

Another threat from ORVs emerges

The council that advises Michigan's director of natural resources is tackling another potential threat to the solitude of Pigeon River Country.

House Bill 5639 was enacted in December by the Michigan Legislature. It allows four-wheel off-road vehicles (ORVs) to be street legal if they undergo certain modifications, including safety belts and specific lights, horn, and tires. This appears to mean modified ORVs could be legally driven on roads open to cars and trucks. Since this appears to have implications for their use in the PRC, the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council has put the issue on its Jan. 25 public meeting agenda. The meeting begins at 5 p.m. in Corwith Township Hall, Vanderbilt.

It is unclear what will govern use within the forest of ORVs modified in accordance with the new state law. There are no ORV trails in the PRC and ORVs are not allowed on Otsego or Montmorency County roads in the PRC but are allowed on the shoulder of all Cheboygan and Presque Isle county roads.

The modified-ORV law passed Dec. 20 by a 27-11 vote and was signed by Governor Snyder Dec. 28. It goes into effect March 28, 2019, after which time an owner could obtain a vehicle identification number (VIN) from the Secretary of State. The tires required by the law must "have 2/32-inch tread, [and] shall not have exposed cord or tread separation."

The ORV exhaust "shall be in good working order and shall not produce excessive noise," which is not further defined by the law.

In the PRC, snowmobiles may be operated on roads open to vehicular traffic, but not elsewhere within the forest.

Military acts to preserve quiet airspace over Pigeon

A quiet airspace over Pigeon River Country is being preserved with some quiet arranging between military and state forest authorities. It will prevent low-level flights that

otherwise would come a few hundred feet above the forest's trees. Here's what happened:

Tucked away in a 146-page document, the Air National Guard describes a flight corridor that would have nearly one hundred military aircraft a year flying as low as 500 feet above the ground over virtually the entire Pigeon River Country. That low altitude violates a quiet airspace agreement made by the Air National Guard to fly no lower than 3,000 feet above mean sea level, which would be at least 1,600 feet above the forest floor. The military authorities were not aware of the quiet airspace that was adopted by the military three decades ago.

The quiet airspace agreement, signed by Lt. Colonel Ronald W. Rubin, who was Selfridge Air National Guard airspace manager at the time, has been in force since October 1990. The agreement identified the same corridor in 1990 that is in dispute today. The corridor, four miles wide, runs east from Wolverine above Webb Road and turns southwest above Dog Lake, continuing toward Grayling.

Many PRC features are under the path, including Pine Grove Campground, Cornwall Flooding, Inspiration Point, Hemlock Lake, Lost and West Lost Lakes, North and South Twin Lakes, Hardwood Lake, Grass Lake, Ford Lake, Pigeon River headquarters, the Discovery Center, Pigeon River Campground, the Witness Tree, Round Lake Campground, the Black River Swamp, and at least one crossing of the Pigeon, Sturgeon, and Black Rivers, all within Pigeon River Country boundaries.

The low-level corridor is described in a table that appears in an environmental assessment prepared for the Air National Guard by a contractor in Pasadena, California.

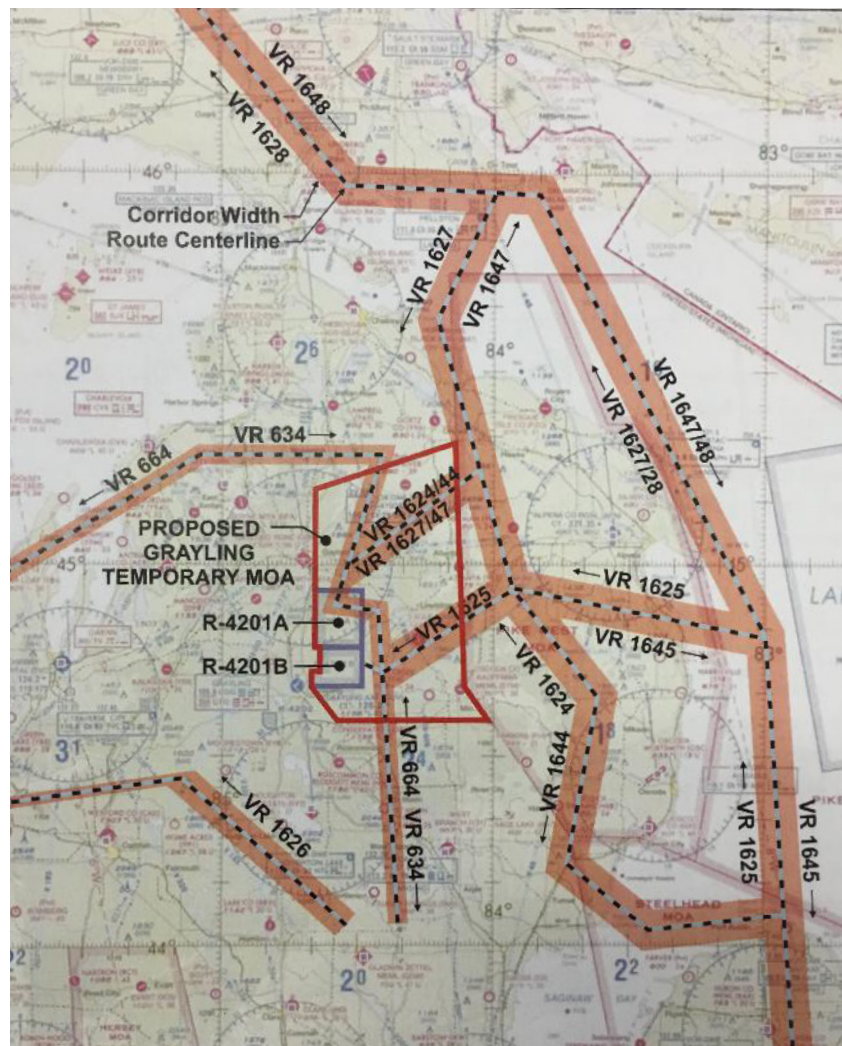
Major Andrew LaFountain, commander of the Grayling Air Gunnery Range, confirmed on Jan. 8 that the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center has "put a temporary hold on scheduling" the corridor for flights "until we can work with the FAA and National Guard Bureau to raise the flight ceiling on the portion of the routes that traverses the Pigeon River Country State Forest. We tentatively estimate that it will take about 6 months of coordination, once the FAA gets back to work from the current partial government shutdown."

Major LaFountain added: "In the long term we would prefer to move the route off the boundary of the Forest so that aircrew can fly at tactical altitudes instead of the top of

the route.” Finding an alternate route, if a suitable one can be located, is expected to take a year.

It seems the quiet airspace agreement had drifted out of the awareness of those responsible. There was relief among forest supporters that the agreement is back on the radar, as the expression goes.

The corridor is known as a visual route and appears on Michigan’s 2017 aeronautical chart used by pilots. It is called VR-634 when flying in one direction and VR-664 when flying the opposite way. The table reports annual sorties in the corridor as 70 in one direction and 21 in the other. It says the corridor is from 500 feet above ground



VR-634, a low-level corridor, is one of the airspaces near the forest that are designated as military training flight routes.



Low-level route VR634/664 shown on 2017 Michigan Aeronautical Chart goes east from Wolverine and turns sharply southwest over Dog Lake. The route is easiest to find looking just left of the words Black River Ranch in about the middle of this image.

level to 2,000 feet above mean sea level. The PRC is approximately 1,100 feet above sea level, with some higher terrain, so the table describes flights that are about 800 or 900 feet above the forest floor at their highest, and 500 feet at their lowest. Mature oaks and white pine can reach higher than 100 feet, by comparison.

The low-level corridor appears in the table as information about what conditions already exist in a larger area east of Gaylord, roughly a rectangle running down the east side of Interstate 75 from Vanderbilt to south of Grayling,

extending east to the north and south of Atlanta. That area includes about half of Pigeon River Country.

The Air National Guard is seeking permission to fly in the larger area at altitudes as low as about 3,500 feet above the ground for a period of 45 days in summer 2019. This proposed airspace is called the Grayling Temporary MOA (military operations area). Permission has been granted in previous years for the Grayling MOA, the latest in the summer of 2017. The current request for 2019 included publication of a 146-page environmental assessment that was posted online and made available in printed form in the Otsego County Library. Deadline for public comment was Dec. 31, 2018.

Major LaFountain plans to attend the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council meeting Jan. 25, starting at 5 p.m. in the Corwith Township Hall in Vanderbilt. The council advises the director of the Department of Natural Resources, who since the new year is now Dan Eichinger.

Looking at the forest with moccasins on

We have embarked on a project to create a Native American display for the Discovery Center. What gives it special interest is that the subject is not a culture or language or even a people, but the forest itself.

Here is the working proposal:

Discovery Center Indian exhibit, A course of action

--Gather historic information from printed sources, local tribal members of both the Burt Lake Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (living mostly in Emmet and Cheboygan Counties) and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, use textual and in-person tribal input and materials to prepare an indoor display.

--Prepare garden bed for Indian plant display. *See How Indians Use Wild Plants: for Food, Medicine and Crafts* by Frances Densmore, Dover Publications (orig. publ. by U.S. Printing Office in 1928)

--Prepare an image locating beaver ponds from earliest info available.

The theme could be:

**Unlocking the power of the forest.
If anyone can do it, the Indians can.**

Suggestions: Foremost should be sharing the idea of what Pigeon River Country offered to Native Americans/Indians/Anishinaabe/Odawa. The forest's charms can be obscured by history related from a European perspective, by the human drama that concentrates attention away from the more subtle natural setting. We are not telling the story of the Indians—we are telling the story of why Pigeon River Country is meaningful. We have a place that sits kind of in the shadows; we should capitalize on that, perhaps by emphasizing it as a place of some mystery hiding at the end of the blacktop and behind the pages of standard history texts.

An Indian exhibit could be a theme for a season. Activities could include teaching about herbal remedies, silent listening tours by small groups that pledge to keep their ears open, meditation sessions, fireside story telling. Such activities could benefit from, for example, people sharing how the outdoors puts us in touch with profound things, people who engage in healing through use of natural substances, people who conduct events for young folks who would benefit from increased sensory concentration in the forest.

Anishinaabe healers became herbalists and, sometimes, “philosophers concerned not only with preserving life and mitigating pain, but also with offering guidance and principles for living the good life whose end was to secure general well being ... the well being of the body was directly related to the well being of the inner being of a person.” (from *Ojibway Heritage* by Basil Johnston, 1976, University of Nebraska Press).

We might have someone show how the rivers connect to the landscape and where the water goes. A hunter with a flair for public speaking could describe how really good hunting involves tracking skills, paying attention to the landscape so as not to get lost, etc. In doing these things, it would be good to try finding tribal people or at least those recommended by them. It might also be beneficial to find an old timer familiar with the Pigeon to take one or two people deep into the forest as a reward for learning some herbal medicine or something like that.

This project offers the opportunity for new investigation by interested people, preferably including tribal members, into what our current urban environment has caused us to forget—a chance to rediscover some of the real benefits of land that is kept more wild and natural than most of us experience day to day.

We are in the early stages this winter of gathering and preparing materials for the display. So it is open to input from anyone having something to contribute.

What this forest meant to people familiar with the look, feel, and properties of the lifeforms present on this part of earth can be imagined with only the greatest effort by visitors who aren't absolutely certain about mushrooms, snakes, or those plants with three leaves and little white berries.

Western European culture sees *tree* as an object separate from ourselves but useful, sort of like seeing our own fingers as *belonging* to us rather than *being* us. Original inhabitants of northern lower Michigan tended to see everything as one: you are your fingers; everything is not only related, but is one whole of which a person is an inseparable part. There is a life force in us. That force is us—and is the same life force that manifests as a tree, a stream, a forest.

Does this make any sense to a visitor in the Pigeon River Country? Such is our task, to place an elusive way of seeing things into our consciousness as if it can be perfectly understood. And to do it in a corner of a seven-room display center in the middle of the forest with a handful of quotes and tangible objects.

Science and the Indian

In seeking contact with nature in Pigeon River Country, we bring two powerful tools: science and an attitude that has emerged from our growing understanding of how life plays out on our planet. This attitude can be characterized as awe in the presence of all the earth's interacting elements that find success together. It involves paying attention, observing without damaging. It is an attitude enriched by learning about how native people lived off the land.

The science comes from a western society that measured carefully, recorded accurately, and cooperated in testing and analyzing results. It cleared away much misinformation even while itself sometimes operating with assumptions that would resist being examined themselves.

The naturalist Aldo Leopold in 1938 pointed out one such shortcoming in science that specialized in taking things apart but neglected to explain how they hang together:

“Look at the trees in the yard and the soil in the field and tell us whether the original settler carved his farm out of prairie or woods. Did he eat prairie chickens or wild turkey ... ? What plants grew here originally which do not grow here now?”

For all their study of animal and vegetable component parts on a lab table, neither the student nor the scientist were likely to have any real understanding of how those plants and animals interacted out in the backyard. Now, partway through the next century, we can see more care showing up in science to look at such questions, to correct the earlier tendency to impose ourselves on our environment while not really trying to observe closely how it already works.

Science seeing plants with new eyes

Scientists injected radioactive isotopes into fir trees in British Columbia. Within a few days, every tree in a plot 30 meters square lit up, showing a network with the oldest trees acting as hubs, some having as many as 47 connections. Michael Pollan, reports this in his book, *How to Change Your Mind*. He quotes another scientist saying the largest organism on earth is a fungus in Oregon measuring 2.4 miles wide and also saying these vast mycelial networks are in a sense conscious—that is, aware of their environment and able to respond accordingly to challenges. Pollan comments, “When I first heard these ideas, I thought they were, at best, fanciful metaphors. Yet in the years since, I’ve watched as ... scientific research has emerged to suggest they are much more than metaphors.” The New York Times lists the Pollen book as one of the 10 best in 2018.

Surely a growing awareness of how native peoples successfully lived in their natural environments without subjugating them is providing a richer new approach to our understanding of nature. Leopold asked:

“Does the educated citizen know he is only a cog in an ecological mechanism? That if he will work with that mechanism, his mental wealth and material wealth can expand indefinitely?” Leopold added: “But that if he refuses

to work with that mechanism, it will ultimately grind him to dust?”

One day in the early 1900s, Leopold heard a full-blooded Indian speak. Leopold reports: “He said, after speaking of the Indian’s knowledge of nature, ‘Nature is the gate to the Great Mystery.’ The words are simple enough, but the meaning is unfathomable.”

We seek to convey something useful for us to know about the forest. In our increasingly urban society, visiting a forest is not only a pleasure and comfort, but a necessity for good health of the visitor.

When attempting to understand what it is about the forest that cannot be easily put into words, you might imagine you can keenly sense what is happening at some place in the forest. Hear the pulse of activity in the trees, smell the cottony web of fungus underground, listen to that forest internet of fungus partnering with roots to provide increased nitrogen and phosphorus to the plants, taste the vinegar tints in the phosphorus. While you may not, unaided by instruments, be able to count the 15 electrons on its outer rings, you can by looking closely detect the mass of branching mycelium above and below ground that breaks down nutrients to feed into the system. Imagine tracing one fungus plant inch by inch along the length of many football fields, taking time to identify each plant you come upon across the forest floor. Such are some of the scales of view available for closer inspection than we usually give in a culture occupied elsewhere.



A myriad of forest floor flora. Photo by Jillian Downey.

Scholars are now confirming that the original peoples of the Great Lakes were never conquered by the newly arrived. The Odawa, in particular, essentially managed trade among all the parties, including the English and French.

From the clues of Great Lakes Indian history available, it seems native tribes did not live in what is now Pigeon River Country. But they undoubtedly spent time in what would have been a great resource of plants and animals around the Pigeon, Sturgeon, and Black Rivers. There is historic documentation about tribal village life at Burt Lake, which is fed by the Sturgeon River flowing through Pigeon River Country less than 20 miles away.

It was part of what can be recognized today as once a vibrant, decentralized, but powerful organization that can indeed be called an empire—one that the empire builders of Europe failed to appreciate in their telling of the history but which clearly played the major role in the life of the region at that time.

The people Europeans called at the time Ottawa, Potawatomi, Chippewa, Algonquin, Nipissing, and Mississauga have remained until recently vague figures at the edges of European and American histories. The real story is about a civilization that spoke Anishinaabemowin, a distinct subset of Algonquian, lived in dozens of settlements populated by thousands of their own, continued dominating a Great Lakes empire from Montreal to the Mississippi River until the early 19th century, and dictated to the French and English intruders on matters of trade and cultural interaction with a flexibility that displayed genius of social organization.

Those the French called Odawa controlled geographic trade routes. The Odawa (or Ottawa or *Ouatouais*) were revered as the mediators in all serious disputes. They thrived even when war with the Iroquois and diseases introduced by Europeans killed large numbers, procuring enough to live protected from the worst effects. The Odawa, alone among tribes, mastered canoe building sufficiently to navigate across the Great Lakes while other tribes would not venture beyond site of the shoreline. The Odawa were themselves the threads in an expansive weaving of relations, living in scattered communities mostly along coastline in summers and camping in small dispersed groups through the winter, moving as far south as the Muskegon and Grand Rivers in what is now southwest Michigan. The European fort at Michilimackinac (now Mackinaw City) at the straits

between Lakes Huron and Michigan was but one of the Indian villages in a network across the *pays d'en haut* (high country of the Great Lakes). During the whole colonial period, Europeans never invaded or settled the Odawa region.

That Odawa mobility spreading from the coastline inland suggests that Pigeon River Country was integral to their web of activity, with its three rivers flowing north to Burt, Mullett, and Black Lakes, which in turn flow out to Lake Huron. Well into the 1800s, Anishinaabemowin speakers took to the woods hunting wild pigeons, along with partridges, hares, venison, foxes, and raccoons. They were active traders of pelts of mink, otter, marten, muskrat, and beaver in exchange for knives, awls, nets, and kettles. Europeans depended on the Anishinaabeg for their canoe skills. The Anishinaabe word *ota'wa* means "to trade" and is the source for the French words Odawa, Ottawa, and Ouatouais. Burt Lake, the terminus of the Sturgeon River that flows through Pigeon River Country, is less than 15 miles from a major Odawa village at what was later Cross Village, and much of that mileage is accessible by canoe. So it seems certain that fur gathering took place in Pigeon River Country, along with the harvesting of a rich supply of woodland plants, including birch. Food, medicine, and craft supplies came from an abundance of what they knew intimately of sugar maples, pine, cedar, balsam, spruce, tamarack, lilies, bluebells, sumac, alder, ash, aspen, blueberries, blackberries, burdock, wild cherry, dogwood, ferns, ginger, hazel, hemlock, ironwood, juneberry, milkweed, mugwort, oak, wild onion, pipsissewa, poplar, thistle, willow, and yarrow, to name a few.

While many of their kin to the south were forcibly removed from the main line of American settlement, the Anishinaabeg of northern Michigan, along with the Menominee and many Winnebago of Wisconsin, managed to stay where they were.

American historians have largely underestimated the importance of the peoples at Michilimackinac. They have remained largely invisible. Michael A. McDonnell writes in *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America*:

"The Odawa today are connected to peoples all across the Great Lakes, and to nations with reservations in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba. The Anishinaabeg, long a powerful

presence in the *pays d'en haut*, are today one of the largest indigenous ethnic groups in North America.”

As Basil Johnston wrote in *Ojibway Ceremonies*, “Men and women ... must live in harmony with the seasons, the mountains, valleys, and rivers ... Men and women are co-tenants with other creatures upon the land and must respect the rights and lives and tenure of the animals, birds, and fish, if *they* are to survive.”

Twelve hundred visitors

Volunteer hosts at the Discovery Center counted 1,228 visitors during its first season of operation, on weekends from May to November 2018. Saturdays were the busier days, and on three-day holiday weekends the third day had the fewest visits.

The forest is getting about 70,000 visitors per year, based on monitoring of traffic, with 84 percent from Michigan and most others from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, according to numbers gathered by Aren Calton, the AmeriCorps worker in the Pigeon who checked traffic counters and campground registrations. He reports the bulk of visitors were from 40 to 300 miles away—a combination mostly of local, Ann Arbor and suburban Detroit, and Grand Rapids residents.

Steering committee keeps busy

Rudi Edel reports that in several meetings in the past few months the Pigeon River Country Discovery Center steering committee has taken steps to raise funds systematically for support of the center, which is closed for the winter except for occasional special activities.

A contract has been signed for the first phase of fundraising. An educational committee has been formed to pursue projects for the center, made up of local teachers to work with an AmeriCorps technician, Samantha Peterson, who will spend 25 percent of her time on Discovery Center educational program development and the rest of her time directly supporting the forest headquarters for the Department of Natural Resources.

Another AmeriCorps worker from Huron Pines will also devote 10 percent of working hours helping the Discovery Center educational efforts.

A new emergency generator is now installed at the center, programmed to start within 30 seconds of a power loss to

run the furnace so that cold weather will not damage the pipes.

In addition to fundraising, educational programming, and exhibit updates, the steering committee will focus on construction of a Discovery Center display at the trailhead being installed in Vanderbilt along the old railroad tracks that are now the North Central State Trail running north-south near Old 27, which was the federal highway to Mackinac until the laying of Interstate 75.

The trailhead will have a kiosk highlighting Pigeon River Country but not connecting the hiking/biking trail to the forest directly. The North Central State Trail, made of packed crushed limestone, runs 62 miles from Gaylord to Mackinaw City for non-motorized users yearlong (including horses and bicycles) and snowmobiles from Dec. 1 to March 1 each winter. Vanderbilt is 10 miles via Sturgeon Valley Road from PRC headquarters and is labeled one of the gateways to the forest. Wolverine is 10.9 miles north of Vanderbilt along the trail, which also passes through Indian River, Topinabee, and Cheboygan.

This newsletter combines what would have been the Fall 2018 and Winter 2018-19 newsletters.

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!



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