

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

BLPOA Community Center
6996 South SR 10
Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana

September 21, 2023

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russ Blais
Renee Bulger
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Rhonda Milner
Rich Vallicelli
Kirt Verhagen
Rick Vlaming
Larry Wickert

Call to Order by President

On September 21, 2023, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox at 5:35 pm, CDT (6:35 pm, EDT).

Review and Approval of Minutes of August 24, 2023

Larry Wickert moved for approval without modification the membership meeting minutes of August 24, 2023. Diane Blais seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

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



Kathy Lucas distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as follows:

**Treasurer's Report
September 21, 2023**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from August 24, 2023 **\$80,880.06**

INCOME

08/25/23	Northern Indiana Community Foundation Match Grant	\$25,600.00
09/15/23	Dues (Arlene Noble)	<u>25.00</u>
Total Income		\$25,625.00

EXPENSES

08/30/23	Healy Home Center (lumber, etc. for Fell Ditch/P. Byer)	3,362.53
09/19/23	Go Daddy (possible duplicate payment of \$33.48)	<u>69.51</u>
Total Expenses		\$3,432.04

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 08/24/23 **\$103,073.02**

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

**TOTAL AMOUNTS
PER CATEGORY**

Benches

Blais-Vlaming Bench	For 210/450 site or other	\$350.00	
McMillin Bench	For Bass Lake area	350.00	
			\$700.00

Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl UR Here)	1,130.54	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	3,767.10	
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50	
			\$5,560.14

Northwest Extension (or Operations)

Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020)	NW Extension or operations	5,000.00	
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021)	NW Extension or operations	5,000.00	
Luminous Fund Grant #6 (2022)	NW Extension or operations	10,000.00	
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	NW Extension or operations	6,000.00	
VFW Grant	For "trail improvements"	5,000.00	
PTC Contribution to ITP Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00	
Gene Novello	Trail Extension	1,200.00	
Naylor Pipe	Trail Extension	400.00	
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	25,600.00	
			\$68,200.00

Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	1,368.42	
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	1,668.52	
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,368.42	

Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations	Maintenance or Most Needed	2,699.11	
Doral Solar Contribution	Bridge/Trailside Clearing	<u>6,637.47</u>	(pd. 3,362.53 Fell Ditch Bridge)
			\$14,741.94

TOTAL RESTRICTED 89,202.08

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$103,073.02
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$89,202.08</u>
	== UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$13,870.94

Kathy reiterated our thanks to the Northern Indiana Community Foundation and to the generous donors who made it possible to tender to the DNR the required 20% local match. She thanked Arline Noble for again helping support the PTC through an annual membership dues payment.

Kathy outlined efforts to sort payments being made to GoDaddy Inc. GoDaddy is an American Internet domain registrar and web hosting company. It is the largest company of this kind, is recommended by our webmaster, Steve Antisdell, and has provided these services to the PTC since 2015. Kathy suspected a double payment was made to GoDaddy in the amount of \$33.48 but was not involved with registering PrairieTrailsClub.org in 2015. She said Bruce Fingerhut and Steve Antisdell worked with her to obtain the 2015 information and attempt to correct the payment status with GoDaddy, but she is not yet certain the correction is complete.

Kirt Verhagen moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Rick Vlaming seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul Byer said he has removed a number of #2 square screws from the deck of the Fell Street Bridge in anticipation of the September 28 project. Larry and Russ Blais have also done so. Removal of the screws is an arduous process and often requires the screws to be pried out because they have been counter-sunk. He said more help is needed to prep screws before surface planks can be removed.

Paul said the original plan had been to remove the current planks, which are placed at a diagonal to the trail, and replace them with planks parallel to the trail. But with further review he had determined this approach is inappropriate because the result would be grooves between planks that could catch bicycle tires and cause crashes. For safety, the new planks must either be at right angles or at diagonals to the trail.

During the meeting, Paul handed Kathy paperwork regarding expenses paid for materials and an invoice for the purchase of tape to help extend the longevity of the anticipated deck repairs. He said he plans to speak with the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum about taking wood removed from the deck. He will set aside some of the wood that is in better shape, particularly from planks placed recently to replace deteriorated original planks. These might be helpful to making future repairs. Paul added that with help from Russ he replaced several boards on the railing of the Bogus Run Bridge.

Paul said he intended to speak with officers at the HVRM to determine if the PTC might store equipment used for trail maintenance in one of the HVRM’s buildings. He said he has now placed all the asphalt purchased this spring for repairs to the trail surface.

Steve reflected that with the celebration during our August 24 meeting of receipt of the NICF match grant, maintenance efforts earlier in August did not receive full recognition. In particular the successful PTC Workday held on August 2 was unreported. He said he would include in these minutes a few images of the event by Kathy and Peg. The primary purpose of the August 2 Workday was the placement of asphalt on the trail surface east of Range Road crossing, but removal of encroaching vegetation occurred on both east and west of the crossing, and the team also witnessed a visit from a passing trekker.



Participants in the August 24 Workday included Russ Blais, Paul Byer, Nadia Coral-Frias, Kathy Lucas, Steve Lucas, Yancy Lucas, Anita McMillin, Brian McMillin, Eugene Pugh, Frank Stalbaum, Peg Stalbrink, Rich Vallicelli, Rick Vlaming, and Larry Wickert.

Paul and Linda continued weed suppression efforts at multiple locations along the trail east of the former Indiana Route 10 rest park. Kevin Kennedy augmented these efforts immediately east of the rest park. Within the western one mile, mowing continued south of the trail. In this area, Kirt mowed and pushed back weeds along both edges of the trail with support from Kathy and Steve.

Final Preparations for Fell Ditch Bridge Workdays

Pre-construction efforts for this project are referenced in the prior section. In addition PTC members removed vegetation and debris from around the Fell Ditch Bridge to make it more accessible for construction.

Larry continued his extensive effort to coordinate the project with Doral Renewables and among the members and friends of the PTC who have volunteered to take on this project. He said the start time for work on September 28 would be 8:00 a.m., CDT (9:00 a.m., EDT). During the meeting there was an extended discussion of the effort's logistics.

Larry advised the membership that a scheduling problem means Doral Renewables will be unable to assist on September 28 as previously anticipated. Representatives of Doral Renewables indicated a willingness to reschedule for sometime in mid-or-late October, but Larry was concerned weather conditions may deteriorate markedly by then. He spoke with several knowledgeable craftsmen who have agreed to advance the project within the original schedule. These include Rick and Paul within the PTC and others. Russ, Brian, and Rich are also experienced and will provide support. The expectation is that Doral Renewables craftsmen will assist with the final phases of the project.

Linda said she would cause the placement of signage at Starke County Roads 300 East and 400 East indicating trail closure until the project is completed. She has announced the project and coming closure on Facebook. Steve said the project is the featured item on the Homepage of the PTC website. He will request that our webmaster amend the website to make updates consistent with adjustments outlined by Larry. He said he will also ask WKVI Radio to report on the construction project and requisite road closure.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report

Steve said he and Kathy conferred virtually with Kelle Williams, Vice-President for Real Estate at Gulf & Atlantic Railway, on the morning of September 18. Williams already had a copy of the "Trail Easement Agreement" which the PTC entered with Northern Indiana Railroad. They offered to provide Williams the "Memorandum of Understanding, Letter of Intent, and ail Easement in Wayne Township, Starke County, Indiana" with preliminary drawing attached. The MOU was emailed to her later in the morning.

They explained to Williams the MOU was signed by representatives of the Town of North Judson (John Rowe, Town Council President); Northern Indiana Railroad Company, LLC (Brian Miller); Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, Inc. (Todd Flanigan, President), and Prairie Trails Club Inc. (Steve on behalf of the Board of Directors). Williams was told that development of the MOU and the drawing followed onsite inspections by representatives of the four parties and the MOU was a core element of the PTC's trail grant application to the Indiana DNR.

Williams inquired about the appraisal and suggested money must have changed hands. Steve indicated to her that the appraisal was part of the grant application to the DNR. The PTC paid \$2,500 for the appraisal and the "bottom line" was the appraiser determined the value of the real estate easement for the one-mile extension in the grant application was \$3,878. Money did not change hands because the easement was a responsibility of the Northern Indiana RR and now Gulf and Atlantic Railway.

Williams said she plans to visit Starke County in October and meet then with us. She said an exact date for her trip had not been determined.

On the evening of the same day, Kathy and Steve reported to the North Judson Town Council on progress of the Northwest Trail extension. Steve said the PTC is awaiting a draft contract from DNR to implement the grant and expected to receive it in the next two or three weeks. He added Kathy and Bob Aloï have negotiated terms of the engineering contract. The PTC Board and Rhonda, as President, have okayed the contract terms. Implementation of the engineering contract is contingent upon concurrence with the DNR contract. Steve outlined the phone conference with Kelle Williams earlier in the day. The Town Council questioned whether Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum was provided notice of the pending sale, and given the opportunity to exercise its right of first refusal, before completing the sale. Steve said the PTC had not received notice of the sale from either Gulf & Atlantic or MB and that he and Kathy had initiated the contact with Gulf & Atlantic.

Branding, Identity and Continuity (BIC) Committee Update

Steve said the BIC Committee will resume activities soon. Current members are Russ Blais; Linda and Susan Byer; Kathy, Steve and Yancy Lucas; Sharon Smead; Brian McMillin; Kirt Verhagen; Rick Vlaming; Peg Stalbrink; Deb Mix; Mike McGregor; and Kevin Kennedy. The BIC Committee will do most of its work by email or remotely.

Steve praised Rick's extraordinary efforts regarding the you-are-here signs. He said that Rick replaced all the existing obsolete signs and placed three new signs to serve our two-mile southeast trail extension. For the three new signs, Rick donated treated lumber posts, painted them green for continuity, and sank them in holes he made through ballast that adjoins our asphalt trail. The template for these signs was developed by Yancy and Susan and approved through the BIC Committee—both in their obsolete and current forms. The PTC members gave a round of applause to Rick for so generously sharing his expertise, donating materials, and providing labor.



Example of a new You-Are-Here sign placed by Rick Vlaming. This sign is located in the partial shade of a walnut tree at the trailhead next to Starke County Road 700 East.

Image by Kathy Lucas

Linda said involvement in the BIC Committee by Susan and her was for the purpose of developing the you-are-here signs. She was uncertain about future participation.

Steve responded that during the August 24 meeting, members talked about a variety of issues. Brian referenced obtaining banners for use at PTC booths and other events. There was discussion of the new Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail designation and the need for wayfinding signage to identify the “Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail”. Peg had spoken of historic English Lake and an image of Lew Wallace and that the trail extension should include interpretive signage.

Kathy said the BIC Committee could help develop a logo used on signage and otherwise relative to the new Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail (perhaps abbreviated in some contexts as the “GKM Trail”). Steve added the logo might include an iconic animal native to the area. For example, sandhill cranes are frequently depicted locally. But his thought was that they may have already saturated regional logos. He suggested that Linda might have an idea for a mammal or bird that is native and colorful. She identified the wood duck as a possibility.

Although discussions are at an embryonic stage, Kathy Carrier has proposed a strategy to improve visibility and connectivity between the Erie Trail and Bass Lake Beach. She has offered the possibility of commissioning Yancy to design signage similarly to how she supported the *Vin Fiz* interpretative signage at Aldine.

Steve said he would distribute suggestions for signage and banners among the members of the BIC Committee before the October general membership meeting. Members who wish to be added to the BIC Committee are encouraged to let him know.

English Lake Kayak Launch Update

The PTC has long supported the concept of improved kayak access to public waters in Starke County, particularly the Kankakee River and the Yellow River. Our “2016 Vision” and “Future Vision 2022” recognized the value of these rivers as blueways. The PTC wrote in support of a Starke County Park Board initiative in 2017 to develop land for a kayak and canoe launch on the Yellow River, and the PTC offered financial support for signage had the project become a reality. It did not.

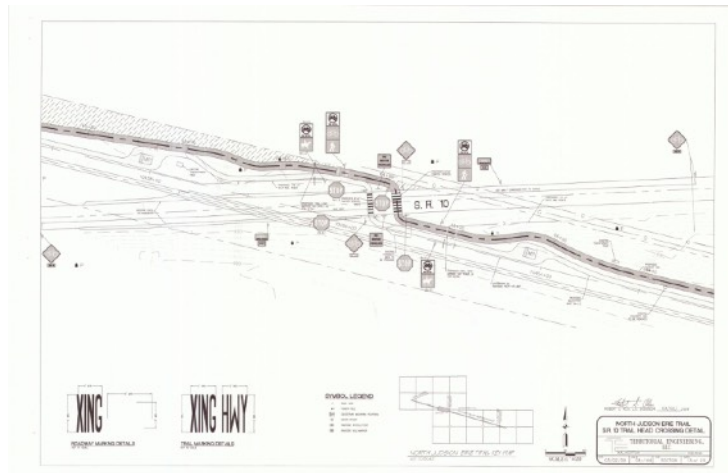
Kathy Norem, President, Starke County Convention and Visitors Commission, reported this April to the Starke County Park Board on progress of two new kayak launch projects. She said the CVC Board committed \$30,000 for two new kayak launch projects—one at Wythogan Park in Knox and the other on the Yellow River at its confluence with the Kankakee River at English Lake. A stipulation was that the Park Board provide a \$5,000 match. The match did not materialize.

Kathy Norem requested our organization to appear before the Park Board on September 12 and express support for the kayak project at English Lake. Kathy Lucas reported to the PTC that she and Steve appeared as requested. Steve spoke favorably on the project as part of our mission to support blueways. Better kayak access to the Yellow River, the Kankakee River and perhaps the Kline Arm would be provided. The new English Lake kayak launch site is in close proximity to the proposed pathway of the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail and would provide opportunities for better connectivity among trail and kayak users as well as the Hoosier Valley Railroad.

During the Park Board meeting, Kathy Norem said the CVC Board would commit the final \$5,000 for the English Lake kayak launch. Bob Aloji of Territorial Engineering developed the plans for the launch. He said the DNR had approved a Floodway Permit for the project, but the permit has since expired. He said he would communicate with the DNR to determine if it might allow the permit to be reinstated, or, if not, to obtain a new permit. Bob said Territorial Engineering would not charge an additional fee for these services. At its September 12 meeting, the Park Board approved construction and future management of the kayak launch at English Lake.

INDOT SR 10 Trail Crossing Update

Steve said that during the August meeting, he mentioned receiving an Early Coordination letter from INDOT regarding a preventative maintenance Hot Mix Project on Indiana 10 scheduled for the spring of 2025. At the direction of the PTC Board of Directors, he made a timely comment supporting the project and requesting additionally that INDOT restore markings at the Erie Trail crossing near the former rest park to conform with 2009 design standards—or such standards as INDOT would use today. He passed out a handout that included the INDOT invitation to comment and the PTC’s response. In a September 8 email, INDOT acknowledged receipt of our response. Immediately below is a copy of the 2009 crossing design.



Steve said he was unsure whether INDOT would provide a written reply to our response or make any adjustments based on our response. Since implementation of the project was not scheduled until the summer of 2025, he did not anticipate any reply for several months.

Review of Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Linda said that again this year the HVRM is offering two unique experiences for its Pumpkin Trains: Diesel Pumpkin Trains and Steam Pumpkin Trains. The Diesel Pumpkin Trains take passengers on a 45-minute, 10-mile round-trip journey from North Judson across the Kankakee River and back. Steam Pumpkin Trains feature the Bock Lumber Company No. 1 steam locomotive and take passengers on a shorter 20-25 minute nearly three mile round-trip. Linda said these kinds of “event trains” are major fund raisers for HVRM.

Open Discussion

Four topics were discussed during open discussion:

A. Trail Counters

Joan reported by email on August 29 that she collected available data from our trail counters through August 27, 2023. She reflected the daily data “was just too many lines to make much sense. As expected, more usage on weekends....” She did observe that numbers were lower in August, perhaps “because it was so hot.”

Joan also reported upon another vandalism at the counter located west of US Highway 35. But the elements of the counter seem still to be functional, and she suggested that the counter be relocated to a less visible site. Linda and Kathy agreed that relocation was a good idea. Linda said she had a new location in mind but wanted to look at the site to determine if the angle of the viewer and distance from the trail would be viable.

B. Erie Night Glow Ride

Char Liss is developing the inaugural “Erie Night Glow Ride” equestrian event to be held on the evening of Sunday, October 29. Staging would be at 5:00 p.m., CDT, (6:00 p.m., EDT) at 8120 South US 35, Knox, with the ride to begin at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT). Pre-registration and a signed waiver would be required. Char is suggesting but is not requiring participants to make a \$10 donation to the Prairie Trails Club. The ride would be northwest from US Highway 35 to Starke County Road 300 East with a return to US 35—a four mile round trip. Bob Albert sent an email on September 12 to Char and Linda in which he stated “HVRM is agreeable to the ride.”

C. Mowing Along and Near Trail West of Starke County Road 250 West

Kirt suggested the PTC consider committing \$2,000 annually to mowing the former rest park and the grassy area between the railway and the asphalt trail west of Indiana State Road 10. This area was mowed about ten times in 2023. Kathy asked if this meant Erie Trail Travelers were no longer going to fulfill this function. Kirt responded that he thought she was correct.

Members discussed the need to address weed encroachment on the trail from the north side. Steve said he had invited but not received an estimate on this cost from the group which performed mowing this year. Linda suggested the area north of the trail might most efficiently controlled with chemical spraying. The presence of tree-of-heaven and poison hemlock on the north side of the trail is a complication. Members observed that the PTC at one time assisted with weed control but have not since the Erie Trail Travelers have been active. In any event, weed control on the north side of the trail would be in addition to the \$2,000 annual cost which Kirt referenced.

Linda said the growing season is ending for 2023. The PTC has the winter to think about Kirt’s proposal.

D. Bicycles for Children

Russ said that the Starke County Park Board had bicycles at the Bass Lake Beach they no longer wanted. Bikes for Kids, Inc., a Northern Indiana based 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, collects and refurbishes bikes and distributes them at its Annual Spring Bike Giveaway. Bikes for Kids will help get the Park Board's bikes in the hands of children. Larry added that Kids Closet also distributes bikes to children.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was set for Thursday, October 26, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:06 p.m., CDT (8:06 p.m., EDT).