

**MEETING MINUTES OF
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.**
Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center
6996 South State Road 10, Knox (Bass Lake)
June 25, 2026

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Peggy Stalbrink

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum

Call to Order by Vice President

On June 25, 2026, Russ Blais,, Vice President, called to order a Meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Road 10, Bass Lake.

Review and Approval of Minutes of May 13, 2026

Peg Stalbrink moved to approve the draft May 13 minutes without amendment. Diane Blais seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

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
June 25, 2026**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance from May 13, 2025 (prior meeting) **\$39,358.74**

INCOME

5/18/26	Kirt Verhagen (through Starke County Community Foundation)	1,225.00
5/19/26	RunSignUp	100.00

5/26/26	RunSignUp	470.00
5/27/26.	"Day of" 5K/3K sales	20.00
5/27/26	"Day of" 5K/3K sales	171.00
5/27/26	Cash Box replenishment	300.00
5/28/26.	State of Indiana reimbursement (ITP 23-06)	<u>24,836.57</u>

TOTAL INCOME

\$27,122.57

EXPENSES

5/14/26.	Check #1237 to Knots & Spots (T-shirts for 5K)	1,525.00
5/20/26	Check #1240 for Cash Box	300.00
5/26/26.	Check #1239 to Precept Partners	90.00
5/27/26.	Check #1241 ti Jim Chessor (Mowing 5/1 & 5/16)	450.00
5/27/26.	Check #1242 to T&H Timing (5K/3K Timer)	850.00
6/01/26.	Check #1253 to Kathleen Lucas (reimbursement for porta potties)	1,560.00
6/16/26	Check #1244 to Linda Byer reimbursement for glyphosate	<u>561.00</u>

TOTAL EXPENSES

(\$536,00)

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 06/25/26 = \$61,145.31

Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer 06/25/26

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 04/23/26

SIGNAGE/WEB

Luminous Fund	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	685.64
Hardesty Mem.	Wayfinding or historic signs	1,707.31
Lucas lakehouse	Future Vision/Website	<u>662.50</u>
		3,055.05

NORTH JUDSON 5K/3K & GRAND OPENING

CVC grant	361.20 (less 850 for T&H Timing)
McMillin Donation	<u>125.00 (less 125 Knots & Sports shirts)</u>
Proceeds at Race	<u>761.00</u>
	1,247.20

DNR REIMBURSEMENT for ITP 23-06 Northwest Extension

Balance in DNR Project Fund	7,458.70
Reimbursement from DNR for Invoice #5	<u>24,836.50</u>
	32,295.27

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	7,269.48
Arrowhead Grant	Invasive Species Control	145.19 (less 561 for glyphosate)
Verhagen Family Fund	Mowing	<u>650.00 (1,100-450)</u>
		11,046.60

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$47,644.52

FFBT Balance	\$61,145.31
Restricted Funds	— <u>47,644.52</u>
Unrestricted Funds	\$13,500.79

Kathy expressed special appreciation to Kirt Verhagen for financial support of mowing between Main Street in North Judson and the rest park. Russ and Di provided the same support but without passage through the SCCF. Linda Byer noted Jim Chessor's efforts were particularly important with the heavy rains and fast-growing grass this spring.

Kathy outlined the expenditures and income sources pertaining to the 5K Run/3K Walk. Although the turnout was not massive, it was successful in terms of bringing people from outside Starke County. Peg noted that sales of tote bags were encouraging. Diane also commented on other items sold in addition to those for race participation,

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

Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP-23-06

Kathy reported that our consultant, Bob Aloï, informed her in the past week that the project is 95% complete. She circulated his detailed AIA seeking as Invoice #6 \$40,889.07 which would leave \$21,069.07 yet to be paid. This amount is somewhat more than the half payment recently suggested to Bob, but it would not affect the bottom line of the PTC's financial responsibility. Kathy said she could take the needed amount from Unrestricted Funds or possibly from other compatible Restricted Funds. She asked for membership input on making the full requested payment.

Steve Lucas said Kirt Verhagen was unable to attend the meeting, but he did have the opportunity to seek Kirt's perspective as a Board member. Kirt wrote that he supported paying the full amount of the invoice.

Several members at the meeting expressed their concurrence with Kirt's perspective. No one spoke in opposition.

Paul Buyer moved to affirm the membership's support for payment of the full \$40,899.07 requested by Hill Excavating. Diane seconded the motion, and the motion carried. Kathy said she would proceed accordingly.

Ad Hoc Committee for Bike Racks, Bench and Signs on ITP-23-06

Steve suggested establishing an ad hoc committee to address needs pertaining to the PTC's placement of bike racks, a bench, and signs on the trail extension. The committee would dissolve after completion of the task.

Bob Albert, Liaison from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, said the HVRM's Board has approved use of the concrete pad that was formerly utilized by the New York Central Railway. Members suggested the pad be the location for the copper nature-themed bike rack as well as the green bench. Members urged that the black railroad-themed bike rack be placed adjacent to the trail near the new kiosk.

Russ, Linda, Paul and Steve volunteered to serve on the committee. A request will also be made to Rick Vlaming to participate. Other members or interested persons are invited to participate.

Final Report of May 23 5K Run/3K Walk

Anita opened a discussion of the 5K Run/3K Walk. She distributed a participant listing that showed all but seven of the 28 were from outside Starke County.

Coordinating the timing of the event with construction of a new trail was challenging. Members thanked Jeremiah Patrick for accommodating the PTC by allowing use of the trail prior to finalization, including prioritization of intersection safety with the placement of “tactile pavement” (alternatively called “ADA stamps”) within hours of the event.

Members agreed the event was a success but also a dress rehearsal for completion and formal opening of the trail extension through North Judson. Members discussed the possibility of staging a second event on the same day as the ribbon cutting. The PTC has shirts and medals that could be utilized for a second event, but augmentation would be needed. As discussed later in the minutes, a portable toilet is already in place. There may be financial support by the Town of North Judson for most of the cost of a timer.

Report of Warrior Expeditions June Passage through Northwest Indiana

Kathy thanked Diane, Russ, and Peggy for partnering with Steve and her on hosting the Warrior Expeditions trekkers as they passed through Starke County.



The first to arrive was Mary Montigny, shown above left with a sign made by a St. Peter Lutheran School student, on the morning of June 10 as she traveled northwest. Later that day Steve spoke briefly on the trail to Patrick Smith, and Justin Abramo visited at the Lucas cabin. Above right is depicted our dinner that night at the Woodshed Tap. Sitting opposite each other in front are trekker Winston Hall and Russell Blaise, both veterans of the Vietnam War. Moving around the table past Winston are Kathy, Jayson Goetz, Mitchell Villafania, Steve, Peggy, and Diane.

The overnight stop for all six members of the Warrior Expeditions after leaving Starke County was, in two groups of three, at the Lisses' home in Crown Point. Shown below are Char and Corey Liss with the first group of three—Mary Montigny, Patrick Smith, and Justin Abramo.



Block Family English Lake Trail Easement Recordation

Members repeated their thanks to Walter Block and family for donating a trail easement at property bordering Starke County Road 650 West and the Pinsky Railroad at English Lake. Regarding the donation, Charlotte Liss wrote earlier in the month: “The generosity of others, to assist in providing and maintaining a trail for the public's general use, with little or no benefit to the donor, is truly a gift of epic proportions!”

Steve circulated the “Trail Easement Agreement” he prepared between the PTC and the Block family “recorded as presented” by the Starke County Recorder on June 10, 2026 (Parcel 75-04-36-104-009.000-011). He referenced a Board of Directors action taken April 23, 2025 in which the President and Board Chair were authorized to expend \$5,000 for design, survey, and recordation for the easement or a deed transfer. This commitment has not since been singled out in the Treasurer’s Report as establishing a Restricted Fund. With recordation of the “Trail Easement Agreement” accompanied by a \$25 fee, the PTC’s commitment for obtaining an easement is achieved without needing to spend the anticipated \$5,000. The PTC is responsible to design and construct signage for the site that expresses appreciation for the donated easement, as well as for wayfinding and historic interpretation.



On June 11, Walter Block, himself a veteran, met Warrior Expeditions veterans Winston Hall, Jayson Goetz, and Mitchell Villafania at the site on their way northwest. The four men in the image above are standing on the concrete remains of the former Pennsylvania Railroad water tower. The location is on the connector the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy uses between completed trail segments of the Great American Rail-Trail in North Judson and Hebron.

Work has already begun on identification of the easement site as part of the American Discovery Trail, US Bike 35, and locally the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail. With support from PTC members—most recently the Blaisses and Kirt—Walter has placed fines for a parking area and groomed the surroundings. He has also planted and nurtured shagbark hickory saplings near the easement’s southern boundary.

Hive Grant Award and Placement of Portable Toilets for 2026

Kathy reflected that Di and Peggy joined her as members of the *The Hive a Giving Circle* within the Starke County Community Foundation. With the PTC one of five finalists for an annual Hive grant opportunity, Di, Peg, and she attended its annual dinner on May 20.

The application sought to fund one or two portable toilets with hand sanitation along the trail for the warm months this year. If the grant exceeded what was needed for portable toilets, remaining funding would be used for new pamphlets for the PTC’s expanded trail system.

Kathy was pleased to report the PTC’s grant application finished second with a resulting award of \$2,000. She negotiated with LRS for placement and weekly maintenance of *three* portable toilets from June 1 through September 30. LRS provided a very generous discount as it seeks to support nonprofits. The units were placed at Main Street in North Judson, Starke County Road 100 West, and by the parking lot at US 35. Kathy has twice happened upon LRS when its staff was servicing the portable toilets. She periodically checks to confirm appropriate maintenance. The cost for the service was \$1,560. When the SCCF delivers the grant award, \$1,560 will be returned to Unrestricted Funds and the remaining \$440 dedicated to developing new pamphlets.

Trail Cleanups Following June Storms

June storms resulted in an estimated eight major and twenty lesser tree falls on the Erie Trail as a result of June storms. Members expressed appreciation to Corey and Char Liss for taking a lead on their removal. John Ruth was a major contributor along with Steve and Kathy.

Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum

Bob Albert, HVRM Liaison to the PTC, provided a follow-up on a report last month that INDOT was planning to close the railroad crossing of State Highways 10 and 39 adjacent to the rest park. He said INDOT has since communicated that it is dropping this plan.

July 11 will be HVRM’s very popular annual “Civilians and Soldiers in History Day”. He said the HVRM is acquiring another business car.

Trail Counters

Linda provided an abbreviated report on the trail counters. She said during the period since the May report, data collection at the US Highway 35 site was compromised by an ant colony invasion. When she opened the box at that site, she encountered the nest and its angry residents. After a considerable effort and enduring ant bites, she was able to secure the counter. But she had to remove it from the site.

Linda then suggested relocating the counter to the trailhead at Starke County Road 700 East. This location would provide new insights on trail usage.

American Discovery 250 Relay: One Trail-One Nation 250 Years in Motion

Members discussed the scheduled passage of the American Discovery 250 Relay through North Judson. Participants are expected to arrive late on October 14 and to go southeast on the trail the next morning. Steve said he has outlined the timing of the event to the Starke-USA250 Committee, and members of that Committee noted it falls on Fall Break for students at North Judson, Knox and Oregon-Davis. The possibility of a student sign participation was raised.

Diane indicate this event was extraordinary and having PTC participation would be a good thing. She suggested members might support the event by providing materials for student artistry or H-stakes to hold them. Others offered similar perspectives. Steve said he planned to attend the next Starke-USA250 Committee meeting on June 29 and would then seek to better gauge their interest in a collaboration.

New Signs Recognizing Volunteer Trail Maintenance and Seeking Support

Steve shared a generous offer sent to him by email a few days previously from Corey Liss. Corey suggests putting out signs promoting the club and asking for help as its members are unpaid volunteers. Corey offered to do all the work to have the signs manufactured and also to donate the cost of the signs. The goals would be to promote the trail club and to try to get new people to attend or possibly to help maintain the trail. Corey believes many people do not realize PTC members are unpaid volunteers. He wrote that the initiative might help correct this common misconception.

Corey indicated he believed developing signs with a “golf sponsor size that would be easy to screw to posts or even throw a few along the trail on the stakes they come with.” That size is 18 inches wide and 24 inches tall. Corey would share a proof with anyone interested. Steve said he and Kathy have agreed to assist Corey and Char. Cory would chair the effort, but PTC members would be welcome to join the effort.

Linda reflected that early in her participation with the PTC she prepared small signs that had a similar goal to Corey’s current proposal. Corey’s signs would be more robust and she hoped water resistant.

Members thanked Corey for his offer. They endorsed an ad hoc committee for the stated purposes to be chaired by him and supported by Charlotte, Kathy and Steve. Multiple members also offered their assistance if later determined helpful by the committee.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was set for Wednesday, July 29, 2026 at 5:30 p.m., CT (6:30 p.m., ET) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Road 10, Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:08 p.m., CT (8:08 p.m., ET).