

**MEETING MINUTES OF
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.**
Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center
6996 South State Road 10, Knox (Bass Lake)
December 10, 2025

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
JD Castleman
Joan Hardesty
Charlotte Liss
Corey Liss
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Rich Vallicelli
Kirt Verhagen
Peggy Stalbrink

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum
Michelle Lagestee, President, Jasper County Trails Club

Call to Order by Vice President

On December 10, 2025, Russ Blais, Vice President, called to order a Meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake, Indiana at 5:41 pm, CT (6:41 pm, ET).

Steve introduced Michelle Lagestee who has joined us in previous meetings. Michelle and her Jasper County Trails Club are great partners to our organization, and we look forward to someday having connected trail systems. Michelle said the Jasper County Trail Club is currently developing an access site on the Kankakee River.

Review and Approval of Minutes of October 16, 2025

Char Liss moved to approve the November 10, 2025 minutes. Kirt Verhagen seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP #23-06

Kathy Lucas said with the early occurrence of cold and snow this year, progress on the trail extension for this meeting was defined mostly by the noteworthy advancements on project funding. For this meeting she would include the ITP #23-06 Report as part of the Treasurer’s Report.

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
December 10, 2025**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance from November 13, 2025 (prior meeting) \$77,566.51

INCOME

11/14/25 State of Indiana ITP #23-06 (reimburse 80% of invoice #6) \$28,119.48

TOTAL INCOME \$28,119.48

EXPENSES

11/19/25 Check #1227 to Hill Excavating (Invoice #3) \$77,474.02

11/19/25 Check #1223 to Precept Partners (50% discount to address "web navigation glitch) 75.00

TOTAL EXPENSES (\$77,549.02)

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 12/10/25 \$28,136.97

Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer 12/10/25

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 12/10/25

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	-0-	Reduced 9,700.00*
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	-0-	Reduced 8,306.25*
Rails to Trails	Trail Extension	-0-	<u>Reduced 823.87*</u>
		-0-	(18,920.12)

DNR REIMBURSEMENT for ITP 23-06 Northwest Extension

07/11/25	Reimbursement #5	-0-	Reduced 12,069.63*
11/14/25	Reimbursement #6	-0-	<u>Reduced 28,119.48*</u>
			(40,216.12)

MAINTENANCE

Hardesty Mem.	Trail Maintenance	157.24
HVRM (Buckeye)	Trail Maintenance	593.61
Rich Stalbrink Mem.	Maintenance or most needed	2,231.08
Doral Solar	Bridge/clearing	<u>7,269.48</u>
		10,251.41

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 \$15,548.28

NOTE:

*These restricted funds were used to pay Hill Excavating invoice #3 of \$77,474.02 on 11/19/25 which was 1/2 of the bill received from them. PTC will pay the remaining half (same amount) after Reimbursement #7 from the State is reflected in the PTC account.

FFBT Balance	\$28,136.97
Restricted Funds	— \$15,548.28
Unrestricted Funds	\$12,588.69

Kathy reminded members that DNR authorized the PTC to submit an off-quarter payment for one-half of Hill Excavating’s most recent billing. DNR later processed reimbursement for 80% of the \$77,474.02 and recommended its approval through the State’s funding process. Kathy said she has just received by email from the State Comptroller an ACH Notification that 80% reimbursement in the amount of \$61,979.21 is scheduled for bank deposit on December 10. After the FFBT clears the check, Kathy intends to hand-deliver a second check to Hill Excavating in the amount of \$77,474.02. Following deposit by Hill Excavating, she can include the amount in the final quarterly report to the DNR for 2026.

Following billing by Bob Aloï, Kathy also sent a \$1,000 check made payable to Territorial Engineering, LLC. Bob informed her that Territorial Engineering will cease operations on December 31, but Bob will continue to serve as PTC consultant for ITP #23-06. Kathy sought and received permission from the DNR to substitute Bob Aloï as consultant in his individual capacity. Records of the Secretary of State indicate Territorial Engineering, LLC currently has active status and that Bob is the sole owner. The DNR has asked that this modification be reflected in the final quarterly report.

Rhonda Milner moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Joan Hardesty seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Election of Four Members to Board of Directors

Russ called for action on the election of four members to the Board of Directors. He said the positions were currently held by Charlotte Liss, Kirt Verhagen, Rich Vallicelli and Steve Lucas. Russ added that each of our seven Directors serve for two-year staggered terms. He asked if anyone else wished to stand for election or nominate another person. No one responded.

Paul Byer moved to re-elect by acclamation Char, Kirt, Rich and Steve to the PTC’s Board of Directors. Brian seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Starke County Convention Visitors Commission Grant Award for 2026

At approximately the same time as the meeting, CVC President, Kathy Norem, emailed that the PTC grant request “for 2026 has been approved by the Starke County Visitor and Commission Board for \$2,000. The request for the check will be submitted to the Auditor by the CVC Board after their 2026 organizational meeting. Usually, that is in February.”



Editor’s note: This information was not available during the December 10 meeting but will be tendered during the February 18, 2026 meeting as a technical amendment.

Erie Trail-Panhandle Pathway Collaboration Final Report

On November 15, Rick Vlaming and Steve met onsite at the Starke County Road 700 East trailhead with our area’s Utility Pipeliner/ROW Lead at Buckeye Partners, John Rangel. John approved sites for placement of both PTC collaborative signs with the Friends of Panhandle Pathway for an asphalt county road connection between the Erie Trail and the Panhandle Pathway. All on his own, Rick erected the signs later that day. It is a much appreciated effort. Steve said he wished Rick were present to be recognized by the members and asked that Diane and Russ pass along our thanks.



On the left is the sign for the connection from Starke County Road 700 East toward Winamac. On the right is the sign Starke County road directed northwest past Bass Lake and toward North Judson.

The sign for the connection from Winamac toward SCR 700 East was included in the October 16, 2025 Prairie Trails Club Minutes at page 5.

For its entirety the Connector is also identified as S-17.

The final step for the project was to provide wayfinding information through the QR code for the sign directed toward Winamac. Our webmaster, Steve Antisdell, on December 8 activated the QR code and placed new text under the Visitors tab for the “Erie-Panhandle Connector”. Precept Partners will send a \$125 invoice for this project and has also agreed to make additional updates to items in the Visitors drawdown before our next meeting at no cost. The completed Erie-Panhandle Connector element satisfies the final commitment made in the CVC grant received with this May’s 5K Run/3K Walk.

You-are-Here signs beginning and going northwest from this trailhead present a similar opportunity, with a different QR code, for travelers going northwest toward Bass Lake or North Judson. Steve said he hoped members can make progress this winter on what services are available for a listing using the QR code on these You-are-Here signs.

May 23, 2026 Event Update

After consulting with Board members and officers, on December 3 Steve emailed a signed contract to Todd Henderlong of T&H Timing for a 5K Run/3K Walk in North Judson beginning at 9:00 am, CT. Todd previously reserved the date and location for the PTC but needed a start time and signed contract as confirmation.

Report of Ad Hoc Committee to Provide ABC Promise Partnership Bench

Joan reported that with an overstock sale at Green Tree Plastics, the PTC bought a new green bench at the same price, as though we had also collected 100 lbs. of lids, through the ABC Promise Partnership Program. The 40 pounds already collected will be donated to Knox Community Middle School to assist with a PTO Recycle program now underway.

Kirt said he planned to drive to Evansville “tomorrow” to pick up the new bench. He will hold the bench until a site on the trail extension through North Judson is ready for placement.

Update on Gate Segment Replacement at Starke County 600 East

Russ reported that Reinhart Welding & Repair fabricated the structure to replace the stolen gate element. Paul has developed a new gate pin. The structure is now ready for powder coating.

Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Update

Bob Albert said inclement weather forced cancellation of HVRM Santa Trains planned for November 29. But passenger numbers were near capacity for December 6 and seemed likely to be near capacity again on September 13. In response to a question, Bob said there were 627 passengers on December 6. The final 2025 Santa Trains are set for December 20.

HVRM has not yet published its schedule for 2026. Bob said to expect similar excursions to those in 2025 with a notable highlight the growing “Civilians and Soldiers in History Day”.

American Discovery Trail News

Steve said there were two developments of interest coming from the American Discovery Trail Society. In response to a question from Corey Liss, he said that for most practical purposes in Northwest Indiana, the ADT's Northern Branch follows the same route as the Great American Rail-Trail. An exception is that the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy identifies for the GART a "preferred" route, and that route sets minimum standards including a separation from motorways. The ADT is often located on streets and highways.

First Development: *American Discovery 250 Relay*

During the October Rails-to-Trail's "TrailNation Summit" held in Cleveland, a California participant reported the American Discovery Trail Society was planning for next year a coast-to-coast America 250 Relay. Steve said he asked how the ADT would address the trail split between Colorado and Ohio where there is a Northern Branch and a Southern Branch. The Southern Branch extends near the Ohio River. The California participant answered the Relay would likely use the Southern Branch, but it might incorporate part of the Northern Branch as well. Steve said he expressed the opinion that it would be a mistake not to fully incorporate the Northern Branch.

In late November the ADT Society circulated an email announcing that the "*American Discovery 250 Relay: One Trail-One Nation-250 Years in Motion*" was scheduled for next summer and fall. The Society aimed to recruit "thousands of people to pass the baton across our land" through running, walking, wheelchair, biking and horseback riding". The event would start in California and end in Delaware. "The relay will split in two from Denver, CO and reunite in Cincinnati, OH."

The ADT Society also circulated an online form seeking volunteers for the event. Steve completed the form indicating the Prairie Trails Club was willing to carry the baton for the length of our trail. During the meeting he said he believed our members could probably carry it through the full length of Starke County. He intended to print out the completed form, but the form disappeared upon completion.

Steve said he was reluctant to respond without having first conferred with membership, but it seemed important to make an early response. To him participation in the 250 Relay seemed a good opportunity, to foster public awareness of our trail, without a huge effort or expense. It could include a public celebration on our new trail in North Judson and perhaps elsewhere in Starke County or a neighboring county. He said the ADT Society did not guarantee every person who wished to carry the baton could be accommodated. Steve was confident that at this early date he could withdraw the PTC bid to participate if that were the members' wish.

Corey asked if he sought participation for the length of the Erie Trail or for the length of the American Discovery Trail in Starke County. Steve answered that he referenced on the ADT Society's form the length of the Erie Trail. But he thought the PTC and our friends could pretty easily cover the full trail length in Starke County. That would only add about 1/3 mile going south to the Pulaski County Line. Kirt concurred with him the extension would be roughly four miles going northwest to the Kankakee River.

Diane recalled a torch being carried around Bass Lake for the Bicentennial. She said it brought local excitement and thought locals and frequent visitors would be excited by the possibility of participating.

Michelle said she thought the concept was a good one. It provides an opportunity to highlight what trails can be in our area.

Char said she could ride horseback for the length of the Erie Trail and possibly more. Several members said the variety afforded by the ability to walk, run, or ride a bike would make the event doable and bring good publicity.

No one expressed opposition to or reservations about seeking participation in the event.



Second Development: *Seek ADT “Trail Town” Designation for North Judson*

The ADT has a new initiative for communities along or near its route to seek designation as a “Trail Town”. Only cities and towns can qualify, so currently in Starke County, only the Town of North Judson seems a likely candidate.

Mitch Barloga is the ADT’s Indiana State Coordinator for the Northern Branch and also a member of its Board of Directors. Steve emailed him for an opinion whether he thought it worthwhile for North Judson to pursue the designation. Mitch responded, “I think it would be great idea and I would encourage you to pursue it!”

On December 9, Steve spoke with North Judson Clerk-Treasurer, Andrew Rowe, and updated him on trail progress generally. He also outlined the communications with Mitch and asked Andrew if North Judson might consider seeking an ADT designation. Andrew expressed interest in exploring the possibility. Steve then forwarded materials from the ADT governing requirements for a Trail Town designation and offered assistance if the Town chooses to seek designation.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was set for Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 5:30 p.m., CT (6:30 p.m., ET) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Highway 10, Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:22 p.m., CT (7:55 p.m., ET).

Holiday Celebration

An informal Holiday Celebration followed the meeting.