

**MEETING MINUTES - WESTERN REGION RC&D COUNCIL**  
**L'Anse Village Hall, February 4, 2010**

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Carol Rose Fouts -Keweenaw Co Bd of Comm; Bruce Petersen-NRCS; Bob Larson-Baraga CD; Bill Rolof & Bill Menge-Baraga Co Bd of Comm; Bob Black-Iron Co Bd of Comm; John Pelkola-Ontonagon Co Bd of Comm; Jim Stewart-Iron Conservation District; Dennis Jacobson-Gogebic Co Bd of Comm; Barbara VanAlstine-Ottawa Natl Forest; David Harmon & Marvin LaGrew-Gogebic CD; Ken Marshall – KBIC; Sue Haralson & Gina Nicholas-Houghton Keweenaw CD; Jim Cederna & Dennis Margoni-Recreation Assoc. of Iron Co; Marilyn Shy-UP RC&D Coordinator; Darcy Rutkowski-UP RC&D Council

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bob Larson at 10:00 am. The agenda was approved with the addition of “House Bill 5319” as a business item. Members present introduced themselves.

**MINUTES:** The Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written.

**TREASURER’S REPORT:** Darcy presented the Treasurer’s Report. The balance in the checking account as of January 29, 2010 is \$390.64 and there has been no activity for the past several months. Invoices have been sent to all conservation districts requesting \$25 dues for FY2010.

**BUSINESS ITEMS:**

**County Dues:** Darcy reported that invoices were sent to all counties in the UP on January 19, 2010 requesting \$300 dues for FY2010. Counties were also asked to provide the name and contact information for their appointee and alternate to the regional RC&D council covering their county. Dues payments have already been received from Luce and Iron Counties.

**RC&D Performance Improvement Criteria:** NRCS and the National Association of RC&D Councils have developed a set of criteria that they are asking all councils to meet prior to September 30, 2011 (earlier if possible). NRCS will complete a “Rapid Assessment” of all designated RC&D Areas around March 30, 2010 to determine if each criterion is being achieved. There are seven criteria and the UP RC&D Council does not currently meet two of the criteria: Completes Annual Report, and Conducts Annual External Financial Audit/Review. These two criteria are currently in the process of being completed. Darcy will produce an Annual Report which will replace one of the newsletters that the Council currently produces. Bids have been requested from three local CPA firms for completion of a financial review.

**Annual Plan of Work:** Marilyn distributed the Annual Plan of Work for the UP RC&D Council which covers 2010. The Annual Plan was approved by the UP Council in December 2009 and was signed by State Conservationist, Garry Lee. The Plan details the major goals for the UP Council and strategies for accomplishing those goals. All active projects are included in the Plan and the format includes space for entering current progress on the individual projects which Marilyn had recently updated.

**Michigan House Bill 5319:** Bob Larson circulated a copy of the language in HB5319 and suggested that the Western RC&D Council oppose this bill which he described as transferring Michigan groundwater rights to the public trust (state owned) from private property ownership (which is now the case). Members questioned the ability of the state to manage this resource properly, the possibility of the state taxing water withdrawals, or limiting withdrawals in the future. A motion was made and passed that “The Western RC&D Council is opposed to any State control of ground water, and that they want to see groundwater remain under local control” (Black/Pelkola).

## **REPORTS:**

**Baraga County:** Bill Menge reported that the county received funding and is working with WUPPDR and the Great Lakes Commission to develop a wilderness park on the tip of Pt. Abbey. They are also working on a “scramble area” on the Baraga Plains. He will attempt to get more information on this prior to the next Western meeting so the council can write a letter of support if they so desire.

**Baraga and Ontonagon Conservation Districts:** Bruce Petersen reminded members of the work KBIC completed on vegetative remediation of stamp sands in 2006 on 33 acres at Sand Point. The area was extremely uniform and now they are placing boulders, trees, mounds of soil, etc. in the area to create more diversity. There are a total of 10 bat enclosures that will be installed (9 in Ontonagon Co, 1 in Keweenaw Co) and 7 of these are located in the Ottawa NF and have already received funding. He also attended a Portage Twp Meeting and provided them GIS maps of shallow bedrock, soil sites that are well-drained (for crushed rock), and also sand and gravel deposits. The township will use the maps to update their land use plan. Bob Larson commented that high bedrock crushing can contaminate drinking water. They are currently working to complete 12-14 contracts (EQIP, WHP, Wetlands Resource Program, etc) prior to February 19<sup>th</sup>. Bruce also reported that UP Engineers and Architects applied for Great Lakes Initiative funding for Hamar Creek and worked with KBIC on an Indian Road funding proposal to remediate 3 road crossings. They hope to install larger culverts that will spread out the water and thus eliminate some of the erosion. Bruce sits on the Houghton Planning commission and they are looking for assistance for trail representation. There are more than 300 miles of trails in the western UP that don't have permanent easements. There is enough work to support a full-time position working on legal concerns for encumbrances and encroachment issues. It would be great to resolve some of these issues before they become problems. WUPPDR is looking at main artery trails to determine ownership.

**Houghton Keweenaw Conservation District:** Gina Nicholas reported that the district applied for another grant for “Central 3” on the Eagle River. This would be a \$600,000 project that would be contracted to NRCS (Rob Aho) for engineering and local contractors would actually do the work. They also applied for a GLRI grant for \$415,000 for Hills Creek/Black Creek which is in cooperation with NRCS, the Michigan Nature Association, Longyear, Michigan Tech and the CD. The restoration on the Cliff Mine site will be done this summer with funding they have already received.

**Gogebic Conservation District:** Dave Harmon reported that DC Tom Berndt brought together local stakeholders to provide input in identifying priority resource issues to help determine local ranking criteria for FY2010 EQIP and WHP programs. The district received an award from the USFS for “Cooperatively Managing the Ecosystem at a Landscape Scale to Reduce the Effect of Invasive Species” and they are working with the USFS to hire a seasonal herbicide sprayer to control garlic mustard. They are now receiving income from the Soil Erosion Sedimentation Control Program (Bill Perkis is the county enforcing agent). June 12 is the kickoff for “Get Outdoors for Gogebic County” (part of a national event) and they are partnering with MSUE. The district is seeking foresters that want to become technical service providers for NRCS to write forest management plans. There is some online training involved prior to certification. The “Survivor Up North” program will take place on March 13 and some of the district directors are volunteering with about 25 youth predicted to participate. The District was one of four organizations in the Upper Peninsula to receive an Arbor Day Mini-Grant from the DNR. Their annual tree sale will be held on May 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Gogebic County:** Dennis Jacobson reported that the Gogebic/Iron County, WI airport new terminal is now operational. The Wakefield township supervisor reported that the western UP recycling plant has done well in the past year and they are planning on expanding operations (recycling of tires). The county supported them by selling them 40 acres for \$1. Orvanna Minerals is on schedule with their copper mining venture in Ironwood Township. They plan to start construction next year and open in 2013. The US Census Bureau is having trouble filling positions in Gogebic County.

**Iron County:** Bob Black reported that U.P. Engineers and Architects, Inc. was hired to write a 5-year Recreation Plan for the county. They are now in a 30 day comment period for the Pentoga Park Project. They hope to utilize the 80 acre Cooks Run (hatchery and blue ribbon trout stream) as a facility for youth activities and thereby be eligible for grants. Bob now serves on the recreation board of the Michigan Assoc. of County Commissioners. He feels like tourism from snowmobiles and ORV's is beneficial to the UP and is trying to collaborate with other counties to make regulations across jurisdictional boundaries consistent. He is part of a group called ANSWERS which includes the border counties of MI and WI and they are interested in a reciprocal ORV license (like is done for fishing). Iron County native Nick Baumgartner will compete in the Olympics on February 15th in snowboarding.

**Iron Conservation District:** Jim Stewart reported that the CD is in the process of trying to secure \$30,000 from the Ottawa NF for a portable boat wash. The funding will cover some wages, and other expenses. They received an award for their work with the Western UP Cooperative Weed Management Area. They are getting ready for their spring tree sale (also sell shrubs, berries, rhubarb, asparagus, etc.). Their CD Administrator is now working 2 days per week and she will be doing some work on administering the boat wash grant.

**Keweenaw County:** Carol Rose Fouts reported that Keweenaw Mt. Lodge is open for winter use 7 days a week. They recently held a ribbon-cutting for the new terrain park. The county commission voted not to support the terrain park financially but the Copper Harbor Trails Club immediately raised the money necessary. The Lodge will be receiving the "Spark Plug Award" from the Chamber of Commerce, but she wants to make sure folks know how much credit the trails club deserves for their efforts. She is also involved in Horizons Alternative High School in Keweenaw County. They spent a good deal of time clearing trails for the terrain park, sledding hill, skating rink, cross-country ski and snowshoe trails. The Lodge is working collaboratively with Mt. Bohemia to try to attract visitors to both venues. Until recently the snowmobile trail groomers didn't have a way to communicate with anyone in the area (poor cell service) and recently borrowed some radios to use for emergency purposes. There will be a public hearing to present plans for where snowmobiles may ride on public roads to access trails. She also mentioned their Annual Madi Gras fundraiser to support Horizons and Keweenaw Kraysons.

**Ontonagon County:** John Pelkola reported that the county board formed the Ontonagon County Economic Partnership and that there is now a lot of interest with the loss of jobs at Smurfit Stone (180) and the nursing home (60). There are 10 subcommittees and they are hoping to see some revitalization of the area. The Ontonagon Co. Prosecutor is working with the state of Montana hoping to speed up the sale of the facility for future re-use.

**KBIC:** Ken Marshall reported that the tribe is developing a transfer station for Baraga County which will be located in the industrial park. This should create a few jobs and is really needed in the area. They will start out just collecting garbage, but hope to add composting and recycling. They have a grant to build another gas station (Harvey or Negaunee area). The "Baraga County Community Wildfire Protection Plan" was funded (only 3 funded in the UP). This should help them develop capacity for fighting future wildfires in the area. They also received a grant to re-engineer the campground on Sand Point.

**USFS:** Barbara VanAlstine reported that they are also working on a community wildfire protection plan for the area around Bruce Crossing which is funded by the USFS and they hope will allow them to get future grant funding. The bat enclosures in the Ottawa NF mentioned by Bruce Petersen were funded by stimulus funding. Hiker safety is an issue with old mine pits. They are also updating Camp Nesbitt using local contractors, and fixing CCC buildings at Lake Ottawa. The Ottawa underwent a review last week that is done once every 10 years. The reviewers contact local government reps to see how the forest is doing. The forest is working on travel management maps to make improvements (changes come out every April). There

were 3 sales on the Ottawa that belonged to Smurfit Stone and were defaulted on. The Ottawa must report these losses and it makes more work for them.

**RC&D Coordinator Report:** Marilyn distributed an RFP for Estuary Habitat Restoration grants funded by NOAA and the Great Lakes Commission. These grants can be used for re-establishing historic hydrology and fish passage and habitat. The deadline is early March. She also reported that she has completed two years of training in the role of a facilitator, and has provisional accreditation. She is available to work with groups (preferably related to conservation issues) that need the assistance of a facilitator. Updates on projects were provided in the updated Annual Plan of Work that she distributed. One project specifically mentioned was the “cooperative weed management area for the eastern UP”. The USFS received funding to form a cooperative weed management area and they are working in collaboration with the Chippewa/East Mackinac CD.

#### **NEW MEASURES:**

**Iron County Multi-Recreational Facility Expansion-**This project involves the expansion of the Ice Arena in Caspian to become a multi-recreational facility by adding 240’ of length to the 122’ wide structure. The expansion will allow for low cost indoor sporting activities for this low income area. The focus on year round activities is to improve the wellness of residents of all ages, expand interaction and quality of life for the large senior population (23.7%), improve the sports performance of local athletes, and increase tourism in the county. They are going to incorporate as much “green technology” as possible (recapture of heat from cooling ice, incorporate solar, biomass, use recycled material from Connor Flooring). They are requesting help in locating appropriate grants for this project. The project was approved (Marshall/Pelkola).

**PROJECT UPDATES:** See above under “Coordinator’s Report”. Also, Darcy gave an update on the BURN-UP Project. The Phase II extension will be complete March 31, 2010. Remaining funds are being used to complete engineering pre-feasibility studies at the Republic-Michigamme School and also for select buildings at the Ford Center. Earlier this week a grant proposal was submitted to the USFS for a “BURN-UP Phase III” which would continue the current work being done and expand activities with new partners in northern Wisconsin (Lumberjack RC&D Council, BEREC).

**CORRESPONDENCE:** All councils received correspondence from the National Association of RC&D Councils regarding the President’s FY2010 budget which was recently released. The RC&D program has once again been zeroed out for funding. We are waiting for word on a recommended strategy for having funding reinstated by congress.

The council also received a request to donate an item for the silent auction for the North Central RC&D meeting which is scheduled for early April in Canton, Ohio. If any members have items they wish to donate, please contact the UP RC&D office. The donation can generate a lot of good publicity for the organization or business making the donation. The HK Conservation District offered to donate a t-shirt from their Bete Grise Preserve.

**NEXT MEETING:** The next meeting will be held on Thursday, May 20, 2010 (please note change in date from original schedule) in Keweenaw County. Either Marilyn Shy or Darcy Rutkowski will contact Carol Rose Fouts to determine the exact location. Tentatively the meeting will take place at 10 am (Eastern time).