

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

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

August 22, 2024

MEMBERS

**Paul Byer
Kathy Lucas
Steve Lucas
Charlotte Liss
Rhonda Milner
Rich Vallicelli**

GUESTS

**Bob Albert, Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum
Robert Aloi, President, Territorial Engineering**

Call to Order by President

On August 22, 2024, Rhonda Milner, President, called to order a membership meeting of the Prairie Trails Club Inc. (“PTC”) at the BLPOA Community Center, Bass Lake at 5:46 pm, CDT (6:46 pm, EDT).

Review and Approval of Minutes of June 27, 2024

Paul Byer moved to approve the minutes of June 27, 2024 without amendments. Char Liss 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 and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as shown below:



**Treasurer’s Report
August 22, 2024**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance on June 27, 2024 (prior meeting)

\$104,267.16

INCOME

06/01/24	Tabitha Lucas Balzer donation	100.00
06/01/24	PayPal Transfer*	391.28
07/19/24	State of IN grant ITP #23-06 (Payment #2)	6,077.48
08/16/24	Peggy Stalbrink donation from craft sales	<u>45.00</u>
	Total Income	\$6,613.76

EXPENSES

08/01/24	Go Daddy Website Fee	38.28
08/01/24	Check #1169 to K&G Lawn Service (K. Verhagen through NICF fund for mowing former rest park twice)	<u>200.00</u>
	Total Expenses	(\$238.28)

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 08/22/24 **\$110,642.16**

* NOTE: In this period it was learned that PayPal no longer copies the Treasurer, Kathy Lucas, when a person makes a payment to the PTC account. Bruce Fingerhut receives notice, and he and Kathy had assumed she did also. Upon learning of this change to PayPal notifications, persons who made previous donations are identified below are thanked:

<i>Rick Vlaming</i>	<i>47.76</i>
<i>Bruce McDonald and Suzanne Morrow</i>	<i>96.02</i>
<i>Tabitha & Chris Balzer</i>	<i>100.00</i>
<i>Mark McMillin</i>	<i>96.02</i>
<i>Kirt Verhagen</i>	<i>23.64</i>
<i>Corinne and Marty Lucas</i>	<i>47.76</i>
<i>Jeff Daggett</i>	<i>9.16</i>
<i>Dave Warkentien</i>	<i>23.64</i>
<i>MorningSun Kelly</i>	<i><u>23.64</u></i>
	<i>391.28</i>

RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED FUNDS

**TOTAL AMOUNTS
PER CATEGORY**

Benches

Blais-Vlaming and McMillin Bench	\$350 each; awaiting placement	\$700.00	
			\$700.00

Signage/Web

Luminous Fund Grant #2 (2018)	Signs Bass Lake (incl. UR Here)	960.64	
Hardesty Memorial Grant	Wayfinding or historic signage	2,948.32	
Lucas Lakehouse Guest Donations	Future Vision/Website	662.50	
			\$4,571.46

Northwest Extension

VFW Grant	For "trail improvements"	2,492.03
PTC Contribution to ITP Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00
Gene Novello	Trail Extension	1,200.00
Naylor Pipe	Trail Extension	400.00
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	25,600.00
Rails to Trails Conservancy	Trail Extension	7,500.00

\$47,592.03

DNR Reimbursements for ITP 23-06 Northwest Extension

05/15/24 (Payment #1) 17,589.06
07/19/24 (Payment #2) 6,077.48

\$23,666.54

Maintenance

Mower Sale & NICF/Verhagen Maintenance (now Rest Park Mow) 800.00 (Reduced \$200 for 2 mowings)
Hardesty Memorial Fund Trail maintenance 594.00
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline) Trail maintenance 2,68.42
Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations Maintenance or Most Needed 2,699.11
Doral Solar Contribution Bridge/Trailside Clearing 7,269.48

\$13,731.01

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$90,261.04

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$110,642.64
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>90,261.04</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$20,381.60

Kathy thanked the members who made donations and who renewed their memberships. She welcomed new members Dave Warkentien and MorningSun Kelly. Kathy reminded members that August is dues month for those paying annually.

Kathy reflected that the category for DNR Reimbursements is the DNR 80% contribution for professional services rendered by Bob Aloï and Territorial Engineering. For the grant to extend the trail southeast of US 35, DNR provided funding in advance of services. But for the current ITP 23-06 grant to extend the trail through North Judson, the PTC must pay for services and then seek reimbursement from DNR. To complete the project that is anticipated by the ITP 23-06 grant, the PTC will expend all funding identified as DNR Reimbursements as well as all funding identified as Northwest Extension.

Char moved for approval of the Treasurer’s Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds. Paul seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Engineer’s Update on Northwest Trail Extension

Bob Aloï, Consultant and Engineer for the PTC in implementation of DNR grant ITP-23-06, reported that he has joined Jones Petrie Rafinski Corp. (“JPR”), a firm with offices in South Bend. Bob indicated that Territorial Engineering will still be handling the project with him as the lead contact according to the contract between Territorial and the PTC. JPR staff may be involved in aspects of the project subject to DNR approval. In response to a question, Bob said Territorial Engineering would continue to operate as a business for pending projects such as ITP-23-06. He would continue as the PTC’s Consultant and Engineer. But new projects would be under the auspices of JPR.

Bob presented an extensive binder entitled “Erie Trail & Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail Northwest Extension” along with preliminary plans (95% completion set). He said he would forward electronic copies of the plans to DNR as well as to representatives of the PTC, HVRM, Pinsky Railroad Company, and Town of North Judson. While DNR review of

the preliminary plans is ongoing, Bob will develop the required environmental protection elements for submission to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

Bob said the “core of the stuff is in the detail specifications”. The railroad crossing is addressed as well as a possible design for an information kiosk and a suggested design for the “Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail” signage. He and the membership discussed the need for benches and whether the PTC could already provided benches or whether a new initiative should be pursued for gathering plastic lids to be converted into benches.

Bob Alois referenced the need to remove poles along the trail route that formerly served the Western Union telegraph. Bob Albert said during the meeting the HVRM could assist in this effort. The Pinsky Railroad has also expressed interest in removing some of these long-obsolete poles.

Update on Next Level Conservation Trust Grant Application

During the July 2022 meeting, Steve Lucas reported Shirley Heinze Land Trust (“SHLT”) applied to DNR for a Next Level Conservation Trust grant for property adjoining Bogus Run in a corporation with shares owned among his brother, his sister and him. Grant implementation would preserve 425 acres of natural area. Of particular note to the PTC is that an access was planned to connect the natural area to the Great American Rail Trail (Erie Trail) near its crossing at Starke County Road 100 West.

SHLT sought PTC support for the project, and the PTC voted to give its support during the July 2022 meeting. As President, Rhonda wrote to communicate the vote to the DNR. Kris Krouse, SHLT Executive Director, outlined the project to the North Judson Town Council. The Town and the Starke County Community Foundation added support letters. In September 2022, Krouse appeared before the Starke County Commissioners to seek approval if the DNR were to issue a grant. WKVI reported “The motion was made and passed in support of the Shirley Heinze Land Trust preserving land in Starke County.”

As required by the DNR, SHLT in 2022 obtained a property appraisal. Consistent with seeking an NLTC grant, the acreage would be sold at appraised value including a 25% discount—in other words a “bargain sale”. In an MOU the parties acknowledged that as part of the NLTC grant, a permanent conservation easement would be placed on the land in favor of the DNR. A primary source of DNR funding is “from the American Rescue Plan”, which was approved following the Covid-19 pandemic, and which the DNR stated carried “federal restrictions on use.”

The MOU further specified: “3. Great American Rail Trail Connection. In addition to the property described... [west of Starke County Road 100 West to be transferred as a result of the grant, the siblings] will donate a 40’ wide strip of land to connect the conveyed property to the Great American Rail Trail, a public trail with the connection on the east side of CR 100W.”

Following negotiations between the siblings and SHLT, a sale and purchase agreement was entered on August 9, 2024 for a bargain sale of the 425 acres with inclusion of the trail connection east of CR 100 West. The MOU is referenced in the agreement and has a “COVENANT FOR PUBLIC ACCESS” to the natural area. Motor vehicles and bicycles would not be authorized within the natural areas. DNR has suggested a portion of the 425 acres may qualify under Indiana statute as a dedicated nature preserve or preserves, and, if so, this portion may receive special protections. DNR is now reviewing matters pertaining to real estate ownership and usages.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul reported that he and Linda Byer have recently cut up and removed three large trees that fell across the trail. He added that PTC member, Michael McGregor, has agreed to cut back recently-fallen trees sufficiently to let bicyclists through if the PTC would buy a small battery-operated chain saw. Michael rides the entire trail daily. He reports regularly on large tree falls to the PTC which require a more vigorous solution, and he would continue to do so. Paul and Char reflected that a small battery-operated chain saw can be purchased for under \$150. Members expressed that support should be given to Michael's offer.

Char moved to authorize by or on behalf of the Byers the expenditure of up to \$150 for the purchase of a battery-operated chain saw to be used to remove portions of trees and brush that would be sufficient to allow for safe passage on a bicycle. Steve seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Paul reported repairs to both sides of the Fell Ditch bridge have been completed. Steve placed sand and stone in the holes, and then Paul covered the fill with asphalt. Char said she observed Paul's efforts and that they were nicely done.

Paul said he has finished filling cracks in the asphalt from Main Street to SR 10. In doing so he used all the cold pack Brian McMillin purchased on behalf of the PTC for filling trail cracks. Paul urged that that sealcoating from Main Street to SR 10 should be a high PTC priority.

Paul reported on his completion of repairs to two gate arms. This labor-intensive project was performed at Starke County Road 400 East and repeated in Aldine at Starke County Road 125 East.

Paul said that Linda has also resumed spraying trail segments to help control vegetation.

Paul thanked Jim Chessor for volunteering and repeatedly mowing the grass adjacent to the trail between Main Street in North Judson and SR 10. Members also passed along their appreciation for this important and high-profile need.

The former rest park east of State Road 10 continues to be mowed regularly as a result of a financial contribution by Kirt Verhagen. The effort combines well on the western mile plus of the Erie Trail with efforts by the Glasses, the Byers and now Jim Chessor.

Kathy said Jesse Johnston, Director of Hope Restored in North Judson, has expressed an interest in having men in his program provide volunteer assistance to the PTC. The membership discussed the possibility of a volunteer workday or workdays in the fall. September 21 and September 28 were identified as possible dates, and Kathy was asked to determine from Jesse whether he had a preference.

BIC Committee Report

The Branding, Identity and Continuity ("BIC") Committee reported:

(1) Consistent with prior PTC membership actions, the remaining black-on-white "North Judson Erie Trail" and "North Judson Trail" signs were removed earlier this year. New gold-on-black "Erie Trail" signs were purchased through HighStar Traffic in Knox. These

were placed by August 7, 2024—except one kept as a model for "Erie Trail" signs to be placed on the trail extension through North Judson.

(2) Committee members developed a consensus that the “Rules of the Trail” signs should be updated to more closely equate to the PTC’s brochures and to read:

1. Open from dawn to dusk.
2. Non-motorized use only except for emergency, maintenance, or ADA authorized vehicles. Class 1 & 2 ebikes are allowed.
3. No trespassing on adjoining property.
4. Obey stop signs.
5. Use the right side of the paved trail.
6. Yield to pedestrians and warn others as you approach from behind.
7. Helmets are recommended.
8. Pack out your trash.
9. Pick up after your pets and keep them on a leash and under control.
10. Ride horses on the sand horse trail beginning at Starke County Road 100 West and continuing to US Highway 35. East of US 35 signs designate where horses may be ridden on either the north or south side of the asphalt trail and approaching Bartee Ditch bridge.
11. Report problems to Starke County Sheriff’s Department at 574.772.3771. Use 911 for emergencies.

In addition, the BIC Committee reached consensus that a more resilient material should be used on updated signs than the plastic that is currently used. If feasible, a material such as that on the PTC’s “You-Are-Here” and TransAmerica signs produced by OTES should be used.

Paul moved the “Rules of the Trail” be amended as the BIC Committee recommended and that the BIC Committee proceed to identify appropriate materials for manufacture and where they should be placed. Rhonda seconded the motion and the motion carried.

(3) The BIC Committee conferred on design for a “Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail” sign. But a consensus was not reached, and suggestions were solicited from PTC members and friends.

Membership discussed the possibility of an advertised competition to develop a design. They later reviewed the design proposed by Bob Ali and Territorial Engineering that was discussed briefly earlier in the meeting. The comments on his design were supportive of its adoption. The BIC Committee was then asked to consider the Territorial Engineering design and to report back.

Warrior Expeditions Trekkers on the Great American Rail-Trail Final Report

Sarah Zeller of Warrior Expeditions reported that the last of the seven veterans, K P Haueter, “reached La Push on the 19th of August.” All seven of the veterans completed this epic journey. Sadly, Callie Leaver lost her lifetime partner when Callie had nearly

completed her ride. She paused the trek and returned to her home. But at family urging, Callie returned to Washington and along with fellow veteran, Allen Megginson, rode the final distance to La Push.

The PTC looks forward to hosting a new group from Warrior Expeditions next spring.



Above left, Russ, Peg, and Diane welcome the first Warrior, John Wirth, who arrived shortly before the PTC's 5K Run and 3K Walk on May 25. Center, Annette and husband Jim Skibbe send along Warrior Michael Kohler from the rest park on May 27, Callie Leavor honors one of the sign's designed by Annette's students as she resumes her trek on May 28.



Above left Russ and Diane hosted a PTC dinner on the evening of May 28 that included Warriors Suzanne Williamson and KP Haueter. Members joining them were Steve, Rich Vallicelli, Kathy, Larry Wickert, Peg, and Rick Vlaming (not pictured). Above right are Warriors Suzanne, KP, Callie and Brandon Blankenship who were hosted at the Crown Point home of Char and Corey Liss. The four Warriors resumed their trek west on May 30, the morning after the image was taken.

Update on Bass Lake—Erie Trail Signage

Kathy Carrier has decided to support the development of signs larger than those posted at the Bass Lake Beach and Campground. Yancy Lucas has designed a new sign and shared a proof with her and the workgroup. As Kathy Carrier requested, the message is simplified and uses a new color scheme. The size of the new sign is doubled from the existing four feet by six feet.

Finding a location or locations for the proposed larger new sign presents a challenge. Kathy Carrier has said she will seek permission on the Boa Shores fence, marina fence, and fence on the north end of Bass Lake Beach—at the start where the road curves. Russ Blais has also said he would seek permission from the landowner on the south side of SR 10 across Starke County Road 600 East from Scoops & Smiles.

Review of Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

Bob Albert, HVRM liaison to the PTC, said this summer has been a very good one for the Museum. Diesel Excursions are particularly popular and have typically sold out. He said the Ice Cream Trains will run on Labor Day Weekend. Sallie's Small Batch Ice Creams will serve before boarding passengers board a train to enjoy a leisurely ride north from the depot.

Bob said HVRM “got out the Lynne” (aka, “Monon Business Car #2”) for a trial run. He said it ran pretty well, but “we found what is thought to be a minor brake problem” that needs to be addressed.



HVRM Facebook image of the Lynne crossing the Kankakee River

Monterey Erie Trail Inquiry

Kevin Kennedy has expressed interest in a larger PTC role in support of maintaining the segment of the Great American Rail-Trail at Monterey known locally as the “Monterey Erie Trail”. He indicated Steve Newland owns a structure near the trail that was formerly the depot for trains passing through Monterey, and Newland pays a person to mow the area by the depot. But Kevin is otherwise unaware as to whom provides maintenance.

Kevin sent two images of the area which illustrate current conditions. He expressed concern with grass that is growing on the trail and the resulting damage to the asphalt

trail surface. He expressed the perspective that the trail name should be simplified to “Erie Trail” from “Monterey Erie Trail”, similarly to what has been done west of US 35.



Kevin also stated he thought the signage for “Pulaski County Bike Route #1” could be removed. This signage references a share-the-road route that connects the Monterey Erie Trail to the Panhandle Pathway in Winamac. The form and substance are similar to what has been considered for Connector routes to the Erie Trail in Starke County but that has not been fully implemented.

Members at the meeting discussed the history of volunteer support for the Monterey Erie Trail. No one could be identified by name who is currently active. The hope is that this discussion will help disclose their identities. Steve reflected that, at least for the portion of the trail that Kevin included in his images, maintenance appears to have improved from what he previously observed.

Saris Bicycle Repair Stand Awarded by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Paul asked about the status of the Saris Bike Repair Stand discussed during the June meeting. Steve responded that Kevin Belle of the Rails to Trails Conservancy indicated on August 19 that Saris has not yet delivered the repair stands to the Conservancy. Steve added that he thought there was a good possibility the PTC will receive a repair stand before the next meeting. Members have suggested to him that placement at Starke County Road 700 East, across the road from the new trailhead, would be a good location. Members are invited to weigh-in if they have other thoughts for site location.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was set for Thursday, September 19, 2024 at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) in the BLPOA Community Center, 6996 South SR 10, Bass Lake (Knox), Indiana.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m., CDT (8:28 p.m., EDT).