

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

April 28, 2022

MEMBERS

**Diane Blais
Russell Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Joan Hardesty
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Peg Stalbrink
Larry Wickert**

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison

Call to Order by Vice President

Rhonda Milner, Vice President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) on April 28, 2022 in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Road 10, Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana at 5:36 pm, CDT (6:36 pm, EDT).

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of March 24, 2022

Peg Stalbrink moved to approve the minutes of the March 24, 2022 membership meeting, with the word “could” substituted for the word “would” in the second paragraph of the discussion of the North Judson Trail Extension Proposal from Main to Railroad Street and On. Paul Byer seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Update on Fiscal Reconciliation of NLT-01-07

Kathy Lucas, Treasurer, thanked the members for their extraordinary efforts to perform punch list items the DNR identified following its October 22, 2021 inspection of the 2.1 mile trail extension. She also expressed appreciation for members finalizing documents to memorialize their efforts. As a result, she was able to prepare, scan, and tender by email full reconciliation documentation by the April 8, 2022 deadline stated by our DNR Grants Coordinator, Lisa Herber.

Kathy said the PTC was originally concerned it had insufficient funding to perform fully the trail construction. But even with adding significant new elements to the project at US Highway 35, with the amazing volunteer efforts of the membership, we completed our contractual obligations under budget and on time. Lisa reflected the PTC would need to

refund the DNR for an under-run on the grant. Following extensive discussions with Kathy, Lisa on April 18 reported the PTC had a "\$2,624.76 under-run." But to Kathy's pleasant surprise, Lisa added the DNR's NLT Team is "ok if this work extends past the May 1 deadline for the contract but wants the under-run made up. Please review and contact me to discuss [the] next step."

Subsequently, Paul and Linda Byer drove to and from Woody Warehouse in Hendricks County to obtain *Viburnum lentago* plants as a barrier near Bartee Ditch Bridge—the final outstanding punch list item. Also known as "nannyberry", the species is native to most of northern Indiana, including Starke County.



Plant at the center bottom is one of three nannyberries placed by Paul and Linda at Bartee Ditch Bridge in April.

Image by Kathy Lucas

Kathy said that costs associated with the nannyberry plants would be applied to reduce the under-run. She added their value to claims under the grant. That leaves the PTC with \$2,269.74 to spend on the trail—instead of returning this amount to the State of Indiana.

Steve Lucas had consulted by email with PTC Board Members and Officers seeking their preferences for how to expend the \$2,269.74 remaining from the NLT-01-07 Grant. Two possibilities were viewed most favorably: (1) trail counters; and, (2) upgrading the area on the west side of the US 35 trail crossing used for parking. He believes both purposes are meritorious but was uncertain of the status of access to US 35 from the parking area. He noted an INDOT permit was obtained for the NLT Grant trail crossing, but it required several months and persistence by Jonathon Geels of the Troyer Group. The DNR has expressed interest in trail managers obtaining counters and recording usage.

Rhonda said she was involved with obtaining funding for the six-mile segment between Starke County Road 100 West and US 35. Because of budgetary and time constraints, Starke County then terminated the Erie Trail several feet short of US 35.

After thorough discussion, the membership agreed to pursue acquisition and placement of counters. Kathy said Australian and Canadian companies appeared to be the primary producers of trail counters. She has had discussions with a possible Canadian source, and the cost of two counters and their delivery would approximate the remaining \$2,269.74. The members authorized Kathy to proceed with seeking acquisition.

Review and Approval of Treasurer's Report

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



**Treasurer's Report
April 28, 2022
Bass Lake Property Owners Community Center
Knox, Indiana**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 3/24/22 **\$58,347.46**

INCOME

(None) \$0.00

Total Income 0.00

EXPENSES

03/25/22 Check #1102 to Technicoat \$146.72
(Powder coating bike rack)

03/25/22 Check #1091 to Technicoat 136.00
(Powder coating bike rack)

04/02/22 Check #1108 to Paul Byer 160.00
(Sealant for bridges)

04/02/22 Check #1109 to Russ Blais 26.25
(Nuts and bolts to secure bike rack)

04/05/22 Check #1110 to Rick Vlaming 54.14
(Concrete and wire mesh for bike rack)

04/05/22 Check #1111 to Starke Co. Highway Dept. 1,221.86
(Invoice #2044-04-001)

04/05/22 Check #1112 to Smith Farm Co. 41.79
(Concrete for bike rack)

04/06/22 Check #1113 to SCILL 1,500.00
(Balance of KVREMC Grant)

04/07/22	Check #1114 to Paul Byer (Clamps for bike rack)	19.95
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Total Expenses	\$3,307.01
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ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 4/28/22	\$55,040.45
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Kathy also provided a report of PTC restricted and unrestricted grants and donations. She explained this report is made with reference to the last such report included in the membership's November 16, 2021 Meeting Minutes. A copy of the November report was distributed to the membership for their convenience during the April 28, 2022 meeting but is not reproduced here.

Kathy explained that a report of restricted and unrestricted grants and donations was not made after November 16 because of uncertainties associated with the final reconciliation. We have been uncertain as to what costs would be incurred, how DNR would evaluate some of our soft match initiatives, and how best to allocate expenses to revenue sources. With definitive dollar amounts identified and approved by the agency for the final reconciliation, it is now possible to make allocations. She reminded members that funding sources fully applied ("zeroed out") would not again be reflected in a listing of restricted funds. Kathy said she was pleased that following completion of our match obligations under the NLT-01-07 Grant, the PTC will still have more than \$50,000 in our checking account.

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

RESTRICTED FUNDS

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (UR Here)	1,418.54	-2,706.40 for NLT signage
Luminous Fund Grant #3 (2019)	Matching NLT-01-07 Grant	0	-1,281.25 for NLT
Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020)	Northwest Trail Extension	5,000.00	
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021)	NW Extension or Operations	5,000.00	
Hardesty Memorial Grant (2018)	Wayfinding/historic signage	4,205.10	-2,706.40 for NLT signage
Hardesty Memorial Grant (2019)	Matching NLT-01-07 Grant	0	-1,281.25 for NLT
PTC Account Commitment	Matching NLT-01-07 Grant	0	-1,218.25 for NLT
Marshall County Horse Ass'n	Bench for NLT	0	-350 bench installed 700E
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT-01-07 Grant	0	-1,281.25 for NLT
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donation	Future Vision/Website	700.00	
DNR NLT-01-07 Grant	NLT-01-07	2,269.74	-355.02 for nannyberries
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	Northwest Trail Extension	6,000.00	
Stalbrink Donation	Scholarship or most needed	100.00	
Blais/Vlaming Bench	For trailhead at 450/210	350.00	
McMillin Bench	For trailhead at 450/210	350.00	
Maintenance Fund (mower sale)	For general maintenance	4,000.00	
KVREMC Bike Rack Grant	Balance of grant amount	0	-1,500.00 to SCILL
VFW Grant	For "Trail Improvements"	5,000.00	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	For Trail Maintenance	<u>3,500.00</u>	

\$37,893.38

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST

TOTAL IN BANK	\$55,040.45
— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$37,893.38</u>
== UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$17,147.07</u>

Kathy asked if there were questions or comments. There were none.

Diane Blais moved to approve the Treasurer's Report and the Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as presented. Anita McMillin seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Preparations for July 30 Bass Lake 5K Run/3K Walk

Russ Blais said preparations were underway for PTC volunteers to again manage the 5K Run/3K Walk in the Bass Lake Festival. The event will be held this year on the morning of July 30. He said he and Diane will continue to guide those preparations, but they will not be available on July 30. Brian and Anita McMillin have agreed to take the lead, with assistance from Rick Vlaming, on the day of the event.

Diane said most of the purchasing associated with the event will be performed by the Bass Lake Festival organizers. She said their bulk purchases result in lower unit costs and better continuity. She negotiated a better T-shirt share cost between the PTC and the Festival organizers which is more favorable to the PTC. But she said the cost of the timer has increased significantly. The price for services from last year's timer appeared attractive, but there was great frustration with his performance. Russ urged that we this year emphasize the event is supported by more sophisticated technology and a timer with a proven record.

Russ asked if the event should reflect the PTC's management role, tried as an experiment last year and chosen to be continued this year. There was an extended discussion among the membership as to a name change. Anita suggested that we reflect the event was being "hosted by" the PTC. Her suggestion was viewed favorably, and it was agreed the event would be identified as the Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk as hosted by the Prairie Trails Club.

Russ circulated a sheet indicating persons who have volunteered to assist with the event and seeking additional volunteers for particular responsibilities. PTC Members and any others able to assist may contact Diane or him.

Report of Zoom Meeting to Realign USBR 35 in Starke County

On March 29, Kathy and Steve participated in a Zoom meeting with Brandon Burgoa, INDOT's Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, and reached consensus on wording to realign US Bike Route 35 from the North Judson Trailhead to Starke County Road 700 East. Brandon shared the application he will prepare for review within INDOT, and then submission to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials ("AASHTO"), to seek the realignment.

Report of Greenways Foundation 14th Annual Award Luncheon

The Greenways Foundation of Indiana awarded the PTC the prestigious "Outstanding Trails Group" designation for 2021 during its April 28 meeting.



Image by Kathy Lucas

Tabitha Balzer and her Lewis and Kappes Law Firm contributed one-half, each, for the funding to sponsor a table and invited PTC members to attend as their guests. Russ, Diane, Brian, Anita, Paul, Kathy, Steve, Kirt Verhagen, and Deb Mix attended on behalf of the PTC. Our group was accompanied by Superintendent of the Starke County Parks and Recreation Department, Camryn Kopka.



From left to right are Russ Blais, Diane Blais, Brian McMillin, Anita McMillin, Paul Byer, Camryn Kopka, Kathy Lucas, Steve Lucas and Deb Mix

Larry Wickert asked if there would be an effort to obtain publicity locally regarding the award. Steve responded that he anticipated WKVI radio would feature the event in an April 29 report. See <https://wkvi.com/2022/04/prairie-trails-club-receives-award/>

Report of Panhandle Pathway and Nickel Plate NLT Grants

Steve reported that Next Level Trails, Round 3, grants were announced on April 20 for two trails systems of particular local interest:

Panhandle Pathway Grant

This \$2,503,809 NLT grant will extend the asphalt Panhandle Pathway on both ends. The 0.83-mile southern extension will connect the current terminus to France Park in Cass County. The 1.50-mile northern extension in Pulaski County will connect the trail to the north edge of Winamac, helping the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway move closer to their park-to-park goal and bringing the Panhandle Pathway 1.5 miles closer to the Erie Trail. Once completed, the Panhandle Pathway will be 24.3 miles long.

Nickel Plate MAC Trail

This \$3,623,297 NLT grant in Miami County will build 7.1 miles of asphalt trail between Grissom Air Reserve Base and McGrawsville. In Bunker Hill, the new trail intersects with the existing Nickel Plate Trail stretching from Kokomo to Peru. Doing so will help close major gaps in the Great American Rail-Trail and the American Discovery Trail, two transAmerican trails the Erie Trail also hosts.

Report of Bloomer Run

Kathy said she and Steve contributed financially to and manned a table in North Judson, on behalf of the PTC, at the April 23 Bloomer Run. A strong wind was not conducive to a large runner participation, but she prepared a modest display of images highlighting our 2.1 mile trail extension. The event did provide an opportunity to support the Starke County Chamber of Commerce and to share information with several local residents who were not fully familiar with the Erie Trail.

Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC, reflected the event was not well attended. He said only two or three of the race participants elected to ride the train.

Report of Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup

Larry said Kirt, Steve and he were invited to attend the April 9 meeting of the HVRM Board of Directors to discuss our aspirations for extending the Erie Trail northwest from its current western terminus on Main Street in North Judson. He said he thought it was a productive discussion, but there is still much work to be done before we can identify a particular route. Bob Albert and Linda Byer, our liaisons from the HVRM and the PTC, respectively, were also in attendance. Larry added that he believes Kirt has since had the benefit of a follow-up discussion with an HVRM Officer.

Bob Albert was asked for his perspectives on trail extension discussions with the HVRM. He responded that he agreed details need to be worked out, but in his opinion "It's going to happen."

Report on Proposed Parks Department Trailhead Building at Bass Lake

On April 4, Larry Wickert led a group including Russ, Kathy and Steve who spoke to the Starke County Commissioners and asked if they would reconsider contributing to a more

robust trailhead project at County Roads 450 East and 210 South, if additional financial support could be obtained locally. A specific dollar amount was not discussed, but the Commissioners were encouraging. They said the more support secured locally, the more likely they were to endorse a commitment of additional county funding.

At Park Board Member Rik Ritzler's invitation, Larry, Russ, Diane, Brian, Anita, Kathy and Steve attended an informal meeting on April 25. The purpose was to discuss the Starke County Commissioners' decision to cancel a new trailhead building project anticipated as part of a Stellar award. After reviewing bids, the Commissioners did give approval to site reconfiguration and a parking lot but determined funding was insufficient for the building. Ritzler wrote, "Many members of the community have expressed a desire to find a way to fund the construction of the building."

Members of the Bass Lake Conservancy District and other appeared 30 minutes after the April 25 meeting convened. It was suggested a key element of the decision, to remove funding for the trailhead project, was a determination by the BLCD to decline waiver of the sewer hook-up fee. OCRA personnel stated having a wastewater treatment facility decline such a waiver in favor of a governmental entity providing public services was highly unusual. A question was raised on April 25 whether the trailhead project was seeking a waiver of the hook-up fee exclusively or exemption from that and the regular monthly user fee. The response was that the request was for waiver of the hook-up fee.

The core element for which reconsideration of the Commissioners' decision is being sought is for the trailhead building. The hope is that in addition to providing restrooms and potable water, the building can also serve as an office for the park superintendent. The location makes it easily accessible to US 35 and to the county's most prominent property, Bass Lake Beach and Campground, without locating the office on that property and making them synonymous. The park superintendent is now housed at a basement office in Knox. To reinstate the trailhead building, outside funding support would be needed. Two sources were referenced who have expressed a willingness to contribute.

Steve reflected during the April 25 meeting that the PTC has two benches, which would be sponsored by the McMillin and the Blais-Vlaming families, for donation in association with a Trailhead Building. He said he believed that the PTC would, through its donors, be willing to finance connectivity signage between the Erie Trail and the Parks Department Trailhead Building, as well as identify the location of the Bass Lake Beach. He also thought PTC members might be willing to help place these in accordance with directions by the Starke County Parks and Recreation Department and the Starke County Highway Department. Placement of a bike rack was another possibility. These activities would occur with an understanding the Trailhead Building and surrounding grounds would be a Starke County property, and the PTC would serve in a volunteer rather than a proprietary capacity. During the PTC's April 28 meeting, he asked if the members agreed. They gave their concurrence.

During the April 28 meeting, Kathy volunteered to make the first effort on a brief writing to articulate the value of the Trailhead Building to citizens in Starke County and for tourism. Others present at the meeting volunteered to perform various tasks underlining the importance of reinstating funding for the Trailhead Building.

Report of Final Approval of North Judson Parks and Recreation 5-Year Plan

Andrew Rowe, Clerk Treasurer, reported to the North Judson Town Council on April 4 that he received an email from DNR approving the Town's Parks and Recreation 5-Year

Plan. Steve said he very recently requested a copy of the plan from Andrew and hopes to meet with him in the coming weeks to discuss possible opportunities for collaboration.

Report of Maintenance Workgroup

Paul said he intended to begin filling cracks on the asphalt trail or applying sealant to the bridge decks at Bogus Run and Fell Ditch when weather conditions become favorable.

Linda informed members the cost of glyphosate, the herbicide used most frequently on the Erie Trail, has risen dramatically since the PTC's most recent purchase. But with a cautiously measured application last season, and a drought, enough of the chemical was retained that she will be able to make the standard application this spring. Linda said she would defer application as long as practicable, probably to June, in order to cause the greatest impact on weed control.

Kathy said she contacted Town & Country Paving of DeMotte about whether the company might be interested in asphalt surface work west of US Highway 35. Town & Country was the subcontractor that did paving for the two-mile extension east of US 35. Two of the company's representatives came to the Lucas home to tour the trail on April 22. When they arrived she was informed the company recently inspected the trail and provided a quotation in early April that would address rough spaces and also seal the asphalt for the entire trail. It was later determined the quotation was made at the request of a person not associated with the PTC. As of April 24, the person had not followed up with Town & Country Paving.

Kathy said the President of Town & Country Paving, Rodney Urbano, later phoned her to talk about aspirations to develop a trail system near DeMotte. He has since expressed interest in connectivity with trail systems supported by the PTC. She offered to meet with Urbano and a fledgling Jasper County trail organization to discuss PTC experiences and the possibility of collaborations. She would also share information about obtaining not-for-profit status from the State of Indiana and from the Federal government.

Informal Review of HVRM Activities

Bob Albert reported that the Easter Trains were a huge success for the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum. The seating was sold out and the revenue was "the best single day HVRM ever had." He said that training is now underway to qualify HVRM volunteers to service steam locomotives.

National Trails Day on June 4

Rhonda reminded the members that National Trails Day is set for June 4. She suggested previously the PTC might give the date recognition with a work day. But she has since learned her own availability on June 4 will be very limited. Kathy responded that perhaps there would be interest in an informal bike ride. This subject will be revisited during our May meeting.

New E-Bike Laws

During open discussion of items for possible future action, Steve reported there have been recent email exchanges among PTC members concerning the use of E-Bikes on the Erie Trail. New Indiana legislation on this topic was referenced briefly in the *Indiana*

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2021-2025. Kathy suggested the PTC begin discussing E-Bike laws at the next meeting, including the possibility of developing policies and signage consistent with those laws. This discussion should engage the HVRM as well.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was scheduled for Thursday, May 26, 2022 at 5:30 pm, CDT (6:30 pm, EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake (Knox). [Editor's note: the meeting was later relocated to the trailhead at Starke County Road 700 East to accommodate *Outdoor Indiana* magazine.]

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m., CDT (8:24 p.m., EDT).