

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

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

September 19, 2024

MEMBERS

**Diane Blais
Russ Blais
Linda Byer
Paul Byer
Joan Hardesty
Charlotte Liss
Corey Liss
Steve Lucas
Anita McMillin
Brian McMillin
Rhonda Milner
Peggy Stalbrink
Larry Wicker**

GUEST

Christina Alexander, North Judson Mint Festival

Call to Order by President

On September 19, 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 5:38 pm, CDT (6:38 pm, EDT).

Review and Approval of Minutes of August 22, 2024

Diane Blais moved to approve the minutes of August 22, 2024 without amendments. Charlotte Liss seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

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

Steve Lucas distributed written copies of the Treasurer's Report and Report of Restricted and Unrestricted Funds as shown below:



**Treasurer's Report
September 19, 2024**

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST (FFBT)

Balance on June 27, 2024 (prior meeting) \$110,642.64

INCOME

03/09/24	Paypal transfer Kirt Verhagen dues	23.64
05/09/24	Richard Staesina dues	25.00
05/09/24	Yancy Lucas dues	25.00
05/09/24	Nadia Corral Frias dues	25.00
06/09/24	Kay & Jack Reibold dues and donation	100.00
06/09/24	Randy Glass lifetime membership	250.00
13/09/24	Starke County Community Foundation board donation	1,000.00
13/09/24	PayPal transfers Linda & Paul Byer; Deb Mix; Corinne & Marty Lucas; and Kori Glass dues	142.80
16/09/24	Lisa Misch dues	<u>25.00</u>

Total Income \$1,641.44

EXPENSES

26/08/24	Check #1171 to Paul Byer (reimbursement for asphalt patching materials)	345.84
27/08/24	Check #1170 to Territorial Engineering #3 (payment #3 for NW Extension)	6,017.31
11/09/24	Check #1174 to Ace Hardware, North Judson (safety paint for trail crossings)	53.98
12/09/24	Check #1172 to K & G Lawn Service (mowing rest park #4)	100.00
12/09/24	Check #1173 to Jim Cressor (mowing rest park #5)	<u>100.00</u>

Total Expenses (\$6,617.13)

ENDING FFBT BALANCE AS OF 09/19/24 \$105,666.95

(Kathleen Lucas, Treasurer)

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"	-0-	(Reduced by 2,492.03)*
PTC Contribution to ITP Match	Trail Extension	10,000.00	
Gene Novello	Trail Extension	-0-	(Reduced by 1,200)*
Naylor Pipe	Trail Extension	-0-	(Reduced by 800)*
NICF Grant	Trail Extension	25,600.00	
Rails to Trails Conservancy	Trail Extension	5,974.72	(Reduced by 1,525.28)*
			\$41,574.72

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)	600.00	(Reduced by \$200 for 2 mowings)**
Hardesty Memorial Fund	Trail maintenance	594.00	
HVRM (and Buckeye Pipeline)	Trail maintenance	1,968.60	(Reduced by 399.82)***
Rich Stalbrink Mem, Donations	Maintenance or Most Needed	2,699.11	
Doral Solar Contribution	Bridge/Trailside Clearing	7,269.48	
			\$13,131.19

TOTAL RESTRICTED \$83,643.91

FIRST FARMERS BANK & TRUST	TOTAL IN BANK	\$105,666.95
	— RESTRICTED FUNDS	<u>83,643.91</u>
	= UNRESTRICTED FUNDS	\$22,023.04

*Territorial Engineering design plans

**Mowing rest park by K&G Lawn Service once and by Jim Cressor once

***Patching materials and paint for asphalt safety markings

Steve said he was not as familiar with the particulars of the Treasurer’s Report as Kathy Lucas so his comments would be brief. He made note that Randy Glass determined to become a lifetime member and thanked Randy for doing so. The \$1,000 donation from the Starke County Community Foundation was unsolicited and derived with the generous support of an SCCF committee. He thanked the Reimbolds for payment of dues with an added donation and thanked the several members who renewed with their annual dues payments.

He said the main item in the Expenses column was a payment to Territorial Engineering in support of DNR’s ITP 23-06 grant to extend the trail through North Judson. When PTC sends the quarterly report required by DNR in late September, the report would include a reimbursement request for 80% of the August payment made to Territorial Engineering. This reimbursement would then be dedicated as a restricted fund for later stages of the trail extension.

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

Mint Festival Collaboration

Christina Alexander with her children appeared to ask about the possibility of a PTC role in the North Judson 2025 Mint Festival. Several concepts were discussed, including a bicycle or running event or a bicycle decoration contest. Members expressed interest in exploring the possibilities and thanked Christina for her attendance. Rhonda directed that an agenda item be included on the October meeting to further consider possibilities. The Mint Festival is held annually on Father's Day Weekend. In 2025 Father's Day is on Sunday, June 15.

Northwest Trail Extension Report for ITP-23-06

Steve said that during the August meeting Bob Aloï presented printed copies of the engineering specifications for the trail extension, including 95% completed drawings for our project to extend the trail through North Judson. Afterwards Bob emailed electronic copies of the drawings to representatives of the DNR, HVRM, Pinsky Railroad Company, Town of North Judson and PTC.

On September 6, DNR Grants Coordinator, Erie Gummere, provided Plan Review #1 for the 95% plans. Substantive parts of her Plan Review #1 were distributed during the meeting:

...I conducted the initial plan review for ITP 23-06, the Erie Trail Extension. I've attached a plan review report, as opposed to typing out a lengthy email. Please review my questions/comments and let me know if I can provide any clarity. I look forward to seeing additional plan details soon.

Regarding the contract documents & specifications, thank you for including the ITP project code and name of the program. Please add a blurb somewhere within the specifications that inform the contractor(s) that the project is partially funded by state dollars, through the Indiana Trails Program, and all construction must be completed to the below standards. Once this addition is made, perhaps on pg. 5 or 6, the contract looks good to go from an ITP perspective.

1. ADA Accessibility Guidelines (2010)
2. Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG, 2023)

Lastly, please send over a copy of the bid advertisement once it is ready. The bid advertisement should specify that the project is partially funded by the state Indiana Trails Program and all relevant provisions will apply....

Questions

Main Street & Museum Access Crossing:

- The larger entry drive (with the museum sign) is being greatly reduced in size. What is the traffic flow here?
- The second entry drive appears just to be utility and museum employee access (from google street view), so I'm not as concerned. Flexible delineator #2 does appear to be within the gravel access drive, though.

Signage in general:

- Is the BX-3 plan note the same as sign combo BK-2 on sheet 11?
- The BX-3 signs on sheets 8 and 9 appear to be placed directly behind standard stop signs. Is there a vertical element to these signs that isn't conveyed in the plans, so they're more visible to vehicle users?

English Lake Road/ Trail End:

- What is sign HK-1? I don't see it called out on sheet 11
- Are there any plans for a 'trail ends here' sign, or a 'trail continues on the road'?

Trail Gates:

- Please elaborate the need for gates in this stretch of trail. There are trail gates at every intersection, some right before/after the flexible delineators.
 - o Gates make ADA access a bit tricky, especially for trail users with vision impairments or those in recumbent bikes.
 - o DNR has no problem with the gates, in the right setting. Please help me understand why gates are needed at all these crossings.

Change &/or More Detail Needed

1. Where provided, at least 50% of bench pads and other resting areas must have a companion area. This allows wheelchair users to rest off of the main trail, adjacent to the bench, and transfer over if they wish to.
 - a. Companion areas (at minimum) are 36"Wx48"D, and must be on a firm and stable surface
2. Greater detail regarding the layout of the trail kiosk/rest area
 - a. Where is the bench underneath the kiosk? Is there a companion area?
 - b. How much clear/maneuverable space is around the bike rack?
3. Will the curb on sycamore street be preserved with this project, providing vertical separation between the trail and the road?
4. The plan submission didn't include cross-sections by station. Please include these in the next plan submittal for review. We need this level of detail to check:
 - a. The conditions at the sides of the trail and evaluate need for safety railing or identify obstacles within the 2' recovery area.
 - b. The cross-slope of the trail and recovery area, to make sure everything is within ADA standards and there's no obvious drainage issues.

Steve said he and Kathy met on the morning of September 9 with North Judson Clerk-Treasurer, Andrew Rowe, and Town Manager, Joe Leszek, to discuss Plan Review #1. The PTC's paper copy of the plans was left with them to be shared with the Town Council that evening. Joe later relayed the Town Council received the plans enthusiastically.

A point of DNR emphasis is what the agency believes is an excessive number of trail gates in the plans. This point has been discussed with the Town and with Bob Aloii. Applying guidance from the DNR, it seems likely the number of gates will be reduced in final design plans.

Bob Aloï asked that we pass along to the membership, regarding Eric Gummere's comments, that he does not "have enough topo data out past the edges of the trail in certain areas...to produce the cross sections" the agency has required. He plans to start production of this data before the end of September.

Bob Aloï also indicated he will meet with the Town of North Judson regarding "signage and some of the street work that needs to be coordinated...during the construction." He will approach the Town in the near future during the bidding phase.

Steve reminded members that Larry Wickert and Kirt Verhagen are spearheading the ITP 23-06 project on behalf of the PTC. The recent communications regarding design plans have been shared and Steve has talked with them. Larry said during the meeting that he concurred with Steve's overview.

LaPorte County Trail Initiatives Update

Jeremy Sobecki, Superintendent of the LaPorte County Parks Department, is a participant in the PTC's BIC Committee. His participation is partly a function of the LaCrosse NLT Trails grant application, an application, that if successful, may include Parks Department maintenance of the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail north of English Lake.

Jeremy wrote to Steve on August 21 that LaPorte County has received several grants to develop a county trails master plan with help of an advisory committee. The master plan would inventory existing projects and trails in LaPorte County and develop priorities for connections and future trails.

Jeremy sought someone from southern LaPorte county who could serve on the advisory committee. He asked Steve whether there is a LaPorte County resident in the PTC who might be willing and who could bring knowledge of Starke County efforts complimentary to those in LaPorte County. Steve said the PTC has more than one person who would fit, but as an experienced PTC Board Vice President, he thought Peg would be an excellent choice.

On a related matter, Peg is tuned into the LaCrosse NLT Trails grant application. He asked her to speak to both subjects.

Peg said she talked with Jeremy following a recent meeting of the LaPorte County Council. He said there would probably be three or four meetings of the advisory committee in 2025. If Peg were unable to attend a meeting in person, she could likely attend by Zoom.

Peg said she has recently had discussions regarding progress of the Town of LaCrosse's NLT grant for the Grand Kankakee Marsh Trail. Justin Kiel was an early proponent of the grant as President of the LaCrosse Town Council and later as a member of the LaPorte County Council. Justin has resigned his seat on the LaPorte County Council in order to resume seeking a college degree following recent admission to Columbia University. Peg said her understanding is that the Town Council designated Justin as its grant representative and that he plans to manage the grant's implementation remotely from New York.

Maintenance Workgroup Report

Paul brought a receipt to reimburse the cost of a small electric saw that will be used by Michael McGregor to help restore good bicycle clearance when smaller trees or branches fall on the trail. Steve said he would pass the receipt along to Kathy.

Paul provided a quick inventory of the increasing number of tools and machinery that he has in possession for trail maintenance. His comments underlined the importance for the frequently-stated need to identify a site and purchase a structure for the storage of tools and machinery.

Paul and Linda resumed efforts to protect the timbers on Fell Ditch bridge. The bridge decking and fencing were the focus of a major repair project by membership last autumn using generous funding from Doral Solar.

INDOT Trail Crossing Final Report

In August 2023, INDOT invited PTC comments on a State Road 10 Preventative Maintenance Hotmix Asphalt (PMHA) Overlay Project from the eastern edge of the Town of North Judson to the east junction of SR 39 (northbound toward LaPorte). The project was slated for construction in 2025. On behalf of the PTC, Steve asked INDOT to restore safety markings at the Erie Trail crossing of SR 10, just west of the former rest park, to what were approved when the first three miles of the Erie Trail were constructed in 2009—or according to INDOT standards for safety markers as these may have been modified since 2009.

In conversations with INDOT representatives shortly after the email request, Steve agreed to forward plans from the 2009 trail project in an electronic format. With the help of the Starke County Highway Department, a paper version of the trail crossing plans was converted to electronic format and sent. Because the HVRM's railroad also crosses SR 10 adjacent to the trail crossing, plans included railroad crossing safety markings.

In late spring and early summer of this year, one year ahead of schedule, INDOT performed the PMHA Overlay Project. The project included white thermoplastic safety markings to warn motorists of both the trail crossing and the railroad crossing.

Six safety and information trail markings—three on each side of SR 10—were shown on the 2009 trail drawings for bicyclists and pedestrians. These were also included upon trail construction. Inspired by the new thermoplastic markings on SR 10, Kathy and Steve restored with white asphalt paint the six bicycle and pedestrian markings.



Left Steve repaints a XING (crossing) sign on September 13. The new INDOT thermoplastic sign on SR 10 can be seen in the background. Right on September 15 Kathy repaints the STOP sign.

Scope for September 28 Workday

The members discussed several options for the scope of a September 28 workday and agreed the focus will be vegetation control. The primary efforts will be on the one-mile section between Starke County Road 400 East and the trailhead on the west side of US Highway 35. This section includes the trail crossing of Starke County Road 800 South. The workday will start at 9:00 a.m., CDT (10:00 a.m., EDT) and conclude at approximately Noon, CDT (1:00 p.m., EDT).

Russ identified weed control at the trail crossing of Starke County Road 600 East as an additional need. A second project will be to accomplish weed control in this area.

There are limited parking opportunities at the trail crossings of Starke County Road 400 East, Starke County Road 800 South, west side of US Highway 35, and Starke County Road 600 East. In addition, Corey and Charlotte Liss will allow work volunteers to park on their property along US Highway 35 that is adjacent to, and on the northeast quadrant of, the trail crossing in what was Bass Station. Be cautioned that the Liss property is on the opposite side of US Highway 35 from where work efforts are focused.

Kathy has met with persons at the Hope Restored Recovery Home in North Judson about participation in work projects on the Erie Trail. She and Steve recently showed one of the men from the home key points on the trail to provide a better understanding of the kinds of maintenance needed. She plans to follow up with Hope Restored to gauge whether there is interest in helping on the workday.

Erie Trail Glow Ride on October 5

Char is planning a second Erie Trail Glow Ride to be held October 5, weather permitting. The inaugural event was last year and was described in the November 16, 2023 minutes. She is requesting that riders donate \$10, each, to the Prairie Trails Club.

Char reported the event will begin at 5:30 p.m., CDT (6:30 p.m., EDT) on property owned by Corey and her on the northeast quadrant of the Erie Trail crossing of US Highway 35. Participants will take their horses across US 35 and then use the equestrian designed sand portion of the Erie Trail northwest toward Starke County Road 800 South. Horses and riders will be decorated with glow lights for a stunning evening ride. They will return to the Liss property at about 9:00 p.m., CDT (10:00 p.m., EDT).

Panhandle Pathway Northern Extension Update

John Bawcum, President of the Friends of the Panhandle Pathway, has announced that an NLT Trails asphalt paving project was completed through the northern portion of Winamac. The 0.6 mile project brings the Panhandle Pathway closer to Tippecanoe River State Park and ultimately the Erie Trail at Bass Station. While the extension is not long, the longterm value of completing a route through a city or town cannot be overstated.



Asphalt surface shown on August 27, before completion of recovery zones, near the northern end of the northern extension. Image by K. Lucas

Update on Bass Lake—Erie Trail Signage

Russ Blais reported that he is working with a landowner to develop a sign location near Bass Lake that would be larger and thus have greater visibility from SR 10 than the sign placed this Spring by former Park Superintendent, Tracy Williams. He has received an encouraging response from the landowner regarding permission for sign placement at SR 10 and County Road 600 East.

Russ said he has also spoken with the Starke County Highway Superintendent, Rachel Oesterreich, about the minimum distance requirements for sign placement along SR 10. She advised him a sign needs to be at least 15 feet from the edge of the roadway. He has identified a site on the landowners' property that would have good visibility at SR 10 and

County Road 600 East. The sign would be behind a guy-wire, but the guy-wire would not significantly interfere with its visibility.

Russ shared an image of a large sign (4 feet by 8 feet), located at Toto Road and County Road 625 East, that was developed for a vendor and manufactured by OTES. This sign was not too costly. The sign design could be the structural model for a sign underwritten by Kathy Carrier. He suggested the proposal be reviewed by the BIC Committee before action by the PTC membership.

Russ said he is developing a list of services in the area that would be connected by QR code on these Bass Lake and Erie Trail connector signs.

Trail Counters Report

Joan Hardesty provided an updated trail counters report and circulated printed graphics. During her most recent report, which occurred at the May 23 meeting, she said someone found and dismantled the trail counter on the west side of US Highway 35 then left key components in the open. This counter filled with rainwater resulting in its destruction.

The counter for walkers on the east side of US 35 is functional and has collected data through the present. Joan's circulated report indicates walker usage during the summer months in the range of between roughly 500 to 600 walkers monthly. For September the data suggests the number of walkers is likely to exceed 700.

During the May 23 meeting, members agreed that data collected from trail counters is valuable to the PTC and an important statement to legislators of the importance of trails. During the May 23 meeting it was agreed the possibility of purchasing a replacement trail counter would be discussed at a future meeting when Joan became available. As she is again available, the subject will be placed on the October 23 agenda for discussion.

Review Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum Activities

In her capacity as PTC liaison to the Hoosier Valley Railroad Museum, Linda provided an update on HVRM activities. She said the popular Pumpkin Trains begin excursions by diesel train and by steam train on Saturday, October 5, and continuing on Saturdays throughout the month of October.

Linda said Sallie's Small Batch Ice Creams proved a successful addition to the HRM's Labor Day Weekend events. The service will be continued in October but as an add-on rather than being included in the price of a train ride ticket.

Linda said similarly to the PTC, the HVRM is dependent upon volunteers for service and for maintenance of its facilities. Also similarly to the PTC, the demands upon volunteers are stretching their capacity to meet the its needs.

Next Membership Meeting

The next Membership Meeting was set for Wednesday, October 23, 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.j

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:54 p.m., CDT (7:54 p.m., EDT).