

Ottawa Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)

Meeting Notes January 22, 2025

Location: Watersmeet/ Iron River District Office

Time: Connie Julien (RAC Chair) started the meeting at 8:30 CT

Committee members present in person:

- Evelyn Ravindran. A1 Non-timber forest product harvester groups. Keweenaw Bay Indian Community Natural Resources Department Director.
- Daniel J. Gardner. A2 Developed outdoor recreation, off-highway vehicle users, or commercial recreation activities Secretary, SISU Dirt Crew
- Sarah Topp. A3 Commercial or recreational fishing interests. Upper Peninsula Stream Restoration Manager, Trout Unlimited
- Amber L. Oja. A4 Commercial timber industry. Area Manager, Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands
- Donald Helsel. A5 Forest landowner. Also former RAC member and MI-TRALE Board of Directors.
- Emily M. Clegg. B1 Nationally recognized environmental organizations. Director of Land and Water Management, The Nature Conservancy, Michigan.
- Connie Julien. B3 Dispersed recreational activities. President of the Peter Wolfe Chapter of the North Country Trail Association. RAC Chair.
- Pete Heidemann. B5 Wildlife or hunting organizations, or watershed associations Retired school teacher. Ontonagon Valley Sportsmen's Club.
- Alina J. Shively. C3 American Indian tribes. Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
- Marlene Broemer. C4 Area school officials or teachers. Former Ontonagon County Commissioner, former professor at Finlandia University, substitute teacher.
- Rachael A. Guth. C5 Affected public-at-large. Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development, Environmental Stewardship Division

Committee members present virtually:

- Theresa Pitts. B2 regionally or locally recognized environmental organizations. Wolf Preservation Team with Michigan Anishinaabek Caucus.
- Lindsay Hiltunen B4 archaeological and historical interests. PhD student at Michigan Tech and University Archivist.

Quorum: Yes

Also in attendance:

Forest Service staff: **Darla Lenz (Forest Supervisor and Ottawa RAC Designated Federal Official)**, Trevor Hahka (District Ranger), Amber Tembreull (District Ranger), Jeremy Erickson (Deputy District Ranger), Shanelle Saunders (Public Affairs Officer), Ian Shackleford (Botanist), Blaze Budd (Hydrologist), Mark Menigoz (Forestry Tech), Paul Holeva (Ottawa RAC Coordinator, online), Spring Rosales (Operations Staff Officer, Ottawa NF, online).

Steve McDonough (ISCCW), Michelle Kanipes (ISCCW), Tyler Penrod (Superior Watershed Partnership), Jen Ricker (Iron Baraga CD), Mike Zukowski (Iron Baraga CD), Eugene Clark (Cisco Chain Riparian Owners Association), Steve Worachek (Ontonagon Valley Sportsmen's Club), Nicole Wohlstein (UPRC&D), Tristen Kendrick (TV6 WLUC Negaunee).

Absent:

- Greg Markkanen. C1 state elected office Michigan State Representative (District 110)
- Dan Siirila. C2 county or local elected office Gogebic County Commissioner (District 1)

The purpose of the meeting was to review 20 project proposals and make recommendations on how to use \$765,074 of Secure Rural Schools Title II funding, collected since 2013. All RAC members had already received and reviewed the project proposals. There are no ongoing already-approved RAC projects on the Ottawa NF, and therefore no project statuses to review from previous years.

Darla Lenz welcomed the RAC and thanked them for volunteering their time. She reviewed the Secure Rural Schools Act and how we came to receive the available funding from Gogebic and Ontonagon Counties.

We then reviewed all 20 project proposals. Ian shared a PowerPoint with one overview slide for each project.

Project Presentations

01. Lac Vieux Desert Water Quality and Wild Life Enhancement Project (2025-2026). No one in the room represented this project. Ian discussed briefly.

02. Gete Miinikaanan 2025 & 2026. Brian Hockaday, Ethnobotanist with the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians presented.

03. Assessing the Ecological Needs of Rare Species in Insular Habitats on the Ottawa National Forest. No one in the room represented this project. Ian discussed briefly and read an email from Ryne Rutherford.

04. ISCCW & USFS Partnership for Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention. Steve McDonough and Michelle Kanipes from the Invasive Species Control Coalition of Watersmeet (ISCCW) presented.

05. Twin Pines Canoe/Kayak Landing Project. Steve Worachek, Treasurer for the Ontonagon Valley Sportsmen's Club, presented.

06. Black River Cleanup. No one in the room represented this project. Ian discussed briefly and read a letter from Bill Perkis, Chair of the Gogebic Conservation District.

07. Narrows Park Black River Access Improvement. No one in the room represented this project. Ian discussed briefly. The letter from Bill Perkis covered this project too.

08. Cisco Chain of Lakes Invasive Species Control Project (2025-2026). Eugene Clark, President of the Cisco Chain Riparian Owners Association (CCROA), presented.

09. Courtney Lake Boat Ramp and Access Improvement. Spring Rosales presented.

10. Courtney Lake Toilet Buildings Replacement. Spring Rosales presented.

11. Forest Road 850 Rehabilitation. Spring Rosales presented.

12. Ontonagon County Aquatic Invasive Species Education. No one in the room represented this project. Ian discussed briefly.

13. Hunter Access Improvements. Ian read a letter received from Travis Kilpela (Public land users of the Ottawa National Forest). Forest Service staff discussed briefly.

14. Black River Recreation Area Trails Revitalization Project Scope 1: Bear Track Trails. Danny Gardner presented.

15. Collaborating to Create a More Resilient North Country Trail and Ottawa National Forest. Tyler Penrod (Superior Watershed Partnership) presented. Two letters of support were received and read; one from the Michigan Trail Coordinator for the North County Trail Association (NCTA) and one from the Peter Wolfe Chapter of the NCTA that maintains 85 miles of NCT on the ONF. They both emphasized the need for maintenance help for gas brush cutting and tread work on the NCT.

16. Brook Trout Habitat Improvement Project in the East Branch Presque Isle River Watershed. Sarah Topp and Emily Clegg presented.

17. Langford Lake Cooperative Habitat Enhancement Initiative. Nichole Wohlstein (UPRC&D) presented.

18. Crooked Lake Eurasian Watermilfoil Control Project (2025-2026). No one in the room represented this project. Ian discussed briefly.

19. IBCD & WePIC Four County Collaborative Control of Invasive Species. Jen Ricker (Iron Baraga Conservation District) presented.

20. Ontonagon County Terrestrial Invasive Species Prevention: Trailhead Boot Brush Stations. No one in the room represented this project. Ian discussed briefly.

Project scoring and recommendations

There was some discussion on how to proceed. Connie asked each member to rank each project from 1 to 3 (high, medium, low priority) and recommend how much funding the project should receive. Many or all RAC members may have already identified preliminary recommendations while reviewing the projects before the meeting, and adjusted during the meeting today. Connie then called on each of the 13 present RAC members to share their scores and recommendations, along with brief thoughts. The RAC randomly picked Project #5 (Twin Pines Canoe Landing) to discuss as a full group. Project #5 was well-received, and the RAC tentatively recommended full funding at \$200,000.

There was then a discussion on whether to stay as a full group, or to break into the three RAC sub-groups (A, B and C), as suggested in the draft agenda. The RAC instead chose to continue going through each project as the full, large group, starting with Project #1. Ian recorded the ranking for each project and Rachel Guth recorded the recommended funding. Some RAC members abstained from projects when they were a member of the organization that submitted the proposal.

During lunch Ian and Rachel completed spreadsheets with average rankings and average awards for each project, and listed the projects in the order of their average rankings (Table 1).

After lunch the RAC reviewed each project, starting with the highest-ranked proposal (#14 Bear Track Trails). Group discussion led to recommended funding amounts. Rachel often reviewed the funding recommendations from all RAC members for each project. Often the RAC tentatively recommended full funding, the minimum funding they indicated they would need, or a number equal to the match they promised to provide. Each final funding recommendation was approved by a majority of the RAC members.

There was a long discussion about Project #16 (Brook Trout Habitat Improvement). Many RAC members supported the project, but the minimum \$150,000 of funding (revealed during the project presentation) meant funding that large project could preclude funding for several smaller projects. Eventually the RAC determined that a majority of two of the Groups did not support funding at \$150,000, so the Project was dropped from consideration.

The final project to be recommended for funding was #8 (Cisco Chain Invasives). The RAC recommended that funding only be used for manual control of Eurasian watermilfoil (no pesticides).

After discussing all the projects, the RAC again discussed Projects 17 (Langford Lake habitat) and 13 (Hunter Access Improvements); finally number 17 and 13 were not recommended for funding.

The RAC concluded there were not enough Title II funds remaining to fund these seven projects out of the 20 projects: 16, 17, 13, 19, 7, 11, and 3.

Final RAC Recommendations are listed in Table 1. Thirteen of the twenty projects were recommended for funding, they are listed in order of the RAC priority rating in Table 1.

There was a discussion on what to do if any additional current RAC funding becomes available. For example, if a RAC project comes in under-budget, or the Forest Service learns they already have more than \$765,074. Darla recommended and the RAC agreed, that extra funding should go to Project #2 (Gete Miinikaanan).

*[On 1/23/2025 the Ottawa learned they actually have \$775,271 of SRS funding. Therefore, Project #2 will receive \$110,197.]

If Congress reauthorizes Secure Rural Schools and new funding becomes available, the Ottawa will contact the RAC and ask if we should invite new grant applications. Perhaps we will meet once a year until the member terms expire 2/12/2028.

Adjournment

Ottawa RAC Chair Connie Julien adjourned at 3:15 PM CT.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

 2/4/2025

Connie Julien

Connie Julien, Ottawa RAC Chair

These minutes will be formally considered by the Committee at its next meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting.

Table 1. Ottawa RAC recommendations. G = Gogebic County. O = Ontonagon County.

Proposal Number	County	Project Title	Funds Requested	RAC Recommendation	Average Priority	Average Funding Recommendation	Minimum Acceptable Funding
14	G	Black River Recreation Area Trails Revitalization Project Scope 1: Bear Track Trails (2025-2026)	\$55,000	\$55,000	1.08	\$52,692	\$55,000
15	GO	Collaborating to Create a More Resilient North Country Trail and ONF (2025-5/2027)	\$81,938	\$73,444	1.17	\$58,080	\$73,444
09	O	Courtney Lake Boat Ramp and Access Improvement (2025-2026)	\$80,000	\$80,000	1.31	\$64,615	\$60,000
16	G	Brook Trout Habitat Improvement Project in the E. Branch Presque Isle River Watershed (-1/2030)	\$203,740.24	\$0	1.36	\$85,782	\$150,000
01	G	Lac Vieux Desert Water Quality and Wild Life Enhancement Project (2025-2026)	\$40,000	\$40,000	1.46	\$21,923	Scaleable
02	G	* Gete Miinikaanan (2025 & 2026)	\$466,500	\$110,197	1.54	\$94,615	\$70,000
04	G	ISCCW & USFS Partnership for Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention (no date provided)	\$17,000	\$10,000	1.54	\$10,615	\$10,000
12	O	Ontonagon County Aquatic Invasive Species Education (2025-4/2030)	\$10,000	\$9,300	1.54	\$7,861	\$9,300
20	O	Ontonagon County Terrestrial Invasive Species Prevention: Trailhead Boot Brush Stations (2025-4/2030)	\$15,250	\$15,250	1.54	\$10,696	\$14,500
05	O	Twin Pines Canoe/Kayak Landing Project (2025-2026)	\$200,000	\$200,000	1.69	\$142,307	
10	O	Courtney Lake Toilet Buildings Replacement 2025	\$95,000	\$68,167	1.69	\$46,946	\$70,000
06	G	Black River Cleanup (2025-9/2029)	\$32,713	\$32,713	1.77	\$23,121	
18	G	Crooked Lake Eurasian Watermilfoil Control Project (2025-2026)	\$48,000	\$48,000	1.77	\$19,769	Scalable (sliding)
08	G	Cisco Chain of Lakes Invasive Species Control Project (2025-2026)	\$39,200	\$33,200	1.85	\$14,323	\$33,200
17	G	Langford Lake Cooperative Habitat Enhancement Initiative (2025-4/2027)	\$50,670.85	\$0	2.15	\$21,449	\$850/structure
13	O	Hunter Access Improvements (2025-8/2026)	\$30,000	\$0	2.23	\$13,461	\$25,000
19	GO	IBCD & WePIC Four County Collaborative Control of Invasive Species (2025-2026)	\$45,000	\$0	2.23	\$25,385	\$40,000
07	G	Narrows Park Black River Access Improvement (2025-11/2029)	\$82,200	\$0	2.46	\$20,538	
11	O	FR 850 Rehabilitation (no date provided)	\$200,000	\$0	2.46	\$47,692	\$160,000
03	GO	Assessing the Ecological Needs of Rare Species in Insular Habitats on the Ottawa National Forest (2025-10/2028)	\$100,000	\$0	2.62	\$10,023	\$5,000
			\$1,892,212	\$775,271		\$791,893	