

MEETING MINUTES OF PRAIRIE TRAILS CLUB INC.

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

July 20, 2022

MEMBERS

**Diane Blais
Russ Blais
Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Deb Mix
Sharon Smead
Peg Stalbrink
Rich Vallicelli
Larry Wickert**

Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Liaison

Call to Order by Vice President

On July 20, 2022, Rhonda Milner, Vice President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) at the Bass Lake Property Owners Association Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Knox at 5:36 pm, CDT (6:36 pm, EDT).

Review and Approval of Membership Minutes of June 22, 2022

Russell Blais moved to approve, without modification, draft minutes of the June 22, 2022 membership meeting. Peg Stalbrink seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Update on Fiscal Reconciliation of NLT-01-07

Kathy Lucas reported Lisa Herber, DNR Grants Coordinator for the PTC’s NLT-01-07 grant, is leaving state government on July 24. Kathy said she hoped that final billing documentation can be emailed to Lisa in time for her to give written approval of DNR’s final reconciliation of project expenditures. She thanked Sharon Smead for taking prompt action on researching, obtaining materials, and providing documentation on the costs of an equestrian hitching rack at the Starke County Road 700 East trailhead.

Review and Approval of Treasurer’s Report with Restricted and Unrestricted Funds

Kathy distributed written copies of the Treasurer’s Report as follows:

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$52,064.92
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>\$36,295.88</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$15,769.04

Steve Lucas suggested purchase of the asphalt crack filling machine (also sometimes called a “rubber applicator”) could properly be taken from related maintenance restricted funds identified as the “Maintenance Fund (mower sale)” and the “Hardesty Memorial Grant for Trail Maintenance”, rather than unrestricted funds, since both of these funds are targeted for maintenance. This adjustment would not affect the PTC’s bottom line, and he suggested that no change be made immediately to the Treasurer’s Report.

Diane Blais moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report and Restricted and Unrestricted Funds Report as presented. Larry Wickert seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Final Preparations for Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk

Brian McMillin said he and Anita were putting the final touches on plans for the “Bass Lake Festival 5K Run/3K Walk Hosted by the Prairie Trails Club” which is scheduled for the morning of Saturday, July 30. He overviewed the various assignments of member volunteers. Brian said he had spoken with local police and Starke County Sheriff Bill Dulin, whose officers will assist. In addition, he has communicated with Starke County EMS Director, Eric Wood.

Russ thanked Brian and Anita for stepping up to manage the event. He said that he and Diane had originally planned to participate in leadership roles but will be outside Starke County due to family commitments.

Northwest Trail Extension Workgroup Update

North Judson Corridor Workgroup

Larry Wickert provided an update on efforts to achieve consensus for a trail route from the current trailhead on Main Street northwest through the Town of North Judson. He said the NJ Corridor Workgroup includes four major stakeholders seeking consensus on the advancement of projects, including notably the trail extension, within the Town’s former railroad corridor. North Judson is represented by Jane Ellen Felchuk, Town Council Member, with support from Andrew Rowe, Clerk-Treasurer. The Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum is represented by Robert Barcus, Board of Directors Treasurer. Larry and Kirt Verhagen, Board Members, are representing the PTC. Thomas Hayes, Attorney, is representing the Northern Indiana Railroad.

Larry said the inaugural meeting of the Corridor Workgroup was held on July 12. He said the meeting was congenial and productive. During the inaugural meeting, Kirt tendered a first draft for a trail route that was seemingly well-received. No commitments were made, but the first draft is now being vetted within the four stakeholders and other interested agencies and persons.

Other Items Concerning Proposed Northwest Trail Extension

On June 30, the “Regional News” in LaCrosse reported the Town of LaCrosse and the PTC announced the first major contribution toward their mutual goals of extending the trail in LaPorte County from English Lake to LaCrosse. “The Town of LaCrosse and the Prairie [Trails] Club applied to the Healthcare Foundation of LaPorte (HFL) for a grant to cover over half of LaPorte County’s local contribution to the trail project. HFL approved the \$200,000 grant in June 2022 as part of their mission of empowering our residents to live healthy and well throughout LaPorte County.”

Steve said Kirt, Yancy Lucas, and he met informally in Indianapolis on July 18 with DNR State & Community Outdoor Recreation Planning Section Chief, Robert Bronson. Kirt’s first draft trail route was discussed as were other issues pertaining to the proposed northwest extension of the trail from North Judson to LaCrosse. Bronson reviewed the draft route in some detail and was generally encouraging regarding its qualification for approval.

Bronson said no decision has been made on the timing for a fourth round of NLT grants, and he recommended that the PTC consider seeking an Indiana Trail Program (ITP) grant application for the route through North Judson. An ITP grant provides a maximum 80% reimbursement for an eligible project. An applicant must demonstrate having at least 20% of total project cost available. An applicant may request a minimum of \$100,000 and maximum of \$400,000 in grant assistance. Applications must be submitted via email by March 1, 2023. Bronson urged the PTC to seek assistance through the Land Acquisition Program for land acquisition through the Harrison Trust. He recommended inquiring about NPO funds through INDOT’s northwest regional office in LaPorte.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul reported on the successful application of glyphosate to help with vegetation control along the trail edges. He and a team that included Brian and Russ applied sealant to the Barte Ditch Bridge. He also reported repairing a rotted plank on the Bogus Run Bridge. The maintenance workgroup expressed hope that in the near future, using the asphalt crack filling machine, it can begin rubber applications beginning at US 35 and advancing northwest.

At Paul’s suggestion, the membership discussed the feasibility of acquiring an asphalt roller to address pavement failures exceeding the capacity of the crack filling machine. The membership welcomed the maintenance workgroup’s guidance regarding possible additional equipment acquisitions pertaining to failed asphalt. Workgroup members were identified as including Paul and Linda Byer, Brian, Anita, Russ, Sharon, Larry, and any other members willing to join the effort.

Update on New Brochure

Through Russ’s efforts and generous sponsorships by the JK Deli, Christos, the Bass Lake Pub and the Woodshed Tap, \$400 has been raised toward publication of the new trail brochure. These sponsorships were referenced in the Treasurer’s Report, and another \$100 has since been received from Scoops & Smiles. A total of \$700 was received in sponsorships for the previous trail brochure.

Creation of the new brochure is a project of the PTC’s BIC Committee started in December. The PTC’s “FUTURE VISION 2022-2026” was completed with the participation of multiple

committee members. The 5-year master plan is available on our website at <https://www.prairietrailsclub.org/future-vision-2022-overview> Yancy prepared an updated base map for the Erie Trail, its Connectors, and related transAmerican trails which is now on our website at <https://www.prairietrailsclub.org/maps>

The PTC has received multiple requests from trail users for updated brochures. The new base map will replace the old one. With changes in business ownership, some cards need to be modified or replaced. Russ's research indicates that Carolla delivered the old brochure to the printer as a pdf. The BIC Committee will inquire of Susan Byer and Yancy whether either of them have time to perform the updates. Whether Susan or Yancy (or someone else) does the work, they would be given fair compensation. The PTC has funding from the Hardesty Memorial Grant (2018) for Wayfinding and Historic Signage line, and from the Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donation Future Vision/Website line, that could qualify as funding sources.

The BIC Committee will also update "Who We Are" language in the brochure to reflect updates to the PTC's Mission Statement and completion of the two-mile southeast trail extension. The BIC Committee may also propose other suggested changes.

Listing on 2023 Warrior Hike "Walk Off the War" Schedule

Sarah Zeller, Director of Operations at Warrior Expeditions, emailed the PTC earlier in the day to inform our members the most advanced warrior trekker on the Great American Rail-Trail was a few miles south of Spokane, Washington. The other four trekkers are in Montana.

Steve said Sarah had written on June 21 to thank the PTC "for hosting the 2022 Great American Rail Trail Bike veterans." She added, "We would be honored to work with your community again next year, so please let us know if you would like to be listed on our 2023 Warrior Hike 'Walk Off The War' Program schedule." Steve said if the PTC chose to be included on the listing, it was effectively a commitment to do the work again. For these first two years of the Warrior Expeditions Great American Rail-Trail Trek, several of our members have put in a lot of time and effort.

Diane reflected that the greatest challenge with hosting the warrior trekkers is that "we don't know exactly when they'll arrive." She said she very much enjoyed the experience, however, and would support a commitment to host the trekkers again. Diane questioned that the listing referenced a hike rather a bike ride. Steve responded there are multiple hiking treks, but only one bike trek. There is also one kayak trek. He thought that Sarah intended to make a general reference to all the treks.

Larry said he supported the concept but thought the decision on listing should be left to those who did most of the work. Kathy said she thought the PTC's participation was very much appreciated and was supportive of hosting again next summer. Peg and Brian have also helped with hosting and expressed support for again so doing. Russ and Anita voice their support as well. No one spoke in opposition.

Steve said he would communicate with Warrior Expeditions our willingness to be listed in the 2023 Warrior Hike "Walk Off The War" Program schedule.

Informal Review of Starke County Park Board Activities

Larry updated members on recent activities of the Starke County Parks and Recreation Board. In the brief history of the Parks Department the second Superintendent, Camryn Kopka, has resigned. The Parks Board is now directing attention for a possible Bass Lake trailhead to the Bass Lake Beach rather than the intersection of Starke County Roads 450 East and 210 South.

In 2019 the Starke County Commissioners adopted a resolution directing the Highway Superintendent to consult with the PTC, and to report on the results of the consultation, regarding “a design for a small trailhead at the intersection of” Starke County Road 450 East and Starke County Road 210 South on the north end of S-13. The same resolution urged consideration of a connector to better serve Knox and Hamlet. The PTC acquired two benches with community participation in a recycling project, and underwritten by Russ and Diane with Rick and Mary Vlaming, and by Brian and Anita McMillin. These were offered for trailhead placement, and the Constellation of Starke Program Facilitator expressed her thanks and accepted the offer.

The membership discussed possible relocation of the benches from the Starke County Road 450 East and Starke County Road 210 intersection to another site. Their placement at the Bass Lake Beach seems problematic. Diane expressed flexibility for placement of the Blais/Vlaming bench at another appropriate location along the trail. Brian said he and Anita would prefer that the McMillin bench be placed near Bass Lake.

Deb said with recent changes in Park Board Members and the resignations of two Park Board Superintendents in rapid succession, its future direction was difficult to predict. She recommended the PTC wait for things to settle before pursuing further initiatives with them.

Informal Review of HVRM Activities

Bob Albert reported the HVRM expects to receive a check from Buckeye Pipeline for \$3,500 to help mitigate disruption of trail usage caused by maintenance activities this summer. He said because the disruption will mostly affect usage on the Erie Trail, the Board has agreed to pass \$3,000 along to the PTC. Members expressed appreciation to Bob and the HVRM for their generosity. It was agreed the funds would be exclusively used for much needed trail maintenance.

Shirley Heinze Next Level Conservation Trust Application

Steve said the Shirley Heinze Land Trust Inc. (SHLT) is preparing an application for a Next Level Conservation Trust (NLCT) grant through the DNR for property known as the Big Eastern that adjoins Bogus Run. SHLT is dedicated to preserving and restoring significant natural areas in Northwestern Indiana and manages more than 2,800 acres across Lake, Porter, LaPorte, St. Joseph, and Marshall Counties. The NLCT is designed to enhance and further Indiana’s Bicentennial Nature Trust concept. During its centennial in 1916, the Indiana General Assembly created a state park system as a gift to the people of Indiana. The Bicentennial Nature Trust was begun in 2012 as a statewide effort to honor Indiana’s 200th anniversary.

Steve said if the grant application is approved, more than 400 acres would be preserved for conservation and public access. An access easement is planned that would connect the natural area directly to the Erie Trail near its crossing at Starke County Road 100 West. Consistently with PTC's *Future Vision 2022-2026*, the conservation easement would enhance trail "access and connectivity to...recreational opportunities."

Steve added that he expected the Shirley Heinze Land Trust to seek a letter of support for the project from the PTC. If that occurs, he would assist Rhonda in her capacity as Vice President in drafting and delivering the letter to the SHLT. He said the application is due August 1 so "we'll have to move quickly." The membership expressed its support for the development of such letter of support by Rhonda.

Next Membership Meeting

The next membership meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, August 24, 2022 at 5:30 pm, CDT (6:30 pm, EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake (Knox).

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:04 p.m., CDT (8:04 p.m., EDT).