

Pigeon River Country Association Newsletter

Winter 2015-16



© Dale Franz

Timber bridge replaces dam

The timber bridge is in place over the Pigeon River at Song of the Morning Ranch. It opened for local traffic at the yoga retreat in January. A sand trap downstream, dug three months ago, has already been emptied at least four times



© Dale Franz

to remove sediment set in motion by dam removal and the river's newly free flow. Steelheads, a silvery form of rainbow trout, have begun moving upstream. An early summer ribbon cutting at the bridge is in the works.

Vision for discovery center emerging

The theme of our Pigeon River Country Discovery Center is taking shape. In a January press release, it is described this way: "The exhibits will illustrate, among other things, that the Pigeon River Country State Forest is a 'working wilderness.' While it is a large tract of land that provides solitude and allows visitors to slow down and experience the forest emotionally and aesthetically, taking care of that wild land requires scientific study and management to adapt to changes in the natural world.



New propane heating system pokes a modest exhaust pipe out of the foundation as preparations continue for a late summer opening. © Rudi Edel

"One main idea behind the exhibits will be that conservation efforts, which have been in constant practice in the forest since the early part of the 20th century, are not rooted solely in past practices or in perpetuating current ones. In many instances, illustrated by P. S. Lovejoy and others, conservation grew from the passionate imagination of people who loved the forest and had a vision for what it could look like in the future under wise stewardship. The Steering Committee hopes that visitors to the forest will be inspired to believe that their individual actions can be part of that tradition of conservation."

The language emerged from a meeting the steering committee held in Lansing in December 2015, facilitated by Sandra S. Clark, director of the Michigan Historical Center. She encouraged the five committee members to refine exhibit ideas into a few main approaches.

The process remains open to ideas from the public as efforts continue toward a tentative opening in late summer 2016. Electric power to the log building near forest headquarters has been doubled, a propane tank placed, and a heating system was installed in mid-January.

The steering committee, in summarizing its December planning meeting, said:

“The Pigeon River Country is here today because of the deep dedication of people ... Its survival depends on us continuing that work. Multiple uses were part of the original recovery plan for the forest. It was, and is, managed with an eye toward what it can become.”

Contacts for further information are Rudi Edel, (989) 732-1244; rudi@treespiritfarms.com, or Sandy Franz, (734) 904-3645, ssmfranz@gmail.com. The other members of the steering committee are Brad Garmon, Pat Lunden, and Scott Whitcomb.



Old furnace sits next to log pillar in basement.

© Rudi Edel

Director reassigned

Gov. Rick Snyder appointed Keith Creagh, director of the Department of Natural Resources, to replace the head of Department of Environmental Quality, Dan Wyant, who resigned Dec. 29 amid a Flint drinking water crisis.

William Moritz, a DNR wildlife division veteran and specialist in deer research, has moved up from deputy to head of the DNR. William O’Neill moved up from chief of the forest resources division to replace Moritz as deputy DNR director.

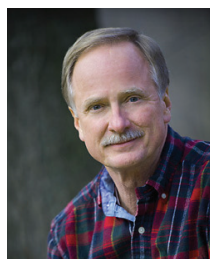
John Walters, chair of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council, said he hoped the interim appointments will be made permanent because of the quality of the appointees. “We have a great relationship with all three,” he told the council at its Jan. 15 meeting. The council sends its advice directly to the DNR’s director. The DEQ was split from the DNR in 1995 by Gov. John Engler to streamline the application process by removing it from the agency responsible for natural resource integrity and management.

Flint’s water has been contaminated with lead, which poisons the nervous system and other organs and causes irreparable brain damage and behavioral problems in children. An emergency manager appointed by Snyder switched Flint’s water supply in 2014 from Lake Huron to the Flint River to save money. The river water, it is now widely acknowledged, is so corrosive that it leached lead from pipes and fixtures into the drinking water.

The Flint Water Advisory Task Force, which Snyder appointed to investigate the contamination, reports that the DEQ communications with the public have had a “persistent tone of scorn and derision” despite the agency having “primary responsibility” in this situation to protect the public health.

“The minimalist approach to regulatory and oversight responsibility,” the report said, “is unacceptable and simply insufficient to the task of public protection. It led to the MDEQ’s failure to recognize a number of indications that switching the water source in Flint would — and did — compromise both water safety and water quality. The MDEQ made a number of decisions that were, and continue to be, justified on the basis that federal rules ‘allowed’ those decisions to be made. ODWMA [an office within DEQ] must adopt a posture that is driven not by this minimalist technical compliance approach, but rather by one that is founded on what needs to be done to assure drinking water safety.”

Flint was reconnected to the Detroit River water in October 2015 but the presence of contaminants remains unresolved.



Keith Creagh



Bill Moritz



Bill O’Neill

File Photos

With people leaving state posts, those remaining have had to try picking up the slack, Scott Whitcomb told the advisory council. Debbie Begalle has moved up to become interim chief of forest resources, he said, leaving unfilled positions and creating greater workloads further down in the DNR.

Archie Reeves retires from advisory council

Six new members were appointed to the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council in January as six appointees left, including Arch Reeves who declined to serve again. He had a long career as a PRC forest technician and is widely respected for his intimate knowledge of the Pigeon. All the appointments were made by the DNR director at the time, Keith Creagh.

Kerry Mase, an equestrian, and Eugene Horan, PRC Association vice president, were willing to serve again as at large members, but the director made a change. Chuck Fanslow, a member of many equestrian organizations, was appointed, as was Drew Youngedyke of Michigan United Conservation Clubs and formerly active with PRCA. The Otsego Road Commission member, who never attended a meeting in his year on the council, was replaced by his boss, Tom Deans, who has a declared interest.

The changes: Brent Shank replaced Mark Ennes (both from the Cheboygan County Road Commission). Brian McPhail replaced Jim Supina (both National Wild Turkey Federation). Eric Ellis of the Ruffed Grouse Society was also appointed, along with Fanslow, Deans, and Youngedyke, while Jason Melancon of the Otsego County Road Commission, Reeves, Horan, and Mase left the council. Mase's departure reduced female membership by one-third, leaving two females among the 18 citizens on the council, Lisha Ramsdell and Sandy Franz.

Peering into the dark *A personal reflection*

Walking around in this forest almost always involves a sense of moisture and coolness, even on the hot days of summer. Where vegetation is sparse, the very grit beneath my feet conjures the slow, cold movement of glaciers. In winter, trees creak and some branches feel brittle, but those tall trunks sway, looking like endless vertical black

lines leaning from side to side in the snow. Beneath the simple quiet of snowflakes and wind gusts there is a steady pulse of life, so a chickadee darting past does not startle me but rather punctuates the constant strum of the woods doing its own living.

Consider then forests in our American West, where brush crackles like tinder, where the very air is thick with silts and pungent smokiness, where the slightest intrusion of a flame or bolt of lightning can set thousands of acres ablaze. In the blink of an eye—seven years—the forests have become stands of giant, drying sticks.

A gathering of forestry practitioners this past spring at nearby Treetops Resort looked at the threat of climate change to northern Michigan's forests and what might be done in response.

Despite the hundreds of pages of study material, there is virtually nothing that addresses how we might, let alone should, act if the forests become anything like those that have been burning in the western states.

Forests there have been bursting into flames in conditions brought on by seven years of drought. The globe was hotter in 2015 than in any other year in modern times. Glaciers are melting at alarming rates. Instability in the atmosphere has triggered severe weather summer and winter.

Despite an unprecedented unanimous endorsement by all participating nations in November to an action plan, skepticism continues to drag efforts down to a crawl. It may already be too late to stop the drastic changes now underway that threaten many species, including humans. Those of us who take planet warming seriously are finding ourselves in an increasingly dark place.

The reason we support and defend a Pigeon River Country is because such places are disappearing. We reach out to explain the value of such essential places because there is the prospect that they will one day be gone—as the passenger pigeon is gone, as elephants and rhinos and chimpanzees and rayed bean freshwater mussels are going.

It's almost unbearable to imagine Pigeon River Country as a vast stand of dry timber exploding into forest fire in conditions that prevent it from greening up again for thousands of years.

I'm finding something more practical than best management practices to deal with all this, something that offers clarity if not comfort, even a way to act if not an action plan, as we contemplate the seemingly relentless pressures that appear to be ending our forests and perhaps our way of life.

William James, arguably the best philosopher America has produced, struggled a century ago with how to deal with the darker realities he recognized around him. He could not dismiss them. But he found an extraordinary way forward by looking at the situation honestly.

Despite the bitterest conditions in life, he said, we can exercise a certain free will to make the best choices for ourselves. The very act of holding a thought rather than moving on to the next one demonstrates we have something James decided to call free will.

Rather than waiting and planning for certainty, we can act on our insights, convictions, perceptions. We can get out of bed, go to work, risk our happiness, take our chances. "All that the human heart wants is its chance."

We emphasize intelligence as the answer to our problems, and can look to many successes. But intelligence can not give us everything we need, James said. It remains outside of things. Instinct, though, works from within and is essential to a full understanding. Instinct applies sympathy or intuition, as artists do in placing themselves within objects, and thus can supplement intelligence in helping us grasp what intelligence fails to give us.

We worry, rightly, about running amok with ill-formed opinions, prejudices, stereotypes. Yet James sees the quality we have inherently--deep within--that we need to use, not sublimate. It's recognizing ourselves from the inside. Many find that being in a forest helps find such things.

How would we use what's inside us? We can assent to the possibilities. We can be active and alive, trust that outward things can be harmonious with our best instincts.

We can proceed in fear or hope. We can look for what offers a deeper service to the universe as our best guide. "The material universe," after all, "is inwardly alive and consciously animated ... in divers spans and wavelengths."

There is no one way to do or see things. James loved a quote from Benjamin Paul Blood:

"Not unfortunately the universe is wild--game flavored as a hawk's wing. Nature is miracle all; the same returns not, save to bring the different."

James found in nature not only solace, but inspiration in the activity of the outdoors, a world rich with pluralisms.

"Our acts, or turning-places, where we seem to ourselves to make ourselves and grow, are the parts of the world to which we are closest, the parts of which our knowledge is

the most intimate and complete," James said in one of his last lectures.

If we reach within ourselves to places stimulated by outdoor experience, he said, we will find "the desire of the heart to be a match for the whole universe and not to shrivel to an infinitesimal accident within it."

Joseph Conrad said that our deep awareness, our attention to every phase of the living planet, "may be our appointed task on this earth."

--Dale Franz

*Documents about forest conditions are available online, such as **USDA's Michigan Forest Ecosystem Vulnerability Assessment (2014)**: http://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/gtr/gtr_nrs129.pdf*

See also a U.S. Forest Service General Technical Report NRS-87 2012. In January 2016, official agencies in the U.S., Britain, and Japan all described 2015 as the warmest globally in records dating to as long ago as 1850.

A particularly readable book about what James thought is *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* by Robert D. Richardson (2006). Joseph Conrad is quoted from his *A Personal Record* (1924).

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported sustained temperatures in northern India above 113 degrees F in May 2015, and India itself reported more than 2,300 people died in the heat wave that month. On July 29, Iraq advised people to stay home as the temperature was rising to 123 degrees.

The New York Times published several comprehensive reports in 2015 about fires in the West, for example describing "the dreadful conditions" in the San Joaquin Valley, "with temperatures soaring over 100 degrees, dry brush everywhere and a miasma of bad air," that seemed "likely to become more common throughout the Western States." It reported that in summer 2015 "residents of Denver grappled with air pollution that had wafted down from wildfires in Canada."

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/15/us/california-wildfires.html?hp&action=click&pg-type=Homepage&module=photo-spot-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=0

See related details of the PRC in Ecology chapter of *Pigeon River Country*, including the rayed bean mussel on page 207.

Someone to say hello

Forest enthusiasts from the local area will keep the visitors center at headquarters open on Saturdays through the winter. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program will have someone at the counter every Saturday through March 26.

RSVP received this year's Witness Tree Award at the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council meeting in January. "This is a 22-year partnership" between the forest and RSVP, Scott Whitcomb said in presenting the award. "They average a thousand contacts a year" at headquarters.

From Stewart Smith, association president:

The Holiday Special bundling book and map was definitely a hit and the beautiful new map a mega hit!

The totally revised Pigeon River Country/High Country Pathway map is available on the website www.pigeonriver.org for \$10.50 including postage. Sales have been high since early November when the map was released.

In addition, the book "Pigeon River Country" written by our own Dale Franz, has also been "flying" off the shelves. That can be purchased on the website for \$28.45 including postage to anywhere in the USA.

The map is essential for navigating the PRC and the book is necessary to understand the majesty and wonder of this special place.

The maps are available from us online and at the PRC HQ, and also the Village Market in Vanderbilt, the Gaylord Area Convention and Tourism Bureau in Gaylord, the Gaylord DNR office on M-32, the Otsego Lake State Park, and Clear Lake State Park. The books are available from us on our website and at the PRC HQ.

Membership renewal reminder

Your membership dues help make it possible to provide a scholarship to a student intern who assists the PRCSF unit manager in the summer with many projects that would otherwise not be completed due to limited staffing. Your dues also help us participate in important activities such as the Song of the Morning dam removal project and the interpretive center project at the former PRC unit manager residence.

Your membership expiration date is on the mailing label of your newsletter or in the email message sending this newsletter. Please keep your membership current.

Thank you.

This newsletter can be seen with photographs in color on our website, www.pigeonriver.org.



Striking images await the observant visitor to Pigeon River Country, such as a white pine branch or a few black spruce reflected in the Sturgeon River. © Dale Franz



In just a few months, white pines will begin to display something like this. © Dale Franz