

PRA Meeting Feb 21 2026

Meeting Information

Date: February 21, 2026

Time: 9:56 AM - 10:56 AM (EST) - PRA Meeting; followed by StreamsideEco Presentation

Location: Zoom Meeting

Meeting Type: Pine River Association Regular Meeting & Pine River Enhancement Fund Meeting

Attendees

Board Members Present: Diane L Nelson Hilfinger (President), Tucker Martin (Treasurer), Fred Goetz, Matt Gray, Gregory Weiers, Michael Wallick, Zack Williams, Fred Iyer

TU Representatives: Tim Bertles (Chair, Pine River Area Chapter of Trout Unlimited)

Guests: Aaron Snell (StreamsideEco - Presenter), Michael Bonebrake, Renee Isard, Jim Walters

I. Call to Order and Approval of Agenda

The meeting was called to order at 9:56 AM. The agenda was approved as presented.

Motion: Fred Goetz

Second: Michael Wallick

Result: Approved unanimously

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed.

One correction was noted: "Coal Creek" should be "Coe Creek" under Natural Rivers Variance Board section.

Motion to approve minutes as corrected: Michael Wallick

Second: Fred Goetz

Result: Approved unanimously

III. Treasurer's Report

Pine River Association Account

Balance as of February 21, 2026: \$13,367.39

Recent Activity:

- Interest earned: Less than \$2
- Donation to Luther Library: \$450 (October 29, 2025)

Motion to approve: Michael Wallick

Second: Gregory Weiers / Matt Gray

Result: Approved unanimously

Pine River Watershed Enhancement Fund

Balance (as of October): Approximately \$16,300

Recent donations: Additional \$500-1,400 received in December and January

Note: Tax filing deadline is March 15, 2026

IV. Announcements

- **TU Fundraiser:** Pine River Area Chapter of Trout Unlimited fundraiser scheduled for May 2, 2026, at Cadillac Grill. Capacity: 125-150 guests. Tickets not yet on sale.
- **Member Notification:** Guy Benson (Frankenmuth) passed away in October 2024.

V. Old Business

X. Next Meetings

- Next Board Meeting: April 2026 (date TBD)
- Annual Members Meeting: June 2026 (weekend of June 25-28)
- TU Fundraiser: May 2, 2026 at Cadillac Grill

IX. Action Items and Follow-Up

- Tucker Martin: File Enhancement Fund taxes by March 15, 2026
- Tucker Martin: Send donation acknowledgment letters to recent donors
- Tucker Martin: Update Enhancement Fund board composition on website
- Zack Williams: Follow up on scholarship program coordination with Mariah
- Zack Williams: Provide contact information for PRA apparel supplier to Tucker
- Fred Goetz: Share shirt brand/specifications for merchandise reorder
- Diane: Consult attorney/accountant on PRA-Enhancement Fund merger feasibility
- Diane: Begin property owner database creation using OnX and plat books
- Diane: Coordinate with Tim Bertles on North Branch project funding and volunteer opportunities
- Diane: Ramp up MICOR volunteer recruitment in March/April
- Diane: Scan historical meeting minutes for website archive
- Diane: Follow up with Jacob Milner on impoundment survey findings
- Board: Recruit candidates for June annual meeting elections

VIII. Pine River Enhancement Fund Meeting

Brief meeting held after StreamsideEco presentation:

Attendees: Diane, Tucker, Fred, Matt Gray (quorum present)

Action Taken:

- **Motion:** Tucker Martin moved to approve \$5,000 funding for North Branch Pine River project
- **Second:** Matt Gray
- **Result:** Approved unanimously
- Funding source: Pine River Watershed Enhancement Fund
- Discussion of potentially transferring funds from PRA account to Enhancement Fund in future

Administrative Items:

- Confirmed need to send donation acknowledgment letters for tax purposes
- Letters to be sent upon receipt of donation (not year-end batch)
- Tucker to use Fred's letter template going forward

Meeting adjourned: ~12:30 PM

VII. Guest Presentation

StreamsideEco - Stream Restoration Projects

Presenter: Aaron Snell, Owner, StreamsideEco

Background:

- MSU graduate (B.S. 1997, M.S. 2001 in Fisheries and Wildlife)
- 16 years operating StreamsideEco with partner Mike Nurse
- Specializes in stream restoration, habitat improvement, and aquatic surveys
- Works throughout Michigan, primarily in southern Lower Peninsula

Projects Presented:

1. Coldwater River - Freeport Dam Removal

- 15-year-old project removing failing dam structure
- Opened fish passage and improved safety
- Heavily fortified structure (Cold War-era shelter with extensive rebar)

- Included grade control structures and floodplain restoration

2. Coldwater River - Nolan Nature Sanctuary (Shrems TU Property)

- In-stream woody debris installation project
- 44 branded logs anchored with steel pins
- Dramatic fish population increase: 42 trout/mile to 1,600 trout/mile
- Evidence of natural reproduction (fish 2-4 inches observed)
- 5-year post-construction monitoring program
- Worked with contractor Sean Knauss

3. Paint Creek - Rochester Municipal Park (\$750,000 project)

- Large-scale urban stream restoration
- Removed failing gabion baskets and metal infrastructure
- Created overhanging/undercut banks with log structures
- Extensive bank stabilization and native plantings
- Challenge: managing waterfowl damage to vegetation

4. Paint Creek - Dinosaur Hill Nature Preserve

- Ongoing volunteer-based projects with Vanguard TU
- Annual budget: \$10,000-\$20,000 per project
- 6 consecutive years of in-stream improvements
- Volunteer workdays for log installation and bank stabilization

5. East Branch Ausable - Grayling Fish Hatchery

- Dam removal with elevation control for hatchery operations
- Contractor: Sean Knauss
- Stepped structures to maintain water intake for hatchery
- Removed multiple concrete bridges and structures
- Design allows future full restoration if hatchery closes

6. Lower Tyler Creek Feasibility Study (Current Project)

- Ambitious plan to return Tyler Creek to historic pre-1918 channel
- Current channel: 1,800 feet straight dredged drain
- Historic channel: 4,100 feet with natural meanders
- Historic channel still intact after 100+ years
- Sediment probing found gravel bed only 6 inches below surface
- Discovered preserved native mussel shells in old channel
- Benefits: Triple stream length, reduce sediment, restore floodplain, increase recreation
- Involves Kent and Ionia County drain boards
- Feasibility study concludes summer 2026
- If approved, construction estimated 2028-2030

Key Themes from Presentation:

- Importance of project constraints (drainage requirements, access, infrastructure)
- Value of volunteer involvement in planning and implementation
- Need for monitoring to document project success
- Collaboration between conservation groups, drain commissioners, and agencies
- Trade-offs between paddler access and habitat complexity
- StreamsideEco also conducts water quality testing, E. coli source tracking, and mussel surveys

Contact: Aaron welcomed volunteers and consultation requests (contact via StreamsideEco website)

VI. New Business

A. Board Vacancies and Leadership Transition

Discussion of upcoming board changes:

- Pine River Enhancement Fund President position vacant (Steve stepping down)
- Diane expressed interest in stepping down to focus on projects rather than administration

- Board recruitment needed for June annual meeting elections

B. Potential Merger of PRA and Enhancement Fund

Preliminary discussion on combining organizations:

- Goal: Reduce administrative burden and streamline operations
- PRA operates as corporation; Enhancement Fund is 501(c)(3)
- Proposal: Merge into Enhancement Fund structure while maintaining PRA name for operations
- Next steps: Consult with attorney or accountant familiar with 501(c)(3) organizations
- Board generally supportive of exploring this option
- May require legal fees but would simplify long-term management

F. MICOR (Macroinvertebrate Study)

Plans for summer 2026 bug study:

- Scheduled for weekend of June 25-28, 2026 (overlapping with annual meeting weekend)
- Volunteer recruitment to begin in March/April
- Board considering providing lunches or gas reimbursement for volunteers
- Burdell Township Hall identified as potential workspace for bug counting

G. River Monitoring Stations

Status update on three monitoring stations:

- Two stations functioning properly
- North Branch station experiencing intermittent signal issues
- Discussion of relocating North Branch station for better data consistency
- Links to monitoring data available on PRA website

D. June Meeting Location

Discussed location for annual June members meeting (no formal decision made).

E. North Branch Pine River Habitat Improvement Project

Presenter: Tim Bertles, Pine River Area Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Project Details:

- Location: North Branch Pine River, approximately 1 mile south of previous project on state property near 22 Mile Road
- Scope: Stream habitat improvement with woody debris installation along banks
- Estimated work: 200-300 yards of river restoration
- Contractor: Sean Knauss
- TU Contribution: \$15,000
- Timeline: Mid to late summer 2026
- Benefits: Erosion control, improved trout habitat (brook and brown trout), deeper stream channels

Funding Request:

- **Motion:** Fred Iyer moved to donate \$5,000 to the project
- **Second:** Zack Williams
- **Result:** Approved unanimously by PRA
- **Source:** Pine River Watershed Enhancement Fund (approved in subsequent Enhancement Fund meeting)

A. Communication Strategy

Discussion regarding transitioning from paper mailings to digital communication via website:

- Website will feature minutes, agendas, community announcements, and calendar
- Paper copies will be maintained for members without email access

- Frequency of paper mailings may be reduced to twice yearly instead of quarterly
- Board acknowledged generational preferences: younger members expect electronic communication
- Policy to be developed regarding communication methods

B. Merchandise/Apparel

Discussion on reordering PRA clothing and merchandise:

- Need new supplier
- Preference for embroidered items over printed
- Historical pricing: \$5-10 profit per shirt, \$5 per hat

C. Property Owner Database

Discussion on creating a contact database for Pine River property owners:

- Goal to increase outreach and membership awareness
- Proposed use of OnX app and Plat books to identify property owners
- Plan to send informational mailings to non-members about PRA
- Board approved moving forward with database creation