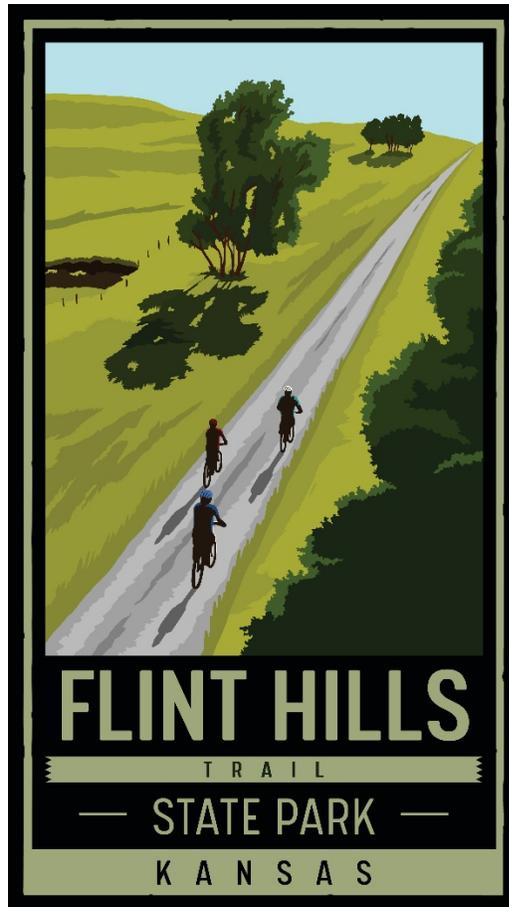


Flint Hills Trail State Park



Master Plan 2021

The purpose of this master plan is to guide current and future operations and development at Flint Hills Trail State Park. Reference to this plan will ensure that operations at Flint Hills Trail State Park meet the needs identified in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2020. This plan is required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF); accepting such funds dedicates the park in perpetuity to outdoor recreation. Grant funding from LWCF, the Recreational Trails Fund, and many others are critical to development of recreational opportunities in all Kansas state parks.

Guidance from this plan also ensures that development will be in alignment with the Department mission statement:

- Conserve and enhance Kansas's natural heritage, its wildlife and its habitats—to ensure future generations the benefits of the state's diverse, living resources;
- Provide the public with the opportunity for the use and appreciation of the natural resources of Kansas, consistent with the conservation of those resources;
- Inform the public of the status of the natural resources of Kansas to promote understanding and gain assistance in achieving this mission.

The Flint Hills Trail began in the late 1860's as the Council Grove, Osage City and Ottawa Railroad, a branch of the Missouri Pacific. Sections of the trail west of Council Grove roughly follow the route of the Santa Fe Trail. In the 1980's the Missouri Pacific (MO Pac) discontinued service. The railroad then became part of the Union Pacific.

In 1995, with assistance from the Rails-to-Trail Conservancy, the corridor was rail-banked by the Kansas Horsemen's Foundation. In 2003 the corridor was transferred to the Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy. Since that time, the Conservancy has worked to develop and maintain the corridor as a rail-trail, but were unable to overcome some development issues due to the scale of the project.

Recognizing the economic, tourism, and outdoor recreation potential of the trail, the Kansas Department of Wildlife Parks and Tourism (KDWPT), in 2014, partnered with the Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy to assist with development and completion of the trail.

In partnership with Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT), the Department has utilized federal Transportation Enhancements (TE) and federal Transportation Alternatives (TA) grant funding to continue the development, repairs, and construction of the trail infrastructure at a faster pace.

On-site surveys of trail conditions were made in early 2014. Also at that time, planning began. In 2018, the Kansas Legislature named Flint Hills Trail a state park, bringing it under the management of KDWPT.

Flint Hills Trail State Park crosses the Flint Hills, one of the last remaining tallgrass prairie ecosystems in the world. It also traverses the corridor of the Marais des Cygnes River, intersects with the Freedom's Frontier aspect of the Underground Railroad, coal mining areas, and cattle ranches of the Flint Hills. The trail will eventually connect Osawatimie in the east and Herington in the west, passing through the towns of Rantoul, Ottawa, Pomona, Vassar, Osage City, Allen, Bushong, Council Grove, Wilsey and Delavan. All of the trail is open to hikers and bicyclists; many portions are open to equestrians. E-bikes of Class 1 and 2 are allowed on the trail, making it more accessible to a greater number of users. It will be the longest rail-trail in Kansas at 117 miles when completed and the seventh longest rail-trail in the United States.

Currently, thanks to Transportation Alternatives grants from the Kansas Department of Transportation and Recreational Trail Program grants, the trail is open and usable on the 93 miles from Osawatomie to Council Grove.

Approximately 62 miles have been redeveloped to a high level of standards meeting Americans With Disabilities (ADA) and American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards for shared use paths. During construction, the trail surface is centered in the middle of the railroad right-of-way. To date, twenty-nine bridges have been replaced, refurbished or improved to meet safety and ADA requirements with aggregate or concrete decks and metal railings and safety approaches. Numerous pipe and box culverts have been replaced or repaired, and other drainage structures improved. Farm crossings are accommodated in each construction phase. At crossroads, safety bollards, metal half-gates and signage is installed per Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards. At highways, additional safety measures are installed. Surfacing is completed with at least six inches of compacted limestone aggregate to a width of ten feet, and in many areas the base is built up for improved drainage. Trailhead parking lots have been developed in six areas at Pomona, Miller, Admire, Allen, Bushong, and Council Grove. Restrooms, shelters, and other amenities are being developed at Pomona, Miller, Admire, and Bushong trailheads. Additionally, the Osawatomie Trail Task Force has developed a trailhead at the beginning of the trail in Osawatomie and will be installing a restroom and other amenities there.

The office and shop for the Flint Hills Trail are located in Garnett, Kansas, the center point of the Prairie Spirit Trail State Park, which intersects the Flint Hills Trail at Ottawa. Both trails are managed as a unit.

Staffing for the trail is very lean. At present, a manager and park ranger are stationed in Garnett and a second ranger works from the Tuttle Creek area and a naturalist works from the Pomona area. Seasonal workers and AmeriCorps members are essential to the often manual hand labor of keeping the trail free of hazards such as low hanging tree limbs, trees downed by weather events, trail washouts or cracking due to weather extremes, as well as to monitor and host events on the trail. Volunteers also assist with routine maintenance such as mowing and weed eradication, as well as advocacy for the trail.

The park has obtained some equipment to make development and maintenance of the trail less labor intensive including a New Holland 130-hp tractor with mounted boom mower, one small dump trailer, one truck, and a mini MT85 stand-on Bobcat.

Significant equipment and replacement needs:

¾-ton Law Enforcement truck

1-ton dump truck

Mini excavator

Dump trailer that can haul excavator

From its beginning, the trail has called for vision to bring it to its full potential. Staff has interacted with the management of Missouri's Katy Trail for information, advice, and potential solutions. This, as well as lessons learned from management of the Prairie Spirit Trail, have provided development and management vision for Flint Hills Trail. When complete, the Flint Hills Trail will rival the Katy. It has the potential to be just as popular.

More and more communities are seeing what an asset a long distance, connected trail is to their community. For some communities, the presence of such a trail has revitalized them.

Businesses, such as bike shops, cafes, campgrounds, and hotels locate along the trails to serve trail users. Trail users bring economic opportunities to the communities the trails pass through.

Future Developments

Future plans call for expanding events and interpretive programming on the trail.

Because of the advantages offered by the trail, the City of Ottawa, Franklin County, and the Osawatomie Trail Task Force and City of Osawatomie are engaged in trail-side developments that enhance the trail and offer conveniences for its users. The Osawatomie group acquired and constructed the eastern-most .75 mile of the trail. Osage City, in Osage County, is constructing the trail through the entire town limits.

More and more communities are seeking linkages to the trail from their trail systems. Already, the Flint Hills Trail intersects with the Prairie Spirit Trail in Ottawa. Eventual plans are for the Flint Hills Trail to connect through a series of other linking trails to the Katy Trail, the Landon Trail, and more. Someday, this growing network of trails will enable travelers to travel to and from any number of destinations and communities in Eastern Kansas and beyond. The trail passes through six counties: Miami, Franklin, Osage, Lyon, Morris, and Dickinson.

In 2021, the trail was awarded \$5.5 million in a TA grant to construct a railway overpass 1.5 miles west of Ottawa, Kansas, to safely direct trail users over a high-use BNSF railway. This railway is one of the most significant obstacles to safe trail use. The completion of this phase will eliminate the need for a current 3.5-mile detour onto county roads.

Phases of development have been as follows:

Phase 1 (2015) 6.28 miles from Pomona at Colorado Rd. east to Iowa Rd.

Phase 2 (2016) 4.84 miles (including detour on county roads) from Ottawa west to Louisiana Terrace.

Phase 3 (2016-17) 5.39 miles Pomona to Quenemo and from Ottawa east to I-35

Phase 4 (2017-18) 26.38 miles Quenemo to Vassar and from Allen to Council Grove

Phase 5 (2019-20) 18.8 miles from Allen east to Admire, Miller, and Osage City

TO DATE COMPLETED:

62 miles (including detour on county roads)

3 concrete box culverts new

1 large signature bridge modified

25 other bridges modified, 3 new bridges

Numerous metal culvert pipes replaced and boxes rebuilt

6 trailhead parking areas- Pomona, Miller, Admire, Allen, Bushong, Council Grove

Surfacing, gates, bollards, signs, road crossings, farm crossings

UNDER CONSTRUCTION:

PHASE 6: (2020-2021) 4 miles from Osage City east to Lewelling Rd.

NEXT FUNDED PHASE:

PHASE 12 (2022-2023) 2.3 miles Louisiana Terr. To Iowa Rd. crossing 2.3 miles

FUTURE PHASES:

- 7 Lewelling Rd. east to Vassar 5.6 miles
- 8 Ottawa I-35 to Kingman Terrace 4.8 miles
- 9 Kingman Terr. to Vermont Rd. 3.6 miles
- 10 Vermont Rd. to John Brown Rd. 6.7 miles.
- 11 John Brown Rd. to East end 1.3 miles
- 13 Council Grove west to Herington 26.8 miles

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