

# Pigeon River Country Association Newsletter

Winter 2014-15



## Honeymoon Cabin ‘unsafe’

### **Council weighs cabin rental as a new recreation policy**

The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council is stepping up its investigation of a DNR proposal that could potentially alter the character of the Pigeon: the idea of formally renting cabins to forest visitors.

As background: in 2011, following a new approach statewide by Governor Rick Snyder, the Department of Natural Resources brought its Parks and Recreation Division into the Pigeon River Country for the first time in its history. All management of campground rentals, pathways, and water access sites (Cornwall, Pickeral Lake, Town Corner Lake) was reassigned away from foresters to the recreation specialists as administrators of a “forest recreation program.”

Parks and Recreation is putting together tentative plans to turn two buildings on recently purchased land into rental cabins as the start of a cabin rental program for the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

**One cabin fronts** on the Pigeon River in a 120-acre parcel about a mile northwest of Pine Grove Campground and a mile south of Webb Road. The other sits on a 40-acre high ground that slopes down to Tubbs Creek, a tributary of the Black River, just east of Sawdust Pile Trail. Both cabins are in excellent shape, unlike those usually found in poor condition when the DNR buys an inholding.

The idea of rental cabins was first discussed by the advisory council in January, 2014 and got considerable attention at the advisory council’s Oct. 15, 2014 meeting. The advisory council held a special meeting in December to weigh in on these plans while they are still being circulated and modified within the DNR.

Charles Maltby, whose office is in Gaylord, said at the October meeting that his Parks and Recreation Division had been evaluating the two cabins in the PRCSF to “help guide us” in decisions for recreation in those areas. “We’d also like to develop a recreation management plan for the Pigeon River in general, to be a part of and work with the Concept of Management.”

**Rich Hill, the Gaylord** district parks and rec supervisor, summarized what parks and recreation could do with

cabins that are in good condition: “We’d want to somehow let people use them in a safe manner and be able to recoup some revenue of some sort just to be able to make that program more sustainable for us. What that could look like, I guess we’d have to look at a variety of different options. It could be more of a rustic hike-in model.” It could resemble facilities “at some of the more remote parks. ... The key take for us is we’d want to be able to rent those to make a more sustainable forest in some capacity. Very basic amenities, that is probably what it would be ... Exactly what the model is, I think we’d have to find something that’s a good fit.”



**Log cabin on Pigeon River proposed as rental.**



**Half-log structure off Sawdust Pile, a candidate for proposed rental program.**

The Dec. 15 meeting began with the image of the cabins as a low key, remotely-located alternative to crowded campgrounds, cabins that renters might have to walk some distance to get to, carrying their belongings in and out. The cabins would have wood heat but not electricity, and would use vault toilets.

Maltby had said earlier: “We’re basically looking at about 200 people a year out there ... a hundred nights a year. You’re not talking about a ton of people. I mean you’ve got physically more—a bigger footprint—from a large deer camp.”

**But what emerged** was that other factors, not currently well understood or defined, could change the character and size of the rental cabin program.

One unexpected requirement, for example, is that at least the first such cabin will have to meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards of accessibility so that people with disabilities can have full access to this kind of recreational experience. Even the roadway to the cabin would need to meet specific mandated standards for size and slope.

Council members, a majority of whom at first seemed about to vote in favor of the rental idea, decided instead to examine it more closely after hearing that it might result in greater than anticipated impact on the forest. They heard not only that federal disabilities law might require new roads and greater accessibility in the remote forest, but that the policy might lead to renting of more cabins than the two being considered. There are more cabins potentially coming in soon with new inholding purchases, Scott Whitcomb, the forest manager, said. And it was unclear if mandates would somehow require DNR to build more structures.

**Several advisory council members** expressed concern that a plan for managed recreation—compatible with, or as an amendment to the concept—should be in place before implementation of such a project. Other members felt the rental cabin initiative was contrary to the PRCSF Concept of Management.

Dave Smethurst: “I think it’s critical that in writing, as a part of this effort, you address how this does fit in with the Pigeon River Concept of Management. And that’s not only to justify what’s happening now, but that so 20 years from now ... we know the framework for it.”

Brad Garmon: “I’m concerned if we have movement on any specific cabin lacking a really thoughtful, comprehensive look at what the recreation plan is, we’re getting the cart before the horse.”

Mike Brown, the association’s representative on the council, noted the Concept of Management says on page 19, “Except as needed for management purposes, buildings, structures, and facilities on acquired private lands that are added to the PRC shall be removed and/or disposed of as soon as practical.” The concept, Brown remarked, “doesn’t say ‘if there’s an opportunity, if we think it’s a good idea, or we’d like.’ It says they *shall* be removed.”

**Council chairman John Walters** said he would appoint a committee of DNR personnel and council members to draft an amendment to the Concept of Management that was adopted by the DNR in 1973, amended in 1983, and updated in 2007. The proposed new amendment would “describe recreational use, specifically a rental program for existing or new buildings in the PRCA,” he said. It would then go before the whole advisory council for review. The drafting committee will include three council members and a representative from each of the pertinent DNR divisions: forest resources, fisheries, wildlife, recreation, and law enforcement.

The phrase in the concept, “except as needed for management purposes,” is receiving considerable attention regarding the cabin rental program. It has been suggested that two Green Timbers structures in use for recreation since the 1980s establish that such use is already forest policy within concept language. Others disagree. See discussion on our website, at [www.pigeonriver.org/cabin-rentals](http://www.pigeonriver.org/cabin-rentals).

Parks and recreation officials confirmed at the Dec. 15 meeting that the two cabins left standing after the Green Timbers purchase in 1982 are now unsafe. The two cabins, one called the Honeymoon and the other the River Cabin, were modified back then into three-sided shelters, and have been used ever since by campers in the Pigeon. The use has taken its toll on the structures.

**Parks and recreation** personnel now say the two cabins will not be restored with any funds controlled by their division. Near the end of its Dec. 15 session, the advisory council voted to endorse a decision to remove them from the forest, even though that decision has neither been formally announced nor the council’s advice sought. Advisory council member Brad Garmon voted no, pointing out that at least 400 people have spontaneously joined an online effort to save the two structures.

Scott Whitcomb said forest management is “sort of at a crossroads”: “From the department’s standpoint. . . a management purpose, at least in those two Green Timbers cabins, has been recreation since 1982. . . So what we’re considering at this point is, Is it feasible, or desirable, or, you know, prudent, to expand that ... Now you’re ... sort

of at a crossroads. Do you continue down that road? Or, you could scale it back [by removing] those two at Green Timbers, because they're at the point now where I would argue they're not serving a management purpose in their present condition?"

*Much of the essential discussion of this crucial issue is available in a fuller article, posted on our website at [www.pigeonriver.org/cabin-rentals](http://www.pigeonriver.org/cabin-rentals) but left out of this printed newsletter because of space limitations.*

*Dale Franz has been writing and editing the newsletter since spring 2014, and Julie Feldpausch has been fitting it into the proper columnar form, what is called graphic design, and double-checking grammar, spelling, and all the usual details.*

*For now, we are publishing the print version in black and white, and the same newsletter online in color. This keeps our costs reasonable for printing, yet, by adding pages with the cost savings, gives us more room to provide articles in some depth. Email: [info@pigeonriver.org](mailto:info@pigeonriver.org).*

*We would appreciate any responses from readers about how they would like to receive the information (printed, emailed, posted on a website, etc), how much detail they actually prefer for themselves, and whether they would rather have a collection of articles showing up periodically as a traditional newsletter, or articles posted and updated online as events dictate and time to prepare articles is available.*

*Dale has been recording meetings, transcribing, and producing articles designed to access the subtleties of a meeting. Seeing it focused on a page allows reflection on important issues like recreation policy above. Let us know if you read the fuller article online and have an opinion about the alternatives.*

*We have received a few compliments recently, including this: "I like the quality of writing and appreciate every newsletter I get. I'm feel[ing] emotional[ly] drawn to keeping the wild wild and wish I could do more to help keep it that way."*

The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council meets Friday, Jan. 23, at Corwith Township Hall in Vanderbilt, starting at 6:30 p.m.

### **Path to cooperation runs from cold of the running river to heat of a conference room**

*In this second of a series examining the shift from confrontation to cooperation about removing the dam from the Pigeon River at Song of the Morning Ranch, Dale Franz reports on his interview with one of the people involved in the process that led to the agreement.*



**John Walters at the drawn down pond along the Pigeon River in July 2014.**

Even in the coldest days of winter, John Walters loves to stand in the Pigeon River, dressed in waders, feeling the flow, breathing the moist air, watching a fluff of materials at the end of his line entice a trout. He belongs to Trout Unlimited, a national organization of people like him who are passionate, even reverent, about fine trout streams.

If the trout takes the fly, he brings it in, pauses to take in the moment, maybe gets a photograph, then lets the trout swim free. Catch and release.

"I remember distinctly what changed my mind about catch and release," he says. "I was steelhead fishing [one] March, and that water was cold. I hooked into a beautiful female, probably 24 inches long. She gave me a great fight. I put it in the net. I took the hook out of its mouth. I'm holding it with my left hand under its chest and my right hand at its tail, and I'm holding it in the water. The water is freezing, probably 38 degrees. I feel the heartbeat of the fish. And I thought, 'Holy smokes, this is awesome. This is what this is about.' And once it had strength enough to swim out of my hands, I thought, 'I've got to do this every time.'"

**He says, “It’s more** than a choice. It’s a responsibility to what I’m so passionate about—the resource, the water, and the trout that live in that water. I love the chase. I love the success. But the success is not necessarily catching trout. The success is being there, sharing it with others—sharing it with my wife, sharing it with the trout that I catch. It’s catching a trout that size and [capturing it with] the camera, holding that handful of color, then watching it swim away.”

“Unless you have the passion for being out there, and experience what I’ve been through in my fishing ... I don’t know if you get it. ‘What do you mean you want to catch them again? Don’t you like to eat trout?’ ‘I’d rather do that at the restaurant.’ ... If you’re not living it, you don’t understand it. And I think it’s a life choice.”

For John Walters, the choice has meant giving personal time as president of his local Trout Unlimited chapter, as newly elected president of Michigan Trout Unlimited, as chairman of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council, as a key member of the group that spent six years resolving the controversy over getting the dam removed from the Pigeon River, and now as a partner with those active in getting the dam properly dismantled. As with all the others in such situations, his experience has been a challenge of the first order.

**“I was the first to report** the catastrophe on the Pigeon River” in 2008, he says. He had spent much of the previous week with a 14-year-old, “one of my best friends’ sons. ... That week he caught a 15-inch brook trout and a 20-inch brown trout. We saw eight fawns along the river bank. So it was really a special week. He left on Saturday.” Sunday John’s wife, Sue, said, ‘Let’s go fish the Pigeon.’

“We pulled into ‘the tubes’” at the Pigeon River campground around 2 p.m. “and as we were going over the bridge she says, ‘What’s wrong with the river?’ I said, ‘There’s nothing wrong with the river. I’ve been here all week.’ As John pulled into the parking space, ‘I saw less than one-third of the river bed with flow. It was black. The exposed gravel had black sediment on its surface and it wasn’t going anywhere. It was all just black.” It turned out to be light organic black sediment from the Golden Lotus pond above the dam.

“She’s yelling, ‘It’s the dam!’ I said, ‘Let’s just confirm that. We’ll go to an access site just above the dam and see what it looks like.’ So we went to the access site just across from Joe Jarecki’s house, called ‘the meadows.’ There the Pigeon was running clear and clean, so it was very evident the dam downstream was causing the problem.

“They apparently had been having computer problems with their gate lift. We didn’t notice that as anglers: everything was running smoothly.” Ian Wylie, who was manager at the time, says the primary system was turned off because it was sounding false alarms, while the secondary system needed more manual input than some were familiar with performing. The inexperienced operator that night opened the gates too far in response to a very localized rainstorm, Wylie says. When alarms went off in the middle of the night, they sounded like all the false alarms that had gone off previous nights. John relates: “At 2 in the morning of June 23rd, 2008, ... alarms went off, two people got up, turned the alarms off, and went back to bed.” By 6 a.m. “their impoundment was dewatered, completely. The gates were wide open.

**“So what they did** at 8 o’clock in the morning was close the gates completely to fill the impoundment. But what that also did was stop any flow going downstream. ... I called DNR fisheries division [personnel at home] and said we’ve got a big problem.”

In the years that followed, the people with their various perspectives struggled toward a solution. Agreement was reached by all parties in spring 2014 about how to remove the dam completely. Golden Lotus members have welcomed John and others to observe the ongoing changes as the river started flowing more freely.

“They’ve been very accommodating. And I want to make sure if others want to go out there, that they call ahead.” Members live on their property, but “they also want to share ... the experience of what’s happening in this real historic event ... they’re very aware that on their property we’re witnessing something really special. ...”

### **How did they reach accord?**

“It did not come overnight. Both sides were calling for trust.” The DNR and DEQ did a “bang-up job” investigating the incident, John said. “They were out there immediately.” And the DEQ was determining how much life got destroyed by the sediment and testing levels of water, dissolved oxygen, suspended solids, that sort of thing. DNR’s fisheries division was looking at which species were making it, how balances changed, how the Pigeon River was impacted.

“Moving from investigation to resolution was incredibly challenging. On our side we thought, ‘Two years max.’ Well, six years is what it took. ... We were asking for trust because we were coming up with solutions on how to fix this problem, how to remove the dam, how to do the drawdown, how to set up the sediment traps so that we

don't have more sediment moving downstream. We had quality solutions. And they were asking for us to trust them in their saying, 'We do want to take the dam out, but we don't have the money.' And that's where the struggle really evolved.

"We did come to a point where we said, 'You know what? We do trust each other.' And we were getting some headway until we tried to collectively put together a grant. Song of the Morning Ranch was working together with Huron Pines on a grant for dam removal through the State of Michigan—and they missed the deadline. That significantly broke down trust between our side and Golden Lotus, but also Huron Pines, which was a facilitator but had no skin in the game, and was expecting the grant to be filed and move this forward. So we took a major step backwards, I think. That was around 2011 or 12.

**"We ultimately got through** another series of processes where we trusted each other. It was a lot of two steps forward, two steps back. We would agree to something and then there would be attorneys that spin it totally a different way and change the dynamics of what the agreement intended. So we said, 'No, we're not living with that.'"

How would they bring themselves back to a positive direction? "It took time. Obviously, there was more than disappointment, more than one occasion, multiple occasions. Pete Gustafson, who represented Trout Unlimited [TU] and Pigeon River Country Association [PRCA], was brilliant in keeping things on an even keel. Certainly he would be frustrated, but he wouldn't show it. He expressed to the group, TU and PRCA, that we need to continue to push for solution regardless of what happened 'yesterday.' He kept on moving down the path of solution. ... But if it wasn't for Pete, if it wasn't for our other attorney, Ed Davison, who was in my opinion absolutely brilliant when it came to strategy—Ed Davison, you know, gets very little credit for the ultimate outcome ... What I found with Ed Davison was that he thought in this capacity: he thought, 'It doesn't matter what Golden Lotus thinks when we're going to court. It matters what the judge thinks and does.' Pete had a different way of looking at it, a different strategy, and ... they complemented each other very well, two attorneys' points of view, and then we had to decide as a group, 'How do we move forward with our position?' 'How do we convey the message to Golden Lotus and the State of Michigan?'

**"But the State of Michigan** stayed kind of out of a lot of this negotiated stuff. So ... how do we convey to Golden Lotus that this is the solution that we're willing to accept? We'd bring it over to Golden Lotus, then their attorneys would speak with them—their attorney Bill Schlecte—and

they would spin that and make it not really at all what we wanted or intended. So it was trust, don't trust, trust, don't trust, where are we—all word manipulation game. Ultimately we came to a conclusion at the very last hour, the very last day, with Pete Gustafson, Bryan Burroughs [TU executive director], and Joe Jarecki [of PRCA] spending wee hours into the morning coming up with a final solution because we had to file paper work with the judge, like the next day, or this whole thing would have been blown up. It was also dependent on another grant application that we were trying to have Golden Lotus apply for. ... We as a team got it done. If those three guys had not spent those wee hours of the morning, that time, contemplating and dissecting all the language that needed to be in the agreement, I would venture to guess we'd still be battling in court."

Were individuals able to put their personal doubts or feelings aside to make this work? "We did need to really consider Golden Lotus's opinion. ... That was vitally important. About personal thoughts and feelings, ... I really worked hard at not getting overly emotionally attached. I would talk to many, many, many people, and they ... were angry," telling him Golden Lotus should not be able to have this kind of negative impact on the river. "And everybody was upset that this ... discharge took place. But it was, 'We need to find the right solution that we can live with, and that we're not sacrificing our mission one bit,' and that was full and complete dam removal. Anything short of that was going to be unacceptable. ...

**"When Golden Lotus** first applied for their permit for dam removal, is when we got into a little bit of a problem, primarily with the state, in that [the state's proposal] was not a dam removal, but a drawdown. And that's where trust with the state got diminished, trust with Golden Lotus got diminished, and we said, 'We are not accepting that at all.' This was midway through the six year period. We had a settlement agreement that said, 'Dam removal.' So then we had to go to court to establish what 'dam removal' meant. And Judge [Dennis] Murphy indicated that 'dam removal' means dam removal. Everything must go—gates, spillways, retaining walls, and impoundments, impediments, and so on.

"That's when the state really stepped aside and let Golden Lotus and our group try to find a solution." He recalled the state representatives saying, "We want to review it, certainly, but more than likely we will agree to it." His team "did our best to keep the state involved, but they still stayed at a distance."

Concentrating on the goal was not always easy. One challenge to "complete and utter dam removal and a

free-flowing Pigeon River” was understanding there are possible disadvantages of a free-flowing river, particularly the fact that the dam has prevented invasive species from moving upstream. When the team first began to meet, Trout Unlimited and Pigeon River Country Association team members contemplated the question.

“We knew,” John said, “there were no rainbow trout above the dam. We would then allow rainbow trout above the dam. There are other factors, positive and negative, that affect the stream when removing an impediment. We still came up with the same conclusion ... Once we came to that conclusion at the first meeting, we never wavered from that. Now, there were variables that would question that position, and we would have internal meetings with TU, PRCA, and our attorneys, where there was very lively discussion on not standing for that exact position, and having something less than that ...

**“Certainly there are species** living below the dam that you don’t want above the dam, but in the grand scheme of things [a spill] brings greater devastation to the river than the things that live in it. There’s also a dam on the Cheboygan River that stops Great Lakes invasive species, so we felt safe and secure. For example, gobies and all these other things that live in the lakes aren’t able to get through that dam in the Cheboygan River.

“Especially early on, there were a lot of people that wanted [Golden Lotus] crushed. We would get phone calls saying, ‘You’re gonna take those guys right out of business, aren’t you?’ And I continuously said, ‘That’s not our objective. Our objective is to see dam removal.’ If you recall, in the 1984 case Judge [William] Porter actually ruled in Golden Lotus’s favor, but also said [that] if this dam becomes a nuisance, it must be removed. And when the State of Michigan filed the lawsuit in 2008 they did not include the aspect of nuisance. Well, we [TU and PRCA] did. ...

“Bryan Burroughs was very instrumental” in the early stage of the 2008 case explaining to the state “that, ‘Listen, this is not about Golden Lotus as an organization. It’s about the river that they have flowing through their property and the mismanagement and misoperations of a dam. So let’s remove the dam.’”

**The state “was adamant** about it being a million dollar fine or one point five million. ... Ultimately, it ended up being \$150,000. I truly believe that’s because Bryan Burroughs eloquently conveyed the message, ‘It’s not about the operations of Golden Lotus and what they do.’” It was argued Golden Lotus could use its 800 acres as collateral in paying a high fine, even argued that the state should get the land, but “we had to convince the State of Michigan, in

order to get the dam out, there had to be money to do it ... That’s why the fine got greatly reduced.”

That in turn helped facilitate the 2010 settlement agreement, “full and complete dam removal, no impoundment, the fine of \$150,000 that would be paid over 15 years.” Burroughs and others helped convince the state, John said, to think differently.

How did they avoid hateful “getting even?” John said that’s “not a winning solution. We knew that right away. The thing I’ve always kept in mind is, ‘I have no ill will towards those people at Golden Lotus. ... I didn’t agree at all with how they managed the dam, but that has nothing to do with the individuals we were going to have to work with. I kept the vengeance, the spitefulness, the hate out of the equation. I can’t explain how, other than I wouldn’t let it creep in, because that’s not productive.’”

When the team took a position and Golden Lotus a contrary one, John says they were sometimes able to “lower the barriers” simply by talking together without attorneys, finding common ground, then moving on.

**“They had an attorney** who looked out for their best interests. And I understood that. There were times when I disagreed with the tactics, and still do. But he was looking out for his client.” For his part, John Walters was able to stay grounded in the goal and says Burroughs operated the same way. “When you’ve got two guys on the team that are pretty steadfast about the final outcome,” it “really wasn’t that difficult” to keep the natural human emotions balanced with finding a solution.

“We as a group disagreed on a lot of different strategies moving forward. [But] when the phone was hung up after the conference call, we had one position.” Until that point, “I have no trouble listening intently, because there were some other thoughts that I hadn’t even considered. And I’d think, ‘Whoa, that’s interesting.’ And it’s a twist on the direction that I was thinking. I like finding a solution that might not be right down the center of the road, but you might need to take the sidewalk or a different path to get to your final destination. ...

“It was the people who made up the group. It was Ray Hoobler [president of PRCA], it was Joe Jarecki, Bryan Burroughs, myself, Dave Smethurst [of TU and a founder of PRCA], Pete Gustafson, and Ed Davison. ... We were all adults. If you can’t find a solution for us, how can you find a solution for your opponent? We were looked to by the State of Michigan, and really by Golden Lotus, to find a solution that everybody can agree to.”

“Our group had to lay out” process, find ways to fund it, and how to implement it. When things started going negative, either within the team or between the parties, “we’d say, ‘Stop right now.’”

“I really don’t think anyone was happy, but were we all satisfied with the outcome? Could we live with the outcome? Yeah.

“I’ll never forget the final day in court, when we were done with the court, which was April 5, 2014. We looked across the aisle to Golden Lotus and the State of Michigan, and they looked at us, with a huge sigh of relief. It was pretty profound to say ‘This part’s over. And now the work begins.’ We could put all the differences aside and work together.”

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### Sand deposits on the move

Sand is beginning to move downstream from the upper end of the pond at Song of the Morning Ranch. And farther upstream, where the main Pigeon channel turns between two islands, the top four or five inches of three sunken rowboats are now visible above the deep sandy bottom. The sand dropped out of the running water to the riverbed over the decades as the flow slowed down approaching the dam.

Joe Jarecki and John Ernst are monitoring the drawdown. Now that the dam gates are fully open and the river flowing steadily through the former pond, they report that the sand is slow to begin washing downstream, partly because woody material is reducing the flow energy, and partly because coarser organic materials seem to be cohesive enough to resist floating away until they break into chunks. Nonetheless, Joe reported on Jan. 6 that a plunge pool immediately below the dam has accumulated one to three feet of sand. The sand, “firm enough to walk on,” is sitting atop the silt and fine sand that moved early in the drawdown.

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### Invading the invasives

Forest staff removed or thinned invasive species on 15 acres as part of a year-long project demonstrating how wildlife habitat can be improved. The treatment, done in fall of 2014, is being followed during January through March 2015 by treating 3 acres of invasive trees. In April on 40 acres Siberian crab will be pulled up and several areas planted as wildlife food plots. By September 2015, the Huron Pines organization, along with DNR staff and contractors, will have cultivated, planted, and treated more than 75 acres, including eight oil and gas pads.

The project has a budget of \$75,200. The Wildlife Habitat Grant is providing \$59,600, and DNR and Huron Pines \$15,600 through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



Wildlife opening near Inspiration Point.

Pointing to a color slide, Scott Whitcomb told the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council in October, “What we targeted here was the CCC openings in the area at Inspiration Point. ... What used to be fairly open ... has been steadily [encroached upon by] a number of different plant species. Currently our grass and uplands goals are being met ... That being said, this whole area is classified as grass, and as you look at it today you’ve got a lot of black locust in there, a lot of Siberian crab, which is good for wildlife, but it’s also quite invasive, and you’ve got a lot of Japanese barberry, which is an invasive. So the quality of this area [is] being encroached upon by woody vegetation—that happens, forest succession happens, we expect that. We’re constantly fighting against ... a number of invasive species” including autumn olive that have made the quality drop. “This grant is focused on setting back succession in this area, not eliminating the Siberian crab, but at least setting it back a little and targeting invasives to lift the quality.”

“What we’d like to do is put native species in there that are more adapted to our climate” and to enrich the diversity of the forest, by burning, cutting, herbicides, and planting. He notes that spotted knapweed, highly invasive, is being outcompeted in some places by bee balm and other native plants. “As part of this grant, we’ll be looking at the soil, making sure the pH is right.”

Soil pH is a measure of the *power of hydrogen*, where 7 is neutral, 1 is highly acidic (the most hydrogen) and 14 highly alkaline (least hydrogen, also called base). Most plant nutrients dissolve well and become available to the roots of plants at 6.0 to 7.5 pH. Above 7.5, phosphorus, manganese, and iron are less available, and below 6.0 pH, nitrogen,

potassium, and again phosphorus are less available. Blueberries thrive in moderately acidic soil, which is typical of forested lands or places with heavy rainfall.

If a site growing wild blueberries is dotted with witch hazel and shaded by red maple and white pine, it's a common Pigeon River Country habitat, very dry to dry, with few nutrients. It's called PARVHa, a type of habitat named for what grows there, a more accurate and inclusive grouping than a term like "hardwood forest."

*Along the ground, we're likely to find bracken fern, wintergreen, wild lily of the valley, and false Solomon's seal ... The difference in this kind of classification is that it considers several things at once: soil, water, what's on the ground, the bushes, the trees, and what associates with what ... managing for overall resource health rather than individual forest resources in isolation.*

—from our book, *Pigeon River Country*, page 209

"The other component of this grant," Scott told the advisory council, is arresting spotted knapweed, a blight on Niagara well pads scattered throughout the forest. "The soil's been compacted, the pH is out of alignment." After loosening the soil and modifying pH, forest technicians will plant an annual, perhaps buckwheat, which will provide green manure to build up the soil as planting is repeated over a number of years. Some will eventually be covered with a perennial mixture, others as tree stands. It is hoped a successful model will be developed for what works on these sites.

The oil and gas industry, Scott said, "is interested in these things, because, in the end, nobody wants an unproductive site."

Arch Reeves noted the original CCC opening was done by prison labor working the site manually.

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### Reading the signs

The advisory council in October approved language for a recommended signage policy. A key stipulation is that any new or revised signs not already specifically addressed by the policy would be brought to the advisory council in advance for review and comment.

Road intersection signs would be "provided in cooperation with applicable County Road Commissions. The location for such signage shall be determined by the PRC Unit Manager in consultation with" the road commission of the appropriate county. The policy document does not address how decisions will be made if the unit manager and road

commission disagree.

It does allow for interfacing with electronic mapping and global positioning system (GPS) technology in addition to "post-type" road signs.

Signs about "special contributions" or recognizing volunteer service "shall be limited "to the area within the PRCSF Headquarters buildings complex," except for the Lovejoy monument or other signs "mandated by State and Federal requirements."

The document also recommends setting up a "Headquarters education zone" located "adjacent" to the headquarters complex, with perhaps "an educational trail which would allow more signage than" otherwise allowed. The recommendations were sent to the DNR director.

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### Center idea offers brighter future for darkened historic building

The association board at a special meeting Dec. 10 welcomed Phil Alexander as project manager for an effort underway to save the big log home at headquarters by turning it into an interpretive center for the forest. The former residence, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1935, has sat unoccupied for a decade.



**Log home near headquarters, vacant for a decade.**

Phil Alexander served 25 years as the educator for community and economic development for 21 northern Michigan counties under the auspices of Michigan State University Extension Services, and among his many voluntary roles helped the Otsego County Historical Society open a museum in downtown Gaylord, a service he calls "near and dear to my heart."



**Seed money** for the proposal is coming from the family of an historic figure who was known and beloved throughout northern lower Michigan a century ago but is now virtually unknown, even as his favorite place has become one of the period's great legacies, the 105,000-acre state forest called Pigeon River Country.

The log structure was home to the resident manager of the Pigeon River Country State Forest through most of the seven decades from 1935 until the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, faced with ever-lower budgets statewide, stopped funding its use in 2004 when Joe and Jude Jarecki were living there. It remains an imposing but unmaintained log building a hundred yards behind the Pigeon River Country headquarters on Twin Lakes Road.

The family that offered initial support for the interpretive center are descendants of Herman Lunden, born in Sweden in 1877, who came to northern Michigan at age 20, worked in lumber camps, began to promote the idea of sustained forest harvest and regrowth, established banks in Atlanta, Gaylord, and Lewiston, a lumber yard in Gaylord, and a telephone company in Montmorency County, where he was county treasurer from 1896 to 1901.

**Lunden (pronounced Lundeen)** knew and corresponded with P.S. Lovejoy, and expressed in writing his own love of the Pigeon River Country that Lovejoy called the "Big Wild." Lunden served two years on the state's environmental policy board that later became the Natural Resources Commission and was instrumental in, among other things, the first efforts by Michigan to abate water pollution. He wrote letters encouraging land owners who found growing crops unsustainable on the sandy soils to deed their land to the state.

Lunden owned property in the Pigeon, had homes in Gaylord and Lewiston, and was at the time of his death in 1929 described by Gaylord's Herald Times as an essential member of the Otsego and Montmorency County communities: "Lunden was a part of us, the leader in nearly every movement begun to improve the community."

Phil Alexander says, "The story of this community leader not only helps us know our own regional history. It also helps us understand the resources of the region—our own natural resources." Alexander is leading the effort to open the interpretive center on behalf of the Pigeon River Country Association in collaboration with the Otsego County Historical Society, Otsego County Retired Senior Volunteers Program (RSVP), and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. A steering committee of representatives from those organizations, and one from the Lunden family, will be reaching out to local governments and

groups throughout the region to help in this effort to showcase the Big Wild's history, its character, and the principles pioneered by Lunden and Lovejoy. Rudi Edel will represent the association on the steering committee.

The association's first priority is to obtain a lease from the state for the 2,200-square-foot building to house exhibits and documents. The initial aim is to have the interpretive center open on weekends during the summer months of 2016, staffed by RSVP volunteers.



**All smiles as association launches steering committee for interpretive center.**  
L-R: Rudi Edel, Scott Whitcomb, Phil Alexander, Rick Kropf, and Joe Jarecki.

*Ray Hoobler took on the difficult initial steps in evaluating if and how the association could take on the interpretive center proposal, originally envisioned as a museum. Here is his report:*

### **The Proposed Historical Interpretive Center**

Who built the first fire tower in the state? Why is Pickerel Lake the only lake in the PRC with a sand beach? Where is the best view in the PRC? These and other questions would be answered if our proposed historical interpretive center is constructed in the manager's residence behind DNR forest headquarters.

Last spring the Lunden family contacted us through the DNR unit manager, Scott Whitcomb, to ask about honoring Herman Lunden who emigrated from Sweden in 1877 and later set up the first fire tower while developing sustainable forestry in northern Michigan at the turn of the last century. (More information is available on the Otsego County Historical Society website at [www.otsego.org/ochs/Affiliated%20Projects/Pigeon%20River/Pigeon%20River%20Jump%20Page.htm](http://www.otsego.org/ochs/Affiliated%20Projects/Pigeon%20River/Pigeon%20River%20Jump%20Page.htm).) The manager's residence behind headquarters has been empty for more than 10 years but is a magnificent structure built by the CCC in 1935. This then led to the idea of using it to offer displays about the history and the different regions in the PRC. The

Lundens liked this idea and offered substantial financial support to cover the work necessary to make the residence publicly accessible.

So last summer we drafted a proposal for this use that Scott sent up the DNR hierarchy. You can find a copy on our website, [www.pigeonriver.org](http://www.pigeonriver.org). This proposal gave a list of possible displays, including logging days, establishment of CCC camps in the PRC, and the oil and gas fight in the '70's. We recognized that we didn't have the necessary expertise to design and make displays. So we contacted the Otsego County Historical Society to see if they were interested in helping. They were and have joined with us in this project. By the way, one of the accomplishments of the CCC camps in the '30's was adding a sand beach to Pickerel Lake. That was achieved by trucking in loads of sand in the winter when the lake was frozen solid and then simply waiting a few months!

We had hoped that the DNR would share the costs by doing routine maintenance as needed after we had put in the necessary ramps and done the other work to meet public access construction code standards, but they weren't able to help financially in any way. This means we will need to raise an endowment to cover items like electricity, heating, and any necessary future repairs. Anyway we went ahead and had a local architect make plans and estimate the cost of preparing the residence for public access. Since we weren't sure of the scope of our project we got estimates for three possibilities ranging from \$37,500 to \$54,000. This does not include any costs for exhibits which would certainly run into thousands of additional dollars since we are proposing video and computer displays that would include both photographs from lumbering days to today and videos of some of the highlights in the PRC. The videos would range from wild areas like Dog Lake to parts of the High Country Pathway, Inspiration Point, the Black River and would certainly include the best view in the Pigeon from the Honeymoon Cabin site in Green Timbers.

Currently we plan to have the historical interpretive center open and staffed by RSVP volunteers when they are at forest headquarters. Thus visitors to the Pigeon would approach the manager's residence along a path to be built to a side door (upper photo). They would enter a magnificent room (middle photo) with a large stone fireplace. There is an adjacent large room (lower photo) through a wide archway, and three adjacent back bedrooms. Next time you are at forest headquarters, go around the back and take a look at the manager's residence to get some idea of how this would look when this project is carried out.

The October meeting of the advisory council approved a motion supporting the establish-



**Proposed front entrance for interpretive center.**



**Great room just inside proposed main entrance.**



**Dining room of log home built by CCC in 1935.**

ment of an interpretive center in the manager's residence. The final piece was, we believe, accomplished recently when Phil Alexander agreed to become project manager and suggested including a timeline featuring post-glacial geological conditions, Native American activity, the Witness Tree, Civilian Conservation Corps, and going to the current removal of the Lansing Club Dam on Song of the Morning Ranch property. He is knowledgeable about Herman Lunden and is currently active in the Otsego County Historical Society and has contacts in the state government and many interesting ideas. We are now drafting a formal request to lease the manager's residence from the State of Michigan for the purpose of establishing a historical interpretive center. We hope to build a list of individuals and organizations that believe in this project and will help carry it out by contributing various types of artifacts and helping prepare grant requests to cover display costs and establish an endowment.

We are setting up a special fund to help us achieve this objective. Donations should be made to PRCA with a notation "for interpretive center". Also please let us know what you think should be included in the displays and any ideas you have for the layout since planning is still going on.

Ray Hoobler

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*The life of every river sings its own song ... Parks are made to bring the music to the many, but by the time many are attuned to hear it there is little left but noise.*  
—Aldo Leopold, "A Sand County Almanac"

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### **New representative for advisory council**

The Pigeon River Country Association board has selected Sandra Franz to represent the association on the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Mike Brown's term expired in December.



**Sandy Franz at the Black River.**

Sandy has served previously on the advisory council, succeeding Sam Titus when Sam retired. Sandy and her husband, Dale, lived in Otsego County for 22 years, then spent 16 years living in Ann Arbor, and moved back to the Gaylord area in November. She has been a member of the association since 1977.

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### ***From Ray Hoobler, association president:***

There's some very nice news to report! We've just been told by Scott Whitcomb that the Pigeon River Country Association will be named the Volunteer Group of the Year at the January advisory council meeting in recognition of nearly 40 years of support for an intern in the PRC. You can check our website, [www.pigeonriver.org](http://www.pigeonriver.org), for more information including a picture of our award. There have also been some developments in the museum proposal that you'll find in an article in this edition of the newsletter and further progress in removing the Song of the Morning dam as well as a discussion of

possible uses for the Honeymoon and River cabins in Green Timbers. So if you don't want to visit the PRC in the snow this winter, just go to our website to get more information about these and other developments.

We have submitted a proposal to the DNR that both describes our goals and the capabilities we have to carry it out. A copy is on our website [www.pigeonriver.org](http://www.pigeonriver.org). We would like your feedback. Do you like this idea? What topics should be covered? What displays would you like to see? Please send us a message at [info@pigeonriver.org](mailto:info@pigeonriver.org) with your thoughts.



**Graffiti on the river cabin in Green Timbers.  
Structure is unsound, DNR says.**



**Pigeon River flows past cabin on 120 acres  
recently added to forest.**



**View from Honeymoon Cabin porch  
that's now considered unsafe.**



**Old wood stove in Pigeon River cabin  
could remain for use by visitors.**



**Interior of cabin on Sawdust Pile Trail.**



**Interior of Pigeon River cabin includes stone fireplace.**

*Newsletter photos © Dale Franz*