

# MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

May 11, 2023

## MEMBERS

Paul Byer  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathy Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Anita McMillan  
Brian McMillan  
Rhonda Milner  
Peg Stalbrink  
Rich Vallicelli  
Larry Wickert

## GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison  
Linda Brebner, President of the Hebron Park Board and  
Member of Veterans Memorial Committee  
Frank Stalbaum, President, Hebron Stormwater  
Management Board  
Stephanie Vandy, Hebron Board of Zoning Appeals  
Jenny Wallace, Hebron Park Board  
Amy Tebbe, Guest of Joan Hardesty

## Call to Order by President

On May 11, 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 5:39 pm, CDT (6:39 pm, EDT).

## "North Judson Celebrate Trails Day April 22, 2023" Final Report

In spite of chilly temperatures accompanied by high wind, rain and sleet, "North Judson Celebrate Trails Day April 22, 2023" was held as scheduled at the grounds of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum and southeast along the Erie Trail.



Images courtesy of Anne Kingma and Kathy Lucas

Constituting a "signature event" of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy along its preferred route for the Great American Rail-Trail, a special thanks is due to the HVRM for providing

a free train ride to highlight shared rail and trail usage of the corridor going southeast of North Judson, as well as plans for an extended trail northwest to the Kankakee River and then on to LaCrosse in LaPorte County. Thanks also to Kirt Verhagen for arranging to have the grounds mowed in anticipation of the event.

Steve said the event was “sort of a three-ring circus having different events in different places both at once and at different times”. Attendance was estimated at 180 people. Below is an image courtesy of Michelle Lagestee taken early in the day’s festivities.



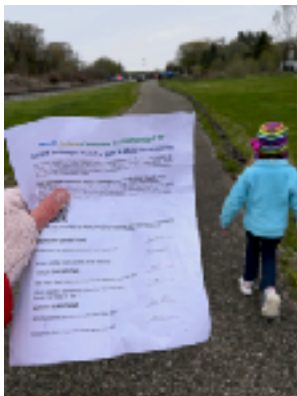
Rich Vallicelli was MC for 9:30 am opening remarks. Brian K. Housh, Midwest Policy Manager for the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, with offices in Yellow Springs, Ohio, was the keynote speaker. He was joined by Andrew Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer of the North Judson Town Council; Justin Kiel, Vice President of the LaPorte County Council; Erica Gummere, DNR Grants Coordinator, Indiana Division of State Parks; Marty Lucas, chief designer of Our Solar System in Scale (OSSIS); and Steve Lucas, Chair of PTC’s Board of Directors. Below Brian Housh addresses the audience. Image courtesy of K. Lucas.



The event was designed to and did bring together representatives of trail organizations and advocates within proximity to the PTC. In addition to Justin Kiel, who is actively seeking a trail extension from the Kankakee River to LaCrosse, those attending included Michelle Lagestee, Anne Kingma, Charlene Groet and Grant Allen of the of the Jasper County Trails Club, Inc.; Fred Kasten and Kevin Whiteman of the Friends of Panhandle Pathway; and Frank Stalbaum of the Hebron segment of the Great American Rail-Trail and American Discovery Trail. On the following page from left to right are Michelle Lagestee, Brian Housh, Frank Stalbaum, Kevin Whitehouse, Steve Lucas, Rhonda Milner, Fred Kasten, Eric Gummere, and Justin Kiel. Image courtesy of K. Lucas.



Beginning at 9:30 am, sets of parents and their children set about the self-guided tour of the OSSIS Project Scavenger Hunt from Mercury to Venus, Earth, and Mars—the full round trip being about a mile long. For those who undertook the trip, prizes included Bass Lake coloring books donated by Kathy Carrier, Solar System Bouncy-Balls donated by Rich, and to recognize Earth Day, seed packets were donated by Purdue Extension (through Deb Mix) and Lowe’s in Plymouth (through Marc Vendl and Russ Blais). This activity received praise from several of the participants. A second self-guided tour by bicycle was designed to extend all the way from Mercury to Neptune, a round trip of 18 miles, but was made impracticable by the inclement weather.



The OSSIS Project Scavenger Hunt included a questionnaire which sought answers from both sides of the signs.

Image courtesy of A. King

Despite the inclement weather, Return to Normal (the Marty Lucas and Corinne Becknell Lucas music duo) performed without fee. Leslie Zank served fresh-brewed hot coffee. Michael McGregor shared with them free access to the electrical outlet at his Main Street home.



Images courtesy of K. Lucas and M. Lagestee

At 11:00 am, the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum began a free train ride starting from its Depot and traveling northwest to cross the Kankakee River at English Lake. The train then returned past the Depot and on to the former rest park at the intersections of the railway, State Roads 10 and 39, and Starke County Road 250 West. The ride highlighted plans for a trail extension through North Judson (for which an Indiana Trails Program grant application is pending), and, more ambitiously, northwest to LaCrosse. The ride provided an opportunity for the PTC and the LaCrosse contingent to outline aspirations to the DNR Grants Coordinator. It also illustrated the current ability of the railroads and the trail to share the corridor southeast of Main Street in North Judson.

Shown below are two images provided courtesy of Anne Kingma. On the left is the view from the perspective of one of the many children who enjoyed the train ride.

The view on the right provides perspective on two rail lines which cross the Kankakee River. The HVRM uses the former C&O Railroad, the railing of which can be seen in the right hand corner of the image. This railroad has been identified in an engineering analysis as suitable for a cantilever to carry a pedestrian and bike trail. At the center of the image is what had been the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge. The engineering analysis reflects that this bridge also appears to be in good condition structurally. Its ownership is unclear and use would require land acquisition to connect it to the active railroad line on which the PTC has an easement.



Kathy thanked Bob Albert for serving as Conductor and Paul Byer for assisting with the train ride.

Beginning at Noon, the PTC provided free hotdogs and chips next to the Depot. Diane Blais previously secured the hotdogs. Rhonda Milner and Anita and Brian McMillin cooked and distributed the food onsite.



Image courtesy of K. Lucas

**At about 12:30 pm, the PTC staged a brief color run for kids and their parents in the greenspace between the HVRM and American Oak Preserving Company. HVRM allowed us to close the adjacent parking area during the event. American Oak concurred with the activity. The event was brief but energetic with the kids receiving and spreading the color among themselves and the adults.**

**As the day progressed, the weather only worsened. Tents erected at Main Street were lifted into the wind and crashed together. The closing view looked much like a tornado had struck, but the only damages were to the tents.**

Image courtesy of Joan Hardesty



## **Review and Approval of Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds**

**Kathy said there was an error in the tendered April 13 Treasurer’s Report underreporting income by \$93.81, primarily due to timing of pending PayPal donations. She distributed to members an amended April 13 Treasurer’s Report with resulting adjustments also proposed to the Restricted/Unrestricted Fund. These changes were then recognized in a modified May 11 Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds.**

**At the meeting, Kathy circulated both the corrected April 13 Treasurer’s Report and the modified May 11 Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. The April 13 Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds are not included in these minutes, but if approved by the members, would be posted in their final form on the PTC website. The May 11 Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds follow:**



**Treasurer's Report  
May 11, 2023**

**FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)**  
**Balance forward from April 13, 2023**

**\$70,346.14**

**INCOME**

04/14/23	R. Stalbrink Mem: Owens	\$30.00
04/24/23	Network for Good	212.00
04/28/23	Merchandise from Celebrate Trails 2023	94.00
05/04/23	Amazon Smiles	5.00
05/09/23	R. Stalbrink Mem: Marsh	<u>96.02</u>

**Total Income                    \$437.02**

**EXPENSES**

04/20/23	Check #1133 Falk: mowing	2,000.00
04/20/23	Check #1134 OTES: You are Here signs	576.00
05/04/23	Check #1137 GenTech: glyphosate	<u>735.00</u>

**Total Expenses                    \$3,311.00**

**ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 05/11/23        \$67,472.16**

**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	(-288 U R Here signs)
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	3,767.10	(-288 U R Here signs)
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50	
			<b>\$5,560.14</b>

### Northwest (or Other Extension)

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	
			<b>\$42,600.00</b>

### Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	1,368.42	(-2,000 mowing)
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	1,783.42	(-735 glyphosate)
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,368.42	
Rich Stalbrink Mem Donations	Maintenance or most needed	2,699.11	(new 226.02+merged prior category)
			<b>\$8,219.37</b>

**Total Restricted 57.079.51**

<b>FIRST FARMERS BANK &amp; TRUST</b>	<b>TOTAL IN BANK</b>	<b>\$67,472.16</b>
	<b>— RESTRICTED FUNDS</b>	<b><u>\$57,079.51</u></b>
	<b>== UNRESTRICTED FUNDS</b>	<b>\$10,392.65</b>

Paul moved to approve correction of the April 13 Treasurer's Report to include the \$93.81 income that was previously omitted and for posting of the April 13 Treasurer's Report and Minutes with these corrections. Included in his motion was approval of the May 11 Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as circulated during the May 11 meeting. Brian seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

### Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of April 13, 2023

Joan Hardesty moved for approval of the membership meeting minutes of April 13, 2023 with inclusion of Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as circulated during the meeting. Anita seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

### Warrior Expeditions Ride Preparations

Kevin Bell of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy reminded us by email that, in association with the Warrior Expeditions, it is again sponsoring veterans on a transAmerican trek on the Great American Rail-Trail. Six veterans will be participating, four men and two women. They are expected to leave Washington, DC on May 16 and arrive at La Push,





## **Starke County Convention and Visitors Association Grant Invitation**

Steve said Kathy Norem, current President of the Starke County Convention and Visitors Association, sent the PTC an email in which she reported that the Association awards grants to non-profit organizations that are designed to increase tourism in Starke County. The fund is drawn from an Inn Keeper tax that is collected by law. Her email reflected that she wanted the PTC to be aware that a grant which would support the Erie Trail could qualify. The maximum award this year is \$1,500 per grantee. The submission deadline for a grant application is May 26. A completed application could be emailed to Norem or sent via the USPS to her at 53 East Mound Street in Knox.

Members discussed the grant opportunity and expressed their appreciation to Norem for making the PTC aware of it. With the time and energy expended hosting North Judson Celebrate Trails Day April 22, 2023, and which will be required for us to host the Warrior Expeditions and the Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk in the next two months, there was concern whether the PTC could handle yet another event this summer. Rhonda asked Bob Albert if he thought the HVRM would be interested in co-hosting an event. He answered that he believed his organization was already stretched to the limit with planned activities.

Membership directed that Steve express our appreciation to Norem for making us aware of the grant opportunity, but inform her that our current PTC commitments are all we should undertake this summer. Members asked Steve to also let her know the PTC would appreciate an opportunity to apply for a grant next summer.

## **Informal Review of HVRM Activities**

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison to the PTC, reported that the HVRM opened its regular season on the previous Saturday. He said considering the season it was a “pretty fair patronage.” Bob added that new injectors were acquired for the V-16 engine which powers the blue train.

## **Wayfinding Signage**

Steve said OTES Signs & Graphics completed the wayfinding (you-are-here type) signs on April 18. He and Kathy subsequently met with Rich Vlaming who has again agreed to provide the carpentry for their support posts and to lead the effort to replace signs west of US Highway 35 and add new signs at and east of US 35.

## **Trail Counters Update**

On June 6, Joan and Kathy attempted to ground-truth the trail counters. Unfortunately, they learned a piece of paper had been inserted in the more westerly counter that blocked its camera scope. The “paper wad” greatly hampered their effort to ground-truth the equipment, but they had good conversations with several trail users from nearby

counties. Joan said data received thus far supports trends we would probably expect: trail usage is generally higher on weekends and when the weather is nice.

### **Fourth Round of Next Level Trails**

Earlier on the meeting date, Gov. Eric Holcomb issued a press release through the DNR stating that \$30 million has been approved for the Fourth Round of Next Level Trails. The application period begins on July 1 and ends on August 1, 2023.

Kathy said Justin Kiel, now Vice President of the LaPorte County Council, has increased his match availability to \$250,000 for a trail extension north of the Kankakee River toward LaCrosse. Kiel intends to seek at its May 22 meeting a commitment for an additional \$200,000 match from the LaPorte County Council. The trail would likely be called the "Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail". Kathy, Peg, and Steve anticipate representing the PTC in support of the \$200,000 match request on May 22.

### **Next Membership Meeting**

The next membership meeting was set for Thursday, June 29, 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 7:23 p.m., CDT (8:23 p.m., EDT).