

# MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

BLPOA Community Center  
6996 South SR 10  
Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana

March 19, 2025

## MEMBERS

Diane Blais  
Russ Blais  
Paul Byer  
Linda Byer  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathleen Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Rhonda Milner  
Peg Stalbrink  
Kirt Verhagen

## GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum

## Call to Order by President

On March 19, 2025, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake at 5:34 pm, CDT (6:34 pm, EDT).

## Review and Approval of Minutes of February 19, 2025

Joan Hardesty moved for approval of the minutes of February 19, 2025 as circulated by the Secretary to the membership in a March 14, 2025 email. Kirt Verhagen seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

## Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP-23-06

PTC members and other interested persons appeared in the North Judson Town Hall on February 20 to consider contract bids for the planned one-mile northwest extension of



Centerline stakes  
within the northern 1/3  
of the northwest  
extension mark the  
path for tree cutting.

Image by K. Lucas

the Erie Trail, and the beginning of the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail, in North Judson. A single bid was received and opened from Jeremiah Patrick of Hill Excavating, LLC in Grovertown. The bid amount of \$365,403.30 was 11% over what DNR approved in an ITP project grant. Pursuant to grant terms, DNR would contribute 80% of financing in cash, and the PTC 20% with soft match (such as labor and materials) and private donations.

As grant recipient for this type of state government program, the PTC can negotiate with the lowest bidder (in this instance, the only bidder) to seek agreement on a qualified bid. The PTC's Consultant and Engineer, Bob Aloï, spoke with DNR Grants Coordinator, Erica Gummere, regarding contract elements that might be modified or eliminated to allow the project to proceed within the approved budget amount.

Bob then met with Jeremiah Patrick regarding suitable adjustments. They succeeded in lowering the construction cost to \$329,806.24—enough to fit the budget.

Members of the PTC Board of Directors and Officers were advised through email of the reduced cost and modified terms. The seven Board members were asked to either vote in favor, in opposition, or to abstain from voting on approval of the modifications. Six voted in favor, and one did not vote, so the motion carried.

Kathy reviewed the substantive terms of a form contract drafted by engineering services that would govern unless modified. She recommended changes to language that did not fit an entity such as the PTC—which lacked ownership and never conducted activities on what will become the trail route. She recommended other changes to simplify, clarify, or shorten the 66-page form contract and cause it to be more balanced relative to the PTC. Rhonda reviewed and approved the changes. The revised contract was ultimately signed by Patrick for Hill Excavating and by Rhonda for the PTC.

DNR reviewed the modified construction documents, and most were approved. Two items resulted in additional discussions between the Engineer and the DNR. The first related to ADA compliance with the trail crossing over rail lines. The second focused on the use of boulders to delineate a trail crossing of English Lake Road. These two issues will likely be further refined going forward, but neither seems likely to put the project in serious jeopardy.

On the morning of the membership meeting, Erica Gummere wrote that the PTC was now "clear to move ahead". In the afternoon, Bob Aloï wrote that Hill Excavating intended to have a crew mobilized to start cutting down trees and meet a March 31 deadline for the protection of nesting bats. They are expected to start work in the week beginning March 23. If the deadline is not met, cutting would be deferred until fall causing a serious delay to the progress of construction. Bob added the DNR does not require that felled trees be immediately removed.

## **Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds**

Kathy distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as shown on the next page:



**Treasurer's Report  
March 19, 2025**

**FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)**

**Balance on February 19, 2025 (prior meeting)** **\$112,068.53**

**INCOME**

02/21/25	Larry Wickert (dues for 2024-25)	50.00
02/26/25	Anita and Brian McMillin (donation for 5K/3K)	1,000.00
03/04/25	RunSignup Payout #1	25.00
03/07/25	State of Indiana Reimbursement #4 (ITP 23-06)	1,215.50
03/19/25	A&B McMillin's donation for balance of T-shirts	<u>315.00</u>

**TOTAL INCOME** **\$2,835.50**

**EXPENSES**

02/26/25	Check #1186 to Greentree Plastics (6' Denali, NICF)	519.50
03/10/25	Check #1188 to Garrett Verhagen (transport bench from Evansville)	356.00
03/18/25	Check #1190 to Knots & Spots for T-shirts	<u>1,315.00</u>

(NOTE: Checks #1187 & 1189 voided)

**TOTAL EXPENSES** **\$2,190.50**

**ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 03/19/25** **\$112,713.53**

*(Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer)*

**RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 12/4/24**

**TOTAL AMOUNTS  
PER CATEGORY**

**BENCHES**

Blais-Vlaming	Awaiting placement @ Bass Lake Beach	350.00
McMillin	Awaiting placement	<u>350.00</u>
		700.00

**SIGNAGE/WEB**

Luminous Fund	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	960.64
Hardesty Mem.	Wayfinding or historic signs	2,423.32

Lucas lakehouse	Future Vision/Website	<u>662.50</u>
		4,046.46

**NW EXTENSION**

PTC Local Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	25,600.00
Rails to Trails	Trail Extension	<u>4,470.40</u>
		40,070.40

**DNR REIMBURSEMENT for ITP 23-06 Northwest Extension**

05/15/24	Reimbursement #1	17,589.06
07/19/24	Reimbursement #2	6,077.48.
11/04/24	Reimbursement #3	4,813.85
03/07/25	Reimbursement #4	<u>1,215.50</u> (DNR reimbursement #4 rec'd)
		29,695.89

**MAINTENANCE**

Mower fund	Verhagen mowing donation (NICF)	200.00
Hardesty Mem.	Trail Maintenance	594.00
HVRM (Buckeye)	Trail Maintenance	1,788.61
Rich Stalbrink Mem.	Maintenance or most needed	2,699.11
Doral Solar	Bridge/clearing	<u>7,269.48</u>
		12,551.20

**K/3K 2025 (CVC Grant)**

Grant from CVC	5K/3K & Panhandle connectivity	2,000.00
	T-shirts for 5K/3K (McMillins' donations)	0 (\$1,315 received & spent)
RunSignup	1st registrant payout	25.00

**TOTAL RESTRICTED 89,088.95**

**FFBT Balance 112,713.53**

**Restricted Funds 89,088.95**

**Unrestricted Funds 23,624.58**

Kathy began by expressing great appreciation to Brian and Anita McMillin for their very generous donations of T-shirts in support of the 5K Run/3K Walk. She also pointed out the continuing financial support by Ace Hardware in North Judson and said she and Steve have made a point of patronizing their business. Kathy thanked Larry Wickert for membership dues and his consistent support of our organization. She said that she was pleased to have obtained reimbursement from the State of Indiana for the 4th payment to Bob Aloï on the ITP 23-06 Grant, reflecting notably the State's 80% financial contribution to the project.

Diane Blais moved for approval of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Joan seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

## **Bass Lake Beach and Campground Revitalization Update and Kayak Launch Site Acquisition**

At the invitation of Starke County Park Director, Amie Flora, Steve attended the Bass Lake Beach Renovation Committee site viewing held on February 26. Although it's not obvious from SR 10, great progress has been made with the current renovation project—particularly to the interior of the Pavilion and buildings in the campground. Aimee was unable to attend the March meeting, but she shared that the Troyer Group is overseeing the project with Brown and Brown of Wakarusa the construction company. The belief is that the project is still on track for completion by Memorial Day.

Also from the Starke County Park Department, it was announced earlier this week that Dr. and Mrs. Walter Fritz have donated land along SR 23 for development of a public kayak launch on the Yellow River. Amie reflected the project aligns with the Park Department's mission to expand recreational opportunities and preserve the area's natural beauty. It's also noteworthy this key land acquisition supports the "mission of the Prairie Trails Club Inc....to advance, promote, and maintain...blueways" locally.

## **Review of Hoosier Valley Museum Activities**

Bob Albert, Liaison from the HVRM, joked that "Everyone is getting in the panic mode because we're close to starting." He said that with illness and the HVRM's dependence upon a small group of qualified volunteers, steam engines were going to be operated only sparingly this season. HVRM will schedule mostly diesel trains. The popular Easter Trains are scheduled for excursions on April 5, 12 and 19.

## **April 26 Celebrate Trails Day in Starke County Update**

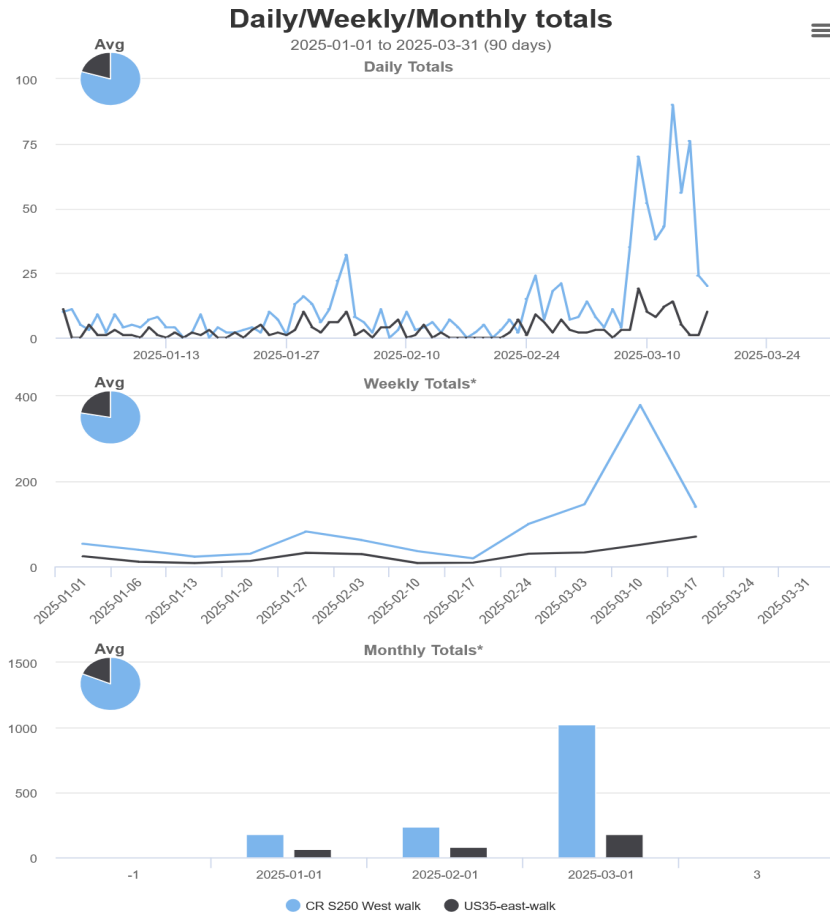
In February Kathy posted on Facebook that the PTC's Celebrate Trails Day plan is to have a walk and bike ride, wildlife and nature enjoyment, trail maintenance activities, and hopefully, dedication of the Saris bike repair station, a gift received through the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. The occasion might also serve as a date to place the NICF bench that was discussed later in the meeting. Steve requested support materials from the RTC to memorialize the day—including signage and four six packs of nonalcoholic beer and day-pack sparkling water from Athletic Brewing Company. Activities will be held between US 35 and Starke County Road 700 East. Final touches will be decided during the April 23 meeting.

## **North Judson Mint Festival Update**

With the absence of key participants, action pertaining to the Mint Festival was deferred until the April 23 meeting.

## **Trail Counters Update**

Joan provided an update on the status of the trail counters. She said two are operating and a third is being considered for placement. The most recent results are set forth on the next page.



### Master Summary

Download as [Excel](#) [CSV](#)

Year	Site	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	ADT†	ADT†x365	Days with data
2025	CR S250 West walk	179	235	1,021*										12.816	4,678	76
	US35-east-walk	69	83	181*										3.303	1,205	76

ADT† = Average Daily Traffic

\* = based upon that month's ADT [Learn more](#) Indicates months with less than 6 days of data.

Joan said recent upturns in usage were a predictable result of warmer and pleasant days in the early spring. Members thanked Joan for managing the counters and said they looked forward to placement of a third counter in the near future.

## May 24 5K Run/3K Walk and Bike on the Great American Rail-Trail (Erie Trail) Update

Kathy referenced during her Treasurer's Report the very generous donations by Brian and Anita of T-shirts for the event. New medals are being purchased for participants who have the fastest times in age and gender groups.

The 5K Run/3K Walk held last year brought tourists to Starke County. The grant received from the Starke County Convention & Visitors Commission was the foundation for last year's event. A second grant received from the CVC this year again made staging the event possible.

The 5K Run/3K Walk was the core element of last year's event. It was facilitated by a new parking lot placed with HVRM permission on the east side of Starke County Road 700 East. The 5K Run/3K Walk will be the core element of this year's event. A secondary element, one also intended to support tourism, is an identifiable backroad connection between the trailhead at Starke County Road 700 East and the Panhandle Pathway.

A foundation for the secondary element was to secure support from the Starke County Commissioners for share-the-road status on SCR 700 E. That occurred during a meeting held on December 2, 2024 for the portion of SCR 700 E from the Starke-Pulaski County line north to Indiana Highway 10 near Bass Lake.

On March 4, 2025 Steve met with the Starke County Highway Department's sign person, Nathan Harrington, to go onsite and identify appropriate locations for share-the-road signs on SCR 700 E. A result was locations for three signs that were then recommended



for approval by Highway Superintendent, Rachel Oesterreich—two serving northbound traffic and one southbound. Another result was to recommend placement of high profile pedestrian crossing signs and “piano key” markings on SCR 700 E between the trailhead and the new parking lot. As a courtesy the Department placed new pedestrian crossing signs.



High profile pedestrian crossing sign at parking lot facing north (March 2025)

Image by K. Lucas

John Bawcum, President of the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway, collaborated with Steve on a cue sheet for the backroad connector between the SCR 700 E trailhead and the Panhandle Pathway. A draft for comment was shared with PTC members during the February 19 meeting. Steve and Kathy later ground-truthed the backroad connector from SCR 700 E trailhead to the Panhandle Pathway. Following technical refinements, John agreed on wording for the cue sheet. Steve will meet with Heather Norris of OTES on March 24 to begin design work for a sign on the new trailhead identifying the connector and providing additional information to bicyclists and other trail users.

## **Report of Jasper County Trails Club Meeting**

On March 18, Kathy and Steve attended the monthly meeting of the Jasper County Trails Club in DeMotte. Organizing its Jasper Jaunt Bike Ride set for June 14 was the primary topic of discussion. When more details become available, they will be provided to PTC membership.

Kathy and Steve agreed the JCTC has been a great partner would hope our members will be supportive. Kathy said they intend to sign up for the event.

JCTC members discussed challenges to obtaining land dedicated to trail development. They also reflected upon the need to enhance public awareness of the health, recreation, and economic benefits supported by trails.

Indiana Greenways Foundation Executive Director Khepri Hazel was a guest speaker. She referenced an unsuccessful effort to secure any funding for trails in the Indiana House appropriations bill and said the focus had turned to seeking relief in the Senate.

Khepri outlined opportunities available to trail groups to seek up to \$10,000 in funding for trail maintenance. An Indiana 501(c)(3) nonprofit is eligible if it:

- Has raised 50% of the funding needed for project completion;
- Is dedicated to the maintenance of one or more trails;
- Will complete the project within 12 months of receiving an award; and
- Will keep the trail open to use and enjoyment of the public.

PTC membership discussed the possibility of seeking a Greenways Foundation grant to help support asphalt maintenance work at trail locations where subsidence has resulted in damage. Members were supportive of pursuing this possibility.

## **Mowing at Rest Park and West to the North Judson Trailhead**

During the February 19 meeting, members voted to accept a proposal by Jim Chessor to mow the entire distance from the North Judson trailhead to and including the rest park. Mowings would cost \$200 each. Approximately ten mowings were anticipated, but the members voted with a stated understanding this number was largely dependent upon the weather.

Kathy reported she met with Jim in late February to inform him his offer was accepted. She said that \$200 remained in the fund Kirt Verhagen established last year so the first mowing is covered. As Treasurer she will seek other sources for subsequent funding.

### **Gate Vandalism or Theft at Starke County Road 600 East**

Members discussed unauthorized removal of a portion of the yellow steel gate on the east side of Starke County Road 600 East. Paul reported the matter to the Starke County Sheriff's Office which responded an investigation report would be provided to the PTC at its North Judson Post Office Box before the end of February. Steve has not received a report.

Members agreed further action should be taken. The possibility of offering a reward in connection with the occurrence was discussed. The decision at the meeting was to seek relief through contacts with a Deputy or Deputies before pursuing more formal actions.

### **Wayfinding Sign on SCR 600 E across from Scoops & Smiles**

Russ Blais provided an update on his efforts to place a wayfinding sign across Starke County Road 600 East from Scoops & Smiles and a few yards southeast of the Bass Lake Beach and Campground. During the February 19 meeting, the membership authorized him to spend up to \$500 for manufacture and erection of the sign.

Russ reported he has since met with the landowner, Kurt Basler, to confirm permission to place the sign. Permission was confirmed enthusiastically. He has also updated Kathy Carrier regarding the initiative.

### **NICF Bench**

There was a brief report on acquisition and planning for placement of an ADA-compliant bench as requested by the Northern Indiana Community Foundation.

### **Next Membership Meeting**

The next membership meeting was set for April 23, 2025 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) at the Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room, 300 Keller Avenue, North Judson, Indiana. The SCCF offices are located in the First Farmers Bank & Trust Building with access to the meeting room at doors on the northeast side of the building (not the southeast side which is the regular entry to the bank).