

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

September 18, 2025

**MEMBERS**

Russ Blais  
Diane Blais  
Linda Byer  
Paul Byer  
J.D. Castleman  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathy Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Rhonda Milner  
Peggy Stalbrink  
Rich Vallicelli  
Larry Wickert

**GUESTS**

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum  
Walter J. Block  
Amie Flora, Starke County Parks Superintendent

**Call to Order by President**

On September 18, 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). Members welcomed new member J.D. Castleman.

**Review and Approval of Minutes of August 18, 2025**

Steve Lucas thanked Charlotte Liss and Russ Blais for identifying errors in the draft minutes that have now been corrected. Charr said Linda Byer was added as a person assisting with managing the new security camera and also identified spelling errors. Russ drew attention to a redundancy with repetition of the words “resolved” and “addressed”. With these items corrected, Diane Blais moved to approve the August 13, 2025 minutes. Peg Stalbrink seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

**Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP #23-06, including Development of Strategies to Obtain a Bench and to Powder Coat Knox Student Bike Racks**

**(A) Trail Construction Progress**

In late summer, our contractor Hill Excavating, LLC started bringing gravel for the trail extension to near the Town of North Judson’s maintenance garage. On September 5, Steve and Kathy were driving southeast on English Lake Road when they happened upon two Hill workers near the garage. Steve introduced himself and asked how the project was progressing. The workers said they met earlier that day with a Buckeye Pipeline representative where pipelines cross under the trail’s 1/3 northwest extension. The Hill Excavating workers said that Buckeye’s representative told them Hill could not

work within Buckeye's easement until it obtained permission. He representative told them Hill should contact John Rangel to confirm what was needed.

Hill Excavating owner, Jeremiah Patrick, wrote that he contacted Rangel, who said he could not find information in his files concerning the trail or that Buckeye had given the needed permission. Hill could return to finish the portion within the Buckeye right of way only after obtaining the permission. Patrick indicated the company would continue working toward town until the problem with Buckeye was resolved, but he added it needed to wait a few days for other 811 tickets to clear. His company wanted "to get that stretch finished up before we moved on. The asphalt plants will begin shutting down for the season within the next 60 days or so. We had planned on getting this project done yet this fall but this would need to be resolved quickly for that to happen."

Our consultant, Bob Aloï, then had communications with Buckeye Pipeline. He shared an email from Michael Lark, in Buckeye's Zionsville Terminal, where Lark wrote:

"I don't see where you have Buckeye's HPPPP High-Pressure Petroleum Product Pipeline shown on any of the plans. All of Buckeye's pipelines would be correctly labeled with company information, such as 'Buckeye Pipe Line Marker' or 'NIPSCO Pipeline Marker.'"

Lark added, "I think that this matter is complex enough that it needs to be submitted to Allentown for corporate Encroachment Review. Please use the application found on document page 15."

As PTC Board Chair, Steve emailed Lark on September 11 expressing understanding of the importance of pipeline safety, referencing good relations we have had with Buckeye, and expressing the hope we could seek accommodation within Indiana. He sent copies of the email to John Rangel and Shawn Vaillancourt of Buckeye, Bob Aloï, and Rhonda, Larry and Kathy within the PTC. Shortly after the email was sent, Kathy was contacted by Vaillancourt, and they had positive discussions. Vaillancourt and Kathy agreed they hoped the matter could be resolved without the expensive and time-consuming process of a corporate Encroachment Review in Pennsylvania.

Lark responded by email that he had "briefly reviewed the plans submitted by Jones Petrie Rafinski" (Bob Aloï's firm). "Buckeye's lines are not correctly identified within the set of plans sent to me. Construction plans must accurately show and identify underground utilities to protect infrastructure, ensure worker safety, and avoid costly delays...." Lark added he attached a copy of Buckeye's right of way use guide, and he would "be happy to re-review the plans once they have been updated as requested."

Steve thanked Lark for his email. At Shawn Vaillancourt's suggestion, Kathy contacted John Rangel, scheduled an onsite meeting for the morning of September 13, and Steve so informed Lark. Rangel later rescheduled the meeting until the afternoon of September 16. Rangel emphasized Buckeye was troubled by the surprise of our trail project and the inadequacy of notice from the consultant, but he expressed optimism that the problems could be resolved.

At the PTC meeting, Steve said he understood Rangel's analysis at the northwest pipeline crossing showed the amount of vertical clearance was adequate for pipeline safety. Rangel suggested a small adjustment to the Main Street crossing of about seven feet would remove the trail from the pipeline corridor and eliminate the need for a depth analysis there. An element of the Main Street adjustment was Town of North Judson concurrence on removal or relocation of an existing sign post. John marked on the grass with fuchsia paint the suggested corridor for the trail.

On the morning of September 17, Steve and Kathy spoke with Andrew Rowe and Joe Leszek, North Judson Clerk-Treasurer and Town Manager, about relocating or removing the post at Main Street. They were updated on the general status of the trail extension. Andrew and Joe said the Town would be happy to relocate or remove the post.

Kathy called Bob Aloï and outlined her understanding of needed corrections to the plans as outlined by John Rangel. She said we could meet Bob onsite to discuss Rangel's recommendations, but Bob believed he understood what was needed and that we would not need to meet.

On the afternoon of September 17, Steve returned to Main Street to remove and then to repurpose an Erie Trail sign on the post. Bob happened to come to Main Street while he was there, and they discussed the possible trail route adjustment. Bob said it was doable. Bob would prepare corrected plans for the pipeline crossings on the northwest part of the trail extension and so that the trail would not cross the pipeline corridor at Main Street.

Members thanked Steve and Kathy for their efforts.

### ***(B) Development of Strategy to Satisfy DNR Grant Commitment for Benches***

During our August 13 meeting, it was determined the PTC needed a new strategy for the benches grant commitment. In our application we promised to "place at least one bench that is a product of the ABC Plastics Partnership"—now referred to as the "ABC Promise Partnership", a community-based recycling program. The grant application specified that "For continuity the bench would be green as are the others along the Erie Trail. A second bench would be placed in association with" a kiosk. To deviate from this grant application commitment would require DNR consultation and probably an application amendment.

Steve said the second bench at the kiosk should not pose a problem. This bench is an element in the Hill Excavating contract. His perception was the kiosk bench is a place visitors would sit while looking at brochures or signs in or near the kiosk.

He said an ad hoc committee (a committee which would dissolve with completion of its purpose) could help satisfy our commitment for a recycled bench. We would collect, sort, and exchange materials consistent with terms of Green Tree Plastics in Evansville. Specifics were set forth in a link to Green Tree Plastics included in last month's minutes. To qualify for a new ABC bench, the PTC would "like" Green Tree's Facebook page, choose a mentor, register intent to obtain a recycled bench through the program, collect a sufficient weight of qualified plastic lids, sort and wash them, deliver the lids at a scheduled appointment time to Evansville and then bring a bench back. Steve said since our August meeting, Char suggested she and Corey might offer a vehicle for delivery of lids and bench pick-up from Green Tree Plastics.

During the meeting, Joan Hardesty volunteered to serve as the requisite mentor and to coordinate the effort to obtain a new ABC Promise bench. Peg said she was willing to serve as co-mentor. Members thanked them for serving. A discussion ensued as to how the PTC had previously collected qualified plastics for the ABC Promise Partnership. Kathy said she would call Green Tree Plastics to help define what lids and caps qualify under the current program and share the information with the members.

### ***(C) Strategy to Powder Coat Knox Student Bike Racks***

On September 15 Steve telephoned Aaron Williams, owner of Technicoat in Grovertown. He asked if Aaron still had interest in powder coating two artistic bike racks designed and built by Knox High School welding students. Steve told Aaron the PTC preferred, if practicable, to have the work done locally. Aaron responded that he did have interest, but his company was busy with large projects, and he would advance the efforts when time permitted during lulls in those projects. Aaron said if the bike racks were delivered to Grovertown next week, he was prepared to receive them and provide an estimate for powder coating. He said the cost would be comparable to what Technicoat had charged previously for SCILL students' bike racks and that he tried to provide a price break for this local endeavor. The expectation is that the bench depicting native animals would be copper-colored and the bench with a railroad theme would be black.

Paul and Linda said they intended to next week deliver the two bike racks to Technicoat. They would call Aaron Williams in advance to arrange a delivery date and time.

### **Report on Millings Placement for Trail Repair**

Larry Wickert and Walter Block led a major effort for a pilot project to make trail repairs between Starke CR 250 West and Starke CR 700 East. Volunteers came out on August 27, August 28, and September 4 to work on this ambitious project.

The turnout was amazing. In addition to Walt, Larry noted several at the meeting who helped with the project—Paul Byer, Rich Vallicelli, J.D. Castleman, Russ, Peg, Kathy and Steve. He noted particularly the expertise and assistance of member Randy Glass. Brian and Anita McMillin assisted. Larry added support from volunteers outside the club was instrumental. He referenced the special efforts of Shane Lindeman. Jesse Johnston of Hope Restored in North Judson came and brought another volunteer.



**As a result of volunteer's hard work, areas damaged by subsidence near the wetlands were made smoother and safer.**

During the meeting, Rich said he had bicycled the trail subsequent to the project. The work is "hanging in there nice." Where the patching "is deep it's good and shallow not as much but still pretty good." The repaired portions of the trail were much improved. Walter said the work sites need "patching up", but he believed the result was "pretty good". Larry said the PTC will see how the effort responds over the winter, but his initial impressions were positive.

## **Report on Other Maintenance Committee Activities**

Paul sealed cracks in the trail east from Main Street to Indiana State Highway 10 (and 39) and from US Highway 35 to Starke County Road 800 South. This ambitious challenging effort used all the “Hot Pour” sealant purchased by the PTC in July.

Walter drove his tractor with a blower from the OSSIS Uranus sign to Starke County Road 250 West and back to push off leaves and accumulated soil from the Erie Trail’s asphalt surface. Yet another worthy and ambitious project that will need follow-up but improves immediately the trail’s surface to the benefit of walkers and bicyclists.

Kathy said she received a note from Arlene Nolan that Arlene’s son, Brad, is working at keeping their bench area SCR 300 East mowed and groomed. She also noted the Aldine crossing has been mowed regularly.

## **Action on Gate Segment Replacement at Starke County 600 East**

Russ said he sought quotes from possible contractors to replace the gate elements stolen from Starke County Road 600 East. He said Thomas Excavating & Welding, Inc. placed the original gate and submitted a Work/Proposal for a 1—2’ by 4’ Tubular Steel Gate as originally designed by the Troyer Group. The quote was for a gate element that would be powder coated safety yellow with reflector an in the amount of \$3,552. A second quote was obtained from Reinhart Welding & Repair in Knox for custom fabrication of the gate, powder coating, and installation in the amount of \$2,200. Russ said he was recommending that the PTC accept the Reinhart Welding & Repair quote.

Kathy said that she and Steve believe it is important to replace the gate both for safety and aesthetic integrity and would contribute \$1,000 toward either bid the membership could support. Members expressed appreciation for the financial commitment.

Paul moved to accept the quote from Reinhart Welding & Repair to custom fabricate the replacement for the gate and to powder coat and install the gate at a cost of \$2,200 with the contribution referenced by Kathy. Larry seconded the motion. The motion carried.

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

Starke County Parks Superintendent Amie Flora provided an update on the Bass Lake Beach & Campgrounds renovation. She said the renovation was nearing conclusion but she had hoped it would be sooner. A ribbon cutting and soft closing took place on July 19, and a punch list was recently identified with the contractor. Addition concrete was poured to patch up the sidewalk. She said the original plan did not include a new roof and insulation but that is now in the works. A new well is needed to provide hot water in the winter. There will not be water this winter for either the beach house or campground so the grounds will close as they have previously. But the hope is to have hot water and keep the beach house open for activities beginning with the 2026-2027 winter.

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

Kathy circulated written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds:



### **Treasurer's Report September 18, 2025**

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

**Balance from August 13, 2025 (prior meeting)** **\$108,882.20**

#### **INCOME**

|          |   |               |        |
|----------|---|---------------|--------|
| 08/12/25 | T.I. Jones (Lifetime Membership via PayPal)                     | 240.78        |        |
| 08/14/25 | Linda & Paul Byer ( Annual dues via PayPal)                     | 47.76)        | 71.50  |
| 08/14/25 | Rick Vlaming (Annual dues via PayPal)                           | 23.64)        |        |
| 08/18/25 | Richard Staresina (Annual dues via check)                       | 25.00         |        |
| 08/21/25 | Renee & John Bulger (Annual dues via PayPal)                    | 47.76         |        |
| 09/05/25 | J.D. Castleman (Lifetime Membership via check)                  | 250.00        |        |
| 09/15/25 | Arlene Noble (Annual dues via check)                            | 25.00         |        |
| 09/15/25 | Lucas family (Dues for Yancy, Nadia, Tabitha & Chris via check) | 100.00        |        |
| 09/15/25 | Kori Glass (Annual dues via PayPal)                             | 23.64)        | 119.16 |
| 09/15/25 | Corinne & Marty Lucas (Annual dues & donations via PayPal)      | <u>95.52)</u> |        |

**TOTAL INCOME** **\$879.10**

#### **EXPENSES**

|           |   |        |
|-----------|---|--------|
| 08/14/25  | Check #1214 to Jim Chessor (Mowing #4, 7/7 and 7/30)      | 400.00 |
| 08/29/25. | Check #1216 to Larry Wickert (Tools for asphalt patching) | 93.05  |
| 09/03/25  | Check #1215 to Paul Malecki (Trucking to haul millings)   | 375.00 |
| 07/08/25  | Check #1217 to Jim Chessor (Mowing #5, 8/12 & 8/25)       | 400.00 |

**TOTAL EXPENSES** **(1,268.03)**

**ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 09/18/25** **\$108,493.27**

*Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer 09/18/25*

## RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 09/18/25

### SIGNAGE/WEB

|                 |                                 |               |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Luminous Fund   | Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here) | 685.64        |
| Hardesty Mem.   | Wayfinding or historic signs    | 1,831.13      |
| 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> |
|          |                  | 43,256.63        |

### MAINTENANCE

|                     |                            |   |
|---------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Hardesty Mem.       | Trail Maintenance          | 394.00                                      |
| HVRM (Buckeye)      | Trail Maintenance          | 593.61                                      |
| Rich Stalbrink Mem. | Maintenance or most needed | 2,699.11 (reduced 468.03 for pilot project) |
| Doral Solar         | Bridge/clearing            | <u>7,269.48</u>                             |
|                     |                            | 10,488.17                                   |

### 5K/3K 2025 (CVC Grant)

|                |                                |                 |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Grant from CVC | 5K/3K & Panhandle connectivity | 989.45          |
| RunSignup      | Registrant payouts             | <u>1,128.15</u> |
|                |                                | 2,117.60        |

**TOTAL RESTRICTED \$79,611.79**

**FFBT Balance \$108,493.27**

**Restricted Funds \$79,611.79**

**Unrestricted Funds \$28,881.48**

Kathy expressed special appreciation to T.I. Jones and J.D. Castleman who both became new lifetime members with \$250 donations.

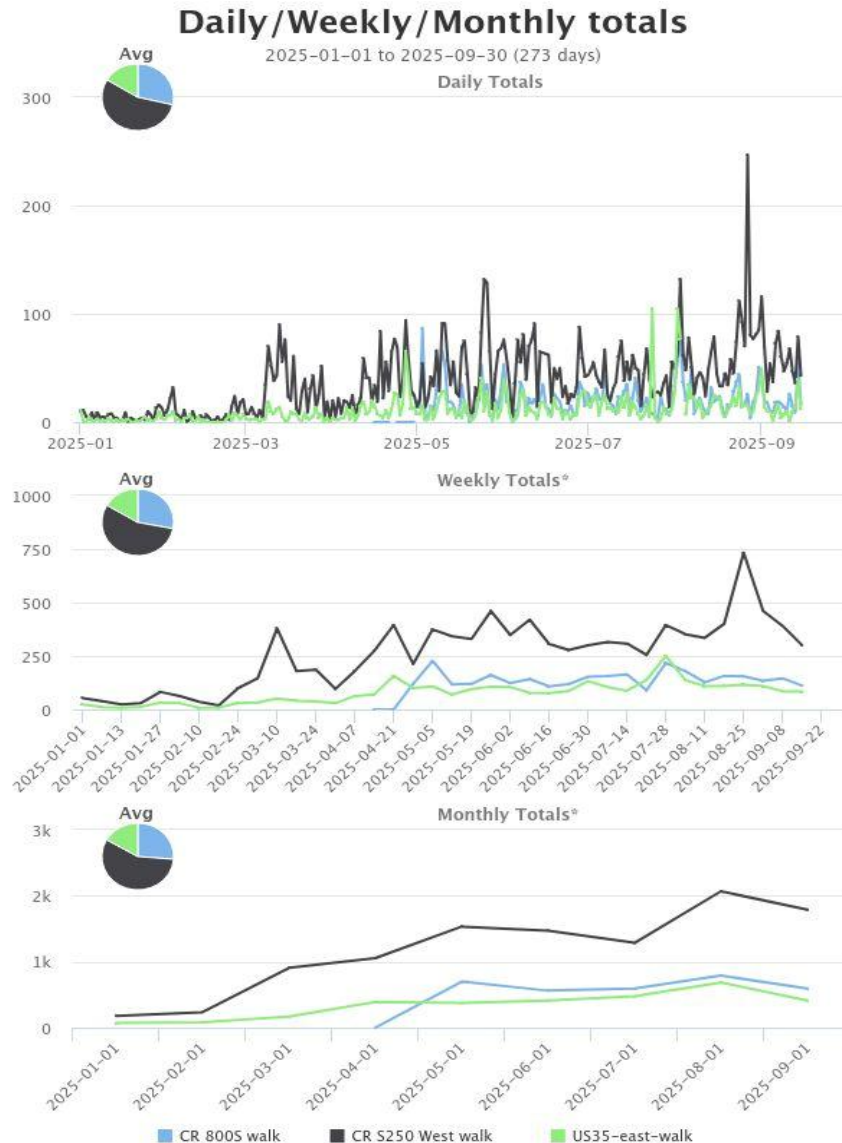
Kathy thanked Corinne and Marty Lucas for renewing their memberships and for also making donations. She thanked Paul and Linda, Rich Vlaming, Renee and John Bulger, Kori Glass, Yancy and Nadia Lucas, and Tabitha and Chris Balzer for renewing their memberships.

Kathy said Duke Korus handed \$5 cash to Peg during the pilot project in support of the PTC. Peg passed that to Kathy who will deposit it with the First Farmers Bank the next time she does business there. Peg also renewed her membership at the meeting,

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

## Trail Counters Review

Joan Hardesty distributed copies of the PTC trail counters review as follows:



Joan said she edited the report to remove the exceptionally high usage numbers at US 35 on August 8, when PTC members were mowing and doing other maintenance activities there, likely distorting the count. The usage numbers continue to increase, and the new counter in the vicinity of the rest park, has shown greater usage than at other locations.

In the past the counts have identified walkers and bicyclists as separate entities. Since the counters are activated by warm bodies passing, whether walkers, bicyclists, or for that matter an occasional horse or deer, Joan believes attempting to distinguish walkers and bicyclists is unrealistic. This listing references all users as “walkers”. Several members suggested that, particularly on the most easterly counter near US 35, bicyclists easily outnumber walkers. During the October meeting, members will consider a better descriptive term for what is shown to be counted.

### **Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities Update**

Bob Albert, the HVRM’s liaison to the PTC, provided an update on Museum activities. He said “Labor Day Weekend turnout was pretty good but a bit down from recent years.” Bob said they were busy getting ready for the Pumpkin Trains—HVRM’s busiest season. He said 1,000 tickets have already been sold, and each ticket gets a pumpkin. He noted that NIPSCO informed the HVRM it will in April place three new lines at its trail crossing east of US 35.

### **Next Membership Meeting**

The next membership meeting was set for Thursday, October 16, 2025 at 5:30 p.m., CT (6:30 p.m., ET) in the Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room, 300 Keller Avenue, North Judson, Indiana. (The Meeting Room is located in the First Farmers Bank & Trust Building.)

### **Workday**

Membership previously set a workday for October 18. This workday was rescheduled for Sunday, October 19, 2025 at 12:00 Noon, CT (1:00 p.m., ET) on the Erie Trail between Starke CR 100 W and CR 250 W. Parking is available at the Rest Park near CR 250 West and at 6555 CR 100 West (Steve and Kathy’s log house). *{Editor’s note: Due to inclement weather the workday was again rescheduled for Saturday, November 1, 2025 at 11:00 am, CT.}*

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 p.m., CT (7:56 p.m., ET).