

Erie Trail and Related Trails: Future Vision (2022-2026)

by **Prairie Trails Club Inc**

Trail and Connector Extensions

1. Extension of the Erie Trail (perhaps named the “Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail” or the “English Lake Trail”) northwest through North Judson and onward to the Kankakee River as Host to TransAmerican Routes

The number one project goal for the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”), the Erie Trail and associated trails in the *2016 Vision*, was to encourage “local and regional connectivity and future trail expansion.” After Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb announced the Next Level Trails (“NLT”) Grant opportunity through the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (“DNR”), with the First Phase applications due in February 2019, the PTC established a workgroup that offered recommendations to the membership regarding an application. *PTC Minutes*, Sep. 27, 2018, p. 7.

An extension was considered either to the southeast or to the northwest of the then nine-mile long Erie Trail. With complexity of property ownership through the Town of North Judson, and the announced sale of railroad lands by the Town of North Judson (later accomplished through the North Judson Redevelopment Commission), action on northwest extension was in 2018 deferred in favor of pursuing a southeast extension.

A northwest extension would bring the Erie Trail closer to Indiana’s second largest population center in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. Applying an NLT Grant, a one-mile extension of the Great American Rail-Trail (“Great American”) and the Northern Branch of the American Discovery Trail (“ADT”) was completed in 2020 at Hebron in Porter County. A Second Phase NLT Grant for these transAmerican trails was approved in 2021 as part of Crown Point’s Pennsy Greenway to Veterans Trail in Lake County. Online NIRPC Press Release (Mar. 4, 2021). Informal conversations with users from outside Starke County offer anecdotal support for a conclusion that Lake

County and Porter County residents are the most frequent visitors to the Erie Trail (including the Great American and the ADT).

In January 2021, the North Judson Redevelopment Commission accepted a Midwest & Bluegrass Rail bid to buy the town's 33-mile rail line northwest from North Judson. The *Leader* newspaper and WKVI radio reported the sale was conditioned on the PTC, with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and its Great American Rail-Trail, having "an easement to develop a trail on the Starke County portion of the rail line." *PTC Minutes*, Feb. 11, 2021, p. 2. The PTC asked the Redevelopment Commission to support an easement likely to meet DNR grant minimums, as well as those for qualification as a segment of the Great American.

Midwest & Bluegrass Rail determined to conduct its operations through a wholly-owned subsidiary, Northern Indiana Railroad Company, LLC ("NIR"). The NIR and the Redevelopment Commission closed the sale on April 27, 2021. A sale condition was that the NIR would provide the PTC with an easement to construct, install, maintain, and repair a trail and trail facilities. Following extended negotiations between the NIR and PTC, they entered a "Trail Easement Agreement" in July 2021 authorizing a route from Main Street in North Judson to LaPorte County Road 875 West near LaCrosse. The LaPorte County portion of the Trail Easement Agreement was recorded on August 17, 2021, and the Starke County portion of the Trail Easement Agreement was recorded on September 16, 2021.

A recommendation in the "Starke County Five Year Parks Master Plan (2022-2026)", p. 28, is to extend the Erie Trail northwest of North Judson. The "North Judson 5-Year Parks & Recreation Master Plan", p. 31, reflects a part of the vision for the Erie Trail is extension northwest of North Judson.

On December 15, 2021, PTC's Board of Directors approved a resolution underlining the importance of the northwest extension. "As a priority," the PTC should seek "a trail extension through and northwest of the Town of North Judson to the Town of LaCrosse. To achieve the trail extension, the PTC should make every reasonable effort to achieve local consensus on a viable route through the Town of North Judson." The resolution added that the Board desired "a partnership among the Town of North Judson, the County of Starke, the County of LaPorte, and the Town of LaCrosse to complete an asphalt pavement that meets the grant requirements of the State of Indiana." *PTC Board Minutes*, Dec. 15, 2021, p. 2.



Engineer Max Rehlander provided perspectives on bridges over the Kankakee River formerly operated by the C&O Railroad and the Pennsylvania Railroad. Pictured on the left is the underside of the C&O Railroad which Max described in August 2021 as “overall...in really good shape.”

On December 15, 2021, PTC membership with LaCrosse participation discussed an appropriate trail name if extended through North Judson to LaCrosse. Members reflected the former Erie Trail did not cross the Kankakee River at English Lake but three miles west near Horseshoe Bend in the vicinity of Wilders. To use the name “Erie Trail” would be historically inaccurate and potentially confusing. The name “Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail” (possibly abbreviated as “GKM Trail”) could better reflect the route’s unique geographic and historic context. *PTC Minutes*, Dec. 15, 2021, p. 5. Another

possible name suggestion was the “English Lake Trail” to reflect the historic context and also avoid possible confusion with “Grand Kankakee Marsh County Park” in Lake County which also has a trail.

There are major challenges for funding match and for the identification of a particular route through North Judson, but if feasible the PTC’s first priority should be to extend the trail through and northwest of town. The PTC should seek to have the extension also serve the Great American, the ADT, and at least a portion of US Bicycle Route 35 (“USBR 35”).

2. Extension of the Erie Trail southeast from Starke County 700 East as Host to TransAmerican Routes and considering the Tippecanoe River bridge, Tippecanoe River State Park and the Panhandle Pathway

The PTC Workgroup began reporting in October 2018 on efforts to obtain donations for the 20% local match required to seek funding under the First Phase of the NLT Grant opportunity. *PTC Minutes*, Oct. 30, 2018, p. 4. In December, match donations promises came from the Luminous Fund and the Greenways Foundation of Indiana. *PTC Minutes*, Dec. 6, 2018, p. 4. Additional donations for match were later committed by the Hardesty Memorial Fund through the Northern Indiana Community Foundation, the Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund, the Starke County Commissioners through its Highway Department, and by a Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum (“HVRM”) easement.

In February 2019 the PTC filed with the DNR a timely grant application for a 2.1 mile trail extension from US 35 southeast to Starke County Road 700 East. The application referenced contributions to the local match by the Hardesty Memorial Endowment Fund, the Luminous Fund, the Greenways Foundation, the Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund, and the PTC through its members and supporters. The HVRM dedicated the north one-half of the former Erie Railway corridor for trail location. Additional support came from a Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (“SCILL”) for student-built bike racks, funded in part by the KVREMC RoundUp program, and through PTC and local participation in the ABC Promise Partnership with Green Tree Plastics in Evansville. Under the latter partnership, youth with local ties helped recycle plastic lids into benches. The Starke County Commissioners promised to contribute labor and materials. The amount of the grant including local match totaled \$490,888.18.

In May 2019 Gov. Holcomb and the DNR announced approval of the PTC's grant application.



A grant agreement for NLT 01-07 was entered between the PTC and the DNR in September 2019. There were phases for design and engineering and for construction. State of Indiana, Purchase Order Order Grant 0020010638 (11/06/2019). The PTC selected the Troyer Group as consultant. Territorial Engineering provided surveying. The State of Indiana released funding for design and engineering.



Following consultation with the Troyer Group, the PTC adopted design and engineering elements, which included environmental reviews. In April 2021, the DNR approved PTC's design execution and the selection of Thomas Excavating & Welding ("TEW") as its general contractor. The PTC entered a construction contract with TEW, and, on April 30, 2021, the State of Indiana released funding for the construction phase. Town & Country Paving became the asphalt subcontractor. In May the Indiana Department of Transportation ("INDOT") approved permit T0000148776 for the trail's pedestrian and bicycle crossing of US Highway 35. The asphalt bicycle and pedestrian path and many other construction elements were finished in September. A ribbon cutting ceremony to open the trail was held with the DNR and the PTC's partners on October 22, 2021.



An Erie Trail extension southeast of County Road 700 East would advance the Great American, USBR35, and the ADT. Also, an extension would bring it closer to the Monterey Erie Trail and the Nickel Plate Trail. The extension could bring the trail to the historic two-rail Erie Railroad Bridge over the Tippecanoe River. These are all worthy goals.

But another Erie Trail southeast extension is unlikely to result in a direct connection with the Panhandle Pathway. Also, to qualify for the minimum expenditure specified a Next Level Trails grant, the project would need to extend into Pulaski County and obtain approval from another jurisdictional authority, the County Commissioners of Pulaski County. To extend the Erie Trail to the Monterey Erie Trail would require rehabilitating the bridge over the Tippecanoe River, an exciting but complex and expensive proposition.

Extending the Erie Trail southeast of Starke County Road 700 East remains a serious option. But if a trail extension can be accomplished northwest of North Judson, the southeast extension should be the junior priority and probably a subsequent project.

3. Guidance for Enhancing Trail Access and Connectivity to Services and Other Recreational Opportunities

The *2016 Vision* outlined guidance for connectivity to services and to other recreational opportunities from the Erie Trail. Services near the Erie Trail

are available at North Judson, Bass Lake and Knox. Tippecanoe River State Park, Bass Lake, Kankakee State Fish & Wildlife Area, Koontz Lake, Round Lake Wetland Conservation Area & Nature Preserve offer outdoor recreational opportunities. Navigable waters of the Kankakee River, Yellow River, and Tippecanoe River also provide public recreational opportunities. The guidance urged improving connectors to the Erie Trail, through share-the-road designations and with signage and mapping in four phases, to make services and recreational opportunities more accessible.

The “Starke County Five Year Parks Master Plan (2017-2021)” supported trail advancement, and, more particularly, the phased approach suggested in the *2016 Vision*. Starke County was urged to “look to further develop the trail system, expanding upon the existing” Erie Trail. This Master Plan continued: “Additional connections to the trail and throughout the county should be explored as opportunities arise. The county should utilize existing planning efforts such as regional trail plans” and the *2016 Vision* “to plan future routes.” Starke County Master Plan, p. 21.

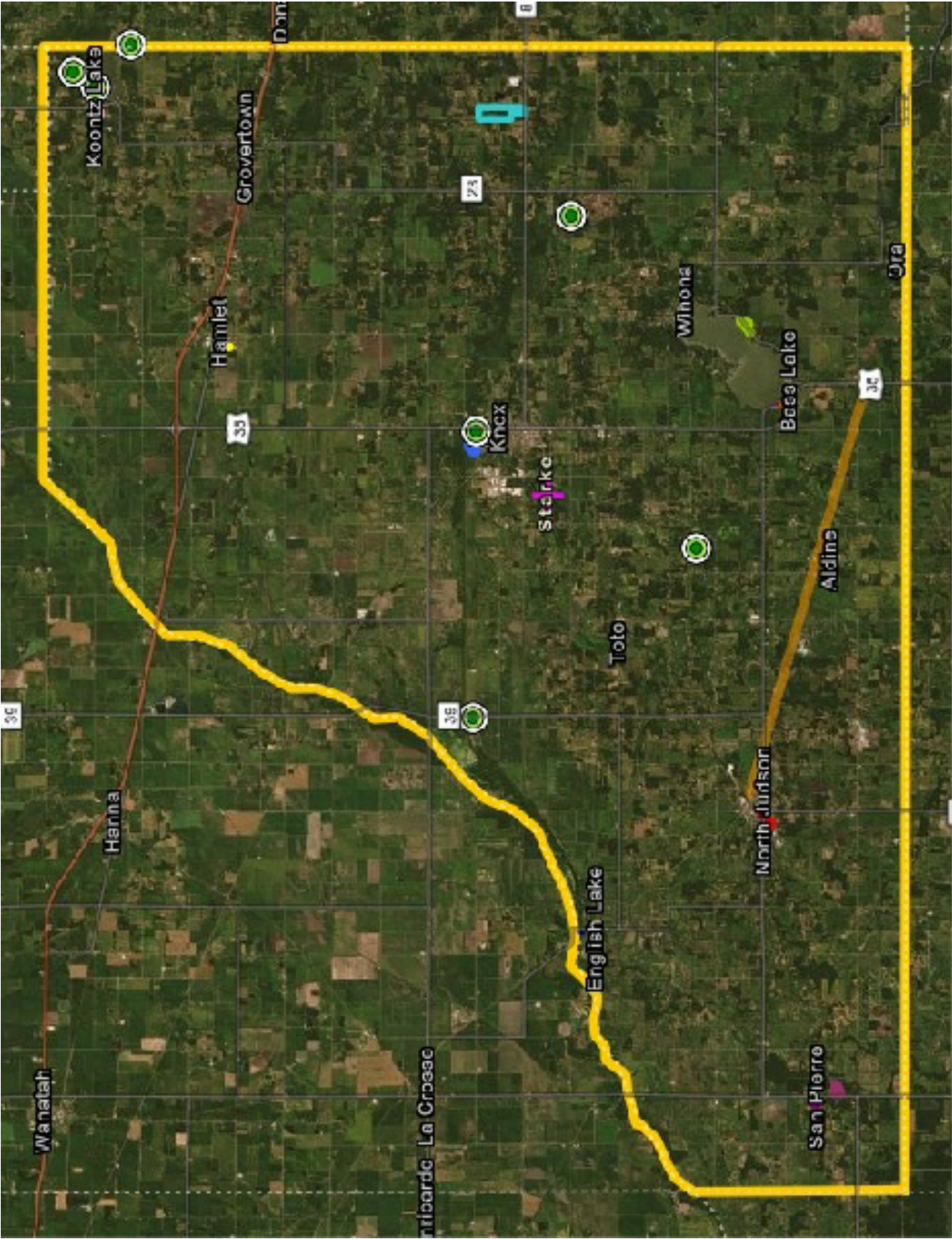
The “Starke County Five Year Parks Master Plan (2022-2026)” built upon the prior Master Plan and urged at p. 27:

The public would like to see more trails to connect facilities. Many enjoy the existing network but would like to see that extend to other areas for greater connectivity.

The county should look into leasing the Erie Trail from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum. This could help improve maintenance and safety by being able to utilize county resources.

The county should also look to further develop the trail system, expanding upon the existing Erie Trail. Additional connections to the trail and throughout the county should be explored as opportunities arise. To help with this, the county should look to regional trail plans and the Erie Trail Future Vision Phase Plan to plan future routes and help acquire property through INDOT or other programs such as the Indiana Recreational Trail Program.

The “Starke County Five Year Parks Master Plan (2022-2026)” identifies existing recreational sites within Starke County, including the Erie Trail, as set forth in the following map:



PTC members agreed the enumerations in the four-phase approach for Erie Trail connectors, identified in the *2016 Vision*, was not a prioritization. Each phase would progress as quickly as practicable and concurrently with or independently of other phases. *PTC Minutes*, Sep. 28, 2016, p 3. The connectors would use existing county highways with share-the-road designations, and for one connector, it was recommended the Erie Trail be extended one mile as a non-motorized route. As illustrated by the map on page 19, progress has been made with all of the connectors. But because each connector is also unique, they are here considered separately.

Phase 1 [S-9] proposed share-the-road signage from the Erie Trail north on Range Road to Indiana Highway 10 and across from Bailey's Discount Center. On April 3, 2017, the Board of Commissioners of Starke County ("Starke County Commissioners") adopted a resolution approving this route for share-the-road status. *PTC Minutes*, Apr. 12, 2017, p. 2. The Hardesty Memorial Endowment Fund ("Hardesty Fund") and the Luminous Fund provided grants to assist with signage acquisition. With a system designed by the PTC's Branding, Identity and Continuity ("BIC") Committee [*BIC Committee Minutes*, Jul. 25, 2017, p. 2], this connector was designated Starke County Route 9 ("S-9") *PTC Minutes*, Aug. 22, 2017, p. 6. Within a competitive bulk bidding process, the Starke County Highway Department applied the Hardesty Memorial Fund and Luminous Fund grants to purchase share-the-road and safety signs, and without cost to the PTC, the Highway Department installed them in October 2018. *PTC Minutes*, Dec. 6, 2018, p 6. S-9 was designated with a solid purple line on PTC maps.

When Phase 1 was proposed, a Dairy Queen and Orange Julius franchise was present at Bailey's Discount Center. The franchise provided access for extended hours to food, water and restrooms in reasonable proximity to the Erie Trail. This franchise closed. Biggby Coffee was a recent replacement



which has a limited food menu but has an enhanced coffee option. Bailey's Discount Center has restrooms and includes hardware and groceries within a listing of available general merchandise.

Another possible benefit from Phase 1, through S-9 (Range Road), was as a Connector to a proposed Yellow River kayak and canoe access site. The *2016 Vision* recognized the importance of the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers for recreation and tourism. Starke County owns land next to the Range Road bridge over the Yellow River north of the Erie Trail. In 2017, the Starke County Park Board sought to develop the land for kayak and canoe access. The PTC wrote in support of the Park Board's bid to obtain a grant, and agreed to assist with wayfinding signage between the Erie Trail and the Yellow River access if the project became a reality. *PTC Minutes*, Jul. 11, 2017, p. 8. Starke County decided later the amount of land ownership at the Range Road bridge was insufficient for an access. In 2020, the Starke County Park Board initiated another attempt to develop kayak and canoe access on the Yellow River, which would include from three to six sites, but none of them would be located at the Range Road bridge.

The potential of Phase 1 has probably diminished since approval of the *2016 Vision*. But S-9 provides notable access to services within two-thirds of a mile of the Erie Trail at a location where there is demonstrable need. The current status of S-9 should be continued. If practicable, signage might also be placed to identify S-9 as the Connector between the Erie Trail and Bigby Coffee within Bailey's Discount Center.

Phase 2 [S-13] was to connect to Bass Lake and Knox with share-the-road status on Starke County Roads 800 South and 450 East to County Road 210 South (discussed later as the proposed "Parks Department Trailhead"). The *2016 Vision* observed These roads "provide a safe connection to Bass Lake while minimizing interface with US 35." A trail crossing at the US 35 and CR 450 E intersection "is ideal with good vision in both directions and clear shoulders on each side of US 35. CR 450 East continues to CR 210, and provides an ideal link to the west side of Bass Lake, and ultimately, connectivity to Knox to the north." The Phase 2 connector was designated Starke County Route 13 ("S-13"). The same processes and timing apply as referenced previously for S-9, including signage placed in October 2018. S-13 is also marked with a solid purple line on PTC maps.

As a courtesy to the PTC, Kathy Carrier funded a billboard at the north end of S-13 on Bass Lake which included a map of the Erie Trail and directions to the Erie Trail. The multicolored billboard was posted in early April, and, to correspond with tourist season was maintained onsite until October 2018. *PTC Minutes*, Apr. 26, 2018, p. 6. Developed by Lucas Corral Planning and Design, the billboard was reformatted slightly and included in 2018, without cost to the PTC, as a black-and-white map in the “Bass Lake Property Owners Directory”. *PTC Minutes*, May 24, 2018, p. 3.



The image has since been included each year in the Directory, updated starting in 2020. With guidance from its BIC Committee garnered from a Zoom meeting held on December 9, 2021, the PTC approved another map update to incorporate changes resulting from completion of the two-mile Erie Trail extension southeast of US Highway 35. Lucas Corral Planning and Design incorporated these updates in a base map to be included in the 2022 Directory.

On May 20, 2019, the Starke County Commissioners adopted a resolution for the Highway Superintendent to consult with the PTC, and report on the results of the consultation, regarding “a design for a small trailhead at the intersection of” Starke County Road 450 East and Starke County Road 210 South on the north end of S-13. The same resolution urged consideration of a connector to better serve Knox and Hamlet.

The Constellation of Starke received a promise of \$333,000 as one of the finalists in the 2019 Regional Stellar Communities Designation process. The Constellation of Starke identified four projects within the county to fund. One of these was the trailhead at the intersection of County Road

450 East and County Road 210 South. WKVI Online, Anita Goodan, *Starke County Commissioners Support Stellar Finalist Projects* (Jul. 7, 2020).

The Constellation of Starke Program Facilitator reported to the PTC that what may be called the “Parks Department Trailhead” was envisioned to include restrooms, parking facilities, and wayfinding signage. Two benches acquired by the PTC with community participation in a recycling project, and underwritten by Russell and Diane Blais with Rick and Mary Vlaming, and by Brian and Anita McMillin, were offered for trailhead placement. The Program Facilitator offered her thanks and accepted the offer.

A PTC member urged that the Parks Department Trailhead include public access to potable water. The Program Facilitator said she expected the trailhead would connect to the Bass Lake Conservancy District for waste-water treatment and disposal. She believed providing access to potable water was probably be feasible.

Another participant in the facilitation, who later joined the PTC, reflected the proposed trailhead was not on the Erie Trail, and many in the Bass Lake community did not understand connectivity to the Erie Trail. He said wayfinding signage was needed. The PTC responded that mapping and share-the-road signage existed but agreed to the need for additional wayfinding signage at the proposed trailhead. The PTC members offered to assist the Starke County Highway Department with signage acquisition. *PTC Minutes*, Aug. 27, 2020, p. 1. The Department’s Highway Superintendent later resigned but remained a member of the Starke County Parks Board. At the Park Board’s March 2021 meeting, he reflected Starke County remained committed to developing the Parks Department Trailhead in 2022.

In early March 2022, the Starke County Commissioners agreed to accept the lowest bids for the main aspects of the proposed trailhead. “The county will provide the match for the...project in the amount of \$31,245.” WKVI Online, Anita Goodan, *Starke County Commissioners Approve Bids for Stellar Projects, Eliminates Project* (Mar. 9, 2022). But later in the month the Commissioners cut back funding for the trailhead project substantially. On April 4, 2022, PTC members asked the Commissioners if they would reconsider and contribute to a trailhead project that would be more in keeping with the Stellar concept, if additional financial support could be obtained locally. A specific dollar amount was not discussed, but the Commissioners were encouraging. They said the

more support secured locally, the more likely they would be to endorse a commitment of additional county funding. *PTC Minutes, Apr. 28, 2022, p. 7.*



Images from proposed trailhead project site in Spring 2022

Going south from the proposed trailhead on S-13 would connect to the Erie Trail so a bicyclist or pedestrian could turn right toward North Judson or left toward Winamac. But a route could also be defined from the trailhead north to Knox and then on to Hamlet.

The Constellation of Starke grant application, which was made during the Stellar process, included a proposal for an additional Connector advancing generally north from Bass Lake with a point of beginning at the intersection of Starke County Road 210 South and Starke County Road 500 South. From this point of beginning, the Connector would extend west on County Road 500 South to County Road 550 East and then north to County Road 200 South (also known as “Palmer Road” in Knox). The route could follow County Road 200 South west to County Road 500 East and then again north. The proposal would jog westward on John Street, and then angle northeast, before resuming the designation of County Road 500 East to cross the Yellow River. At CR 550 North, the route would turn east to enter Hamlet. “Constellation of Starke Stellar Development Plan 2019”, 2 Connecting Trails, p. 3.25.

Preliminary discussions between the PTC and the Starke County Highway Department considered share-the-road signage on CR 210 South, to follow the western shore of Bass Lake, and advancing generally to the northwest.

From the intersection of Starke County Road 210 South and County Road 500 South, as referenced in the previous paragraph, the route through Knox and Hamlet could be adopted as proposed in the Stellar process. *PTC Minutes*, Jul. 27, 2020, p. 1. These should be implemented only if desired by the City of Knox and the Town of Hamlet. As an uninterrupted route that would run generally north and south, the entire Connector from the Erie Trail to Hamlet could be designated S-13. Distances in miles could be referenced to key stations. A suggestion is that these would be to (A) the southern terminus of S-13 on the Erie Trail; (B) the proposed trailhead intersection of Starke County Road 450 East and CR 210 South; (C) a location along S-13 in Knox as selected by the City of Knox; and (D) a location along S-13 at a northern terminus in Hamlet as selected by the Town of Hamlet.

The potential of Phase 2 has improved considerably since publication of the *2016 Vision*. The PTC should identify and offer to provide wayfinding signage at the southern terminus of S-13 for both directions on the Erie Trail and north on S-13. The PTC should consult with the Starke County Parks Board as to signage and services at the proposed trailhead. The PTC may also assist the City of Knox and the Town of Hamlet in efforts to develop and implement coordinated and mutually beneficial protocols for signage on S-13.

Two other items should be given future consideration. Bicyclists have been reluctant to use the portion of S-13 south of US Highway 35 and north of Starke County Road 800 South, on County Road 450 East, because of roadway conditions. Before 2020, a 1/3 mile segment CR 450 East was sand and gravel. The segment was unfriendly to bicycling, most notably during extended dry periods. The rest of County Road 450 East was paved but sometimes uneven. In 2020, the Starke County Highway Department improved the road by adding a basic asphalt surface on the 1/3 mile that had been sand and gravel. With recognition there are numerous roadway needs, the PTC should express support for further Highway Department upgrades to County Road 450 East.

Also, Starke County Road 450 East southbound ends at County Road 800 South. To reach the Erie Trail using S-13, a person must turn right (west) on County Road 800 South. The intersection with the Erie Trail is then a short distance and at a slight angle which is comfortable going west toward North Judson. But to go east toward Winamac, or as a loop to the east side of Bass Lake, the angle is sharp and the turn awkward. The distance

is about 250 feet from the north end of County Road 450 East to the Erie Trail. A trail extended in a straight line from the north end of County Road 450 East to the Erie Trail would simplify and shorten the length of S-13 from the planned trailhead to the Erie Trail. The result could also improve safety. The PTC should support development of this 250-foot long segment as a road or preferably as a trail.

Phase 3 [S-15 and proposed S-17] was the most ambitious phase as set forth in the *2016 Vision*. It was prefaced on a one-mile non-motorized Erie Trail extension southeast of US Highway 35 to the intersection with Starke County Road 600 East. When completed, Starke County Road 600 East was to be designated and signed for share-the-road status north from the Erie Trail. The route would extend to the Bass Lake Beach & Campground, a property formerly under DNR ownership but transferred to Starke County. From 2008, the property was leased by Callahan Development, LLC as a for-profit business. Starke County terminated the lease in April 2021 on the death of Richard Callahan, since the lease required he “personally control and direct” the business’s operations, and it reinstated direct control. WKVI Online, Michael Gallenberger, *Starke Park Board Terminates Bass Lake Beach and Campground Lease following Death of Lessee* (Apr. 28, 2021). This connector has been designated Starke County Route 15 (“S-15”). S-15 is also designated with a solid purple line on PTC maps.

Because a non-motorized Erie Trail extension was then only an aspiration, for S-15 the Starke County Commissioners were requested and agreed to interim use of CR 800 South from its junction on the Erie Trail to Starke County 600 East, a distance of a little more than 1 1/2 miles. At County Road 600 East, S-15 would turn north. *PTC Minutes*, Apr. 12, 2017, p. 2. The same processes and timing for S-15 applied as were referenced previously for S-9, including the placement of signs in October 2018.

As discussed previously, in 2019 the DNR and Gov. Eric Holcomb entered an NLT Grant with the PTC to extend the Erie Trail two miles from US 35 east to County Road 700 East. When in October 2021 the extension was completed, the Erie Trail crossed County Road 600 East and continued for an additional one mile. Grant Agreement #36278 (NLT-1-107).

Completion of the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail warrants four and possibly five sets of additions or modifications to signage and trail designations as follows:

- (1) The PTC should request the Starke County Commissioners to extend the S-15 designation south from the intersection of Starke County Road 600 East and County Road 800 South to the intersection of County Road 600 East and the Erie Trail. The length of this new segment would be approximately 1/2 mile. The PTC should also inquire whether the Commissioners might wish to withdraw the interim designation of S-15 along County Road 800 South from its intersection with the Erie Trail to County Road 600 East. The length of the segment that could be withdrawn would be about 1 1/3 mile.
- (2) The PTC should request the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to declare the two-mile extension a segment of the preferred route for the Great American.
- (3) Currently, southbound USBR 35 follows the Erie Trail until County Road 800 South where it turns east (concurrently with S-15 and S-13). USBR 35 then crosses US Highway 35 at an unsigned location on County Road 800 South. At County Road 700 East, USBR 35 makes a right turn and continues south toward Pulaski County and a bridge over the Tippecanoe River. In 2019, the PTC requested the INDOT Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator make an upgrade to USBR 35 from its current share-the-road status to non-motorized vehicles only on the two-mile southeast extension. INDOT Email from Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, Feb. 25, 2019. The proposed upgraded route would follow the Erie Trail in a straight line until the junction at County Road 700 East, and then resume the current route toward the Tippecanoe River bridge. A new signed and piano-key crossing was established at US Highway 35 a part of the NLT-1-107 Grant. The hypotenuse in place of what is now a right-angle triangle would shorten USBR 35. INDOT's Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator has indicated the agency had come "on board to make a petition to change the designation of USBR 35." He asked to be kept current on the process and to receive images for documentation. INDOT Email from Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, May 3, 2019. After the exchange of several emails, the PTC provided the Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator with a proposed revised cue sheet from North Judson to County Road 700 E that would use the hypotenuse made possible by the two-mile trail extension and additionally made cue corrections. PTC Email to Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator, Jul. 29, 2021. The Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator indicated the local jurisdictional authority needed to approve the modifications. During an October 18 meeting, the PTC proposed modifications to the Starke County Commissioners to relocate USBR 35 as described in this paragraph and to make clerical corrections to the cue sheet. The proposal was approved and the Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator informed. He responded on November 15 that he would consult with INDOT's "partners at Adventure Cycling Association to" and he would have "necessary

information for the route realignment in [the 2022] Spring cycle.” The PTC should continue to pursue completion of this initiative.

- (4) Currently, eastbound the ADT follows the Erie Trail until CR 800 South where it turns east (concurrently with S-15, S-13, and USBR 35). At US Highway 35, the ADT turns south and past the entrance to Tippecanoe River State Park and then again east. In May 2019, the PTC approached the ADT’s national office in Virginia to consider inclusion of the two-mile extension and a new route that would use Pulaski County Roads to the east of Tippecanoe River State Park (rather than US Highway 35). The ADT President redirected the PTC to the Indiana Coordinator for the ADT’s Northern Branch. The Northern Indiana Coordinator expressed support for the suggested change and mapped a proposed relocation. He added, “Once this new section of trail is completed..., you can make a request to me to reroute the ADT along the county road specified here—or some other idea your club may have.” Barloga Email, May 3, 2019. The ADT President stated concerns the new route would not pass in front of the access to Tippecanoe River State Park. “[I]t misses a camping opportunity in an area where (I think) there aren’t that many. This is not necessarily a fatal flaw because we can tell people how to find camping, but it is something to consider.” Seaborg Email, May 6, 2019. Travelers should be informed of the access to camping at Tippecanoe River State Park. With the Friends of Panhandle Pathway, the PTC should consider signage near the crossing of US Highway 35 on the Erie Trail, at a location southeast on the ADT, and possibly at a third location on the Panhandle Pathway. The PTC should consider information on its website to reference opportunities for camping in the vicinity of Bass Station. The PTC should request the ADT to implement a trail relocation, following ground-truthing.
- (5) During a virtual meeting of the BIC Committee held on December 9, 2021, its members determined that, with the two-mile southeasterly trail extension, a new Connector was “feasible to improve access to and from the Erie Trail, particularly for residents and businesses on the north and east sides of Bass Lake, using Starke County 700 E.” If approved, the new Connector should be designated “S-17”. Two recent developments appear to lend added vitality to development of proposed S-17. First, receipt by the Panhandle Pathway of a Next Level Trails, Round 3, grant brings it closer to the Erie Trail and seems to invite a share-the-road connection on the east side of Tippecanoe River State Park. The northern end of this connection would likely utilize Starke County Road 700 East. Second, a possible kayak and canoe access to the Yellow River is being considered at the County Road 700 East Bridge north of the Erie Trail. These concepts are in their earliest stages, and they are by no means settled, but the possibilities warrant serious consideration.

Phase 4 [S-11] was to provide share-the-road signage from the Erie Trail south on Starke County Road 200 East, across the Pulaski County line, and continuing to the Panhandle Pathway Trailhead in downtown Winamac. The Pulaski County Economic Development Commission conceptualized this initiative, and it was approved by the Starke County Commissioners on September 6, 2016. On September 28, the PTC endorsed and joined the initiative. *PTC Minutes*, Sep. 28, 2016, p. 3.

The 1.8 mile portion of the route located in Starke County was designated S-11. In Pulaski County the route was about 17 miles and advanced through unincorporated towns of Denham and Ripley before advancing to Winamac. The ambitious two-county connector was described in detail during the following July's PTC meeting. *PTC Minutes*, Jul. 11, 2017, p. 7. The same processes and timing for S-11 apply as referenced previously for S-9, including the placement of share-the-road signs in October 2018 in Starke County. PTC maps indicate with a solid purple line what is S-11 in Starke County as well as the northerly portion of the connector in Pulaski County. But signage has not been placed in Pulaski County.

The Friends of Panhandle Pathway in 2020 proposed a modification to S-11 that would bypass Denham and reduce the length in Pulaski County significantly. There would be no adjustment to the Starke County portion of the route. If Pulaski County authorities approve these changes, the PTC should seek authorization to place wayfinding signage along the Connector and at both the Erie Trail and the Winamac trailhead.

The working draft below provides an updated map of the Erie Trail, as of January 1, 2022, shown in **dark green** and extending southeast in Starke County to County Road 700 E. In **purple** are Connectors S-9, S-11, S-13 and S-15, which the Board of Commissioners Starke County Commissioners approved previously, if the Commissioners would agree to reconfigure them as suggested in this *Future Vision*. Also depicted in **purple** is proposed new S-17 with the limited purpose of improving connectivity between residents and businesses on the north end of Bass Lake and the Erie Trail. But this depiction does not address the potential offered by a more ambitious S-17 continuing north to the Yellow River Bridge and south to the Panhandle Pathway. The draft also shows the transAmerican trails: Great American in **light green**

green; USBR 35 in dotted pink (updates pending) ; and ADT in light blue (update requests not yet requested):

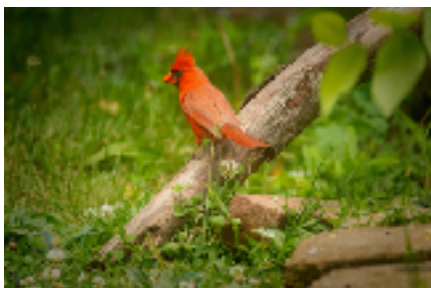


Phase 5 [proposed S-7] was not part of the 2016 *Vision* but has an embryonic presence in North Judson. In 2018 the HVRM Liaison to the PTC reported that visitors occasionally asked HVRM volunteers for directions to the Erie Trail. He recommended the PTC and Town collaborate on a directional sign at Norwayne Field. The PTC's BIC Committee suggested two options for a directional sign, and PTC members offered the options to the Town. OTES printed proofs which were delivered to Town's Clerk-Treasurer. The Town selected the preferred option, and in May 2019, it erected a sign which is visible from Main Street and Indiana Highways 10 and 39. The sign shows Erie Trail, ADT, USBR 35 logos with an arrow pointing to the Main Street trailhead *PTC Minutes*, Jun. 26, 2019, p. 4. In October 2020 a second sign was placed on the opposite side of the May 2019 sign, facing southeast toward Main Street, with the Great American logo and pointing to the trailhead. *PTC Minutes*, Oct. 29, 2020, p. 3. This double-sided sign is the only identification of Main Street as a potential Connector from Norwayne to the Erie Trail. The route as a Connector has not been endorsed by the Town of North Judson nor is it shown on a PTC map.



The *Leader* newspaper
October 1, 2020, p. A2

In early 2021, Ball State University developed a revitalization plan for downtown North Judson. The plan emphasized the potential value of the trail system and the need for improved connectivity between the Town and the Erie Trail. It wrote “The trail network that converges in North Judson is an incredible asset [with] the potential to bring much attention and assist in continued economic vitality with the people that the trail systems attract to the community.” It reflected the Erie Trail was “part of three national trail systems, the TransAmerican route of the Great American Rail-Trail, the northern branch of the American Discovery Trail and US Bike Route 35. Adding “these national trail systems presents many opportunities for” the town.



An official
Ball State
Cardinal

The Ball State plan observed the “lack of bike related infrastructure and wayfinding signage contributes to an unsafe riding environment for cyclists.” Also, the North Judson trailhead of the Erie Trail “is hard to locate from Downtown North Judson as well as from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum.” J.P. Hall, Ball State College of Architecture & Planning, *The North Judson Downtown Revitalization Plan 2021*, Connectivity & Trails, p. 36.

The spirit of the Ball State Plan was repeated in the BIC Committee by Carolla Heilstedt who urged “increased connectivity [and] access from HVRM to the start of the trail. This would be particularly useful for future events departing from or returning to the Museum. I would view this as a cooperative effort with HVRM and would look to [the HVRM] to contribute to the expense and lift associated with this project.”



Also, the Town of North Judson recently increased the recreational value of Norwayne Field. Among changes are the introduction of a splash pad, sidewalk beautification, and more dignified separation from an adjacent cemetery. The Starke County Commissioners approved the low bids for the main aspects of a Constellation of Starke project, funded through the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, to provide restrooms at Norwayne Field. WKVI Online, Anita Goodan, *Starke County Commissioners Approve Bids for Stellar Projects, Eliminates Project* (Mar. 9, 2022). The main project would be covered by OCRA funds, “but the Town will fund work around the parking lot, a small sidewalk attachment, and a concrete pad where picnic tables and benches will be included. The concrete area will include a shade sail to provide relief from the heat to park visitors.” WKVI Online, Anita Goodan, *North Judson Town Council Discusses Restroom Project* (Mar. 11, 2022). The project was slated for construction to begin in late summer 2022. WKVI Online, Anita Goodan, *Norwayne Field Project to Begin this Summer* (May19, 2022).

The “North Judson 5-Year Parks & Recreation Master Plan” (2022-2026), for which the Troyer Group was consultant, at p.31 urges:

In North Judson, the focus would be assessing how to connect pedestrians from town with the trail without the use of a vehicle. Pedestrian connectivity across North Judson has been identified as a goal in previous planning documents and will still guide this Master Plan document as well. Other improvements to this trail would be installing some restrooms and improving parking and accessibility at trailheads.

The PTC should explore with the Town of North Judson, and with the North Judson Parks and Recreation Board, the possibility of more robust signage to connect the Erie Trail to Downtown and to Norwayne Field. Discussions should include a sidewalk dedicated to connectivity. Using the PTC system of connector enumerations [*BIC Committee Minutes*, Jul. 25, 2017, p. 2], the connector would be designated “S-7”. This effort should be a priority and should also solicit engagement by the HVRM.

Online Guidance

The PTC has a website and a presence through Facebook. These are augmented by transAmerican trail-based online sites.

The PTC website features a “Maps” drawdown that identifies the Erie Trail, its context in the local community, and relationships to the Great American, ADT, and USBR35. At least two versions of the map had existed before 2019. In the summer of 2019 the temporary Brochure Workgroup was formed to develop a new pamphlet which would feature a base map and recognize nearby food and beverage services sponsoring the pamphlet.

“Susan Byer developed the draft for an initial printing of a new four-fold design on nine-by-thirteen inch paper. The [existing] brochure facing was retained but with a new map by Yancy [Lucas] to identify official Connectors and transAmerican elements. With support from Bruce [Fingerhut], Russell [Blais] led a successful effort to market advertisements.” *PTC Minutes*, Oct. 15, 2019, p. 4. 3,000 brochures were printed. The demand for the brochures was exceptional, and all but about 100 were distributed by mid-2020.

On December 9, 2021, the BIC Committee met by Zoom call to discuss a range of topics, including updating the base map to incorporate the two-

mile Erie Trail extension and consequential modifications to the approved Connectors. In addition, the need to update the pamphlet was identified, because of the two-mile extension and because some of the businesses changed which had sponsored the 2019 pamphlet.

Lucas Corral Interpretive Design prepared an updated base map which was presented to the PTC membership in February 2022. The members approved the map for general distribution, with technical adjustments for the depiction of Indiana Highway 10 near Bass Lake, and on condition that it reflect “some route approvals [are] pending”. *PTC Minutes*, Feb. 22, 2022, p. 5.

A “Visit” drawdown identifies websites of “Nearby Attractions” as well as “North Judson Erie Trail Gallery” 1 through 4, the “Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum”, and the “Erie Monterey Trail”. Each of these need to be made current, and the four Galleries should be restructured to identify diverse subjects.

The only municipality that is located within six miles of the Erie Trail is North Judson at its northwest trailhead. Visitors to the trail offer comments that are mostly positive, but the inconvenience of access to food services and restroom facilities has been referenced. Online reviews in TrailLink underline this sentiment. A 2020 reviewer noted there were “no restroom facilities”. A 2018 reviewer reflected “no facilities unless you go into [North] Judson but not very helpful at the other end.”

Initiatives funded in part through a Stellar Communities grant are advancing at North Judson and Bass Lake. The North Judson initiative would be on an identified connector if **Phase 5** discussed previously is implemented. The Bass Lake initiative is located on S-13 as considered in the discussion of **Phase 2**. The hope is that new accessibility to restrooms and possibly to potable water will result.

The two-mile extension southeast of US Highway 35 makes connectivity between the Erie Trail and Bass Lake amenities simpler and potentially more comfortable. Existing, emerging and remodeled food services at and near Bass Lake can enhance the experience of trail riders. Also, the new straight-line link on a modified S-15 (County Road 600 East) between the Erie Trail and the Bass Lake Beach & Campground offers possibilities, in particular because the Beach & Campground are now under guidance of the Starke County Parks Board and the Parks Superintendent.

In 2017 the PTC and the Starke County Chamber of Commerce contributed to a USBR 35 project to identify amenities near the route. The project was led by Hamilton County Tourism, Inc. and culminated in a website with a broadly-based listing for Starke and the other 14 Indiana counties through which USBR 35 passes. In later discussions with Hamilton County Tourism, the PTC learned the project had no continuing funding and no mechanism to update the multi-county listing. As businesses closed and new businesses opened, the listing became outdated, and Hamilton County Tourism sunsetted the website.

The USBR 35 project provides a good model for identifying available local amenities near the Erie Trail. The project required considerable effort in Starke County to identify particular amenities and how far they were from the trail. Updates would need to be made to the listing, but the bulk of the work has been done. Whether the listing would be available only online or also in a written form should be a later decision. If a written version were developed, perhaps the PTC could publish it similarly to our brochure and advertisers would help with funding. To be effective, the listing would need to be kept reasonably current.

During a December 9, 2021 Zoom meeting, the BIC Committee reflected there were ongoing updates to the PTC's website. These would continue, and the website would most likely need to be revamped in the next five years. The Committee agreed "The Facebook Page is somewhat confused by having two versions." The Committee recommended determining if the older version should be closed or merged into a newer more active version. These online initiatives should be actively pursued.

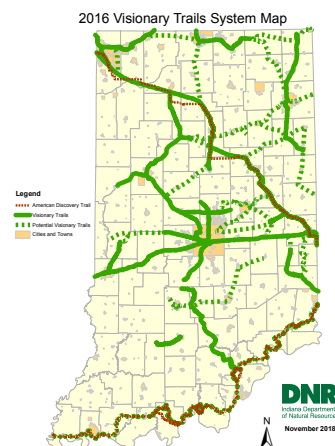
4. Collaborations with TransAmerican and Visionary Trails

The *2016 Vision* capitalized on the Erie Trail's designation as host to the ADT and USBR 35, two "interstate" trails. More than interstate trails, the ADT is an east-west route which extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific. USBR 35 is a north-south route, dedicated within Michigan and Indiana in 2015, and which is planned to extend from Canada to near New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. The ADT and USBR 35 are truly "transAmerican" routes.

In 2019 the Erie Trail also became host to the Great American Rail-Trail, a third transAmerican route. Similar to the ADT, the Great American extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. The ADT begins at Cape Henlopen State Park in Delaware and ends at Pt. Reyes National Seashore in California. The Great American begins in Georgetown near the United States Capitol and ends at La Push, Washington. USBR 35 begins at Sault Saint Marie, Michigan and is planned to end at USBR 45 in Mississippi or Louisiana.

In 2020, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior announced that the Panhandle Pathway was added to the National Trails System. This system promotes enjoyment and appreciation of trails. Trails added to the system receive a certificate of designation, trail markers, and a letter of recognition from the Secretary. WKVI Online, Michael Gallenberger, *Panhandle Pathway Added to National Trails System* (Oct. 27, 2020); and National Park Service Online, *America's National Trails System*. The PTC and the “Friends of the Panhandle Pathway” have cooperated on trail initiatives with the hope of advancing mutual connectivity.

The *2021 Vision* should capitalize on its status as host to the now three transAmerican routes, the Great American, the ADT, and USBR 35. A new emphasis should be placed on improving connectivity with the Panhandle Pathway. The viability of these routes within and beyond Starke County is significant to the vitality of the Erie Trail and to trail connectivity generally. The PTC has adopted goals and objectives that include the “missions of the Great American Rail-Trail, the American Discovery Trail (Northern Branch), US Bike Route 35, and the Panhandle Pathway in Starke County and adjacent Counties.” *PTC Minutes*, Feb. 11, 2021, p. 7. Because each of these trail systems offer opportunities and challenges which are in some ways unique, they are addressed separately.



Collaboration with the Great American Rail-Trail In advancing the Great American, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy seeks to accomplish a coast-to-coast experience on non-motorized asphalt, concrete, or crushed stone surfaces. Preferred routes may serve trail activities including bicycling, fishing, wheelchair accessibility, horseback riding, mountain biking, snowmobiling, walking, and cross country skiing. With its conception in 2020, the Great American's preferred route in Starke County was synonymous with the nine-mile Erie Trail from North Judson to US Highway 35. Officials in the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy participated in the October 22, 2021 Grand Opening of the two mile southeast extension of the Erie Trail to Starke County Road 700 East. Shortly afterwards, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy recognized the two-mile extension as part of the preferred route of the Great American Rail Trail.



In 2020 the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy invited Steve Lucas to serve in the Great American's Indiana Stakeholders. The Stakeholders' first meeting was held by videoconference in June. *PTC Board Minutes*, Jun. 11, 2020, p 6. Since then the PTC and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy professionals have communicated regularly on issues for connecting the Starke County Great American segment with other completed segments located to the northwest and the southeast. Illustrative are *PTC Minutes*, Jan. 11, 2021, p. 4; WKVI Online, Michael Gallenberger, *North Judson to Sell Railroad to Midwest & Bluegrass* (Jan. 19, 2021); *PTC Minutes*, Feb. 11, 2021, p. 3; WKVI Online, Anita Goodan, *Officials Cut Ribbon on Newly Completed Segment of Erie Trail in Starke County*, Oct. 23, 2021.

To the northwest, the nearest Great American segment is at Hebron in western Porter County. As discussed previously, if feasible the first priority for trail extension is northwest to the Kankakee River and then to LaCrosse

in LaPorte County. The PTC should also support Rails-to-Trails efforts in LaPorte and Porter Counties to extend the Great American to Hebron.

A significant priority should be to also extend the Erie Trail (including the Great American, ADT and USBR35) across the Tippecanoe River to the Town of Monterey. Beyond Monterey there are major challenges for land acquisition, but the ultimate goal should be to continue through Pulaski County and then to the Nickel Plate Trail at the City of Rochester.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy partnered with Warrior Expeditions in the summer of 2021 for the inaugural Great-American Trail Warrior Expeditions Trek. Warrior Expeditions is a non-profit outdoor therapy program which supports combat veterans transitioning from the U.S. Military through long-distance outdoor expeditions. Five veterans bicycled all 3,800 miles of the Great American in 2021, arriving in Starke County as separate groups but with each passing through North Judson via the trail on June 19. Four of the veterans stayed overnight in homes of PTC members the Blaisses and the Lucases, and PTC members pitched in for an outdoor dinner hosted by the Blaisses at their Bass Lake home. Two of the veterans also visited the Starke County Veterans Memorial Plaza, the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 748, and other local sites.



Paul Cook was the first veteran to complete the epic journey, arriving at La Push, Washington on August 7.



The PTC has agreed to again serve as local hosts for the Great-American Trail Warrior Expeditions Trek in the summer of 2022.

Representatives of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy are major contributors to Indiana trail activities, including celebration of Indiana's 2021-22 "Year of the Trails" and the Indiana Legislative Trails Caucus. They have expressed a desire to help the PTC extend the trail in Starke County, with planning and potentially with financing. The PTC should continue collaboration with professionals and volunteers at the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, including through the Great American's Indiana Stakeholders.

Collaboration with the American Discovery Trail, Northern Branch

Although having different starting and ending points, and different routes in most states, the Northern Branch of the ADT approximates the same route as the Great American through Indiana. The ADT's history and philosophy differ modestly from the Great American. Forty years ago, the American Hiking Society organized a cross country hike in order to raise the public consciousness of backpacking and trails. The hike was the progenitor of the ADT. With hiking emphasized, and in 1980 paved non-motorized trails a rarity, much of the ADT followed public roads. In Starke County these were notably US Highway 35 eastward and US Highway 421 westward from Starke County



The ADT has supported PTC efforts to develop the Erie Trail. In February 2019, its President wrote to urge an NLT grant be awarded to the PTC for the two-mile extension. He reflected that when approved and construction completed, the extension would advance the ADT with a marked crossing on US Highway 35, and later connectivity southeast to Rochester. The two-mile extension would also eliminate the need for the ADT to follow busy US 35 south for six miles, a road with little or no shoulder. In the longer term, the modification would bring the Erie Trail (and the ADT) closer to a direct connectivity with the non-motorized Nickel Plate Trail that hosts the ADT to the southeast, as well as another major non-motorized trail, the Panhandle Pathway.



The current northwestern trailhead of the Erie Trail is at Main Street near the eastern municipal boundary of North Judson. The ADT established a route through the northern edge of town along a pre-1960 corridor of four separate rail lines. Westbound on the ADT a traveler would follow county roads angled northwest, turn directly west, and then proceed north on US Highway 421 to cross the Kankakee River.

In 2011, the Hoosier Rails to Trails Council recommended a route for USBR 35 that would have followed the one previously established by the ADT. But the following year the North Judson Town Council countered with a route for USBR 35 passing nearer to its commercial and public services. The Hoosier Rails to Trails Council agreed to the Town's alternative route. The result is the ADT identifies one route through North Judson, and USBR 35 identifies another slightly different route.

In the spring of 2018, the PTC requested and was granted permission by the North Judson Town Council to place wayfinding signage for travelers on the ADT and USBR 35. Individual signs had the logos of both routes but with all placed on the route previously approved by Town for USBR 35. Signs were funded by a donation from the Hardesty Foundation with posts and labor contributed by the Town of North Judson. WKVI Online, Jacque Ryan, *North Judson Permits Prairie Trails Club to Place Signs on Erie Trail* (May 12, 2018) and WKVI Online, Jacque Ryan, *North Judson Clerk-Treasurer Meets with Members of the Prairie Trails Club to Discuss Sign Placement* (June 7, 2018).



As discussed previously, extension of the Erie Trail (perhaps identified as the “Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail” or the “English Lake Trail”) northwest, as host to the Great American, ADT and USBR 35 from North Judson to the Kankakee River, is the PTC’s highest priority. Existing wayfinding signage should be reviewed in this context. Wishes of the Town of North Judson are paramount but wishes of the ADT and USBR 35 leadership should also be considered.

For the route northwest of North Judson, the PTC should engage the ADT in a discussion to relocate from US Highway 421, with its bridge over the Kankakee River, to a river crossing at English Lake. In the near term, the crossing could be achieved on the share-the-road route currently used by USBR 35. In the longer term, the ADT should be engaged to consider the approval of a non-motorized route harmonious with the proposed extension of the Erie Trail northwest as host to the Great American, ADT and USBR 35 from North Judson to the Kankakee River.

Collaboration with US Bicycle Route 35 The U.S. Bicycle Route System is a developing national network of bicycle routes connecting communities with signed roads and trails. Much of the network has share-the-road status with motor vehicles—in some instances on busy highways. Since 2005, Adventure Cycling Association has shepherded the system. *Adventure Cycling Association Online, U.S. Bicycle Route System.* In Indiana, USBR 35 stretches 360 miles on paved roadways from near Lake Michigan to Louisville, Kentucky. In Starke County USBR 35 uses a combination of the Erie Trail and County roads but has successfully minimized contact with highways.

Communications with INDOT's Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator were outlined previously. These considered relocating a portion of USBR 35, which currently uses Starke County 800 South and Starke County 700 East, to the two-mile southeastern extension of the Erie Trail from US 35.



In North Judson wayfinding signage should be addressed similarly to treatment of the ADT if the existing Erie Trail is extended northwest. Again, the wishes of the Town of North Judson must be paramount, but the PTC should also seek concurrence through INDOT.

Collaboration with the Panhandle Pathway. The PTC and the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway collaborate on a regular basis. The DNR identifies both the Erie Trail and the Panhandle Pathway as “visionary” trails. The Friends wrote a letter of support for the PTC’s Next Level Trails, Round One grant application. The PTC wrote a letter of support for the Next Level Trails, Round Two grant application of the Panhandle Pathway. The two not-for-profits collaborated on development of a share-the-road Connector between the Panhandle in Winamac and the Erie Trail along the route in Starke County designated S-11. As referenced previously in the Phase 4 discussion, the Friends have suggested reducing the connector’s length in Pulaski County.



On April 20, 2022, the Panhandle Pathway received from Next Level Trails, Round 3, a \$2,503,809 NLT grant to extend its trail on both ends. The 0.83-mile southern extension will connect the current terminus to France Park in Cass County. The 1.50-mile northern extension will connect the trail to the north edge of Winamac, helping the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway move closer to their park-to-park goal and bringing the Panhandle Pathway 1.5 miles closer to the Erie Trail. Once completed, the Panhandle Pathway will be 24.3 miles long.

Discussions with bicyclists, following completion of the two-mile Erie Trail extension southeast of US 35, identify a growing interest in a new share-the-road connection to the Panhandle Pathway. The route would be east of Tippecanoe River State Park and optimize its Round 3 extension. This route would minimize, or perhaps even eliminate, the need for bicyclists

and walkers to use busy US Highway 35. Evaluation of this opportunity should be a priority,

The PTC should continue collaborating with the Friends on other projects of mutual interest.

Collaboration with the Nickel Plate Trail The Nickel Plate Trail extends 40 miles south from Lake Manitou and Rochester in Fulton County. Like the Erie Trail, the Nickel Plate Trail is host in Rochester to the ADT and USBR 35 and is on the preferred route of the Great American.

Between the Erie Trail in Starke County and the Nickel Plate Trail is a half-mile segment “Erie Monterey Trail” in Pulaski County. The long-term hope is to unify the Erie Trail, the Erie Monterey Trail, and the Nickel Plate Trail as a single trail system.

Like the Erie Trail and the Panhandle Pathway, the Nickel Plate Trail has been designated a “Visionary” trail by the DNR. The need for a bridge over the Tippecanoe River, lengthy distances, and absence of a well defined route southeast of Monterey make realization of a unified trail unlikely in the near future. But proponents of the Nickel Plate Trail and the Erie Trail both participate as Indiana Stakeholders in the Great American. Opportunities for collaborations should be sought, possibly that include representation from the Town of Monterey.

Collaboration with the Lake Max Trail The Lake Max Trail is intended, when complete, to circle Lake Maxinkuckee. Its distance from the Erie Trail would then be roughly nine or ten miles. Crossing the Tippecanoe River would not be necessary. Key governmental entities for the Lake Max Trail include the Town of Culver, the Culver Redevelopment Commission, and the Marshall County Board of Commissioners.

The Troyer Group, which was consultant for the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail completed in 2021, is also serving as consultant for phases of the Lake Max Trail effort. At least one member of the PTC is communicating with Marshall County on projects within Starke County. The PTC should determine whether there is interest in Marshall County for a collaboration and in defining a connection between our trail systems.

Collaboration with Jasper County Embryonic discussions with a group in neighboring Jasper County, and centered in the Town of DeMotte, identify possible interest in the development of a collaborative trail initiative. The PTC should be open to pursuit of this possibility.

5. Collaboration on Development of Starke County Blueways

Following PTC discussions which extended over several months, the Board of Directors on October 15, 2020 directed the development of a consensus document for a new mission statement that was accompanied by goals and objectives. An element of the new mission statement was to be the explicit inclusion of blueways. *PTC Board Minutes*, Oct. 15, 2021, p. 2.

“Blueways” are marked routes on rivers, lakes, canals and similar waters that are navigable for recreational use. They allow access to waterways for non-motorized boats and sometimes motorized vessels, inner tubes and other craft. Water trails not only provide access and exit but also identify places on shore for boaters to camp, picnic, or obtain other services. In the United States and Canada, the management of blueways are commonly guided by governmental agencies. Adapted from *Wikipedia*, “Water trails” (also known as “Blueways”).

Following the Board’s direction, the membership on February 21, 2021 adopted a new **Mission Statement with Goals and Objectives**:

“The mission of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. is to advance, promote, and maintain greenways and blueways in northern Indiana.

“Goals and objectives to implement our mission are as follows:

- 1 To assist with management and maintenance of the existing Erie Trail and Connectors to the Erie Trail approved by a governmental unit with jurisdiction in Starke County or Pulaski County.
- 2 To share in the missions of the Great American Rail-Trail, the American Discovery Trail (Northern Branch), US Bike Route 35, and the Panhandle Pathway in Starke County and adjacent Counties.
- 3 To encourage biking, hiking, kayaking, horseback riding, and similar activities that support public health and recreation.
- 4 To foster education, events, and activities that provide healthy outdoor recreation and advance the quality of life in our community.” *PTC Minutes*, Feb. 11, 2021, p. 7.

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources is the state agency with “general charge” of Indiana’s navigable waters. IC 14-19-1-1(9). Through the Natural Resources Commission, the Indiana DNR established a roster of navigable waters by county. For Starke County, this Roster consists of the portions of the Kankakee River, Tippecanoe River and Yellow River located in the county. *Navigable Waterways Roster*, Information Bulletin #3 (Fifth Amendment, Sep. 21, 2021).

Similarly, the Commission established a roster of Indiana lakes that are available for public navigation. For Starke County, this Roster consists of Bass Lake, Eagle Lake, Hartz Lake and Round Lake, and the portions of Koontz Lake and Langenbaum Lake located in Starke County. *Indiana NRC Listing of Public Freshwater Lakes*, Information Bulletin #61 (Eighth Amendment, Sep. 21, 2021).

The PTC has supported Starke County efforts to augment existing access to the Yellow River by kayak or canoe. At the request of the Starke County Parks Board, PTC members in July 2017 helped design and committed to funding for a grant application to the Indiana Office of Tourism Development and the Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs. The grant would have funded a dedicated access site for kayaks and canoes on the Yellow River at county-owned land adjacent to Range Road. In December 2020, the PTC obtained an Indiana Greenways Foundation support letter for another Parks Department effort to obtain a grant from the Indiana Office of Tourism Development for access improvement. Unfortunately, both of these Starke County efforts were unsuccessful. But the Parks Department continues to pursue funding to augment kayak and canoe access to the Yellow River. In December 2021, the former Parks Superintendent identified the following sites as the focus of the pursuit.

- (1) Starke County Road 1100 East (Bridge 39)
- (2) State Road 23 Bridge
- (3) Starke County Road 700 East (Bridge 27)
- (4) Wythogan Park Knox
- (5) English Lake (Confluence of Yellow River and Kankakee River)

The PTC should continue to support these efforts. In particular, sites at English Lake and at Starke County Road 700 East offer opportunities for public trail and public water connectivity. For other Starke County public waterways, the PTC should consider collaborative efforts with local and state government to improve and maintain accessibility, connectivity and use for recreation.

6. Development of a Sustainable Strategy to Maintain the Erie Trail and Connectors as Viable Bicycle, Pedestrian, and where appropriate, Equestrian Routes

Trail maintenance is a vexing challenge that is seemingly universal to trail systems. On its website for the Great American Rail-Trail, the Rails to Trails Conservancy reports:

“Trail maintenance is a critical need for all trails. The Rails to Trails Conservancy co-chairs the Coalition for Recreational Trails, which is working to increase federal investment in the Recreational Trails Program—a federal trail fund that specifically designates trail maintenance as an allowable use. If this campaign is successful, it will add considerable money for states to invest in maintenance. Federal funding through programs such as the Transportation Alternatives program has been essential to building trails in every state. RTC has consistently been and will continue to be central to establishing, protecting and increasing these federal investments in trails.”

The Indiana Greenways Foundation has called for the establishment of an Indiana Greenways Fund:

“A Greenways Maintenance Fund (GMF) needs to be established at a state level to be able to build and maintain the growing number of off-road, multiple use trails in Indiana. Public funds need to be assembled to assist in maintaining greenways and in meeting grant requirements for local matches. Currently, the demand for funding far exceeds the supply available for greenways, and the demand is likely to increase.

....

“The burgeoning interest in trail development is clear, but perpetual maintenance of our trail network remains inconsistent at best. Currently, a patchwork of municipalities and trail advocacy organizations help maintain the vast majority of greenways in Indiana. Costs to maintain one mile of trail average between \$3,500 and \$6,500 annually. This in turn represents a sustainable investment, but a necessary one to maintain trails for long-term use and enjoyment.

“Major elements of trail maintenance include, but are not limited to the following:

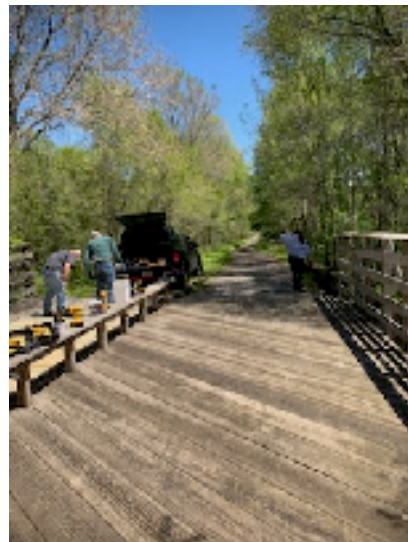
- Upkeep of trail signs & pavement markings
- Patching and grading of trail surfaces
- Cleaning and sweeping of trail
- Litter and trash pick-up
- Mowing of trail shoulders
- Repair and replacement of trail amenities (lights, benches, etc.)

“To aid with the growing demand to maintain our valued trail networks, the Greenways Foundation of Indiana proposes the establishment of a Greenways Maintenance Fund at the state level. This fund would be available to trail management agencies, public and not-for-profit, to provide financial aid in maintaining off-road trails.”

The Indiana Greenways Foundation in 2020 approved a legislative platform urging the creation at the State level of a sustainable trails development and maintenance fund. The Greenways Foundation recommended the DNR administer the fund and that it include financial resources “for new trails, maintenance, and promotion. The DNR should also receive adequate funds to effectively administer said program.”

The PTC held its first meeting on March 30, 2011. Minutes of that meeting recognized the Erie Trail’s “most pressing...issue is maintenance.” The membership minutes for 2018 through 2020 illustrate the importance of maintenance. For the 24 meetings held during the period, in only two winter meetings was there no reference to maintenance. From most to least common, topics were vegetation control, repair and replacement of trail amenities, patching or grading trail surfaces (asphalt, equestrian, and bridges), and mowing of trail shoulders. For cleaning and sweeping of trail and for litter and trash pick-up, services are provided mostly by individual volunteers without a scheduled PTC workgroup event.





Maintenance was a central topic during the PTC membership meeting of May 20, 2021 at page 7:

“Kathy [Lucas] said the Indiana Greenways Foundation has sought support for trail maintenance. The Foundation urged the establishment of the Greenways Maintenance Fund at the state level “to build and maintain the growing number of off-road, multiple use trails in Indiana. Public funds need to be assembled to assist in maintaining greenways...” She also referenced the Indiana Trails Caucus, described as “a group of state legislators— Republicans and Democrats from the House and Senate—committed to creating a statewide trails network that provides significant health, economic and other quality of life benefits for all Hoosiers.” She suggested that PTC members can advance the cause for trail maintenance by urging our local legislators to join in or support the Indiana Trails Caucus.

“John Bawcum, President of the Friends of Panhandle Pathway, said his organization is also challenged by the huge financial cost of trail maintenance. Volunteers provide great assistance with labor costs, but keeping asphalt and bridges in good repair needs major outside financial help. Deb Mix recommended the Friends of Panhandle Pathway and the PTC combine efforts to encourage our local legislators to support trail maintenance. John said he agreed.”

The PTC and its members should write letters of support and appreciation to the Indiana legislators who have supported the Trail Caucus, as well as to those who have not, urging them to join the Trail Caucus. Consideration should be given to forming a workgroup to assist members with identifying their legislators and with drafting letters. As a nonprofit, the PTC cannot lobby but individual members can express their opinions. The workgroup might also consider contacting the Secretary of Transportation, former South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, regarding trail maintenance needs and the importance of maintenance to a national trail system. The PTC might encourage a dialog to encourage federal support. Discussion with the Great American and ADT leaders, with which the PTC already has regular contacts, could result in a more targeted approach.

The PTC “Summary Management and Maintenance Plan” described in its 2019 application for the Next Level Trails Grant described a project aimed at asphalt repairs:

“On July 21, [2019,] the membership selected the best bidder for the pavement repairs and agreed to expend \$6,750 for those repairs. Because the bid was more favorable than anticipated, when a written contract was later executed, additional repair items were included and the amount of the contract was increased to \$7,000. As a courtesy to the PTC and the community, the contractor later added still more repairs at no cost.

Successful completion of the contract is documented in words and images in the August 21, [2019,] minutes.”

In November 2021, the membership had a broad discussion of challenges posed by maintenance issues and particularly dealing with problems that are associated with asphalt deterioration. The members agreed to explore how to most-effectively apply funding targeted for maintenance. Asphalt repairs are a pressing need and might generate even more discussion if funding were more readily acquired.

7. Promotion of Signage and Other Projects to further the Enjoyment of Historic, Scientific, Artistic, and Alternative Uses of Trail Corridors

Historic The PTC authorized renditions by lucascorral design, approved, and then placed three interpretive local history signs. In July 2019, these signs were placed east of Starke County 100 West for illustrating the planned community of Lena Park in 1910 and for Bass Lake in the first half of the 20th Century at Starke County 700 South. A sign for the 1911 transcontinental flight of the *Vin Fiz* was placed at Aldine in May 2020. These were underwritten by grants from the Luminous Foundation and the Hardesty Memorial Endowment.



A topic which has generated particular member interest is the recognition of pioneering efforts to develop the Erie Trail, including founding members of what became the PTC. Update on Signage Proposals Recognizing Early Trail Activists and Joint Bill-board with HVRM, *PTC Minutes*, Apr. 15, 2021, p. 7. This recognition should be a priority. Signs could be done tastefully to honor the vision and energy to seek trail funding when trail building was not as popular as it has become. The PTC should focus on those people, both locally and at the state level, who were

instrumental in the original three-mile trail segment from North Judson to Starke County Road 100 West.

Added historic interpretations should be developed with possible subjects including Bogus Run, Piqua, Aldine, Bass Station, agriculture, railroad, telegraph, and First Nations occupation. Interpretive railroad signage should be placed so as not to compete with HVRM initiatives. If signage is developed for Bass Station, it should include reference to the main line of the Erie Railroad and its spur to Bass Lake.

Scientific 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 for this aspect. 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 Our Solar System in Scale (the "OSSIS Project").

The Community Foundation formed a workgroup to design and cause the placement of 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 at least one model and the misplacement of two others on the equestrian trail, they needed to be reworked. Plans are for the Sun model to be designed and then placed near Main Street in North Judson. There are also plans for a model of the dwarf planet, Pluto, to be placed near the eastern end of the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail. Another possible inclusion is of Ceres, a dwarf planet in the asteroid belt between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. The PTC should continue with its support of the OSSIS Project, with a prominent website posting.



Other scientific or nature interpretive signs or stations should be developed, both onsite and online. A notable example of a previous effort is a 2018 PTC grant request to KVREMC RoundUp for the “Erie Science & Nature Trail-Bike Rack Project”. As described later, the bike rack element of the request was funded and became a great success. The second element would have provided \$6,500 for trial kiosk kits, booklets and scavenger forms, an audio tour on the PTC website, and modest prizes. This element also received support from the Starke County Youth Club, Inc. but was not funded. The PTC should renew efforts to seek this or a similar grant.

Artistic In a partnership with the Purdue Extension Community Wellness Program, the PTC obtained a grant from the Kankakee Valley REMC “RoundUp” program to construct bike racks. The \$2,500 grant was used for materials, in an initiative with the Starke County Initiative for Lifelong Learning (“SCILL”), to make bicycling a more accessible option and thus contribute to public health and to the environment. Students in the SCILL program were challenged to use imagination and welding skill to create bike racks. At first students seemed uncertain about expressing their artistic side, but with increasing vigor, they produced bike racks that whimsically depict flowers and vines; owls on branches with axes; fishermen; or nuts, bolts and tools.

In October 2020, the first bike rack was placed at Norwayne Field in North Judson. This site includes wayfinding signage to the Erie Trail and a new splash pad, and it is slated for the addition of public restrooms in 2022 or 2023. Also, the PTC committed in its NLT Grant application to place three bike racks east of US Highway 35. Two were placed in October 2021, and the third was placed in April 2022. Although they have utilitarian functions, the four bike racks also provide artistic interpretations.

Bike racks are more helpful when they are readily available than when they are infrequent and obscure. The PTC should seek additional opportunities for the development and placement of bike racks with artistic elements, particularly upon trail connectors that can serve utilitarian uses, such as for cyclists to park their bikes and perform errands or enjoy a local amenity



Part of the \$25,000 grant from the Lilly Endowment to the Starke County Community Foundation, referenced previously, was used for a student project to design and execute a painting on the former signal bungalow that is near Starke County Road 200 East. The site was prepared and the painting started in the summer of 2021. The PTC should encourage the painting's completion and support efforts to highlight the site.



The OSSIS project discussed previously is an important artistic effort, as well as an important scientific effort.

In 2020 a large blue bike sculpture was installed at the former State Road 10 Rest Park where the highway crosses the Erie Trail a mile east of North Judson. The sculpture is an important artistic draw to the trail.



Alternative Uses To the extent not detrimental to the Erie Trail's core uses for biking, running, walking, and horseback riding, the PTC should support alternative uses that will encourage healthy, outdoor activities by the public.

A great example is a geocache trail created by the PTC's Linda Byer in 2012 which currently begins on the Erie Trail at US Highway 35 and goes northwest to North Judson. Her geocache trail offers an alternative use which requires exercise and persistence that results in an adventure for an audience that might not otherwise be interested in the Erie Trail. Or it may offer a different experience to a regular bicyclist or pedestrian.



At the same location as the artistic large blue bike sculpture, placed in 2020 were a public bicycle repair station, picnic tables and trash cans. If the public bicycle repair station proves useful, another such station with similar accompanying amenities may be warranted east of US Highway 35.

Other uses that might be promoted are mushroom hunting, snow skiing, snowshoe walking, walnut collection, and supervised nighttime usage. The PTC should consider these or other alternative uses in collaboration with the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, the Starke County Parks Department, and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

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