

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

December 1, 2022

MEMBERS

**Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Joan Hardesty
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Sharon Smead
Peg Stalbrink
Rich Vallicelli
Larry Wickert**

GUESTS

**Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison
Charlotte Liss
Corey Liss
Frank Staulbaum**

Call to Order by Vice President

On December 1, 2022, Rhonda Milner, Vice President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) at the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox at 5:38 pm, CDT (6:38 pm, EDT).

Steve Lucas introduced guests Charlotte Liss, Corey Liss, and Frank Staulbaum. He said all three had experience with northwest Indiana trails and were particularly interested in PTC efforts to control vegetation along the trail. Rhonda welcomed the guests on behalf of the PTC and thanked them for coming.

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of November 3, 2022

Without amendment, Larry Wickert moved to approve the membership meeting minutes of November 3, 2022. Brian McMillin seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul Byer opened discussion for the maintenance workgroup. Paul said he and Richard Matzat viewed onsite the six-miles of the Erie Trail between Starke County Road 100 West

and US Highway 35. They agreed that the five miles between Range Road and US 35 needed vegetation removal. There is need for both clearing by a side-mount mower for smaller woody vegetation and the removal or trimming of higher branches that interfere with equestrian use. Paul said he had one estimate for side-mount work at \$250 but had no sense of how much distance would be covered within an hour. He said the density of vegetation varied significantly along the trail.

Linda Byer emphasized that higher branches should be cut at or near the main stem of a tree to discourage regrowth. The work could be performed this winter and the trail should be closed during the removal of woody vegetation.

Paul asked whether work should be performed on both sides of the trail and whether it should be extended to the edges of the former Erie Railroad right-of-way. Linda said she believed work should be limited to the equestrian trail and perhaps what was necessary on the opposite (north) side of the trail to maintain viability of the asphalt trail. Sharon Smead said she believed the first priority should be for the equestrian trail. Charlotte Liss urged an approach consistent with Sharon's view.

After further discussion, Sharon moved that the maintenance workgroup be authorized to spend up to \$2,000 on vegetation control with a side-mount mower or some other mechanical means along a section or sections of the equestrian trail between Range Road and US 35. This authorization was in addition to the roughly \$1,500 for chemical applications to the trail length approved during the September meeting. Larry seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Paul then discussed the need to perform major work on Fell Ditch Bridge. He distributed a preliminary report he developed from materials at a Menards store. Included were joists on 16" centers; 28 2x8 20 footers and 28 2x8 10 footers. The estimate for decking was 100 2x8 16 footers for \$2,028. He wrote the estimate did not include fasteners or screws. "The wood should be treated for fungus also.... The wood would need to be treated and sealed or painted before being installed. He added that "borax can be used for fungal treatment. Square footage 722. Would take two gallons of paint at 400 square foot per gallon. About \$100 for best paint for coating one side." He said work would be performed in March or April and would require trail closure. A full cost estimate using volunteer labor was \$4,000.

Members agreed that the approval of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum was needed before undertaking the Fell Ditch Bridge project. Our liaison to the HVRM, Linda Byer, agreed to provide a project description to Bob Albert for HVRM consideration. The HVRM is owner of the bridge and the project would not change this ownership. The PTC would be acting as a volunteer. Larry urged the maintenance workgroup seek to advance this project as soon as is practical and that it be authorized to expend \$4,000 toward completion. Kathy seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Larry said that he would also explore the possibility of obtaining support for vegetation control along the trail from Doral LLC. Charlotte Lisa said she intended to make a similar effort including possible participation by the Bope family.

There was a general discussion about vegetation control along the trail. Typically, there has been an annual membership weed wrangle. But individual members have also made significant contributions to invasive plant suppression. Also, members may be called upon to remove trees from the equestrian or asphalt trail, particularly following storms.



Above left on November 10, Steve cuts and removes the top branches on a fallen aspen which crossed both the equestrian trail and the asphalt trail east of US Highway 35. Above right later on the same day, Paul and Linda use their personal chain saws to cut and remove in segments the main stem of the aspen. Images by Kathy Lucas who also assisted with the aspen's removal.

Review and Approval of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds

Kathy Lucas distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report as follows:



**Treasurer's Report
December 1, 2022**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 11/03/22 \$68,316.34

INCOME

11/08/22	Membership dues <i>Sharon Smead</i>	\$25.00
11/14/22	Lifetime membership dues <i>Kevin Kennedy</i>	250.00
11/21/22	Proceeds from Chesapeake Run Holiday Bazaar <i>Peggy Stalbrink Coordinator</i>	306.00

11/21/22	Amazon Smile donation <i>Free by choosing Amazon Smile: PTC</i>	<u>7.95</u>
----------	--	-------------

Total Income	\$598.95
---------------------	-----------------

\$68,905.29

EXPENSES

11/04/22	Check #1125 to Bowen Printing <i>New brochures including SE extension</i>	\$1,300.00
----------	--	------------

11/08/22	Check #1126 to Joan Hardesty <i>Batteries, etc. for trail counters</i>	<u>37.78</u>
----------	---	--------------

Total Expenses	\$1,337.78
-----------------------	-------------------

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 12/04/22 \$67,567.51

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

Benches

Blais-Vlaming Bench	For 210/450 site or other	\$350.00
McMillin Bench	For Bass Lake area	350.00

Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl UR Here)	1,418.54
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	4,205.10
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50

Northwest or Other Extension

Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020)	NW Extension or operations	5,000.00
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021)	NW Extension or operations	5,000.00
Luminous Fund Grant #6 (2022)	NW Extension or operations	10,000.00
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	NW Extension or operations	6,000.00
VFW Grant	For "trail improvements"	5,000.00

Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	3,368.42
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	2,518.42
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,368.42

Miscellaneous

Stalbrink donation	Scholarship or "most needed"	100.00
Brochure Fund	2022 Erie Trail Brochure	<u>000.00</u> (Removed \$700 for brochures)

TOTAL RESTRICTED 46,341.40

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST

TOTAL IN BANK	\$67,567.51
— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$46,341.40</u>
= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$21,226.11

Kathy expressed appreciation to Sharon for renewing her membership and to Kevin Kennedy for joining the PTC with a lifetime membership. She added that Kevin is active with the HVRM and joined us for our October 1 weed wrangle. Kathy offered a special thanks for Peg's hard work in preparing dish cloths and desserts as well as coordinating an attractive presentation on behalf of the PTC at the Chesapeake Run Holiday Bazaar. Anita and Diane Blais also donated baked goods for the sale.

Rhonda asked if there were questions or comments. Hearing none she asked if there was a motion for approval. Brian moved to approve the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as submitted. Anita McMillin seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Election of Board Members

The Board of Director positions held by Peg Stalbrink, Larry Wickert, and Diane were scheduled for election. Each of the incumbents expressed a willingness to serve another two-year term. No other person was nominated, and no one said they wanted to run for a position. Peg, Larry, and Di were reelected unanimously.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report

Kirt Verhagen and Larry for the PTC; Bob Albert for HVRM; and Town Council Member, Jane Ellen Felchuk met onsite on November 11 with Robert Byrd, Northern Indiana RR Train Master. Together they walked the proposed trail extension route through North Judson. The triangle depicted roughly midway through the extension could serve as a small park and include trail and town information. Bob Albert said HVRM plans to put wiring at that location in conduit for safety and to facilitate any needed repairs. Pending written entry of notices of intent, and ultimately a memorandum of understanding, there appears to be consensus that the route would approximate the yellow line depicted on the aerial image shown below:

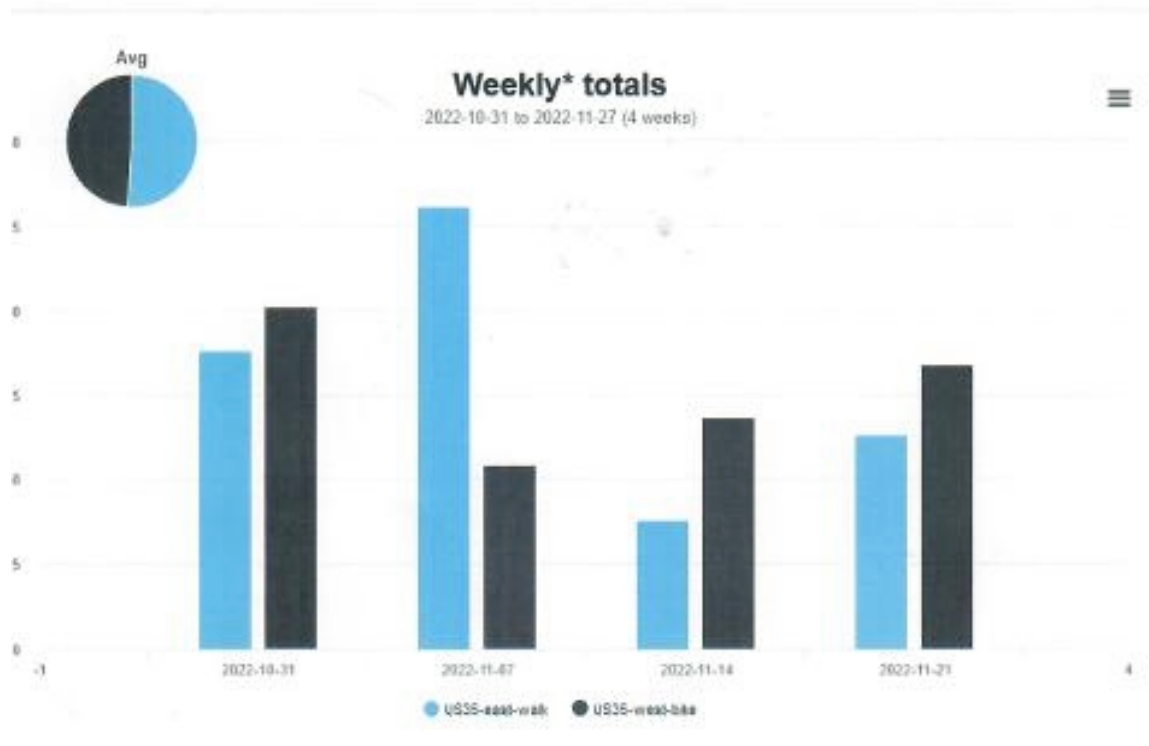


A draft cuesheet of the 2/3 mile-long route was prepared by Kirt and would be refined as we move forward. An email was sent to the DNR contact for Indiana Trails Program (ITP) grants to schedule a conference to discuss the route proposal. An auto-response stated the DNR contact person was out of the office and would respond later. The Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup will be conferring with our own Board before the end of 2022 if it seems we may be able to complete a grant application by the end of February. Larry and Steve intend to review the route proposal with the North Judson Town Council on December 5.

Trail Counter Discussion

Joan provided an update on data collection from our two trail counters. She distributed four separate graphs of trail activities. As we approach winter, the amount of usage seems to generally decrease but fluctuates markedly—possibly as a result of daily weather conditions. To be kept in mind is that the two graphs represent two distinct data sets: (1) bicycle traffic west of US Highway 35; and, (2) pedestrian traffic east of US 35.

Four weekly totals for October 31 through November 27, 2022 are identified in the bar graph below. The cumulative usage in the first two weeks is similar (about 180 users per week), but the proportions between the type/location of usages differ markedly. Among the four illustrated below, the week during which the number of walkers east of US 35 is highest is the week in which the number of bicyclists west of US 35 is lowest.



Joan reported the batteries have held up well. Members thanked her for managing the trail counters and helping us obtain an improved understanding of trail usage. For both reasons of equipment security and winter’s challenging temperatures, the membership

agreed with Joan's suggest that she remove the trail counters, at her convenience, for spring re-installation.

Update on PTC Laptop Purchase

Kathy provided a brief update on purchase of the laptop through Best Buy in Valparaiso. Consistent with membership preferences expressed during our November meeting, she purchased a Dell Inspiron 16 2-in-1 and included Microsoft 365 with Excel and twice the storage than previously proposed. She said Best Buy requires pre-approval for non-profits which would have required her to make an additional trip to Valparaiso. A store manager ultimately approved a cost discount that was comparable to the value of the tax exemption. Kathy paid for the laptop through her personal credit card and will later seek reimbursement from the PTC in the same amount. She successfully obtained Geek Squad service for the PTC laptop under the umbrella of her existing plan. The total cost for the laptop and supporting software and hardware was \$949.82. Kathy said she scheduled an appointment with the Geek Squad for December 5 to cause software, hardware, financial records, and some images to be transferred from her laptop to the new PTC laptop.

Hitching Post Placement

Paul and Sharon reported on their early November placement of a hitching post east of County Road 700 East. Although just beyond the "End of Trail" as provided in the NLT 01-07 grant, the HVRM gave the PTC an okay for the hitching post to serve equestrian usage, particularly east of US Highway 35.



Informal Review of HVRM Activities

Bob Albert said there was a good turnout for the Santa Trains on November 26. He said seats on the Santa Trains in December were already sold out.

Wayfinding Signage

Linda said with distribution of the brochures now underway, the PTC needs to update its wayfinding signage to also incorporate the two-mile extension. She reflected that we have existing funding for this purpose. Kathy noted that we needed the approval of the Starke County Commissioners to place signage along county roads. Linda agreed but suggested we could update the you-are-here signage along the trail. She said OTES could make new signs during the winter to replace existing obsolete signs in the spring. Steve said he would pursue this initiative.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was set for Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., CST (6:30 p.m., EST) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m., CST (8:12 p.m., EST). Members and guests then enjoyed a Holiday celebration.