

**MEETING MINUTES OF
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.
Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room
300 Keller Avenue, North Judson**

June 11, 2025

MEMBERS

Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathleen Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Peggy Stalbrink
Kirt Verhagen

GUEST

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum
Carl Banas
Heather Banas
Walter Block
Frank Stalbaum, Veterans Memorial Trail in Hebron

Call to Order by Vice President

On June 11, 2025, Russ Blais, Vice President, called to order a Membership Meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") in the Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room, 300 Keller Avenue, North Judson at 5:36 pm, CT (6:36 pm, ET).

Review and Approval of Minutes of May 14, 2025

Steve Lucas thanked Russ and Joan Hardesty for identifying errors in the draft minutes that have now been corrected. He said the most notable of those errors was a reference to the village of Ober which should have been to the village of Ora. Peg Stalbrink moved for approval of the May 14, 2025 minutes as corrected. Paul Byer seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP-23-06 Including Bike Racks

Kathy Lucas said major billings were paid since the May meeting to Hill Excavating and to Territorial Engineering. Consistent with the PTC's grant agreement with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, she will seek 80% reimbursement for these billings at conclusion of the second quarter, June 30.

Kathy reflected on the wonderful bike racks made by welding students at Knox High School. She thanked them and instructor, Mrs. Rachel Moore, for designing racks that are both functional and artistic. One set of racks applies a railroad theme and the other a nature theme, both appropriate to our community. She said the bike racks will later be powder coated and placed on the one-mile extension of the trail through North Judson.



Millings for Trail Repairs and Easement Proposal at English Lake Updates

Walter Block provided an update on discussions with Larry Wickert and potential sources of millings to repair trail segments. He identified costs for equipment rentals and offered his own time and expertise for material placement and manipulation. Steve thanked Walter for his efforts and urged him to continue working with Larry.

Steve said he recently communicated with Bob Aloï about identifying, in a manner that could be recorded, real estate at English Lake offered by Walter and his wife in support of extending the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail. Bob said agreed with the PTC’s concern that a formal land survey would be cost-prohibitive. But if he had a copy of the railroad drawings at his office, which he may have, with a few GPS points of Pinsky Railroad’s land and Walter’s deed, he likely could put together “a sketch and a legal” description. Walter shared a copy of his deed at the April 23 PTC meeting, and that has been passed along. Bob guessed \$750 to \$1,000 would cover the needed survey work. Steve said if those figures prove to be accurate, the total project cost should be well within the \$5,000 amount already authorized by the Board of Directors.

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:



**Treasurer’s Report
June 11, 2025**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance from April 23, 2025 (prior meeting) \$114,790.17

INCOME

05/13/25	RunSignup #5	50.00
05/20/25	RunSignup #6	200.00
05/27/25	Cash box dollars returned to bank account	300.00
05/27/25	5K/3K "day of" money collected	393.70
05/27/25	RunSignup #7	320.00
06/04/25	RunSignup #8	25.00
06/09/25	NJ Ace Hardware "Round Up" program	<u>310.00</u>

TOTAL INCOME **\$1,598.70**

EXPENSES

05/14/25	Check #1199 to Hill Excavating (invoice #1 for clearing, etc.)	\$15,793.75
05/16/25	Check #1202 to OTEs for Panhandle-Erie Connection signs	270.00
05/21/25	Check #1206 for cash box change for 5K/3K	300.00
05/23/25	Check #1200 to Rick Vlaming for sign placement materials	179.69
05/23/25	Check #1203 to Linda Byer for glyphosate	450.00
05/28/25	Check #1205 to T&H Timing	850.00
05/29/25	Check #1201 to Territorial Engineering	1,157.18
06/05/25	Check #1207 to Knox School Welding program.	210.00
06/05/25	Check #1208 to Jim Chessor (Mowing 5/12 & 5/24)	400.00
06/09/25	Check #1204 to Paul Byer for Quickrete	95.11

TOTAL EXPENSES **(19,705.73)**

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 06/11/25 **\$96,683.14**

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 04/23/24

**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)	685.64
Hardesty Mem.	Wayfinding or historic signs	1,973.63 (less 449.69 for signs & frames)
Lucas lakehouse	Future Vision/Website	<u>662.50</u>
		3,321.77

NW EXTENSION

PTC Local Match	Trail Extension	9,700.00 (less 210.00 to Knox Welding)
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	9,806.25 (less 15,793.75 to Hill Excavating)
Rails to Trails	Trail Extension	<u>823.87</u> (less 1,157.17 to Territorial Eng.)
		20,420.12

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>
		29,695.89

MAINTENANCE

Hardesty Mem.	Trail Maintenance	394.00
HVRM (Buckeye)	Trail Maintenance	938.61 (less 850 mowing/glyphosate)
Rich Stalbrink Mem.	Maintenance or most needed	2,699.11
Doral Solar	Bridge/clearing	<u>7,269.48</u>
		11,301.20

K/3K 2025 (CVC Grant)

Grant from CVC	5K/3K & Panhandle connectivity	1,064.45 (less 850 T&H; 85.55 medals)
RunSignup	Registrant payouts	<u>1,128.15</u> (+595 /RSU/393.70 "day of race")
		2,139.45

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$67,631.58

FFBT Balance \$96,683.14

Restricted Funds \$67,631.58

Unrestricted Funds \$29,051.56

Kathy said most of the income this month came from staging of the 5K Run/3K Walk. She again thanked the Starke County CVC for its financial grant and Brian and Anita McMillin for their generous support buying T-shirts, advertising, and contacting EMS and law enforcement.

Kathy also expressed appreciation to the North Judson Ace Hardware and its "Round Up" program. She reflected the \$310 contribution from this local hardware store was the largest amount to date and urged that PTC members thank employees for the continuing support.

Anita McMillin moved for approval of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Linda Byer seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Approval of Design and Manufacture of Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail Signs

Four possible designs for the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail signs were shared with the BIC Committee, and each committee member who voted expressed preference for the beige 18-inch by 12-inch option. The four options were previously circulated online to PTC members and friends. Heather Norris at OTESS assisted in developing the options from a design originated by Bob Alois. Heather stated the cost of five of the signs with rounded corners would be \$117.50 with the design, file setup and layout fee being \$25 for a total cost of \$142.50.

Kirt Verhagen moved to give final approval to the design as recommended by the BIC Committee and to authorize purchase of five signs at a cost of \$142.50. Paul seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Final Report of May 24 5K Run/3K Walk on the Great American Rail-Trail

Brian thanked the volunteers who supported the 5K Run/3K Walk. He said it was "truly a team effort." He expressed appreciation to Nathan Harrington and the Starke County

Highway Department as well as the Starke County EMS for their presences. Fortunately, no emergency presented itself that needed attention.

Membership expressed thanks to Brian and Anita for spearheading the event and for their financial contribution. Appreciation was once again extended to the Starke County Convention & Visitors Commission for the grant that provided the initial impetus for the event.



Brian provided a listing by self-identified residence of the 43 people who entered the event. Among them there were 37 runners and six walkers. Ages ranged from 11 to 86 years with 25 females and 18 males. Except for one Frenchwoman, they identified themselves as Hoosiers.

Knox	8	Flora	1
Plymouth	7	France	1
North Judson	6	Hebron	1
Bourbon	3	LaCrosse	1
Rochester	3	Lafayette	1
Burr Oak	2	Monticello	1
Culver	2	Rensselaer	1
Argos	1	Schererville	1
Chesterton	1	Elkhart	1



Upper left: Marshall County Running Club. Left to right: four successful runners; automobile of volunteer flagger Kevin Kennedy at County Road 600 East; and bike rack welder, Briar Ballas.

Overall winners of the 5K Run were Steve Stavitzke, male, and Jody Brown, female, and of the 3K Walk were Scott Bradley, male, and Edna Riewoldt, female.

Shortly before the race began, Steve counted 74 people that included race participants, volunteers, students who built the bike racks, and observers. There were likely others along the trail that he did not see.

Steve said an element of the grant is placement of two signs to assist with identification of a backroads connection between the Panhandle Pathway and the Great American Rail-Trail (Erie Trail). By agreement with John Bawcum, Friends of the Panhandle President, the sign for travelers toward Winamac or Rochester will be placed along the trail west of Starke County Road 700 East, and for travelers toward North Judson or Bass Lake the sign will be placed on the north side of the parking lot. He asked if anyone wished to participate in determining exact signs locations. Kathy volunteered.

Warrior Expeditions and Great American Rail-Trail Bicycle Trekkers Report

From more than 500 applicants, Warrior Expeditions chose seven veterans for this year's coast to coast bicycle trek on the Great American Rail-Trail. The trek is supported by Warrior Expeditions and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Six of seven veterans came through Starke County between May 24 and May 26. Kathy and Steve just barely beat Matthew Hofmeister to their cabin following the 5K Run/3K Walk.

Matt was joined a few hours later by fellow Army veterans Bradley Hagstrom, Lloyd Stephenson, and Michael Owens. Timing made a planned outing with PTC Membership unfeasible, but Kathy reserved a double table at the Woodshed Tap to include Brian and Anita. Matt, Brad, Lloyd, and Michael stayed overnight at Steve and Kathy's Bass Lake place and had breakfast before going northwest to stay with Char and Corey Liss in Crown Point.



Air Force veterans John Morash and Frank Nicholson arrived mid-day on May 25. They also elected to stay at Bass Lake, where John paddle boarded and took a very chilly swim.

On consecutive mornings the two groups of trekkers stopped at a row of welcoming signs, made by students of Annette Skibbe at St. Peter Lutheran School, and placed at the Highway 10 rest stop. John and Frank stopped there on Memorial Day, a solemn and emotional day for them. Frank regularly contributes to a blog, and he did so as he left the rest stop going toward North Judson. He concluding by saying, "I'm putting my feet in the pedals, and running away from ghosts, but it feels good." A longer segment of his blog can be heard on the PTC's Facebook page.

Brad, Matt, and Lloyd left Omaha, Nebraska on June 8. John, Frank, and Michael left Omaha on June 10.

The seventh veteran is David Martel. He had a bicycle accident early in the journey and suffered a shoulder separation. David has been recuperating since, but earlier this week had an encouraging medical report and hopes to resume his journey shortly.

Review of Hoosier Valley Museum Activities

Bob Albert reported that “we’re getting ready for the North Judson Mint Fest.” With an economy that is slowed by tariffs ridership is somewhat down from last year.

Bob suggested interpretive signage might be warranted for the former water tower on the trail extension through North Judson. He said the Museum had photos that could be part of the signage. Members welcomed the concept and supported further exploration as the construction phase moves forward.

Saris/Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Work Station Update

Russ reported he has been in contact with Saris concerning replacement of a small but critical element of the Saris Work Station. He showed the element to the members. Saris quoted a price for the piece to which the PTC agreed, but in a recent communication Saris identified it as having been “paid”. Saris stated the item has been shipped, but Russ said it is yet to be received.

Frank Stalbaum said the Veterans Memorial Trail in Hebron obtained the same Saris Work Station. Hebron also is yet to place the it.

Gate Theft at Starke County Road 600 East Update

Kathy reminded members that Jonathon Geels was the PTC’s consultant for the two-mile southeast trail extension completed in 2021. Jonathon is now President and Principal Landscape Architect for the Troyer Group. She telephoned Jonathon and asked him about plans for the yellow gates on the southeast extension. Jonathon said he designed the gates using standard piping material and sizes. Thomas Excavating & Welding, Inc. used the plans to construct the gates. Kathy said Jonathon was prompt and cordial. He suggested she contact Thomas Excavating about the possibility of replacing the stolen gate element. Kathy said she will attempt to contact Thomas Excavating in the next few days.

Weed Suppression Along the Trail

Linda said she and Paul have continued to apply glyphosate for weed suppression along the trail, although recent rains have slowed progress. Heather Banas and Kathy pulled garlic mustard and other invasive species. Steve mowed from the crossing of Starke County Road 100 West east to the bench and historic signage for Lena Park. As noted previously, Jim Chessor has twice mowed the rest park and west to Main Street in North Judson.

Bass Lake Beach & Campground Renovation Update

Starke County Parks Superintendent, Amie Flora, emailed that the construction crew to renovate the Bass Lake Beach & Campground is running behind her desired schedule. The crew believes the project will be finished between June 29 and July 6. Amie added “The tentative deadline for a ribbon cutting ceremony is July 19. The beach itself is open to the public, and the kids have been enjoying the new play set. New sand will be brought in when the parking lots are completely finished.”

Next Membership Meeting

No meeting was set for July. The next membership meeting was set for August 13, 2025 at 5:30 p.m., CT (6:30 p.m., ET) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Road 10, Knox (Bass Lake).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m., CT (7:40 p.m., ET).