



Threat to forests oozing up in Lansing again

Michigan Senate bills 302 and 303 have resurrected the twin threats to our forests that emerged last year but didn't get enacted. Trout Unlimited and other organizations are alerting the public to oppose these measures as bad news for our natural resources.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Trout Unlimited, and the PRCA, among others, urge you to contact state legislators to tell them you are opposed to such legislation. Contact information:

<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/fysbyaddress.html>

For details and updates, go to the Backcountry Hunters & Anglers website:

http://www.backcountryhunters.org/michigan_action_alert_state_senate_bills_302_303

Our own website will also offer whatever information we can: www.pigeonriver.org

The two bills reduce the ability of Michigan's Department of Natural Resources to acquire land. Such acquisitions have been essential in protecting habitat ranges for wildlife in the Pigeon and elsewhere in the state. Backcountry says 302 degrades hunting and fishing by breaking down "one of the greatest arguments for hunting and angling, which is that" those regulated activities conserve and protect habitats and species.

Senate Bill 303 provides a way to sell off state lands, resources that we the public together hold for values that are increasingly under threat.

These legislative actions aim to strip away tools from the professionals who manage our natural resources on our behalf. These legislators do not even claim to have experts on their staffs to make such judgments based on science, outdoor experience, or knowledge of the various fields of study that guide our natural resource management.

Our annual meeting Saturday, July 8, noon

A complimentary membership will be awarded via a drawing. President Stewart Smith urges members and potential members to attend, starting with a sandwich lunch at noon, then the meeting where we talk about our efforts on behalf of the Pigeon River Country. He notes that these are important days to participate in supporting our work, with the Discovery Center about to open, and increasing pressures on the forest's well-being needing our attention.

Look for the Discovery Center behind forest headquarters. Hope to see you at noon.

A further threat has arisen in Michigan Senate Bill 280 that would divert money out of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. This is the fund established as the compromise allowing hydrocarbon drilling in Pigeon River Country. Legislators have been lusting after those funds for decades, even though they are set aside from hydrocarbon revenues specifically for our natural resources and have allowed for purchasing properties that have enhanced Pigeon River Country habitat.

Read more about Senate Bill 280 at:
<http://www.bridgemi.com/public-sector/lansing-trying-steer-funds-reserved-recreation-land>

Youngsters prowl for signs of owls *(Report and photos provided by Rudi Edel.)*

With Discovery Center exhibits still being built, the Pigeon River Country Discovery Center opened its doors in partnership with the DNR and Headwaters Land Conservancy to host a special educational evening called "Owl Prowl."

On March 11, some 35 people came to the Discovery Center to learn about forest owls and attempted to call an owl. Visitors came from a 35 mile radius of the center. About half were school age and half were older adults/parents.

After PRCA President Stewart Smith welcomed visitors to the center, participants began to dissect owl pellets revealing skulls, various bones, and teeth. Using charts, the various skeletal remains were identified. Younger visitors also participated in crafts, one being the construction of an owl with articulating wings, made out of construction paper.

Retired DNR Officer Ed Pike discussed owl habitat, life cycles, and migration patterns. He is federally licensed to temporarily capture raptors, band them, and study migration patterns in northern Michigan. After dark, Pike led the group on a hike into the forest along the Towerman's Watch Trail [related article below], calling owls. He reported the owl call exercise was successful several days earlier, probably due to warmer weather. On this very cold night (9 degrees F), he thought the owls were focused primarily on hunting. No return calls were heard.

Participant comments during the evening focused on the importance of the Discovery Center hosting experiential educational opportunities to ensure the next generation understands and respects the forest. Several requests were made for the center to host other learning opportunities every 6-8 weeks throughout the year, and there were



Samuel Brooks



Inara Gray-Edel

many “thank yous” for an excellent evening. Rudi Edel, a member of the center’s Steering Committee, said that providing on-going educational opportunities to reinforce stewardship responsibilities of the forest is one of the goals of the Steering Committee.



Additional owl prowl photos are on our website.

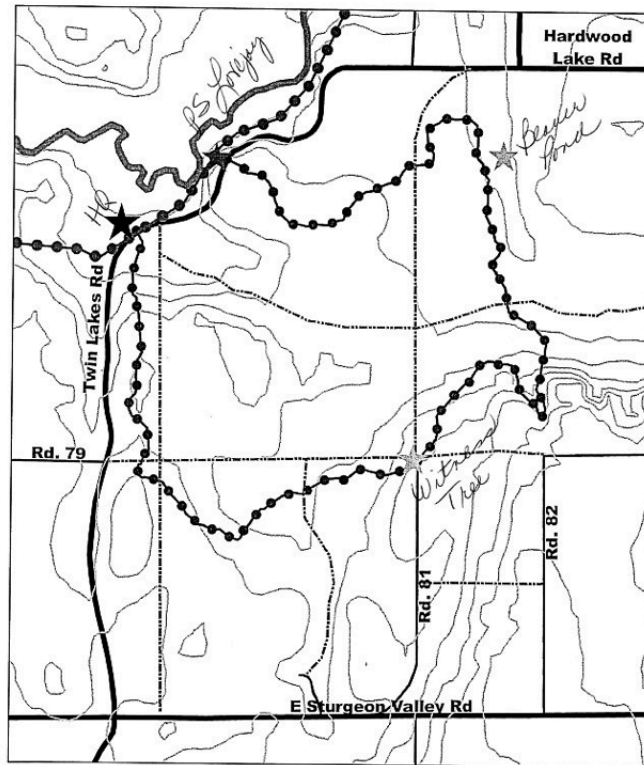
Volunteers find positive image

About 35 people attended a scavenger hunt on March 4 at the Discovery Center as a thank-you event of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). They in turn expressed their thank-yous to Joe Jarecki, who shared with them some background and history of the Pigeon River Country Association and the new center. Attendees said they are looking forward to staffing the center when it opens in late summer.

New pathway

The Towerman’s Watch Pathway is a new, short path designed to let visitors walk to a few iconic sites near Pigeon River Country Discovery Center without worrying that they might get lost.

Towerman's Watch Pathway



Length: 2.9 Miles

Legend

- ★ Beaver Pond ★ Witness Tree ●-● Shingle Mill Pathway
- ★ P.S. Lovejoy ★ Headquarters ●-● Towerman's Watch Pathway
- Equestrian Connectors



Volunteers built three wooden sliders to cover windows when showing images on a screen in one room of the Discovery Center. @ Rudi Edel



Elk arriving in Pigeon River Country by boxcar from the American West are illustrated by this display at the Discovery Center. A railroad track has since been added to the installation, built in winter 2016-17 by Eugene Horan and Joe Jarecki (shown below) during and between the work bees.



Following life's trail to the forest center

Tammy Kohnert took some time off from scrubbing the kitchen floor to step outside the Discovery Center with her husband and talk a bit about why they are volunteering during the many work bees at the forest facility. She and Bruce Kohnert, who a few moments before was wiring and hanging track lights, stood in the crisp wind recalling that he has been coming to the Pigeon since the 1960s. His family had a cabin on Otsego Lake. "Pigeon River was always our place to go, trout fishing, mushrooming, deer hunting, camping."

Tammy and Bruce moved north five years ago after careers as control system engineers at Dow Chemical Co in Midland. "We were out for a hike one day," Tammy said, "and we ran into a couple, Mary and Willard Flinn" on Shingle Mill Pathway. After talking for half an hour about how they all enjoyed the Pigeon, the Flinns suggested the Kohnerts contact RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program). Soon they were volunteers staffing the desk at Pigeon headquarters on weekends. Then John Jenkins told them about the Discovery Center.

"We've been slave labor ever since," Bruce said. More seriously, he said they have used their "debugging skills" to find out what needed fixing, then doing it. Control systems was Tammy's specialty, working with computers that run the plants at Dow. Bruce explained that their electrical engineering group handled the controls for what the chemists used to make products. The systems engineers are "looking at tank levels, temperatures in furnaces." That was also how Tammy and Bruce met.

"It's like baking a cake," Tammy said. "The chemical engineers know the recipe and we provided the automated ovens."

Tammy's grandparents brought her to the Pigeon when she was a child. "This is where I always camped and played." So when she and Bruce met, "we had the Pigeon in common." Where Bruce lived as a child in Oakland County, he frequented a large area of open land with woods and trails right across the street. It gave him a lasting affection for the outdoors.

Does early experience relate to people's love of the forest? "For me, it's the smell of pine," Tammy said. "Then I know I'm back up here. Where I grew up, it's all hardwoods" on 80 acres of her grandparents' dairy farm, but "when you come to the Pigeon, you smell the pine."

Bruce also credited his fondness for the forest to stories he'd hear from folks like his grandfather, Lester Appel, a hunter, fisherman, and photographer. "You hear the stories from their experiences. As you get older, you can do more yourself, and share in those experiences first hand." Bruce would hear people at Otsego Lake talk about picking berries, the best locations, "and it becomes part of who you are."

He said the center will offer kids exposure to those kinds of experiences, where they can learn about the outdoors.



Bruce and Tammy Kohnert outside the Pigeon River Country Discovery Center, where they have been enjoying a little manual labor on behalf of the forest they love.

DNR showcases Whitcomb ties to Pigeon

The following photo and text are from an article circulated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources showcasing family ties in the department. Association members who knew him before he retired have fond memories of Doug Whitcomb working in the Pigeon, and some may be surprised to know his son is now the highly respected unit manager of the Pigeon:

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has plenty of second- and even third-generation representatives of families who have followed the family tradition. And for the most part, they had to fight their way in – working for other agencies, often in other states – before they joined the DNR.

So, why?

“I think they see the lifestyle – the conservation community and the cool things their parents got to work on – and it breeds the interest,” said Scott Whitcomb, unit manager for the Pigeon River Country State Forest in the DNR’s Forest Resources Division. “A lot of DNR people have gone that route.”

Whitcomb, whose father, Doug, was a long-time wildlife biologist with the DNR, studied wildlife management and forestry in college. He went to work in Virginia after graduate school, but moved back to Michigan when a wildlife position came open.

He worked in Lansing until he had the opportunity to transfer to the Forest Resources Division and go back to Pigeon River Country, where he grew up.

“You learn what you’ve been taught, and if you’re taught to value the outdoors and wild places and hunting and fishing traditions, those are things you want to do yourself,” Whitcomb said. “I remember coming home from basketball practice and my father telling me to go out and look in the bed of the truck. “And seeing it was full of crates of pine martens that were going to be released the next morning in the Pigeon River Country, and (I was) thinking to myself, “This is real cool.””

Whitcomb said that when he went into wildlife management, his father warned him that jobs were hard to come by.

“I always thought there would be always some people who get hired, and I wanted to be one of those persons,” Whitcomb said. “My father always gave me the impression that it was a good job with good people in a good organization and that he always appreciated his job.”



Scott Whitcomb, right, his father, Doug, and his daughter, Mikayla, pose for a photo with Mikayla's first buck. @ Scott Whitcomb

Membership renewal reminder

Membership dues help provide a scholarship to a student intern who assists the forest manager in the summer, and help us protect the wild character of the PRC. Your membership expiration date is on your mailing label or email sending this newsletter. Please keep your membership current.

Thank you!

Visit our website at www.pigeonriver.org.