

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

June 29, 2023

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russ Blais
John Bulger
Renee Bulger
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Peg Stalbrink
Rich Vallicelli
Larry Wickert

Call to Order by President and Introductions

On June 29, 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 5:36 pm, CDT (6:36 pm, EDT).

Rich Vallicelli introduced John Bulger, MD, and Renee Bulger. Rhonda welcomed them to the meeting. They became PTC members later in the evening.

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of May 11, 2023

Paul Byer moved for approval of the membership meeting minutes of May 11, 2023. Peg Stalbrink seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

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

Russ Blais distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds.



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

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from May 11, 2023

\$67,472.16

INCOME

05/12/23	Amazon Smile donation	\$15.69
05/24/23	GivingA Foundation (Dollar Solar donation)	<u>5,000.00</u>
Total Income		\$5,015.69

EXPENSES

05/12/23	Check 1138: Precept Partners (web security, updates)	\$125.00
05/25/23	Check 1135: Diane Blais (food for Celebrate Trails Event).	141.21
06/07/23	Check 1139: Joan Hardesty (Trail counter desiccant)	27.20
Total Expenses		\$293.41

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 4/13/23

\$72,194.44

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 (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	
			\$42,600.00

Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	1,368.42
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	1,783.42
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 (new)	5,000.00
		\$13,219.37

TOTAL RESTRICTED 62,079.51

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$72,194.44
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	\$60,079.51
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$10,144.93

Kathy expressed great appreciation to the Doral group for a contribution of \$5,000 which is hoped will be sufficient to fund the majority of material costs to repair and upgrade Fell Ditch Bridge. She was surprised that another donation was received from Amazon Smile. Larry is discussing a second contribution from Doral with its representatives.

Brian McMillin moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and the Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Diane Blais seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul and Linda Byer perform the lion’s share of trail maintenance with their heavy equipment. On May 29, Linda applied glyphosate on the equestrian trail and along the north edge of the asphalt trail from US 35 to Starke County Road 200 East. She reported that hot and dry weather caused targeted plants to become dormant, and so the applications was largely unsuccessful. She expects to repeat this application. On June 23, Linda applied glyphosate from SCR 200 E to Range Road. This application appears to have been more successful. Paul and Linda also plan to apply glyphosate west of Range Road.

On June 22, Paul and Brian sealed the deck of the Bartee Ditch Bridge. This effort was successful and should prolong the viability of the deck.



Image by Linda Byer

One deck board is cracked and will be replaced by Paul.

Last summer Paul and Brian successfully filled cracks on the surface of the asphalt trail with the PTC's rubber applicator. See *August 24, 2022 Minutes*, page 6. The work is hot and grueling. Paul said they plan to resume the effort this summer beginning at Range Road and going east.

Larry said he is communicating with Ran Rabi, Operations and Public Relations Manager of Doral LLC, on setting a date for the project to upgrade and repair the Fell Ditch Bridge. Doral is anticipating the project would be undertaken in September or October. After a discussion among the PTC membership, it was agreed September or October would be good timing, but weather conditions later than that probably would not be conducive to what will be a major project. Linda referenced the need to close the trail while work is in progress. Paul spoke of the need to take images beneath the bridge to better understand its condition. John Bulger offered to assist in this regard.

Paul spoke of the need to replace wooden gates on the trail that are being damaged by carpenter ants. He suggested the use of bollards similar to those on the Panhandle Pathway. He or Linda will obtain estimates of cost and report those estimates to the membership at a later meeting. This proposal will then be reviewed in more detail.

Steve Lucas said he has been using glyphosate on an individual plant basis to suppress poison hemlock near the Range Road crossing and to suppress sapling Siberian elms and other invasive species near the SCR 100 W crossing. Linda reminded the members of the need to address tree of heaven, particularly in the vicinity of Aldine. This species is resistant to most herbicides and requires unique attention.

Update on Preparations for Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk

Brian circulated a printed worksheet of volunteers who have agreed to help stage the July 29 Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk. He reflected that several PTC members have agreed to help but that the PTC is also dependent upon people outside our organization. Among these are Rich and Kathy Linkus, Donna Skulski, Donna DeMaria, Mary Golding, Donna Underwood, Rick Anderson, Sue Linkus, and Steve Hoffman. Brian said at least 17 people are needed and that he hoped there might be additional volunteers.

Review of Warrior Expeditions Great American Rail Trail Trek

Steve overviewed the PTC's third year participating in the trek of combat veterans on the transAmerican Great American Rail Trail. The trek is sponsored in a partnership between Warrior Expeditions and the Rails to Trails Conservancy. Warrior Expeditions is a non-profit outdoor therapy program that helps veterans transition from wartime experiences through long distance outdoor activities.

The six trekkers in this year's group consisting of two women and four men came through Starke County between June 2 and June 5. PTC members provided lodging, transportation to obtain groceries and medicines, meals, and assisted with identifying a suitable detour around the county road closure at English Lake. A highlight of the visit was a June 2 pitch-in cookout near the trail with participation by several PTC members and the four veterans who arrived earlier. Applying Warrior Expeditions formula, the

monetary value of all PTC member services was \$1,216.92. The greater human value was sharing time and thoughts among the PTC members and the veterans.

With the county road closure at the Kankakee River crossing of English Lake, the four veterans who first arrived decided on a detour that went north on Starke County Road 100 West directly to Indiana Highway 8 and missed North Judson. A teacher at St. Paul Lutheran School, Annette Skibbe, had helped her students develop trail signs to express appreciation to our veterans. These were placed just west of SCR 100 W so as to be viewed by the veterans during the June 2 cookout and not to be missed the next morning as a result of the detour. Veterans, teachers, and students are shown below with one of the welcoming signs.



Image by Kathy Lucas

The four veterans who arrived earlier and the two who arrived later all had their images taken with the bicycle sculpture at the trail crossing of State Highways 10 and 39. Shown in the image on the left from left to right are Aaron Ledbetter, Charles Sonnenberg, Stephanie Buffett, and Brittany Greene. Shown in the image on the right are Jared Thomas on the left and Timothy Davis on the right.



Image on the left by Kathy Lucas on June 2. Image on the right a selfie on June 5.



Using instead of SCR 10 West as a detour, Jared and Tim went through North Judson and crossed the Kankakee River on US Highway 421. After the trekkers left Starke County and passed Chicago, they became ever farther separated. As of our meeting date, the most advanced and least advanced trekker were about 1,000 miles apart.

During the meeting, Steve circulated a thank-you letter sent to the PTC from the Warrior Expeditions. The letter stated in substantive parts:

“Dear Steve:

“I would like to thank you, the members of Prairie Trails Club, and your local community for supporting the 2023 Warrior Bikers during their stay in North Judson, Indiana.

“Your support helped our veterans restore their mental, physical, and social well- being while hiking the Great American Rail Trail. Additionally, the camaraderie that was shared between your community and our veterans helped facilitate their integration back into society.

“To recognize the contributions made by your community, please complete our online itemized list of support that was provided to our veterans....

“We would be honored to work with your community again next year. If you are willing, please contact us...if you would like to be listed on our 2024 Warrior Bike program schedule.

“Semper Fi,

“Sean Gobin, Executive Director...”

Steve asked the membership whether it wanted the PTC listed on the 2024 Warrior Bike program schedule. Members expressed enthusiasm for the program and for the ability to give back in a small way to our veterans. They also acknowledged the challenges posed by hosting the warriors in the summer when schedules are crowded and members may be away on vacation or visiting family. After a thorough discussion, the membership agreed to be listed on the 2024 Warrior Bike program schedule and to again host the trekkers in 2024.

Reminder of Annual Membership Dues

Kathy reminded members that August is renewal time for members paying annual dues. She said she hopes people renew their memberships to help support the efforts of our nonprofit association. Renewal is not required for lifetime members or for new members who have paid dues in the last few months.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Update

On May 22, Peg, Kathy and Steve attended a meeting of the LaPorte County Council in support of a request by Justin Kiel for a local match commitment of \$200,000 for a Next Level Trail Round 4 grant to extend the trail from LaCrosse toward English Lake. Steve spoke briefly and answered questions at the meeting on behalf of the PTC. The LaPorte County Council voted unanimously to pledge \$200,000 toward a grant. Kiel, who was formerly President of the LaCrosse Town Council and who is currently Vice President of the LaPorte County Council, now has a total of \$450,000 pledged in local match for this project. If an NLT4 grant is approved it would need to utilize the easement held by the

PTC for a majority of the distance between LaCrosse and English Lake, and our nonprofit organization would work to help accomplish this result.

In response to an inquiry from Steve, DNR Grant Coordinator, Erica Gummere, emailed on June 22:

“Thank you for checking-in-regarding ITP awards. We hope to announce the ITP awards in the next few weeks, so please hang tight for further updates. There was some additional logistics work that... [had] to take place internally, as can happen with a young and evolving grant program.

“I will say that, if PTC would be interested, that the organization can pursue an NLT grant while having an active ITP project (if selected for award). However, the ITP and NLT project scopes cannot overlap. For example, if selected for an ITP award, then PTC could apply for NLT with a project scope that extends the trail south-east towards Monterey. Should the PTC team have questions, please review the NLT Round 4 Applicant Workshop slides that are available on the NLT applicant webpage. Any further questions should be directed to nextleveltrails@dnr.gov, as I'm only helping with the program on an as-needed basis moving forward.

Thanks again, we'll be in touch soon regarding ITP....

Membership discussed extensively the options suggested in Gummere's email. Our organization has repeatedly expressed an intention to extend our current 11-mile trail both northwest toward English Lake and southeast toward Monterey. But funding is critical. With wonderful support we have obtained local match for a one-mile extension of the trail through North Judson under an ITP grant. We do not now have the liquidity for an addition trail extension. Also, the application for an NLT4 grant must be completed and submitted by August 1. That short period would make completion of an application difficult if not impossible. Ultimately, the members determined to stay the course with the pending ITP application in the hope it will be approved and with the expectation we would be supportive of the LaPorte County initiative to extend the trail northwest of the Kankakee River.

Review of HVRM Activities

Linda, who is the PTC liaison to the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, updated the membership on its recent and anticipated activities. She said the new ticketing system is working great for scheduling our volunteers to man trains and the gift shop. Civilians & Soldiers in History Day will be Saturday, July 22. Bock Lumber #1 will be pulling trips to English Lake the next two Saturdays, July 8th and 15th at 11am, 1pm, and 3pm. HVRM's regular Diesel powered trips will also be running both days at 10am, 12pm, and 2pm. All times are CDT.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was set for Tuesday, July 25, 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 7:02 p.m., CDT (8:02 p.m., EDT).