

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB, INC.

North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library
208 Keller Avenue
North Judson, IN

March 8, 2017

MEMBERS

Kenny Bailey
Peggy Bohac
Paul Byer
Linda Byer
Susan DeSantis
Kathleen Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Bryan McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Greg Wittig
Karen Wittig

GUESTS

Bob Albert
Rick Anderson

Call to Order

Rhonda Milner, Vice President, called to order the meeting of the Prairie Trails Club, Inc. (the "PTC") in the North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library at 6:02 p.m., CST (7:02 p.m., EST) on March 8, 2017.

Approval of Minutes

Rhonda presented for approval the draft minutes of the February 7, 2017 meeting. Susie DeSantis moved to approve the minutes as written. Greg Wittig seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote the minutes were approved.

Treasurer's Report

Kathy Lucas provided the Treasurer's Report. She said the PTC has \$1,413.37 with the First National Bank of Monterey, \$55.40 in PayPal, and (effective December 31, 2016) \$5,458.37 with the Northern Indiana Community Foundation. These accounts total \$6,927.14. She reminded that the members the usage of some funding is specified, such as the donation from the Luminous Fund.

Preliminary Report of Onsite Trail Inspections at Fell Ditch Bridge and West of Range Road

Bob Albert, Liaison from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum ("HVRM"), said he and PTC President Bruce Fingerhut performed a joint onsite inspection of the trail on February 18. The two agreed to pursue short-term and long-term solutions to problems caused by muck subsidence northwest of the Fell Ditch bridge. One approach might be to place railroad ties, crushed-stone fill and a new asphalt surface. Where muck subsidence has caused

dips just west of Range Road, crushed stone might be used for fill and then covered with asphalt patches. Bob said Bruce was exploring options for implementation beginning when weather allows this spring. He also noted that Bruce picked up a copy of the signed "Memorandum of Understanding" between the HVRM and the PTC.

Update on Application for Federal 501(c)(3) Status

Kathy reported the IRS recently simplified and reduced the cost of an application for organization status exemptions under Section 501(c)(3). She prepared for the PTC and filed on February 21 online Form 1023-EZ. After determining the PTC's employee identification number, she supplied the \$275 fee (formerly \$400) from her personal account. On March 6 Kathy telephoned the IRS and learned the application crossed successfully over the initial review hurdle. She said she hoped to have more information for the April meeting.

Update on Participation in US Bike Route 35 Project for Identification of Starke County Services

Kathy thanked members for participating in the project to identify Starke County services to help users of US Bike Route 35 that is now in development. During the February PTC meeting the members were requested to offer guidance in preparing the document (which Indiana Tourism staff refer to as the "USBR35 Assessment").

Guidance was provided and the document finalized accordingly. One element was that we were to contact Harold Woods, who operates a bike shop on SR 10, to determine if he wished to have the shop listed. Steve talked with Harold at his shop. Harold was interested, said he would like to have the shop listed, and it was.

As agreed during the February meeting, the Starke County portion of the USBR35 Assessment was circulated to members on February 9. A final version was forwarded on February 10 to Lexa Muehlbauer, an intern with Hamilton County Tourism, who is coordinating submissions by participating Indiana counties.

On February 27 Lexa emailed to indicate the USBR35 Assessment was complete except for an introduction. A three paragraph "Starke County Website Content" was prepared and sent to her the same day. On February 28 Lexa responded, "Perfect, thank you!" Kathy concluded by saying her understanding is that this phase of the project is completed.

Consideration of Committee Report for National Trails Day Celebration on June 3 with First Annual 5K Color Walk-Run

Peggy Bohac provided the committee report for the inaugural 5K Color Walk-Run in celebration of National Trails Day on June 3, 2017. She said Madison Osborne chaired the first committee meeting on February 28 in North Judson. She thanked Kenny Bailey for joining the committee and providing very helpful assistance.

Peggy reported the committee determined the 5K Color Walk-Run could be effectively managed and provided a good opportunity for increasing awareness of the NJ Erie Trail and for additional funding of trail activities. Pre-registration was set at \$20 per person with registration following a deadline at \$25. Payment of the entry fee would entitle each participant to a race day kit. The kit would include a packet of color powder for each runner and walker, sunglasses, stickers and a white t-shirt with event logos. Kenny agreed during the committee meeting to obtain shirt cost estimates to include logos.

Each race kit costs \$6 and every 50 race kits ordered comes with a 25 pound bag of powder. The goal is to have 200 participants. “We will be spending \$1,200 not including shipping. We would have to add the cost of shirts, banners and any trophy.”

Peggy said the committee agreed the Color Walk-Run course should begin and end at Norwayne Field on Main Street, North Judson. Runners would leave Norwayne Field at 8:00 a.m., CDT. This would be a timed race for people who want to compete for a trophy. The second wave of runners and walkers could be scheduled to leave Norwayne Field at 9:30 a.m., CDT. The first color station would be at Norwayne Field, the second at the NJ Erie Trailhead on Main Street and the third just before the trail crosses Indiana Highway 10. At the third location the Color Walk-Run would turn around and return to North Judson, ending at Norwayne Field and constituting a 5K course. The committee concluded having this event cross SR 10 would pose too many safety and traffic hazards.

Peggy added that the committee understood the need to obtain authorizations from the North Judson Town Board and from the North Judson Parks and Recreation Board. Following the committee meeting Peggy said she met with the Town Board and obtained permission to block off Main Street during race times. The North Judson police have agreed to assist. She said Rich Akers, Member of the North Judson Parks and Recreation Board, has reserved Norwayne Field for the PTC during event times. She also sought and obtained a waiver of the permit fee.

Peggy said the committee is still researching whether local businesses would like to set up food and drink stations for race participants and observers. “We need to get some kind of speaker system to play music.”

Kenny reported during the PTC meeting that he has since obtained cost estimates and alternative designs for shirt logos. The members agreed the estimates were very competitive. Kenny showed possible shirt designs from his cellphone. He said he was working on banners to help announce the event.

Bob Albert reported he reviewed the event with members of the HVRM. On June 3 the HVRM expects to hold train rides, but he believes the 5K Color Walk-Run and the HVRM functions are compatible. As many as 30 parking spots might be available for the Color Walk Run. Operators of the two events need to communicate and continue to work together to help assure their mutual success. Bob said he does not expect the Museum would be using the State Road 10 Rest Park during the 5K Color Walk-Run.

Rick Anderson said the Bass Lake Property Owners Association was willing to announce the event in its newsletter.

Rhonda thanked the committee members for their extraordinary efforts to date. PTC members expressed support for the 5K Color Walk-Run plans as outlined by Peggy. Rhonda urged the committee to continue with its work and to provide an update at the April meeting.

Geocaching Demonstration

Linda Byer presented this informational item of trail usage. She said geocaching “is a treasure hunt. People with grandchildren will find it’s a great way to entertain them.” The concept began in the 1990s when the Federal Government released GPS information to the public. Smart phones and GPS instruments can now triangulate from different satellites to identify a position on earth. Accuracy varies from about four to forty feet depend-

ing on equipment, vegetation and weather. A participant enters his or her name in a logbook when the geocache is discovered.

Linda showed her swag (an acronym for “stuff we all get”) bag that she uses to stock a site. Her swag is largely “things that kids like” but can also include items useful to the exercise of geocaching such as pencils and pencil sharpeners. She sometimes leaves behind small plastic bags to encourage participants to pick up and remove trash. For traditional geocaching a person may remove an item from the geocache but is expected to replace it with another item of equal or greater value. A virtual geocache encourages a participant to an experience or aesthetic of interest but does not involve removing or exchanging material things. A participant writes about a find in the cache logbook.

Linda distributed printed information from geocaching.com. The information explained: At its simplest level, geocaching requires these 8 steps:

- Register for a free Basic Membership.
- Visit the “Hide & Seek a Cache” page.
- Enter your postal code and click “search”.
- Choose any geocache from the list and click on its name.
- Enter the coordinates of the geocache into your GPS device.
- Use your GPS device to assist you in finding the hidden geocache.
- Sign the logbook and return the geocache to its original location.
- Share your geocaching stories and photos online.

Linda said she developed a 20-site geocache complex for the NJ Erie Trail. These sites are about one-half mile apart from one another. Her primary intent was to draw interest to the trail for persons who might not otherwise be aware of its existence. She has received a number of email communications regarding the complex, reflecting that it is a success.

Report on Lids-for-Benches Project and Starke County 4H Participation

Rhonda reported she, Kathy, Brian McMillin and Anita McMillin met on March 6 at Knox High School with Starke County 4-H Youth Leadership to sort lids collected by PTC members and our supporters. Five 40-pound bags of lids were loaded and delivered in Kathy’s SUV to the meeting. She said the evening began on a “Laurel and Hardy moment” with a hole in one of the bags, and lids spilling out and rolling in all directions. There were probably 40 to 50 participants in the meeting, including adults and youth. Kathy did “a real nice demonstration of eligible lids at the beginning” of the meeting. The review process was completed in a little more than hour. “Some were very interested and into it.”

Kathy said a few more lids were collected subsequent to those in the five bags Rhonda referenced. “We believe we now have enough collected and processed for the first bench.” She added that Deb Mix, Chair of the Starke County Park Board, just advised her of an IDEM grant opportunity that might offer financial support for another lids-for-benches initiative.

Update on Implementation of Future Vision for Bike Route Connectors

Steve Lucas reminded members that during our November 2016 meeting, authorization was given to ask the Starke County Commissioners for share-the-road status on Range Road north to Bailey's Discount Center, and, using CR 800 South, to Bass Lake along CR 450 East and CR 600 East. The status would specifically designate these public roads for usage as bicycle routes, similar to authorization the Starke County Commissioners gave Nathan Origer and Pulaski County last year on CR 200 East for linkage from the NJ Erie Trail to the Panhandle Pathway and Winamac. The status would also anticipate the placement of signage on CR 800 South, CR 450 East and CR 600 East to assist users with navigation and provide historic or cultural interest. Some of the signage would come from the PTC, some likely from the Starke County Highway Department, and some possibly from sponsors of US BR35. "You will recall that the generous donation from the Luminous Fund is earmarked for improving connectivity to Bass Lake."

Steve said that also during the November 2016 meeting he noted Starke County Highway Superintendent, Rik Ritzler, would be contacted to determine if he had concerns before we made a presentation to the County Commissioners. "Kathy and I met briefly with Rik at his office on February 24. He was supportive, even enthusiastic, but re-emphasized the policy call rests with the County Commissioners." Rik added a trailhead for a Bass Lake connection might be coordinated with a roadway construction project Starke County hopes to perform that would include the intersection of CR 450 East and CR 210.

Steve added, "Kathy and I also spoke to the Bass Lake Property Owners' Association this past Saturday. We talked generally about the Prairie Trails Club. We discussed the NJ Erie Trail, US Bike Route 35 and the American Discovery Trail—with emphasis on improving connectivity to Bass Lake." The BLPOA Board and visitors were positive and encouraged us to move forward.

Steve said, "Unless someone has reservations, we'll move forward with seeking a place on the Starke County Commissioners agenda to consider endorsement and approval of these concepts. If we're placed on the agenda, I'd inform PTC membership and ask if there were volunteers to attend the meeting and express support. I'd ask Bruce and Rhonda if either wished to appear and speak as PTC President and Vice President."

Rhonda asked the membership for perspectives. No one expressed reservations or asked questions. The consensus was that Steve should take the lead in carrying this initiative forward to the Starke County Commissioners.

Consideration of July 15, 2017 Bike Ride from Bass Lake to NJ Erie Trail

Rhonda recognized Steve and Rick Anderson. Steve said Rick is President of the Bass Lake Property Owners Association (the "BLPOA") and would introduce a concept for a new event.

Rick proposed consideration of the the "First Annual Erie Bass Lake Bailey's Ride". The event would need to be aggressively promoted. "WKVI, the Leader and South Bend TV may not want to be left out." He said the BLPOA has an email distribution that is sent regularly to approximately 800 families. The BLPOA estimates that these 800 emails are ultimately seen by 2,000 people.

Rick added that there could potentially be more than 100 riders. The route from the Bass Lake Property Owners Building to Bailey's Discount Center would be about eight miles and about 16 miles going both ways. It's about "one mile to CR 450 E, 1.6 miles south on CR

450 to CR 800, right on 800 and trail 4.5 miles to Range Road. One mile north and you arrive at Bailey's." As an alternative "there could also be a shortened ride possibly from the BLPOA Building to the trail and back, about five miles."

Rick said "lots of people ride their bikes around Bass Lake" by using CR 210 and Indiana SR 10. "That's about eight miles. But many people on Bass Lake are not yet aware the NJ Erie Trail exists." He proposed that the event take place on Saturday, July 15.

Paul Byer said the Winamac Power Show was scheduled for July 13 to July 16. The event draws people from around the state and likely would include persons interested in a bike ride on July 15.

Kathy said the concept was previewed at the March 4 BLPOA meeting and well-received by those in attendance. Larry Collura, Vice Chair of the Bass Lake Conservancy District, expressed support for the bike event and for facilitating participation in trail functions. He said the Conservancy District could place a link on its website to the bicycle event and for PTC membership applications.

Rick emphasized the value of direct email communications and not just through placing information on a website. "Really, if you want people to go to a website, you put it in an email to go to the website."

Kenny expressed support for the concept. For participants who wished to ride bicycles just one way from Bass Lake to Bailey's Discount Center and then shop, he believed arrangements could be made for vehicle transport back to the BLPOA Building.

PTC membership endorsed the concept of the bike ride and of holding the event Saturday July 15. Rhonda appointed a committee with Steve and Kenny to work with Rick, Larry Collura and any other volunteers from the PTC or Bass Lake to move forward. Steve said he would begin committee activities with email communications.

Scheduling of April Meeting

Following a brief discussion, the membership approved April 5 and April 12 as alternatives for the next meeting, depending on Bruce's availability. Bruce emailed on March 9 he was available April 12. *The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 12, 2017 at 6:00 p.m., CDT (7:00 p.m., EDT) in the North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library.*

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m., CST (8:24 p.m., EST).