

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

December 7, 2023

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russ Blais
John Bulger
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Joan Hardesty
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Peg Stalbrink
Rich Vallicelli
Kirt Verhagen

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum
Rhonda Carpenter
Mark McMillin
Frank Stalbaum, Hebron Veterans Memorial Trail

Call to Order by Vice President

On December 7, 2023, Russ Blais, Vice 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 5:42 pm, CST (6:42 pm, EST).

Review and Approval of Minutes of November 16, 2023

Two sets of amendments were offered to the draft minutes.

(1) The first paragraph of the *Trail Counters Report* on page 6 would be stricken. This language would be inserted in its place:

"Joan Hardesty provided the trail counters report. She had observed an unusually high count west of US Highway 35 on November 4 and wondered if it was an anomaly. She asked Linda and Steve if either had thoughts on a possible reason for the high count. Linda noted Girl Scout troops were geocaching on the trail that day. Steve referenced the Erie Trail Glow Ride. This experience helps verify the counters' reliability."

(2) A *Trail Geocaching* section would be added at page 10 to read as follows:

"Steve said Linda asked him to pass along there are 'a lot of people doing geocaching,' including recently a Girl Scout troop. Linda has replaced 'a couple of caches that were missing.' The caches along the trail are west of US 35."

During the meeting, a question was posed as to the meaning of “geocaching”. In general terms, ‘geocaching’ is an outdoor recreational activity, in which participants use a GPS receiver or mobile device and other navigational techniques to hide and seek containers, called ‘caches’, at specific locations.”

Peg Stalbrink moved for approval of the minutes of November 16, 2023 with these two sets of amendments. John Bulger seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Election of Four Members to the Board of Directors

The seven members of the Board are elected for two-year terms on a staggered basis with three members elected in even years and four in odd years. The three members elected in 2022 were Diane Blais, Larry Wickert, and Peg Stalbrink. The four positions elected in 2021 and scheduled for action were held by Carolla Heilstedt, Sharon Smead, Kirt Verhagen and Steve Lucas.

Russ said Kirt and Steve have both expressed a willingness to again be considered for election as Board members. Rich Vallicelli and Charlotte Liss have also agreed to be considered for election. Russ asked if any other person wished to be considered or if any person wished to nominate another person to serve as a Board member. No other person asked to be considered, and no other person nominated another. Russ asked if the membership concurred by acclamation to elect Char, Rich, Steve and Kirt to the four available positions. There was membership concurrence.

Report of Holiday Fundraisers

Kathy Lucas started discussion of this item with a “Thank you, Peg!” She said Peg led a great team that included Peg’s sister Edi, daughter Tracey, and grandson Owen. PTC members who assisted at the booths and provided items for the sale included Joan Hardesty, Anita McMillin, Diane Blais and herself. The two Christmas bazaars run by Peg netted over \$1,000.



On the left, Peg and family. Image by Kathy Lucas.



On the right, the photo board display. Image by Joan Hardesty.

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
December 7, 2023**

**FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)
Balance on November 16, 2023**

\$111,030.13

INCOME

11/20/23	Merchandise (Peg Stalbrink)	\$20.00
11/270/23	Proceeds from Erie Trail Glow Ride (Char Liss)	200.00
12/04/23	Proceeds from Christmas Shopazaar (@ Bass Lake Fire Dept.—Peg)	376.00
12/04/23	Proceeds from Bass Lake Christmas Market (Peg)	<u>662.00</u>

Total Income \$1,258.00

EXPENSES

12/05/23	Reimbursement to K. Lucas for red “no unauthorized motor vehicles” signs	<u>\$568.78</u>
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Total Expenses \$568.78

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 12/07/23

\$111,719.35

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

**TOTAL AMOUNTS
PER CATEGORY**

Benches

Blais-Vlaming and McMillin Bench	\$350 each; awaiting placement	\$700.00	\$700.00
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Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	960.64	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	3,198.32	<i>reduced by 568.78 for no MV signs</i>
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50	
			\$4,821.46

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	
Rails to Trails Conservancy	Trail Extension	7,500.00	
			\$75,700.00

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>7,269.48</u>	
			\$15,373.95

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$96,595.41

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$111,719.35
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$96,595.41</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$15,123.94

Paul Byer moved for approval of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Brian McMillin seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Consideration of Precept Partners Extended Services Agreement

Kathy initiated a discussion of an extended services agreement proposed by our web service provider, Precept Partners, that could reduce the likelihood of cyber theft. She previously shared the proposal with our Board of Directors for input.

Russ reflected that the proposal would result in a minimum annual cost for web services of \$1,200. Our current costs average about \$700 annually, and the extended services agreement would include some but not all of those costs.

Linda said she discussed the proposal with her son. Her perception was the proposed services might augment security, but the way the PTC uses its website does not pose a great risk of cyber theft.

Mark McMillin said the PTC might wish to consider Square Online as a possible option for potentially better security at a modest cost increase.

After an extended discussion, Kathy said she would check on security risks that might be posed by our use of RunSignup for a walk/run event. Members agreed that absent a determination that RunSignup would pose a significant risk, no modification should be made at this time to the PTC's arrangement for security with Precept Partners.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul reported on his efforts to obtain estimates to assist with vegetation maintenance along the trail. One of the estimates for the area from Aldine to US 35 was in the amount of \$50,000. He said the person making the estimate was thorough and effective, but he understood the PTC does not have the ability to fund a project this costly.

Paul and Linda reflected the winter provides a good opportunity to perform vegetation maintenance. Some farmers with the right equipment are not as busy as during planting, growing, and harvest seasons. Membership consensus was that an effort should be pursued to push back invasives this winter. Kirt moved to approve an expenditure of up to \$3,000 at a site or sites Paul and Linda determine most effective along the Erie Trail this winter for vegetation control. John seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Kirt expressed an interest in further vegetation maintenance initiatives. Other members are encouraged to join Paul, Linda, and him to advance the purposes of the Maintenance Workgroup.

Kathy learned at the Bass Lake Christmas Market on December 2 that the Sanders family has mowed and provided other maintenance along the trail east of US 35. She expressed appreciation on behalf of the PTC for their support.

Steve added that Tabitha Balzer, with help from her son Cyrus Balzer and family, swept leaves and branches from the trail between Starke County Road 250 West and Range Road.



Image by K. Lucas

Paul expressed the need for new 12"-by-12" timbers to replace some of the gates damaged by carpenter ants. He said cedar was the preferable wood but that he might have to use pine. If pine is used, additional treatment would be required. John asked whether Paul still planned to shorten the ends of horizontal beams to widen the central spaces for recumbent bicycles. Paul responded that he hoped to pursue together timber replacement and beam trimming.

Based on Paul's estimate of cost for the new timbers, Rich moved to authorize Paul to expend up to \$500 for their purchase. Diane seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report

Steve said that Indiana Department of Natural Resources Grants Coordinator, Nathaniel Simmons, emailed him on November 25 to inform the PTC the agency "just received news that some of the last internal processes to enact the State Grant Agreement have been completed. This now puts us at the final step, which involves the building of the contract and your signature. This final process usually takes a few weeks, so it looks like your Contract/State Grant agreement should be up and running" by January 1, 2024.

At this stage the process is mostly under DNR control. Steve said he was now optimistic the PTC would soon be able to move forward with the planned trail extension through North Judson. Next stages would be for Kathy to contract with DNR and with Bob Aloï of Territorial Engineering. Following an opportunity for a PTC Board review, President Rhonda Milner would sign the documents. Territorial would then do a site survey that includes topographic work. The hope is these stages can be completed by late spring.

Grant from Starke County Convention and Visitors Board for May 25 5K Run/3K Walk and Bike Ride on the Great American Rail Trail

Steve said Kathy Norem, President of the Starke County Convention and Visitors Board, emailed him on November 30 to report, "I am pleased to inform you that [the PTC has] been awarded \$2,000 toward your 2024 project.... "

Norem indicated a claim for the check was being submitted to the Auditor's office and would be mailed to the PTC when the claims process is completed. She added that the PTC's "final report for this grant is due within thirty (30) days after the event." A blank copy of the required report was attached to her email.

Steve reminded members that during our October 26 meeting, May 25, 2024 was chosen as the preferred date for a chipped 5K run/ 3K walk on the Great American Rail Trail (Erie Trail) southeast of US 35. Another proposed event element was a connector route bike ride to the Panhandle Pathway, but this element would not be timed. Brian and others who managed the 2023 Bass Lake Festival Run/Walk said in October that calendars of good timers filled quickly, and the PTC would need to move aggressively. Brian and Michelle Lagestee from DeMotte recommended using T&H Timing in Valparaiso.

Steve had emailed T&H Timing on October 28 to outline our event plans. Based on membership comments, he asked whether a chipped event could be held east of US 35 without a good internet connection. If not, could a hot spot device solve the problem?

Todd Henderlong of T&H responded promptly. He said the company had "non-carrier specific hot spot devices," and so long as there was cell service, T&H could access the internet. But regardless, T&H didn't need WI-FI to chip time a race.

Following receipt of Norem's email announcing the grant award, Steve on December 2 wrote a follow-up to Todd Henderlong to ask whether T&H was available to provide its services on May 25. Again, Todd responded promptly and indicated T&H has "a crew available on May 25th" and would be happy to assist us. Todd attached additional detail about T&H services. He added, "If you decide you'd like to secure our services for that

date, just let me know and I'll send you a timing agreement to fill out and send back to me. We do not require any deposit, just payment in full at the conclusion of the event.”

During the December 7 PTC meeting, members expressed enthusiasm for the grant and for advancement of the project. Brian and Diane, who have worked with T&H as timer for the Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk, underscored the importance of contracting with the organization as soon as practicable. A workgroup for the proposed May 25 event was formed with Brian as Chair and members Anita, Russ, Diane, Rich, Steve and Kathy. Details of the May 25, 2024 event will be developed by the workgroup.

Update on Connector Signage for Starke County Road 600 East

Steve reported that on November 28, webmaster, Steve Antisdell, prepared a QR code for the connector signage between Bass Lake and the Erie Trail using Starke County Road 600 East. The QR code would allow visitors to more readily identify “Bass Lake Area Services and Attractions”. Yancy Lucas is currently putting final touches on the signs—including incorporation of the QR code.

Steve said Kathy Carrier is financing the project other than costs associated with the QR code. PTC restricted funds identified as “Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations” would pay for the QR Code, and the PTC would then populate and manage the content. He said that his understanding is Kathy Carrier hopes to have the signs ready for placement in the spring.

Update on Unauthorized Motorized Vehicle Signage

Kathy Lucas reported on acquisition of 26 red signs, as authorized previously by the members, to convey clearly that motorized vehicles are generally prohibited on the trail. Steve has erected three of the new red signs. The effort will be to use existing posts for the new red signs and to coordinate them with existing signs that identify permissible usages.



Image depicts white-on-brown signs showing permissible usages. From top down at this Range Road location, these are horseback riding, bicycling, and walking. Red “No Unauthorized Motorized Vehicles Beyond this Point” is the only new sign. Removed from this location was a redundant and confusing “No ATVs” sign.

Image by K. Lucas

Trail Counters Report

Joan Hardesty provided an update and shared images for the two trails counters. Due to technical difficulties, one of the counters did not record data for recent dates. But she believes she has corrected the problem. Weather permitting, her intention is to collect data until the end of the year. Brian observed that the counters reflect overall trail usage has increased between 2022 and 2023.

Review of Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison to the PTC, said “things are going pretty good.” Monon Business Car no. 2 and caboose no. 81532 will be making the trip from French Lick to HVRM on December 11. Santa Trains are expected to be sold out.

Hebron Veterans Memorial Trail

Frank Stalbaum provided an update on activities at the HVM Trail, a segment of the Great American Rail Trail in Porter County. He said D.R. Horton is donating \$25,000 for trees and shrubs along the HVM Trail. Frank’s hope is a trail extension northwest into Lake County will come to fruition, but there are competing interests for use of the funding in more northerly portions of Lake County. In response to a question about connectivity going southeast, he said the hope is that also will happen eventually.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was scheduled for Thursday, February 22, 2024 at 5:30 p.m., CST (6:30 p.m., EST) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:52 p.m., CST (7:52 p.m., EST). Following adjournment members and friends enjoyed a Holiday celebration.