



Snow goose draws attention to one of the exhibit panels in the Pigeon River Country Discovery Center, opening to the public Saturday, May 26. This Chen hyperborea passes through PRC en route between the Arctic and Atlantic Coast. Donated by a friend, like many other mounts on display.

Parks and Recreation drops effort to write a usage plan

Preparations underway to write a recreation plan for Pigeon River Country have been halted. The idea had met with reluctance, even some hostility, by members of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council and others, who feared it would undermine or distort the fundamental identity of the forest as a place to experience its remote wildness.

Parks and Recreation, a division of the Department of Natural Resources, had been working on the recreation

plan since the governor in 2011 brought the division into the Pigeon's management for the first time. The division has primary responsibility for managing Michigan's state parks. Many of the Pigeon's supporters expressed concern that the division would treat the PRC as another park.

Parks are managed primarily to provide a range of opportunities for the public to engage in recreation, while the Pigeon, as a forest instead of a park, has been managed primarily to enhance its values as a wildlife habitat, timber resource, and destination for those seeking the quiet of a remote outdoors. Its primary guide in deciding usage questions is the Concept of Management.

The Concept of Management, first adopted when the forest was designated Pigeon River Country 40 years ago, specifies that the policy shall be "to protect and maintain the natural beauty of its forests and waters, and to sustain a healthy elk herd, fish and wildlife populations." Other provisions of the concept flesh out the guidelines.

That approach has stood as a sometimes lonely sentinel against efforts to open new buildings, expand roadways, and allow off-road vehicles to roam around the forest. When "recreation" was proposed by the division to need further clarification and policy statements, worries surfaced that the lonely sentinel might be abandoned.

At the Pigeon's quarterly meeting of its Advisory Council on April 20, Scott Whitcomb, unit manager, announced the planning has been stopped.

A statement from the division says, "Through a series of meetings that included the Resource Bureau, PRD Section Chiefs and local field staff, the decision was made to not proceed with a Recreation Plan in the Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRC). It was felt that the benefits of a comprehensive plan, while valuable, did not outweigh the efforts needed to complete it. Furthermore, Department staff felt that the Concept of Management (COM) along with other Resource Management plans, was adequate and items that fell outside of those guidelines could be addressed on a case by case basis."

"A cautionary tale of unintended consequences," an article describing the subtleties of making decisions about usage, appeared in our Fall 2016 newsletter. Look for it on our website, www.pigeonriver.org. A link is: http://www.pigeonriver.org/uploads/2/6/2/8/26281507/prca_fall_2016_color_forweb.pdf



Rudi Edel briefs volunteers on April 26, 2018, about the care needed in placing exhibit panels on the walls. They are (l-r) John and Pegi Jenkins, Sandra Franz, Eugene Horan, Joe Jarecki, Bruce and Tammy Kohnert, and Judi Jarecki.



A quote from Ernest Hemingway gets placed next to the fireplace in the visitors' entry room. The author fished the Pigeon and the Black when he was recovering from wounds suffered in World War I.



A welcome to this magical forest goes into place next to the fireplace that visitors see upon entering the seven-room Discovery Center.



Many hands make a map straight to show the boundaries and environs of the roughly 10-mile-by-20-mile Pigeon River Country.



A cluster of panels describes the removal of the dam from the Pigeon, a cooperative project that brought renewed health to the famed trout stream.



Display recounts the joy of discovering the Pigeon “has a voice.”



The forest manager's office is recreated in a tribute to the dedication of countless people who worked and planned, paid attention, and took steps to make the forest what it is today.



One of the many stories of the forest gets posted in layers.



Mounted elk heads peer out of a mock-up rail car in the dining room display that spotlights Michigan's herd, now numbering more than one thousand wild elk ranging through the wild land centered in Pigeon River Country.

Ideas keep popping up, some get left for later

The Discovery Center preparations got us focused on meanings and values of the Pigeon River Country, leading to many words, images, and displays. Some of the thinking got put on view, some remains for another day.

Ford Kellum, who in 1971 got our Pigeon River Country Association started, and who retired early as a state wildlife biologist to fight against hydrocarbon development in the forest, had this to say about the Pigeon:

“The whole setting is nice. You’ve got your free flowing rivers. You’ve got lakes, and no cottages are on them. You’ve got trail roads—two ruts. You’ve got the big trees—virgin or not, they’re big. You’ve got a good stand of white pine with a winding two-rut trail through it. It’s pretty. And you can get back in there and have solitude.

“And people need a little of that. You go nuts listening to traffic buzz by your place all the time. People just aren’t made for that stuff. You’ve got to have a little solitude sometime, some place, to shake these things off and settle down into nature. It does you good.”

Visitors can see those thoughts of Ford Kellum today, and hear them in a video looping in one of the Discovery Center rooms—one of a dozen videos presenting some of our recorded history. Some.

Even with 95 graphics on display, the Discovery Center in spring 2018 has had to leave other exhibit material for another time. Here is one of those additional thoughts that expand our view of the Pigeon River Country, the idea of a display that actually invites the visitor to leave the building. The idea was triggered by a New York Times article, “Microsoft Jumps Into Augmented Reality With HoloLens Headset” on Jan. 21, 2015—an article about the wonders of artificial reality available in an electronic device you strap around your head. Here’s what such a device can’t compete with:

We’re thinking of posting a display over a door to the outside that says:

Beyond holograms

Step through this door for unparalleled 3D experience. Use your own body as the headphones. Goes beyond virtual reality to a reality that engages all your senses: smell, sight, touch, several dimensions beyond what even software giants can offer.

No batteries needed. No instructions necessary. Everyone from infants to the elderly can enjoy immediately. You carry the technology with you.

Astounding effects, from snowstorms to rain-showers to golden sunshine to starry nights. Feel the rain. Make actual snowballs. See full spectrum fall colors. Hear branches moving in breezes that you can feel on your face. Dip your fingers into flowing streams. Step over waving ferns and grasses.

Encounter creatures weighing up to ten times your own weight. Find others too small to see with the naked eye.

The drama unfolds in real time and continues without end or interruption. Watch whole systems interact without human intervention. Observe ongoing conflict and cooperation. Experience the imperceptible pace of evolution. Watch ancient light arrive in your visual field from a dark universe of suns so far away they look like shiny pins. See how the whole array of stars shift across the sky through the night.

Hear thunder that seems to roll around the heavens. Feel your pulse race as lightning cracks down in flashes of brilliant light and leaves the air electrified.

Listen to a dove mourn its private thoughts, and a meadowlark float silky melodies into the woods. Smell sweet fern charging into your receptors with ancient tinges of memory.

There is no charge or shipping fee for this experience. Donate whatever time or commitment you think appropriate, based on a shared sense of responsibility for what belongs to all of us together.

**Association's annual meeting
Saturday, July 14, noon**

Members and potential members are cordially invited to this casual, once-a-year gathering where we talk about our mission to protect the Pigeon's unique wilderness characteristics and ensure that it retains its "aesthetic, wildlife, recreational and educational values." Sandwiches will be available at noon. The meeting begins at 1 p.m. in the new Discovery Center behind the forest headquarters on Twin Lakes Road.

Visiting hours centered on weekends, holidays

Starting May 26, the Discovery Center will be open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays from spring through fall, thanks to hosting from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), enthusiastic supporters of Pigeon River Country.

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

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