

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

June 22, 2022

MEMBERS

**Diane Blais
Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Sharon Snead
Kirt Verhagen
Larry Wickert**

**Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison
Char Groet, DeMotte Trail Organization
Michelle Lagestee, DeMotte Trail Organization**

Call to Order by Vice President and Introductions of Attendees

Rhonda Milner, Vice President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") on June 22, 2022 at the Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox at 5:35 pm, CDT (6:35 pm, EDT). She welcomed Michelle Lagestee and Char Groet who are helping to form a new trail non-profit in Jasper County, and notably near DeMotte. Persons attending then introduced themselves.

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of May 26, 2022

Russell Blais moved to approve, with clerical corrections, draft minutes of the May 26, 2022 membership meeting. Kirt Verhagen seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Update on Fiscal Reconciliation of NLT-01-07

Kathy Lucas reported the two trail counters were received from TRAFx Research Ltd. She forwarded payment by check, and TRAFx acknowledged receipt of the check by email, but the check has not yet cleared the bank. About \$300 will remain from the grant for NLT-01-07. She suspected batteries for the counters might prove expensive and thus exhaust most of the \$300, but they merely use AA batteries.

Sharon Smead recommended using the \$300 to purchase and place a horse hitching rack at the southeastern trailhead on Starke County 700 East. Bob Albert, Liaison from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, stated that doing so would be acceptable on either side of the road. The membership agreed to this approach. Sharon will work with Paul and Linda Byer to identify and purchase materials.

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

Kathy distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report as follows:



**Treasurer's Report
June 22, 2022
Bass Lake, Indiana**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 5/26/22	\$55,111.75
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INCOME

05/19/22	Deposit (Amazon Smile donation)	\$8.83
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05/23/22	T-Shirt Sales (Thanks to Peg Stalbrink)	<u>55.00</u>
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Total Income	\$63.83
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EXPENSES

00/00/00	-None-	\$0.00
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Total Expenses	\$0.00
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ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 6/22/22	\$55,175.78*
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Kathy thanked Peg Stalbrink for her efforts to sell T-shirts and other merchandise. She also reflected that TrafX, a Canadian corporation, has been paid \$1,960 for two counters and has acknowledged receipt of payment, but the deduction has not been posted on the PTC's bank account.

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

RESTRICTED FUNDS

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (UR Here)	1,418.54
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Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020)	Northwest Trail Extension	5,000.00
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021)	NW Extension or Operations	5,000.00
Hardesty Memorial Grant (2018)	Wayfinding/historic signage	4,205.10
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donation	Future Vision/Website	662.50
DNR NLT-01-07 Grant	NLT-01-07	2,269.74
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	Northwest Trail Extension	6,000.00
Stalbrink Donation	Scholarship or most needed	100.00
Blais/Vlaming Bench	For trailhead at 450/210	350.00
McMillin Bench	For trailhead at 450/210	350.00
Maintenance Fund (mower sale)	For general maintenance	4,000.00
VFW Grant	For "Trail Improvements"	5,000.00
Hardesty Memorial Grant	For Trail Maintenance	<u>3,500.00</u>

\$37,855.88

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$55,175.78
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$37,855.88</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$17,319.70

Rhonda asked if there was a motion for approval.

Diane Blais moved to approve the Treasurer's Report and Restricted and Unrestricted Funds Report as presented. Larry Wickert seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Membership Approval of Future Vision (2022-2026) Master Plan

Steve Lucas said the Branding, Identity, and Continuity ("BIC") Committee met by Zoom call on December 9 to begin addressing several issues, including updating the "2016 Erie Trail Future Vision", with what is now considered for approval as the PTC's Future Vision (2022-2026). BIC Committee Draft 4 was a substantial committee effort, and it includes numerous changes as a result of proposals offered in the evolution between Draft 1 and Draft 4. This final draft was distributed to members and those on our courtesy list with the email announcing tonight's agenda. Draft 4 was accompanied by a brief overview. In effect, if approved by the membership, "these documents would become our new 5-Year Master Plan." No one has sought additional changes since distribution of Draft 4 and the overview to the membership in the email announcing the agenda.

Paul moved that the membership adopt the "PTC's Future Vision (2022-2026)", with the overview, as its Master Plan to update and replace the "2016 Erie Trail Future Vision". Sharon seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Updates to Erie Trail Base Map

Another issue identified by the BIC Committee on December 9 was need for an updated Erie Trail Base Map in light of completion of the trail extension southeast of US Highway 35. Yancy Lucas has now completed the update. On June 13, PTC webmaster Stephen Antisdell removed former maps and replaced them with a new map and a downloadable version. As acknowledged generally on the new map, the PTC still needs final approvals from governmental agencies or organizations regarding connectors and transAmerican routes. The base map will later be used in various contexts and formats

Russ is seeking sponsors to help defray the cost of new brochures that would feature the base map and include modifications reflecting management and availability changes

to sponsors and their services. There were seven ads sold to sponsors in the recent brochure, but the number will be increased to eight if there is sufficient interest.

Russ said many residents and visitors to Bass Lake are unaware of the location or even the existence of the Erie Trail. He spoke of the need for directional signage between SR 10 and the trail, particularly along SCR 600 East. Steve said the current share-the-road status was approved by the Starke County Commissioners, and he believed the PTC should seek the Commissioners' approval before acting on a modification to that status. Larry volunteered to help coordinate a request to the Starke County Commissioners to modify share-the-road connectors. S-13 (which uses most prominently Starke County Road 450 East) and S-15 (Starke County Road 600 East) would be extended. Use of busy Starke County Road 800 South would be greatly reduced. A new S-17 (Starke County Road 700 East) would be recommended.

US Bicycle Route 35 is one of the transAmerican routes from which approval is needed for relocation southeast of US Highway 35. The state agency primarily responsible for managing US Bike Routes is INDOT. At the national level, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials ("AASHTO"), sets standards and coordinates the growing US Bike Route network. Brandon Burgoa, who is INDOT's Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, emailed Kathy on the morning of the membership meeting that the approval process is moving forward. He added AASHTO is currently developing a press release for the changes and additions made to the USBR network in the spring. He invited Kathy to help develop the press release for US Bike Route 35.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Update: North Judson Corridor Workgroup

Kirt spoke to the HVRM Board of Directors on June 11. One of the topics of discussion was the possible formation of a workgroup to sort and maximize interests of key players in the railroad corridor through North Judson. These were identified as the HVRM, the Town of North Judson, the Northern Indiana Railroad ("NIR"), and the PTC. Among the issues for consideration would be identification of a trail route through town. The Board agreed to join the workgroup and appointed Robert Barcus, the HVRM's representative.

The North Judson Town Council placed "Designation of Representative to Workgroup for Trail Extension" on its June 20 agenda. Larry and Steve spoke to the need to identify a trail route and expressed support for the workgroup and the Town's participation. Steve praised Larry's concise and complete presentation. The Town agreed in principle to the concept but deferred action to appoint a Council member representative until its June 27 meeting. Andrew Rowe said he would help facilitate once a corridor workgroup is formed.

On June 13, Steve had emailed NIR President of Operations, Brian Miller, to invite his company's participation in the corridor workgroup. Miller deferred to the NIR's Attorney, Thomas Hayes. Subsequent to the North Judson Town Council meeting on June 20, Steve and Thomas Hayes spoke by telephone. Hayes indicated that he would be the NIR representative on the corridor workgroup.

Kirt, Larry, and Steve outlined steps taken toward formation of the North Judson corridor workgroup. Included was reference to a pending Bob Alois boundary survey of two parcels involved in the land transfer from the Town to the NIR. Steve reminded the PTC membership that Kirt and Larry have been leading efforts to extend the trail through

North Judson. By consensus the membership approved the appointments of Kirt and Larry to serve as the PTC representatives on the corridor workgroup.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

John Bawcum, President of the Friends of Panhandle Pathway, invited PTC members to observe an asphalt crack fill machine demonstration on June 9. Brian McMillin, Paul, Russ, Steve and Kathy met him near Star City in Pulaski County.



Friends of Panhandle
Pathway demonstrate
asphalt crack fill
machine

Image by Kathy Lucas

Members agreed there are places on the Erie Trail, particularly near wetlands, that need more robust treatment than would be afforded by a crack fill machine. But Paul noted filling lesser cracks could be accomplished, reducing the damage from cracks filling with water turned to ice, and helping defer the need for major resurfacing. Members debated the merits of purchasing a new or used machine, as well as the feasibility of rental equipment. There was agreement that purchase of a new asphalt crack fill machine, if it did not exceed about \$1,500, was economically feasible and a worthy use of maintenance funds. After extended discussion, an ad hoc committee was formed that included Linda Byer, Paul, Russ, and Brian to pursue purchase of a fill machine, similar to the one used for the Panhandle Pathway and consistent with the \$1,500 cost estimate.

Paul donated use of his tractor with 5.5 hours of labor on June 11 and 4.5 hours of labor on June 12 to mow the trail from Starke County 700 East to Starke County 100 West. Steve assisted on June 11 with edging along the two-mile extension southeast of US Highway 35. On June 21 Paul and Russ performed deck repairs to Bogus Run bridge.

Linda reflected it has been too hot recently for the application of glyphosate to help with vegetation control along the trail edges. She believes an application will occur by the end of June if weather conditions are favorable.

Update of Warrior Expeditions Trek on the Great American Rail-Trail

For the second year, five combat veterans bicycled through North Judson on their Great American Rail-Trail trek from Washington, DC to Washington State's Pacific Coast. The Warrior Expeditions and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy are sponsors. Warrior Expeditions

is a veteran nonprofit outdoor therapy program that helps combat veterans transition from wartime experiences through long distance outdoor expeditions.

While in Starke County, the trekkers were hosted by the PTC. Russ and Brian took them to the VFW Post and to the Veterans Memorial Plaza in Knox. Trekkers stayed overnight at Kathy and Steve's trailside home where they and PTC members shared an outdoor barbecue. He said trekkers had completed more than 1000 miles of the nearly 4000-mile journey, with some of them in Iowa with others in Illinois.



Warrior trekkers, Richard Rivadeneira and Mike Buckley, travel west on the morning of June 21



Warrior trekker, Carlos Monterroza, arrives from the east on the afternoon of June 21



Warrior trekkers, David Davila and Carlos Monterroza check out two of the youth signs they enjoyed as they travel west on the morning of June 22



Images by Kathy Lucas

Informal Review of HVRM Activities

Bob Albert reported the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum had a very good Mint Festival weekend. "Our Sunday crowd was the best we've had.... Training for the steam engine is ongoing—probably for the rest of the summer."

On June 16, the HVRM announced the National Park Service added the Chicago & Erie Railroad bridge in Pulaski County to the National Register of Historic Places. Bob said the bridge is the first item of national significance nominated by the HVRM that has been added to the National Register.

The railroad bridge spans the Tippecanoe River northwest of Monterey in Pulaski County. In a press release, the HVRM reflected in part regarding its placement on the National Register:

“Museum representatives will be on-hand at the Indiana State Fair in Indianapolis this August. The museum will be presented with official State and National Register certificates during a special ceremony recognizing the achievement.

‘This is a significant accomplishment for the museum,’ said Treasurer Robert Barcus. ‘I’m very excited to see it added to the National Register so we can help preserve this unique piece of railroad history for future generations to enjoy this marvel of engineering.

‘The bridge is not currently connected to the museum by rail but using the structure for future trail use is always a possibility. The museum owns the entire right-of-way between North Judson and Monterey, Indiana, and has worked with the Prairie Trails Club in opening the corridor for public use.

‘The bridge is part of a rail-banked corridor with interim trail use,’ said Barcus. ‘While the museum currently does not have any plans to relay tracks to Monterey, the PTC may want to use the bridge. It could be a huge draw for cyclists and hikers in the future.’”



Facing north and northwest on April 10, 2022

Images by Kathy Lucas



Bob said additionally that the “C&O steam engine is currently up for consideration” for the National Register.

Bob also reported that the HVRM Board met with representatives of Buckeye Pipeline concerning maintenance planned for this summer. He said Buckeye suggested it will make a donation to HVRM to help defray expenses and accommodate for inconvenience that is likely to result. Because the inconvenience is likely to impact trail use more than

HVRM railroad operations, the Board has graciously determined to pass through 80% of the donation to the PTC. In discussions with the Board, Kirt committed to having the PTC allocate any pass through in a manner that will also support HVRM needs, such as with asphalt repairs or vegetation control. As noted in the PTC's May 26, 2022 minutes, Buckeye has also had conversations with PTC representatives concerning its summer activities.

Kirt provided an overview of his coordination efforts relative to the activities of the Erie Trail Travelers group within the HVRM. He said the group planned to schedule its annual chili dinner for September 24, including activities at the trailhead on the former State Road 10 rest park. PTC members agreed to refrain from scheduling an activity that would conflict with plans for the chili dinner. He said plans are underway to design new signage to honor those providing support for trail maintenance in a way that would be inclusive. These plans would incorporate PTC input as they move forward.

Starke County Chamber of Commerce "Business of the Month Award"

Vice President Rhonda Milner expressed the membership's appreciation and honor at having been selected by the Starke County Chamber of Commerce as the May 2022 Business of the Month. Russ, Diane, Brian, and Anita attended the Chamber's meeting on June 1 and accepted the award on behalf of the PTC. Brian said he believed he spoke for all four when he said it was an enjoyable and informative ceremony.



Image courtesy of Brenda Palmer, Director, Starke County Chamber of Commerce

Linda reflected, that although appreciative of the honor, she did not consider the PTC to be a business. Kathy concurred and said the Chamber of Commerce understands the distinction, and the selection was the Chamber's way of honoring our organization for the contributions made to Starke County through trail maintenance and expansion. She added that last year Russ and Diane made a personal contribution to the Chamber, and this year she and Steve made a personal contribution. These were made on behalf of the PTC, but without using PTC funds, to help underline our status as a charitable non-profit organization rather than a business.

Russ said he praised the Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (“SCILL”) and the Starke County Economic Foundation for its support of SCILL. During the June 1 event, he described the creative work of SCILL students who constructed bike racks for the trail.

Brian expressed interest in a continuing relationship with the Chamber. Rhonda and Deb Mix encouraged him to seek inclusion on the Chamber’s mailing list and to help foster the PTC’s relationship with the Starke County Chamber of Commerce and its members.

“Indiana Year of the Trails” Reception in Indianapolis

Also on June 1, Indiana Gov. Holcomb was named a Doppelt Family Rail-Trail Champion, the first acting governor to receive the honor. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy gave award Gov. Holcomb the award. The Conservancy and the General Assembly’s Indiana Trails Caucus sponsored the “Indiana Year of the Trails Reception” at the Farmers Market Café in the Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis. At the invitation of the Conservancy, Steve and Kathy attended and there met with national and regional officials to discuss advancing the Great American Rail-Trail in northwest Indiana.



Mitch Barloga, President of the Greenways Foundation, and Coordinator of the Indiana Segment of the American Discovery Trail (North Branch), addresses reception invitees at the Indiana State Museum

Review of Starke County Parks and Recreation Board Activities

Larry, Russ and Brian attended the June 14 meeting of the Starke County Parks and Recreation Board. Brian told the Board that on Memorial Day weekend PTC volunteers had assisted Parks Superintendent, Camryn Kopka, with processing pier slips and grounds maintenance at the Bass Lake Beach. He praised Cam’s efforts and emphasized the need for the Parks Board to give her the support needed to achieve success.

Larry said he told the Board that some PTC members have expressed interest in having it take a greater role over maintenance and oversight of the Erie Trail, at least in proximity to park facilities like the Bass Lake Beach and Campground. Larry indicated the Board did not offer “any declarative comments, but I had the sense they were generally positive to that idea.”

Larry outlined Board discussions of actions anticipated at the triangle formed by Starke County Roads 450 East and 210 South. He said the Board has again modified its focus so its first choice is now a trailhead near Starke County Road 600 East within the Bass Lake Beach. The triangle was relegated to a second choice, and in the absence of a building or restrooms, would serve primarily as a spill-over parking lot for the DNR’s public access site. The Board discussed reallocation of private financial support offered for the triangle and having it redirected to Bass Lake Beach.

Russ said Rik Ritzler estimated the cost of a building at the triangle formed by Starke County Roads 450 East and 210 South was between \$80,000 and 100,000. Rik said private sources would cover approximately half the cost. Russ indicated the beach pavilion “needs a lot of work inside, but when it was in the Stellar plans, architects indicated what was necessary to update it.” He said during the Park Board meeting “it was mentioned that the beach, being just a short distance from 600 East, would also be a good access to the trail.”

Deb reflected her understanding a fee would be required for entrance into Bass Lake Beach. Several members expressed concerns that a trailhead behind a fee gate would be an unwelcoming proposition for cyclists seeking a restroom. Because Bass Lake Beach fronts on a state rather than a county highway, possibilities offered by the triangle would be lost for a share-the-road designation going toward Knox. Several PTC members had doubts the private funding offered for the triangle would be transferable to a trailhead within Bass Lake Beach. Members urged Larry to share these concerns with Park Board members, individually or during its next meeting.

Celebration of National Trails Day on June 4

On June 4, PTC members celebrated National Trails Day with both a bike ride and a walk on the Erie Trail, followed by a pitch-in dinner and barbecue at Steve and Kathy’s house.

In association with the celebration, Kay Reimbold shared that she had recently assisted two trekkers on the Erie Trail.

“One was from California and left from Rehoboth Beach Delaware. His name was George. He stopped by SS Cyril & Methodius Church in North Judson looking for a place to stay. He spent the night in the Church basement. Very nice guy.

“The other was Clay from Kentucky. He left also from Delaware and hoped to arrive in Washington State by the end of October. He also came to the Church on a Wednesday after 6 pm Mass looking for a place to pitch his tent. I invited him to stay at our house. He did and we had a very nice visit. He was hoping to walk 20 to 22 miles a day with 37 pounds on his back.

“So nice we have this trail running through our communities with many uses.”

Also, our webmaster, Stephen Antisdal, emailed on National Trails Day “a screenshot of the last 90 days traffic info. Some interesting insights: 95% new visitors. Time on site is excellent. Lot of [website] interest in About and Maps plus Meetings and OSSIS.” He also reported interest in Linda’s geocaching project.

Introduction to New Indiana E-Bike Laws

According to the *Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2021-2025)*, E-Bikes are now “regulated the same as bicycles....” They are assigned to one of “three classes based on their maximum speed and components. All classes of e-bikes must follow the same rules and be given the same responsibilities as any other bicycle.... [O]nly Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes are allowed on multi-use, hard surface trails or paths,” such as the Erie Trail, “unless a broader or stricter policy is specified by the local authority....”

Steve said he was uncertain what entity is the “local authority”, but he suggested it was likely a county’s board of commissioners, except within a municipality where the town or city’s government would serve in this capacity. He said if membership wished to apply a broader or stricter policy, he believed the initiative should follow an HVRM resolution.

Kathy distributed a two-page edited version of the Indiana statutes that now apply. In general, the statutes seem pretty straight-forward, although she and Steve agree there may be one internal inconsistency. Steve said “We’d like our members to have a chance to take a look at the statutes. Perhaps we can take a more in-depth look at them during next month’s meeting, or if you wish, please give one of us a call or send an email or text with questions.”

The membership discussed the new laws. Bob Albert reflected he agreed the statutes were reasonably clear. There was an apparent consensus that signage needed to be modified to inform cyclists of the governing law, whether applied in its current form or pursuant to a broader or stricter policy. No motion was made nor was any action taken. On request, a member would be provided with the two-page edited version of the statutes distributed during the meeting.

OSSIS Project Update

In 2019 the Constellation of Starke applied to the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs for a major grant which included an in-scale model of our solar system along the Erie Trail. Funding was awarded for other aspects of the application but not this one. The Starke County Community Foundation repeated the in-scale concept as an element of a 2020 grant application to the Lilly Endowment’s GIFT VII program, and it received \$25,000 for what became in part Our Solar System in Scale (the “OSSIS Project”).

The Community Foundation formed a workgroup to design and place models of the Sun, planets, and associated heavenly bodies in-scale as to size and the distances between them. Planet models were completed and placed along the trail, but following storm damage to several models and the misplacement of two others on the equestrian trail, so (with the exception of the Saturn model), they were removed.

Using a new and sturdier structure, the Community Foundation and OTES replaced the Mercury model on the morning of the membership meeting (June 22). Additional planet models are expected to be replaced in the near future.



Depicted in the images above are from left to right: obverse facing southeast, reverse facing northwest, and sideview showing the new double thickness which sandwiches two metal posts. These contrast with the former single thickness supported by a single post.

Obverse signs identify the mathematic and scientific elements of heavenly bodies. Reverse signs consider their mystique and beauty. Images courtesy of the indefatigable Michael McGregor who took them and many others on one of his almost innumerable bicycle rides.

Guidance for Email Meeting and Draft Minute Notices

During the May meeting, Steve said concerns have been raised by a few members about the public nature of our growing distribution list and visible email addresses. Following a brief discussion, members agreed that the Secretary should, upon advance request by any individual, send “blind copies” of minutes and notices. Otherwise, circulation of these kinds of documents would remain unchanged from current PTC practices.

AARP Bulletin (Indiana Edition)

Several PTC members and friends have commented on the story “*Building Trails for all to Enjoy*” on page 50 of the Indiana edition of the AARP Bulletin for May 2022. The story reports favorably on the PTC’s successful effort to extend the trail with a Next Level Trails program grant in “Indiana’s Year of the Trails” and also discusses the critical need for funding to provide for trail upkeep.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, July 20, 2022 at 5:30 pm, CDT (6:30 pm, EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake (Knox).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m., CDT (8:31 p.m., EDT).