

**MEETING MINUTES OF  
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.  
BLPOA Community Center  
6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake, IN**

**August 13, 2025**

**MEMBERS**

**Russ Blais  
Diane Blais  
Linda Byer  
Paul Byer  
Charlotte Liss  
Steve Lucas  
Brian McMillin  
Rhonda Milner  
Peggy Stalbrink  
Rich Vallicelli  
Larry Wickert**

**GUEST**

**Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum  
Walter J. Block**

**Call to Order by President**

On August 13, 2025, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a Membership Meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) in the BLPOA Community Center, Knox (Bass Lake) Indiana at 5:33 pm, CT (6:33 pm, ET).

**Review and Approval of Minutes of June 11, 2025**

Steve Lucas thanked Russ Blais and Brian McMillin for identifying errors in the draft minutes that have now been corrected. Russ pointed out that the caption for the bike rack image omitted the word “rack”. Brian noted my reference to a “Frenchman” should have been to a “Frenchwoman”. Peg Stalbrink moved for approval of the June 11, 2025 minutes as corrected. Charlotte Liss seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

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

On July 1, Kathy Lucas submitted the requisite Second Quarter 2025 report to Erica Gummere, IDNR Grants Coordinator, for the North Judson one-mile trail extension. She reported to DNR that the PTC obtained signs for the extension, including new Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail signs, Knox High School students constructed artistic bike racks, and Hill Excavating was continuing grubbing along the trail route.

Steve showed one of the new Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail signs during the meeting. He said it was a design originally offered by Bob Aloï and approved conceptually by the BIC Committee and PTC membership. Heather Norris of OTES refined the image to a quality sufficient for manufacture, and with a few adjustments following PTC review.

Kathy included an 80% reimbursement request in the submission for billings from Hill and our Project Engineer, Bob Aloï. Erica approved the report on the following day and forwarded the reimbursement request through the State of Indiana budget review chain.

Bob Aloï reported recently that, following work by Hill Excavating for bat mitigation, on the week of July 27, Bob’s company re-staked the trail’s centerline. He said previously he expected work for bat mitigation would knock out stakes and require re-staking.

Bob added that Hill Excavating “had been in contact with utility companies, specifically coordinating with Buckeye Pipeline which has an adjacent parcel and gas line to the project area.” Hill informed him it is “Currently working to finish a project at John Glenn High School and Intends to “get out to the trail” by the week beginning August 17 with “two crews on” the project by then. Hill Excavating would likely start grading at the northwest end of the trail extension and then advance southeast.

Steve said he informed Andrew Rowe and Joe Leszek at the Town of North Judson of the anticipated scheduling and also wanted Bob Albert, as Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison to the PTC, to be aware. Bob Albert said it was important for HVRM to be advised that Hill Excavating was about to become more active on-site. He added that HVRM would need to undertake steps to stay compliant with Federal regulatory requirements. Steve thanked Bob Albert for his remarks and asked if he should be identified to Bob Aloï as the point of contact. Bob Albert answered that he was an appropriate point of contact. Steve said he would email Bob Aloï within 24 hours to share this information.

**Review and Approval of Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds**

Written copies of Kathy’s Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds were distributed at the meeting:



**Treasurer’s Report  
August 13, 2025**

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

**Balance from June 11, 2025 (prior meeting) \$96,683.14**

**INCOME**

07/11/25 State of Indiana payables (reimbursement ITP-23-06) 13,560.74

**TOTAL INCOME \$110,243.88**

**EXPENSES**

06/11/25	Check #1209 to LRS for portable toilet for 5K/3K	150.00
06/24/25	Check #1210 to OTEs for GKM Trail signs	142.50
06/27/25	Check #1211 to Jim Chessor (Mowing 6/10 & 6/23)	400.00
07/08/25	Check #1212 to Brian McMillin for "Hot Pour"	345.00
07/10/25	Web Order to Go Daddy (Internet platform)	210.90
07/25/25	Check #1213 to Precept Partners	75.00
08/01/25	Web Order to Go Daddy (Internet platform)	38.28

**TOTAL EXPENSES (1,361.68)**

**ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 06/11/25 \$108,882.20**

*Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer 08/13/25*

**RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 04/23/24**

**TOTAL AMOUNTS  
PER CATEGORY**

**BENCHES**

Blais-Vlaming	Awaiting placement @ Bass Lake Beach	0.00 (removed as a PTC item)
McMillin	Awaiting placement @ Bass Lake Beach	0.00 (removed as a PTC item)

**SIGNAGE/WEB**

Luminous Fund	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	685.64
Hardesty Mem.	Wayfinding or historic signs	1,831.13 (less \$142.50 for GKM signs)
Lucas lakehouse	Future Vision/Website	<u>662.50</u>
		3,179.27

**NW EXTENSION**

PTC Local Match	Trail Extension	9,700.00
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	9,806.25
Rails to Trails	Trail Extension	<u>823.87</u>
		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	1,215.50
07/11/25	Reimbursement #5	<u>13,560.74</u> (DNR 80% reimbursement)
		43,256.63

**MAINTENANCE**

Hardesty Mem.	Trail Maintenance	394.00
HVRM (Buckeye)	Trail Maintenance	593.61 (less \$345 for paving "Hot Pour")
Rich Stalbrink Mem.	Maintenance or most needed	2,699.11
Doral Solar	Bridge/clearing	<u>7,269.48</u>
		10,956.20

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

Grant from CVC	5K/3K & Panhandle connectivity	989.45 (less \$75 for QR etc.)
RunSignup	Registrant payouts	<u>1,128.15</u>
		2,267.60

**TOTAL RESTRICTED \$80,079.82**

<b>FFBT Balance</b>	<b>\$108,882.20</b>
<b>Restricted Funds</b>	<b><u>\$80,079.82</u></b>
<b>Unrestricted Funds</b>	<b>\$28,102.38</b>

Steve said he thought the Treasurer’s Report of income and expenses was pretty straight forward. The only new income was the 80% reimbursement for project advancement to date—a substantial sum but one that was anticipated by the contract between the DNR and the PTC. The reimbursement is expected to be expended as the trail project moves forward.

Russ reflected that the Blais/Vlaming bench had been redirected for use at Bass Lake Beach. Steve said that was his understanding, as well, but he thought the McMillin bench was still available for placement on the North Judson trail extension. Brian then stated the McMillin bench would also be placed at the Bass Lake Beach.

Steve said the PTC will have to develop a new strategy for satisfying its ITP #23-06 grant commitment. If we are to place a bench or benches comparable to those on the 2021 southeast trail extension, a concerted effort will be required for collecting, sorting, and exchanging materials with Green Tree Plastics, LLC in Evansville. Green Tree’s ABC Partnership is described at <https://www.facebook.com/p/Green-Tree-Plastics-ABC-Partnership-100064402011251/>. An ad hoc committee might help coordinate the elements of the effort. Rhonda suggested a bench in North Judson could be blue instead of green. The subject will be revisited at the September 18 meeting.

Although she was unable to attend the meeting, Kathy provided a copy of “PTC FFBT Check Register 2019-25” identifying First Farmers Bank and Trust financial transactions during that seven-year period. Members were invited to review the Check Register.

Steve said the report would be amended to reflect that neither of the benches is now available for use in the ITP #23-06 grant.

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

### Millings for Trail Repairs

During the June 11 meeting, Walter Block provided an update on discussions with Larry Wickert and potential sources of millings to repair trail segments. Larry made a request to the Starke County Commissioners for approval to use a portion of the millings being stored by the Starke County Highway Department. Walter and Larry viewed the millings at the Highway Department headquarters but determined they were unsuitable for use on the trail.

Walter said a source for fresh millings is at the former gravel pit near the crossing of SR 39 and US Highway 30 in LaPorte County. Following an extended discussion among the membership, it was determined a pilot project could obtain and place millings at one of the sites on the trail next to a wetland where subsidence has resulted in rough asphalt. A cost estimate for the pilot project to include purchase, transport, and placement of the millings was \$2,000. Larry said the project would require major support in terms of labor and expertise from volunteers in the PTC and among our friends. Rich Vallicelli, Russ and Steve committed \$200 each to purchase the millings. Bob Albert said the millings could be stored within the HVRM easement at a site east of SCR 250 West as chosen by the PTC.

Paul Byer moved to approve that the amount of \$2,000 be authorized to pursue the pilot project as outlined. Steve seconded the motion. On a voice vote the motion carried with no one opposed.

***Editors Update:*** Following the meeting, Larry and Walt obtained three truckloads of millings with two placed at CR 100 West and one at CR 250 West. Depicted below are the two loads placed at CR 100 W. It's hoped there is sufficient material for more than one site to be mitigated.



## **Warrior Expeditions and Great American Rail-Trail Bicycle Final Report**

Consistent with the Warrior Expeditions prior practices, the PTC was asked to provide a fiscal valuation of services. As outlined by the IRS, valuation includes elements for transportation, lodging, and meals. The valuation in Starke County last year totaled \$709. Char and Corey also provided services from their Crown Point home.

Steve provided the requested valuation to the Warrior Expeditions on August 3. This year the amount was \$1,294—an increase caused in part because four veterans arrived within hours of the conclusion of the “May 24 5K Run/3K Walk and Bike on the Great American Rail-Trail”. Two more veterans arrived the following day. The PTC did not have enough time to plan and host an evening dinner—a rewarding get-together that has been often held in past years.

In addition to their major support for the 5K Run/3K Walk, Brian and Anita contributed generously to an evening dinner for four of the veterans at the Woodshed Tap. With the help of its Manager, Stephen Rivero, Kathy was able to reserve a large table on a busy

Saturday evening. Veterans expressed appreciation for the live music. Stephen Rivero had also helped clear the trail in anticipation of the 5K Run/3K Walk. Brian and Anita joined the group for the celebration at the Woodshed Tap.

Sarah Zeller of Warrior Expeditions reported the first Warrior to finish at the Pacific Ocean was Matt Hofmeister on July 25. Since then the other trekkers have completed the journey with John Morash and Frank Nicholson being the final two on August 8. Sarah wrote she would be “in touch again next January when” Warrior Expeditions selects “participants for the 2026 season.”

Char reflected that the distance between Bass Lake and her Crown Point home with Cory Liss is about 50 or 60 miles. Six of the veterans arrived the day following their overnight stays with the Kathy and Steve. Char and Corey hosted four on the first day for lunch and dinner. They dined on filet mignon with all the trimmings. The latter group of two enjoyed the same feast. Both groups were sent on their ways with a hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs, biscuits and gravy. She noted sadly that during the trek Michael Owens would lose his grandfather, and he went to the funeral before returning to finish at La Push in the Pacific Ocean on August 4.



Michael Owens raises his bike at La Push

Char shared that her son served in the military with deployment in Afghanistan and urged that the Warrior Expeditions trek is a worthy project recognizing and supporting our veterans.

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

Bob Albert reported the “Civilians and Soldiers in History” on July 18 and 19 was a huge success. Attendance and participation were unprecedented and that the HVRM will look forward to repeating the event next year.

Bob said that on behalf of the HVRM, Bob Barcus will accept recognition at the Indiana State Fair for the C&O 2789 and Freight Train placement on the National Register. This great honor is rarely accorded to railroad moving stock.



C&O 2789

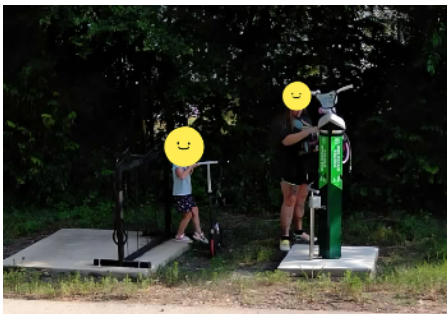
## **New Saris/Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Work Station and Security Camera**

Owing to the dogged determination of Paul, Russ, and others, all the pieces were made to work for the Saris Work Station on the southeast side of the US 35 trail crossing at Bass Station. They placed the structure on a concrete pad near a student designed and constructed bike rack. The Work Station pairs nicely with a similar structures at the State Road 10/35 Rest Park.

Paul Byer makes the final touches for placement of the Saris Work Station



Through the wonderful generosity of Corey and Char, a security camera was purchased and positioned to record activities in and around the work station. The camera has since identified some nefarious activities but has also recorded that the work station is being used for its intended purposes. Rhonda and Linda have volunteered to assist the Lisses with data retrieval. Members discussed but did not make a final decision as to whether a sign should be posted indicating there is security camera present.



Security camera image of bike rack and Work Station in use July 15, 2025

## **“Rules of the Trail” Signs Update**

Paul took the lead on erecting two of the eight new “Rules of the Trail” signs. These are on the west side of US 35 and at CR 100 West. Although the PTC can make adjustments, the other six signs are tentatively slated for Main Street, State Road 10, CR 250 East, CR 300 East, the east side of US 35, and CR 700 East. Signs at CR 300 East, the east side of US 35, and CR 700 East would be new. Others would replace existing signs.

## **BLPOA Bicycle Social Ride Report**

Russ said this year twelve people participated in the event. He added that the green sign across from the former Scoops & Signs restaurant has been well received locally and that the sign formerly on the fence along the corridor for CR 700 East extended to Bass Lake has been relocated to a more visible site at the Bass Lake Beach.

## **Gate Segment Replacement at Starke County Road 600 East Update**

Russ has obtained a tentative bid of \$2,200 for replacing the stolen gate segment at CR 600 East. He said he would follow-up to determine if the source is interested in making a formal bid.

The original gate was placed by Thomas Excavating & Welding, Inc. On June 17, Thomas submitted a Work/Proposal for 1—2’ x 4’ Tubular Steel Gate designed by Troyer Group Powder Coated Safety Yellow with Reflector Tape Installation of Replacement Gate with a Total Cost for replacement and installation of \$3,552. Kathy spoke with Jonathon Geels, who was our consultant for the 2021 two-mile southeast trail extension, and who is now President and Principal Landscape Architect for the Troyer Group. Jonathon told her he thought the June 17 Thomas bid was reasonable considering inflation and that the placement would be an isolated event and not part of a larger project.

Steve said reducing the price for the project from \$3,552 to \$2,200 was a great possibility if the projects are comparable. He expressed the personal opinion that the gate needed to be repaired as nearly as possible to its original condition. He feels vandalism and theft must be addressed to maintain the integrity of the trail. At the same time, he is mindful that there are differing opinions regarding the proper response, and he has only one vote. He concluded by saying Kathy and he agree to contribute at least \$1,000 to the repairs.

Paul suggested that the steel gate should be augmented with wooden fencing to prevent motorized vehicles from simply going around the gate. He believes part of the reason that the thieves were able to lift off what is a very heavy steel structure is that they were able to position a vehicle adjacent to the gate. He said wooden fencing would not be very expensive nor would it be difficult to place.

## **Powder Coating Knox Student Bike Racks**

Linda reported that she and Paul still have not been contacted by Technicoat, LLC in Grovertown to powder coat the two student bike racks prepared for the North Judson trail extension. Paul said he believed a company near Plymouth powder coated the bike racks placed in the 2021 southeast extension. This subject will be revisited during the September 18 meeting.

## **Maintenance Committee Report**

Larry and Walter discussed millings for trail repairs as discussed earlier in the minutes.

Char has undertaken a huge mowing project to augment extensive herbicide spraying previously by Linda and Paul. An inevitable consequence of these efforts is that debris needs to be removed from the asphalt and in many instances the equestrian trail as well. Char said she was frustrated that trimmed vegetation was often left on the equestrian trail. Linda responded that a lot of trail work is performed by persons not associated with the PTC, and these persons may not even be aware that eight miles of the trail were designed to have an equestrian element.

Walter and Char spoke of the need to trim high branches over the trail and that special equipment was required. Steve added that he understood the frustration with branches cut and then left on the equestrian trail, and he wished people trying to help would take the extra step to throw the branches farther from the trail. But cut branches do help with clearance for bicyclists, and cut branches are more easily removed than those uncut so it is progress.

## **Disposition of Cub Cadet Mower**

Char addressed the Cub Cadet Mower with Paul and Linda prior to the meeting. Paul and Linda picked up the mower from the Bass Station home of Corey and Char. They are storing it, on an interim basis at their home, along with other maintenance equipment used by the PTC. Previously members discussed development of a more permanent arrangement for equipment storage, and these discussions need to be revisited.

## **Trail Counters Review**

Linda collected data from the three sites maintained by the PTC. These are located at CR 800 South, CR 250 West, and US 35. A high count at US 35 on the week of August 8 was in part attributed to trail maintenance work by Char and Steve at that location. But the counts overall were notable. The median weekly counts were 306 for CR 250 West, 153 for CR 800 South, and 88 for US 35.

## **Bass Lake Beach & Campground Renovation Update**

Starke County Parks Superintendent, Amie Flora, emailed that the Park and Campground renovation is considered 95% complete. A September punch list is expected “to wrap things up.” On August 9 the first fundraiser, “Luau on the Lake”, raised approximately \$4,200. She sees “many ways we can improve the event for next year.” Amie added that an upcoming program for educators, called “Wonders of the Wetlands”, can be used in support of a teaching license renewal.

## **Next Membership Meeting**

The next membership meeting was set for September 18, 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).

## **Workday**

Membership set a workday for Saturday, October 18, 2025 at 9:00 a.m., CT (10:00 a.m., ET) for the 1 1/2 section of the Erie Trail between CR 100 West and CR 250 West. Parking will be available at 6555 CR 100 West (Steve and Kathy's log house), the CR 100 West crossing of the Erie Trail and the State Road 10/39 Rest Park adjacent to CR 250 West.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m., CT (8:00 p.m., ET).