

## **Notes from 10/19/2017 PRCAC meeting**

Held at PRCSF HQ

(**Note:** These notes are not intended to be draft minutes. They summarize items of particular interest to PRCA members, but do not cover every item presented at the advisory council meeting.)

### **2018 Meeting dates:**

The 2018 Advisory Council meeting dates are:

Friday	January 19	Corwith Twp. Hall
Friday	April 20	PRCSF HQ
<b>Thursday</b>	July 19	"
(July 19 <sup>th</sup> is also the date for the annual Forestry Open House)		
Friday	October 12	"

There is a new, earlier start time of **5:00 p.m.** for all meetings. The public is welcome, and there is the opportunity for public comment at every meeting.

### **Witness Tree Award for Volunteer of the Year:**

The Volunteer of the Year award this year went to Bev and Ernie Schuster, host campers at Pickerel Lake campground. They have provided invaluable volunteer aid to DNR staff and have created a welcoming atmosphere in the campground that many campers mentioned in their reviews.

### **Legislative Update:**

#### **PA 288:**

PA 288 was signed by Governor Snyder last fall. It mandated an inventory of all state forest roads in Michigan and opens more state forest roads to ORV use and allows ORV use to retrieve game.

## Public Comment Matters:

PRCAC Chairman John Walters testified before the Natural Resources Commission in September 2017 support of the DNR's recommendation that state forest roads in the PRC remain closed.

After incorporating input received in June and July, the DNR has 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.

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During the prior comment periods, the PRCSF received the most comments of any of the state's special management units, and all but one agreed with the DNR's recommendation that state forest roads in the forest remain closed. Public comment has had an impact: Scott Whitcomb reported that, statewide, approximately 125 miles of forest roads went from open to closed due to public comment.

The advocacy of DNR staff was crucially important in maintaining vehicle access in the PRC: Paul Rose reminded the council that all the state forest roads were "on the table" (up for review with the possibility of being opened) at the beginning of the inventory process and that the achievement of keeping roads closed is a considerable one, even though we may view it as a continuation of current management practices. He also reminded us that many view this fight to gain greater vehicular access as ongoing.

### Governmental fiscal irresponsibility:

PA 288, which will open thousands of miles of forest roads to ORV use, was passed with no additional funding for the maintenance of these roads, for signage or enforcement, or for restoration of areas impacted by ORV use, such as road-stream crossings, sandy areas and other sensitive landscapes. There is resistance to using any funds generated by ORV user fees to fund implementation or enforcement of PA 288, even within the DNR's own ORV Advisory Committee.

Senate Bill 552 proposes to extend the current prices for ORV licenses and trail permit fees until 2024. The fees are now due to be discontinued in 2019. Extending the "sunset" date is good and is generally favored in the legislature; increasing the price of an ORV license by even a modest amount and targeting those funds to implement PA 288, although considered at least two House members, is unpopular with most of the legislators and is unlikely to be included in the bill.

[Let your Michigan senators and representatives hear from you on this topic!](#)

### What (non-funded) PA 288 means on the ground:

Illegal ORV use in the Pigeon has "gone through the roof" coincident with the passage of PA 288 (which doesn't take effect until January 1.) Although the DNR has recommended that roads within the PRCFS remain closed, without money for signage or increased enforcement, the practical effect may be nearly the same as if the roads were opened. But law enforcement efforts continue. CO Nick Torsky reported that, while there is some "benign use," "the people who are ripping and tearing are the ones I'm really after," and arrests for illegal ORV use have increased.

### **Oil & Gas update:**

Merit Energy, operator of the oil and gas wells in the PRCSF, is negotiating with an as-yet unnamed company to purchase all of their Michigan assets, including the wells in the Pigeon. They hope to conclude the deal by the end of the calendar year, and more information may be available in a couple of weeks.

### **Fall Elk Hunt: Brian Mastenbrook:**

100 permits were issued for the fall hunt. 100 more were issued for the upcoming December hunt, for a total of 200 for the year. (40,000 hunters applied for those 200 permits!)

74 elk were harvested by state hunters, 44 antlerless, of which 7 were calves, and 30 bulls. This number is in line with the long-term harvest percentage of 72%.

11 tribal permits were issued; 6 elk were taken by tribal hunters, of which 4 were antlerless and 2 were bulls.

### **Fisheries: Tim Cwalinski:**

Tim presented extensive documentation of stream temperatures on the Sturgeon, Pigeon and Black. Data shows that removal of the Song of the Morning dam has equalized temperatures above and below the area of the former impoundment and lowered temperatures during the warmest months of the summer on the Pigeon.

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