

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

November 16, 2023

MEMBERS

John Bulger
Renee Bulger
Joan Hardesty
Charlotte Liss
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Peg Stalbrink
Rich Vallicelli

GUESTS

Bob Albert, HVRM

Call to Order by President

On November 16, 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 5:39 pm, CST (6:39 pm, EST).

Review and Approval of Minutes of October 26, 2023

Anita McMillin moved for approval of the meeting minutes of October 26, 2023 without amendment. John Bulger 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
November 16, 2023**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance on October 26, 2023 **\$110,113.70**

INCOME

10/27/23	Dues and Merchandise (Deb Mix)	\$55.00
10/27/23	Refund on unused lumber from Healsey's Home Center	861.43
Total Income		\$916.43

EXPENSES

Total Expenses **\$0**

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 11/26/23 **\$111,030.13**

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	
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	
			\$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>7,269.48</u>	Refund for unused bridge lumber

\$15,373.95

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$97,164.19

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$111,030.13
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$97,164.19</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$13,865.94

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

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Linda Byer reported by email that she is pursuing options for possible contract mowing at selected sections of the trail. She and Paul Byer have identified possibilities for large machinery contracts where work is needed to push back woody invasives. But they are seeking the most cost-effective approach. She wrote that the person who mowed and did brush suppression for the mile east of Starke County Road 300 East charged \$2,000.

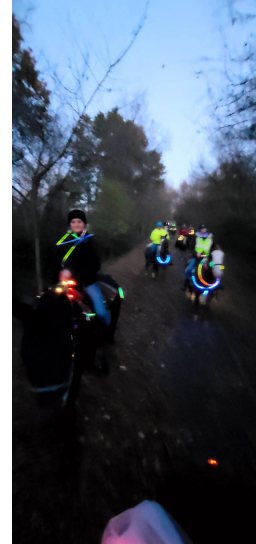
In preparation for the Erie Night Glow Ride, Char Liss mowed the equestrian trail from US 35 to Starke County Road 300 East.

Report of November 4 Erie Trail Glow Ride

Char reported on the Erie Trail Glow Ride. She said that it was originally scheduled for October 29, but due to inclement weather, was rescheduled and held on November 4. As a result of rescheduling, participation was likely diminished. On the PTC’s Facebook page, 56 people had expressed interest in the event. Even with these challenges, nine horseback riders participated, and with support by Corey Liss and her, raised \$200 for the PTC.



Char said most of the participants were new to the trail and were not previously aware it included an equestrian element. In general, the Erie Trail Glow Ride went smoothly. Participants enjoyed themselves and expressed support for having another event next year. She received “very positive feedback” regarding the event.



Images by Charlotte Liss

Crossing US 35 from the Liss home on the west side to the east side was challenging. Char had made arrangements for a Starke County Deputy Sheriff to assist, but this effort was complicated by rescheduling the event and further complicated because on-duty Deputies were responding to emergencies. Volunteer Firemen from California Township stepped up to help, but they were delayed by a misunderstanding as to the exact location where riders on horseback would cross US 35.

Char said that for next year’s event she would seek a location west of US 35 for parking and to begin the ride. The ride was disrupted by a person who drove an unauthorized ATV on the trail and by walkers with an unleashed dog. She welcomed PTC efforts to emphasize with new signage that unauthorized use of motorized vehicles on the trail is prohibited.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Zoom Call)

Steve Lucas said on November 7 he and Kathy participated in a Zoom Call monitored by Brandi Horton, Vice President of Communications for the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Brandi was joined by Mary Ellen Koontz who is an urban planner and the Conservancy’s TrailNation Collaborative lead.

Mary Ellen reported that this year the Conservancy issued 30 financial grants totaling \$348,000. Representatives for most of the grantees were present for the Zoom Call. She said the RTC was “inundated with millions of dollars of requests this year”—few of which the organization was able to fund. Most grants were for outreach and planning, as well

as to foster cooperation among neighboring communities. The focus of several grants was upon traditionally underserved communities through organizations such as for the Black People who Hike Comm(unity) Trail Run and the Latino Outdoors initiative known as “Vamos Outdoors”.

Brandi said more funding is available “for infrastructure than community building.” Little of this year’s RTC funding was directed to infrastructure. The PTC funding to support match for the PTC’s one-mile trail extension was the only one identified as specifically supporting extension of the Great American Rail-Trail. The only other infrastructure grant which stood out was for a West Virginia project that has been “stymied since 2010”.

Brandi said the Conservancy would issue a press release on November 15 to recognize partnerships among local communities and to identify the Conservancy’s contributions, including the 2023 grants. The press release was intended to “lift organization efforts” to purchase equipment, such as trail counters, and to help leaders better understand the importance of trails as infrastructure. The press release would be included in the PTC’s newsletter that has a circulation of almost 500,000 readers.

Brandi added that 2023 grantees need to make a final grant report in September 2024. The report is to be sent as a short pdf. This requirement would apply to the PTC with its RTC \$7,500 grant for the one-mile trail extension through North Judson.

Brandi also underlined the importance of recognizing the next *Celebrate Trails Day* which will be held on April 27, 2024. The PTC participated with the Conservancy and the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum in this year’s *Celebrate Trails Day*—in the sleet and wind in North Judson. A 2024 event need not be as elaborate as this year’s event, but some activity or recognition next April 27 is probably warranted.

Steve said the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy later issued a press release as referenced in the November 7 Zoom call. Only five grants went to Great American Rail-Trail projects, and those were mostly to support planning and design. See <https://www.railstotrails.org/resource-library/resources/rtc-2023-grants/> for more information.

Update on Connector Signage for Starke County Road 600 East

During the October meeting, Steve reported Kathy Carrier and Yancy Lucas developed signage to better identify Starke County Road 600 East as a Connector between Bass Lake and the Erie Trail. One draft signage image was shared with the BIC Committee. Three images were circulated to members during the October meeting. BIC Committee members who had commented previously expressed general support for the project and for the draft signs.

Russ Blais emailed to inquire about the size of the draft signs. Steve responded he thought they would be two feet tall and three feet wide, but that he would follow up to be certain. Yancy recently confirmed these were the dimensions of the three draft signs.

In October, membership thanked Kathy Carrier and Yancy for their efforts. Consistent with BIC Committee recommendations, members supported designing two additional signs. These would be placed at the intersection of Starke County Road 600 East and the Erie Trail to help bicyclists locate the Bass Lake Beach and Campground and services available at or near Bass Lake.

On October 30, Steve emailed the membership's perspectives and recommendations to Kathy Carrier and Tom Busch, member of the Starke County Park Board, with copies to Yancy and Kathy Lucas. The email expressed the PTC's understanding, that at the Bass Lake Beach and Campground, any decision as to if and where signage would be placed rested with the Starke County Park Board and the Park Superintendent. This note was intended primarily to address concerns by Deb Mix and others expressed at October meeting. Steve conveyed to Kathy Carrier that some members said placement on the fence line, which separates the Bass Lake Beach and the Starke County Road 600 East extension (easement) to the lake, could have good visibility from State Road 10.

Kathy Carrier previously expressed an intention to support financially the creation of signage at Bass Lake. Following the October 30 email, she added development of the two additional signs, at the intersection of Starke County 600 East and the Erie Trail, as part of her project.

In a November 14 conversation with Yancy, he said he would develop two proposed signs for this location. These would be harmonious with the Bass Lake signs and include a QR code to identify nearby services and arrows to show travelers the direction to Bass Lake from County Road Road 600 East. Kathy Carrier will confer with Yancy for manufacture of the signs. She expressed an intention to work with Tom Busch and Tracy Williams, Park Superintendent, on sign placement at Bass Lake. Sign placement at the Erie Trail would be as determined by the PTC consistent with our arrangements with the HVRM, and with the PTC construction contract with the IDNR, for the recent two-mile extension east of US 35.

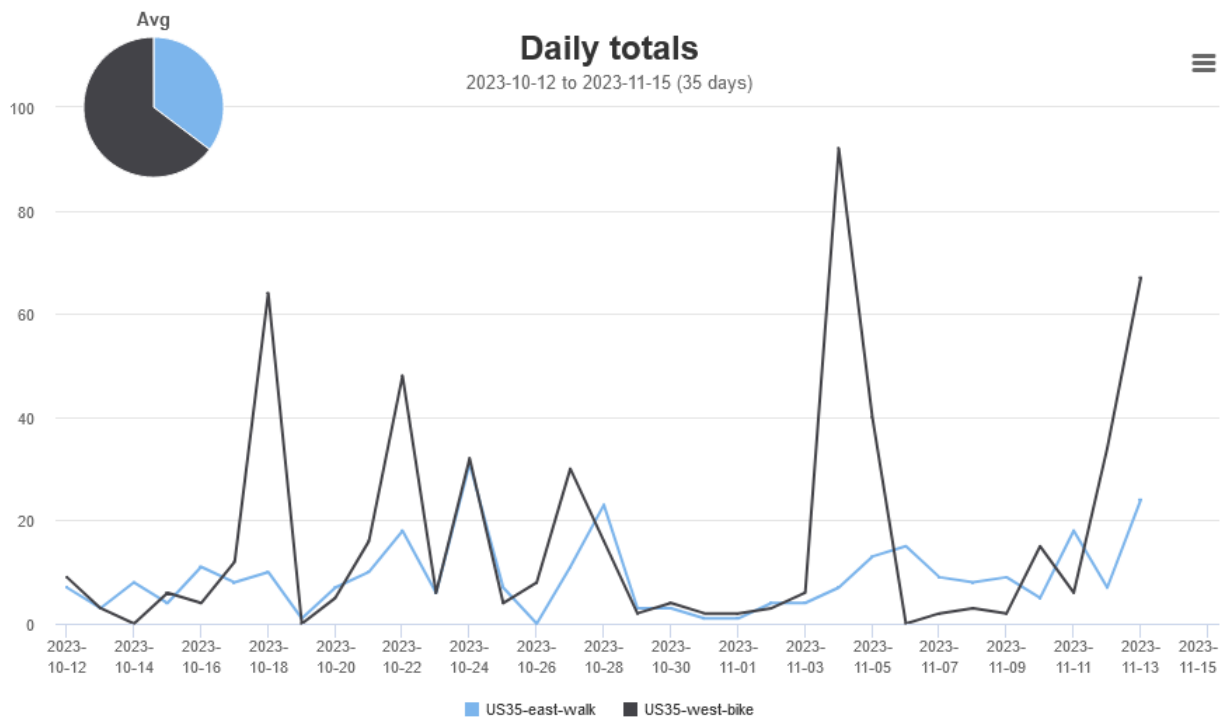
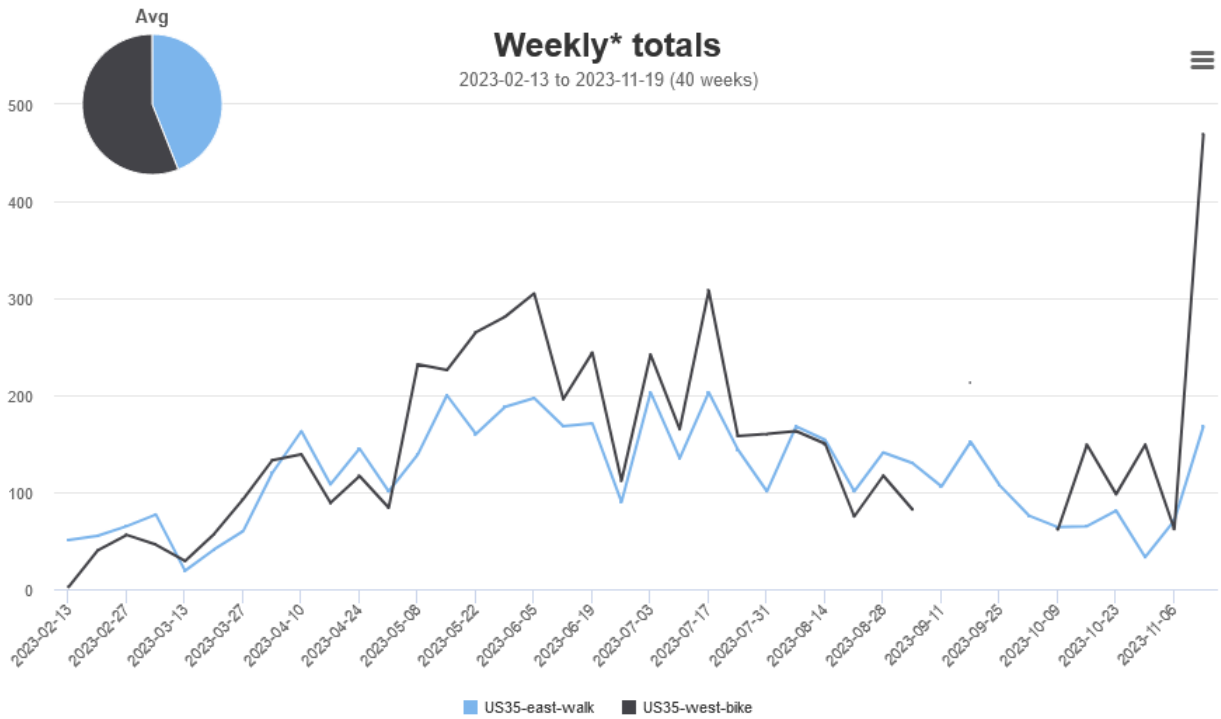
Action on Starke County CVC Grant Application Opportunity

With signature by Rhonda as PTC President, and Steve as Board Chair, a timely email grant application was filed with Kathy Norem, President of the Starke County CVC, on October 30. On the same day, a paper copy was sent to the CVC. Norem acknowledged receipt of the email application later on October 30, thanked the PTC, and wrote she would forward the application "to the entire board". Steve circulated the application in its final form to members present at the November meeting.

Trail Counters Report

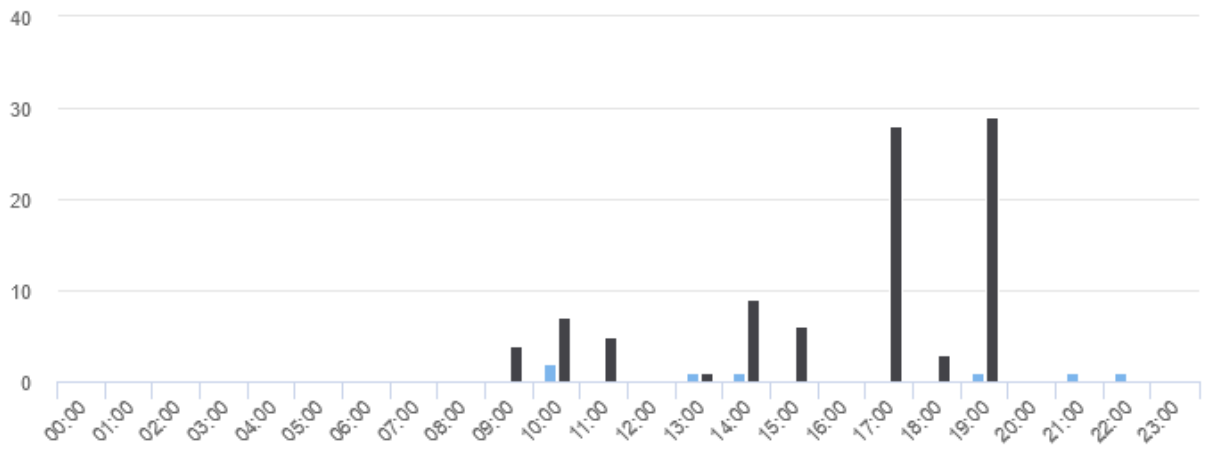
Joan Hardesty provided the trail counters report. She had observed an unusually high count west of US Highway 35 on November 4 and wondered if it was an anomaly. She asked Linda and Steve if either had thoughts on a possible reason for the high count. Linda noted Girl Scout troops were geocaching on the trail that day. Steve referenced the Erie Trail Glow Ride. This experience helps verify the counters' reliability.

Joan observed trail usage well into Fall was still significant on good weather days. Comprehensive weekly totals, daily totals, hourly averages, and a master summary for 2023 are set forth below. Joan said the ability to count usage on an hourly basis was not previously recognized as a possibility.



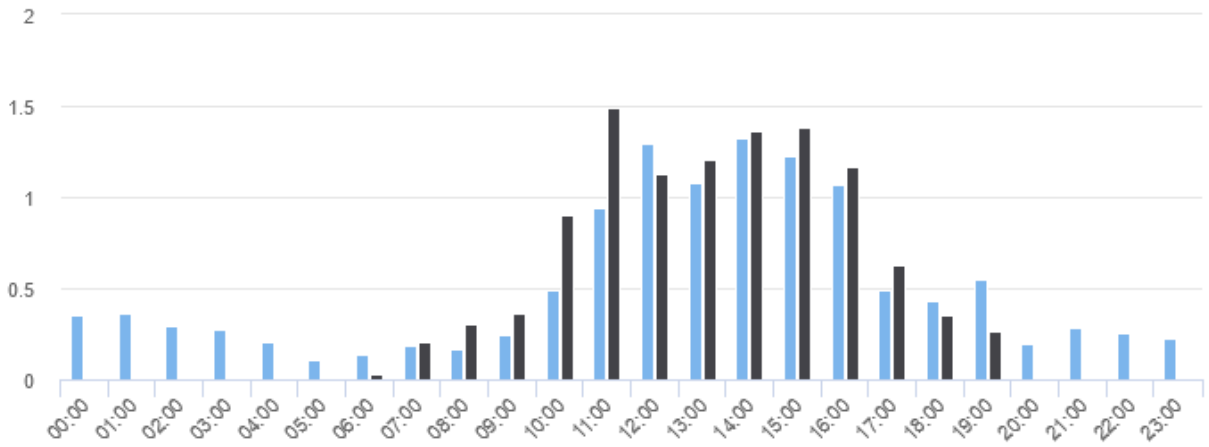
Hours of the day

2023-11-04 to 2023-11-04
Hourly averages



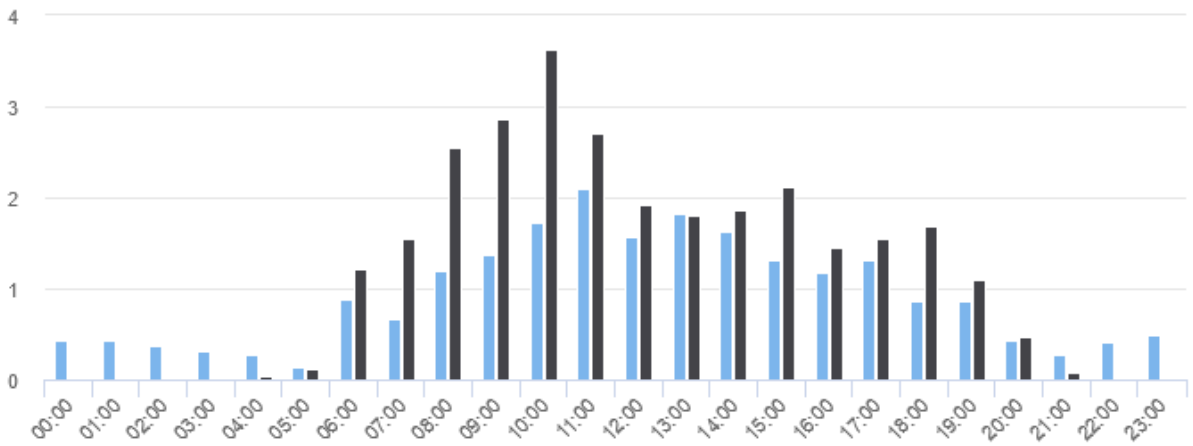
Hours of the day

2023-02-15 to 2023-04-30
Hourly averages



Hours of the day

2023-05-01 to 2023-08-31
Hourly averages



[Back](#)

Master Summary

Year	Site	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	ADT [†]	ADT [†] x365	Days with data
2022	US35-east-walk									564*	490	372	217*	14,034	5,123	87
	US35-west-bike									844*	596	339	116*	16,067	5,865	89
2023	US35-east-walk	235*	218	555	692	688	734	593	527	315	286*			16,808	6,135	271
	US35-west-bike	103*	234	522*	1,039*	995	941	586	648*	438*	628*			21,157	7,722	236

ADT[†] = Average Daily Traffic

* = based upon that month's ADT [Learn more](#) Indicates months with less than 6 days of data.

Unauthorized Motorized Vehicle Signage Update

Kathy provided an update on signage purchase intended to emphasize that motorized vehicles are generally prohibited on the trail. Consistent with what she said during the October meeting, and in an effort to support local business, Kathy emailed and followed up with phone messages to Traffic Control Systems in Knox. The calls were to determine if TCS would be interested in developing the desired signage. After the passage of more than two weeks without a response, she contracted online for the purchase of 26 such signs.

The day after she purchased the signs online, a TCS representative called to tell Kathy her messages were received in the email box of an employee who was being reclassified within the company. The TCS representative then apologized for not responding and asked if the company might still be of service. Kathy said she had already made other arrangements but took the employee's contact information and said the PTC might soon invite TCS to manufacture black-and-gold Erie Trail signs.

Kathy said she hoped the new red signs prohibiting unauthorized motor vehicles will be received before the end of November. The PTC will need to also purchase hardware and decide specifically where the signs should be placed.

Review of Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison to the PTC, said there were a record 2,942 riders on the Pumpkin Trains. The effort was "very successful" despite poor weather.

Bob added the HVRM was "now gearing up for its Santa Trains". Passengers have the chance to visit Santa and to take family photos to remember the experience. Every child aboard the train receives a gift.

Bob said the Grasselli Tower has been closed to undergo repairs and to install a new set of fabricated steel stairs. The new steel stairs will last longer than wood and provide a safer and more reliable way to access the second floor. The estimated cost of the new stairs was nearly \$38,000, but the HVRM was able to negotiate a price of \$14,000 with significant support through volunteer labor. A challenge grant was made to obtain the \$14,000. An anonymous donor pledged to contribute up to \$7,000 in matching funds. Another donor contributed \$4,000 to the project. Bob said the HVRM recently received the final \$3,000 needed for project completion.

Trail Geocaching

Steve said Linda asked him to pass along there are "a lot of people doing geocaching," including recently a Girl Scout troop. Linda has replaced "a couple of caches that were missing." The caches along the trail are west of US 35.

During the meeting, a question was posed as to the meaning of "geocaching". In general terms, geocaching is an outdoor recreational activity, in which participants use a GPS

receiver or mobile device and other navigational techniques to hide and seek containers, called “caches”, at specific locations.

Open Discussion

The membership engaged in extended considerations of two topics:

Rich Vallecilli spoke of the need to bring more people into the PTC membership—in particular more young people. He referenced the arduous effort to restore the bridge at Fell Ditch as an example of a project beyond what our volunteers should be expected to accomplish.

Char said she believed the PTC needed to undertake new efforts to help the public to understand that trail maintenance is entirely dependent upon volunteer labor and private donations. No public funding is received. She suggested developing signs to help pass along this message. She believed the PTC could be more effective with social media. Char offered to develop a list of concepts. Included among these concepts may be to determine the availability of wood chips to improve the corridor east of US Highway 35 that was designed for use as an equestrian trail. Several members said that they would support more designated work days.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was confirmed 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.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 p.m., CST (8:23 p.m., EST).