

## **Grand Opening of Discovery Center Set for Memorial Day Weekend**



**Elk awaits visitors to Discovery Center, starting May 26, 2018**

The five-member Steering Committee has set May 26, 2018, for a grand opening of the Pigeon River Country Discovery Center.

The committee's efforts have brought unexpected savings by using volunteers extensively to help fit the building for a public opening, seek financial resources, and settle on display themes appropriate for this unique Michigan state forest, along with many tasks needed to bring it all together. The trade-off has been a longer period of preparation than first hoped for, but the results are leaving good impressions among those watching developments closely.

In July, the Pigeon River Country Association enthusiastically approved the Steering Committee's offer to remain in place as operational manager. Sandra Clark, director of the Michigan History Center, came up from Lansing on Oct. 30, donating a day of her time to work on display content with the committee. She left with this impression:

"I really enjoy working with all of you and this kind of work." She particularly praised the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application prepared by the committee, and said the whole idea of the Discovery Center received high marks from those hearing about it in Lansing.

As the application narrative points out: "This amazing forest's sustainability is threatened by many factors; chief among them is a lack of public understanding and value. By highlighting the history and recreational opportunities of the forest and the development of Michigan's conservation ethic, the Discovery Center hopes to make the PRCSF's visitors more informed, excited about, and supportive of the Pigeon and its natural resources. It also hopes to make the 'Big Wild' more accessible to those with less outdoors experience or ability."

Whether or not the grant is rewarded, Sandra Franz said, the rigorously detailed application process brought helpful focus to the whole Discovery Center project that started in 2014 with a funding offer from the Lunden family and shepherded initially by Scott Whitcomb, forest manager, and the association's longtime president Ray Hoobler, who got the Otsego County Historical Society and others in the local community interested.

The Steering Committee has five members: Rudi Edel (historical society), Sandy Franz (PRC Association), Pat Lunden (the Herman Lunden family), Scott Whitcomb (DNR), and Brad Garmon (PRC Advisory Council). There have been exhaustive efforts since then to line up support, prepare materials, gather information, work on the physical space and surroundings, and make myriad decisions about the center. The grant application alone, Sandy said, took periods of intense concentration and writing from March until mid-October 2017, periods in which work bees organized by Rudi at the building seemed like a welcome respite.

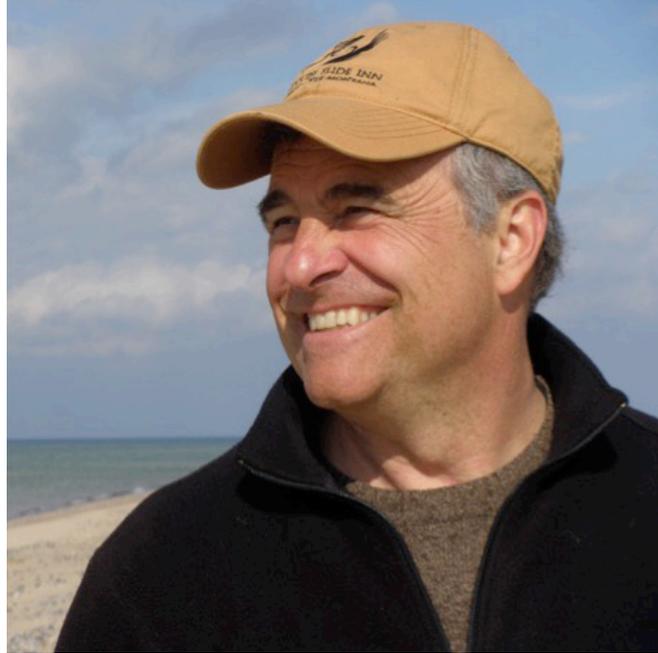
“Even with its wildness,” the application notes, “the Pigeon is not a wilderness area. It is a working, managed forest which supports hunting and fishing, other active and contemplative recreation, wildlife habitat, and timber harvests.” Its manager, Scott Whitcomb, was also charged by the DNR in 2017 with running the state forest road inventory at the heart of the controversial legislative effort to open roads for ORV use. Scott has spent many days and weeks guiding that inventory and receiving praise for his success in listening to the public and working to nourish and protect our natural lands far beyond the PRC boundaries. At the same time, he has continued to contribute as one of the five Steering Committee members, just one example of the dedication each has brought to the effort.

So when Sandra Clark met with the committee on Oct. 30 to review the center’s work and bring suggestions, Rudi Edel had just told the Gaylord Herald Times: “Due to the complexity of these panel designs, the steering committee wanting to get everything right and the change in the seasons—entering the winter now—the team has moved the grand opening to coincide with Memorial Day” by opening May 26. The night following Sandra Clark’s visit, four inches of snow fell in Gaylord.

The same day, an order for our Pigeon River Country/High Country Pathway map arrived from Virginia.

*Pigeon River Country, with its diverse natural resources and varied recreational experiences, will survive only if you join in the work of the people who planned, compromised, and negotiated to create it.*

--An idea that emerged during Discovery Center preparation



**Jerry Dennis @file photo**

### **Jerry Dennis: A voice of caring for our outdoors**

A noted northern Michigan writer was driving near Pigeon River Country with a friend, who confessed that he has lived his whole life in Michigan yet has spent almost no time in this forest.

The writer, Jerry Dennis, told him, You've got to get the book (*Pigeon River Country: A Michigan Forest*)--it's got wonderful information provided in appealing language.

Jerry relayed that story just after a presentation at the Otsego County Library on Oct. 25, where he was invited to talk about his own book, *The Living Great Lakes*, a highly readable account of the largest expanse of fresh water in the world, the lakes that have a powerful effect on the weather and conditions of the PRC.

His book does not mention the PRC, but he clearly loves the place and agreed wholeheartedly when asked if we could use excerpts from his other writing for videos to play at the Discovery Center starting next spring. We are preparing short films from his words about clouds, thunderstorms, winter storms, and birds. Here are a few brief examples:

**Clouds:** At sunset [jet contrails] become as brilliant and colorful as any other cloud ... Contrails can offer clues to upcoming weather. If a jet leaves no trail or if the trail fades quickly, it is an indication of a relatively dry upper atmosphere, which suggests the weather will remain stable and fair. Long-lasting contrails stretching across the entire sky are evidence of high moisture content in the upper atmosphere and the approach of a warm front and subsequent precipitation.

**Ruffed grouse ... and common redpoll** conserve body heat by burrowing into loose snow [for] its insulation. In a roost beneath eight or ten inches of snow, [it] remains as much as 40 degrees warmer than outside air ...

These come from *It's Raining Frogs and Fishes: Four Seasons of Natural Phenomena and Oddities of the Sky*. Along with his several books, Jerry Dennis has written essays on nature for *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian*, and *Audubon*. He has received the Sigurd Olsen Nature Writing Award among other recognitions of his work centered in Michigan's natural settings. He lives in Traverse City. His website is <https://jerrydennis.net/> It includes this posting:

“—**Get the Kids Outdoors:** For the first time in human history more people live in cities than in the country. As a result, our children have fewer opportunities than ever to encounter wild nature while still retaining their fascination with wildlife, weather, and natural landscapes. Jerry discusses the implications for these recent cultural changes and suggests ways we can help our kids receive an education outside of classrooms and away from electronic devices.”

Some other Jerry Dennis material for our Discovery Center videos:

**Thunderstorms:** Most scientists suspect that the violent vertical winds within a thunderstorm cause particles of water and ice and molecules of air to electrify, gaining or losing electrons and separating them into powerful charged fields. Air is a poor conductor of electricity, and serves to keep the charges apart for a time. But when the difference in voltage ... becomes too great for the air to resist, a bolt of lightning equalizes the charges by leaping the gap within the cloud, like a spark jumping from an electric outlet to a plug.

A lightning stroke ... creates temperatures of 50,000 or more degrees Fahrenheit, instantly cooking the surrounding air and causing it to expand violently in a roar of thunder. ... The process repeats itself three or four times (and as many as twenty-six times), but the bolts travel up and down so fast – at a rate of up to 93,000 miles per second – that our eyes see only a single, blinding flash of lightning.

The safest place to be during a thunderstorm is inside a building, away from windows, and out of contact with plumbing, electrical wires, or telephone landlines (cell phones are perfectly safe). Outside, you are safest inside a car with the windows rolled up. If caught outdoors without shelter stay away from solitary trees, wire fences, wet beaches, and water, and never raise golf clubs, fishing rods, or umbrellas in the air. Taking cover in a thick stand of small trees is much safer than being the tallest object in a field or on a hill. If you are in the open, with no shelter available, crouch with your hands around your knees to keep the least possible contact with the ground.

**The storms of winter** rarely begin with crash and clamor. They ... [grow] by small degrees, engulfing us almost without notice. The first indication of a coming blizzard might be a slow drop in barometric pressure, ... a thickening of cloud cover and a leaden ... sky. Snow may or may not fall, but if it does the flakes are often small, hard ice pellets.

Modified excerpts from: Jerry Dennis. *It's Raining Frogs and Fishes*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.

The ... objectives are to manage ... so that those activities which are permitted are in keeping with the unique and wild character of the Pigeon River Country, and to protect the area from overuse and overdevelopment.

--from A Concept of Management for the Pigeon River Country

## Watch DNR website for final road ruling

Pigeon River Country State Forest is scheduled to remain closed to ORV (off-road vehicle) traffic under rules taking effect in January 2018. Public comments are still being received. The DNR posts this note:

“After incorporating input received in June and July, we have made final recommendations on which state forest roads will be open for ORV use and which will remain closed. Mail, email and online comments will be accepted until Nov. 16, 2017. In-person comments will be accepted at the Oct. 12, Nov. 9 and Dec. 14 Natural Resources Commission Meetings.”

Search the Michigan DNR website under *road inventory* to get updates.



**Richard Kropf with his e-bike. He offers a look at guidelines for e-bike use in the forest. He lives outside the boundaries and has been biking in the PRC for decades, both as an outdoor enthusiast and a former PRC Association officer.**

**@photo supplied by R.W. Kropf**

*Bicycles equipped with electric motors raise another modern-day question in the ongoing effort to protect the wild character of Pigeon River Country. Richard Kropf, at 85, finds the bicycles a low-impact mode of transport from his remote cabin on the Black River, but examines the unresolved question of whether e-bikes are or should be permitted on PRC roads. Mountain biking is allowed on the High Country Pathway, Shingle Mill, North Spur Riding Trail, and Pickerel Lake Pathway, but not other pathways in the PRC; bikes are also allowed on all vehicle roads.*

### **E-bikes in the Pigeon River Country?**

Should people riding “e-bikes” be allowed on the roads and trails within the Pigeon River Country Forest? This is not an easy question to answer. It seems that it depends on at least three things.

One is the question of what an e-bike actually is. An e-bike is a bicycle that has an electric motor installed on it — either as a means of propulsion or as an assist in the work of pedaling a bike. Some e-bikes (those employing a thumb-activated or perhaps a twist-grip throttle on the handle-bar) are capable of being driven solely by the battery-powered electric motor often up to speeds approaching 20 mph or more. With these you can forget about needing to pedal at all!

The only physical limitation with this type of e-bike is how far might one go using battery-power alone. The answer: “Not very far.” This is because you’re in danger of running out of juice after a few miles and having to pedal all the way home. The typical lithium battery that might have taken you a few miles that weighs about six pounds or more and the wheel that has that electric motor in its hub will weigh around five pounds more than a conventional motorless wheel. Then the control unit and wiring adds another pound or so — all good reasons that you would not want run out of juice unless the way back home is all downhill.

Most e-bikes have a “PAS” or pedal assist system which senses either when the pedaling rate is being increased or when more pressure is being applied to the pedals and gives you a bit of extra power as needed. Although I installed both a thumb throttle and a PAS system on my old mountain bike, many newer e-bikes being manufactured in China especially for sale in Europe (where more restrictions apply) have no thumb throttle but are controlled exclusively by a PAS system. I have found that

when conservatively used in the PAS mode, a bicyclist even as old as I am (85) might easily travel up to 25 miles or more with the expenditure of about as much energy as it would take to have pedaled only about 1/3 of that distance without any electrical assistance, at least if used out on the open road – even if it is an unpaved one as in most of the PRCF.

But this brings up the second or legal question. Our state legislators, apparently unacquainted with any motor-driven vehicle that has less than four wheels, have classified e-bikes as “mopeds” – a term that originally described a bicycle to which a gasoline-powered motor has been attached, but which still needs to be pedaled at first to get the motor to start. Once that motor starts, riding a moped is a lot like driving a lightweight motorcycle and for it to be street legal in Michigan, it must have a headlight, horn, automatic stop or brake-light as well as turn-signals, and be registered with the Secretary of State and driven only by a licensed driver who obeys all the rules governing automobiles (except not being allowed on freeways and having to stay on the far right side of the road). Much the same legal status and requirements remain the case for e-bikes in neighboring Ohio and many other states. But there are some other states that recognize e-bikes as being in a class by themselves and allow them to be used almost anywhere that ordinary bicycles can be used.

That “almost” brings us to the third question – should e-bikes be permitted on the forest roads and trails within the PRCF?

Some DNR controlled pathways, like the rail-to-trail route from Gaylord north to Mackinaw City, are posted with “No wheeled motorized vehicles allowed” signs, which, if taken literally, would exclude e-bikes (unless perhaps the battery is removed and left at home). Yet a friend who lives near Traverse City tells me that he sees e-bikes over there all over the place – including the rail-to-trail routes. Apparently DNR and other law-enforcement officers are more attuned to the reality of e-bikes than the state legislators are. And in the opinion of my young friend (who bike-rides regularly as part of training for triathlon competition) it is all about how fast one goes that determines whether or not one becomes a hazard to other trail-uses and who assures me, after trying out my e-bike, that he can pedal much faster on his own un-motored racing bike.

So then, what about the High Country Pathway and other pathways within the PRCF? These are, at least in one place I've seen, already posted with the "No wheeled motor vehicles" allowed sign. And I can very well see why. Although the nearly 80 miles long High Country Pathway (HCP) is very much used by mountain-bikers (and who also help to maintain it), I can see a real reason e-bikes might be excluded, not just for the safety of other users, but for the safety of the e-bikers themselves as well as to protect the physical condition of the trail. There are sections of the HCP that snake up and down steep hillsides, or twist through heavily wooded swamps by means of narrow boardwalks, where a sudden surge of power from a PAS sensor, or an inadvertent twist of the thumb throttle could crash you into a tree, leaving you with a broken limb or head concussion miles from any help.

But on the other hand, I have heard of similar bike accidents on the HCP or other PRCF pathways without any motors involved. But at this point in my life, after having covered the whole almost 80 miles of the HCP (limiting myself to 5 to 10 mile segments per day by pedal power back in the 1980s and 90s) I have little hope of repeating that wonderful experience, even in part, especially with my bad knee, without the assist of my e-bike. So my personal opinion, although it may sound like I'm joking, is that e-bikes should be permitted on the HCP, Shingle Mill, North Spur, and Pickerel Lake Pathway in the PRC for those 65 years of age or over — or if they are younger than 65, for those carrying some kind of official disability permit. Anything more permissive than that might be, in my opinion, detrimental to a younger person's future health.

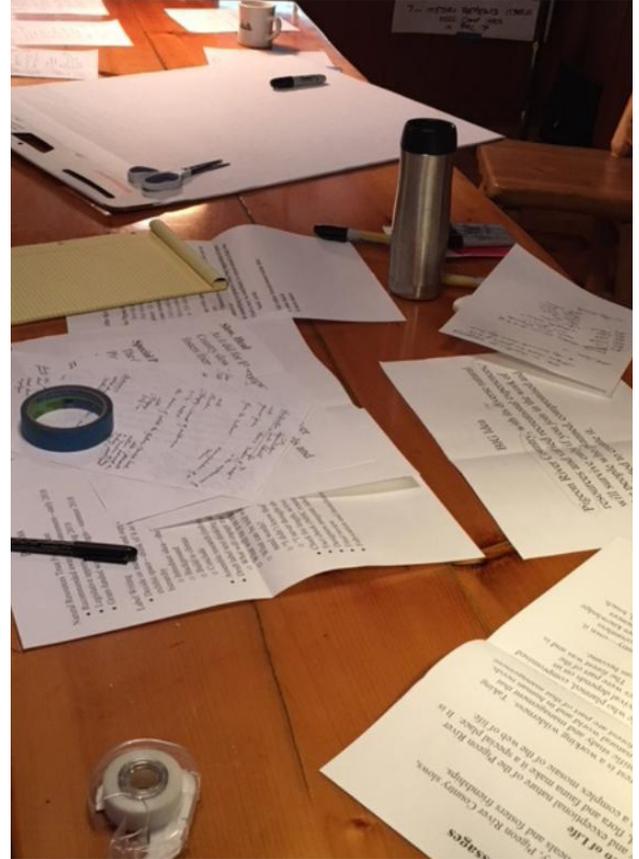
R. W. Kropf

*Rick rode his e-bike some 21 miles in three hours on Oct. 29, the day before it snowed. "Despite the electric assist, I ended up quite exhausted," he said, adding he "will think twice before I tackle that much in about three hours."*

*His route was down Black River Road to Sparr Road, west to Shingle Mill Bridge Road to the Town Corner campground, and through the McIntyre property back to his Black River cabin. It used up about three-fourths of the battery power.*



**A cow elk emerges at the boxcar door to await with the bull for Memorial Day weekend visitors to the Pigeon River Country Discovery Center. The heads were donated by center supporters.**



**Preparation of Discovery Center exhibits includes some less-than-compelling initial work, to be presented in more appealing displays by May 26.  
@Sandra Franz**

A series of videos about Pigeon River Country are posted on YouTube, prepared by Dale Franz for showing in the Discovery Center after it opens next May. They can be found at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcoGsm6movCRbPQ3UJUKePffqEccz4Jax> or by searching YouTube for “Dale Franz” and choosing the one that has his photo.

### Membership renewal reminder

Membership dues help provide a scholarship to a student intern who assists the forest manager in the summer, and help us protect the wild character of the PRC. Your membership expiration date is on your mailing label or email sending this newsletter. Please keep your membership current.

Thank you!



Visit our website at [www.pigeonriver.org](http://www.pigeonriver.org).

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