

Friends of Military Ridge Trail Monthly Meeting

Meeting Date: January 12, 2026

Meeting Location: Blue Mound Park Friends Shelter, Blue Mounds, WI

Friends attending: Jerry Wilson, President; Dave Pearson, Vice President; Bill Kalscheur, Treasurer; Adam Maus, Secretary; Kevin Swenson, DNR; Brad Bates, DNR; John Helmenstine; Bruce Paull; Paul Hutchins

Highlights

- Our annual meeting is next month. Are you interested in running for a board position? We are always welcoming new people. No experience required! If you're interested, please let us know.
- DNR will close and completely remodel the Mt. Horeb rest station this summer. This is the first major restoration since it was built in 1995.

Minutes

Bill motioned that the November 2025 minutes sent out on November 15th, 2025 be approved, John seconded it, and it passed unanimously.

Financial Reports

November Reports: Bill sent out the November financial report on December 1st, 2025. The financial report showed a balance of \$54,440.29 in the Farmer's Savings Bank as of November 28th, 2025. The Zeffy account had \$477. Kate's report on December 4th matched Bill's.

December Reports: Bill sent out the December financial report on January 2nd, 2026. The financial report showed a balance of \$65,613.43 in the Farmer's Savings Bank as of December 31st, 2025. The Zeffy account had \$477 (a net gain of \$282 in 2025). The Fidelity 2025 report showed \$48,757.88 (a net gain of \$9,278.01 in 2025). Kate's report on January 8th matched Bill's.

There will likely be some updates to the balances because of a book of trail passes coming in late.

There was 1 donation in December. Thank you to Sara & Abe Welle who donated in memory of Pete & Linda Keller.

Dave motioned to accept the financial report. Adam seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

DNR Topics

The snowmobile trail was open for about 12 straight days a few weeks ago but it is closed right now due to lack of snow.

Trail crew are out working on the trail and will be in the Klevenville area on and off to work on trees around the new parking lot.

DNR met regarding the bridge project and are now having engineering firms assess the bridges. Engineers had significant concerns about the pilings not being able to bear weight on the bridge just south of Paulson Road near Riley. DNR is currently waiting to hear back about a weight limit restriction which could impact snowmobile trail groomers and other vehicle traffic like maintenance trucks, but regular trail users shouldn't have to worry.

DNR is continuing to clear snow off the paved section from the Fitchburg Trailhead near Cottonwood Dr. to Old PB.

DNR is working on a big remodel for the Mt. Horeb rest station – this project is funded by the DNR. This will be the first large restoration project since it was built in 1995. Due to restrictions on wildlife impact, they will be working on it in the summer, and the station will likely be closed. However, the station will be getting a new roof, gutters, interior bathrooms and mechanicals, and the dragons on the roof will be refurbished.

Annual Meeting

Jerry outlined a plan for the annual meeting at 5:30pm on February 12th at Blue Mound State Park Friends Shelter. At the meeting, we will ask for feedback and ideas for the trail and elect board members. Afterward, we will move to our regular monthly meeting.

Jerry asked attendees if they had intentions to run for a position and created a draft ballot.

- President: Jerry Wilson. The president's role is to preside over meetings.
- Vice-President: Dave Pearson. The vice-president's role is to fill in when the President is unavailable.
- Treasurer: Bill Kalscheur. The treasurer's role is to administer and supervise financial records and recordkeeping for the organization.
- Secretary: Adam Maus. The secretary's role is to record meetings.

Each board member was willing to forgo running if someone else wanted the position. Jerry will ask for nominations prior to the meeting and from the floor at the annual meeting.

If you are interested in running or want to know more about a position, please let us know. We are more than happy to explain our roles and would provide guidance as needed.

Kestrel Nest Box Project

Adam has been working with Brand Smith with the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance Kestrel Nest box Monitoring and Banding program to setup a nest box on the trail off of W. Blue Mounds Rd, near Hwy K. Brand went in December to dig and put up the nestbox. Adam will be monitoring the box in 2026 and will be trained in February then start

monitoring the box weekly from March to July. We allocated \$210 for the project and Brand suggested a donation in lieu of billing us for materials. We sent that donation at the end of December.

Repairs to Depot and Caboose

Bruce wrote up a project overview about the repairs needed to the caboose and sent it out to the group on January 10th. This has been an ongoing debate because the caboose has a lot of rotten wood in the interior and on the exterior and will likely require significant funds to make repairs. However, we haven't found any interested contractors. We will also have to do some repairs to the depot, especially to address boards that need to be replaced.

Bruce thinks we could utilize Facebook, the website, our mailing list, and reach out to railroad organizations to help find contractors and receive donations to fund the repairs. John has offered to put a significant amount of money towards the project.

We discussed the project and a few notable suggestions came out of it:

- Set the project's funding goal to around \$35,000 which should cover costs to repair both the depot and caboose. This was a ballpark estimate since we haven't gotten any bids for the work yet. Mineral Point remodeled their caboose and might have a list of contractors or people that could help.
- Set a deadline for the fundraising for a year and, if we don't receive enough, any donations would go towards the Depot restoration.
- Allocate funds towards repairing the caboose's exterior, its interior, and any remaining funds could go to the Depot. There was concern that we need to make this distribution of funds apparent to donors.
- Create a subcommittee of FMRT members and other groups, such as the Village of Ridgeway, to work on this project.

Dave made a motion to start a fundraising campaign to fund the caboose and depot repairs led by Bruce for the goal of \$35,000. It passed but was not unanimous. There were concerns whether this project made sense for us to pursue.

Bruce will rework his project overview to include the depot, contact the Village of Ridgeway about setting up a subcommittee, and reach out to the Mineral Point depot about their remodel. Adam will look into setting up the fundraising page on Zeffy.

Depot Maintenance

Bruce did not hear the fan that runs to help with moisture when he was setting up for the pictures with Santa at the Depot event. He also noticed that the light is not working on the light pole lamp on the northeast corner close to the caboose. Brad and Kevin said they could check it out.

The Ridgeway Water Utility said that the Depot water meter wasn't working so they removed it and the plumber will put it back on when the water gets turned back on in Spring.

Knowles-Nelson Grant

Jerry and Kevin submitted the grant application to update the trail maps and trail use signage in all of the kiosks in November. Thank you both for the hard work!

Calendar

We started discussing events that will go on the 2026 calendar. Bruce talked to a contact at the Dodgeville library to ask about dates that the library would use the Depot. Jerry and John talked about when the Depot would be open and how that would coincide with the Ridgeway Farmers' Market. We also discussed John's project to have high school students help at the Depot. Adam is going to contact a few groups to see if we can set up "Field Trips" on the trail. Adam will take care of updating the calendar document so feel free to send him events and our hope to have a near final draft at the March meeting.

Santa at the Depot

Thank you to Bruce for setting up and supervising pictures with Santa at the Depot for Ridgeway's Holiday Celebration on December 20th!

This event included a light parade where cars drove down Main Street dressed up with lights, fireworks at the Ridgeway ballpark, and pictures with Santa in the Depot.

Bruce thought over 40 people attended the pictures. He thought the Village would be interested in doing this again and the Friends group would encourage this.

Facebook and Website Updates

Adam updated the website with digital copies of the meeting minutes back to around 2004 from the archive he received from Sarah. There are some still missing so if you think you might have them, please send them his way.

Bruce has continued promoting different events on the trail on Facebook.

Federal Recreational Trail Program Grant

The Federal Recreational Trail Program (RTP) Grant has changed their deadline from May 1st to March 1st because it is no longer combined with the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Local Assistance Program and the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grant programs.

This is a rather broad grant with the goal to encourage the maintenance, rehabilitation and development of trails and trail-side amenities by providing cost-sharing assistance.

Some potential ideas floated could involve trail resurfacing or repairs to depot and/or caboose. Jerry will follow up with Kevin. A decision will need to be made soon because of the short timeline.

Other Bits and Bobs

- We received a nice thank-you from the Bikes 4 Kids group in Madison for our donation.
- Start thinking about getting your trail passes, Spring will be here before you know it!

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be February 9th, 2026 at the Blue Mound State Park Friends Shelter in Blue Mounds, WI at 5:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Adam Maus
Secretary