

**MEETING MINUTES OF  
PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.  
Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center  
6996 South State Road 10, Knox (Bass Lake)  
April 23, 2026**

**MEMBERS**

Russ Blais  
Linda Byer  
Paul Byer  
Joan Hardesty  
Kathy Lucas  
Steve Lucas  
Brian McMillin  
Anita McMillin  
Rhonda Milner  
Kirt Verhagen  
Larry Wickert

**GUESTS**

Walter Block

**Call to Order by President**

On April 23, 2026, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a Meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) in the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake, Indiana at 5:38 pm, CT (6:38 pm, ET).

**Review and Approval of Minutes of March 19, 2026**

Steve Lucas referenced a change to the draft minutes that he and Russ Blais agreed was needed with respect to the agenda item “Preparations for May 23 5K Run/3K Walk”. The change would delete sentences in the draft minutes which state: “Russ suggested that the route be removed from the shirt. Steve offered that the route be retained but with only one walker element.” A single new sentence would provide that: “Russ and Steve suggested the shirt be simplified to show the route but with only one walker element.” During the meeting, Russ expressed his concurrence with this change.

Joan Hardesty moved to approve the draft March 19 minutes with the change identified by Steve and Russ. Paul Byer seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

**North Judson ADT Society “Trail Town” Designation**

Peter Schoettle, Chair of Trail Town Committee for the ADT Society, announced March 23 that the Committee favorably advanced the request by Andrew Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer of the Town of North Judson, to be declared a “Trail Town”. Schoettle added that “if things continue to move along, it looks like North Judson will be the fourth American Discovery Trail Town nationally, the first between the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, and the first in Indiana.”

Two documents required to finalize designation were a “Trail Town Public Proclamation Supporting the American Discovery Trail” and a “Memorandum of Understanding Between the American Discovery Trail Society and the Town of North Judson, Indiana”. Andrew drafted these and presented them to the Town Council which endorsed each at a

public meeting on April 6. Kathy spoke in support on behalf of the PTC. Rhonda, Kirt Verhagen and I also attended.

On April 19, Eric Seaborg, American Discovery Society President, and Mitch Barloga, Northern Indiana State Coordinator for the ADT, approved the MOU. Schoettle wrote on April 21 the “one remaining step is for you to receive your three official Trail Town signs in a public ceremony. Our suggestion is for you to place one where the ADT enters your town; one where the trail exits the town, and the third on an appropriate public building, such as a visitors center. We know that you will work closely with “Mitch Barloga, to make this happen.” Schoettle had written previously “it would be wonderful” to have 250 Relay runners and bicyclists received “as an official American Discovery Trail Town.”

Advancement of the “Trail Town” designation was posted on the PTC’s Facebook Page where it received 32 “LOVES” and 111 “LIKES”. That is believed the largest and most positive response for any PTC Facebook posting. The “Trail Town” designation and Town of North Judson actions were also favorably reported on WKVI.

Membership applauded this major accomplishment.



**TRAIL TOWN PUBLIC PROCLAMATION**  
**SUPPORTING THE AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL**

**Town of North Judson, Indiana**

Whereas, the Town of North Judson is situated on the American Discovery Trail, and

Whereas, the American Discovery Trail is the nation’s longest and sole, non-motorized coast-to-coast trail, and

Whereas, the American Discovery Trail Society manages the American Discovery Trail and leads volunteers who continue to develop and improve the 6,800-mile trail, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, and

Whereas, that multi-use trail provides year-round access to outdoor recreation, transportation, improved fitness, and sources of pleasure to the citizens of the Town of North Judson and to visitors, and

Whereas, the community of North Judson is an ideal destination for many of today’s outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and

Whereas, Starke County offers a variety of outdoor and cultural experiences to residents and visitors, and

Whereas, available supporting services and facilities, such as lodging, restaurants, and stores, make North Judson an outstanding heritage and nature-based tourism destination, and

Whereas, casual walkers, day hikers, weekend backpackers, and bikers want to enjoy the American Discovery Trail, and the community of North Judson can provide the gateway to their experience.


Now Therefore, the Town of North Judson does hereby proclaim to be an:

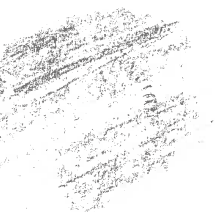
**AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL TOWN**

And commends the American Discovery Trail Society for its work in developing and improving the American Discovery Trail and further encourages all residents of and visitors to hike or ride a bike on the American Discovery Trail.

Date: 4/6/26

  
Town Council President  
**John Rowe**

ATTEST:  
  
Clerk-Treasurer  
**Andrew J. Rooie**

Seal:  


## **American Discovery 250 Relay**

Dave Whitson, who is managing the Relay on behalf of the ADT Society, has provided a pretty solid date for arrival in Starke County, weather permitting. The expectation is the entourage will arrive on October 15—two days later than discussed previously.

The tentative travel route is a crossing of the Kankakee River into Starke County on US Highway 421, a left turn onto Starke County Road 400 North, a right turn onto English Lake Road and on to North Judson. On October 16, the entourage would follow the Erie Trail until US Highway 35 and then turn right (south) into Pulaski County passing Tippecanoe River State Park. Pulaski County is arranging for receipt of the entourage as it goes southeast.

The American 250 Committee had questions about a fee for participation in the 250 Relay. Dave shared that the concept was considered early in event planning, but has since been rejected. In his words: "But no, there definitely won't be a pay-to-play aspect to the relay."

## **Review Progress on Trail Extension at English Lake**

Walter Block and Larry Wickert outlined progress on a small but key element of a trail extension northwest and within Starke County. Walter has made a most gracious offer to grant the PTC a walking and bicycle easement for the northern portion of a parcel, which he owns with his wife, adjacent to Starke County Road 650 West and the Pinsky Railroad.

Steve shared a draft easement with Walter and Larry. The terms are not finalized but would be measured 120 feet from the centerline of the railroad—but would not include real estate beyond the Blocks' property line. Anticipated projects on the parcel would be a modest parking area, historic signage, wayfinding signage for US Bike Route 35 and the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail (and possibly others), with an acknowledgement of the Blocks' contribution.

Walter and Larry have made arrangements to obtain additional millings to help support trail efforts. The millings have been donated to the PTC, but there are costs associated with trucking them. Walter requested \$250 to help defray those costs. Russ offered to contribute \$125, and Kirt Verhagen offered to contribute the other \$125.

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

Kathy circulated written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds:



**Treasurer's Report  
April 23, 2026**

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

**Balance from March 19, 2025 (prior meeting) **\$38,592.09****

**INCOME**

Arrow Head Grant	\$706.19
Donation from Barbara Patterson	200.00
State of Indiana payables	27,919.97
Donation from Peggy Stalbrink	<u>100.00</u>

**TOTAL INCOME **\$28,926.16****

**EXPENSES**

**{03/18/26 Check #1234 to Hill Excavating (Invoice #5) **31,045.71****

**NOTE: This entry is for information only. Hill has not cashed the check.}**

**TOTAL EXPENSES **(0)****

**ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 04/23/26 **\$67,518.25****

*Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer 04/23/26*

**RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS 04/23/26**

**SIGNAGE/WEB**

Luminous Fund	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	685.64
Hardesty Mem.	Wayfinding or historic signs	1,707.31
Lucas lakehouse	Future Vision/Website	<u>662.50</u>
		<b>3,055.05</b>

**DNR REIMBURSEMENT for ITP 23-06 Northwest Extension**

Pre-existing + State reimbursement for Invoice #4 **38,504.44** {10,584.44 + 27,919.37}

**MAINTENANCE**

Hardesty Mem.	Trail Maintenance	157.24
HVRM (Buckeye)	Trail Maintenance	593.61
Rich Stalbrink Mem.	Maintenance or most needed	2,231.08
Doral Solar	Bridge/clearing	7,269.48
Arrowhead Grant	Invasive Species Control	<u>706.19</u>
		<b>10,957.60</b>

**TOTAL RESTRICTED **\$52,517.09****

<b>FFBT Balance</b>	<b>\$67,518.25</b>
<b>Restricted Funds</b>	<b>— 52,517.09</b>
<b>Unrestricted Funds</b>	<b>\$15,001.16</b>

Kathy congratulated Rhonda on her successful request and thanked Arrow Head Country RC&D for the \$706.19 to assist with controlling invasive species along the trail. She thanked Barbara Patterson and Peggy Stalbrink, both of whom are noteworthy donors to the PTC’s efforts. She also expressed appreciation for the quick turnaround by the DNR and State Budget Agency on our 80% reimbursements for trail construction.

Kirt moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Larry seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

**Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP-23-06**

Kathy reflected that work was progressing on the trail extension, although the frequent rains in late March and April have likely slowed the efforts of Hill Excavating. Bob Aloj indicated the project may be completed by the end of this Quarter—which would mean by the end of June. A visible advancement is at the kiosk.



**Consideration of USBR 35 Relocation to Trail Extension**

On March 23, Steve emailed Brandon Burgoa, Indiana’s Statewide Pedestrian and Bicycle Coordinator with the Indiana Department of Transportation, regarding the trail extension as it bears upon US Bike Route 35, one of the hosted routes. The current USBR35 Route through North Judson uses town streets. The PTC would seek to relocate it to use the non-motorized trail extension.

On April 21, Brandon emailed that “If we are still on track to have the trail open to the public by this summer, we can try to get the USBR 35 realignment submitted for the Fall cycle of the AASHTO Special Committee on US Route Numbering.” He “looped in two... colleagues: Alison Shaner and Allison Gross...as they have been immensely helpful in keeping the USBR program up-to-date and thriving.”

Brandon and Steve have since exchanged several emails. Brandon forwarded our status “to Noelle Szydyk at the Indiana Destination Development Corporation (formerly Office of Tourism) so their team is aware of the recent [“Trail Town”] award and designation....” Brandon added “Alison, Allison, and [he] will investigate the potential [for a] USBR 35 realignment and review” our documents. These include an aerial of the new trail route

and the kiosk in place but not completed. Brandon wrote, “Once we familiarize ourselves with the descriptions you provided, we can get together on a call.”

### **Bike Racks Sandblasting and Powder Coating**

Kathy and Steve relayed to Aaron Williams of Technicoat that PTC members expressed the preference that the railroad-themed bike rack have a black glossy rather than a matte finish. Aaron said both racks had been sand-blasted and that he would powder coat the railroad-themed rack soon. He informed us shortly afterwards that the rail-road themed rack was finished and could be picked up. Steve said earlier in the day Aaron informed him that both bike racks are now finished. We need to make arrangements for Paul and Linda to pick them up and to pay Aaron for his services.

### **Arrow Head Country RC&D Awards Ceremony**

Rhonda attended the Arrow Head Country RC&D Awards Ceremony on behalf of the PTC. She said the ceremony was casual and a good learning experience. She reflected there were several other award recipients who intended to use their awards for exotic weed control in natural areas. She thanked PTC members who provided her assistance with writing the application and noted JD Castleman was instrumental to her understanding of what might properly be considered in a grant application.

### **Starke County Treasures Tour on April 11**

Students from the Advanced Placement American History Classes at North Judson-San Pierre High School and Knox High School guided bus trips called the “Starke County Treasures Tour”. Kathy and Steve rode with the North Judson students. We heard about railroad history, local veterans, the Vin-Fiz crash landing, Abraham Lincoln funeral train, and the two terms of Governor Henry Schricker. Most riders were familiar with the other events, but many were unfamiliar with the Vin-Fiz flight. The bus stopped in Aldine at PTC signage designed by Yancy Lucas which the Luminous Fund financially supported. American plums were in full bloom there, and the Vin-Fiz stop was well-received. Russ reflected that there are hopes to repeat an APA History Class event next year.



Starke County Treasures Tour stop at Vin-Fiz sign

Image by K. Lucas

### **Preparations for RTC April 25 Celebrate Trails Day and Arbor Day**

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has provided signs, stickers, and other items for use by the PTC and other organizations to support Celebrate Trails Day. In association with the RTC, the Athletic Brewing Co. has provided four six-packs of non-alcoholic beer. The

event is of special interest because the Great American Rail-Trail is the most-ambitious project of the RTC. The theme of the PTC's event this year is CONNECTIONS with other outdoor organizations and opportunities.

Celebrate Trails Day is on the same date that Arbor Day will be observed locally by the Starke County Arbor Day Committee of the Starke County American250 Initiative. As an element of the CONNECTIONS theme, the PTC will provide a booth with its brochures as well as some of the items donated to us by the RTC for Celebrate Trails Day. This Arbor Day event will be held at the Starke County Forest.

Rhonda is loaning a table for use at the Arbor Day event. The main activity of the PTC for Celebrate Trails Day will be grooming the Great American Rail Trail (Erie Trail) between Starke County Roads 700 East and and 600 East. At 700 East, Rhonda will provide lunch as she did last year.

### **Preparations for May 23 5K Run/3K Walk**

Brian McMillin reported that he, Anita McMillin, and Rich Vallicelli met to identify routes for the 5K Run and 3K Walk in Wayne Township. Brian said he has a typewritten version of these routes. Kathy reminded the group Bob Aloï emphasized that the new trail through North Judson is a worksite under control of Hill Excavating. Brian responded he spoke with Jeremiah Patrick at Hill and told him of the event. Patrick was not previously aware. Steve said the PTC also needs to coordinate any event routing through North Judson with Town officials. The PTC has an excellent relationship with the Town and needs to maintain that. Steve volunteered to speak with Andrew Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer, and asked that Brian share a copy of his typewritten route to help with their discussion.

Brian reported that medals for the event have been ordered and will soon be ready for pickup.

Kathy has reserved a portable toilet with hand sanitation to be placed onsite.

Brian asked whether the PTC should consult with the homeowner along Main Street northeast of the trail. He noted the homeowner had worked with us previously. Members responded one of our members, Michael McGregor, previously lived there, but he has since moved. Other than the need to be responsive to neighbors, as a general principle, consultation was not needed. Linda also pointed out that most of the area he referenced was obtained through the efforts of Bruce Fingerhut and is now owned by the HVRM.

### **Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum**

Linda reported tickets are now available for excursions for every Saturday from May 9 through October. Her best understanding was that there was no train scheduled on May 23 until 11:00 am—reducing the likelihood of a conflict with the 5K Run/3K Walk. The HVRM is experiencing challenges with the Pinsky Railroad for excursions going to the Kankakee River and is now exploring options for laying new track southeast as far as Monterey. She said HVRM is pursuing a new “coach car” that is associated with Holland College.

### **Report of Hive Video Grant Application**

Kathy submitted an application for a competitive grant from “The Hive a Giving Circle of the Starke County Community Foundation”. The SCCF required the application to be

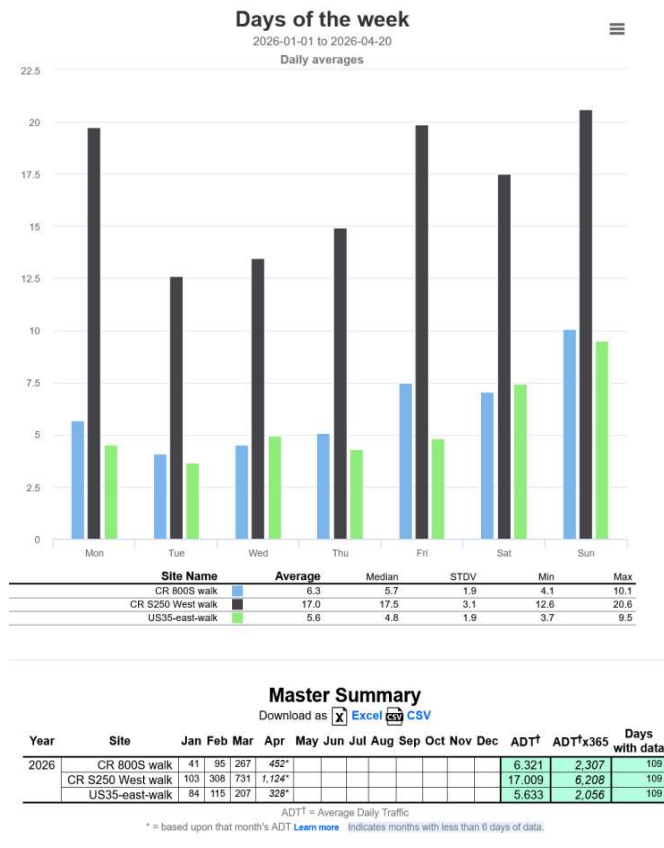
made as a video. Kathy drafted an application to fund one or two portable toilets with hand sanitation along the trail, for the warm months this year, and if the grant exceeded funding needed for the portable toilets, to develop new pamphlets for the PTC's growing trail system. Yancy Lucas and Nadia Corral-Frias formatted the application as a video, and Nadia provided narration. During the meeting, Kathy expressed the perspective that competition for the grant funding will be challenging.

## Greenways Foundation Trails Celebration Annual Charity Luncheon

The Greenways Foundation annual luncheon and awards ceremony was held on April 10 at the Heirloom at NK Hurst, Indianapolis. Attending from the PTC were Tabitha Lucas Balzer, Brian, Anita, Russ, Diane, Kathy and Steve.

## Trail Counters

Joan provided an update on the TRAFx trail counters. Included among her documents was a summary of counts for 2025 showing 28,963 users. Many users never pass a counter and so are not tallied.



## **Kankakee River Access Site Collaborative**

Dustin Ritchea, Communications and Creative Director for the Indiana Dunes Tourism Board, and Michelle Lagestee, President of the Jasper County Trails Club, are guiding a workgroup with the core mission of developing a new kayak launch on the Kankakee River at Jasper County Road 400 North. Amie Flora and Teresa Trout for Starke County Parks and Recreation, and Steve for the PTC, attended an April 14 Hebron meeting of the workgroup. Activities supporting blueways in Starke County and adjacent counties, such as Jasper County, are within the PTC's stated mission.

During the April 14 meeting, Amie outlined two new kayak launches in Starke County—one at English Lake, including both the Kankakee River and Yellow River, and a second on the Yellow River near Ober. The workgroup discussed the benefits that could be achieved by having mapping of kayak launches in the Kankakee River watershed both upstream and downstream from the Jasper County project. A suggestion was that Mitch Barloga might assist with mapping. Amie, Teresa, and Steve were added as workgroup members. It's next public meeting was set for July 14 in Hebron.

Steve reported during the PTC meeting the Jasper County Trails Club announced on the previous day receipt of a \$5,000 NIPSCO grant to help finance the Jasper County launch. Russ said the new Starke County kayak launch near Ober is now active, and he expects an official grand opening to be announced in the near future.

## **Mowing and Trash Pickup Between Rest Stop and Main Street**

Kathy reported she had a discussion with Jim Chessor about mowing and trash pickup along the trail between the rest stop at Starke County Road 250 West and Main Street. Last year his fee was \$200 per occasion (not more than twice a month) from April through October. He asked for an increase of \$25 more per event, but he rescinded that request during their conversation.

Kirt graciously offered to contribute the same amount for the mowing and trash pickup that he had previously. Members spoke favorably about Jim's efforts last year and noted the price of gasoline has since gone up considerably.

Joan moved to approve a fee of \$225 per occasion upon the same terms as last year. Russ seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

## **Consideration of Resurfacing the Trail Between Rest Stop and Main Street**

Linda identified places along the trail between the rest stop and Main Street that need to be resurfaced or stabilized. She reflected that the PTC is in the process of building a new trail segment, and it should be adjacent to a well-maintained existing trail. Members agreed to the concept of seeking strategies to address these concerns and determining the costs for their implementation.

### **Next Membership Meeting**

The next membership meeting was set for Wednesday, May 13, 2026 at 5:30 p.m., CT (6:30 p.m., ET) at the Starke County Community Foundation Meeting Room, 300 Keller Avenue, North Judson, Indiana 46366.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m., CT (8:46 p.m., ET).