

# **MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.**

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

**November 16, 2021**

## **MEMBERS**

**Diane Blais  
Russell Blais  
Linda Byer  
Paul Byer  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathy Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Anita McMillin  
Brian McMillin  
Sharon Smead  
Peggy Stalbrink  
Kirt Verhagen  
Larry Wickert**

## **GUESTS**

**Bob Albert, Liaison from Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum  
John Bawcum, President of Friends of Panhandle Pathway  
Marc Vendl, Superintendent of Starke County Parks Department**

## **Call to Order by Secretary**

**Steve Lucas, Secretary, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") on November 16, 2021 in the BLPOA Community Center, Knox (Bass Lake) at 5:33 pm, CST (6:33 pm, EST). He introduced Marc Vendl, Starke County Parks Superintendent.**

## **Review and Approval of Minutes of October 12, 2021**

**Paul Byer moved to approve the minutes of October 12, 2021 without amendment. Russ Blais seconded the motion and the motion carried.**

## **Elections of Members of Board of Directors**

**Four Board members have their two-year terms set to expire. These are Kirt Verhagen, Sharon Smead, Carolla Heilstedt and Steve. All agreed to serve again at the will of the membership. No other person offered to serve or was nominated. Larry Wickert moved the nominations be closed. Diane Blais seconded the motion. The motion carried and Kirt, Sharon, Carolla and Steve were elected for additional two-year terms by acclimation.**

**By email on November 8, 2021, Bruce Fingerhut resigned as a Board member and its Chair effective November 16, 2021. Bruce had one year remaining of his two-year term. Steve said Larry Wickert has expressed willingness to serve the final year of the term and then nominated Larry. Sharon seconded the motion. Nominations were closed and Larry Wickert was elected by acclimation. Diane Blais and Peg Stalbrink serve terms that expire at the end of 2022.**

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

Kathy Lucas provided the Treasurer's Report, including the Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. She made special note of the \$3,500 grant for maintenance from the Hardesty Memorial Fund, thanks to Joan Hardesty. Kathy reflected upon another \$2,000 grant from the Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund. Jennifer Kane was greatly respected by Steve as his longtime paralegal with the Indiana Natural Resources Commission. Kathy thanked Brian and Anita McMillan for supporting the grand opening celebration with a \$200 donation. She expressed the PTC's appreciation for \$5,000 from the Starke County Commissioners in support of the NLT-01-07 Grant. She thanked Peggy Stalbrink for her continuing support with merchandise sales and recognized the final funds received from the Run/Walk event on October 2.

Kathy said all expenses were reimbursements to members for materials to needed to move toward completion of the NLT-01-07 Grant. She thanked the volunteers for their extraordinary work during the last month to help carry the trail extension to closure. Kathy said that on November 13 on recommendation of The Troyer Group she mailed a major payment to Thomas Excavation and Welding for the core construction project, but there has not been time for this check to clear through First Farmers Bank & Trust. Russ asked about work yet to be performed to satisfy DNR's punch list, and Kathy replied that the PTC still held about \$65,000 to help assure full performance. The Treasurer's Report for November 16, 2021 follows:



### **FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)**

Balance forward from 10/12/21 \$ 325,038.82

#### **INCOME**

10/13/21	Donation for Ribbon Cutting from A & B McMillin	200.00	
10/25/21	Hardesty Maintenance Grant & cash from Ribbon Cutting ( <i>\$3500 Hardesty grant; \$255 from sale of merchandise</i> )	3,755.00	
11/2/21	Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund ("Use where most needed")	2,000.00	
11/3/21	Run/Walk SignUp final payment for 10/2 event	52.38	
11/8/21	Merchandise sales from Peggy Stalbrink	22.00	
11/8/21	Starke County Matching NLT-01-07 Grant	<u>5,000.00</u>	
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>11,029.38</b>	<b>\$336,068.20</b>

## **EXPENSES**

10/19/21	Reimbursement: P.Byer for concrete & supplies	882.09
10/15/21	Reimbursement: P.Byer for bench pad supplies	494.50
11/2/21	Reimbursement: K.Lucas for portable toilet for ceremony	150.00
11/2/21	Reimbursement: S.Lucas for asphalt (500 lb)	79.90
11/2/21	Reimbursement: K.Lucas for 5 bench plaque sets	<u>210.55</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>1,817.04</b>

**Ending FFBT balance as of 11/16/21**

**\$334,251.16**

**Kathy reflected that with placement of the bench sponsored by the Marshall County Horse Association at Starke County Road 700 East, this restricted donation has been completed. She added that a second bench placed at Starke County Road 600 East was a PTC asset which was placed as part of our obligation under the NLT Grant, but was not separately sponsored, and thus not identified as a grant or donation in our minutes. It has a plaque identifying the PTC as sponsor.**

## **Restricted/Unrestricted Grants and Donations**

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signage BL (inc. "You are Here")	\$4,124.94	
Luminous Fund Grant #3 (2019)	Matching NLT Grant	1,218.25	
Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020)	Northwest Extension	5,000.00	
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021)	Northwest Extension or Operations	5,000.00	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding/Historic Signage	6,911.50	
Hardesty Memorial Grant (2019)	Matching NLT Grant	1,218.25	
PTC Account Commitment	Matching NLT Grant	1,218.25	
Marshall County Horse Assn.	Bench for Southeast Extension	0.00	(Bench Placed)
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	1,218.25	
Lucas Lakehouse Guests' Donation	Future Vision/Website	700.00	
Next Level Trails Grant	Southeast Extension	270,308.43	
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	Northwest Extension	6,000.00	+2,000.00
Stalbrink Donation	Scholarship or Most Needed	100.00	
Blais/Vlaming Bench	Trailhead @ 450/210	350.00	
McMillin Bench	Trailhead @ 450/210	350.00	
Maintenance Fund	General Trail Maintenance	7,500.00	+\$3,500 Hardesty
KVREMC Bike Rack Grant	Balance of Grant Amount	1,500.00	
VFW Grant	Trail Improvements	5,000.00	
Starke Co. Commissioners	Matching NLT Grant	5,000.00	

**TOTAL RESTRICTED FUNDS      \$322,969.87**

## **BANK ACCOUNT**

First Farmers Bank & Trust (FFBT)	<b>\$334,251.16</b>	<b>TOTAL IN BANK</b>
	<b><u>-322,969.87</u></b>	<b>RESTRICTED</b>
	<b>\$11,281.29</b>	<b>UNRESTRICTED</b>

**Brian moved to approve the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted/Unrestricted Grants and Donations as presented. Following a second by Sharon, the motion carried.**

## **Report of Southeast Trail Extension Inspection and Grand Opening to Kick Off “Indiana’s Year of the Trails”**

On the morning of October 22, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources inspected the two-mile southeast extension of the Erie Trail made possible by Gov. Eric Holcomb’s NextLevel Trails, Round 1 Grant (NLT-01-07). Participants from Indiana DNR’s Division of State Parks were Lisa Herber, Grants Coordinator assigned to our project; Mark Becker, Next Level Trails Program Manager; and Amy Marisavljevic, Trails Section Chief. For the PTC Carolla, Paul, and Larry drove UTVs and were joined by Kathy and Steve. Jonathon Geels represented the Troyer Group, and Jason Young represented Thomas Excavating and Welding. Brandon Burgoa, Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator from INDOT, also participated.

During the inspection, Lisa Herber identified aspects of the project that she believed needed more work (described as a “punch list”), and she included these in an October 25 email:

- “1 Two foot recovery areas on both sides of the trail in several spots has all or high % of ballast. For a safe transition for bikes going off the trail, the recovery area needs to be compacted small stone with dust, bare dirt, or a combo of the 2. The recovery area and drainage slopes all along the trail needs to be compacted and must be flush at the edge of the asphalt trail to avoid erosion in this area that can undermine the asphalt. In a couple of areas on the north side of the trail a 2 ft recovery area was not present and a drainage slope outside of the recovery zone needed to be created.
- “2 Extend the fence at the bridge on the east and west approach sides to block users who might go off the trail and ride down the slopes into the ditch. Fence should be angled out to cut across the slopes and extend far enough to prevent this occurring. Maintain the current fence height from the ground in these areas (AASHTO requires a minimum 42 in height at top rail).
- “3 Horse trail and buffer/recovery next to the bike/ped trail, west of CR 600E crossing, needs compacted and must be flush at edge of the asphalt trail to avoid erosion that can undermine sustainability of the trails.
- “4 Fence on north side of the parking lot is needed per the plans. Ensure it is placed outside of the trail 2ft recovery area.
- “5 Trail and road signage needs installed per the plans.”

**The grand opening for the two-mile extension was held in the afternoon. Joining the DNR contingent in the afternoon were Michael Smith, Chief of Staff, and Chris Smith, Deputy Director for Land Management. The Troyer Group was represented by John Leszczynski, President. Among representatives for organizations with national groups were those for the Great American Rail-Trail, the American Discovery Trail, US Bike Route 35, and Indiana Trails.**

### **As reported by Anita Gooden for WKVI Radio:**

“Officials from the DNR, Next Level Trails, and the Prairie Trails Club, Inc. cut the ribbon Friday to welcome visitors to the newly completed segment of the Erie Trail in Starke County.

“The 2.1 mile asphalt trail extends the 9.3-mile Erie Trail, which is named for the former Erie-Lackawanna Railroad, east along the former rail corridor from U.S. 35 to 700 E. in Starke County. Walkers, runners, and bicyclists may use the trail from 700 E. and travel west all the way to the Town of North Judson and back. An adjacent natural surface trail is available for equestrian enthusiasts.

"The extension was made possible with a \$390,750 Next Level Trails grant to the Prairie Trails Club. DNR Chief of Staff Mike Smith offered congratulations from the Next Level Trails Committee and Governor Eric Holcomb.

"Next Level Trails is the next biggest investment of state trails funding in Indiana history and we're excited to celebrate the extension of the Erie Trail," said Smith."

### **Gooden continued:**

"The Erie Trail is part of the Great American Rail-Trail, a planned route organized by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) from Washington D.C. to Washington State. Including the extension of the Erie Trail, approximately 55% of the Great American's 214 planned miles across Indiana are now complete.

....

"In addition to being part of the Great American Trail, the Erie Trail is part of the American Discovery Trail and U.S. Bike Route 35.

"The event was well attended by many supporters in the area."



Image by Anita Gooden, WKVI Radio

**Carolla opened the ribbon cutting ceremony, and Larry closed the ceremony.**



**Ribbon cutting ceremony on October 22, 2021 to open two-mile extension of Erie Trail. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Carolla Heilstedt, President of Prairie Trails Club; Jacque Ryan, Director of Development, Starke County Community Foundation; Andrew Rowe, North Judson Clerk-Treasurer; Marc Vendl, Starke County Park Superintendent; Mike Smith, Indiana Department of Natural Resources Chief of Staff; Larry Wickert, Prairie Trails Club Liaison to the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum; and Rhonda Milner, Vice President of Prairie Trails Club. BACKGROUND: Eric Oberg, Midwest Regional Director of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.**

Image by Anita Gooden, WKVI Radio

**As reported by Alex Brown in *Inside INdiana Business*, online (October 21, 2021). Indiana was to “kick off a celebration of trails with a ribbon cutting in Starke County” the next day. “Governor Eric Holcomb declared 2021-2022 as ‘Indiana’s Year of the Trails’ following a resolution passed by the Indiana General Assembly earlier this year.**

“The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy says the designation ‘creates an opportunity to bring trail users, business owners, nonprofits, local and state elected officials, and other stakeholders together to experience Hoosier trails and share the value of walking, biking and other non-motorized infrastructure for all Indiana residents and visitors.

....

“Officials will kick off the year-long celebration by cutting the ribbon on the Erie Trail Extension along the Great American Rail-Trail in North Judson. Other events are set to take place this weekend in Muncie, Fort Wayne and Indianapolis.

“‘Indiana’s Year of the Trails creates a meaningful opportunity to foster community around the trail network that’s growing across the state,’ said Brian Housh, Midwest Policy Manager for the RTC and a lead organizer behind the initiative. ‘It gives us a chance to celebrate iconic projects like the Great American Rail-Trail, which will connect hundreds of miles of trail in Indiana and will bring significant economic, health, recreational, safety and other quality of life benefits to Hoosiers.’”

**Diane Blais brought to the ribbon cutting celebratory cookies and a cake on which she caused Fingerhut’s Bakery to include the official “Indiana’s Year of the Trails” design.**



Image by Anita Gooden, WKVI Radio

## **INDOT Interface**

The Indiana agency with which the PTC typically interfaces for the NLT-01-07 grant is the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. But the Indiana Department of Transportation (“INDOT”) issued a Right of Way Permit (T0000148776) for the trail crossing over US Highway 35, has responsibilities for US Bike Route 35, and participates in the Indiana Parks & Recreation Association (regarding Bike Racks and Benches).

### ***Right of Way Permit (T0000148776)***

Pursuant to plans prepared by the Troyer Group, the Right of Way Permit approved a painted “piano key” trail crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists over US 35. Included were terms for the crossing itself and for reflective signage along and approaching US 35 to warn of the intersection. The crossing was placed by Thomas Excavating as part of its construction contract with the PTC. Although it was originally anticipated that Thomas Excavating would also place the related signage, this task was later undertaken with PTC members providing labor as a cost-savings strategy.

Larry worked with the Starke County Auditor, Rachael Osterrieck, and with the Highway Superintendent, Daniel Dipert, to purchase signage at a favorable rate. This purchase was also intended as an element of the Commissioners’ match for the NLT-01-07 grant. Supply chain difficulties delayed receipt of the signs, and they were not yet in place when the DNR inspection took place on October 22. But Larry was able to inform the members on November 4 the signs had arrived and that he would be contacting Indiana 811 to identify the location of buried utility lines. He coordinated an effort to place the signs beginning on November 12. Brian, Russ, and Steve assisted. Brian and Russ completed the work along US Highway 35 the following day.



Above left is a north view along the east side of US Highway 35. The pickup truck is parked adjacent to the trail. Above right is a southeast view taken from the east edge of US 35. The fencing and gates had been placed previously to the equestrian trail sign. Images by Brian McMillan.



The YIELD sign on the right is typical of a new design used at all intersections on the southeast two-mile extension of the trail. This sign is located on east side of US Highway 35, and the view is facing west. The pickup truck in the background is traveling north on US Highway 35. Image by Kathy Lucas.

### ***US Bike Route 35***

**Brandon Burgoa is INDOT's Statewide Bicycle Pedestrian Coordinator. He provides support for USBRs located in Indiana and participates in functions of the Indiana Parks & Recreation Association.**

**In anticipation of the two-mile trail extension, Steve began discussions with Brandon in February 2019 to seek relocation of USBR 35 for its segments on Starke County Road 800 South and Starke County Road 700 East north of the old corridor of the Erie Railroad. These segments would instead be directed in a straight line extending from the existing trail across US Highway 35 to its junction with SC 700 E southbound. This adjustment would shorten USBR 35 with the advantage of the hypotenuse of a right triangle, change the segment from share-the-road to non-motorized, and provide a marked crossing over US Highway 35.**

**There are currently four US Bike Routes approved in Indiana. USBR 35 which is a 381-mile north-south route from LaPorte County near Lake Michigan to the Ohio River; USBR 36 which is a 59-mile east-west route along Lake Michigan; USBR 50 which is a 160-mile east-west route across central Indiana; and USBR 235 which is a 120-mile route from Indianapolis to Seymour. For the most part, US Bike Routes are share-the-road and may include highways with high traffic. Since 2005, Adventure Cycling has shepherded the growth of the USBRs.**

**Brandon reflected there was little or no experience with relocating USBRs in Indiana. On USBR 35 in Michigan, relocation initiatives had sometimes been controversial. But after extended discussions, INDOT outlined a process to accomplish the relocation. Steve was asked to prepare a draft turn-by-turn with road names (a new “cue sheet”) for USBR 35 between North Judson and Pulaski County. The new cue sheet would relocate US-BR35 to follow the two-mile extension and would also correct errors in the existing cue sheet near North Judson.**

**Brandon emailed that written approval of the proposed changes would also be needed from the jurisdictional authority or its agent. He suggested the highway superintendent could provide an approval. Larry contacted Starke County Highway Superintendent, Daniel Dipert. He and Dan conferred and determined the proposal should be submitted to the Starke County Board of Commissioners. On October 18, Larry and Steve made a proposal to a public meeting of the Commissioners which was unanimously approved. On October 20, Board President Charles Chesak approved the following:**

“This Memorandum is offered by the Starke County Highway Superintendent in support of the modification of USBR 35 in Starke County to use the non motorized Erie Trail from North Judson to Starke County Road 700 East. The modification is harmonious with a Jurisdictional Approval Letter by the Starke County Board of Commissioners in support of funding to extend the trail, would support public safety, and would be maintained consistent with operation of public motorways in Starke County. The basis for the modification is set forth in more particularity as follows:

“On January 22, 2019, the Board of Commissioners of Starke County provided a “Jurisdictional Approval Letter” for the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“Prairie Trails Club”) to seek funding under the Next Level Trails initiative of Gov. Eric Holcomb, and if funding was approved, to construct an extension of the existing Erie Trail from US Highway 35 southeasterly along the corridor of the former Erie Lackawanna Railroad to Starke County Road 700 East. The Board endorsed ‘the project enthusiastically as supporting:

- (1) our quality of place with regard to public health and economic development;
- (2) steps toward connectivity with two other significant regional trails, the Panhandle Pathway and the Nickel Plate Trail; and
- (3) Improved viability of two cross-country trails that use the existing Erie Trail—the American Discovery Trail and US Bike Route 35.’

“On September 10, 2019, the Prairie Trails Club was awarded a Next Level Trails grant through the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. This grant was designated by the State of Indiana as NLT-01-07 and was for the purpose of developing “2.1 miles of 10' wide asphalt bike/ped trail & a parallel natural surface equestrian trail with road crossings at US [Highway] 35, CR 700 and CR 600 and basic trail amenities (bike racks, signage and benches) as part of an extension of the existing Erie Trail. Project includes design.” When the grant was approved, the Great American Rail-Trail had joined the American Discovery Trail and US Bike Route 35 as transAmerican trails being hosted by the Erie Trail in Starke County.

“As part of the grant for NLT-01-07, an Indiana Department of Transportation Right of Way Permit (T0000148776) was obtained for a piano key crossing of US Highway 35, including information and warning signs along US Highway 35. Relocation of US Bike Route 35 on the extension of the Erie Trail at its crossing of US Highway 35 would cause the elimination of the current unmarked crossing of US Bike Route 35 which uses the right-of-way of Starke County Road 800 South. This unmarked crossing is less than 1/4 mile north of the new Erie Trail crossing, and the relocation of US Bike Route 35 to the Erie Trail crossing would reduce the likelihood of confusion to both trail and highway travelers.

“Finally, a new cue sheet would be approved to identify the route of US Bike Route 35 from North Judson to Starke County Road 700 East. This route would be simplified and somewhat shortened with use of the straighter southeasterly path developed by the Erie Railroad and now used by the Erie Trail.

**The approved Memorandum was forwarded to Brandon on November 14. The following day he acknowledged receipt and stated he would partner with “the Adventure Cycling**

**Association to make sure we have all the necessary information for the route realignment in this upcoming Spring cycle.”**

***Indiana Parks & Recreation Association (regarding Bike Racks and Benches)***

**According to the NLT-01-07 grant, the PTC was responsible for the placement of three bike racks and two ADA-compliant benches. SCILL students constructed the bike racks.**



**With students encouraged to pursue imaginative designs, the racks are both practical and artistic. This process received financial support through a grant the PTC obtained from the KVREMC RoundUp program. Two of the three bike racks were later powder coated. The PTC also obtained eleven benches through the ABC Promise partnership at Green Tree Plastics in Evansville. Our supporters in Starke County and from Chicago to Indianapolis collected plastic lids. These were sorted with the help of local youth groups, delivered to Evansville, and then returned as benches for use at or near the trail.**

**Paul and Larry coordinated the effort to set two concrete pads, affix the benches, and apply cold pack for a level connection between the pads and the asphalt trail. They were assisted in the effort by Brian, Russ, Linda, and Steve. The effort needed to await trail edging by Thomas Excavating and was completed just hours before the DNR inspection.**

Bench and bike rack  
at Starke County Road 600 E  
Image by Kathy Lucas





Bench and bike rack at Starke County Road 700 E  
Images by Kathy Lucas

The bench and bike rack combinations were well-received by ribbon cutting attendees. Brandon asked Kathy for additional information about their histories to share at an upcoming event. She followed up, and Brandon wrote a “big thank you” to the PTC for “the great work you are all doing in Starke County.... The bench and bike rack process was a unique twist and a lot of the folks who attended the Indiana Parks & Recreation Association conference were inspired by how connected and engaged the community was with collecting lids, engaging SCILL, and involving the youth of the community.”

### New Fencing and Signage West of US 35 and on Southeast Extension

Major contributions were made to fencing and safety signage just before the October 22 DNR inspection or soon afterwards in response to DNR’s punch list. Paul and Linda loaned equipment and expertise for fencing at the intersections for Starke County 600 East and Starke County 700 East, as well as between the parking area and asphalt trail immediately west of US Highway 35. Larry later led a team placing signage. Brian, Anita, Russ, and Steve assisted.



Work in progress on November 3, 2021 for fencing to separate the trail and parking area immediately west of US Highway 35. Image by Anita McMillin.



**Completed fence separating trail and parking area.  
Image by Anita McMillin.**

**A YIELD sign like the one shown on page 7 was later placed on the east end (right) of the fence shown in the image above.**

**One of the items on DNR's punch list is an angled safety wing of the fence at Bartee Ditch. Below left is the wing being placed on November 3; center is the completed wing; and right is the wing with signage added on November 12 to warn bicyclists of a surface change.**



**Images by Brian and Anita McMillin**

**Other signage placed on November 12 included that used to identify the equestrian trail and the end of the trail at Starke County Road 700 East.**



## **Report of Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup**

The continuing membership consensus expressed during the meeting was that the PTC should seek a trail extension northwest through North Judson and then on to LaCrosse. An early challenge which calls for solution is identifying a route through North Judson that meets the minimum requirements of the DNR and the Great American Rail-Trail. The belief is these both require a ten-foot wide trail (which might be asphalt, concrete, or compacted aggregate) with a two-foot wide recovery area on each side—for a total of 14 feet of width. Complexity from the history and geography of the corridor through town, which included four railroads, means the solution is likely best achieved by cooperation among several participants. These include the Northern Indiana Railroad, the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, the Town of North Judson, and the PTC. The goal should be to maximize the needs of these entities and the opportunities afforded. A memorandum of understanding among the participants was suggested as the most-cost effective methodology to reach this goal. The members agreed the PTC would not apply for a Round 3 NLT grant.

## **“North Judson Downtown Revitalization Plan 2021” Approval**

In the spring Ball State University’s College of Architecture & Planning, led by Professor J.P. Hall, developed the “North Judson Downtown Revitalization Plan 2021”. The PTC offered commentary to Ball State at the time the Revitalization Plan was in the works. On October 27, North Judson Clerk-Treasurer, Andrew Rowe, emailed a copy of the Plan. It includes several elements that might be of interest to PTC members and that could help support a grant application to extend the trail through and northwest of North Judson. Steve said he would pass along an electronic version of the report on request.

An example of the Ball State commentary in the Plan is set forth below. Please note the commentary predated completion of the two-mile trail extension southeast of US 35:

“The trail network that converges in North Judson is an incredible asset that has the potential to bring much attention and assist in continued economic vitality with the people that the trail systems attract to the community. The Erie Trail, a nine mile paved trail that extends east from Main Street, just north of Downtown North Judson, connects North Judson with US 35, just south of Bass Lake, two additional miles of trail east of US 35 are in development. The Erie Trail is 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. The addition of these national trail systems presents many opportunities for the city.”

## **Status of Development of the Five-Year Plans for the Starke County Parks Department and for the North Judson Parks and Recreation Board**

### ***Starke County Parks Department***

Marc Vendl, Starke County Parks Superintendent, provided an overview of the status of the five-year plan review for the Starke County Parks Department. Appointed in August, he is the first Superintendent for the Parks Department. He said a six-question online survey sought input on development of recreational properties owned by the county. Of particular interest are advancement of the Bass Lake Beach and Campground and the Starke County Forest. He said responses to the survey, online and in a public session held on November 9, were well in excess to what are typically received and a positive step in Starke County. Marc added comments could still be made online and that the

**process was paused temporarily by the Parks Board to assure full participation from Railroad and Oregon Townships. He said he expected the trail to be prevalent in the plan and that he looked forward to working with the PTC on common goals.**

**Russ, Brian, Anita, Kathy, and Steve are among PTC members who participated in the November 9 public session and made individual comments. The PTC also submitted written comments to the facilitator during the November 9 meeting. Recommendations in those comments were (with supporting text omitted) as follows:**

“The Prairie Trails Club recommends that the county leasing option be revisited as a pilot project on the two-mile extension southeast of US 35. Development of a county lease on this segment could include both the HVRM and the Prairie Trails Club or could be limited to the Prairie Trails Club and based on its easement. The Prairie Trails Club would explore the feasibility of reimbursing the county for any increase in liability insurance that might result from the added coverage. As discussed later here, the two-mile extension has proximity to the Bass Lake Beach and Campground as well as to the public waters of Bass Lake. A pilot project would provide a good opportunity to explore the merits of the partnership and to make refinements before applying it more broadly. If the pilot project proved unsuccessful, it could easily be terminated.

“The Prairie Trails Club recommends Starke County continue to pursue development of the trailhead at CR 450 East and CR 210. Services at the trailhead should be designed to provide a respite that is supportive of Bass Lake and county residents’ access to the lake and to the Erie Trail and that is also welcoming to long-distance bicyclists. The connection between the Erie Trail and the trailhead should be supported by wayfinding and safety signage as appropriate. Starke County and the Prairie Trails Club should also explore the extension of signage north of the trailhead along Bass Lake, as well as whether there is interest by the municipalities of Knox and Hamlet in further extension.

“The Prairie Trails Club recommends the Starke County Parks Board support a request to the Starke County Commissioners to amend SR-15. The amendment would remove reference and signage on CR 800 S and would extend the reference and signage on CR 600 E directly to the Erie Trail. You-Are-Here signage should be placed at the Erie Trail and the Bass Lake County Beach in consultation with the Parks Superintendent....

“[Other Trail Extension and Improvement Opportunities] .... should be pursued both northwest of its current trailhead in North Judson and southeast of its current trailhead at Starke County Road 700 East. The opportunities should be pursued in consultation with the Starke County Parks Board and with the Park Superintendent that appear to facilitate park and public water usage by Starke County residents and visitors to Starke County. An example is the development of an extension northwest of North Judson that would facilitate usage of an access site on the Yellow River or Kankakee River.”

**Steve said the PTC is looking forward to the potential of working with Marc and the Park Board. He added that, upon request, he would, provide a complete electronic version of the “Prairie Trails Club Inc. Comments on Starke County Parks Five-Year Park Plan”.**

### ***North Judson Judson Parks and Recreation Board***

**In September, the North Judson Clerk-Treasurer announced the Town was beginning work on the renewal of its five-year plan for parks and recreation. He said the plan would cover the Town Park and Norwayne Field but would also seek to develop new smaller parks and to work with other stakeholders. The Troyer Group was engaged as facilitator and an online survey prepared. Stakeholder groups were formed with Larry, Kathy, and Steve invited to participate in two of the groups. An open house session was scheduled for late October in which Anita and Brian also participated.**

On October 29, email comments were submitted to Mike Reese of the Troyer Group. He responded on November 1 that the Troyer Group would “reach out with questions or thoughts as we move forward with the planning process.” Upon request, Steve would provide the “Prairie Trails Club Inc. Comments on the North Judson Five-Year Park Plan”.

### **Maintenance Committee Report**

The membership enjoyed a broad discussion concerning maintenance priorities. The recent donation by the Hardesty Memorial Fund of \$3,500, when combined with \$4,000 previously in the maintenance fund, provides a significant opportunity to address the most serious maintenance issues.

Linda suggested there are four places on the asphalt trail over muck that are in serious need of attention: at Bogus Run; over a large wetland 1/3 mile west of Range Road; at Range Road; and at Fell Ditch. Larry recommended seeking an engineer’s assessment of the problem and an appropriate solution. He asked whether Max Rehlander might be willing to assist. Kathy responded that Max recently became a lifetime PTC member, but he has left his position at Abonmarche. Randall Peterson of Abonmarche assisted Max with his work on the proposed trail crossing at English Lake, and he has suggested the possibility of working with us. Kathy said she would attempt to contact Peterson. Russ noted much of the trail was within the service territory of the KVREMC which might offer assistance.

Paul said another major problem resulted from large cottonwoods. In the area east of Aldine cottonwoods have caused asphalt buckling, including where Bruce this summer suffered a bicycle accident. Paul and Brian addressed the accident site, severing roots, suppressing trees, flattening the bump, and then repairing the hole with cold pack. But the over-riding problem caused by cottonwoods persists.

The membership and John Bawcum, President of the Friends of Panhandle Pathway, then reviewed chemical strategies to suppress vegetation along the trail. Linda said chemical strategies required prior removal of large brush to be effective. Paul estimated the cost would be \$400 a mile to implement and said there were businesses in the area capable of implementation.

### **BIC Committee Zoom Meeting Scheduled**

The Branding, Identity and Continuity Committee (“BIC Committee”) was scheduled for a Zoom meeting on December 9, 2021 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT). Past members of the committee will be notified, and all PTC members would be provided a courtesy copy of the notice with an invitation to join. The notice will include an agenda, and committee members may cause additional items to be added to the agenda.

### **Expression of Membership Support for US House Resolution 4878**

Jim Bishop of Indiana Trails requested the PTC express support to Congresswoman Jackie Walorski for US House HR 4878 to enhance “national recognition of the American Discovery Trail”. His request was discussed during our October 12 meeting, and the members authorized Steve to communicate support. On November 11, a letter was emailed to Congresswoman Walorski’s staff with Jim Bishop copied. Jim wrote on the

same day, “Thanks so much for your strong letter of support for the American Discovery Trail (ADT). With the support of groups like yours, the resolution is sure to find success.” No response was received from or on behalf of Congresswoman Walorski. Upon request, Steve would provide a copy of the letter.

### **Informal Review of HVRM Activities**

Bob Albert reported Bruce spoke with the HVRM about the possibility of placing gravel in the area immediately southeast of Starke County Road 700 East. This area had been cleared and used as a makeshift parking lot for the October 22 ribbon cutting ceremony. A portable toilet was also placed at this space for the ceremony. Bruce indicated to the HVRM that he would pay for the gravel himself. Bob said the Museum considered Bruce’s suggestion and was agreeable to it.

Larry reflected that among signs purchased for compliance with the NLT-01-07 grant was a YIELD sign to face southeast from CR 700 E. The sign has not been placed because of concerns that the PTC’s agreement with HVRM did not extend southeast of CR 700 E, and the understanding was that use of the area for parking was only temporary to the ribbon cutting ceremony. Bob reflected the HVRM did not have objections to having a graveled parking area southeast of the county road nor did it have objections to a YIELD sign that would face the parking area east of the road. Larry indicated he would go ahead with the placement of the sign.

Bob said HVRM had its “best month ever” for train ride ticket sales in October. “We made a lot of money.” There were 2,579 riders and could have had more but for having trains at capacity. He thanked members of the FFA for their assistance.

Bob said the “Santa Trains” would close out what has been a very successful calendar year. They are scheduled for November 27 and for December 4, 11, and 18.

### **Next Membership Meeting**

The members agreed to hold the next meeting in LaCrosse to underline our hope to work in partnership with our neighbors in LaPorte County to extend the trail northwest. The meeting would have a Holiday spirit with shared modest carry-in treats from willing members.

The membership meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 5:30 pm, CST (6:30 pm, EST) in the LaCrosse Public Library, 307 State Road 8 [307 East Main Street], LaCrosse, IN 46348.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m., CDT (8:15 p.m., EDT).