

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

**North Judson-Wayne Township Library
208 Keller Avenue
North Judson, IN**

April 12, 2017

MEMBERS

Kenny Bailey
Linda Byer
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Sharon Smead
Greg Wittig
Karen Wittig

GUESTS

Bob Albert
Chris Lawrence
Rosie Rose

Call to Order

Steve Lucas, Secretary, called to order a meeting of the Prairie Trails Club at 6:08 p.m., CDT on April 12, 2017 in the North Judson-Wayne Township Library. He welcomed Chris Lawrence and Rosie Rose who are two of the members of the Starke County Park Board. He thanked them for their work on the Board and congratulated them on their recent successes.

Approval of Minutes

Brian Mcmillan moved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on March 8, 2017. Karen Witting seconded the motion. On a voice vote the motion carried.

Report on Approval of Five-Year Master Plan by Starke County Park Board and IDNR Action

Steve said last month the Starke County Park Board approved the *Starke County Five Year Parks Master Plan (2017-2021)*. The Master Plan addresses a breadth of issues pertaining to management of the county's new park system, including acknowledgement and incorporation of the trails network. He quoted from the *Master Plan*:

Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, such as trails, are growing in importance and popularity. The North Judson Erie Trail runs from North Judson southeast towards Bass Lake and Tippecanoe State Park connecting to US 35. While the trail pavement ends at US 35, the right of way continues to Monterey in Pulaski County. The trail is part of the trans-continental American Discovery Trail and US Bicycle Route 35. It is a 10' wide asphalt trail and a portion of the trail also has an equestrian

trail adjacent to it. Opportunities for expanded trail systems must be integrated into future transportation planning in the county. Regional trail plans have been developed in recent years, and these plans should be analyzed for regional connections to Starke County.

He added that the *Master Plan* makes the following recommendations with respect to the trail:

The county should look into leasing the North Judson Erie Trail from the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum. This could help improve maintenance and safety by being able to utilize county resources.

The county should also look to further develop the trail system, expanding upon the existing efforts such as regional trails and the North Judson Erie Trail. Additional connections to the trail and throughout the county should be explored as opportunities arise. The county should utilize existing planning efforts such as regional trail plans and the North Judson Erie Trail Future Vision Phase Plan created by Lucas Corral Interpretive Design to plan future routes and help acquire trail funding through INDOT or other programs such as IDNR's Recreational Trail Program.

The process for development of the *Master Plan* included oversight and structure from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. Deb Mix, President of the Starke County Park Board, last night announced the DNR has now approved the Master Plan. Rosie Rose said DNR approval qualified the Board to apply for grants, including for matters which may be of particular interest to trail users. Chris Lawrence said he and Rosie volunteered to attend tonight's meeting to acquaint themselves with the functioning of the PTC and with the hope cooperation will support projects of importance to the networking of Starke County parks and trails.

Report on Approval by Starke County Commissioners of Three Share-the-Road Connectors described in PTC Vision Plan

Steve reported that on April 3 on behalf of the PTC, Bruce Fingerhut and he requested the Starke County Commissioners to designate motor vehicle and bike share-the-road status for three roads, similar to what the Commissioners approved last September for two roads toward Pulaski County and the Panhandle Pathway. Our requests were (1) north from the North Judson Erie trail to Bailey's Discount Center on Range Road; (2) east briefly on CR 800 South then north on CR 450 East to CR 210 on the southwest side of Bass Lake; and (3) east on CR 800 South and north on CR 600 East to State Road 10 near the Bass Lake Beach. Starke County Highway Superintendent, Rik Ritzler, was present to lend support. The requests would advance the PTC's Future Vision Phase Plan and the Starke County Parks Five-Year Plan. "We urged that approval would assist connectivity to and use of the NJ Erie Trail, US Bike Route 35, and American Discovery Trail. With these designations the PTC would in coordination with the County Highway Department help place, develop and maintain effective signage to benefit of bicyclists and the general public." The Commissioners approved our request unanimously.

Consideration of Strategy for Developing Uniformity and Branding of Signage and Information Stream

Steve said he hoped the membership would consider establishing uniform approaches to signage and to media communications. The American Discovery Trail has a distinctive national logo. An Indiana logo for US Bike Route 35 is in the final stages of development. The Starke County Park Board and Starke County Highway Department are developing way-finding signage to park facilities. Mary Perren, News Director for Kankakee Valley

Broadcasting, and Pamela Varchetto, reporter for the *Leader* of Starke County of the Pilot News Group, have expressed interest in an information stream from the PTC. The *Leader* may have a feature article covering the PTC next week.

Steve said what we commonly call “the trail” goes by multiple names and signage. “We can better serve our users, and make a stronger organizational statement, if we agree upon standards and designs for signage which are consistent, coordinated among organizations, and aesthetically pleasing.” He suggested forming a committee within the PTC that would invite participation by the Starke County Park Board, the Starke County Highway Department, and the HVRM regarding standards and goals for uniform signage along the trail and its connectors and related trails. “In particular we’d focus on where a trail can be used to access park properties within Starke County. A second purpose of the committee would be to develop a protocol for providing information of interest to media, including cooperative efforts with the Starke County Park Board and the HVRM.”

The members had numerous questions concerning need. Bryan McMillin said he was comfortable being a PTC worker but less so in a committee structure. Sharon Smead acknowledged the importance of having good media relations but expressed concerns for offering information effectively. After an extended discussion the members agreed the item should be tabled for further consideration at the May meeting.

Update on Request to IRS to Approve PTC as a 501(c)(3) Organization

Steve said Kathy asked him to pass along her regrets for not attending the meeting due to a family medical issue. She continues to pursue IRS approval of 501(c)(3) status for the PTC. On Saturday she received a letter from the IRS asking us to file a Form 900-N for tax-exempt organizations not required to file Form 990 or 990-EZ. The form represents that the PTC is active and generally earns less than \$50,000 in any one filing year. The filing is sometimes referred by the IRS as an “e-Postcard”. Kathy tendered a completed Form 900-N by email on Monday, and later in the day the IRS emailed a return filing acceptance. She hopes to receive IRS confirmation of the PTC’s successful 501(c)(3) status by the end of April. If that does not occur Kathy will call the IRS for a status report.

Update on Discussion for Possible Trail Lease between HVRM and Starke County

Bob Albert said he and Cory Bennett met with their attorney, Todd Wallsmith, about ten days ago to discuss the development of a trail lease between the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum and Starke County. Wallsmith was working on the outline for a lease, and Bob had hoped to have the outline but as yet did not. He said the HVRM Board members were “basically all in favor of a lease,” and since the financials would be “basically zero,” he thought the Board was authorized to take action. Bob said Wallsmith indicated that Starke County would write the lease proposal.

Announcement of the Marshall County Horse Association Trail Workday on May 6 and PTC Participation as a Joint Event

Sharon said the Marshall County Horse Association has agreed to undertake an NJ Erie Trail workday on May 6 as one of its official activities. After personally surveying the trail from C.R. 250 West and southeasterly and after discussions with Bruce Fingerhut, she concluded the greatest need was between C.R. 300 East and C.R. 400 East. Sharon said her hope was that the Marshall County Horse Association and the PTC might undertake the

workday jointly. This year's event would be modest but could lead to an annual event if successful. Bryan and Anita Mcmillin, Paul Byer, and Steve and Kathy Lucas plan on participating on behalf of the PTC. Sharon agreed this participation was enough to consider it a joint event.

Linda Byer said the honeysuckle has probably already leafed out sufficiently that chemical treatments to kill cut plans can be successful. She was confident plants could be treated effectively by May 6. Linda said if not chemically treated the effort will be unsuccessful and perhaps even counterproductive. Sharon said she hoped that eventually the Horse Association might help with the cost of chemicals, but she did not have approved funding for this year. Linda said she believed the PTC may have some chemicals available. If not the group agreed the PTC should make reasonable purchases of chemicals.

Sharon said she expected Horse Association participants can use Billy Bope's property as a staging area, reducing the need for vehicles along the trail. Linda said Bope's property is south along C.R. 300 East. PTC members encouraged available persons to help with what can be a productive joint event. Sharon said she would later provide details concerning at what time and where the workday would begin.

Update on First Annual 5K Color Walk-Run on June 3 in Celebration of National Trails Day and Scheduling of Committee Meeting

Kenny Bailey reported the committee was scheduled to meet on April 20, 2017 at 6:00 p.m., CDT, at the offices of Osborne Advantage Real Estate on 202 Schricker Avenue in North Judson. The committee has progressed well in its preparations for the June 3 celebration. Karen asked if that meant the 5K Color Walk-Run was on, and he said it did.

Update on July 15 Bike Ride from Bass Lake to NJ Erie Trail and Bailey's Discount Center

Steve said he did not move forward with the July 15 Bike Ride pending Starke County Commissioner approval of share-the-road status for County Road 450 East and Range Road. Following the Board's April 3 approval, he would discuss the event next week with Rick Anderson, President of the Bass Lake Property Owners Association.

Schedule for May PTC Membership Meeting

The next PTC meeting was set for Wednesday, May 17, 2017 at 6:00 p.m., CDT, in the North Judson-Wayne Township Public Library.

Consideration of Possible Scheduling of PTC Board of Directors Meeting

The members discussed scheduling a meeting of the Board of Directors. The meeting would help identify the Board's scope. One reason for establishment of the Board was to meet IRS expectations for a not-for-profit association. Greg Wittig suggested another is for a "checks-and-balance relationship" with the PTC officers. Steve said he thought that regardless of purposes the Board needed to meet at least once a year. After discussion the members agreed a meeting should be set for June. It was agreed Board members and other interested members should bring calendars to the May 17 membership meeting with the expectation of scheduling a Board meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m., CDT.