

**MEETING MINUTES OF
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.
Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room
300 Keller Avenue, North Judson**

October 16, 2025

MEMBERS

**Russ Blais
Paul Byer
Joan Hardesty
Charlotte Liss
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Kay Reimbold
Rich Vallicelli
Kirt Verhagen
Larry Wickert**

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum

Call to Order by President

On October 16, 2025, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a Membership Meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) in the Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room, 300 Keller Avenue, North Judson, Indiana at 5:37 pm, CT (6:37 pm, ET).

Review and Approval of Minutes of September 18, 2025

With the correction of clerical errors, Paul Byer moved to approve the September 18, 2025 minutes. Kirt Verhagen seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP #23-06

Kathy Lucas reported on the apparent resolution of Buckeye Pipeline concerns identified during the September 18 membership meeting. Hill Excavating is proceeding with the ITP #23-06 trail extension project. Completed are grading and graveling of about half the planned extension, and the beginnings of a retaining wall a few feet northwest of Main Street. HVRM Liaison Bob Albert added that Hill Excavating had just recently placed the first layer of asphalt for the route starting at what will be the new northwest trailhead and continuing southeast almost to the area sometimes referred to as “the triangle”.



Depicted on top is the first layer of new pavement for what will become the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail—through the woods and at the crossing of English Lake Road. Image below is from across active tracks showing the beginnings of a retaining wall northwest of Main Street. Images are by K. Lucas taken on October 17, 2025.

Update on Bike Racks Powder Coating

Paul said that on September 22 he dropped off the bike racks for powder coating by Technicoat, LLC in Grovertown. This company also provided the service for four other bike racks. He was asked if a date was stated for when the powder coating would be completed. Paul said it was not. Steve Lucas said the company has expressed the hope that powder coating could be accomplished in November. Members thanked Paul for the use of his tractor and trailer for pick-up at Knox, storage, and subsequent delivery to Grovertown.

Report of Ad Hoc Committee to Provide ABC Promise Partnership Bench

During the September meeting, Joan Hardesty volunteered to serve as “mentor” and to coordinate the effort to obtain one new ABC Promise bench. During the meeting, she circulated digests of terms and conditions to qualify recycled plastic lids and medicine bottles through Green Tree Plastics in Evansville.

Kirt asked whether the PTC would seek materials for a four-foot wide bench, as has been traditionally the goal, or whether a six-foot wide bench would suffice. The response was that a four-foot wide bench was anticipated. He said he and his wife regularly drive to Evansville, and he has a pick-up truck that he volunteered to carry down lids and to bring back a four-foot wide bench.

Kathy said that the PTC needed to collect and prepare at least 100 pounds of qualified lids for delivery to Evansville. In addition, Green Tree Plastics will require a \$258.50 fee for the new green bench. She placed a basket in the entryway to the First Farmers Bank & Trust in North Judson, with a note requesting public participation and a few qualified and cleaned lids, but no additional lids have yet been donated. Kathy has collected, sorted, and washed about eight pounds of lids. Char Liss said she has also collected lids, and other members have resumed from prior projects or begun new efforts to collect lids.

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

Kathy circulated written copies of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds:



Treasurer’s Report October 16, 2025

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance from September 18, 2025 (prior meeting) **\$108,493.27**

INCOME

08/24/25	Duke Korus (donation at workday)	5.00
08/24/25	Peggy Stalbrink	25.00
10/08/25	Ace Hardware (North Judson RoundUp program)	140.00
10/08/25	Eugene Novello	2,000.00
10/10/25	Victoria & David Pingle	<u>100.00</u>

TOTAL INCOME **\$2,270.00**

EXPENSES

09/18/25 Check #1218 to Chuck Boisvert (trailer) 100.00
10/18/25 Check #1219 to Territorial Engineering LLC 1,500.00

TOTAL EXPENSES (\$1,600.00)

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 10/16/25 \$109,163.27

Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer 10/16/25

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 09/18/25

SIGNAGE/WEB

Luminous Fund Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here) 685.64
Hardesty Mem. Wayfinding or historic signs 1,831.13
Lucas lakehouse Future Vision/Website 662.50
3,179.27

NW EXTENSION

PTC Local Match Trail Extension 9,700.00
NICF Grant Trail Extension 8,306.25 (reduced \$1,500 to Territorial Eng.)
Rails to Trails Trail Extension 823.87
18,920.12

DNR REIMBURSEMENT for ITP 23-06 Northwest Extension

05/15/24 Reimbursement #1 17,589.06
07/19/24 Reimbursement #2 6,077.48
11/04/24 Reimbursement #3 4,813.85
03/07/25 Reimbursement #4 1,215.50
07/11/25 Reimbursement #5 13,560.74
43,256.63

MAINTENANCE

Hardesty Mem. Trail Maintenance 294.00 (reduced \$100 for pilot project trailer)
HVRM (Buckeye) Trail Maintenance 593.61
Rich Stalbrink Mem. Maintenance or most needed 2,699.11
Doral Solar Bridge/clearing 7,269.48
10,388.17

5K/3K 2025 (CVC Grant)

Grant from CVC 5K/3K & Panhandle connectivity 989.45
RunSignup Registrant payouts 1,128.15
2,117.60

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$79,861.79

FFBT Balance \$109,163.27

Restricted Funds — \$77,811.79

Unrestricted Funds

\$31,301.48

Kathy expressed special appreciation to Eugene Novello for his steadfast and repeated generous contributions to the PTC. She thanked Peggy for renewing her membership and her amazing personal service over the years. Kathy said that its always a pleasant surprise to receive the RoundUp donation from the North Judson Ace Hardware, and she urged PTC members and friends to think of their generosity when in need of hardware purchases. She said she was excited by the new contribution from Victoria and David Pingle and by the encouraging note they passed along with it.

Kathy added that Hill Excavating sent a substantial billing for its recent services. The billing was approved by Territorial Engineering, and she has sent a check to Hill, but it has not yet been cashed. She will urge Hill Excavating to cash the check so that she can include its amount in quarterly statement due to DNR in October. Kathy said she emailed DNR with questions concerning payments and reimbursements, but key DNR personnel are on vacation or otherwise unavailable until at least October 20.

Char moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Kirt seconded the motion, and the motion carried

Report of Panhandle Pathway Signage for Backroads Collaboration on S-17

Steve said John Bawcum passed along regrets that he was unable to attend the meeting, but he provided a sign image with QR code. The image identifies a backroad connection between the Erie Trail and the Panhandle Pathway. It shows as Pulaski County extension of S-17—a share-the-road route approved by the Starke County Commissioners using SC Road 700 East. Most of the shared route will be located in Pulaski County. At the PTC’s request, and with funding from the Starke County Convention and Visitors Commission, OTES manufactured two signs with QR codes which are 48 inches wide and 30 inches high. These signs will be located near the trailhead at SC Road 700 E. Construction of posts to hold the signs is in the final stages to complete this collaboration.



Depicted above is the sign with QR code that identifies the backroad connection on S-17 with the Erie Trail (and Great American Rail-Trail, American Discovery Trail, and US Bike Route 35 hosted by the Erie Trail). The sign is at the Panhandle Pathway crossing of Ind. Highway 119 (also known as Washington Street) in Winamac. Image by J. Bawcum.

CVC 2025 Grant Application

On September 29, the Starke County Convention and Visitors Commission announced grant opportunities to fund events that promote and encourage conventions, visitors and tourism in the County. Funding can be used for advertising, promotion, trade shows, special events and recreation. An application is required and funding is limited to \$2,000. This year and last the PTC was honored by the CVC when it awarded the full \$2,000 amount for 5K Run/3K Walks beginning near the southeast trailhead on SC Road 700 East.

A grant application must be submitted by October 31. Understanding that the PTC does not have much time, Steve sought input from the Board of Directors and the Officers on whether an application should be submitted. There were good comments but no consensus on whether or for what activity the PTC might pursue a grant. Events of the last two years could be repeated. An event that would use the trail extension through North Judson is another possibility, but when the trail extension will be completed is uncertain. The two most recent 5K Run/3K Walk events with CVC backing were held in May on the Saturday of Memorial Day Weekend. Steve said he would be willing to take the lead on writing another grant application, if that is the members' preference, but he would look to others to manage the event if funding is granted.

A lengthy discussion was held among members. Highlights of the discussion follow: Bob Albert expressed optimism that the HVRM would likely partner in the event. Different lengths for a run and walk were considered. Larry Wickert went online and identified that a 5K was a favored length—at least for other than those interested in marathons or half-marathons. If the extension of the trail can be completed for the event, some combination with the one-mile trail from Main Street to Indiana Highway 10 and the recently upgraded Norwayne Field can accommodate a 5K. Although contracting with a professional timer is an expensive element, it is essential for a successful event. Char said that she and Corey Liss would consider providing a sponsorship.

No decision was made on timing of the event. But the members agreed to avoid a date that would disrupt the Mint Festival.

Russ, Char, Joan, Kirt, Brian, and Anita said they would be willing together to manage the event. Kathy said she would speak with the Town of North Judson to determine its interest.

The members asked Steve to draft a grant application to the CVC. He said he would and that he would share the draft with the Officers, Board Members, those volunteering to manage the event. An opportunity to comment will be afforded but must be limited in order to comply with the October 31 deadline for filing an application.

Update on Gate Segment Replacement at Starke County 600 East

Russ said an agreement has been achieved with Reinhart Welding & Repair to custom fabricate replacement of the stolen gate element and to powder coat and install the gate at a cost of \$2,200. Pat Reinhart told him that work on the project was expected to begin within a week.

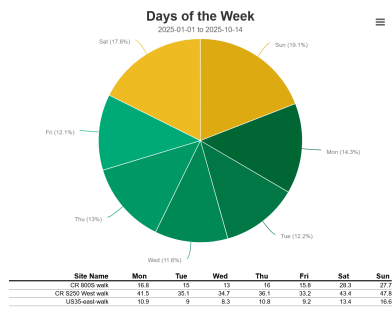
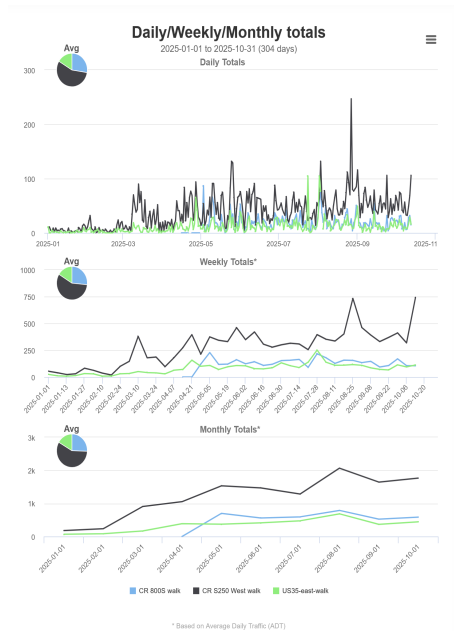
Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Update

Bob Albert provided an update on the activities of the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum. He said the Pumpkin Trains have been enormously successful. On the first Saturday in October there were 765 riders and on the second Saturday there were 838 riders. To

serve more riders, an additional caboose was added behind Bock Lumber Company #1. Four diesel trains will carry passengers from the rest park to English Lake.

Trail Counters Review

Joan distributed copies of the PTC trail counters review as follows:



Master Summary
Download as [Excel](#) or [CSV](#)

Year	Site	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	ADT*	ADT* x 365	Days with data
2025	CR 800S walk	1	0	189	560	944	1081	525	564					19,030	6,949	170
	CR E250 West walk	119	255	507	1,024	1,332	1,470	1,285	2,087	1,943	1,719			38,854	14,182	390
	US35-east walk	81	101	198	371	432	525	445	381	444				11,176	4,075	385

* = based upon that month's ADT. [Learn more](#) Indicates months with less than 8 days of data.

The pie chart is a new element. As anticipated trail usage is highest on Sundays and Saturdays, but the difference between weekends and weekdays is not as great as might have been expected. Monday has the third highest usage. Members speculated that could result from having several Monday holidays.

There was again discussion of the use of the word “walkers” in the count. With counts based on heat from those passing by, bicyclists may also be counted. With a system that is triggered upon a one second delay, multiple warm bodies passing through quickly may only be counted once. Additional ground truthing is probably warranted.

North Judson Redevelopment Commission Park Trail ITP Grant Request

At the Town’s invitation, Steve wrote as PTC Board Chair on September 17 to the Indiana DNR as Chair in support of the Town of North Judson and the Town of North Judson’s Redevelopment Commission request for a 2025 Indiana Trails Program Matching Grant. Through the grant the Town is seeking to improve, redevelop, and grow the walking trail system at the North Judson Town Park. In the letter, he wrote that the “Town has been a wonderful supporter” of PTC efforts. “If DNR approves the matching grant sought by the Town for the North Judson Town Park, the result will be a local amenity that will pair beautifully with the trail extension in progress with the ITP #23-06 project.” The Troyer Group, which is coordinating the Town’s grant, also included the letter in its September 30 application packet to the DNR.

Peggy Stalbrink wrote a heartfelt letter to the DNR in support of the Town’s grant request. With a photo included, she wrote in substantive parts:

“My Husband, Richard Stalbrink, Sr. and I grew up in North Judson and raised our family in a town a few miles away. The photo included in this letter is of my husband and our youngest grandson Owen Cole, age 4 at the time, visiting the park to use the playground area. As taking walks together was part of the adventures, they found this gravel road and explored the ‘forest’ as Owen called it.

“I am an active member of the Prairie Trails Club and have spent time on the Erie Trail watching families with their children in strollers, tricycles, bicycles or just taking a walk; enjoying nature and spending time together outdoors. A young mother I spoke with told me they live just off the trail and she had been incapacitated and could not work, but her daughter wanted to ride her tricycle on the trail and by starting slowly she was able to not only walk distances again but able to return to work. Persons of all ages use trails for exercise essential for good health for mind and body.

“I am asking you to please consider this community for trail improvement.”

The Town’s ITP grant application is for the same program as the PTC’s ITP #23-06 project now active in the North Judson. The DNR recently announced this program will not have another grant application cycle until the Spring of 2028. The Next Level Trails program, under which the PTC pursued successfully the two-mile extension southeast of US 35, has not been funded.

On a related matter, the Town of North Judson is seeking input on its comprehensive plan and has provided an online survey regarding community projects. The survey asks questions such as why residents would choose to live in North Judson, challenges that face the community, and priorities for future development. The questionnaire leans in the direction of comments from North Judson residents, but it also provides a chance for non-resident participation. Of particular interest, there is a question directed to local

trails and the HVRM as potential reasons for coming to North Judson. A link to the North Judson Comprehensive Plan Survey can be found online at northjudsonin.gov

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was set for Thursday, November 13, 2025 at 5:30 p.m., CT (6:30 p.m., ET) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Highway 10, Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana.

Workday

Membership previously set a workday for October 18. This workday was rescheduled for Sunday, October 19, 2025 at 12:00 Noon, CT (1:00 p.m., ET) on the Erie Trail between Starke CR 100 W and CR 250 W. Parking is available at the Rest Park near CR 250 West and at 6555 CR 100 West (Steve and Kathy's log house). *{Editor's note: Due to inclement weather the workday was again rescheduled and reset for Saturday, November 1, 2025 at 11:00 am, CT.}*

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m., CT (8:12 p.m., ET).