

# MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

August 24, 2023

## **MEMBERS**

Diane Blais  
Russ Blais  
John Bulger  
Linda Byer  
Paul Byer  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathy Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Anita McMillin  
Brian McMillin  
Rhonda Milner  
Peg Stalbrink  
Larry Wickert

## **GUESTS**

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum  
John Bawcum, Friends of Panhandle Pathway  
Jacque Ryan, Starke County Community Foundation  
Frank Stalbaum, Hebron Veterans Memorial Trail

## **Call to Order by Vice President and Introductions**

On August 24, 2023, Russell Blais, 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 5:35 pm, CDT (6:35 pm, EDT). Introductions were made around the table.

## **Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of July 25, 2023**

Paul Byer moved for approval without modification the membership meeting minutes of July 25, 2023. Peg Stalbrink seconded the motion, and the motion carried.



## **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 follows:

**Treasurer's Report  
August 24, 2023**

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

**Balance forward from May 11, 2023**

**\$77,244.44**

**INCOME**

07/28/23	Dues: S. Smead, P. Stalbrink	\$50.00
08/02/23	Re-Deposit of cash out for 5K cash box	300.00
08/02/23	Proceeds from Bass Lake Craft Fair (P. Stalbrink & Team)	466.00
08/02/23	Merchandise sales at Bass Lake 5K	55.00
08/04/23	Donation from Gene Novello (through R. Blais)	800.00
08/14/23	Donation honoring T. Kaufman from P. Stalbrink (\$100) & Y/N and T/C Lucas dues (\$100)	200.00
08/21/23	Proceeds from 5K Registration	<u>2,213.00</u>
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$5,084.00</b>

**EXPENSES**

07/24/23	Cash out for cash box 5K	300.00
08/01/23	Go Daddy website registry	33.48
08/02/23	Reimbursement to P. Byer for blacktop patch	<u>114.90</u>
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$448.38</b>

**ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 08/24/23**

**\$80,880.06**

**RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS**

**TOTAL AMOUNTS  
PER CATEGORY**

**Benches**

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

**\$700.00**

**Signage/Web**

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl UR Here)	1,130.54
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	3,767.10
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50

**\$5,560.14**

### 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	
PTC Contribution to ITP Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00	
Gene Novello	Trail Extension	1,200.00	
Naylor Pipe	Trail Extension	400.00	
			\$42,600.00

### Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	1,368.42	
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	1,668.52	(\$114.90 paid out for blacktop patch)
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,368.42	
Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations	Maintenance or Most Needed	2,699.11	
Doral Solar Contribution	Bridge/Trailside Clearing	10,000.00	
			\$18,104.47

**TOTAL RESTRICTED 66,964.61**

<b>FIRST FARMERS BANK &amp; TRUST</b>	<b>TOTAL IN BANK</b>	<b>\$80,880.06</b>
	<b>— RESTRICTED FUNDS</b>	<b><u>\$66,964.61</u></b>
	<b>== UNRESTRICTED FUNDS</b>	<b>\$13,915.45</b>

Kathy expressed great appreciation to Gene Novello for his contribution of \$800. She said he has regularly been a quiet but major contributor. She thanked Peggy for again making a major contribution with handmade crafts and food—this time resulting in a \$466 donation. Peggy said Anita McMillin and Diane Blais contributed delicious cookies for sale at her booth. Kathy added that six additional members paid dues to show their continuing support. Our biggest financial success in July was \$2,213 received from the Bass Lake Festival 5K Run.

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

### Report of Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk

Brian McMillin thanked the members and nonmember supporters, who for the third straight year, made this event a great success. He said the Bass Lake Festival officials cut us breaks by covering the cost of a porte-potty and lowering the shirt cost from \$10 to \$8 each. In addition, the Festival contributed one-half of the timekeeper's fee. He said the effort wasn't perfect and could be improved next year. A member needs to oversee the distribution of medals to assure they are correctly distributed to race recipients. The sign designating where walkers are to turn-around was tampered with this year, and it needs to be monitored closely in the future.

Brian said 21 people were needed to manage this year's event. Many of these are not PTC members, and he expressed some concern for whether they will have continuing interest in providing support. Kathy reflected that our history of being able to provide sufficient personnel to conduct event was positive. Festival officials do recognize the difficulty other organizations might have to provide sufficient personnel.

Membership expressed interest in again conducting the event next year if the PTC is able to reach consensus on terms and funding allocations. An organizational meeting of the Bass Lake Festival officials that is anticipated in September, to begin planning for the 2024 event, may provide an opportunity to address outstanding issues.

### **Preparations for September 28 Workday at Fell Ditch Bridge**

Larry reminded the membership that Doral Renewables, LLC has contributed \$5,000 for materials to help reconstruct the Fell Ditch Bridge. In addition, Doral is bussing about 30 of its employees from Chicago to work for two hours on deck reconstruction beginning on the morning of September 28. He has suggested to Doral beginning at 9:30 a.m., CDT. Following that effort, there will be a free luncheon. He is communicating with local land owners, Billy Bope and son Caleb Bope, to address parking and details of the luncheon.

Larry and John Bulger inspected the underside of the bridge on July 18. The structure appeared in better condition than was feared.

One of several images taken during the July inspection by John and Larry



But it was decided that Larry and Paul should remove several of the diagonal surface boards to better understand conditions. They did so in August (and, at the same time, removed a cedar bench affixed to the bridge that was not part of the INDOT design) and discovered additional wood decay.

Two quotes were obtained by retailers for materials needed for redecking and replacing underpinnings. Paul distributed a quote received from Healey's Home Center, Inc. in the amount of \$3,328.36. He said this quote was somewhat more expensive than one that he obtained from another retailer, but he believed the materials from Healey's Home Center were superior and its location more convenient to the project site. Healey's Home Center gave the PTC an additional cost break to what the PTC typically receives as a nonprofit. Paul circulated a copy of Healey's Home Center quote during the meeting.

John Bawcum said he agreed with Paul's assessment that Healey's Home Center had superior materials to those of the other retailer. He said the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway have had good working relations with Healey's.

Paul said that in addition to materials covered by the \$3,328.36 quotation, he wished to obtain sealing tape for the bridge rafters. The tape would help extend the life of the reconstructed bridge by repelling moisture.

Also, with respect to the Bogus Run Bridge, Paul requested authority to purchase treated timber to replace decayed boards.

Steve moved to approve Paul's purchase of materials for reconstruction of the Fell Ditch Bridge as set forth in the \$3,328.36 quotation. He asked approval for Paul to buy sealing tape for the Fell Ditch Bridge rafters. He also requested authority for Paul to purchase treated timber to replace decayed boards at the Bogus Run Bridge. Diane seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Larry said a small workgroup was needed to make advance preparations for the main workday on September 28. He suggested advance preparations take place on September 25 or as soon after that date as weather allowed.

Steve asked Bob Albert, Liaison from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, what the PTC should do to obtain HVRM permission to close the trail and perform the rehabilitation work. Bob responded that the HVRM Board had already discussed this need for the Fell Ditch Bridge repairs and given its go-ahead for the PTC to do the reconstruction and to close the trail between Starke County Road 300 East and Starke County Road 400 East.

Larry said the PTC needed to let the public know the bridge work would be taking place and that trail closure would occur. Steve said he would place this information on the PTC's website and submit a press release to WKVI Radio. Members who manage the PTC's Facebook page will also provide information regarding the reconstruction.

### **Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report**

Steve said that wearing her Biologist hat, Linda Byer on August 4 scheduled an onsite inspection with Scott Namestnik, Botanist for DNR's Natural Heritage Data Center, to seek Leiberg's Witchgrass (scientific name *Dichanthelium leibergii*) near our ITP grant route through North Judson. Kathy and he joined them. Steve then thanked Linda for contacting Scott promptly and thanked Scott for agreeing to meet with us so quickly.

Scott identified 28 clusters of Leiberg's Witchgrass, an Indiana native threatened species, in the area. But as Linda pointed out, these were at least a quarter mile north of the end of the project route. Scott agreed and wrote work the PTC might do under the current grant "would not impact the population. This is all north" of the proposed trail extension.

The information was emailed to DNR Grants Coordinator, Erica Gummere, on August 6. It was acknowledged that the clusters could be relevant to a later grant application. She was informed the PTC was working with Bob Aloï, President of Territorial Engineering, and he indicated his firm would collect the locations Scott identified when it does "the initial Topographic Survey so at least we have them if needed now or in the future."



On the left, Scott Namestnik and Linda Byer seek Leiberg's Witchgrass. On the right, Scott points to a cluster of the plant.

Images courtesy of Kathy Lucas



On August 8, Erica responded: "Thank you for providing such a quick update regarding the vicinity of [Leiberg's Witchgrass] to the ITP project area! I'm glad the area won't be impacted by this project, and it's been identified for future trail expansions. Your email, and a subsequent map showing the marked location of the habitat and trail alignment, will be sufficient documentation for" the ITP grant. She asked that for DNR records the PTC send her a copy of the completed survey.

### **LaCrosse Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail NLT Round 4 Grant Application**

On the PTC's behalf, Steve emailed a July 31 letter in support of the Town of LaCrosse's application for a Next Level Trails Phase 4 grant to extend the Grand Kankakee Marsh (GKM) Trail north of the Kankakee River in LaPorte County. For the trail between the Kankakee River and LaPorte County Road 875 West, the Town of LaCrosse seeks use of the PTC's easement. As such, the PTC is a partner to the grant application.

On August 1, LaCrosse delivered to the DNR a completed NLT-4 permit application. The total project cost would be \$2,691,400 with a local match of \$588,480. The application is for an asphalt trail 3.1 miles long from the LaCrosse Public Library southeast to LaPorte County Road 2200 South near the north end of Bigler Road. The Library would provide restrooms and an outdoor shelter with parking facilities. The application envisions the trail would eventually connect to North Judson and to a network of trails in the Kankakee State Fish and Wildlife Area. LaCrosse is working to extend HVRM's tourist excursion trains so bicyclists could bike one leg of the journey and ride the train for the other.

The Town of LaCrosse hopes to begin the construction phase in the summer of 2024 with completion in December 2024. Once construction is completed, a partnership would be formed for maintenance. LaCrosse would regularly mow the grass at a the northern trailhead near its Library and provide periodic snow removal between there and CR 875 W. The LaPorte County Parks Department would mow the length of the trail several times per season and provide programmatic trail maintenance as it does for other county trails. The grant application anticipates a partnership with the PTC to develop a LaPorte County chapter to assist with trail maintenance. LaCrosse intends to partner with the LaPorte County Parks Foundation to create an endowment to fund trail maintenance. A copy of LaCrosse's slide show in support of the application was circulated during the meeting.

## **Review of HVRM Activities**

Bob Albert said the “Civilians and Soldiers in History Day” celebrated at the Museum on July 22 was a great success. A wide range of displays dated from the Civil War until modern times. Included were Jeeps, cannons, half-tracks, and encampment displays, along with re-enactors in period clothing. He said the celebration may become an annual event.

## **Advancement of Associated Trails**

Frank Stalbaum reported that progress appears likely with respect to advancement of the Veterans Memorial Trail east of Hebron. Only three easements are yet to be obtained, and these appear to be where property owners may be willing to consent. If the pieces come together, the trail would be extended 2.9 miles. This route also hosts the Great American Rail Trail and the American Discovery Trail.

John Bawcum said the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway are working to implement a Next Level Trails, Phase 3, grant to extend the trail south 0.8 miles and north a similar distance to 17th Street in Winamac. The project has faced challenges because a new landowner chose not to follow through on a statement of intention to grant an easement, but significant progress on trail extension is still being made. He said the Friends final goal is to extend the Panhandle Pathway past Tippecanoe River State Park to the Erie Trail at Bass Station.

## **Banner and Signage Design Development**

Brian referenced the opportunity to obtain a banner or banners at a reasonable cost for use at PTC booths and other events. His comments led to a discussion of the new Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail designation and the need for wayfinding signage to identify the “Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail” or perhaps the “GKM Trail”. Peg noted that English Lake has a rich cultural history and made reference to an image of Lew Wallace. She said the trail extension should include interpretive signage to honor this history. Membership agreed that the Town of LaCrosse should be given an opportunity to participate in both wayfinding and interpretive signage going northwest.

Signage is also needed to make trail users aware of closures. Reference was made to a planned joint sign with HVRM at US Highway 35, a plan put on hold pending completion of the now existent two-mile extension east of the Highway. Signage was discussed in this context to recognize early proponents of our trail system.

Following an extended discussion, this item was referred to the Branding, Identity and Continuity Committee (“BIC Committee”) for study and to make recommendations to the membership. Steve agreed to send a note to BIC Committee members to schedule a meeting. PTC members not currently on the BIC Committee would also be invited to join.

## **Next Membership Meeting**

The next Membership Meeting was set for Thursday, September 21, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

## **Doral Renewables/PTC Fell Ditch Bridge Deck Reconstruction**

This workday event was set for September 28, 2023 at 9:30 a.m., CDT (10:30 a.m., EDT) at the Erie Trail crossing of Fell Ditch Bridge midway between Starke County Road 300 East and Starke County Road 400 East in California Township. The event will be followed by a free luncheon onsite for employees of Doral Renewables, LLC, the PTC, and any others lending assistance to the reconstruction project.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:52 p.m., CDT (7:52 p.m., EDT). Following adjournment the membership and guests enjoyed refreshments.