

**Annual meeting:** Sunday, July 13.  
 Members & visitors welcome.  
 Noon: picnic lunch  
 1 p.m.: meeting  
 By 3 p.m.: field trip to see dam drawdown at Song of the Morning Ranch  
*(Ray Hoobler tells more about meeting, page 6)*

**A chance to find out how the forest looks to those who walk it**

*One million plant and animal species are expected to vanish from the earth within two more decades. ... Natural resources people in Michigan have shown extraordinary dedication to the outdoors, especially field personnel, who tromp across the land doing their job whenever they can get out of their office cubicles ...*

*[A whole new way of treating forests is emerging]: managing for overall resource health rather than individual forest resources in isolation ... No longer will the system ignore the ongoing and significant decline in natural red pine communities, with their mix of flora and fauna, or the disappearance of others ...*

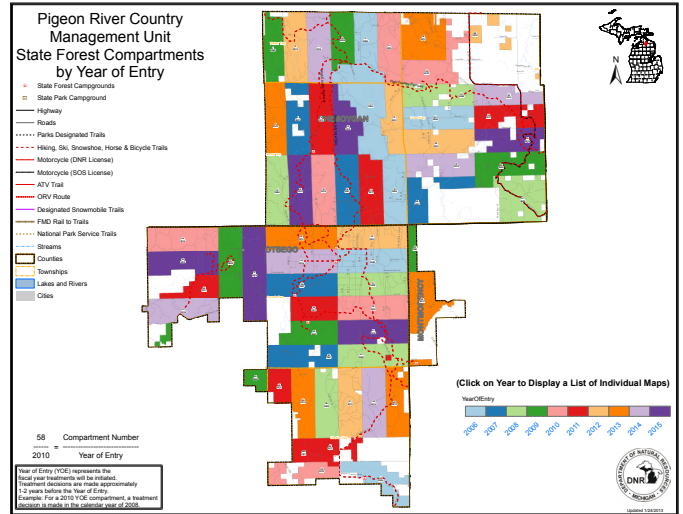
from “Ecology” chapter of our book, *Pigeon River Country*

**An open house at Pigeon headquarters July 31, from 3-6 p.m. will have Scott Whitcomb, forest manager, and others there to answer questions about proposed forest management for 2016. Here’s what it’s all about:**

Would it be interesting to see the Pigeon River Country real close, the way a forester or biologist might? Yes, it would.

Can we do that? Yes, we can. The Department of Natural Resources looks at 10 percent of the forest every year. It divides the land into compartments and studies six of them, all about two miles long and a mile wide, scattered throughout the forest. The compartments are what make up the colorful map you see at the DNR main online page for the Pigeon, at:

[http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-30301\\_30505-66207--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-30301_30505-66207--,00.html)



An open house is held for public comment two years before the proposed treatment is actually done on site. Compartments getting their 2014 public input for 2016 treatment will be posted online about June 20, after our newsletter deadline. So we’ll use the 2015 compartments as an example of what you can find in the data. At the open house July 31, field personnel will talk about any compartment or area of the Pigeon you wish.

The six compartments that will get active “treatment” next year (2015) are purple. Near the bottom of the Pigeon main page at the DNR website you can click on any of the compartments. Let’s take compartment 041. What we find is 33 pages of maps and data.

You can get there yourself going by foot, car, or horse to the southeast part of the Pigeon where Chandler Dam Road intersects with Tin Shanty Road. There’s a lot of lowland, some upland hardwoods growing in sand. The Black River runs along the bottom of the compartment, and Hardwood Creek runs through it.

When we start examining the online stuff, we find there are three stands of very big red and white pines, many older than 120 years, in the eastern part of the compartment. They will be left alone. There’s also a large area of oak that will be allowed to keep maturing, and dropping acorns for deer, elk, turkeys, and bears.

Many things are deep in the details. One is that all the cedar in compartment 41 is older than 90 years, and that new cedar either doesn’t grow well or gets browsed out by hungry mammals. There’s also a lot of swampland that gives privacy and protection to animals, as well as cleaning the water and giving many little critters their start in life.



**Black River in compartment 41** | © Dale Franz

The plan includes clearcutting 91 of the 259 acres of aspen in the compartment, and 15 of the 50 acres of upland mixed forest. (Upland is ground that's usually dry; lowland is flooded two weeks or more in growing season.)

A typical treatment for a single stand is the first one listed: "Clearcut all aspen and red maple as well as all pine under 10 inches DBH" (diameter at breast height of an adult). The purpose typically is to grow a mix dominated by aspen, which when young is a favorite food for deer, among others. It's state policy to keep a large deer herd for hunters.

When Michigan holds public meetings about what it's planning to do two years later in managing compartments of the Pigeon River Country, few people notice how the inventory alone can be a good reason to show up.

It's a chance to get a good, close look from people who have walked and studied virtually every square foot of the place.

It's not just about trusting that its managers can do a good job. It's about finding such things as vernal ponds. They are ephemeral, not connected to a waterway. Yet essential ecological processes go on in vernal ponds. They get marked on the map in part so vehicles won't turn them into ruts.

The July 31 open house is the only one covering plans for Pigeon River Country. Others listed on the DNR website are for other forest areas of Michigan.

### **Accord on removing dam brings many happy faces**

*After the short hearing in court Thursday, all parties involved seemed friendly toward one another and happy a resolution has finally been reached.*

*"We're absolutely delighted with the outcome," said Golden Lotus attorney Bill Schlechte. "The members (of Golden*

*Lotus) have come to realize that dams are not good things and that restoration is a good thing."*

*State attorney Pam Stevenson said the agreement goes "way beyond" what was ever litigated by the court.*

*Carol Armour is a chairperson for Golden Lotus and said the pond, a gem of the quiet, natural retreat, will become a meadow of wild plants.*

*from "Agreement reached," by Chris Engle, Gaylord Herald Times, April 3-4, 2014*

### **A glossary**

**Golden Lotus Inc.** owns the property known as **Song of the Morning Ranch**

**Impoundment** The pond on the upstream side of the dam, named on most maps for its previous owner as Lansing Club Pond

**DEQ** The state's Department of Environmental Quality

**DNR** The state's Department of Natural Resources

**MITU** Michigan Trout Unlimited

**PRCA** Pigeon River Country Association

**SMP** sediment management plan

*From above, trout appear dark and serpentine, curving and twisting like olive drab shadows through the water below ... In the summer of 1984 their waters in the Pigeon River turned black.*

*from "Dam" chapter, Pigeon River Country*

### **How Song of the Morning dam and pond are to be removed**

*Joe Jarecki, PRCA treasurer who participated in negotiations, provided this report.*

You may have heard the good news that the Golden Lotus/Song of the Morning dam litigation has been resolved by a negotiated agreement among the parties (Pigeon River Country Association, Michigan Trout Unlimited, Golden Lotus, DNR and DEQ). The impoundment drawdown began May 22. The dam may be removed as soon as next year, depending on how quickly the drawdown proceeds and available funding.

The DNR estimated that the 6/30/2008 sediment release killed 80% of the trout in nearly 25 miles of the Pigeon River as well as 12 other species of fish. It was the second sediment release that caused a fish kill since the dam was owned by Golden Lotus (the first in 1984). The State of Michigan Attorney General's office, on behalf of the DEQ

and the DNR, filed a civil suit that our association (PRCA) and Michigan Trout Unlimited (MITU) joined as intervening plaintiffs. The parties reached agreement and an interim order was entered on 4/5/2010.

**PRCA and MITU subsequently** disagreed with Golden Lotus and the state about the language of the interim order regarding removing the entire dam versus just removing the spillway gates and the generating equipment. Judge Dennis Murphy agreed with PRCA and MITU in his 7/22/2011 order. The parties then decided there was enough uncertainty associated with the outcome of a trial on the unresolved issues that it was in everybody's best interest to negotiate a settlement agreement. The successful negotiation culminated in Judge Janet Allen entering a consent judgment on April 3, 2014.

While just drawing down the impoundment would have removed the threat of another sediment release killing fish and other aquatic organisms, leaving part of the dam in place would have negatively impacted the ecological functions of the Pigeon River. With only the gates removed and the dam still in place, the river would have to flow through a 21 foot opening rather than the 30 – 35 foot channel that is normal above and below the impoundment. Also, the spillway floor is steep and the upstream end is about 2.5 feet above the estimated natural river bed elevation. The narrow channel and steep spillway would create flow velocities strong enough to restrict most fish and other aquatic organism trying to pass through the channel, and be dangerous as well for watercraft and wading anglers. The raised river bed caused by the spillway would also negatively affect normal sediment transport processes. It is good news for the river and those who recreate along it that the negotiated settlement includes removing the dam as well as drawing down the impoundment.

The dam structure also includes the bridge that Golden Lotus members use to access many of their facilities, so removing the dam requires replacing the bridge. Since Golden Lotus does not have the financial resources to replace the bridge, the negotiated settlement includes a plan to replace the bridge as part of the dam removal project.

**To address the many issues** important to the parties, the settlement includes four documents: the consent judgment, the Collaborative Agreement, the Project I Sediment Management Plan, and the Project II Sediment Management Plan. (Available on our website: [www.pigeonriver.org](http://www.pigeonriver.org))

The consent judgment, signed by all five parties, settles the litigation. It says the impoundment will be drawn down as provided for in the DEQ permit issued 10/16/2013. Golden Lotus will pay for the drawdown plus \$150,000 to the State of Michigan as mitigation for damages and investigation

costs, \$30,000 of which can be used to remove the dam provided that the permit to remove the dam is applied for within two years.

The Collaborative Agreement is a contract between PRCA, MITU, and Golden Lotus to remove the dam, to manage the organic sediment and sand that will be mobilized by the drawdown, and to replace the bridge that will be removed when the dam is removed. Huron Pines will be project manager for the dam removal/bridge replacement. A steering committee of representatives from the three parties plus Huron Pines will make the decisions about design and implementation.

**Almost 90% of the estimated cost** to achieve dam removal and bridge replacement has been raised. Golden Lotus has provided \$70,000 in cash and will provide about \$76,000 in services and equipment for removing sand. In addition to the \$30,000 that the state has allowed to be used, Huron Pines was recently awarded a \$272,000 grant from the DNR Aquatic Habitat Grant Program, which was established by the recent fishing and hunting license fee package. (Some would say that public funds should not be spent to build a private bridge on a private road. Others would say that a private owner who cannot afford it, but who is willing to remove a structure that is causing significant negative impacts on a public resource, should qualify to receive public funds even if that means restoring access that will be removed with the structure.)

Funding for the rest of the project is being pursued through grant application(s) to other sources; it is hoped that necessary matching funds will come from additional donations. The drawdown process is expected to extend into the fall and may not be completed until next summer (2015), while the dam removal and bridge replacement is expected to take place no sooner than next summer/fall of 2015.

**The Collaborative Agreement** includes two sediment management plans: the Project I SMP to manage organic sediment and sand sediment during the drawdown process; and the Project II SMP to manage sand and sediment beyond the scope of the DEQ permit (a sand trap downstream of the dam and possibly one upstream plus possible bank grading in the former impoundment). Drawing down an impoundment is a dynamic process with many variables, including some that cannot be controlled or predicted. That said, the SMPs were designed to help assure that the organic sediments and sand sediments that start moving during the drawdown will have the minimum possible negative impacts on the Pigeon River. Bryan Burroughs, the executive director of Michigan Trout Unlimited, has expertise regarding impoundment drawdown impacts and was instrumental in developing the sediment management plans.

The first step in the drawdown that began May 22 was to lower the water level about two feet using the existing spillway gates, then install 30 four-inch stop logs and draw down the rest of the impoundment by removing a stop log at the maximum rate of one every three days. There are many unknowns regarding how the organic and sand sediments will move and how they will impact the river's ecosystem. Most of the pond is filled with organic sediments tested and found not to contain contaminants. Most organic sediments in the pond are expected to remain in place and vegetate naturally from the viable seeds already in them. If necessary, additional seeding will be done.

**As the river reestablishes** its channel, the organic sediments in and near the channel will be transported downstream. While this will cause significant turbidity, the organic sediments are very light and most will be transported downstream to Mullett Lake. As long as the concentration is not too high, these organic particles cause few problems for fish and other aquatic organisms. Their main impact is on the oxygen available because there will be an increase in microbial activity taking advantage of the increased food source. Increased microbial activity can reduce oxygen available for fish and other aquatic organisms, creating lethal conditions if the organic sediment concentration is too high, though estimates are that the concentration will not be that high. The Project I SMP provides for sampling dissolved oxygen and total suspended solids (can be correlated to turbidity). If the data shows levels out of the predicted range, Golden Lotus will work with Trout Unlimited and PRCA to attempt to determine why and how best to proceed, then will go to the DEQ for approval.

The sand moved by the drawdown (expected to be at least 7,400 cubic yards, most of which is upstream of the pond) will be monitored to determine when it will begin arriving at the dam where as much as possible will be removed by dredging. Before the drawdown is completed, the sand management part of Project II may begin with installation of a sand trap downstream of the dam.

The process began with the parties as intense adversaries. They have evolved into strong partners whose mutual goal is to restore the Pigeon River to its natural free flowing condition.

### **Effort underway to regenerate extinct passenger pigeons**

*The name Pigeon River comes from a creature believed to have been the most numerous of its kind on earth ... flocks in such numbers they darkened the sun. ... When passenger pigeons came to northern Michigan ... they preferred cedar stands, common in the wetlands along the Sturgeon, Pigeon, and Black rivers ... The birds would nest in*

*colonies up to two or three miles wide and perhaps 20 or even 40 miles long. Sometimes there were 90 nests in a single tree.*

from pages 5-6, "Introduction" to our book *Pigeon River Country*

The last passenger pigeon died in her cage at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. Her body was frozen in a 300-pound cube of ice, shipped to the Smithsonian Institution, thawed, stuffed, and mounted. Someone has counted 1,532 passenger pigeon specimens left on Earth, some in jars of ethanol, along with some eggs (31 of them at Harvard).

A privately funded project is underway to attempt bringing the passenger pigeon back through genetic techniques, perhaps by 2020 or 2025.

Nathaniel Rich writes in the March 2, 2014, issue of The New York Times Magazine that plans to restore mammoths and some other extinct creatures include returning "millions to billions" of passenger pigeons. In his article "The New Origin of the Species," besides the problems of identifying genomes and then gradually growing what resembles an extinct species, Rich mentions such challenges as how the world would provide proper habitat for such "de-extinct" creatures.

The ecological system in which passenger pigeons thrived has been shredded of its integrity. The Pigeon River Country, at 105,000 acres, is the largest contiguous holding of state land in lower Michigan. At its estimated peak of 3 billion birds, the passenger pigeon population ate an estimated 55 million U.S. gallons of food a day. The birds not only fed on a wide variety of nuts and seeds, they kept American forests healthy by keeping insect populations in balance.

The Pigeon River Country is a rare remnant of that healthy system, challenged itself by new threats even as it continues to adjust to a changing world.

Rich writes about Stewart Brand, of Whole Earth Catalog fame, that Brand, born in 1938, "has never forgotten the mournful way his mother spoke about passenger pigeons when he was a child. During summers, the Brands vacationed near the top of Michigan's mitten, not far from Pigeon River, one of the hundreds of American places named after the species." Rich notes that in Michigan alone there are three other Pigeon Rivers, "four Pigeon Lakes, two Pigeon Creeks, Pigeon Cove, Pigeon Hill and Pigeon Point."

### **Oldest trees do the most important work**

The oldest trees in the forest are much more than primary candidates for lumber. They are now recognized by earth scientists as mothers who protect the forest: by sending alarms via carbon-bearing molecules, swapping nutrients through soil mycorrhiza or fungi reaching far and wide,

perfuming the air to encourage pollination, killing off insect populations in order to leave the ground littered with water-soluble nitrogen during scarcity, and much else. Diana Beresford-Kroeger, a botanist and medical biochemist, has a short chapter, called "Trees Make Exemplary Mothers," in her 2010 book, *The Global Forest*.

She reports that mother trees create friendly environments around their skirts for some wildflower tubers, rhizomes, and cormous plants. Such trees, she says, have learned best how to live centuries, yet "do not receive the respect they deserve, ever."

Pigeon River Country leaves some older growth trees living among younger stands as legacy trees, Scott Whitcomb says. Details will be available at the Open House at headquarters 3-6 p.m. on July 31.

### Advisory council lauded for 40 years of service

*[The 1973 "Concept of Management"] took a bold step by creating a citizens advisory council; ... the principal actors in the drama ... would guide the department in managing the Pigeon River Country ...*

*The mix of opposing points of view gave the council a vitality ... beyond its role as an adviser ...*

*[Forester Ned Caveney in 1983 wrote,] "This advisory council has truly become a model of public involvement in resources management." [This council is the only one Michigan ever created.]*

from the chapter "Oil" in *Pigeon River Country*

Citizen volunteers have been meeting quarterly for 40 years as the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Michigan's Natural Resources Commission issued a plaque on May 8, 2014, in honor of all those who have given of their time over those 40 years.

They've pondered, pounded the table, yelled, embraced, walked out a few times, walked around in the forest many times, and tried to do what they thought was right for Pigeon River Country. The council marked the beginning of state bureaucracy listening in a systematic way to the public. Our association was crucial to the formation of the council and its success.

The council meets at forest headquarters. Its next 2014 meetings are Thursday, July 17, and Thursday, Oct. 9, both at 6:30 p.m.

The council has 18 appointed members, plus 6 ex-officio members. The current members include a representative from our Pigeon River Country Association, the Cheboygan County Commission, Otsego County Commission, one each

from the Cheboygan and Otsego County road commissions, Michigan State University, West Michigan Environmental Action Council, Michigan Environmental Council, timber industry, Michigan United Conservation Clubs (hunters), National Wild Turkey Federation, Trout Unlimited, the oil & gas industry, and five at large members.

The ex-officio members are the PRC unit manager, the Cadillac District supervisor, the senior fisheries biologist, a wildlife biologist, a conservation officer, and the district FRD (Forest Resources Division) supervisor.

Their names and contact information are listed at: [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/Advisory\\_Council\\_Members\\_Updated\\_FEBRUARY\\_2014\\_448266\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/Advisory_Council_Members_Updated_FEBRUARY_2014_448266_7.pdf)

### The April advisory council meeting

*Mike Brown, PRCA representative to the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council, provided information for the following compiled report on the April 11, 2014, meeting:*

**The council considered** a suggestion for new signage at the sinkhole lakes. The standards & limitations committee is studying guidance language for Pigeon administrators that addresses how to balance traditional values of the Pigeon with efforts to educate the public. One example is the idea of replacing old sinkhole lake signs, in disrepair, with new ones that not only list rules of what users can and cannot do there, but also adds interpretive information about what sinkhole lakes are. If such signage were placed, it was generally agreed that policy firmly forbids placing any information on the sign that shows who contributed funds or labor.

Mike Brown stated, "I personally feel that those who volunteer their time and effort should find reward in what they help preserve for future generations and should not do so in search of acclaim." It was further suggested that any educational signs should be no more than waist high, rather than the billboard signs currently used to post rules.

**The advisory council recommended** approval of a proposal by the DNR management team for a new trail spur from the Witness Tree to the Shingle Mill Pathway. DNR staff said further planning would be done regarding such questions as access and limits to usage.

**Scott Whitcomb discussed buildings** within the PRCSF that are in various states of repair. Questions have been raised whether those in an advanced state of disrepair should be removed or restored. There is also some thought of putting buildings in good repair into the current

fee program for building use similar to camping fees in the forest. The Staff House, on the Pigeon River near headquarters and used for many years by groups studying the forest, currently rents for \$10 per person per night.

Mike Brown noted the PRCSF has been managed as a place to enjoy nature in an undisturbed state. He said, "Preserving buildings for commercial gain seems to go against the basis on which the Pigeon has been preserved." He also noted the Concept of Management states in part that, "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 Staff House itself needs repairs; for one thing, the roof leaks. Two other buildings, the former residence of the forest manager and a smaller residence near headquarters, are vacant and there is serious question whether they should be preserved or removed.

Buildings on a 200-acre parcel added to the forest on Chandler Dam Road, and another at Hackett Lake went from excellent condition when purchased as inholdings to vandalized wrecks that the state finally demolished.

Whitcomb said use "for management purposes" since 1982 has included recreational use accessed by hiking in and staying in one of two cabins or lean-to structures, instead of bringing a camper near a remote site. The so-called Honey-moon Cabin and River Cabin in the Green Timbers section of the Pigeon, used overnight by hikers, are in disrepair.

A question is whether to expand such use to four buildings within the forest instead of the current two. Another question is whether the DNR Parks and Recreation Division has the capacity to take on proper protection and maintenance. That division, not the foresters, are assigned such responsibility under existing state policy.

No decision was made.

**Merit Energy has been issued** a permit to plug and abandon the State Charlton 5-7 well in the PRCSF, citing that the well is no longer profitable. Unfortunately, recently the well has been shown to be profitable again and so Merit will delay plugging and continue to monitor the profitability of the well.

### **Council member posts forest praise online**

Brad Garmon, advisory council member from the Michigan Environmental Council, posted an article online dated May 23 describing seeing three elk "crashing away"

through trees and other delights of his visits to the Pigeon. See <http://michigandistilled.org/2014/05/23/to-praise-and-protect-holiday-thoughts-on-michigans-public-lands/#more-1356>

### **Kirtland's Warblers return to neighborhood**

The warbler nearly extinct 50 years ago will be celebrated for its annual return to northern Michigan with a motel event in Grayling on June 12, sponsored by Huron Pines. Kirtland's Warbler, also known as Jack Pine Warbler, breeds in young jack pines near Grayling in spring and summer, then winters in the Bahamas. Its numbers have expanded in recent decades.

Huron Pines is an active nonprofit working in the Pigeon and elsewhere in northeast Michigan to conserve forests, lakes, and streams. Its website is [www.huronpines.org](http://www.huronpines.org)

The breeding grounds are about 50 miles south of Pigeon River Country, which has 20 or so other warblers (see page 282 of our book *Pigeon River Country*).

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

Things are looking up: some perfect up north weather; Dale Franz and Julie Feldpausch volunteered to be newsletter editors; and the drawdown of the Song of the Morning pond has begun! Now is a great time to go look at lady's slipper and purple fringed orchids, maybe on the way to fish. We are, however, still in need of a webmaster for our website [www.pigeonriver.org](http://www.pigeonriver.org), but until one shows up we will do our best. News, purchases, and memberships are now available on the website. So, for instance, if you've been checking it you know the state granted \$272,000 for the Golden Lotus dam project!

Our annual meeting is at forest headquarters at 1 p.m. Sunday, July 13. Besides a few short and sweet business matters, we are planning a field trip by 3 p.m. to Song of the Morning Ranch to see the effects of the pond drawdown since it began May 22 and discuss dam removal and area restoration. We are part of an overall steering committee developing plans and grant proposals for dam removal (see article, page 2). A picnic lunch starts at 12, the meeting at 1 and field trip by 3. Check our website for further information on the field trip as it becomes available, and photographs.

We look forward to bringing you up to date on our activities at the meeting. So please reserve Sunday, July 13, for our get-together.