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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 Alma 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 rail-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, 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. A grant application to fund development of the Oberlin segment and in-town Norton section is being prepared by WSU PhD candidate Lucas Cylke and will be submitted to regional foundations.

2,800-mile England Coast Path to Open in Four Years

Britain's National Trails website states:

"The England Coast Path will be a new National Trail all around England's coast. It's opening in sections and will be complete in 2020. When it is complete it will be one of the longest coastal walking routes in the world.

The **England Coast Path** is happening because of a completely new right of access that gives everyone the legal right to explore our coast for the very first time. It is much more than just a path, it gives access to beaches, cliff-tops, and most of the wonderful habitats around our coast."

nationaltrail.co.uk/england-coast-path

Iola's Lehigh Portland Trails Grand Opening June 25

Randy Rasa provides this update on the **Lehigh Portland Trails** in south Iola: "Volunteers have been putting in tremendous effort and time, with amazing help from the local community. The last week or two has been filled with bridge work -- bridge railing repairs, dirt moving, driving abutment pilings, pouring concrete. Next step is sand-blasting and painting the Hegwald Bridge (within the next week or two), then moving and setting the bridge onto its new home (early May). On the rail-trail itself, surface prep work continues, hoping to get the final limestone screenings down on most of the trail soon. We're continuing to see lots of local people checking out the trails for the first time, as well as folks from the surrounding region visiting the trails on a regular basis to walk, run, or ride the mountain bike trails." David Tolland with Allen County Thrive reports that his organization was able to obtain easements to extend the **Lehigh Portland Rail Trail** west to the **Southwind Rail Trail** using a .4-mile connector trail. The total length of crushed limestone trails will be 2.9 miles and 6.5 miles for single-track trails. **June 25th has been targeted for the tentative Grand Opening ceremony! Be sure to attend if you can!**

Prairie Sunset Trail Extension Dedication May 14

A ribbon cutting for the **Prairie Sunset Trail** extension will be held on **May 14th at 1:00 p.m. at the Goddard Trailhead**. According to Ruth Holliday with Prairie Travelers, the extension runs from 167th St. west of Wichita into the city proper to Hoover for a total of seven additional miles, making the trail 15 miles in length. It will hopefully connect to the City's bike paths and link it to the **Redbud Trail** which will take trail users to Butler County where activists we are working on the trail from Andover to Kellogg (Hwy 54) and hopefully to Augusta down the road."

Redbud Trail Plans Update

Ruth Holiday with Prairie Traveler reports:

Red Bud Trail - Goal to have it from I-135 to Augusta for a total of 18 to 20 miles or so, depending on getting into Augusta because the bridge was removed over the Whitewater River

- **Wichita's Section** will be done in phases:

- Phase 1: I-135 to Woodlawn = 3 miles completed and paved

- Phase 2: Woodlawn to K-96 = 3 1/2 miles to be done after Phase 3

- Phase 3: K-96 to 159th St E (Butler County Line) = 2 1/2 miles to be next, to connect to the completed 2 miles in Andover and the K-96 bike path that heads north and circles going west and then south and connects to the start of the Red Bud Trail.

- **Butler County Section** will also be in phases:

- Phase 1: Butler County Line to 13th or also known as SW 80th = almost 2 miles completed and paved (1.7 million grant from the last of the federal TA funds) This was a City of Andover project!
- Phase 2: Prairie Creek to Kellogg (Hwy 54) = Just shy of 4 miles to be done by AARTI with the blessing of the City of Andover that is taking over the NITU.
- Phase 3: Kellogg (Hwy 54) to SW River Valley Rd (by the Whitewater River, at the Augusta edge of town) = Approximately 2.5 miles. This phase must wait until we prove to Butler County that the trail is well used and worth their effort, as well as waiting for KDOT to rebuild the bridge they committed to when they removed it over Kellogg for the highway widening this past year!

TA Grants to fund Rail-Trails

KDOT has approved federal Transportation Alternatives grants for several trail projects including two rail-trails. One grant provides \$3 million for continued construction on the **Flint Hills Nature Trail** which stretches between Herington and Osawatomie. Construction is already underway on the trail section from Pomona town to K-68 north of Quenemo. The other grant consisting of \$721,570 will fund Phase II of Lindsborg's **Valkommen Trail** (a rail-trail) in the northeast portion of the town. The new 1.25 section will begin near the Bethany College Campus, go under K-4 and then proceed to **Emerald Lake** where it will circle the lake. The local match of \$278,813 may seem like a significant contribution from a small town but its sales tax is 9.5% which the many visitors to the town pay.

Meadowlark Trail Update

Michele Cullen with Central Kansas Conservancy reports the following: "We have been working for the past one and one-half years on a section of the **Meadowlark Trail** that starts in Lindsborg and heads south towards McPherson. This section is 2.75 miles, has four bridges and is very scenic. Three of the bridges have railings and are decked. One of these bridges is 105' long and about 30 feet off the ground at the highest spot. Great views from this bridge. The last bridge to complete is a small culvert bridge about 10' long. We are making this into a **covered bridge**. The weekend of April 9th the concrete footings were poured for this bridge and we will start construction on our next work day, May 14th. We have had a few large donations made to the **Meadowlark Trail in** the Lindsborg area and those donations are covering the cost of this project. In addition to those donations we had some local contractors volunteer equipment and time.

"We have other exciting news on the **Meadowlark Trail**. Ardie Streit who is our lead person on the McPherson end of the trail (five miles are complete) has teamed up with MCDS. The MCDS group has been out at least once a week with their clients working on the trail. They have repainted picnic benches for us and mowed at our main trail entrance all last summer. They also are looking at getting a grant which will give them funds to do some planting and projects like that along the trail."

Drone may be used for Rails-With-Trails Project

A drone may be used to survey a proposed rails-with-trails route from Norton to Prairie Dog State Park. Since this is a three-mile route over rugged, open terrain, it will be much

cheaper to use a drone to record geo-referenced digital images than having a survey team do the work by hand.



Update on Projects to Connect KC to Katy Trail

According to an article in the *KC Star* (5-01-16) Jackson County, Missouri took possession on May 2 of a rail line that will help connect Kansas City to the famous **Katy Trail**. A trail on this 17.7-mile section of the Rock Island Line in eastern KCMO is scheduled to open in the spring of 2018. The 47-mile **Rock Island State Trail** which connects to the KATY at Windsor will open this fall. This will leave a nine-mile gap between the two trails at Pleasant Hill.

North American Bison Designated as the National Mammal

The iconic North American Bison (commonly known as the buffalo) has been designated by Congress to be the national mammal, joining the American Bald Eagle which is the national emblem. The buffalo is also the Kansas state mammal. There are several herds of bison in the state including at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Konza Prairie and Big Basin State Preserve.

Bill in Missouri Legislature would allow ATVs on Katy Trail

A bill (HB 2047) moving through the Missouri Legislature would allow motorized gas-powered ATVs five feet in width with engines up to 700 ccs and golf carts to be driven on the famous **Katy Trail** in Missouri by anyone over 60 years of age on Wednesdays. People with disabilities can already drive electric carts or scooters. This would disturb the peace and quiet of other trail users and once allowed on one day of the week it could easily be extended to all days of the week. **Allowing ATVs on rail-trails is a bad idea!**

Clark H. Coan

Public Information

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