

**OFFICIAL MINUTES  
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL  
Corwith Township Hall, Vanderbilt, MI  
February 1, 2019**

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Friday, February 1, 2019 at the Corwith Township Hall. Chair Paul Rose called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance. (Note: The P.R.C.A.C. meeting originally scheduled for Friday, January 25 was cancelled due to a winter storm.)

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Paul Rose, Bill Loney, Randy Keen, Lisha Ramsdell, Rob Pallarito, Barb Curtis, Brent Shank, and Dave Smethurst.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Pete Gustafson, Rique Campa, Brad Garmon, Brian McPhail, Heather Shaw, Sandy Franz, Don Horrocks and Drew YoungeDyke.

**EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:** Scott Whitcomb, Dave Borgeson, Brian Mastenbrook and Karen Chapman.

**EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:** Steve Milford, Tim Cwalinski, Steve Buyze, Kelly Kinser and DNR LED.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Judi Yurack, Sandra Boyd, Stewart Smith, Andrew Knapp, Bill Glass, Lyle Horsell, Gary Isaman, Gary Waldo, Eugene Horan, Joe Jarecki, Judy Jarecki, Samantha Peterson and Jeff Whiting.

**INTRODUCTIONS - PAUL ROSE:**

Chair Paul Rose opened by welcoming all to the winter 2019 meeting of the PRCAC. Paul noted for the record that there were 8 members of the P.R.C.A.C. present at the meeting tonight and 8 members were absent. Introductions were made around the room.

**AGENDA:**

Paul Rose recommended that due to only 8 P.R.C.A.C. members present, the current agenda remain as presented, and skip items as necessary. Motion made by Dave Smethurst to approve agenda as presented, seconded by Rob Pallarito, all voted in favor of agenda as presented, motion passed.

**MINUTES:**

After review of the meeting minutes from October 5, 2018, Dave Smethurst made the motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Lisha Ramsdell. All voted in favor of minutes as presented, motion passed.

**CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR CONFIRMATION VOTE – LISHA RAMSDELL:**

Lisha reviewed the updates made to the P.R.C.A.C. Articles of Organization as it relates to the Officers. The Chair and Vice-Chair positions are two-year terms, instead of annual terms. A limit was placed on the Chair position for two consecutive terms, the change was approved by the P.R.C.A.C. at the July 2018 meeting. We are now at the start of the second year of first term for the Chair and Vice-Chair positions. Lisha made a motion to confirm Paul Rose to continue as Chair of the P.R.C.A.C. for a second year, as well as confirm the second year for Rique Campa as Vice-chair, Dave Smethurst seconded.

Before calling the question, Paul Rose stated that due to the tenuous nature of a quorum present, the question will be called for vote at the next meeting. Lisha Ramsdell rescinded the motion until the next meeting. Rose noted that in October, there will be a nomination committee convened, and that officer candidates will be proposed to members for consideration.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Paul Rose opened the floor for comment. Gary Waldo asked if the state has enough staff to cover the PRCSF considering the additional acquisition of land to the PRCSF. He noticed that the disbursed camp cards at his preferred campsite are not always being collected.

Scott Whitcomb stated that staff is spread thin, but efficiencies are gained with land acquisitions because staff doesn't have to work around the boundaries of private land.

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**AD HOC GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - LISHA RAMSDELL:**

Lisha reported that the Ad-hoc Governance Committee has not met since the October meeting, but the next step is to develop the charges for the newly re-organized committees. There is the opportunity to enlist non-advisory council members to provide expertise, which may also be a recruiting tool for future P.R.C.A.C. members. Lastly the committee will re-visit internal and external communications, which has been identified as a skill to strengthen.

Paul Rose reminded members that the January meeting is an organizational meeting, and now that the standing committees have been re-organized, the Council will begin to identify makeup of the committees. Paul will email members to see what committee members are interested in serving. Due to delays in the appointment process, Paul wanted to defer committee organizational process until the full roster of P.R.C.A.C. members are identified.

**PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – BARB CURTIS:**

Barb reported she was not sure of the status on paperwork process with regards to the pavilion at Elk Hill. Approximately \$20,000 has been raised and is on account with the Back Country Horsemen. More fundraising scheduled for spring. A work bee is scheduled for May 18 and 19 and will probably involve a lot of trail clearing. The next meeting of the Equestrian Committee is scheduled for March 21, 2019, at 1:00pm at the DNR Roscommon office.

Paul Rose stated that the last time he spoke with Chuck Fanslow, they were working on the gift acceptance agreement with the Department. Paul also noted that there is still an opportunity for a P.R.C.A.C. member to sit on the Equestrian Committee.

**DISCOVERY CENTER – SANDY FRANZ:**

Reporting for Sandy who was unable to attend, Lisha Ramsdell stated that the Discovery Center steering committee is going through a strategic planning process. The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) application submitted for improvements to the Discovery Center building was not approved.

Scott Whitcomb stated that they will be submitting a MNRTF application for a third year. With regards to educational programs at the Center, Samantha (Sam) Peterson, AmeriCorps member serving at the P.R.C.A.C. will

devote part of her time in developing community outreach programs. Scott also noted that the Pigeon River Country Association will be seeking a student intern for 2019. As housing is always a challenge, will work with the P.R.C.A. on refurbishing the small residence for the intern.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Paul Rose stated that he had asked Scott Whitcomb to create a template for future meetings using the newly restructured committees.

FOREST COVER & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT – HEATHER SHAW:

Heather was unable to attend tonight’s meeting.

RECREATION & ACCESS – RANDY KEEN:

Randy had nothing new to report at this time. Scott Whitcomb stated that the Recreation and Access committee will probably meet sometime in February. They need to review and consider an application received from the Great Lakes Relay to come through a portion of the PRCSF for their 2019 race.

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT- LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reminded us that this year is the 100-year anniversary of the PRCSF, which is a great opportunity to improve communications with the public, the Department, the new administration and legislators. The Council will be inviting Director Eichinger to an upcoming meeting and will be considering a tour of the forest.

AQUATIC RESOURCES & FISHERIES MANAGEMENT- VACANT:

Committee chair to be determined.

RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION- SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy was unable to attend tonight’s meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

STATUS UPDATE ON TUBES AND CORNWALL FLOODING PROJECTS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha Ramsdell reported that Huron Pines has been working on these projects with the Department for quite a few years. Firstly, the “Tubes” is a very popular site on the Pigeon River, it is the location of a campground, and where Ford Lake Road crosses over the river. The bridge crossing is used by equestrians and is part of the Shingle-Mill Pathway. The Tubes structure is in poor condition; and poses a high risk of failure. Lisha distributed photos of the sight, showing the timber bridge in place during the 1940’s, and more recent photos of flooding at the site. Discussions have taken place with the Otsego County Road Commission Board of Commissioners, who are in support of replacing the structure. The bridge crossing has been a chronic maintenance issue for them. Engineers have been hired to provide preliminary designs and cost estimates on a new timber bridge structure. The Otsego County Road Commission will donate in-kind services in the form of labor and equipment. Huron Pines has raised most of the funding necessary to

replace the bridge. Cost estimates right now are between \$400,000 to \$450,000. Permits will be submitted soon, and the plan is for the project to be completed in 2020. Huron Pines wants to start getting the message out to the public that the bridge is going to be replaced and what the site will look like after the Tubes are replaced.

Stewart Smith commented that removal of the “Tubes” is going to be very controversial. Lisha said they want to get out in front of the issue and start educating the public. If nothing is done, and the bridge fails, replacement will be much costlier. Information signage will be posted at the location this summer, alerting the public.

Lisha continued with the Cornwall Flooding dam project. Tim Cwalinski conducted use studies at the flooding, a very popular site for fishing. The dam surface at Cornwall is part of the Shore to Shore trail and gets a lot of equestrian and foot traffic use. The DEQ did a safety inspection in 2016 of the dam and structure, the culvert under the berm is failing, gaps and holes in the culvert. The mechanisms in the riser structure are not working. The dam is owned by the DNR Fisheries Division and is at risk of failure. Maintaining this resource is a high priority. Huron Pines has been working with the Department to develop a plan to rehabilitate the dam structure. Some preliminary engineering work has been completed, along with very preliminary designs. Huron Pines has submitted for a dam management grant to rehabilitate the structure. Cost for this project is likely to be \$400,000 to \$450,000. If funding is received, the earliest construction start date for the project is 2020 or 2021.

#### PUBLIC ACT 288 UPDATE – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

Scott reported that he recently made a presentation to the DNR Natural Resources Commission on the subject. PA 288 was signed in fall of 2016 by Governor Snyder; it is a law that opens forest roads in the Lower Peninsula to ORV traffic. There is a provision in the law to allow the Department to close areas through Land Use Orders of the Director if it is deemed appropriate. The primary intent was to open the forest roads, similar to what is in place for the Upper Peninsula and have similar regulations. In both peninsulas the law requires the Department to inventory and map all of the forest roads and make the maps available to the public. The Northern Lower peninsula was completed in 2017, the Upper Peninsula and Southern Lower portion were completed in 2018. Approximately 16% of the forest roads in the Northern Lower Peninsula including those in the Pigeon River Country State Forest were kept closed to ORV usage. When the maps were adopted in 2017, the Director stated this would be a dynamic process, using public input. Currently the focus will be on correcting mapping errors and getting the maps as accurate as possible. Scott and Brian Mastenbrook worked on changes to the mapping within the PRCSF, then the Department decided to focus on mapping errors. The new maps will be online, available to the public by April 2019. Maps may be viewed at [www.michigan.gov/dnr/forestreads](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/forestreads).

Paul Rose followed up regarding trail camera use within the PRCSF. He noted that the Michigan United Conservation Clubs introduced a policy resolution concerning the DNR engaging in a broader discussion on the use of unattended trail cameras on state managed lands. Paul found that several states have been more pro-active on the issue than Michigan has. Many people are coming together to ask that the SOM get ahead of the curve on the issue of trail cameras.

#### NEW BUSINESS:

#### PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY AIRSPACE – MAJ. ANDREW LAFOUNTAIN:

Major LaFountain was not available to attend tonight's meeting. Scott Whitcomb briefed members regarding a proposal about the airspace that involved the PRCSF, the public comment for the matter closed on December 31, 2018. After review, it was noted that the airspace usage proposal was within altitudes of 6,000 - 18,000 feet, which is outside of the area of concern in the PRCSF. Scott received a briefing from Major LaFountain about 4 additional proposals that may affect airspace in northern Michigan and members should be watchful for a chance to make public comments.

#### SPRING TOUR OF PRC:

Already discussed by Lisha Ramsdell under Education & Engagement Committee Report.

#### EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:

##### WILDLIFE REPORT – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Brian reviewed the 2018 elk hunts. In September 2018, hunters killed 40 cows and 28 bulls, in December 2018, hunters killed 48 cows and 30 bulls. All 3 Pure Michigan hunt winners killed their bulls. There were approximately 166 animals killed, with tribal results still pending. The DNR surveyed elk hunters and found the average days it took a hunter to harvest an elk was 4.3 days, 78% of hunters used a guide, and hunters spent about \$174,000 during the hunts (spread over 200 hunters). Now more animals are taken on private land. The elk survey was completed last Sunday, results show approximately 1200 elk. Brian noted the commemorative Elk Plaque (on a large rock from Green Timbers) is now installed at the rail trail southeast of Wolverine, near the rail siding where the 7 elk were released in 1918. He extended thanks to Parks Division for moving the 4,000-pound rock. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation contributed part of the money to pay the plaque.

Brian then went on to talk about nuisance bear activity, with bears becoming active around the Gaylord area. It appears the bear population is increasing, and the DNR is trying to increase public awareness on educating them to not feed the bears.

Money is becoming tighter for Wildlife Division this year. Brian reviewed a chart of how Wildlife Division dollars are spent. CWD is a priority, with over 30,000 deer heads being tested for the disease.

Grouse were collected to test for West Nile virus, results expected in June or July. Brian heard that it was a bad year for grouse hunting, with not a lot of birds in the woods.

##### OIL AND GAS UPDATE – STEVE BUYZE, DEQ:

With Steve not present tonight, Bill Loney gave a brief update. Lambda, which is based out of Houston, Texas has taken over all Merit assets, they have been busy doing a lot of well work, and getting rid of old and unused equipment, but nothing in the PRCSF yet.

##### PRC UNIT REPORT – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

Scott reported that the PRC foresters have completed their timber sales for the year and are in the process of doing inventory for next 6 compartments. Focus has been on PRC HQ infrastructure with installation of new back-up generator, heat pump replacement, and hardwood floor refinishing. Sam Peterson is our new AmeriCorps member for 2019, Sam has a background in fisheries and wildlife from Lake State and she

loves spending time outdoors. Scott showed us a video from an independent film called "The Forest" partially sponsored by Back Country Hunters & Anglers. The project was largely filmed in the PRCSF.

**VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD – SCOTT WHITCOMB AND DAVE BORGESON:**

Volunteers have always been very important to the PRCSF. There were many fisheries events and activities in the last year at PRCSF, and one man, Gary Isaman was always there. Congratulations to Gary Isaman, P.R.C. Volunteer of the Year!

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**

Paul Rose requested that members contact him or Scott Whitcomb with any future agenda items. Paul will keep everyone posted on developments for the April meeting. You will also be contacted regarding committee assignments.

Paul also noted that Public Act 680, was signed into law, which will allow O.R.V. use on public roads if the machines are specially modified. If these are designated as modified O.R.V. how does this impact use of said modified O.R.V. (assembled vehicle) on roads in the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

Next meeting is Friday April 26, 2019, location to be determined.

**ADJOURN:**

Meeting adjourned at 7:25PM

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,**

**SCOTT WHITCOMB, SECRETARY**



**Pictured above is Dave Borgeson, DNR Fisheries, Gary Isaman, 2018 Volunteer of the Year, Scott Whitcomb, DNR Pigeon River.**

**Dave Borgeson and Scott Whitcomb presenting the Witness Tree Award in recognition of the 2018 Volunteer of the Year to Mr. Gary Isaman.**

**Mr. Isaman was presented the award for his outstanding volunteerism at the February 1, 2019 Pigeon River Country Advisory Council Meeting, which took place at Corwith Township Hall in Vanderbilt, Michigan.**