

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

October 26, 2023

MEMBERS

John Bulger
Renee Bulger
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Joan Hardesty
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Peg Stalbrink

GUESTS

Bob Albert, HVRM
Michelle Lagestee, Jasper County Trails Club

Call to Order by President and Introductions

On October 26, 2023, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") at the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox at 5:37 pm, CDT (6:37 pm, EDT). Introductions were made around the table.

Review and Approval of Minutes of September 21, 2023

Paul Byer moved for approval without modification the membership meeting minutes of September 21, 2023. Anita McMillin seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

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



Kathy Lucas distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as follows:

**Treasurer's Report
October 26, 2023**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from October 21, 2023 **\$103,073.02**

INCOME

09/27/23	Rails to Trails Conservancy	\$7,500.00
10/12/23	Dues (Paul and Linda Byer)	<u>50.00</u>
Total Income		\$7,550.00

EXPENSES

09/25/23	Check #1143 to Rick Vlaming (Materials cost reimbursement for "You are Here" sign placement)	169.90
09/26/23	Check #1142 to Precept Partners (Website updates, monitoring, and bridge closed warnings)	110.00
09/26/23	Check #1144 to Paul Byer (Rubber tape for timber longevity on Fell Ditch Bridge project)	229.42
Total Expenses		\$509.32

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 08/24/23 **\$110,113.70**

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

**TOTAL AMOUNTS
PER CATEGORY**

Benches

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

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	960.64	(pd. \$169.90 sign placement materials)
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	3,767.10	
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50	
			\$5,560.14

Northwest Extension (or Operations)

Luminous Fund Grant #4 (2020)	NW Extension (or operations)	5,000.00	
Luminous Fund Grant #5 (2021)	NW Extension (or operations)	5,000.00	
Luminous Fund Grant #6 (2022)	NW Extension (or operations)	10,000.00	
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	NW Extension (or operations)	6,000.00	
VFW Grant	For "trail improvements"	5,000.00	
PTC Contribution to ITP Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00	
Gene Novello	Trail Extension	1,200.00	
Naylor Pipe	Trail Extension	400.00	
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	25,600.00	
Rails to Trails Conservancy	Trail Extension	7,500.00	(Rails to Trails Conservancy match)

\$75,700.00

Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	1,368.42	
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	1,668.52	
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,368.42	
Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations	Maintenance or Most Needed	2,699.11	
Doral Solar Contribution	Bridge/Trailside Clearing	<u>6,408.05</u>	(pd. 229.42 Fell Ditch Bridge tape)
			\$14,512.52

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$96,302.76

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$110,113.70
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$96,302.76</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$13,810.94

Kathy Lucas reiterated our thanks to the the Rails to Trails Conservancy for its critical donation to the ITP grant for the Northwest Trail extension. She thanked Paul and Linda Byer for their annual memberships—which is by comparison a small part of the amazing contributions they make to our organization. Kathy reflected upon the excellent website service that we receive from Precept Partners. She circulated brownies sent to us by Precept Partners as a “thank you” for our patronage, together with a note acknowledging receipt which she will mail back to them.

Steve Lucas added he often sends website update requests on weekends to our primary contact at Precept Partners, Steve Antisdell, reflecting that he would like service on the requests early in the work week. Typically the requests are already online by Sunday.

John Bulger moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Peg Stalbrink seconded the motion and the motion carried.

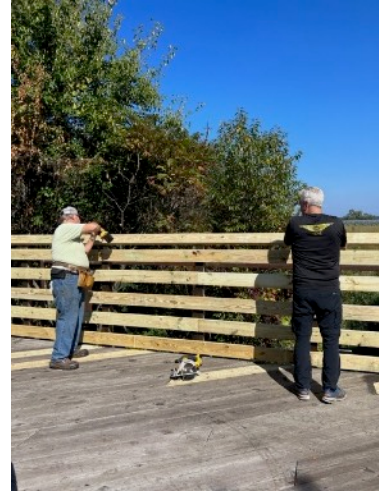
Fell Ditch Bridge Workdays and Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul Byer reported upon completion of the Fell Ditch bridge deck project funded by Doral Renewables, LLC. He and Linda spearheaded a project that required extensive planning



Images by Brian McMillin

and an aggressive construction phase from September 28 through September 30. They were joined by Laura VanMeter, Troy VanMeter, Rick Vlaming, Rich Vallicelli, Eugene Pugh, Russ Blais, Brian McMillin and Larry Wickert. Diane Blais and Anita brought lunch. Steve and Kathy helped on the final day following a required seminar attendance.



Images by Kathy Lucas

Steve praised the effort that was needed critically to restore a decaying bridge deck. He said he had been concerned the project would be too dangerous and too demanding for our PTC volunteers and supporters to accomplish. With Linda's ingenuity as well as with postings on Facebook, our website and WKVI radio, the trail was successfully closed with no consequential mishap. The effort and the results were truly remarkable.

Paul said site clean-up was accomplished within the week following construction. A few of the best remaining timbers were stored by Linda and him for use in future spot repairs while others were salvaged by a trail neighbor or taken to the grounds of the HVRM to be burned. He was also able to return unaffected timbers to the Healy Home Center for a cash refund.

The end result was a safer bridge restored to its original charm.



Image by Linda Byer

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report

Kathy said that during the September 21 membership meeting, she and Steve described a September 18 morning phone conference with Kelle Williams, Vice-President at Gulf & Atlantic Railway. The conference was outlined to the North Judson Town Council later the same day. An onsite meeting with Williams and representatives of the Town Council was anticipated, and the meeting occurred on the morning of October 4. Joining Williams, Steve, and Kathy were Andrew Rowe (Town Council Clerk-Treasurer), James Young (Town Council Member), Larry and the Railroad's Train Master. There was an open and at times animated discussion of issues pertaining to the trail extension.

Williams said she would email to Larry a valuation map (which Williams described as the railroad equivalent of a survey) for the C&O Railroad for the area of the trail extension through North Judson. On October 18, Larry passed the map to Bob Aloï, who will serve as the engineer for our ITP grant, who thanked him and reflected that the map would be helpful to his work.

Coincidentally on October 18, Nathaniel Simmons, IDNR Grants Manager, sent Steve a letter as PTC Board Chair which stated in substantive parts as follows:

“We want to provide you with an update regarding the timeline for the enactment of Prairie Trails Club's State Grant Agreement for the Erie Trail & Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail Northwest Extension project. Due to unanticipated delays in the State's internal approval processes for Indiana Trails Program projects this year, all 2023 projects, including Prairie Trails Club's, are continuing to encounter delays with the finalization of their State Grant Agreement.

“We understand that this is challenging to our grantees and project partners, and apologize sincerely for any issues this has caused. Community Grants & Trails staff have still not been provided with an exact date for the completion of approvals and processes needed to enact the state grant agreements, but we anticipate progress in the coming weeks that will allow us to process the agreements over the course of this coming winter.

“We appreciate your continued patience as we work through these challenging delays, and want to reiterate that they are in no way a reflection of Prairie Trails Club, its staff, or its application & documentation materials. We continue to look forward to working with the organization, surrounding community and all project partners to make this project a reality. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Kathy said she has informed Bob Aloï of the delay in DNR contract approval. Bob had anticipated doing the topographic work for the trail project this Fall but will now hold up until the State of Indiana forwards a grant agreement, and it is approved by Rhonda as PTC President.

Preparations for October 29 Erie Night Glow Ride

Steve said Char Liss emailed to inform him, that if the weather permits, the equestrian ride will begin at US Highway 35 and turn around at Starke County Road 200 East. He acknowledged to the members the current weather forecast was not promising. The turn-around was originally planned for SCR 300 East—meaning that if fully implemented the ride would now be three miles instead of two miles long. Steve said Paul and Linda repeatedly do vegetation control on this segment of the trail. He added that he and Kathy made an effort to improve conditions along the route, particularly at the SCR 700 South

crossing. He offered Char additional assistance for the planned Sunday evening event, but she did not express the need for further assistance.

Action on Starke County CVC Grant Application Opportunity

On September 29, Kathy Norem, President of the Starke County Convention and Visitors Association, sent out a general invitation to non-profit organizations to seek grants for projects or events that could increase tourism in Starke County. November 3, 2023 was set as the application deadline for 2024 projects. The maximum grant amount was set at \$2,000.

With the short turn-around period for making a decision on a grant application between the membership meeting on October 26 and an application deadline of November 3, the grant invitation and a rough draft with one possible application were shared by Steve via email with the Board of Directors and the Officers. The draft would seek funding for a run, walk, and bike event in the spring or summer of 2024. Several Officers and Board members responded the PTC should submit an application. None expressed opposition to the concept in the draft, but no decision was made whether to submit an application—or, if the PTC would submit an application, what should be its terms. Russ later wrote expressing enthusiasm for the draft.

Steve reminded members that in the email notice for tonight’s membership meeting, he attached the draft application for discussion and possible action. Deb reflected that she has written numerous grant applications and evaluated others, including the kinds of grants offered by the CVC. She said the draft was well written.

In the draft application, the proposed name was the “Great American Rail-Trail 5K Run/3K Walk and Bike”. Steve wrote to Kevin Belle, Project Manager for the Great American to seek permission to use the phrase “Great American Rail-Trail” in our event name. Kevin responded earlier in the day: “As for the 5k [Run/3K Walk and Bike], not a problem to use Great American Rail-Trail in the name. We’d prefer if you said something like ‘the XX 5k on the Great American Rail-Trail,’ just so it doesn’t look like an event that we are officially sponsoring. Sounds like a fun event and I wish I could be out there to run it with y’all.” As a result, Steve said any event would use the ending phrase “on the Great American Rail-Trail” rather than beginning with the phrase “Great American Rail Trail”.

Michelle Lagestee suggested T&H Timing has a good reputation for service as a chipped timer. Brian agreed and said T&H Timing is the organization the PTC and Bass Lake Festival used this year and last. He added that T&H Timing has a busy calendar and the PTC should move as quickly as possible to enter an agreement with them if a race is to be scheduled.

The members discussed possible timing for the event. To avoid competing with the Bass Lake Festival at the end of July, the suggestion was a day in May or September. The members ultimately agreed upon May 25 as the target date, but with the understanding that a different date would be chosen if T&H Timing was then unavailable. The May 25 date would be referenced to the CVC in a grant application as the preferred date, but the application would note the potential need to choose a different date.

Brian asked how the bike element of the event would work. Steve answered he would communicate with John Bawcum, President of the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway, to identify map a share-the-road route south from the trail on Starke County Road 300 East intersection. He said a ten-mile route (20-mile round trip) had already been identified

from the trail to where the Friends hoped to extend the Panhandle Pathway with a Next Level Trails 3 grant. As John explained during the August 24 PTC Meeting, deed issues required the Friends to reduce their aspirations so the extension will terminate at 17th Street in Winamac. This earlier termination would require adjusting the southern end of the route and probably a slightly longer journey. The bike route would be marked along its distance, with signage at the improved trailhead, and with a map available in paper form and on the PTC website. The bike route would not be competitive but could include a jersey.

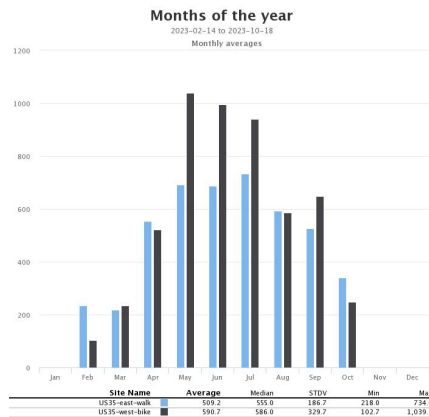
Steve said he envisioned that 3K walk participants would receive a jersey. But there would not be a competitive element. A competitive racewalker must have no visible (to the human eye) loss of contact with the ground. The advancing leg must be straightened from first contact with the ground until the “vertical upright position” is achieved. Judges evaluate race walker techniques and may disqualify walkers determined to have committed fouls. Steve said he does not believe the PTC has the personnel needed to monitor a walk race.

Brian asked if competitors in the 5K race would be eligible to receive medals for the best times in gender and age classes. Steve responded that he anticipated they would.

Linda move to authorize Steve, as Board Chair, and Rhonda, as President, to submit a grant application to the Starke County CVC consistent with the draft application and members’ discussion. Deb seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Trail Counters Report

Joan Hardesty circulated 2023 trail counters data for February 2 through October 18. The counter west of US 35 was vandalized, resulting in an absence of data at that location for 35 days. But with Linda’s help she was able to return the equipment to full capacity. Shown below is the print out for the counter element for “Months of the Year”.



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

Year	Site	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	ADIT ¹	ADITx365	Days with data
2022	US35-east-walk								584 ¹	488 ¹	1202 ¹	2177 ¹	63,034	5,762	371	
	US35-west-bike								584 ¹	596 ¹	1338 ¹	1116 ¹	16,907 ¹	5,262	91	
2023	US35-east-walk	239 ¹	218 ¹	588 ¹	682 ¹	688 ¹	724 ¹	593 ¹	527 ¹	547 ¹				17,863	6,447	243
	US35-west-bike	102 ¹	124 ¹	622 ¹	1,039 ¹	981 ¹	841 ¹	598 ¹	1441 ¹	1245 ¹				22,506	7,428	265

¹ based upon that month's ADT. Learn more. Indicates months with less than 6 days of data.

Joan reminded members that last year the counters were removed during the winter months and asked whether she should again cause their removal this winter. Minutes from the December 2022 meeting stated: “For both reasons of equipment security and winter’s challenging temperatures, the membership agreed...that [Joan] remove the trail counters, at her convenience, for spring re-installation.” Members thanked her for again this year managing the trail counters, and she should again have discretion with regard to the removal and re-installation of the counters.

Having data from the counters will be an important element of the CVC application to help fund the “5K Run3K Walk and Bike on the Great American Rail-Trail”. If a grant is awarded, the counters can assist with providing a measure of success for the project.

Bass Lake Beach to Erie Trail Signage for Starke County Road 600 East

Steve said Kathy Carrier has developed signage which would better identify Starke County Road 600 East as a Connector between Bass Lake and the Erie Trail. Starke County Park Board Member Tom Busch, Kathleen and he participated in her initiative as well. Kathy C. contracted and worked with Yancy Lucas to design the signs. Steve said his understanding was she would also donate the cost of manufacture. Kathy C. was unable to attend the membership meeting but wrote that she would like members’ input on signage design and elements.

Steve said he shared one of Kathy C.’s proposed sign images with the BIC Committee and circulated all three to members attending the meeting. BIC Committee members who commented were positive. Russ Blais asked about their size. Steve responded his belief was they would be two feet tall and three feet wide—in any event, large. He agreed to double-check regarding size and report later.

Steve added his first-blush thought was the PTC might also wish to have a reciprocal sign at the trail which would reference the Beach. It might say something like “Join us at the Starke County Beach! Just take 600 E about 2 miles north”. There could be imagery for the beach house and perhaps a QR code the PTC would manage, with the help of our webmaster, which identifies services near Bass Lake. He said Peg wrote to express support for this concept.

Two days before the meeting, Kathleen and Steve viewed the trail’s Starke County Road 600 East intersection and concluded that ideally two reciprocal signs should be placed there. One would face northwest and the other southeast. They would be informative to travelers on the trail, particularly trekkers, and could also help bicyclists from Bass Lake on a return trip from the trail.

Linda said the sign with a “You are Here” designation would be the most informative of the three signs for bicyclists coming from Bass Lake. Kathy responded she believed the other two signs were meant for general information and could be posted anywhere near Bass Lake.

Deb asked about placement at Bass Lake of the “You are Here” sign. Steve responded that Starke County maintains an easement extending across State Road 10 in a straight line north to Bass Lake. A chain-link fence separates the easement and Bass Lake Beach. He said Tom Busch has consulted with Park Superintendent, Tracy Williams, who expressed support for the signage. Placement of this sign would be as determined by

Starke County and Kathy C. It would not be a PTC sign, but the chain-link fence might be an appropriate location.

The expressed membership consensus was to thank Kathy C. for her effort to develop with Yancy signage to improve public understanding of the use of Starke County Road 600 East as a Connector between the Erie Trail and Bass Lake (particularly Bass Lake Beach and Campground). The membership also expressed support for the development of two signs for placement at the intersection of SCR 600 E and the Erie Trail to assist bicyclists and other travelers with reaching Bass Lake Beach and Campground and the services available at and near Bass Lake.

Unauthorized Motorized Vehicle Signage

During the July PTC meeting, membership approved purchase and placement of new signs on the two-mile southeast trail extension that would affirm motorized vehicles are prohibited on the trail. BIC Committee input was later sought on the possible purchase of red aluminum signs found on the internet. These \$20 signs were described as being 12” by 18”, 63 mil thick, laminated, reflective with rounded corners and pre-punched holes for mounting. A modest discount was offered for purchases of multiple signs. All BIC Committee members who commented were supportive of their purchase.



Older sections of the trail are marked with small white signs with black and red lettering which indicate “No ATVs”. In most places these signs are in bad condition. A handful of intersections have wooden “Rules of the Trail” signs which indicate motorized vehicles are prohibited, but these are also in poor condition and contain other information that is obsolete.

Rather than posting the red signs exclusively on the southeast extension, some BIC Committee members recommended that all intersections receive them. Steve said he and Kathy checked trail intersections two days before the meeting and estimate there are 26 sites where the signs may be warranted—for a total sign cost of about \$520.

During BIC Committee review, Russ wrote to ask if additional posts would be needed or if the PTC could mount the red signs on existing posts. With Russ’s question in mind, Kathy and Steve looked at the intersections. They concluded that in most instances the PTC could probably use existing posts, but for some sites new posts might be needed. Kirt Verhagen emailed he has placed posts at several locations on the trail that are no longer used and might be salvaged for the red unauthorized motor vehicle signs. The PTC would need to purchase hardware for each of the signs.

During the PTC Meeting, Steve asked if the PTC should, as authorized in July, limit the red signs to the two-mile southeast extension? Should we purchase red signs for all 26 intersections, or did the membership have a different directive?

The members revisited discussions concerning E-Bikes and their three categories. Steve responded motorized transport required for ADA compliance, emergency vehicles, and maintenance vehicles are authorized. The Indiana Legislature has addressed E-Bikes by determining they are to be treated as bicycles. John added the PTC would not want to place unwarranted controls on vehicles if needed to provide ADA accessibility. These would be authorized rather than unauthorized uses. The prohibition provided in the red signs would be harmonious.

After an extended discussion, Peg moved to approve the purchase and placement of the red signs at all 26 trail locations. Brian seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Kathy said she would check with Traffic Control Specialists (TCS) in Knox to determine if the company might manufacture comparable signs locally at a competitive price. The members agreed and reflected that supporting local business is always important.

OSSIS Project Update

Steve said Jacque Ryan, Director of Development for the Starke County Community Foundation, requested PTC comment on advancement of the OSSIS Project with completion of the Solar Sign. She was hopeful the project could move through the manufacturing stage and perhaps even be erected yet this fall. There was not sufficient time to bring Jacque's information before the full membership and still allow her to stay on schedule. But the PTC Officers and Directors were able to conduct a review and also provide input on October 9. They thanked Jacque for the opportunity to comment and wrote:

"For this portion of the Erie Trail, the PTC has no proprietary interest and serves strictly in a volunteer capacity. Ownership is with the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum...."

"PTC Board members and Officers have reviewed your proposal and are excited to learn the Starke County Community Foundation is bringing closure to placement of the Sun sign, the keystone of the OSSIS project. The area where the Sun sign would be placed now includes several structures. To the extent of our ability, the PTC would remove structures other than a You-are-Here/Verhagen Station Sign and a bench with ceiling. Our members' understanding is the posts for the Sun sign would be ten feet apart, and the paved trail is eight feet wide. Whether the resulting clearance would be sufficient is outside the PTC's expertise."

"The PTC looks forward to further consultation with the SCCF and HVRM on development of an OSSIS sign for the dwarf planet Pluto in proximity to, and northwest of, the junction of the Erie Trail and Starke County Road 700 East. Our understanding is the Pluto sign would likely include information about the OSSIS project and heavenly bodies in our Solar System other than Pluto. The PTC renews its commitment to participate in the costs of manufacture or placement of the Pluto sign."

Steve said the day before the membership meeting, Jacque provided an update on the OSSIS Project status which included a handout distributed to attending members. She wrote that she was attaching where Bob Alois said the OSSIS Sun installation would be placed, as well as the approved proof from Steindler Signs and Graphics.

Jacque informed the PTC that SCCF had approved the proof and was “coordinating with Steindler about when the work will be carried out.” In addition to the Sun installation, the SCCF was “planning on adding in a few smaller signs that will share information about Pluto and other planetesimals to finish up the project.” Jacque expressed her appreciation for the feedback from the PTC’s Officers and Board of Directors.

INDOT State Road 10 Trail Crossing Update

During the September meeting, Steve said he did not expect to hear again for months from INDOT regarding the State Road 10 crossing of the Erie Trail near the former rest park. But on September 26 he received a call from INDOT consultant, Michelle Greene. A cordial and lengthy conversation followed regarding the trail crossing. Michelle also expressed interest in speaking with HVRM representatives regarding its adjacent rail crossing. Steve forwarded the statement of interest to HVRM and provided HVRM with Michelle’s contact information. Following internet challenges, he was able to send her the planning details for the Erie Trail crossing included in a 2009 Territorial Engineering preliminary drawing. On September 28, Michelle wrote she had forwarded her advance review and the drawing to the manager for the planned 2025 INDOT project.

Report of American Discovery Trail Annual Meeting

On September 23, Kathy and Steve participated virtually in ADT’s Annual Membership Meeting. Vice President, Harold Draper, remarked that “Like all trails, the goal is to get the ADT off roads and onto non-motorized routes.” He reported the ADT was once again unsuccessful in the effort to obtain listing in the National Trails Act.

Within Indiana, the American Discovery Trail has two branches. The ADT on the Erie Trail is part of the Northern Branch. Two ADT Board members are located in Indiana. Mitch Barloga is a member on the Northern Branch and Lorie Van Hook, Executive Director of the Evansville Trails Coalition, the Southern Branch. Members at the virtual meeting, including Steve, voted on Board membership by a show of hands. Nominees were elected unanimously.

Review of Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison to the PTC, said the “Pumpkin trains are in full swing.” This fall has been a very successful time for the HVRM. He noted the Santa trains are the next and final stage of activities for 2023. Passengers get to visit Santa and take family photos. Every child aboard the train receives a gift from Santa. The Santa Trains take passengers on a 60-minute, ten-mile round-trip journey from North Judson to English Lake where the train crosses the Kankakee River before returning to town.

Gate Adjustments to Accommodate Recumbent Bikes

Paul said he has observed the difficulties encountered by persons on recumbent bikes when they need to pass through the wooden gates. If the gates were shaved by three inches on both sides, he thought the difficulties would be resolved. Paul said a person has offered to make the adjustments, but he thought it would be better accomplished

within the PTC and with HVRM awareness. Several members expressed their agreement. John moved to authorize Paul to widen the gap between the arms of the wooden gates by shaving three inches off each side. Steve seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Next Two Membership Meetings

The next Membership Meeting was set for Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., CST (6:30 p.m., EST) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

The subsequent Membership Meeting was set for Thursday, December 7, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., CST (6:30 p.m., EST) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox). Members may choose to bring Holiday refreshments to this meeting

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m., CDT (8:28 p.m., EDT).