

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Forest Township Hall, Tower, MI
Friday, April 10, 2015

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Friday April 10, 2015 at the Forest Township Hall, Tower, MI. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

John Walters, Eugene Horan, Arch Reeves, Kurt Jagoda, Pete Gustafson, Paul Rose, Dave Smethurst, Paul Beachnau, Sandy Franz, Lisha Ramsdell, Donald Horrocks, Brad Garmon, Kerry Mase

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jason Melancon, Mark Ennes, Jim Supina, Rique Campa, Randy Keen

EX-OFFICIO PRESENT:

Scott Whitcomb, Nick Torsky, Brian Mastenbrook, Tim Cwalinski

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Andy Stempky, Steve Milford

OTHERS PRESENT:

Denise Kinsinger, Charlie Maltby, Pete Datema, Anna Sylvester, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Dale Franz, Carol Rose, Tom Stitt, Tim Paulus, Stewart Smith, Bob Lyon (2 residents, names illegible)

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Walters welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the Council members. Introductions were made by attendees.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Dale Franz advised that copies of the PRCA Newsletter were on the front table.

Tim Paulus stated he would like to see the Department get back into a conversation to get local people back into the forest again. Maybe it is time to rewrite the Concept of Management and do it by counties. Different user groups are in constant conflict and different localities have different goals for the forest.

Tom Stitt spoke and stated he lives within the forest. The Concept of Management should be reopened. The people that use the forest are aging and having berms everywhere is not good. Young people are not using the forest anymore. Logging operations are going on constantly and that makes it not wild.

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS:

John Walters stated that one of our committees is called Forest Access which gives us a big umbrella that is not really specific. Walters recommended to the Council to change name to Roads and Trails Committee, because issues concerning roads, include country roads activity and state forest roads. It may be a repair of those roads, both state forest roads and county roads. He recognized that the Department has little comment on what happens to county roads but wants it to be all encompassing relating to the Advisory Council. The committee would include hiking trails, the motorized trails that are available in Cheboygan County, the Equestrian Trails that we have been working closely on as well as the pathway hiking trails, and cross country ski trails. The title of that committee gives a better understanding of what the task is that the committee needs to accomplish.

Dave Smethurst made the motion and Brad Garman seconded.

Joe Jarecki advised there may be other forest access issues that may come up, and then is the committee precluded from dealing with those issues? Those might be wildlife viewing parking areas, concentrated areas of offsite camping. John Walters asked if it would be acceptable to be called Roads, Trails and Forest Access. Dave Smethurst stated that there is boat access and fishing access and, as evidenced by public comment, one of the real issues is the roads and trails access. John Walters stated that Joe Jarecki made a couple good points as to access that is not related to aquatics or other types of use that doesn't fall under a road or a trail.

Donald Horrocks suggested it was important to keep State Forest in the title.

John Walters stated that he would entertain an amendment to the motion to change the name to be Roads Trails and Forest Access. Dave Smethurst made a Friendly Amendment. Brad Garmon supports name change and suggested we move forward. Motion carried.

Lisha Ramsdell stated it would be helpful to have a committee charged with writing up committee descriptions with more than just the names of people on the committee and she would be willing to help with that.

John Walters stated that since the last board meeting there was a special meeting to meet with DNR staff from different divisions to bring closer together and build relationships with staff and the advisory council. We talked about a variety of issues, including the Concept of Management. I would like to thank the staff and the advisory council members who participated in that meeting. Also, I would like to thank Tim Paulus this evening for the invitation to come here to Forest Township to meet.

APPROVE AGENDA:

Donald Horrocks / Paul Rose seconded the Motion. Motion carried

APPROVE JANUARY 23, 2015 MEETING MINUTES:

Arch Reeves /Donald Horrocks seconded the Motion. Motion carried

APPROVAL OF THE FEBRUARY 9, 2015 MEETING MINUTES:

Some minor changes were submitted by Kerry Mase and Brad Garmon. Motion carried.

Pete Gustafson - Aquatics Committee

Pete Gustafson gave background of the committee report and then the committee's recommendations.

The existing Elk Hill equestrian access trail to the Pigeon River, for watering horses, was identified as an erosion area in need of remediation in a 2013 internal DNR (Forest Certification) audit. As a result of this finding and as part of the overall Equestrian Use Plan, now under consideration by the Department, Parks and Recreation Division has developed a stabilization and remediation plan for the access site. Plan documents and photos have been provided with the meeting agenda, and a power point presentation will help explain the proposal. Representatives of the Aquatics Committee participated in a meeting with Parks and Recreation on March 11, 2015 to review the plan, and had the opportunity to discuss it in detail. Many thanks to Charlie Maltby, Rich Hill and Keith Cheli of Parks and Recreation for setting up the meeting and providing detailed information on the plan. We suggest that the Advisory Council review this as a discrete Elk Hill project, rather than as part of the broader discussion involving the overall proposed Equestrian Plan for the PRC

which is being separately considered. The plan had the support of the DNR Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions, and the Natural Rivers Program does not object to the proposed improvements.

Recommendation

Those Aquatics Committee members participating in the meeting support the proposed equestrian access upgrade as necessary and appropriate to protect the river and resolve current erosion and access issues at the site.

Slide presentation by Charlie Maltby.

We are proposing a step down approach to the water (see attachment).

John Walters asked Kerry Mase if a 7-1/2 inch step acceptable for horses. Kerry stated that Chuck Fanslow was consulted and that is acceptable.

Fisheries use this access to sample in August and we would like to have this completed by the time they do their sampling.

Charlie Maltby stated that permit applications have not been submitted yet.

John Walters asked if there was a time line.

Charlie Maltby said they were doing the project in July. The Cheboygan construction crew will be doing the project and it should be completed within approximately one week.

Brad Garmon asked what the funding source was.

Charlie Maltby stated that it was an Equestrian Trust Fund Grant in the amount of \$300,000 which expires in August. There was a statewide lump sum. Elk Hill improvements and Big Oaks were done with this money as well.

Pete Gustafson moved that the Advisory Council recommend support of the proposed Equestrian access upgrade as **necessary and appropriate to protect the river and resolve current erosion access issues at the site.**

Motion was seconded by Sandy Franz. Motion carried.

Special Committee Report – Equestrian Report by Kerry Mase

The Equestrian Committee last met on March 24, 2015. There were several items that we dealt with that day. The committee passed motions of support for the final draft of the work plan for the Pigeon River Country State Forest and Anna Sylvester is going to go over that in more detail. We also made a motion of support for the equine access upgrade to the Pigeon River. We also reviewed the conceptual plan for the ADA approved mounting block and parking space at Elk Hill that Parks and Recreation is planning on building there. The Equestrian Committee is holding a spring work bee to clean the campground and make sure trails are open. Additionally I would like to remind everyone that when Director Stokes created the committee and later when Director Creagh took over as Director, they both urged the Equestrian Committee to look outside of the PRC for other campgrounds and riding opportunities and we have honored that request and worked with Wildlife and Parks and Recreation and we are soon to have a new campground opening at Avery Lake by Atlanta and Lewiston. We are working through the trail proposal process and will soon have some trails approved in that area as well.

John Walters asked if all the topics were supported in the Equestrian Plan. Is the mounting block part of the Equestrian Plan? Charlie Maltby stated it was not. It was part of a previous plan- original Elk Hill upgrades (2012)

OLD BUSINESS:

Green Timbers-Scott Whitcomb:

Scott stated that the general thought is that they need to come down due to safety concerns. There is a social media group that has been actively trying to raise support for the cabins by raising money through donations or making improvements. We decided to reach out to them letting them and let them know what we intended to do. A press release came out today stating our intent to have the buildings removed. The next thing that needs to happen is they have to be tested for toxic substances and then they can be removed. One of the things that was agreed to in order to memorialize them was to be very careful with parts when dismantling them so we can use parts of them on new projects in the future. Kerry Mase asked if the chimneys could remain and Scott Whitcomb stated that it would be a safety issue and they would need to come down. Kerry Mase also asked if fire rings could be put there and Scott stated that it would be dispersed camping and there was no plan to do that.

Kurt Jagoda asked if there was any further discussion about the manager's residence. Scott Whitcomb stated the plans for the Historical Interpretive Center are moving forward. The lease is almost ready to be signed. The PRC Association is the lessee and we plan to have an open house in June with potential partners.

Dave Smethurst stated that by combining Green Timbers and this building, I think we need to preserve the history of Green Timbers, the story of it and for Blue Lakes as well. Significant things happened at those places. There are important stories and fond memories of the Honeymoon Cabin. Possibly a discrete plaque could be put at the site or interpretive center.

Pigeon River Country Equestrian Work Plan - Anna Sylvester

At the last meeting we presented some of the ideas from the Pigeon River Equestrian Committee on how they wanted to proceed with some of the priorities from the master list of items that they wanted to see improved within the Pigeon River trails and campgrounds. At that point we had comments from your group and we have incorporated those comments into a final draft plan that the Director has seen, and as Kerry has mentioned the Equestrian Committee supports.

We realized that maybe we needed some more language for how to approach the PRCAC and how to develop a good process for trail recommendations. So where the PRCEC is tasked with making a trail proposal they will do a presentation to the PRCAC for comment and then the staff will deliberate and make a final determination as to the acceptance of the proposal. We also suggest that when there is concurrence that the item should go to the next step which is getting the Land Use Order to the Director. However, we also recognize that there is probably going to be some instances of non-concurrence and when that occurs we will have a resolution process. What we recommend is that a small group of people from PRCAC and some from PRCEC get together in a facilitated session with the DNR staff to see how we can get a consensus and have everyone live with the proposal or to get everyone on the same page if it can't go through. Then, once again, present the new plan to the PRCAC at the next meeting and then get the Land Use Order to the Director because it is one of the requirements for the Pigeon River to have a Land Use Order for every new trail.

Paul Rose asked if the facilitated session option is if we cannot come to an agreement on this document.

Anna Sylvester advised that the July 16th meeting will cover #2, #3 and #6 plus the DNR adjacent land owners are asking for access into the PRC (#15) which was dropped from the original list and we are going to work internally with the PRCEC by June 1.

Scott Whitcomb stated that we would have maps at the next meeting specifically showing where each proposal would be.

Anna stated that additionally, the Department will be looking at #4 Erosion at watering hole, #5 Equestrian access at Blue Lakes, and #8 Green Timbers-Iconic spots. We will be looking at the overall landscape on these (#5 and #8) to see if we should allow bicycles or horses or what kind of traffic should be allowed into certain areas.

Dave Smethurst – As this planning process evolves we don't want to say that this type of activity is allowed or permitted in a particular area until we get the broad landscape decided.

Brian Mastenbrook stated that this is only one layer looked at. Our intent is to have a process outlined by July, not a plan.

Paul Rose stated that this is a really good response to the Motion that came out of our group at the last meeting. This is actually an update and no action is even necessary at this point.

Anna Sylvester stated that she would like some action taken to show support for the process steps.

Paul Rose asked if there was more to come and Anna Sylvester stated that there was.

Paul Rose made a motion for the Advisory Council to lend support for the interim report on the draft work plan. Eugen Horan seconded.

Sandy Franz asked if this is the document the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committed approved on 3/24/15? Anna Sylvester stated that it was.

Anna Sylvester said that one thing that was of concern last meeting was #9 and it will follow the same process that we have talked about. #2, #3, #6 are to be brought forward at the July 16th meeting. #13 would take legislation because the State Police do not manage unpaved/unimproved roads and cannot change speed limit.

Donald Horrocks – I talked to Peter Pettalia and he is going to get back with me. He may be interested in taking this up with legislature.

Brad Garmon stated that he would like to see proposed new miles of trails and proposed funding source and Anna replied that they will do that.

Dale Franz had questions about the process and Dave Smethurst said he didn't think the process was clear at all.

Sandy Franz stated that she agreed with Dave Smethurst because this is uncharted territory.

Paul Rose said that he does think it is a worthwhile goal to look at the possibility of somehow winding down two committees that have mutually opposing charges.

John Walters– It is not our charge to address the existence or lack of existence of the PRCEC.

Kerry Mase– I think the committee was formed as the result of extreme frustration that equestrians came to this council and felt that no one was listening to anything we had to say. We were told not to come to the council with our requests

and to direct our comments to the DNR. This council was referred to as the council of “no”. It was because of that frustration we went to the legislature.

Dave Smethurst stated that it wasn't this council that said they wanted to severely limit horseback riding in the PRC. NRC said to severely restrict horseback riding in the PRC. It is the NRC that made that rule and I have said that it isn't right to limit horseback riding.

John Walters stated that he has been coming to the Advisory Council as a member or general public participant. In all the years I have been coming I have never heard anyone say to not come. The perception is unfortunate but it never came from this council. To bring our story out to the equestrians, I would hope a lot of those wounds have healed. We have worked very hard to accept many of the plans since 2008 and have come a very long way.

Brad Garmon stated that it is important to realize the Advisory Council is legitimate. We need to have the ability to advise and be respected.

Paul Beachnau advised that we have a motion on the floor and was comfortable with this proposal.

Sandy Franz stated the effort to work together between the two committees is evident.

Motion carried. Arch Reeves was against.

Brian Mastenbrook stated we have asked the Equine Committee to have their proposal to us by June 16th with the intention to have a sub-committee meet with us and look over the proposal and make a recommendation at the July meeting.

John Walters stated he would talk to Randy Keen to have the subcommittee meet.

Pete Datema – Americorps Presentation

- Birds -May 6th at 6:30 intro class on Citizen Scientist bird monitoring.
- iNaturalist.org – free app to report species and locations in PRC.
- Invasive Species-control and eradication
- PRC Usage-sign in at headquarters
- Volunteer groups
- Wildlife Habitat Grant

Legislative Update – Paul Rose

Paul Rose reviewed Senate Bills 39, 40 and 206.

- #39 Requirement to remove all berms, gates and barriers on state land. Redefining areas for ORV use. Trespass issues.
- #40 PILT payments and expansion of uses of trust fund money
- #206 language to change trust fund review and approval process – swap out lands that are use restricted

All of these bills remain in committee. #206 is the only one that the department has come out in opposition to.

Pete Gustafson asked that the chair keep us advised as to when the hearings are being held.

John Waiters asked Paul Rose and Brad Garmon to coordinate efforts to inform the Advisory Council for opportunities to testify.

Road Access in the PRC – Scott Whitcomb

Vehicular access in the PRC

- 290 miles of road
 - 175 miles of county roads
 - 115 miles of forest roads

The PRC is the only state forest in Michigan with a vehicle access plan. Analysis determined that 88% of roads are within ½ mile of a road.

Pete Gustafson stated that Legislators are not knowledgeable about road/public access.

Scott Whitcomb advised that he and Brian Mastenbrook had lunch with the director about 3 weeks ago and had a conversation about access. The Director wanted the information /maps ouavailable.

Statewide Inland Trout Plan – Tim Cwalinski

- Fisheries Division has completed their Strategic Plan – Charting the Course
- Fisheries completed a Musky plan and a Pike plan.
- Now working on Trout Management Plan to be completed in 2016 or 2017.

Tim Paulus stated he has a major concern that has to be addressed with road commissions. Some legislative tool is needed to stop road commissions from putting sedimentation into river crossings.

Fisheries General Work Plan

- Surveying Elk Point upstream to The Tubes
- Stream Temperature Monitoring
- Trout Trails Program
 - Pilot Program that is similar to GEMS for grouse listing great places to go to fish.
 - Partnering through Pure Michigan.
 - Do write ups for particular stations.
 - Going on our web site with geo references.
 - Link back to the communities.

Law Enforcement – Nick Torsky

January to April period is our slowest period. Very cold and lack of snow in PRC.

Two weeks ago significant pile of litter dumped just off Sturgeon Valley Road.

Forest Resources

Tim Paulus was concerned and made the comment that fire staffing is at a minimum with only 1 in Atlanta and 1 in Indian River.

Scott Whitcomb – PRC

Land use issues have been active in last few months. Land acquisitions were approved in Forest Township. We don't have a MNRTF application submitted this year. We did sign an option on the Skiba tract. The department was sued by a landowner in the PRC who is claiming 10 acres of state land as his own. It is an adverse possession claim being handled with help from the Attorney General.

We have several prescribed burns slated for the PRC this spring and several tours of the PRC planned.

Brian Mastenbrook – Wildlife

- Wildlife Division has completed hiring a biologist for Atlanta. We now have 4 technicians.
- TB – 12 out of 4,200 tested positive. Less hunter success so not as much testing.
- No evidence that TB is spreading.
- Chippewa Hills controversy.
- Elk Management meeting for goals.
- Decontamination process – reduce the amount of opportunity we have to transmit invasive species
- Pigeon River Poster/Map – waiting on Brian to get more information back to Lansing – two versions proposed.

Charlie Maltby – PRD

- Reservations for summer have started
- Scott Thompson is ready for trout opener.

Kurt Jagoda asked about oak wilt at Otsego Lake and Charlie stated that they don't cut any oaks at Otsego Lake.

Anna Sylvester added that there are 8 state parks with Oak Wilt and 8 State Forest Campgrounds with Oak Wilt.

Meeting Adjourned at approximately 10:15.