

**Western U.P. Citizens Advisory Council (WUPCAC)
Joint Forestry and Trails/Recreation/Law Committee Meeting
Michigan DNR Office, Marquette, MI
March 3, 2016 at 3:00pm Eastern**

WUPCAC members in attendance: Phil Wirtanen, Jim Lorenson, Warren Suchovsky, A.J. Campbell, Joan Duncan, Larry Heathman, Robert (Skip) Schulz.

Michigan DNR members in attendance: Jeff Stampfly (Forestry), Ron Yesney (Trails), Dennis Nezich (Forestry), Scott Whitcombs, Terry Minzey (Wildlife), Ryan Aho (Law), Don Mankee (Forestry)

- Meeting began with introductions.
- Warren S. explained why meeting was convened: trails and forest roads have become an important topic at WUPCAC meetings and he felt that it was important for subcommittee members to learn more about the difference between forest roads and different types of trails and how the MDNR manages them. Warren also stated that recreation is a good opportunity for economic growth in U.P. communities. Warren specifically wanted to know what state forest land is available for recreation, what are the limitations on managing state forests for recreation, and how the different MDNR divisions cooperate to develop management plans? Warren asked to Don M. to begin answering these questions.
- Don M. explained that recreation interests used to be managed by FRD. In 2012 the department transferred management of recreation to PRD. The snowmobile program is funded by PRD now, but FRD fire officers still work directly with the grant sponsors for trail work. We are transitioning away from this and PRD will eventually fund and manage the snowmobile program. All DNR Divisions work together to develop management plans for state forests.
- Dennis N. explained that state forests are co-managed by WD and FRD. Any treatment on state forests must have concurrence from both divisions. Other divisions, such as PRD, are not official co-managers, but they have meaningful input on management decisions.
- Terry M. further explained that some wildlife lands have deed restrictions based on what funds were used to purchase those lands. If WD misuses funds devoted to management of wildlife lands, Pitman/Roberts or Dingle/Johnson, they will lose those funds. Seventeen percent of state forest was purchased.
- Skip S. asked what restrictions are placed on deed restricted lands.
- Terry M. responded that there is a higher level of scrutiny on deed restricted lands. Scrutiny is highest on development of new infrastructure. Purchased wildlife lands have to be managed for original intent and new uses must be incidental and not detract from intended use. Therefore, developing an ORV trail, for example, on deed restricted lands can be difficult and in some cases off limits.
- Warren S. stated that there is a problem with how some citizens perceive management of state forests. In some cases they believe that land can and should be managed in a way that is not legal.
- Skip S. asked how he could ID deed restricted lands.
- Terry M. recommended that he contact local MDNR forester.
- Dennis N. stated that the different MDNR divisions try to accommodate multiple use. For example, WD works closely with sportsman groups, PRD with ORV trail riding groups, FRD with the forest industry, but all the divisions collaborate together so that all values are considered with making management decisions.
- Jim L. stated that MDNR needs to work harder to communicate nuances of state forest management to public.

- Phil W. acknowledges difficulties with communicating with the public. He also stated that the MDNR website is difficult to use.
- Dennis N. stated that MDNR division heads recently met to discuss how to improve website. Public relations specialists have been hired and will address this issue.
- Jim L. stated that citizen's look up to individual MDNR employees but have problems with the MDNR as a whole.
- Terry M. Public outreach employees with the MDNR put together materials to promote the management of state forests.
- Skip S. asked MDNR to explain when a forest road might not be available for ORV use.
- Terry M. explained that most forest roads remain open for recreational ORV use and hunting. He reiterated that the difficulty lies with developing new recreation trails.
- Ron Y. called in on speaker phone.
- Warren S. quickly updated Ron Y. on progress of the meeting.
- Warren S. switched topic to legal definitions of roads and trails on state forests. Asked Don M. to review the differences.
- Don M. reviewed a document provided by Bill Doan.
- Skip S. asked about definition of snowmobile trail.
- Don M. stated that a snowmobile trail is designated by the state. They are found on state forests and easements on private property. PRD is lead on snowmobile trails but each snowmobile trail has a sponsor and each sponsor has a contact at the MDNR.
- Skip S. states that confusion exists around old forest roads that have become overgrown with trees and brush. He asked if these roads still meet the legal definition of a forest road.
- Don M. stated that yes, they do if they remain passable with a two-wheel drive vehicle. He also stated that forest roads remain open unless otherwise posted in the Upper Peninsula.
- Ryan A. stated that users cannot damage trees on roads. He clarified that seedlings count and can't be damaged by vehicles.
- Dennis N. stated that FRD is lead on forest land management, but PRD oversees trail management. If a designated trail is on an existing forest road then FRD and PRD coordinate management.
- Skip S. stated that some two-track roads are not designated trails and not maintained but still remain open as a forest road. He then asked if these types of forest roads can be used by ORV and snowmobiles.
- Don M. responded that all UP forest roads on state forests are open unless posted as closed.
- Don M. stated that much of snowmobile trail system is on private lands where owners have lease agreements with the MDNR. These trails are not open to ORV in the summer unless a separate agreement is struck.
- A.J. C. asked if there are many ORV trails on private lands.
- Ron Y. answered that there are many but they aren't as common as snowmobile trail lease agreements. He continued that on state forests it takes a land use order by the MDNR director to limit use on a forest road or trail. Unless posted otherwise, trails and roads on state forests are open to all users. When any trail is passable by a two-wheel drive vehicle it becomes a forest road. However, users cannot damage trees on trails including seedlings.
- Dennis N. stated that 15,000 miles of forest roads exist within state forest boundaries.
- Warren S. stated that signing all forest roads would greatly improve access to state forests.

- Dennis N. stated that there is currently no budget for signing roads. MDNR has started to inventory all roads on the state forest. This was an objective in the FRD strategic plan, plus may be required in House Bill 5275 that will make a forest road inventory mandatory.
- Scott W. stated that the Pigeon River Unit that he oversees has maps and signs on all forest roads. He pointed out that Pigeon River is the smallest unit in the state forest system. He also stated that he is lead facilitator on an FRD project to inventory all forest roads statewide as part of the MDNR strategic work plan and that a workgroup has been convened to begin this process.
- Dennis N. stated that MDNR has recognized the need for a road inventory for a long time and they were recently given \$400,000 in capital outlay money to implement a 4 year forest roads survey. The workgroup has members from all MDNR divisions and will utilize cutting edge mapping technology.
- Jeff S. stated that many firebreaks were developed that would have once qualified as forest roads but have now overgrown and are no longer accessible to recreation users.
- Warren S. asked if roads inventory is working with citizens advisory groups.
- Dennis N. and Scott W. both answered no.
- Joan D. stated that it can be difficult to work with citizens groups because they all have special interests.
- Warren S. asked about unintended consequences of catering to all users. He stated that someone usually loses and he thinks that forestry interests often lose to recreation interests. He cited an example of a trail riding group that wanted 100 feet no harvest buffer along both sides of all trails. This would make thousands of acres of state forest off limits to timber harvesting.
- Jim L. said that MDNR should use educational signs along trails to explain how forest management is beneficial to forests, humans, and wildlife.
- Terry M. stated that many users don't want to see forest management regardless of known benefits.
- A.J. C. agreed with Terry M. and stated that education is lost on users who have already made up their minds about timber harvesting.
- Jim L. said education is still worthwhile because local residents respond positively to this type of information.
- Warren S. asked how the CAC can help with inventory of roads. He thought that we could provide input on demand for road use, user preference, and limiting factors for certain uses.
- Skip S. asked how the MDNR uses buffers along roads and generally how they feel about using buffers.
- Dennis N. stated that FRD and WD have drafted a policy statement that is up for review and approval. He continued by stating that FRD wants to manage forests, not hide forest management. He also wants recreation use to be compatible with forestry.
- A.J. C. asked about the use of buffers in certain high visibility areas where the buffer could be an attractive land feature.
- Dennis N. stated that in some cases buffers might be appropriate but that buffers and that within stand retention may help to serve that purpose. We desire to not remove large amounts of land from management.
- Terry M. stated that if trails go through purchased wildlife lands (deed restricted), maintaining buffers might not align with intended use of land.
- Jim L. stated that WUPCAC should support draft proposal.
- Warren S. stated that he has been working with a group to develop logger training for visual management in recreation areas.
- Jim L. stated that equestrian use has increased.

- Joan D. who is an avid equestrian user said that U.P. riders don't care about logging. They care about access and feel that the MDNR has excessive restrictions on trails and don't provide adequate parking lots for horse trailers.
- Warren S. suggested that Joan review and comment on draft proposal.
- Dennis N. stated that equestrian groups were previously provided copies of the draft proposal to review via MTAC.
- Joan D. stated that MDNR doesn't do enough to publicize horse access and that very little parking exists. Therefore, even if equestrian use isn't prohibited, users still can't access because they have nowhere to park. She feels that the MDNR isn't making a good effort to promote equestrian use and is limiting tourism opportunities.
- Dennis N. asked if horse trailers are prohibited on parking lots.
- Joan D. answered that some parking lots allow it but aren't big enough or don't advertise that horse trailers are allowed.
- Dennis N. wondered if this was a funding issue and asked how states with good equestrian access fund the management of infrastructure.
- No answer was provided but Ron Y. stated that the MDNR is well-aware of these issues and wants to incorporate them into trails plan.
- Warren S. stated that equestrian recreation can be very lucrative for communities because users are willing to spend lots of money while practicing their hobby.
- Warren S. closed the meeting by asking Jim L. and Phil W. to review the draft policy proposal and prepare a recommendation for the WUPCAC.

Approved 3/11/16