

Pigeon River Country Association Newsletter

Spring 2015



Donations needed

Dam removal in jeopardy

For want of \$45,000 in public contributions, the Golden Lotus dam across the Pigeon River might not get removed after all. Without those extra funds, a large grant for the project will disappear this fall.

A grant of \$272,500 to pay for the greater share of the dam removal and restoration will expire if not used to complete the project by fall of 2015. If the project is halted, there is no legal requirement for it to be resumed. Left in place, the dam structure keeps the river about 14 feet narrower than normal and the bed about 2.5 feet higher than normal, even with the gates wide open. And it degrades river quality.

Joe Jarecki, former PRC unit manager and now PRC Association board member, who participated in the years of negotiation on behalf of the association, points out that “the impact of leaving the dam in place” would be “to increase

Use a button to remove the dam

“Getting the last 8 percent of funding donated is critical to what we’ve been trying to accomplish for decades,” Ray Hoobler, PRCA president, said. “Please contribute what you can to make this work.”

To donate online at www.pigeonriver.org:

- click on *Maps/Membership/Donations* at top;
- click on *Donations*; then click *Dam Removal*;
- in *Quantity* enter number of multiples of \$25 you wish to contribute;
- click *Buy Now* button and enter your information;
- click the *Complete Order* button.

Or, send a check marked “dam removal” to PRCA at P.O. Box 122, Gaylord, MI 49734.



Dam structure to be removed, approximate area marked. River flows from bottom of image to top.

GoogleEarth_Image provided by Joe Jarecki.

the flow rate of the river at the dam so that most aquatic organisms cannot pass.”

He said it would “be dangerous for watercraft” attempting to move through the dam structure. In addition, the dam structure would reduce “the quality of aquatic organism habitat for about a quarter mile” upstream by keeping “a significant amount of sand” deposited there instead of the sand moving away downstream to be mostly captured in a sand trap.

So a network of organizations is seeking public contributions of \$45,000 to totally free the famed Pigeon River from a dam system that has been disrupting flow for more than a century. The groups, coordinated by Huron Pines, see it as an opportunity for the wider public to help restore one of our prime resources to greater health.

The dam is on a private inholding that in recent decades has belonged to a yoga meditation retreat, Song of the Morning Ranch. The river itself belongs to the residents of Michigan.

The dam sits where the river crosses through the heart of Pigeon River Country State Forest. The Pigeon is a designated natural river. There have been a series of dams at the site since the logging era of the late 19th century. The dams blocked critical spawning habitat upstream, created a pond that warmed the cold river water, and kept organic materials and sediments from distributing normally throughout the river. The impoundment upstream of the dam was known as the Lansing Club Pond when Oliver Black purchased the property in the 1950s and later developed the yoga retreat. He installed a new dam after the existing one collapsed in 1957. That dam spilled the organic contents of the pond downstream in 1984 and again in 2008, both times stressing the premier trout stream and killing thousands of fish.



Dam still sits astride Pigeon River. As viewed from ground that used to be under the pond, the river flows into the open dam and on downstream beyond the opening. All structure is to be removed, except the dining hall on far right beyond the fence. | © Joe Jarecki

The gates were opened gradually last summer and the pond drawn down as required by Judge Janet Allen’s April 3, 2014 consent judgment. The river has now established a path through the pond area and vegetation has blossomed.

After six years of struggling in and out of court, Trout Unlimited, the Pigeon River Country Association, and the yoga retreat’s corporate entity, Golden Lotus, Inc., reached voluntary agreement on plans to remove the dam, including the gates, spillway, supporting structure, and artificially narrowed banks, and to place a bridge providing access to the Golden Lotus facilities across the river.

All the parties are cooperating to remove the dam. That means:

- taking out an electricity-generating powerhouse constructed in the 1950s.
- removing the reinforced concrete spillway that starts above the natural river height and runs through the base of the dam for 60 feet.
- taking out the gates, the turbines, the set of concrete abutments, and all bottom structures at the base of the existing powerhouse.
- removing some of the approximately 400-foot-long, 14-foot-high embankment that also serves as a roadway across its floodplain and the Pigeon River.

The removal project includes installing a timber bridge to replace the roadway atop the dam that provides the only access to the Golden Lotus facilities. The new bridge, with a 50-foot span and total length of about 70 feet, will not impede the free flow of the Pigeon River.

Song of the Morning Ranch members have embraced the idea of removing the dam and restoring free-flow to the river, but have not had the resources to fund the entire project.

The parties in the case have been working together since last summer monitoring the pond drawdown, the settling of the Pigeon River into a stable channel through the pond, and the gradual movement of sand and other sediments that had settled out of the impeded water over the decades. Removal of the entire dam structure and restoration are called “Project II Work” in the collaborative agreement. The scope of Project II work is more comprehensive than the legally-mandated drawdown and “is being voluntarily undertaken” under the March 28, 2014, agreement of the three parties, Golden Lotus, Michigan Trout Unlimited, and Pigeon River Country Association.

Project II calls not only for “removal of the existing bridge, spillway(s), abutments, power generating equip-

ment, and power house structures in their entirety, resulting ... in a natural river bottom.” The agreement also specifies installing a replacement bridge, replacing existing phone and power lines. discharging about 34 cubic yards of fill to make a road 130 feet long for bringing mechanical equipment to the edge of the water to construct and dredge a sediment basin, and constructing an additional sediment basin downstream of the dam. It also calls for “such further habitat improvement” that the parties find mutually agreeable and “for which funding is available.”

This Project II is costing an estimated \$536,500. About \$491,600, or 92 percent, has been raised so far. The last 8 percent is needed in the next few weeks so the project can begin.

The state’s Aquatic Habitat Program is providing the \$272,500 major funding from the pool of fishing and hunting fees. Golden Lotus contributed another \$70,000 cash and \$76,000 in-kind match. The retreat is also paying \$150,000 to the state for damages and investigation charges; some \$30,000 of that payment is scheduled for use on Project II. The Gabby Trust Fund is contributing \$20,000 on behalf of Golden Lotus. And, Patagonia approved a grant for \$10,000.

Trout Unlimited is making an in-kind contribution of \$12,000. The Pigeon River Country Association is donating as matching funds its remaining \$1,150 from its dam removal account.

Huron Pines, a northern Michigan conservation organization headquartered in Gaylord, offers background, updates, and even time-lapse video of the dam removal project at its website, <http://www.huronpines.org/>.

Lord, there is a language you gave only to rivers.
I pray that you would resurrect this water,
gather the way it mends the space
between one body and another ...

Jaimien Delp, from “River Prayer”

Jaimien Delp grew up in the Boardman River watershed west of Pigeon River Country. Her father, Michael Delp, taught poetry at Interlochen and for some years participated in a writing workshop in Gaylord. The character of natural rivers permeates his own work. If you stand on a bank in August, he says, “the clarity of the water pulls at you. You bend close to see your reflection, and, instead, see farther than you have ever seen before.”

Poetry, when it catches you right, can convey what our ordinary language misses about such special places. It

works not only with words, but the spaces around words, the tempo, subtleties, feelings. Like how autumn color slips away onto the river.

The hillsides drain of color

The hillsides drain of color every fall
until only the yellow aspen and
tough brown oak leaves remain.

A few weeks later
after hard rain or killing frost
the yellow and brown leaves
tumble and spiral down toward the river, indolent,
their flight now independent of the wind.
Subservient they still must be to gravity,
but with a certain gaiety.

Freed now from all decision-making—
when to unfurl, when to color,
when to show their backs, when to fall—
some ride buoyantly on top,
some submerged just beneath
(and some unfortunates snagged by limb or bank)
but all seem confident of their unknown destination.
The current is made visible now by
this phalanx of brown leaves
that mirrors and perhaps shelters
the schools of fish below.

Later still, ice floes will follow
the same path as their leaf brethren
as the river starts to congeal
but they seem somehow
more agent than passenger.

Sandra Franz

Our annual Pigeon River Country Association meeting this year will be Sunday, July 5, 2015, starting at noon with a light lunch, then business meeting at 1 p.m.

We will meet as usual at forest headquarters, 9966 Twin Lakes Rd., Vanderbilt, MI 49795, near the middle of the forest’s 105,000-plus acres.

Would you like to join us?
Membership available at www.pigeonriver.org

Your membership dues are essential in helping us protect and defend the wild character of the Pigeon River Country. Please check your mailing label for your membership expiration date and renew when it's time by going to www.pigeonriver.org Or send a check marked "membership renewal" to PRCA at P.O. Box 122, Gaylord, MI 49734.

Council finds rental cabins contrary to concept of Pigeon River Country

Because of the absence of dwellings, cultivation, commercial enterprises and other signs of human activity, visitors to Pigeon River Country can enjoy a feeling of escape from today's fast-moving society. A flavor of wildness and peaceful beauty remains ...

Concept of Management

The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) has rejected the idea of rental cabins—even a limited experiment using two—and left the Department of Natural Resources to ponder whether to proceed.

Local Parks and Recreation Division staff aim to present a summary of the situation, including the PRCAC advice, to senior staff in Lansing in April or May. At this point, it remains a question whether there is sufficient support for the idea or evidence that it could be implemented, given the strong impression left by the PRCAC deliberations that the idea contradicts many specific passages in the Concept of Management, which guides decisions about the forest. At its Jan. 23 meeting, the PRCAC looked at direct quotes from six different sections of the concept that seem to speak with little or no support for maintaining rental cabins. The council voted 8-6 against recommending even a limited cabin rental program. Those who favored the proposal also favored changing the Concept of Management to accommodate the cabins.

Those opposed to the cabins said the Concept of Management is clearly opposed to leaving the cabins in the forest.

Sandy Franz, the new representative of the Pigeon River Country Association on the PRCAC, said, "I applaud the excerpts [that the committee] provided. In my review of the concept there were six, seven, eight, nine more that could have been included that to me make a rental cabin program in the Pigeon River Country inappropriate."

"The charge that I have from the Pigeon River Country Association is to protect the unique wilderness characteristics of the Pigeon ... The goal of creating a contiguous wild piece of land, I think, is the highest value. ... I cannot see this [rental] program being supported by the consistent and in many cases lyrical language of the Concept of Management."

Her predecessor, Mike Brown, commented from the audience: "I don't believe the Pigeon is a place [for] cabins or commercial operations as rentals. We have had historically other structures that were probably as suitable as these for the same purpose. Blue Lakes is a perfect example. There were cabins there, structures; they were removed. There are no structures there. They were in good shape. I think they ended up" moved to other locations outside the forest. "I don't believe these lands were purchased with Trust Fund dollars in order to start a commercial venture, whether by state or private entity. They were purchased to provide the habitat for fisheries, wildlife."

Dave Smethurst, one of the founders of the PRCA, said: "I don't think we ever had buildings quite like these. We had big lodges [for up to] 30 people. ... [But] I don't want [Pigeon River Country] to become a park. ... I want the Pigeon to remain a working forest. ... I think if we have a cabin rental program it will edge people toward thinking this is a park. ... I don't think we should have rental cabins."

The committee presenting the cabin rental proposal for the advisory council vote admitted up front it was uncomfortable with any proposed tinkering with the concept. "The committee does not believe we should open up the Concept of Management to amendment ... on this topic," Pete Gustafson said "There is a question whether ... the concept permits this activity."

He and Paul Rose said that if the council voted against pursuing the idea of rental cabins, it would be unnecessary to consider whether amendments are needed or what they would say. If it voted in favor of the rental cabin idea, the director should provide interpretation of what might need amending before the council considers any amendment language.

The motion, defeated 8-6, read: "The advisory council recommends consideration of the cabin rental program as an appropriate management activity, subject to such terms, conditions and limitations as the council may recommend and the department approve."

The entire Concept of Management can be viewed at www.pigeonriver.org on a drop-down menu in *Documents*.

Center idea gets support

The Historical Interpretive Center proposed for the now-vacant log home near forest headquarters got a favorable response from a committee on behalf of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council.

A majority of the Education and Engagement Committee “supported the idea ... noting that education on the history, ecology and issues of management in the forest is helpful overall; that centralizing activity in this ‘developed zone’ can ideally reduce pressure for activity, signage, etc. in the forest proper, and that there are many good stories to tell.”

Forest staff asks for removal of Honeymoon and River cabins

A memo to the Forest Resources Division chief in Lansing recommends two ailing structures finally be removed from the Green Timbers property. “Local staff members from Forest Resources, Wildlife, Fisheries, Parks and Recreation, and Law Enforcement Divisions have reached a consensus,” the memo advised, “that lack of site control, prohibitively high repair and maintenance costs, and focus on maintaining a wild and scenic focus on management are all legitimate reasons to seek the removal of these two structures” and “the staff of the Department recommend that the structures be removed as soon as feasible.” For further background, see our winter 2014-15 newsletter at www.pigeonriver.org.

Getting lost on horse trails

The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council in a special meeting Feb. 9 decided that a proposal for more horse trails in the forest was too vague for any reasonable response.

Members voted to ask for a single plan, with a map, showing existing and proposed horse trails, and identifying parking and other infrastructure needed. They also asked to be told what criteria would be used in deciding about trails on new land purchases.

Among the specifics troubling members was this proposal: “Trail access to iconic spots such as Inspiration Point.” Dave Smethurst asked what does “such as” mean and how many “iconic spots” does the proposal mean?

Near the end of the meeting, members amended their motion to add that the horse trail proposal seemed inconsistent with the procedure established in April 2013

for receiving such plans. Further work on the “draft work plan” dated Dec. 2, 2014 is ongoing, according to Scott Whitcomb, unit manager. He and biologist Brian Mastenbrook are signatories to the draft plan, along with Ann Sylvester, a section chief in Parks and Recreation Division, Roscommon office.

Whitcomb said the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) requested the trails in two letters to the Department of Natural Resources director in 2014 and the director, Keith Creagh, asked the three to develop a draft work plan.

The PRCEC was set up by the DNR’s former director, Rodney Stokes, in 2011-12 in what insiders recognized as a direct link to the director by one special interest group that was dissatisfied with the broad scope of representation in the advisory council.

Award recognizes a good Joe

At the Huron Pines annual meeting on Feb. 27, our own Joe Jarecki was awarded one of the four prestigious O. B. Eustis Awards. The other three were to Huron Engineering & Surveying, Ogemaw County Road Commission, and the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network.

“Congratulations Joe!” said Pigeon River Country Association board member Stewart Smith.

Another of our board members commented, “I have to admit, I don’t remember who O.B. Eustis was. But we all know Joe represents hard work and commitment on behalf of the forest that is beyond measure. If there was a Joe Jarecki Award, we would know it was a real honor.”

Smith reminds us that O. B. wrote *Notes From The North Country*, published in 1983 by U of M Press, a book reflecting O. B.’s observations about the seasons changing over a year’s time at his home near Vanderbilt. He was also a naturalist.

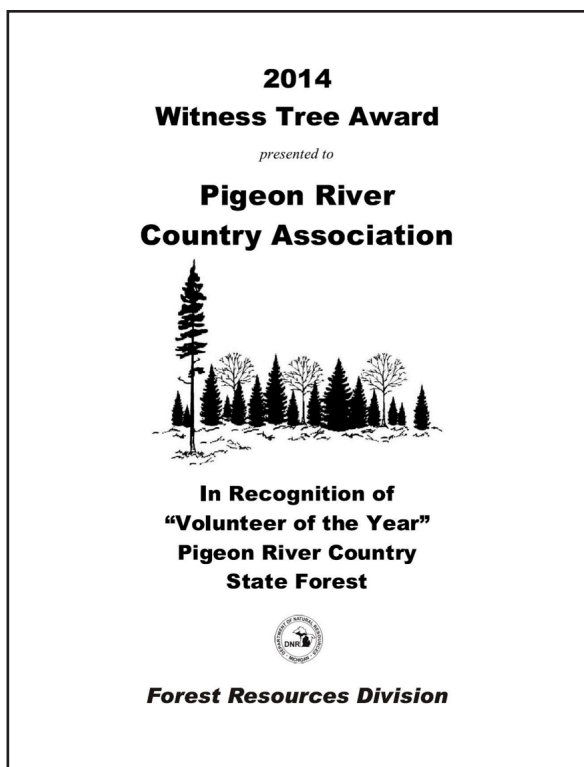
Nominees were judged by a committee from the eleven-county Northeast Michigan region of Alcona, Alpena, Cheboygan, Crawford, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle, and Roscommon counties.

Huron Pines said: “Joe Jarecki has been an inspiration and mentor to many organizations and individuals in Northeast Michigan. A former Unit Manager at the DNR Pigeon River Country State Forest, he was recently involved in developing the current removal project at Song of the Morning Dam, contributing nearly 150 volunteer hours in 2014. In addition, he lends his expertise to many habitat

improvement projects, including restoration at the Sink-hole Lakes, erosion control work on the Black River and an invasive species inventory in the Pigeon River Country State Forest." See more at: <http://www.huronpines.org/projectinfo.asp?pjt=nv&nid=143#sthash.LxUuR5Xf.dpuf>.

Check www.pigeonriver.org occasionally for updates

When major developments happen between our quarterly newsletters, we post updates online. You might want to check there periodically, even if you prefer the printed newsletter.



Keith Creagh, DNR director (2d from right) stands with (l-r) Scott Whitcomb, unit manager; and association members Joe Jarecki, Dale Franz, Mike Brown, Sandy Franz, Eugene Horan, and Stewart Smith.

From Ray Hoobler, association president:

We were honored at the January Pigeon River Country Advisory Council meeting. Scott awarded us the 2014 Volunteer of the Year Witness Tree Award because of our long support of the Pigeon River Country, particularly by providing a summer intern for more than 40 years.

For those who don't know, here is a short history. In 1971 some local residents spearheaded by members of the Pigeon River Audubon Club were concerned about what would happen to the forest now that oil had been discovered. So they formed the Pigeon River Country Association to fight development in the PRC. Within a year they gathered support from all around the state for the establishment of a new DNR management unit to prevent exploitation of PRC resources, and they also went to court with others to block oil development. The DNR and Natural Resources Commission listened and formed the Pigeon River Country management unit with its own management plan that was approved in 1973. The oil fight went on throughout the '70's and finally ended when the state and court declared that there could be no more exploration or development beyond what had already been proposed, that all development would have to meet strict conservation standards, and that the state oil revenue would be used to establish the Natural Resources Trust Fund for the purchase of public land throughout the state.

The oil fight is well known to many but that only put on hold one of the exploitation threats to the PRC. Since the PRC management unit is small, it comes with few resources from the state to maintain it. So the PRCA started to sponsor a summer intern to help the unit manager. For more than 40 years we have funded an intern position with the dual goal of helping the unit manager in his work and providing an opportunity for a college student to see how good conservation practices are carried out. More details can be found in Dale Franz's book, which can be ordered on our website www.pigeonriver.org. Meantime here is a link to the DNR announcement with some additional details: http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-65134_65146-326738--,00.html. It comes with a picture of some of our members receiving the award from Unit Manager Scott Whitcomb and DNR Director Keith Creagh at the January advisory council meeting. Photo and award image are on the left.