

Pigeon River Country Association Newsletter – Winter 2014



2014 Winter River Scene – Photo by Editor

From the President: There's been a gap – too long a gap – since you last heard from us. Contrary to some expectations this gap was not caused by the arctic air that has come through over the winter. Instead we have been struggling with a recalcitrant website and difficult communication with a new newsletter editor. Drew YoungeDyke, our webmaster, had agreed to take on the newsletter editing job that Rick Kropf has been doing for many years now. Unfortunately right after the Fall 2013 Advisory Council meeting his work demands increased which made communication difficult and editing the Fall newsletter impossible. Then our credit card arrangement through Google was terminated. This double whammy meant that you didn't get the Fall newsletter and that you couldn't order a map, book, or pay your dues on the website!

We apologize for our failure. We have, we believe, succeeded in resuscitating our website at www.pigeonriver.org and, while late, resumed our newsletters to you. So please, if you haven't paid your dues, either send \$25 for family membership renewal or \$20 for individual membership renewal to us at PO Box 133, Gaylord, MI 49735 or go online and pay them through our new secure credit card system. (Your mailing label has your membership expiration date on it.) We depend on your support to sponsor an intern every summer to help in the Pigeon River Country State Forest and to provide financial help for projects in the PRC.

Our difficulties also emphasize our need for help. We are looking for a webmaster and a newsletter editor. If you are interested in the Pigeon

River Country and can help in either of these areas, please email us at info@pigeonriver.org with your contact information, how you can help, a brief statement about your background, and any questions you may have.

There has been, however, significant progress in another area. The Association, represented by our treasurer Joe Jarecki, has been in regular, constant communication with the Golden Lotus board, Michigan Trout Unlimited and the lawyers in an effort to safely and completely remove the Lansing Club dam on the Pigeon River. By working together with the consultants, we have greater expertise than any single participant possesses in developing plans for this work. We delayed this newsletter with the hope that the formal arrangements would be completed before sending it to you. But rather than wait another couple of weeks, we decided to give you an update and ask you to check our website for further developments.

So what has happened? Golden Lotus will go ahead this spring with Phase 1, the drawdown of their pond. We have all worked together to ensure that this will be done as safely as possible. For instance, DNR policy and the informal committee agreed that the drawdown should be put off until the spring because of the impact on wildlife of a major drawdown just prior to winter. There will be monitoring arrangements in place that will signal any problems occurring during the drawdown process, so that adjustments can be made to deal with them. Huron Pines, an active, well respected conservation group that has dealt with dam removal in other settings, has agreed to lead the Phase 2 dam removal and river restoration project, to write grant requests, and to manage the project. This second phase will be overseen by a steering committee comprised of Golden Lotus, the Association and Michigan Trout Unlimited, which Huron Pines will chair.

These arrangements are expected in the very near future to be incorporated into an overall resolution of the legal proceedings that have been underway for several years.. All of this has developed over the last several months and has produced, I believe, a partnership that will ultimately restore the Pigeon River to a healthy, free flowing condition and make the Pigeon River Country a better place for all. (*Ray Hoobler, PRCA President*)

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Waiting for Spring - 3/15/2014 Photo by Editor

Advisory Council Reports:

Summary of October 10, 2013 Meeting

Chairman Walters has recently appointed a committee Chaired by Brad Garmon – The “Education & Engagement Committee” They are charged with making recommendations to the council for ways to provide a better flow in of information between the Council, the DNR and the Public.

Saunders Dam Update: The Saunders Dam has been drawn down and the dam removed. Reseeding has taken place and the restoration to a more natural state is looking good. This project is reported to have reconnected 8-miles of stream habitat.

Equestrian Use: Law Division Representative reported that after 6-years since the clarifications of allowable equestrian use. Those rules will be more strictly enforced. A recent enforcement action that was taken to court and the offender found responsible, leniency will no longer be the norm. Equestrian riders have had more than adequate time to make themselves familiar with the rules as well as educate others within the user group.

Full Report of January 17, 2014 Meeting

Council Membership: The Council welcomed two new members at their January meeting, Paul Beachnau replacing Ken Glasser representing the Otsego County Board of Commissioners, and Dave Matelski replacing Jack Deming representing the Otsego County Road Commission. Prior to the April 11th 2014 meeting there will be an orientation for new members and all others wishing to attend. The purpose will be to inform members as to the processes which the Department of Natural Resources uses to make decisions.

Election of Officers: The members elected John Walters for Chairman and Rique Campa for Vice-Chairman to serve another term for 2014.

2014 Meeting Schedule: The remaining meetings in 2014 will be held on Friday April 11th, Thursday July 17th, and Thursday October 9th.

Building Management: Scott Whitcomb reported that there are several buildings in the PRCSF that are in various states of disrepair. Some are unsafe while others could be made safe and usable with a little work. The Department is reviewing these buildings for various factors including possible solutions ranging from demolition to repair to possible use a rental units.

Evergreen Goals: A report was given by Rex Ainsle on the DNR’s – “Evergreen Goals”. These goals cover three core areas, “protection, economic benefit and recreation” The departments intent is to find that area where the three best intersect and can provide the most benefit to the Citizens of Michigan.

Elk Hunt: The last hunt of 2013 was recently completed with a total 202 Elk taken over both the late and early seasons.

Special Discussion:

The Council took place in a facilitated discussion lead by Jordan Burroughs- This was very helpful and the results of the discussion should prove valuable in guiding the Advisory Council in future meetings. Key points that were brought up are:

- Wild and quiet; ensuring future generations can see and feel the same PRC; keeping a “wild” feel with increased use or possible overuse; to protect and preserve the wild character of the PRC.
- How much road access to provide; Access versus roadless areas; how much of PRC should be within ½ mile of a road; promoting public access while controlling resource damage.
- Diversify/enhance support for PRC; creating the next generation of PRC supporters and advocates, remaking the case for the concept of management
- Education of users to respect the resource; more education seminars in forest on wildlife/resource management; increase knowledge of values of PRC with partners and users.
- Control commercial use; regulate commercial activity, economics control; limit commercial development.

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Topics to Consider for Future PRCAC Meetings

- Identify appropriate strategies/actions to address each of the “top” issues/topics?
- Further prioritize top issues/topics based on key factors (e.g., urgent, important, feasible, etc.).
- Discuss expectations - what should the DNR expect from the PRCAC; PRCAC expect from the DNR; PRCAC expect from fellow PRCAC members?
- Discuss how these priorities fit within the other Department and Division plans and goals.
- Identify and prioritize internal PRCAC issues (e.g., process, subcommittee structure/purpose, etc.)
- Define success as a group - what constitutes success for you as a Council? How do you know when you are successful? What are the success indicators?
- Determine whether anyone is missing from the conversation? Does the PRCAC need to consider engaging outsiders based on the issue/topic/problem they seek to address?

(Report by Mike Brown: PRCA Representative to the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council)



Black River in March 2001 – Photo Archives

Climate Change and the Winter of 2013-14

(Some Thoughts from the Editor)

While I’m fully aware that linking these subjects together is a hazardous undertaking — even speaking of “global warming” is no longer politically correct — still, this winter’s brutal weather should even give us northerners, who are supposedly used to such extremes, pause to reflect. After all, most of us, despite our isolation, are more or less in touch, thanks to TV and the Internet, with what is going on in other parts of the country or even in some other places in the world. We hear of gigantic typhoons in the Philippines, extensive flooding and devastating storms on the southern coast of England and

other parts of Europe’s Atlantic coast not unlike Hurricane Sandy’s 2012 impact on the US eastern coast. And while the frequency of tornadoes may not be greater, their size and violence seems to have increased. Lately we’ve had uncharacteristic snowfalls in the southern USA, and until recently, California has experienced the worst drought ever since records have been kept. What is going on?

Well, as I may have mentioned before in writing about this subject, when I first heard of the term “global warming” about a quarter century ago, we were also told that at least some scientists believed its arrival would be most noticeable through wild extremes in the weather, with some summers unusually hot, while others unusually cool. The same goes with the winters, at least for awhile. Less than a decade ago, we were also told that Michigan’s winter weather would generally become warmer and wetter. This became very noticeable with the kind of events we experienced here around the Pigeon River Country when in both March and December of 2012 heavy wet snow brought down the power lines, snapping off tree limbs, and in a few cases, even toppling whole trees, yet temperatures remained generally mild. The rest of the winter of 2012-13 was better behaved, with frequent thaws and very few subzero temperatures except for a few mornings in February (like Feb. 9, 2013, which started off at -15F but by the next afternoon it was +35F).

But this winter of 2013-14 has been brutally different, starting early on December 16th when the morning temperature here was -17F and thereafter no above freezing temperatures were seen except during a brief thaw on January 11-13 only to go back down to -21F on the morning of Jan. 21st. While the thaw lowered the snow level a few inches, more and more fell, as well as blew in on strong winds which, combined with a lack of crust-forming sunshine, has made cross-country skiing difficult, if not downright dangerous at times, given the wind-chill. Early in the morning of February 27 it was -32F outside my cabin, and on March 3rd it was -26F at sunrise. Since then, March has seen temperature as low as -26 (Mar.3) and high as 53 (Mar. 10). With only a few brief thaws that compressed the snow rather than melting it, at this point in time (Mar 17) I’m still more or less “snowed-in” with my Jeep parked a half-mile away -- next to the county road.

Does this mean that overall, that there really is a climate change taking place? And if so, how can it be in the direction of global warming, even while some, given this winter’s weather, are beginning to wonder if we aren’t experiencing the onset of a mini-“Ice Age.” Some were even talking about this weather being caused by what seems to be a lull in sunspot activity at a time that the Sun should be at the peak of its 11-year cycle? But the week after I heard this theory it quit snowing and the sky cleared enough that I was able to check with my small

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telescope equipped with a sun filter and to my surprise there was one of the biggest sunspots I've seen in years!

But even if there is a strange lull in the Sun's 11-year cycle, does this mean that overall, the earth will not continue to warm up? After all, history has recorded mini-"Ice-Ages" before, most noticeably in the late 1600s, but that did not stop the over-all warming trend since the last major Ice Age began to thaw out about 20,000 years ago. So given this overall trend — with the next major Ice Age not scheduled to begin until about 30,000 years from now — what kind of weather can we expect in the meantime?

To try to predict what will happen, even in the short term, we first have to understand what is going on right now. And to do that, we need to try to understand a number of separate things that seem to be going on all at once. These are, first, the increasingly wild behavior of the high altitude jet streams; second, the polar vortex and its oscillations, and, finally, the suspected relationship of the later to the stratosphere and what seems to be going on way up there.

I mentioned "jet streams" in the plural, as there are four of them, two south of the equator and two north of it, each circling the earth from West to East. They are caused by a combination of the earth's rotation and the heating of the atmosphere by solar radiation. They were only discovered after high altitude aviation began in the middle of last century, but now, better understood, they can be seen as acting something like conveyor-belts that tend to drag the air closer to the ground along with them, thus dominating our short term weather patterns.

The polar jet streams are generally located at about a latitude of 70°N or 70°S — depending on which pole we're talking about. But a lot like a wiggling snake, they can swing widely from side to side. The altitude of the polar jet streams fluctuate between about 23,000 to 36,000 feet above the surface of the earth. The north polar jet stream tends to move farther north in the summer and further south in the winter months, as the south polar jet stream does just the opposite. The polar jet streams are also generally the strongest, compared to the two subtropical jet streams, which tend to follow tracks about 30°N & 30°S respectively, but at higher altitudes ranging from 33,000 to 45,000 feet, and are generally weaker. In any case, they are a real boon to aviation — providing you are flying west to east.

However — and this is the really wild card in particular — each jet stream is susceptible to deflection that often throws them even farther off-course. This due to what is called the "coriolis effect", which is the tendency of any spinning object to throw off debris or parts of itself (think of a spinning tire throwing mud from its treads). In the case of the jet streams, this deflection tends to be toward the equator, which in our case, in Northern Michigan (for example, Gaylord at 45°N), means that when the northern polar jet stream gets especially

rambunctious, we are apt to get hit with nasty weather from the north or northwest.

But it's not just the polar jet stream that affects us here. Since the normal track of the northern subtropical jet stream is only about 15 to 20 degrees south of us, it also often affects us here in Northern Michigan, as when this jet stream wanders northward and we experience sudden thaws in the winter, or even tornadoes and other violent spring and summer weather events.

Then there are the effects, even farther away, of what is called the "Northern Pacific Oscillation" which in turn seems to be influenced by the *el Niño* (so named when unusually warm water, originating in the southwest Pacific finally reaches the west coast of South America around Christmas time) or, in some years, its contrarian cooler-water sister, *la Niña*, takes its place. Either way, they eventually affect even the North American west coast. Normally, these Pacific Ocean events don't affect us much here up in the Great Lake State, but recently, this year and last, *la Niña* has been dominant, and when that happens California and the American Southwest get very little moisture, because the ocean temperature and currents also affect the subtropical atmospheric jet streams.

No one seems to know just what causes the *el Niño/la Niña* oscillation. Most climate scientists think it must be connected to the warming of the atmosphere, thus the ocean beneath, but I came across a website claiming it all was result of volcanic eruptions under the Pacific Ocean. But when those ocean currents are cool rather than warm, then the northern subtropical jet stream over the Pacific ocean sometimes veers off sharply to the northeast taking whatever wet weather that was destined to be rain for southern California and snow for the high Sierras and delivers it instead far to the north, even to Alaska and the Yukon territory. And when this moist air from the Pacific moves that far north, then, particularly in the winter months, it can often be deflected southeastward, resulting in heavy snowstorms in the upper Midwest. Once this happens, as it did this past December, things get even worse, as when around New Years it was followed by a new shot of sub-Arctic cold air reinforced by the latest culprit, the mysterious "Polar Vortex" (or vortices). But that is another story, and having run out of space, I'll leave that until the next issue of our newsletter if there is room. If not, you will be able to eventually find the whole article on my website at www.stellamar.net/writings/writindx.htm and searching for articles on various subjects; that is, after the snow melts enough that I can get a repairman into my place my internet satellite system running again. Meanwhile remember to "Think -- and maybe even pray for -- Spring."

Rick Kropf, Senior or Former Editor –

(depending on how much help we can get)