

# Official Minutes

## PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE

March 21, 2019

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) was held on March 21, 2019 at the Roscommon DNR office. Chairperson Barb Curtis called the meeting to order at 1:00

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Barb Curtis, Chuck Fanslow, Kerry Mase, Dick Kleinhardt, Vicki Reinhardt, Kim Ross, Norma Laine and Sandy Franz

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Carol Clute, Bonnie Cornelius, and Darlene Alexander.

**PRESENT:** Forest Division: Scott Whitcomb - PRCSF Manager  
Wildlife Division: Brian Mastenbrook – Fields Operations Manager.  
Parks and Recreation Division: Anna Sylvester - Northern Fields Operations Chief, Jilanne Egleston – Ranger, Nicole Toman- Policy Manager

**EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:** Parks and Recreation Division: Richard Hill – Gaylord District Supervisor, Kelly Kinser – Otsego Lake State Park Supervisor and PRCSF Recreation Programs, Paige Perry- Recreation Trails Specialist, Law Enforcement Division: - Conservation Officer

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Connie Kleinhardt and Nadia Kidder,

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**COMMENTS FROM CHAIR:** Barb Curtis began the meeting with a greeting to all. She announced that she has taken Chuck Fanslow place on the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Barb welcomed to the committee our newest member, Sandy Franz, who is also a member of the Advisory Council and the Pigeon River Country Association. Sandy replaces Don Horrocks.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** A **Motion** to accept the Agenda was made by Vicki Reinhardt seconded by Kim Ross. Motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:** A **Motion** to approve the minutes for the November 1, 2018 meeting was made by Chuck Fanslow and seconded by Kim Ross. Motion carried.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

### **Elk Research Update**

Chad Williamson, Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Fisheries & Wildlife Michigan State University was unable to attend today's meeting but provided the group with a hand-out that covered the objectives of the research and the methodology being used to analyze the data for each objective.

In an email to the committee Chad wrote: "I am currently writing my first dissertation chapter and a manuscript focusing on our first objective (elk habitat suitability and habitat potential of the Michigan elk range) and expect to finish both by May 1, 2019." Chad hopes to be able to attend our next meeting to provide additional information about the research findings.

When Chad finishes each Chapter of his dissertation, a summary will be available on the MSU/Research web page.

### **Pavilion Update**

Chuck Fanslow reported that the project is moving ahead. Additional funds are still needed to reach our goal of \$35,000. He is still waiting to hear whether or not the project was awarded the \$10,000 grant requested from the Parks and Recreation Division-Partnership Grant fund. Anna Sylvester reported that all the requests to the fund have been reviewed and we should be hearing soon whether or not our request was granted. Chuck will be meeting soon with the DNR project committee to finalize paper work. Chuck is hopeful that building construction will take place mid summer. At that time a small volunteer work crew will be needed to stain the lumber before it is installed. Connie Kleinhardt will organize that work bee with Kerry Mase's help.

Both Chuck and Dick Kleinhardt expressed gratitude to all the individual equestrians and the many horse clubs who made contributions and worked on fund raising. Chuck gave Alpena County Horsemen's Club special recognition for their generous contribution of \$10,000.

### **PRD Equestrian Camping Policy**

Nicole Toman, Policy Manager for Parks and Recreation Division presented the Equestrian Camping Policy which goes into effect this spring. The Policy will be reviewed at the end of two years. The Policy addresses procedures for Equestrian Campgrounds in both State Park/Recreation Areas and State Forests. Currently the Equestrian Campgrounds in the State Park/Recreation Areas and in the State Forest can be used not only by equestrians but can also be used by others who do not have horses. Having the campgrounds designated as Equestrian Campgrounds provides protection to the equestrian campers under the Equine Liability Law. The Department will provide signage and awareness/educational information to campers as to what this means. Under the Policy both horse and non-horse groups can make reservations in the Equestrian campgrounds. Nicole pointed out that this is not really a change in policy

since in the past non-horse groups could have had access. Concerns were raised by PRCEC members regarding mixing horse and non-horse campers in the same campground. Safety was of primary concern but also concern that equestrians might be crowded out by other users. Kim Ross pointed out that down state bicyclist have taken over what once were horse campgrounds and their trails. Assurances were offered by DNR staff Scott Whitcomb and Jilanne Egleston that in PRCSF reservations for non-horse groups would not be taken during traditional horse camping times of the year. Scott Whitcomb pointed out that he wanted to have flexibility to use the campgrounds during times when there usually are no horse campers. Nicole recommended that equestrian users in other parts of the state maintain a relationship with their local campground managers and supervisors to avoid scheduling conflicts.

DNR staff pointed out that there are no individual/per person fees for camping in any campground. There is a set fee for sites; \$20 in State Parks and \$15 in Forest Rustic campgrounds with no more than six people per site. In Group campgrounds the reservations are for “camps” which is defined as 1 to 6 people. The fee for a camp is determined by the Supervisor. For 2019 the fee for each “camp” in the Group Campground in PRCSF will be \$38 per night plus a one-time registration fee of \$10.

Additional concerns were raised by Committee members regarding the minimum needed for making a reservation in the Group campground in PRCSF. After discussion Anna asked Nicole to make a change in the policy document for the minimum needed to make a reservation from 5 “camps” (which would be 30 people) to a minimum of 2 “camps” (which would be 12 people).

The Committee did appreciate that there was a procedure for obtaining a refund when “camp” numbers needed to be adjusted.

It was discussed that if there was space available in the group campground and if every other location was full, including the dispersed camps, then it should be discussed about allowing someone to camp in the group camp overnight.

During the discussion several Committee members said that the Equestrian Camping Policy seemed overly complicated and confusing. Nicole stated that the policy as presented today is for DNR staff, but an explanation of the policy for the public will be written that will be easier to understand and will try to avoid confusion.

### **Solar Pump**

Jilanne Egleston, Ranger Parks and Recreation Division, Otsego Lake State Park reported that the Department was unable to get grant money to help pay for the drilling of the well for the solar pump. Anna Sylvester said that the Department will continue to work on securing funding not only for this solar well, to be located in the Elk Hill campground, but also for another well in the Group campground that will be a hand pump. There is significant demand for grant funds because of all the trail damage from significant

flooding this past summer in Houghton. Request for funding for wells in PRCSF are a lower priority at this time.

### **Six Remaining Requested Connectors and Inspiration Point Access Request**

Scott Whitcomb, Forest Division, Manager of Pigeon River Country State Forest reported that the Inspiration Pt. Trail proposal is still making its way through the Department Trails Approval process. Because this trail and the six remaining connectors are located on License Fee lands within the PRCSF, input must also be obtained from USFWS. Scott suggested that if the Inspiration Pt. Trail proposal is recommended for approval to the Director that it should be put together with the other Six to ask USFWS for their input on all seven at the same time.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### **Report from Dick Kleinhardt Equine Trails Subcommittee**

Dick reported that Jenny Cook has replaced Mike Foote as the Chairperson of the ETS. Also added to the subcommittee is Patty Janes who will represent Tourism. Other members are: Janet Holmstrom, Amy Scharmen-Burgdolf and Kristie Walls. Issues of concern are inadequate signage for trails especially in areas with mixed recreational users. The public is poorly informed that all users are to yield to horses. ETS has discussed the need for enhancement of information on where people can camp and ride in our State especially for people coming from other states. Dick mentioned truck stops and the DNR web page.

Dick recently testified in front of the Senate Resources Committee. He said he was proud and happy to testify about the good things happening. He pointed out that equestrians “pay to play” with volunteer hours of skilled and unskilled labor. In Pigeon River last year the value of volunteer “sweat equity” was \$27,500

### **Report from Barb Curtis Pigeon River Country Advisory Council**

Barb spoke about the Discovery Center that is located by the Field office. The Center provides information specific to the forest, wildlife and local history. The Center is closed in the winter but is opened the other seasons on Saturday and Sunday. PRCSF will be celebrating 100 years this year and the forest will be highlighted in the Pure Michigan campaign. Huron Pines is working on replacing the Ford Road bridge over the Pigeon River that is referred to as “the tubes” and repairing the dam at Cornwall flooding. The projects are dependent on funding, but the goal is to have them completed by 2020.

### **Spring Work Bee**

Jilanne Egleston, Ranger Parks and Recreation Division, Otsego Lake State Park reported that Kelly Kinser, Supervisor for PRCSF campgrounds, indicated that work this spring will be similar to last year. Prior to the work bee Kelly Kinser will provide Dick Kleinhardt a more detailed list.

## **OTHER BUSINESS:**

At the request of Barb Curtis, Scott Whitcomb reviewed the timber sales that might affect the riding areas of PRCSF. There have been sales in three areas that have riding trails: by the Witness Tree, by Tin Shanty road and east of the Hardwood Lake off site camp. It is difficult to say exactly when the loggers will be working in these areas. They have three years to harvest and they can ask for extensions. Notices will be posted in campgrounds letting people know the areas that have activity.

Scott Whitcomb also informed people that it may be possible to text 911 in the forest. Sometimes it is not possible to call, but generally you can successfully send a text message to the Otsego 911 center. The 911 call center recommends that you try to call first but if not successful then text.

Nicole Toman reported that information on two new Land Use Orders will be presented in April at the Natural Resource Commission prohibiting operation of drones over any equestrian facility in the State and the prohibition of ski lanterns in Michigan. The Director will sign in May. Several commented that both of these LUOs are welcomed news.

Chuck Fanslow provided a MTRA update. He reported that the new loops in the Stoney Creek Campground area are approved and mapped. This campground has 15 sites and a Group section. Stoney Creek campground is on the Shore to Shore Trail. MTRA continues to work with the Department on development of a new campground for the North-South spur of the Shore to Shore. Anna Sylvester said that the campground is making its way through the Department Approval process.

## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**

Elk Research Update – Chad Williamson

PRD Equestrian Camping Policy document written for the public – Nicole Toman

Status of the Inspiration Pt. Proposed Trail

Report on Spring Work Bee

## **NEXT MEETING**

Meeting date to be determined upon completion of the Pavilion at the Group Equestrian Campground PRCSF. Meeting to be held at the Pavilion immediately following a pot luck lunch.

**ADJOURN:** Meeting was adjourned at 4:00

Respectfully Submitted,

Kerry K. Mase

Secretary

