



Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission

Pres. – Brendan Kearns V. Pres. – Arin Shaver
Secretary – Dale Brier

January 14, 2026, 1:00 pm ET

Fort Event Center at Fort Harrison State Park
Cardinal Room
6002 N Post Rd
Indianapolis, IN 46216

WEBCAST <https://dnringov.rev.vbrick.com/#/events/7d694314-830a-42b0-b8c2-41d2c5bcf797>

Meeting Agenda

Call to Order

- ✿ Welcome new members
- ✿ Introductions
- ✿ Announce Proxies
- ✿ Open Agenda

Review and Approval of November 13, 2025 Minutes

Comments from Visitors or Guests

DHPA Grants Report (Steve Kennedy)

DNR Finance Report (Dale Brier)

President's Report

Old Business

- ✿ 2026 Appointments
- ✿ 2026 Retreat

New Business

- ✿ New funding requests
- ✿ 2026 Officer Election

General Reminders, Discussion, Announcements

Adjournment

Next Meeting: March 11, 2026, 1:00pm ET
Turkey Run State Park

If you anticipate needing a reasonable modification under the ADA to participate or have questions concerning access at the meeting locations, please contact Ric Edwards, DNR ADA Director, at REdwards@dnr.IN.gov or 317-232-4145.

Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission
Pres. Brendan Kearns V. Pres. – Arin Shaver
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November 12, 2025

NICHES Stewardship Facility
4491 E Independence Rd
Attica, IN 47918

MEETING MINUTES

Voting Members Present:

Adams County – Randy Lehman
Allen County – Kyle Quandt
Carroll County – Mike Tetrault
Fountain County – Tim Shumaker
Gibson County – Bill Knowles
Huntington County – Dave Hacker
Knox County – Ben Burke
Parke County – Phil Cox (Alt)
Tippecanoe County – Kris Gertz (Alt)
Vermillion County – Les Zimmerman
Vigo County – Brendan Kearns
Wabash County – Mike Beauchamp
Warren County – Sam Cody
Wells County – Douglas Sundling
DNR – Dale Brier

Counties Absent:

Cass County
Posey County
Sullivan County

Guests:

Eric Shideler – Vermillion County SWCD
Julie Clark – Warren County SWCD
Dianne Powell – Regional Director for Sen.
Young
Bob Easter – Stewardship Director, NICHES Land
Trust
Mark Young – VP, Indiana Parks Alliance
Stacey Poe – State Parks
Gary Schultz – Community Grants and Trails
John Gettinger - Emeritus

Counties with no Appointment:

Jay County
Miami County

Call to Order, Introductions, Announce Proxies, Open Agenda

President Brendan Kearns called the meeting to order at 1:16pm at the NICHES Stewardship Facility in Attica. Kearns initiated introductions. Guests and members introduced themselves. Kearns asked Sam Cody to speak about the building and thanked him for hosting the Commission.

Dale Brier announced that Cass County had given their proxy to Kearns.

Comments from Guests and Visitors:

Diane Powell, Regional Director for Senator Todd Young, thanked the commission for inviting her to attend the meeting.

Kearns added that Diane was a friend of the river and spoke with her regarding her recent visit to the river. Kearns spoke to the importance of having a representative from the Senators office attend the meeting.

Approval of September Minutes:

Corrections were noted and Shumaker made a motion to approve the minutes with corrections and Lehman seconded. Minutes approved.

Kearns spoke to the relationship with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and the importance of working together and being advocates of the Wabash River. Kearns also spoke to the importance of letters of support from other organizations.

DNR Report (Dale Brier)

Brier shared the financial report with the group. The report covers the first 4 months of the Fiscal year and goes through the end of October. Revenue is currently \$46,209. Revenue comes from oil and gas revenue from underneath the Wabash River in southern Indiana. The report shows the expenses and the current balance of \$433,542. No further questions from the commissioners.

Motion to accept the financial report by Dave Hacker and a second by Ben Burke. Report approved.

Presentations

NICHES - Bob Easter, NICHES Land Trust Stewardship Director

NICHES protects properties in 10 counties and services 13 counties – connect habitat, invasive removal, and deer management in the month of November.

Stewardship property is centrally located with over 3000 of the 5000 acres managed in Warren, Fountain, and Tippecanoe counties.

Working with the Laura Hare Foundation as one of the major funding partners they were able to purchase 280 acres in 2022. Through research and land survey records, Easter was able to conclude the property was traditionally prairie and he has been able to restore it to prairie vegetation. The property is located in Tippecanoe County along the Wabash River. The property was enrolled in Wetland Reserve Easement Program which allowed Easter to complete the work necessary for restoration project.

The area of focus is the Laura Hare Bend of the East. Bob discussed how this project was done a little differently than most restoration projects due to the timing of receiving the land. The land was allowed to grow up the following year and then mowed everything down in August. They drilled the seed mix and then the river flooded. Luckily the flood did not affect the seed mix and resulted in things greening up in April of 2024. During the process, plants were found that are on the state endangered list. To be on

the endangered list means there is less than 5 sightings of the plant within the state. They were able to bring in Prickly Pear Cactus pads and place them in the sandy areas. Prickly Pear Cactus is native to the area. By 6/21/2024 with 80 species seeded, everything was coming up and stabilizing. They found other native plants coming up that were not seeded but were part of the natural seed bank.

Bob spoke to other project that NICHES is working on in the area and how he would like to use the seed mix from the Laura Hare project on other areas.

- Randy Lehman mentioned that he had witnessed other presentation on restoration and asked Bob if he had learned the process in college or on the job. Bob acknowledged it was on the job learning with the help of Stewards on staff.
- Brendan Kearns asked Bob if he would be interested in meeting the water conservation group to discuss restoration in more depth.
- Mike Tretrault spoke to visiting NICHES properties in Carroll County and thanked Bob for the work his group does.

Watershed Development Statute Law – Doug Sundling

Sundling asked if he could wait until the retreat to present due to some legislation being presented and Sundling wants to bring all the information together for the commission.

Ohio River Basin Restoration and Protection Plan - Mark Young, VP Indiana Parks Alliance

Young thanked Kearns for inviting him to the meeting and the work the commission does.

Young has worked on the project for 3 years. As Young has worked to spread the word about the plan, he has found that many organizations didn't realize they are part of the Ohio River Basin. The Basin includes 204,000 square miles, 14 states, and all rivers, streams and watersheds that run into the Ohio River which includes the Wabash River.

In 2023, the non-profit, American Rivers, produced an annual list of rivers that are endangered and the Ohio River was #2 of the most endangered rivers in the US on the list. 40% of the rivers on the list are impaired and don't meet the water quality standards of the EPA. The Ohio River Basin project has never received federal funding to address the issues with the River. There was a bill introduced in 2024 to Congress by Erin Houchin and Morgan McGarvey for federal funding of \$350 million. The bill will be reintroduced in the 119th Congress. The bill's main concern is for clean and safe drinking water along the basin. The bill would establish an office in the EPA for a program officer who will oversee and coordinate all the activities of the plan. The group is in the process of getting endorsements for the bill. The bill is currently receiving bi-partisan support. The group is looking for partners in the community to support the bill to help move it through the process.

- Beauchamp asked about the status of a previous Mississippi River Basin plan in the Chicago area with \$15 million funding and what came of the funding for it. Young did not have any information on that project.
- Kearns asked what the commission could do for this project. Young asked the commission to sign on to the plan by writing an endorsement letter of support. No financial support is required. The

counties/communities can do the same. Young has also reached out to Mayors and County Councils for support.

- Kearns asked how the Nature Conservancy is involved in this project. Could the funding of this project help with local project in the lower, middle, and upper Wabash? Young agreed that part of the deal was to support local projects. Young will send Brendan a drafted letter for review. Commission will read it at the January meeting and discuss it.

President's Report: Brendan Kearns

Rafting Survey Report:

Brendan passed out the survey document and mentioned that commission members had received an email from Allen Hurst regarding the rafts. The original plan was to have three sets of rafts, one each in the upper, lower, and middle Wabash areas. The email asked the commissioners to report back as to the direction they would like to take. Kearns asked the commission to look at the documents and talk in their areas. Kearns asked that it be tabled and discussed at to the retreat. Eric Shideler spoke to using the resources of the counties who already have rafts to learn from them. He proposed one set for middle Wabash to be housed in Vigo County. Collaboration with Soil and Water Conservation areas. A formal grant process is not out of the question, or the commission can take the project in house. One partner could be the Blueways initiative. Kearns would like more information on the Blueways initiative for the January meeting by reaching out to the local SWCD's for a contact person.

Old Business:

Membership Appointments:

Hurst and Kearns worked on letters to give to county commissioner's for current members for re-appointment. Kearns asked the members to contact Hurst if the contact person or address has changed for their county commissioners. Brier brought up that there are two letters. The first is technical letter from the DNR on how the commission works and the second is a personal letter from Kearns as president of the commission. Brier did not have the letters at the meeting, but they will be sent out when Hurst returns from vacation.

Gettinger brought the discussion back to the raft trips to speak on how impactful the program is to the 8th graders and shared a story about a time he was on the trip with the kids.

Event Sponsorship Allotments:

Kearns tabled until the retreat. Brier asked for those who had not been to a retreat and then explained the purpose and logistics of the retreat.

Previous Sponsorship Request:

Wonders of Wetland Days: Cox presented it for Zimmerman at the September meeting. The event is on behalf of the Vermillion County 4H. Event was September 22 and 23 for 8th graders of Vermillion and Parke county. The event already occurred, and the money would go toward expenses

already encumbered. Motioned to approve the \$1000 sponsorship by Hacker and seconded by Tetrault. Motion approved. Cox and Zimmerman abstained.

2025 Winter Trails: Kyle represented for the LC Nature Park. The property has bison and elk, and the program will allow the park to be open to the public for 3 weekends in December. Motion to approve \$1000 sponsorship by Beauchamp and seconded by Tetrault. Motion approved. Quandt abstained.

New Business:

New Sponsorship Requests:

No new sponsorship requests.

Amenity Funds Requests:

Hacker has control of the amenity fund. Hacker confirmed that there is \$5148.01 currently in the fund. Hacker discussed the order of how the funds can be approved.

1. Wabash Riverbank Stabilization: Sundling is the conduit for this request. The request is for \$1000. The project is covered; they are asking for funds to recoup some of the funds.
2. WCT/NEIWT Kayak Launch Sign Installation – Sundling is the conduit for this request. Request of \$500 to cover the costs for material. The project is completed. The requested funding would be a reimbursement for the purchase of the materials and hardware for the signs.
3. Posey County Signs: Carrie Parmenter submitted the application but was not present at the November meeting. The project replaced old trailhead signs and added a third one. \$1000

Kearns brought up a question regarding whether they get to the amount of money they need to close down the amenity account today if they were okay with that. If not, Kearns would send the commission something better prepared for their review to decide in January. Quandt reminded the commission that they voted at the November meeting to close the amenity account. Quandt questioned if there is a waiting period and believed there was no waiting period between request and vote. Discussion regarding the rules and the possibility of suspending the rules with 2/3 vote. Kearns read the by-laws. The remaining projects were:

4. Allen County - \$1000
5. Eagle Marsh Signs - \$1000
6. NEIWT Water Trail Signs - \$639.00 (adjusted to \$644.00)

Kearns shared the total amount of requests came to \$5139.00. There is \$5148.01 in the account. Kearns acknowledges that the account will be closed today and no further requests will be taken. Hacker requested that the commission leave \$5.00 in the account because the account belongs to the Historic Forks Foundation, not the commission, and it is up to the Foundation to decide if they wish to close the account permanently.

Motion from Les Zimmerman to leave \$5.01 in the fund and the WRHCC is removed from the funding source and to approve the six requests approved as requested with adjustment of the NEIWT Water Trail Signage in Wabash County request to \$644.00. Total request is \$5143.00. Sundling asked for Kearns to read through the request list. Seconded by Tetrault. Motion approved. It was agreed that members do not need to abstain for this vote.

Hacker requested the names and addresses for each organization receiving funding so he can send the checks to the recipients. Brier will make sure Hacker receives the information.

2026 Officer Elections:

Brier spoke to the election of the President and Vice President. Kearns is still interested in being President. Shaver is current Vice President and is interested in continuing. Kearns asked if anyone else was interested. No one acknowledged interest. Elections are in January 2026.

2026 Meeting Locations:

Jan 14 – Brier mentioned it is usually held at Fort Harrison State Park (FHSP) in Indianapolis. Brier will proceed with reserving FHSP.

Mar 10-11 (Retreat) – Turkey Run (meet Tuesday, lunch provided, business meeting and Wednesday with Breakfast provided, business meeting) Kearns would like to focus retreat on rafts, sponsorship funds, and what we do with our money. Agenda will be set by President and VP. Kearns would like a professional facilitator.

Zimmerman asked if the commission has a current strategic plan and should we have one? Are we relevant and can we justify the existence of the commission? Zimmerman also spoke to the efficiency and ROI and evaluation of the impact of the commission funded grants. Brier reminded the commission that in the past an annual report was provided that summarized what the WRHCC had accomplished, including where the grants went, where the president went, where the executive director went. It was a couple-page document that covered many of the concerns that Zimmerman is expressing. Brier recommended a team be appointed to establish the agenda for the retreat. Kearns asked for any interested to reach out to him. Brier mentioned that the commission sets the priority and the DNR sets the guidelines on how to accomplish those goals.

May 13 – New Harmony – Posey County (Kearns volunteered this location)

July 8 – Kyle Quandt – Allen County – LC Nature Park

Sept 9 – Mike Tetrault – Carroll County– Delphi Town Center

Nov 11 (Veterans Day) Reschedule to Nov 18 – Les Zimmerman – Vermillion County with Vigo County as a backup.

General Reminders, Discussion, and Announcements:

Sam Cody (Host) - He is raising 2 pairs of opossums that are 2 lbs. now.

Tim Shumaker – His son is graduating from Quantico as a Marine Corp officer.

Mike Beauchamp – He is working on an invasive species project on 500 acres. He is submitting a grant application to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Phil Cox – Purdue Extension – December 2 Vermillion County Ag breakfast with Jeremiah Lemmons as the speaker. If anyone is interested please let him know.

Douglas Sundling - 4000 seedlings will be planted next year on 7 acres of farmland.

Ben Burke – Knox County was trying to get a river trip started with 4 county schools. They are partnering with Sullivan county. \$10,000 provided by each county.

Kyle Quant – Brought t-shirts and stickers from Northeast Indiana Water Trail's (NEIWT) 10-year anniversary as an organization. NEIWT is starting a free 'Learn to Paddle' program. They received \$13,000 in funding and are partnering with Adams County to establish the learn to paddle program similar to the rafting programs others are doing. They are promoting it to the underserved communities. NEIWT is doing a fundraising campaign to raise the funds for the in-kind match and an auction is currently open on their website. She reported that the Wabash River Challenge was postponed due to low water and the new date is TBD. WRHCC previously approved a \$250 sponsorship for the event.

Mike Tretault – December 6th is the 'Christmas at the Canal' event in Delphi, Carrol County. The event is free. Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal, Inc is moving an 1830 cabin.

Laura Schwartz - She participated in the Hoosier River Watch training.

Randy Lehman – He is a member of the Adams County Parks board. A small town on the Wabash River had an unusable boat ramp and the parks board dug it out, so the ramp is open again. A lot of Amish use the park, so the town is installing hitching posts for the buggies. There is a litter pick up event and invasive species removal on Nov 6 in Geneva. They received WRHCC funding for the project. Schoolchildren and parents attend and participate in the event. INDOT provides all of the supplies. A program the commission provided funding for on Whooping Cranes and Sandhill Cranes will be presented by the International Crane Foundation.

Les Zimmerman – Vermilion Trails Alliance is still working on their NLT project. They have a bridge design completed and submitted to DNR for approval.

Kris Gertz – "Detrash the Wabash" was a success, and it collected 4.57 tons of trash. Hike the Wabash events would be on December 6 and 20, and the full 13 miles on January 20th.

Bill Knowles – He was in Boise, ID during the November meeting. There was an 8-mile paved trail along the river and he noticed a lot of activity.

Lori Jordan – Fountain County finished another section of the walking trail along the river.

Brendan Kearns – Spoke to installing signs along the river and now working on mile markers. Encouraged all members to attend SWCD meetings. Annual meetings are usually in February.

Brier reminded everyone to turn in their travel vouchers before they leave the meeting.

Brier mentioned that next year is the state's 250-year anniversary and also the 35th anniversary of the WRHCC.

Adjournment:

Motion to dismiss by Zimmerman and seconded by Shumaker. Motion passed.

Kearns adjourned the meeting at 4:03pm.