

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

March 16, 2023

MEMBERS

Diane Blais
Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Sharon Smead
Rich Vallicelli
Kirt Verhagen

GUESTS

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison
Christine Garcia
Dorothy Michalak

Call to Order by President

On March 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 5:41 pm, CDT (6:41 pm, EDT). Introductions were made around the table.

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of February 9, 2023

As modified and circulated on March 10, 2023, Paul Byer moved for approval of the membership meeting minutes of February 9, 2023. Sharon Smead 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 as follows:



Treasurer's Report
March 16, 2023

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance forward from 12/01/22 **\$67,975.69**

INCOME

02/13/23	Donation from Naylor Pipe (R.Blais, Board Member)	\$400.00
02/13/23	Dues from Larry Wickert	50.00
02/13/23	Dues from Randall & LuAnn Glass	50.00
02/21/23	Amazon Smile donation	7.36
02/21/23	Donation from Ellen (Vessely) & Gary Cozart	100.00
02/21/23	Dues & donation from W. Smit	75.00
02/21/23	Donation from Gene Novello	1,200.00
02/28/23	Donation from Joe Hannah	500.00
03/13/23	Donation from Michael Dunigan	50.00
03/13/23	Donation from Michael McGregor	<u>25.00</u>

Total Income **\$2,457.36**

\$70,433.05

EXPENSES

03/07/23	Check #1131 to Eenshuistra Appraisals <i>(for ITP NW Grant Application)</i>	2,500.00
03/10/23	Check #1132 to Precept Partners <i>(website modifications including for NJ Public Meeting)</i>	<u>110.00</u>

Total Expenses **\$2,610.00**

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 03/16/23 **\$67,823.05**

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

Benches

Blais-Vlaming Bench	For 210/450 site or other	\$350.00
McMillin Bench	For Bass Lake area	350.00

Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl UR Here)	1,418.54
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	4,055.10 (Reduced \$150 brochure design)
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50

Northwest (or Other Extension)

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

Maintenance

Mower Sale Funding	General maintenance	3,368.42
Hardesty Memorial Fund (Joan)	Trail maintenance	2,518.42
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	2,368.42
Michael Dunigan	Trail maintenance	50.00

Miscellaneous

Stalbrink donation	Scholarship or "most needed"	<u>100.00</u>
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TOTAL RESTRICTED 57,841.40

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$67,823.05
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$57,841.40</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$9,981.65

Kathy reflected that the diminution in Unrestricted Funds results from PTC commitments to Indiana DNR made in the ITP grant application. If a grant is not approved, portions of the funds could be reallocated into unrestricted status. Also to be noted is that pledges coming from the Starke County Community Foundation (\$25,600), and from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (\$7,500), are contingent upon the grant being approved and thus not identified in the financial report.

Kathy said the support for the ITP grant application was amazing. Donations from the Cozarts, Novello and Hannah were all supportive of the application. Russ Blais has been instrumental in securing repeated significant donations from Naylor Pipe. In all it was been an extraordinary month for financial support to the PTC and our trail initiatives. She thanked our donors and encouraged others to share their thanks as well.

Sharon moved moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and the Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Deb Mix seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Kathy said this month that she updated required registrations for the Indiana “Business Entity Report” and “Entity Annual Report (E-1)”.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Report

The PTC completed, and, on February 27 filed, a timely application for an Indiana Trails Program (ITP) grant with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks. Kathy circulated a hard copy of the 140+ page document at the meeting. Special thanks was expressed to Kirt Verhagen and Larry Wickert for their participation in a workgroup that developed an MOU to identify a trail route through North Judson. Linda Byer was recognized for her expertise as a Biologist and her report analyzing flora and fauna along the northwestern one-third of the route to potentially serve as a “Connection to Nature”, an application element new to this grant cycle. The Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum was thanked for its help in finalizing the MOU and its willingness to contribute

land to the project. Bob Albert, Linda, and Kirt were recognized for their efforts toward developing a professional and cordial working relationship between the HVRM and PTC.

During our February 9 meeting, we circulated a handout “Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Summary (December 1, 2022—February 8, 2023)”. During this meeting, a follow-up handout “Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Summary (February 9—March 1, 2023)” was circulated as follows:

February 12	Site view to survey for Connection to Nature
February 13	Meeting with Northern Indiana Community Foundation
February 15	L. Byer issues Connection to Nature report
February 17	Eenshuistra Appraisals, Inc. issues market value appraisals for trail
February 18	Report of Environmental and Cultural Resources completed
February 20	Public Participation Meeting held at North Judson Town Hall
February 22	DNR issues Early Coordination/Environmental Assessment [ER-25287]
February 22	Report of Public Participation Meeting completed
February 23	Elements of Project Narrative completed
February 24	Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Support Letter received
February 24	Starke County Community Foundation Financial Pledge Letter received
February 24	Territorial Engineering, LLC Project Description {3rd Draft} received
February 24	Treasurer’s Local Match Letter finalized to DNR
February 25	Jay Waters, Col. (Ret.) 2021 Warrior Expeditions Support Letter received
February 25	Location Maps completed
February 26	Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Financial Pledge Letter
February 26	Michael Buckley, Col. (Ret.) 2022 Warrior Expeditions Support Letter received
February 26	Environmental Assessment form completed
February 26	Starke County Chamber of Commerce Support Letter
February 27	Easement Documents with GIS images assembled
February 27	Site Map with annotations completed
February 27	Grant Application (SF 55049 (3-20)) filed electronically with DNR
February 27	Completed ITP grant application Zip-file emailed to DNR in six parts
February 28	By email DNR acknowledges receipt and readability of Zip-file

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul reminded the membership that Larry has requested funding from Doral Renewables, LLC, the company behind the Mammoth Solar project in Starke and Pulaski Counties, to assist with needed repairs to the Fell Ditch bridge, as well as with vegetation control along the trail. He said an onsite meeting between representatives of Doral, including possibly its CEO, Nick Cohen, and representatives of the PTC has been scheduled to help better identify options for going forward. The onsite meeting was set for tomorrow (St. Patrick’s Day) at 11:00 am, CDT. Paul said he is also working to have brush removed along the trail to illustrate what is possible to help manage the asphalt and equestrian portions of the trail.

“North Judson Celebrate Trails Day April 22, 2023” Discussion

Brian K. Housh, Midwest Policy Director for the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, telephoned Kathy in late February indicating the Town of North Judson and the PTC were chosen by

the Conservancy to host a “signature event” for “Celebrate Trails Day April 22, 2023”. She expressed the belief our membership would be honored by participation but added the PTC is a small non-profit and North Judson is a small town. Kathy then shared this concept with the PTC Board of Directors and received positive feedback. At least three options for staging the event were identified. Two of these would need HVRM approval. An email was sent to HVRM outlining these options and requesting its perspectives.

HVRM responded through Liaison Bob Albert with a proposal that was more generous than even what we had hoped. He emailed on March 11:

“This was discussed at the HVRM board meeting this morning. The museum does want to host the event. We thought a train from the depot to rest park to showcase the co-existence between rail and trails. Also, a trip to English Lake to let people see where the northwest extension will be located. The museum will be open for inspection also.

“If possible, we would like to know about how many people are expected and will there be tents set up. I assume that PTC will take care of refreshments.”

In a brief response Steve thanked Bob and indicated the Conservancy and the PTC would set up tents and take care of refreshments. We would also work on making an estimate for how many people might attend.

Brian later explained to Kathy the Conservancy “selects a handful of communities across the nation to highlight during Celebrate Trails Day” every year. For 2023, Celebrate Trails Day will be held on April 22 in conjunction with Earth Day. The event seeks to emphasize “the exciting work that our local partners are doing to promote walking, biking and connectivity. North Judson/Prairie Trails Club is a great example of the transformative nature of building trail networks, which bring significant economic, health, safety, recreation and other quality of life benefits to residents and visitors.” The name of the event particular to North Judson, HVRM and the PTC would be “North Judson Celebrate Trails Day April 22, 2023”.

During the meeting the membership engaged in an extended conversation of what our celebration should entail. Because of the short preparation time, some options might be difficult to execute. There was consensus that the offer described in Bob Albert’s March 11 email provided a wonderful opportunity and one that most trails cannot offer. The core attraction would be a train ride (or perhaps two rides—one going northwest and the other southeast). The PTC offered to cover the cost of port-a-potties as a starter.

The ride or rides would be augmented by events and amenities that are trailside, such as the OSSIS project. Those willing to assist either with planning or with implementing the event were invited to a workgroup at the Bass Lake home of Rich Vallicelli on March 22 at 2:30 pm, CDT. A primary purpose of the workgroup would be to coordinate publicity for, and invitations to, the event. During the meeting members identified our contributors, social media, WKVI (radio and online), schools, neighboring trail organizations, hosted national trail organizations, local government, and the Chamber of Commerce among the entities that should be contacted. Russ, Diane, Sharon, Rich, Deb, Kathy and Steve agreed to participate in the workgroup. Other volunteers are needed.

Warrior Expeditions—Great American Rail-Trail 2023 Preview

Steve reported that Sarah Zeller, Director of Operations for Warrior Expeditions, emailed that five or six veterans are slated to bicycle the Great American Rail-Trail again this year. The PTC supported the event in both 2021 and 2022, the first two years of its existence. All ten of the prior participants completed the journey from Washington DC to the Pacific Ocean in Washington State. Last July our members agreed to be included in a listing for this year's event. Sarah reported the 2023 kickoff will begin about two weeks earlier than previously, and the veterans are expected to arrive in Starke County about June 1.

Wayfinding Signage

Yancy Lucas has prepared low-resolution proofs for all eight of the wayfinding (you-are-here type) signs identified as needed to either replace obsolete or supplement existing signs. An illustrative proof was circulated during the meeting. OTEs has provided a quote of \$72 for the manufacture of each sign for a total cost of \$576. In the February meeting members asked that the proofs be prepared and a cost estimate obtained. If the design shown was approved by the membership, Yancy would be asked to develop high-resolution proofs and forward them to OTEs for printing. New woodwork would also be needed for signs placed at US Highway 35 and along the southeast trail extension that was completed in late 2021.

Diane moved to approve development of the high-resolution proofs and to authorize OTEs to manufacture eight you-are-here signs at a cost of \$576. In addition her motion authorized purchasing woodwork and hardware needed for new signs. Deb seconded the motion, and the motion carried.



Shown on the prior page is a low-resolution proof for one of the eight you-are-here signs. This proof is for the small trailhead on Starke County Road 100 West. When the signs are manufactured the four corners of the sign will be rounded for safety and durability, rather than pointed as depicted in the proof.

Russ recommended that the PTC also complete replacement of the black-on-white “North Judson-Erie Trail” signs with the gold-on-black “Erie Trail” signs—the coloring and design used on the proof shown on the prior page. The PTC determined a few years ago to make this change—in part because the gold-on-black design was more striking and in keeping with Erie Lackawanna Railroad history, and in part because the simpler “Erie Trail” name was more inclusive of our community. When the first three miles of the trail were constructed they were all within Wayne Township and the North Judson school district. The current eleven-mile trail encompasses three townships (Wayne, California, and North Bend) and three school districts (North Judson, Knox, and Culver). Remaining black-on-what signs would be inventoried and a quote sought from TCS for manufacture of new signs. Membership approval for purchase would then be sought.

Russ also reflected upon the need for a wayfinding sign from Bass Lake to the trail. When permission is obtained from the Starke County Park Board or a landowner near the beach to place a sign, an additional wayfinding sign will be developed. This could be in the form of a ninth you-are-here sign, or a more basic sign, depending on the wishes of the landowner.

Trail Counters Update

On February 15, Linda, Kathy, and Joan Hardesty met at the Byers’ home to assimilate the trail counters and the new laptop. The trail counters were subsequently reinstalled. Linda showed the data to members on the new laptop during the meeting. Although trail usage is generally low in early March, bumps showing higher usage have occurred both east and west of US 35 on nice days.

Informal Review of HVRM Activities

Bob Albert joked at the beginning of his remarks that an upcoming activity is Celebrate Trails Day on April 22. The members thanked Bob and the HVRM for their offer to run excursion trains for the event. Bob went on to say the Easter Trains will run four times daily on April 1 and April 8. He added that NIPSCO is scheduled to perform brush control for its lines this summer.

Greenways Foundation Luncheon

The Greenways Foundation annual luncheon is scheduled for April 25, 2023 at 10:30 am to 12:30 pm CDT, at the Ritz Charles Conference Center in Carmel, Indiana. Deb, Diane, Russ, Kathy, Steve, and Brian and Anita McMillin plan to attend. This year the featured speaker is Ryan Chao, President of the national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Kathy will seek to reserve a table or adjacent tables for PTC members and for our friends. She urged that anyone interested in attending, and joining us as a group, inform her as soon as possible so seating reservations can be sought through the Greenways Foundation.

Open Discussion

Dorothy Michalak spoke about excitement in her Hebron group for efforts to extend its one-mile segment of the Great American Rail-Trail both west (toward Crown Point) and east (toward Kouts). She said the group members in Hebron adjusted their meeting date from May 11 to May 10 with the hope of having several of its members visit our meeting on May 11.

Kirt reported that the Erie Trail Travelers, under HVRM auspices, have committed to continuing maintenance this year on the segment of the Erie Trail from the Main Street trailhead to the rest park on Indiana Highway 10. He will also seek to have staging areas mowed in advance of “North Judson Celebrate Trails Day April 22, 2023”.

Next Membership Meetings

The next membership meeting was set for Thursday, April 13, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

The following membership meeting was set for Thursday, May 11, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake (Knox).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m., CST (8:25 p.m., EST).