

# Pigeon River Country Association

## Newsletter

Winter 2024



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### **\$150,000 match required to repair Cornwall Flooding Dam**

This past October, the DNR Fisheries Division acquired an additional \$750,000 in appropriation funds to go toward the repair or removal of Cornwall Flooding Dam.

The cost of renovation is currently estimated at \$1.5 million, but this ultimately depends on the exact price of future construction bids. Based on these current estimates, \$150,000 still needs to be raised for dam renovation to be made possible.

With this recent funding, the DNR now has \$1,365,000 to address the issue. This is enough money to remove the

dam, but not enough to repair it. Either way, the impoundment will be drawn down in the spring or summer of 2024 to alleviate stability concerns.

According to Fisheries Chief Randy Claramunt, whether the dam is ultimately repaired or removed is now primarily a concern for Cornwall stakeholders.

“In the end,” he said, “this will fall on the people who say they value Cornwall to come through with the remaining money. We’ve raised as much as we can. [The Fisheries Department] will keep seeking additional funds, but if there is not a public upwelling to fundraise, it is likely the dam will be removed.”

PRCA Treasurer Joe Jarecki said that the Association Board of Directors is considering an effort to solicit contributions, and that funds raised will be offered to whatever entity is looking to raise the \$150,000 match that is needed to repair the dam.

For this match to be considered viable, the entirety of it must be raised by next fall.

Chief Claramunt suggested that if the entire amount raised for match is not needed, the residual funds will be donated to the Fisheries Division operating budget for Cornwall to go toward long-term dam maintenance, and to aid in funding required inspections.

Claramunt said that this issue needs to be addressed “within a year,” citing results from a 2023 geotechnical survey conducted by Wade Trim Engineering, which confirmed that a significant amount of water is

seeping through the middle of the earthen dam.

“It is not a matter of if the dam will fail,” Claramunt said. “It’s a matter of when.”

“The geotechnical analysis is very clear,” he continued, “and we have some predata that suggests that the flow is constant, which means that it is not decreasing. Seepage like this is almost never linear—it doesn’t slowly get worse. When most dams fail with conditions like this, they have a constant seepage that suddenly increases exponentially [because of a weather event]. Then it fails.”

Given its age and degraded structural state, Cornwall Dam has been considered a safety concern for years. It is inspected by the EGLE every three years, and was assigned a high hazard safety rating in 2019. A high hazard safety dam is defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as “any dam whose failure or mis-



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operation will cause loss of human life and significant property destruction.”

Before the onset of COVID-19, a budget to repair the dam was set at \$410,725. However, post-pandemic material and labor costs drastically increased the estimated cost of renovation.

“There’s been a lot of public misperception about our stance on Cornwall,” Head of Gaylord Fisheries Division, Tim Cwalinski said. “For the most part, the Fisheries Division is against dams, but this one is different. [Cornwall] doesn’t negatively impact fish passage or cold-water resource management to the extent that other dams do.”

“In 2019, [the Fisheries Division and Huron Pines] got an EGLE permit to renovate Cornwall, and we had some funding. We partnered with Wade Trim Engineering to redesign the structure, and put bids out to see who could do this work.”

In 2020, permit applications were submitted for partial drawdown and eventual dam renovation. \$250,000 was requested to FEMA, but this proposal was rejected. Construction bids came back in January 2021 and ranged from \$800,000 to \$1.4 million.

“Most of the impoundment is 5-15 feet deep,” Cwalinski said. “If you draw the dam down a maximum of seven feet, six inches a week or so, we could say that’s probably good, for now.”

“So let’s say we cut seven feet off, to alleviate concerns from engineers. The 20-foot deepest hole will become a 13-foot deepest hole. That water is going to shrink away from the boat launch. It will have a different look.”

Cornwall Flooding is one of Pigeon River Country’s most frequented destinations. Located on Cornwall Creek, it feeds into the Pigeon River after leaving the dam. Since the late 1960s, this secluded 161-acre impoundment has offered visitors several outdoor recreation opportunities ranging from fishing and kayaking to horseback riding and birdwatching. While the dam (built in 1966) does not negatively impact fish passage or cold-water resource management to the extent that other dams do, its overflow valve is stuck and the structure as a whole is considered unstable.

Cornwall Flooding is home to several species of stocked fish that do not live in the Pigeon River, including various panfish and largemouth bass. It is important that these species do not get into the Pigeon River during the drawdown and repair or removal process.

Tim Cwalinski said it will be the responsibility of dam engineers to implement spillover prevention mechanisms.

Over the last year or so, there has been an upwelling of public support in favor of renovating Cornwall Dam, as opposed to removing it. An online “Save Cornwall Flooding” campaign has obtained around 2,000 signatures.

“I have no doubt that if people had not collectively raised their voices, the flooding would be in the middle of drawdown, [to be removed],” Save Cornwall organizer Peter Goldsborough said.

Huron Pines asserted that the impoundment “contributes substantial economic and social value to the surrounding community” and that the

flooding's ecological impacts are less significant than if Cornwall Creek were a cold-water stream.

“With proper funding and support from the DNR and EGLE,” Huron Pines stated that they are “prepared to manage the process of renovation to maintain the flooding and address the safety concerns.”

Other parties directly oppose repairing the dam and believe it needs to be permanently removed. Such advocates claim that Cornwall should be returned to a free-running creek and argue that state funding should not be spent maintaining dam structures.

It remains unclear how Michigan's popular equestrian route, the Shore-to-Shore Trail, which crosses over Cornwall Dam, will be affected by the drawdown.

The PRCA Board entertained a motion, by electronic vote, to support Huron Pines' position in favor of repairing the dam at Cornwall. PRCA by-laws require an electronic vote to be unanimous. The vote was not unanimous and the motion failed. The Association has not adopted any position regarding the question.

## Ray Hoobler Memorial Bench

A memorial bench dedicated to former PRCA President Raymond T. Hoobler was installed on May 28, 2023. It is located behind the Discovery Center and overlooks the Pigeon River.

Previously a mathematics professor at City University New York, Hoobler served as president of the Pigeon River Country Association for 17 years, and served as the association secretary

until he passed. Hoobler was a PRCA board member for 25 years. He died on April 29, 2020, from complications of COVID-19. He was 78 years old.

Before its dedication to Ray Hoobler, the bench was originally installed by Discovery Center volunteers as part of the property's development in 2018.

Ray's son-in-law, Chuck Carlson, inscribed this quote by Dale Franz on the bench: “tread lightly, leave few footprints, remain unnoticed.” He then reinstalled it with Hoobler's granddaughter, Cassie Carlson; and daughter, Aurora Hoobler.



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## Student Art: A New Tradition at the Discovery Center

Vanderbilt Area School partnered with the Discovery Center for the first annual Pigeon River Country Student Art Exhibit in summer 2023.

Students submitted 23 original pieces of artwork inspired by the PRC, collectively named “Nature's Palette.” Their artwork was displayed in the center from May through October, and visitors voted for their favorite pieces during that time. A total of 324 votes were cast.



KaLynn Walter, Emerie Smith, Sabine Schultz  
@Jan Kellogg



First Place Winner: 8th grader Emerie Smith



Second Place Winner: 9th grader Kaylynn Walter



Third Place Winner: 8th grader Sabine Schultz

The top three vote getters were 8th grader Emerie Smith (first place); 9th grader Kaylynn Walter (second place); and 8th grader Sabine Schultz (third place). Each of them were given award certificates and a collection of art supplies.

Jan Kellogg, member of the Discovery Center Steering Committee, said “We were really pleased at the variety of art that was submitted. The people that came through [the Discovery Center] this summer just loved it, and some people even wanted to buy some [of the pieces].”

Kellogg said that the Steering Committee has been wanting to incorporate art [in the Discovery Center] for quite a long time.

“I was contacted years ago to try to bring more people in, but we never really brought it all together. So this last year, I said why don’t we bring in artists from the local school? That’s how it got started.”

The idea originally came from Lisha Ramsdell (Huron Pines, PRCAC) and Sandy Franz (PRCAC). Kellogg said they wanted to “round things out a little bit” at the Discovery Center, since most of its programming is science-based.

“Bringing in this artistic side provides an alternative way for visitors to experience the forest,” Kellogg said.

Amie Kamyszek, the art teacher at Vanderbilt, said that Nature’s Palette opened her students’ eyes to the possibilities of what their artwork can look like.

“A wide range of skill levels and ages [were included],” Kamyszek said. “The students were allowed to use pretty

much whatever medium they wanted. I didn’t put a lot of parameters or a lot of rules around it. [The Steering Committee] framed all the pieces and made it look wonderful. It was really cool to see [the finished exhibit].”

The Steering Committee plans on teaming up with Vanderbilt Area School again in 2024, although they would also like to work with other schools that border the PRC in subsequent years.

“Vanderbilt is the gateway to the Pigeon River Country,” Kamyszek said, “So it was very special that our students were able to have their artwork displayed at the Discovery Center. I am very proud of their work.”

### **Master Naturalist program returning to the PRC**

Michigan State University Extension’s Master Naturalist program will return to the Discovery Center in May 2024. This six-month program offers interested parties the opportunity to become a certified naturalist right here in Pigeon River Country.

According to MSU Extension Natural Resources educator Julie Crick, “[This is] a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of how we, as individuals, can make a collective difference for Michigan’s wildlife habitat.”

Participants will meet a total of six Saturdays, once a month from May through October; with each class featuring a suite of wildlife professionals and educators.

Course subjects include: Native American, European history and

geology of the Pigeon River Country; Michigan wetland habitats, plants, and amphibians; Michigan grassland habitats and prescribed fire; beneficial insects and an overview of invasive species; river and lake ecology and habitat; and forest type and tree identification.

Lectures will be held in the morning, at the Discovery Center. Afternoons will be spent outside, gaining field experience.

The Master Naturalist program also offers K-12 teachers a special opportunity for continued education, awarding an average of 21 SCECH (State Continuing Education Clock Hours) credits to every teacher who completes the course.

According to MSU Extension Coordinator Beth Clawson, "There aren't many opportunities for teachers [in the area] to get continued education credits, and since they need 50 credits every two years, it's a pretty big deal."

Master Naturalist first teamed up with the Discovery Center in 2022. It was the first time the program focused on a Northern Michigan environment and biome.

The program costs \$200 and is limited to 30 people. Children under 18 can attend with an adult guardian present.

Interested parties can email Julie Crick at [crickjul@msu.edu](mailto:crickjul@msu.edu) to be notified when course registration opens. There is no waitlist.

For more information, visit <https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/michigan-master-naturalist>.

A reminder about ORVs from the website:

"Except for a few miles of the MCCCT (Michigan Cross Country Cycle Trail), there are no designated ORV trails in the PRC. ORVs are not allowed on Otsego or Montmorency county roads in the PRC. ORVs are allowed on the shoulder of Otsego and Montmorency county roads outside of the PRC and on the shoulder of all Cheboygan and Presque Isle county roads. Contact the appropriate county road commission for details or updates. PA 288 of 2016 opened many state forest roads to ORVs, but the PRC state forest roads remain closed to ORVs."

An updated version of the High Country Pathway maps will be available shortly, probably in February.

**Please Join or Renew Your Membership**

Please join us in helping to protect the Pigeon River Country and its resources and wildlife. Individual memberships are \$20 per year. Family memberships are \$25 per year. Visit our web-site to join or renew, or mail a check payable to 'PRCA' to: The Pigeon River Country Association, P.O. Box 122, Gaylord MI, 49734-0122

Thank you!



Visit our websites at <http://www.pigeonriver.org>  
<https://pigeonriverdiscoverycenter.org>

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