

Kansas Trails News

Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy

3/2/2016

Three Rail Corridors Railbanked in Northwest Kansas

Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy has nearly finished conserving/railbanking three out-of-service rail lines in Northwest Kansas. The **Stagecoach Trail** stretches 31 miles between Oberlin and Sebelius Lake. The 12-mile **Prairie Sunrise Trail** links Almena with the Nebraska state line. The 3.5-mile **Prairie Dog Trail** will utilize a one-mile railroad spur in Norton and then will use a rails-with-trails path along an active rail line to **Prairie Dog State Park** at Sebelius Lake.

These will be the first rail-trails in Northwest Kansas, an area noted for wide-open spaces and few people. The communities of Norton and Oberlin are already excited about the trails and possible trail project coordinators have already stepped forward. They will marshal resources, recruit and direct volunteers, oversee trail construction and help land grants. The people in Oberlin want to build the trail 1.4 miles from the city park out to popular 480-acre **Sappa Park** so that bicyclists, joggers and walkers have a safe way to reach the park. The Soles on the Sappa Running Club has expressed an interest in ensuring this trail segment is developed.

Updated Kanas Rail-Trail Map Now Available

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An updated Kansas Rail-Trails Map has been prepared by Elaine Bryant, a GIS Developer at KDOT, with guidance from Clark Coan, SRTC's Public Information Specialist. This map, which replaces the 2013 map, depicts existing rail-trails; rail-trail projects; and proposed rail-trails. It is available for viewing at:
sunflowertrails.org/links.htm



Wichita State Uni. Assisting Sunflower

Ph.D. candidate, Lucas Cylke in the Psychology Program at Wichita State University under the direction of Prof. Greg Meissen, is using his doctoral practicum to develop a grant proposal template; identify potential funders; develop a board succession and recruitment plan; and create a sustainable scheme for recruiting, training and retaining trail project coordinators for Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy. Lucas is working 10/hours/week for 15 weeks on the project. *"The Conservancy is pleased to receive this assistance, remarked President Larry Ross, "It will make us a more effective organization which will enable us to build more rail-trails in the Sunflower State."*



Prairie Spirit Trail 20th Anniversary Celebration

The 20th anniversary of the Prairie Spirit Trail will be held on March 16 in Garnett. The rail-trail opened with great fanfare 20 years ago and was the first long-distance rail-trail in the Sunflower State. For more information go to:

<http://bikeprairiespirit.com/news/celebrate-the-prairie-spirit-trails-20th-birthday/>

Population Trends and Trails

A new Wichita State Uni. study (*"Kansas Population Forecasts: 2014 to 2064* by the Center for Economic Development and Business Research) is projecting that 85 Kansas

counties will see significant declines in population over the next 50 years. Wallace County will decline from 1,506 in 2014 to just 329 and Decatur County (Oberlin) will decline from 2,904 to 748 in 2064 while

Johnson County will almost double to 1 million! Also, projected persistent and prolonged droughts coupled with continued low oil prices could possibly accelerate this trend.

Over the past 35 years the state's changing rural economy has resulted in the abandonment of over 2,900 miles of rail lines. Although many of these rail corridors were lost forever, more than 23 totaling 553 miles were conserved for future rail use through the 1983 railbanking amendment to the National Trails System Act. Under railbanking, out-of-service rail lines can be used for recreational trails (commonly called rail-

trails) until changing circumstances warrant the reactivation of rail service. Nationally, over 20 railbanked lines have already been returned to rail service.

The population trends over the next 50 years are likely to result in additional rail lines going out of service. So, it will be critical that organizations such as Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy railbank or conserve these lines before they are lost forever. Fortunately, nationwide, easy access to linear parks and open space has become a new measure of community wealth—an important way to attract businesses and residents by guaranteeing both quality of life and economic health. Plus, nature-based tourism is the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry. New trails may slow the loss of population for many communities. New trails will be

necessary for those growing communities to meet additional demand.



National Park Service celebrates 100th birthday

The act creating the National Park Service was signed into law a century ago this year in 1916 by President Woodrow Wilson. This act resulted in the saving of many stunning natural landmarks including Kansas' own **Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve**. The NPS also promotes and oversees the national historic trails such as the **Santa Fe National Historic Trail** and **Oregon-California National Historic Trail** and scenic trails such as the **Continental Divide Trail** and **Pacific Crest Trail**. The agency also manages scenic rivers

such as the **Buffalo National River in Arkansas** and the **Ozark National Scenic Riverways** in Missouri.

The National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program assists groups and communities in developing trails. They recently assisted Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy and state agencies develop a State Rail-Trails Plan. Writer and conservationist Wallace Stegner called our national parks: "America's Best Idea" and that is why we should celebrate our national parks in this centennial year.

Overbrook Trail Extension Moves Forward

The Overbrook Trail Extension will soon become a reality. The .75-mile extension is being cleared for the laying of limestone screenings later this spring. One of the most avid supporters of

the trail in Overbrook is Scott Averill. He and his family own our Brookside Community - Skilled Care and Assisted Living facility.

This past Saturday, Scott and four other volunteers got landowner permission and cleared that next section mile of trail in one day. After a couple of more work days and the blading of the rock ballast on the old railroad bed, a surface suitable for road bikes, wheelchairs and strollers will be install. This new section will create a 1.5-mile trail heading Southeast from Overbrook. Support and use of the trail is growing exponentially.

Lehigh Portland Rail Trail in Iola Progresses

Randy Rasa reports the following on Sunflower Rail-Trails' 2.3-mile Lehigh Portland Rail Trail in south Iola. The trail is being developed by local volunteers and Allen County and will eventually link the Southwind Rail

Trail with mt. bike single track trails at a park.

All the wide trail is clear, but the surface has just dried up enough for machinery to get in this week. Most of the stumps are ground out, and we're smoothing and evening out the trail dirt now. There is a bit of dirt work to be done, then need to haul base rock in some places, then hopefully begin to lay limestone screenings. Hoping the rain holds off! I don't know how long the process will take, but I'm optimistic that we'll see significant progress soon. At last!

Clark H. Coan

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