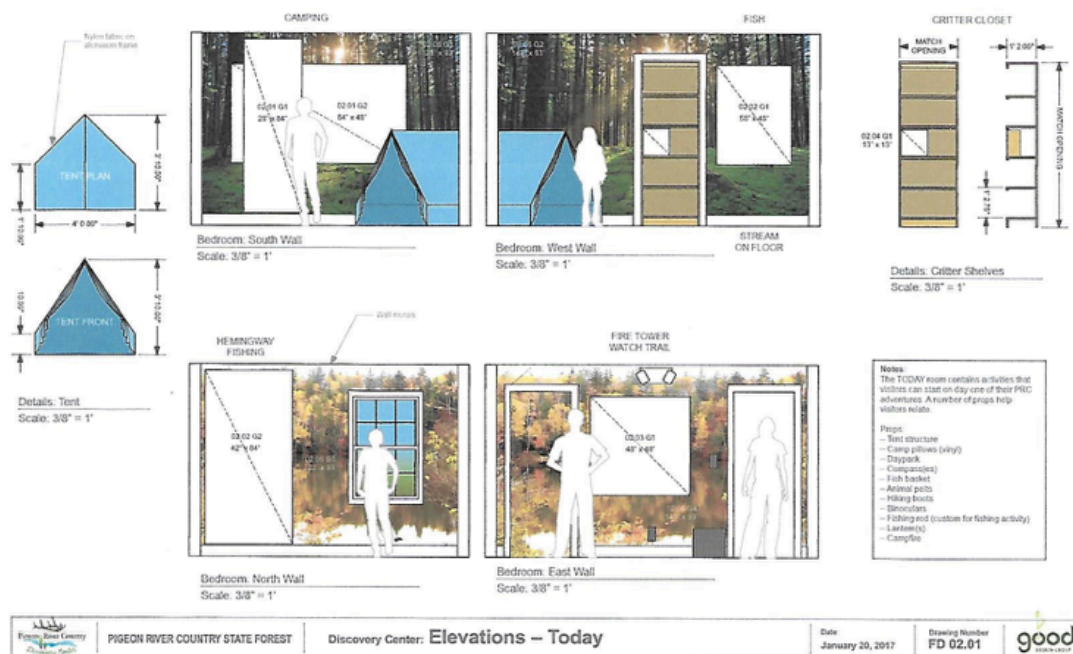


## Discovery Center getting ready to show its stuff by Memorial Day

A gravel pathway laid by volunteers curves 313 feet from the parking lot at Pigeon River Country State Forest headquarters around to a log building erected in 1936 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The last phase of preparing that building for a public opening as the Pigeon River Country Discovery Center is underway.

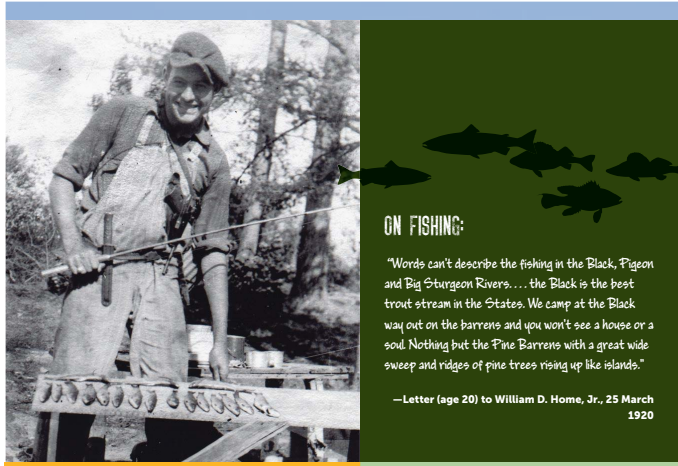
*Sandra Franz, member of the steering committee, provides this report:*

“Our design company, Good Design Group of Midland and Ypsilanti, has taken the text, illustrations, quotations, and photographs gathered by the Steering Committee and designed exhibit panels from them. After review and modification by the Steering Committee and by Sandra Clark, director of the Michigan History Center, the exhibits are about ready to be printed at the fabricating company. We estimate they will be up on the walls within six to eight weeks, in time for our grand opening on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend.



**Preliminary design sketch for room containing the Hemingway exhibit.  
A partial pup tent will also be on display in the room.**

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**ON FISHING:**

"Words can't describe the fishing in the Black, Pigeon and Big Sturgeon Rivers... the Black is the best trout stream in the States. We camp at the Black way out on the barrens and you won't see a house or a soul. Nothing but the Pine Barrens with a great wide sweep and ridges of pine trees rising up like islands."

—Letter (age 20) to William D. Home, Jr., 25 March 1920

**HEMINGWAY**

After returning from WWI, Ernest Hemingway organized several fishing trips here to the Pigeon River Country, which he called the "Pine Barrens." Here are some of his descriptions of this place taken from letters recruiting friends to join him and from his Nick Adams short stories and novels.

"Nick knew there were trout in each shadow. In the afternoon, after the sun had crossed toward the hills the trout would be in the cool shadows on the other side of the stream. The very biggest ones would be up close to the bank. You could always pick them up there on the Black."

—"Big Two-Hearted River," 1925

**ON CAMPING:**

"Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent... It had been a hard trip. He was very tired... Now it was done. He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it."

—"Big Two-Hearted River," 1925

"Picture us on the Barrens, beside the river with the camp fire and the tent. And the full moon and a good meal in our bellies smoking a pill and with a good bottle of Grog. There will be some good singing."

—Letter to Howell G. Jenkins and Lawrence T. Barnett, 26 July 1919



**One of the Discovery Center exhibit drafts shows information about writer Ernest Hemingway, who camped along the rivers as a young man.**

“Seeing these exhibits take shape has been a personal journey for all the Steering Committee members. Behind each panel that goes up on the wall is the distillation of so much history, both objective and personal, colored by memory, emotion, aesthetic preferences and imagination. It will be exciting—and surprising, I bet—for all of us to see the actual exhibits on the walls after carrying them around in our heads and hearts for all these months.”

The Hemingway exhibit will contain some quotes from his short story “Big Two-Hearted River,” which is quite a way north of the Pigeon River Country in the U.P. Here is the story behind that story:

*In 1924, he wrote “Big Two-Hearted River,” a short story based in part on a 1919 fishing trip to the Fox River at Seney in the Upper Peninsula. He used the name of the river north of the Fox because of its “poetry,” and it is apparent that he drew on other Michigan experiences for the story, which is about a wounded man battling for inner recovery.*

Pigeon River Country, p 139

And Chris Struble of the Michigan Hemingway Society told us the other day that Hemingway’s writing about fishing and camping in northern Michigan is undoubtedly based mostly on his experience of Pigeon River Country, since he visited it many times, visited the Fox River only once, and the Big Two-Hearted not at all.

## **Paul Rose elected to chair Pigeon’s advisory council**

Paul Rose and his wife, Carol, call Ann Arbor their hometown (“except for our years attending Michigan State” in East Lansing, he says), but they have deep roots in the north country, particularly on the Black River. Paul experienced the north woods as a child at family cabins in the northeast Lower Peninsula. One cabin owned by relatives was near Hillman, where Paul and Carol currently live, just east of the Pigeon and Atlanta state forests. They first bought their own cottage in the area in 1979, and in 1983 bought an old resort lodge a mile from their cottage and moved north from Ann Arbor to renovate it.

He transitioned his real estate consulting business and they both got active volunteering in watershed activities. Carol is currently chair of the Upper Black River Council and serves on the Michigan Wildlife Council. Paul operates his own business as a State Certified General Appraiser specializing

in the valuation of northern Michigan commercial real estate and larger forestry/recreational-use lands.

An old family friend, Bud Slingerlend, got him involved in the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Bud was an advisory council member, representing Michigan United Conservation Clubs. Paul began driving Bud to meetings because he could no longer manage the drive himself. After some years, Bud stepped down from the PRCAC in 2007 and Paul was appointed to replace him. Rose has also been chair of MUCC and chair of Huron Pines, the independent conservation organization that is very active in the area.



Blue Lakes “is maybe my favorite reach of river in the world,” he said in an interview. “Besides its sheer beauty and real diversity, I’ve always been struck by the history.” Blue Lakes, on the east side of Pigeon River Country, was homesteaded by a trapper. “Also, I still have an image of those corridors which were at one time—probably old growth pine—being completely filled with passenger pigeons. When I walk that high bank along the mainstream of the Black through Blue Lakes, I like to think about the possibility that DNA from those millions of pigeons [is] beneath my feet.”

His interest in legislative activity in Lansing has “helped make me aware that we need to continue to make the case for the Pigeon and find new ways to get younger and



new users of the Pigeon here.” He said the Concept of Management will not survive long-term “unless there is public support for it.” The fact that the PRC is only about two and a half percent of Michigan’s public land inventory, “it sure seems like” the Pigeon provides an ideal “special management opportunity.”

He sees the challenge of maintaining public support for the Pigeon as complicated by changing attitudes in younger generations. He said the recreation that young people seek today includes access to electronic media, while older outdoor recreation models of a rustic campground or cabin face declining interest. “Small traditional resorts are gone” from northeast Michigan. “Young families want to come to a place that has Wi-Fi, a pool, and is close to other activities that are not outdoor recreation-based. We’ve got some fundamental challenges as to a generational shift and how they see northern Michigan. We’re just seeing fewer people spend time here.”

**Paul said one** of his first acts will be to gather some council members to implement ways of recruiting younger stewards of the land to work on behalf of the PRC. He was recently a guest lecturer to a fisheries and wildlife class at Michigan State University. He found that fewer than five of the class of 25 young adults had even heard of Pigeon River Country. He said he was stunned, given the class topic, but found they had a serious interest when he began sharing the history of this forest.

Outgoing chairman John Walters recalled he and Rose started in the PRCAC at the same time. Walters said, “Thank you for your leadership, your behind-the-scenes work, for your stepping forward and being a core element of this council.”

### **John Walters leaves Advisory Council to join Natural Resources Commission**

John Walters, a fly fisherman with a passion for the Pigeon River Country, has been appointed by Gov. Rick Snyder to the seven-member Natural Resources Commission, the state’s policy body for fish and game regulations. He chaired the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council one last time on Jan. 19, saying, “I’m tremendously humbled and honored to have served here.”

He started on the advisory council in 2007 and became chairman in 2010.



**The outgoing chairman is handed a brook trout painting that clearly pleases him, a gift from the advisory council's members.**

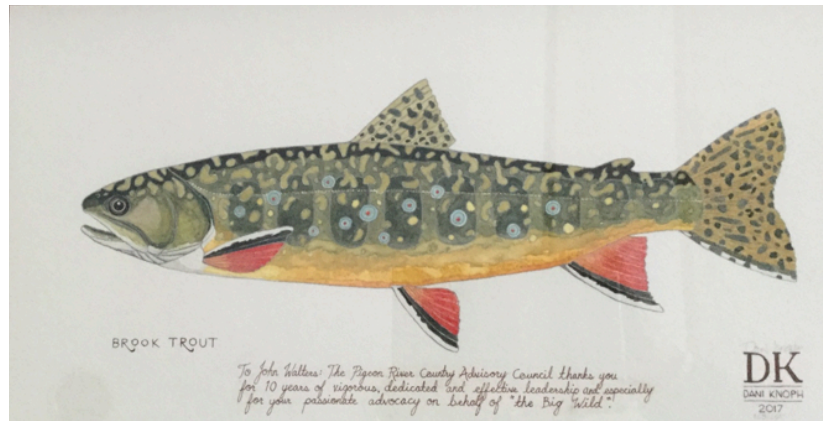
He told members on his last night, "I think it's important to keep in mind why you're here: the desire to keep this [forest] special. And it's special to everyone differently." He said it is "vital" to "continue to find the balance between different users ... Don't be afraid to ask questions. Hold people accountable, including me on the NRC. That's where the decisions get made and the tough answers get delivered." There has not been an NRC commissioner from the northern part of Michigan for 20 years.

Among those attending the quarterly advisory council meeting, held in Corwith Township Hall in Vanderbilt, was Keith Creagh, director of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, who acknowledged that Walters got off to a "good start" in his first meeting of the NRC at the Michigan State University veterinary laboratory in Lansing.

The advisory council presented Walters with a painting of a brook trout by artist Dani Knoph of Elk Rapids, Michigan. The framed image was inscribed:

"The Pigeon River County Advisory Council thanks you for 10 years of vigorous, dedicated and effective leadership and especially for your passionate advocacy on behalf of 'the Big Wild.'" Pete Gustafson, in presenting the painting, added, "The Big Wild called out, and you answered. Let's all continue to do the same."

Walters, as a member of Trout Unlimited, played a key role in the removal of the dam on the Pigeon River. "We were asking for trust," he recalled in 2014, "because we were coming up with solutions on how to fix this problem, how to remove the dam."



**A brook trout rendering by artist Dani Knoph and inscribed to John Walters.**

For details of his role in the dam removal and his perspective, see pages 3-7 in our Winter 2014-15 newsletter in the archive at [www.pigeonriver.org](http://www.pigeonriver.org)

On Jan. 8, the Gaylord Herald Times published an article about John Walters, available online by searching his name, or this link: [https://www.petoskeynews.com/gaylord/sports/outdoors/otsego-county-s-walters-joins-natural-resources-commission/article\\_ea2bf53a-f98f-51d2-a81e-c2d6cfc0fe1b.html](https://www.petoskeynews.com/gaylord/sports/outdoors/otsego-county-s-walters-joins-natural-resources-commission/article_ea2bf53a-f98f-51d2-a81e-c2d6cfc0fe1b.html)

## **Nick Torsky moves on, praised for enforcement**

Nick Torsky has been known around Pigeon River Country for his professional approach to conservation tempered with an understanding of how to treat people in a way that encourages them to support the values of the outdoors. He was one of Otsego County's two conservation officers for the past 11 years.

Torsky has now transferred to Emmet County. His former partner, Mark DePew of Gaylord, is now sergeant here and gave his first report on CO activities at the PRC Advisory Council January 2018 meeting.

Torsky has been a CO for the Department of Natural Resources for 18 years. He has a medical research degree and studied fish genetics at the University of Michigan.

An article about the transfer is available online in the Gaylord Herald Times by searching Nick Torsky, or this link: [https://www.petoskeynews.com/gaylord/featured-ght/top-gallery/local-co-torsky-transfers-new-officers-to-serve-otsego-county/article\\_6e5bc7e0-a0e4-5d7d-b52d-91c3bbb505ee.html](https://www.petoskeynews.com/gaylord/featured-ght/top-gallery/local-co-torsky-transfers-new-officers-to-serve-otsego-county/article_6e5bc7e0-a0e4-5d7d-b52d-91c3bbb505ee.html)



“Nick really said it well: it’s about the passion and the commitment,” DNR Director Creagh said after Torsky spoke briefly to thank the PRCAC for honoring him at the January meeting. The director, visiting from Lansing, said he expects budgeting for COs to reach an all-time high in 2018. “If you call 911 in a rural area, you’ll get somebody in grey show up,” a reference to what he described as the good work of department COs. With the balance of enforcement they provide, in an airplane crash, for example, they find the pilot, Creagh said. “If the kid was lost, they found the kid. If you’re having a domestic dispute, they protected the life.”



## **Chronic wasting disease leaves DNR unsettled**

Chronic wasting disease in wild deer herds is presenting a dilemma in wildlife management, which purposely maintains a high deer population by cutting aspen and other practices to provide young browse for the deer. Director Creagh told the advisory council that the DNR must decide whether to manage deer population for health or numbers. "Let's see if we can figure it out. It will be a process adapted over time."

Paul Rose noted that chronic wasting disease is worse than he initially recognized. Once present, it doesn't go away. The director responded that chronic wasting disease offers a challenge to alert the public, get input, study the science, particularly genetics, then decide whether it makes sense to implement a reduction in the herd to allow greater health. The Natural Resources Commission will tackle the issue of chronic wasting disease, known as CWD, and also address such related topics as baiting—that is, putting out piles of food to attract game and then shooting the game.

## **One parcel sells privately, another sought for forest**

Two large land parcels adjacent to PRC have been actively sought for state acquisition. Kerry Wieber, forestland administrator with Forest Resources Division in Lansing, told the PRCAC that one of them was sold privately and is no longer available. The other remains in play.

The Storey Lake property is three miles west of the PRC on Alexander Road near the corner of Fontinalis Road, just west of Green Timbers, about 2,100 acres. The proposed purchase has involved interaction with three townships and two counties (Otsego and Cheboygan). A 2017 trust fund application resulted in a grant of just over \$900 thousand, or 25 percent of a \$3.6 million request. Conversations are ongoing about trying to raise the remaining money. Meanwhile, the property remains on the open market.

The 600-acre Walled Lake property is on the east side of PRC, about a mile of Black River frontage immediately south of Blue Lakes area. While awaiting word whether federal funds would be available to purchase it for the public, the nine property owners accepted a private offer and sold the acreage to an unknown party. They have been advised that conservation practices could be voluntarily

implemented to enhance its relationship to the health of the PRC.

An article about the Storey Lake grant approval appeared in the Dec. 19, 2017 Gaylord Herald Times.

## **Managing for overall resource health—an update**

*A serious problem remaining is how thin we are stretching these resource managers. One of Keith Kintigh's favorite moments has been watching nighthawks diving in the remote forest, an experience likely to be more rare for him than ever. By mid-2006 Gaylord's sole wildlife ecologist had to take on additional duties when the wildlife biologist in Atlanta retired. This has been the trend in recent years, with fewer people being assigned more responsibility but few new resources.*

Pigeon River Country, p 211

Happily, conditions have stabilized since we described them in 2007. Keith Kintigh after two years was able to move on to best apply his training in ecology for the state lands of northern lower Michigan. A wildlife biologist was brought in to fill the Atlanta position. In fact, Keith is now back in Gaylord as the person working to bring the best practices to state forestry through a nationwide certification system.

His job is Forest Conservation and Certification Specialist in the Forest Resources Division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Some of the new practices described in our book have been simplified, but the idea of considering all the relevant information at once remains in place when decisions are made about harvesting and managing state forests for health, sustainability, and appearance.

Another trained ecologist, Erin Victory, is now filling Keith's old position as Wildlife Ecologist and Planner out of Traverse City, responsible for the northern Lower Peninsula. An ecologist in Newberry is likewise responsible for the whole Upper Peninsula, and there is a position for the southern Lower, presently awaiting a proper candidate for appointment.

Not that the department is flush with personnel. Scott Whitcomb, manager of the Pigeon River Country State Forest, has been doing double duty putting in place the

revised state ORV use practices for open and closed roads in the northern Lower Peninsula, and with that one complete is doing the same for the Upper Peninsula and helping advise the project for the southern Lower. Such work has stretched him very thin, indeed, filling his email box and all his free time.

Kintigh's effort to get Michigan's forests designated eventually allows products from those forests to be labeled as resulting from certified sustainable practices, third-party standards with which Michigan complies. "We participate in one that's global, called Forest Stewardship Council, or FSC," he said. Their headquarters is in Bonn, Germany, with a U.S. office in Minneapolis, MN. Another is Sustainable Forest Initiative, SFI. Both labels are used on paper products.

Under both systems, there "are all kinds of things related to biodiversity, sustainability," and the like, "values much broader than the timber industry, that relate" to such things as water and soil quality. "We've been certified under both of those systems since 2005," he said.

**"That was really** a watershed moment in the way state forests are managed," he added. The classification system has become streamlined, simplified, and is continually receiving technological updates to allow collection of more, and better, information more efficiently.

"It's vastly improved over the old operations inventory," he said. "We are now in our second and sometimes third generation of spatial data inventory, the ability to look at all historic information in one place." Easiest for public understanding is probably the maps being generated, he said, showing such things as natural rivers buffers, high quality trout streams, and various designated habitat areas.

"Our treatment decisions" are now "consistent with the conservation area goals," he said. Regular timber sales may be modified to account for biodiversity, for example, to retain part of the parent stand, perhaps. Downed deadwood can provide wildlife opportunities, or cuts may be modified so they are not too close to each other for visual or sustainability reasons.

"We were going through a kind of shifting baseline, in terms of staff," in the early 2000s, but "that's kind of settled out since, been stable for quite a long time." He noted, "Younger folks coming into the department

are more ecologically-minded, I think, because of the education they are receiving.”

And recently, while out in the field with some others as twilight approached, Keith watched nighthawks diving.

## **Forest beetle makes the news**

The New York Times science section headline declared:

*Toads Eat Beetles.  
Sometimes, Beetles Make Them Regret Their Meal Choice.*

They're talking about the bombardier beetle, known to inhabit our forest (actually, the beetle, *Brachinus*, ranges throughout the United States and southern Canada, mostly in moist floodplains near rivers and lakes.) A new study reports that once swallowed by a toad, the bombardier releases a hot chemical spray. Sometimes, that causes the toad to vomit the beetle back out, where it can live another day. Bombardiers are about a quarter-inch long, with blue metallic wings and brown body. Their life span, uneaten, is about two or three years.

Bombardiers were known to spray their toxic liquid onto the skin of humans, but it took the new study to identify the spray as their escape weapon. Toads apparently also survive the encounter. Humans suffer a skin stain when sprayed. The study was published in February 2018 by the journal *Biology Letters*. The researchers mentioned they could hear the spray inside the toad as “a small explosion.” More than half of swallowed bombardiers are expelled from the toad, the researchers said. But where toads and bombardiers inhabit the same territory, the toads apparently adjust to the bad taste, since only a third vomit out their little meal.

Drop for drop, the bombardier weapon is more potent than skunk spray. That comes from Gilbert Waldbauer, who wrote *Insects Through the Seasons* in 1996. He also mentions that the beetles escape before being swallowed by spraying in the toad's mouth and being spit out, and that bit of information predates the new study by 22 years.





**Discovery Center living room, with new lights on fireplace. Furniture has been donated by the Lunden family.**

### **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](http://www.pigeonriver.org).

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