

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

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

**August 26, 2021**

**MEMBERS**

**Diane Blais  
Russell Blais  
Paul Byer  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathy Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Anita McMillin  
Brian McMillin  
Rhonda Milner  
Max Rehlander  
Sharon Smead  
Kirt Verhagen  
Larry Wickert**

**GUESTS**

**Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, Inc. ("HVRM") Liaison**

**Call to Order by Vice President**

**Rhonda Milner, Vice President, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. ("PTC") in the BLPOA Community Center, Knox (Bass Lake) at 5:34 pm, CDT (6:34 pm, EDT) on August 26, 2021.**

**Approval of Minutes of May 20 and June 17, 2021**

**Kathy Lucas noted the minutes circulated to the membership for June 17 did not reflect the new \$5,000 donation by the Luminous Foundation, even though the donation had been acknowledged in the listing of donations. Also, approval of the May 20 minutes was not recognized in the June 17 minutes, even though they had been approved. Paul Byer moved to approve the June 17 minutes with clerical corrections as suggested, as well as to affirm approval of the May 20, 2021 minutes. Joan Hardesty seconded the motion and the motion carried.**

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

**Kathy provided the Treasurer's Report including reference to restricted and unrestricted funds. The two-page Treasurer's Report is reproduced on the following page and the Restricted/Unrestricted Grants and Donations are shown on page 3:**



**Treasurer's Report  
August 26, 2021**

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

Balance forward from 6/17/21 (No July meeting) \$ 375,674.25

**INCOME**

6/21/21	Convention & Visitors Center grant	1,000.00	
8/18/21	Registration for 5K event on 10/2/21	37.83	
8/23/21	Reimbursement for Warrior Expedition banner (S. & K. Lucas donation)	35.00*	
8/23/21	Dues (for Y. Lucas, N. Corral Frias, T. & C. Balzer)	100.00	
8/25/21	Deposit to return cash box withdrawal (for Bass Lake 5K)	200.00**	
8/25/21	Sale of merchandise (at Bass Lake 5K)	<u>85.00</u>	
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,457.83</b>	<b>377,132.08</b>

**EXPENSES**

6/29/21	Check # 1075 Barrel Maker Tshirts B. Fingerhut from CVC grant	1,018.62	
6/29/21	Check # 1078 Reimbursement to R. Blais (bench supplies)	50.26	
7/02/21	Check # 1079 Precept Partners for web update, QR map codes	375.00	
7/08/21	Check #1077 OTES: Warrior Expedition banner	35.00*	
7/13/21	Check #1080 Thomas Excavating Invoice #1 (ending 6/15)	16,146.67	
7/23/21	Check #1081 (B.Fingerhut: Booth fee for San Pierre 5K)	25.00	

7/23/21	Withdrawal for cash box (Bass Lake 5K)	<u>200.00**</u>	
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>(17,850.55)</b>	

**Ending FFBT balance as of 8/26/21 \$359,281.53**

/s/Katheen Lucas, Treasurer

## 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	3,503.75	
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	3,503.75	
PTC Account Commitment	Matching NLT Grant	3,503.75	
Marshall County Horse Assn.	Bench for SE Extension	350.00	
Indiana Greenways Foundation	Matching NLT Grant	3,503.75	
Lucas Lakehouse Guests' Donation	Future Vision/Website	700.00	
Next Level Trails Grant	SE Extension (2nd Installment)	305,868.33	(-16,146.67)
Mitchel-Kane Charitable Fund	Northwest Extension	4,000.00	
Stalbrink Donation	Scholarship/Most Needed	100.00	
Blais/Vlaming Bench	Trailhead @ 450/210	350.00	
McMillin Bench	Trailhead @ 450/210	350.00	
Maintenance Fund (Mower Sale)	General Trail Maintenance	4,000.00	
KVREMC Bike Rack Grant	Balance of Grant Amount	1,500.00	

**TOTAL RESTRICTED FUNDS      \$352,269.77**

### BANK ACCOUNT

First Farmers Bank & Trust (FFBT)	<b>\$359,281.53</b>	<b>TOTAL IN BANK</b>
	<b><u>-352,269.77</u></b>	<b>RESTRICTED</b>
	<b>7,011.76</b>	<b>TOTAL UNRESTRICTED</b>

Kathy reminded the members that Bruce Fingerhut and Rhonda obtained the \$1,000 grant from the Starke County Convention and Visitors Center, and this funding was used to purchase materials for the October 2 Erie Trail Fall Run/Walk and Ride. The first event registration was received. She and Steve purchased a banner for the PTC to welcome the Warrior Expedition and reimbursed the PTC for the cost.

August is dues month and four members (Yancy Lucas, Nadia Corral-Frias, Chris Balzer, and Tabitha Balzer) provided their annual dues. Kathy said several more members brought in their dues today, sometimes with additional donations. She thanked them and said those would be reported in the September meeting.

Kathy said the major expenditure was \$16,146.67, beginning the second installment of Gov. Holcomb's NLT Grant for the construction of the two-mile extension of the Erie Trail. This payment was to Thomas Excavating & Welding, and she expected to send a second check to Thomas for \$44,000+ before the end of the month. Russ Blais asked whether there had been recent progress regarding construction. Kathy responded that work was now underway and there would be further discussion concerning construction later in the meeting. She also referenced payment to Precept Partners for updates to our web-page and to better accommodate references to the OSSIS Project.

Diane Blais moved to approve the Treasurer's Report with the Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds for the period ending August 26, 2021. Kirt Verhagen seconded the motion and the motion carried.

## **Planning for Erie Trail Fall Run/Walk and Ride**

Brian McMillan provided a brief report of the committee chaired by Bruce to plan for an October 2 Erie Trail Fall Run/Walk and Ride that would include a train ride and bling to the participants. He said Bruce was currently in Alabama but was expected to return within the week to help hone final details for the event. Bob Albert, the Hoosier Valley Liaison to the PTC, said the HVRM could be flexible in helping with the train ride. Jacque Ryan, Director of Development for the Starke County Community Foundation, emailed the PTC to reflect she had spoken with Bruce and the Foundation is reaching out to the Constellation of Starke Creatives Network to see if it wants to participate as a vendor.

## **Report of Southeast Trail Extension Workgroup**

On July 16, representatives of the Southeast Trail Extension Workgroup met onsite with representatives of The Troyer Group and of Thomas Excavating & Welding to foster progress with trail construction. Carolla Heilstedt, Larry Wickert, Kathy Lucas, and Steve Lucas were present on behalf of the Trail Extension Workgroup. For the Troyer Group were John Leszczynski and Jonathon Geels. Thomas Excavating was represented by Jason Young. On a morning with interspersed rain showers, progress on grading was observed and a highlight was viewing of the rehabilitated Bartee Ditch bridge, including a new deck.

The Erie Railroad had two lines where crossing the Bartee Ditch, constructed at different times and different elevations. Below is an image taken by the Troyer Group in March 2020 with the southern crossing in the foreground and the northern crossing in the background. The trail extension would use the northern crossing with the southern crossing reserved for future railroad extension by the HVRM.



The next image is of the rain soaked deck of the rehabilitated northern crossing, taken by Kathy, as it appeared on July 16:



A central discussion point during the July 16 meeting was reservation of the southern portion of the corridor for possible HVRM rail expansion. Larry reported to membership on having discussions during “the walkthrough”, and subsequently with representatives of HVRM, about positioning the equestrian trail south of, rather than north of, the asphalt trail for the stretch east of Bartee Ditch. An agreement was reached with HVRM to this effect, with the understanding the PTC would move the equestrian trail if needed for an HVRM railroad extension. Bob Albert confirmed the agreement and said the likelihood of this contingency occurring was well into the future.

Larry said additional clearing would be needed, and timing was a challenge. The Starke County Commissioners pledged a soft-match of \$5,000 in the 2019 Grant application. In part, the match would be achieved with the placement of signage within the rights-of-way of County Roads 600 East and 700 East. The hope is the rest can be satisfied through brush clearing before placing asphalt. He said he would continue working with the County and was “90% certain of getting those things accomplished” within a few days.

Thomas Excavating continues to advance with grading. Depicted below is an image by Kathy of aggregate stockpiled on the west side of US 35 early on August 26.



Members reported during the meeting that by the end of the day those stockpiles had expanded.

Russ is pursuing the possibility of seeking a grant to cover some of the cost of split rail fencing. He said the Home Depot might be a source. He was encouraged to continue the inquiry.

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

A copy of the “Trail Easement Agreement”, entered between the PTC and the Northern Indiana Railroad LLC (“NIR”) in late July, was circulated among those present. Steve said that the Redevelopment Commission of the Town of North Judson was critical to gaining the easement, and its final terms were negotiated between representatives of the PTC and the NIR. The document provides an opportunity for a 14-foot wide easement for a trail on property acquired by NIR from Main Street in North Judson to LaPorte County Road 875W near LaCrosse.

Kirt Verhagen asked if the easement opportunity was limited to the former right-of-way of the C&O Railroad. He noted there has been interest in the possibility of locating the trail west of English Lake Road on the former Pennsylvania Railroad corridor rather than east of English Lake Road on the former C&O Railroad corridor. Steve responded that the 14-foot easement was understood to be the minimum width required by DNR to qualify for an NLT Grant, as well as the minimum required for the Great American Rail-Trail. But in particular northwest of the North Judson Town limits, use of the Pennsylvania Railroad corridor could offer more width and be an attractive alternative. The NIR did not acquire the Pennsylvania Railroad corridor there and so could not offer an easement on it. The PTC or some other interested entity would have to acquire or otherwise obtain rights to use portions of the former Pennsylvania Railroad corridor.

Sharon Smead asked if an equestrian trail was anticipated northwest of North Judson. Steve said the width of the corridor would not support an equestrian trail. Kirt suggested an active railroad might not be compatible with an equestrian trail.

Kathy reported upon preliminary communications with Mitch Barloga, Mitchell Bishop, and Justin Kiel concerning the possibility of seeking a Third Phase NLT Grant for a northwest extension. Mitch Barloga is President of the Greenways Foundation, Indiana coordinator for the Northern Branch of American Discovery Trail, and serves in several professional capacities for Northwest Indiana planning. Mitchell Bishop is Director of Planning and Development/Grant Administrator for La Porte County. Justin Kiel is the President of the LaCrosse Town Council and Editor of The *Regional News* in southern LaPorte County. The focus of these discussions is the possible development of a trail between North Judson and LaCrosse.

An onsite meeting was scheduled for August 31, 2021 at the DNR Access Site to the Kankakee River in English Lake among Max, Larry, Kathy, Steve, and Justin. Mitchell Bishop, Russ, and Sharon may also attend. A primary purpose of the meeting is to allow Max to make an early assessment of the active railroad bridge and what may be needed to provide a trail over the Kankakee River. Max is a Civil Engineer for Abonmarche, a firm with a Valparaiso branch that was consultant for the Great American in Hebron.

Participants who are PTC members may meet immediately after the bridge assessment to consider more broadly opportunities and challenges to obtaining a Third Phase NLT



grant. This informal meeting could include trail improvement possibilities in addition to the northwest extension.

### **Report of Warrior Bike Trip on Great American Rail-Trail**

The PTC welcomed the Warrior Expedition trekkers on their bike trip between Washington DC and Washington State. Paul Cook and Jay Waters stayed with Steve and Kathy. Alan Garrigus and Allison Garrigus stayed with Russ and Diane. Russ led a visit with Paul and Jay to the Knox VFW, American Legion, Starke County History Center, and Veterans Memorial Plaza.



Jay Muddy Waters and Paul Cook at  
Veterans Memorial Plaza  
Image by Brenda Palmer

Diane and Russ hosted a June 18 dinner at their Bass Lake home to honor the trekkers. PTC members who contributed to the festivities included Carolla, Anita and Brian McMillin, Peg and Rich Stalbrink, Bruce, Rhonda, Larry, Rick Vlaming, Kathy, and Steve. Below are trekkers Allison Gerrigus, Allison Gerrigus, Paul Cook and Jay Waters.



Image by Kathy Lucas

**Steve and Kathy met the fifth trekker, Joseph de la Garza, on June 19 as he was en route on the Erie Trail, a segment of the Great American Rail-Trail, a mile east of North Judson.**



**Image by Kathy Lucas**

**On August 7, Paul Cook (image below) became the first trekker to finish the epic journey at La Push, Washington where he logged the 3,830 mile trip.**



**Image supplied to Russell  
Blais by Paul Cook**

**All five trekkers plan to complete their journeys by mid-September.**



## **Report of Bass Lake Festival 5K Run and 3K Walk**

Russ provided a preliminary report on the Bass Lake Festival 5K Run and 3K Walk which was held on July 24. He thanked membership for their efforts in conducting the event, including their diligence in arriving early in the morning. Russ said that unfortunately the timer for the events was a disappointment. Diane said the timer changed the order of participant finishes in several instances, resulting in medals being awarded which then had to be withdrawn. In other instances, medal awards were delayed so the winners were not recognized for their accomplishments until days after the event. The Bass Lake Festival organizers are still in discussions with the timer concerning his performance and compensation.

Russ said he expects to have final numbers on the financial success of the event before the PTC's September 23 meeting. No decision has been made whether the PTC would seek to again serve as sponsor. He hopes to provide the final report during the next meeting.

## **Report of San Pierre Spirit of Summer Festival**

Brian reported that he, Anita, and Bruce served as PTC representatives at a booth during the inaugural San Pierre Spirit of Summer Festival. He thought promotion of the event was probably hampered because its sponsors did not have a website. They depended for publicity upon social media such as Facebook. He said he was happy, however, to have served the community in efforts to develop a new initiative.

## **Report of Starke County Community Foundation Activities**

On August 25, Jacque Ryan by email provided updates on two Starke County Community Foundation activities in which the PTC has participated:

### ***OSSIS Project***

Jacquie Ryan reported she has "reached out to Johnnie Shelton from OTES and he has said a crew will be able to move the two signs that are currently on the equestrian trail" to the north side of the asphalt trail. These are the signs for Uranus and Neptune.

Jacquie reported Marty Lucas, Bob Alois, Johnnie Shelton and she met on August 18 "to discuss redesigning the posts because a recent storm caused a bit of damage to the existing signs. The changes will be made as soon as possible. Once those changes are made, we will go full force with project promotion (*i.e.*, creating an explanation video, hosting an event, [and] encouraging educators to use [the] trail for field trips)."

### ***Signal Bungalow Mural***

Jacquie reported "a lot of progress has been made on creation of the mural" at the signal bungalow that is located along the trail 1/4 mile east of County Road 200 East. She is "scheduling site visits as the artists are available." The artists are students at Knox High School. "The student artists estimate that they'll be able to finish it up with one or two more site visits."



Signal bungalow mural in progress  
(August 12, 2021)  
Image by Kathy Lucas

## **Maintenance Committee Update**

**Paul reported patching an area that had considerable damage. He heated the patched area with a blowtorch and then drove over it a few times to smooth the cracks and flatten the fill. He has used all the asphalt material previously purchased and said he is willing to continue the process.**

**Members asked if Paul wished to have an additional appropriation for the purchase of patch material. Kathy suggested that the \$4,000 obtained from sale of the PTC's mower was a good source. When asked how much he would like appropriated at this time, Paul did a quick calculation and responded \$500. Steve moved to approve an appropriation of \$500 to Paul from the maintenance fund. Diane seconded the motion, and the motion carried.**

**Paul said he and Linda also plan to fill holes created by groundhogs and seek to manage the groundhog population. Members thanked Paul and Linda for their efforts.**

**Paul added that Linda asked him to present a proposal she wrote for trail maintenance. He then read into the record her proposal:**

**"I propose we start an adopt a trail program like the adopt the highway program the state has. A person, family, group or business could adopt a section of the trail and do all necessary maintenance on that section. Trimming, mowing, herbicide application, pavement care etc. If they don't have the equipment or experience to do all that is needed, they can hire someone to do it. The club does have a good lawn tractor that can be used by any member. The Lucas' already have the trail between 100 W and range road well maintained and Paul and I would like to take**

care of at least the section between US 35 and 400 W. The club can pay to put up signs attesting to the fact that we are providing the maintenance of that section of the trail since there is money for signage. For the sections that need a lot of work, we can use those areas for work days and then turn it over to someone in the area that may be interested in maintaining it. Or perhaps multiple people can adopt more difficult areas.

"This way the entire trail's maintenance won't be a financial burden on the club or any one individual. The cost and time spent can be spread out. Of course any major storm damage or other major repairs or maintenance like the bridges, can be tackled by the entire group.

"The idea of hiring a local farmer with a side mount mower to mow all or sections of the trail and chop the invading brush is a great idea and should be pursued. The existing trail is falling apart fast and something needs to be done before it is all lost. Just my thoughts. Linda Byer"

**Rhonda thanked Paul and Linda for the proposal. She said it should be included in the minutes for membership review and discussion at a future meeting.**

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

**Bob Albert reported the HVRM "is doing pretty good this year. We've made more income this year than in any prior year," and two of our best visitation periods, Halloween and Christmas, are yet to come.**

**Bob said the HVRM recently entered an operating agreement with the Chesapeake and Indiana Railroad. The physical track and the company that operates the railroad were both recently purchased by Midwest & Bluegrass Rail. HVRM has stated the agreement "simplifies operating protocols and communication... and gives the museum greater operating flexibility." The HVRM will continue to lease and maintain that section of track, while Chesapeake and Indiana retains the right to serve freight customers.**

**The Chesapeake and Indiana Railroad recently donated a diesel locomotive. The HVRM is planning to keep the engine in service pulling excursion trains. Bob continued, "We got everything we asked for and more." HVRM can now resume excursion rides to LaCrosse. The cost of insurance has been cut in half making these excursions not only possible but also financially feasible. "We might run one train to LaCrosse this fall and maybe make a monthly trip there next summer."**

### **Next Membership Meeting**

**The next membership meeting was scheduled for September 23, 2021 at 5:30 pm, CDT (6:30 pm, EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South State Road 10, Knox (Bass Lake), Indiana.**

### **Adjournment**

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m., CDT (8:27 p.m., EDT).**