

Kansas Trails News

Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy

12/28/2015

Rail-trail from Marysville, Kansas to Lincoln, Nebraska now Open!

The 19.5-mile Chief Standing Bear Trail which links Beatrice, Neb. to the Nebraska state line was completed this fall creating a continuous rail-trail from Marysville to Lincoln. The other trail sections are the 30-mile Homestead Trail stretching between Beatrice and Lincoln and the Blue River Rail Trail which was also completed this fall and runs 11.5 miles from Marysville to the Nebraska state line

Points of interest along the two trails in Nebraska include the Homestead National Monument, the 1906 Burlington Railroad Depot which houses the Gage County Historical Society and Museum, Big Indian Recreation Area, Arbor Park, Big Blue River Bridge and Chautauqua Park.

In Kansas, the Blue River Rail Trail generally follows the Big Blue River. The trail features bluffs and heavy timber plus a covered bridge north of Marysville. It also traverses the heavily wooded Oketa valley. Decrepit stone stairways built into the side of the hill once allowed town residents to access trains. In Marysville, efforts are underway to extend the trail south past a train depot that will be restored to a short rail-trail on the south edge of town.

Flint Hills Nature Trail construction moving forward

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Jeff Bender with the Kansas Dept. of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism reported at Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy's annual meeting that construction on Phase 1B (Ottawa west for 3 miles to Iowa Rd.) may start as early as this month, weather permitting. The contract was awarded to APAC-Kansas, Inc. for \$1.28 million.

Unfortunately, there will be a long-term 3-mile detour on gravel roads for this section due to a busy railroad crossing. Bids for Phase 1C may be let also be let this month. This phase is from Pomona to Quenemo for 4 miles and 6 miles from Ottawa east to Kingman Rd. Construction on Phase 1C may start in spring,

Coffeehouse with Bike Rentals to open in Ottawa

John and Carol Gladman of Ottawa are planning to open a coffeehouse near the intersection of the **Flint Hills and Prairie Spirit Trails** in downtown Ottawa. The coffeehouse may even have bike rentals. A cafe with coffee in St. Charles, MO along the Katy Trail has bike rentals. A bed and breakfast is scheduled to open next year nearby. Things are starting to happen in Ottawa.



Sheriff deputies patrolling trails

The Franklin County Sheriff has announced that deputies are patrolling both the **Flint**

Hills Nature Trail and **Prairie Spirit Trail** within the county. The County has recently purchased three bicycles for use by deputies. Safety patrols will be able to help trail users experiencing problems and enforce rules such as the ban on motorized vehicles and shooting. Plus, they will help deter vandalism. Shawnee County sheriff deputies are patrolling the Landon Nature Trail using ATVs.

Climate Change to affect rail-trails

The *Kansas City Star* (11/18/15) recently had an article describing the climate change predictions by climate scientists for the Kansas City area. These predictions could also apply to rail-trails in eastern Kansas. Shorter and warmer winters may extend the temperate weather in fall and spring encouraging more trail use. However, the more

frequent and longer heat waves in summer could reduce summer trail use. Extreme weather events including rain downbursts causing flooding and windstorms may damage trail surfaces. Not only could flooding wash out trail sections it could damage or destroy bridges. Plus, windstorms could result in downed trees and branches which would block trails. Although the tick season will be extended by weeks, rail-trail users tend to avoid ticks because rail-trails are so wide that users don't brush up against bushes.



Bikepacking is growing sport

Bikepacking is loosely defined as "seeking adventure through multi-

day, self-supported trips on lightly loaded bikes."

Bikepacking 101 on the bikepacking.com website defines it as "Simply put, bikepacking is the synthesis of mountain biking and minimalist camping; it evokes the freedom of multi-day backcountry hiking, with the range and thrill of riding a mountain bike. It's about forging places less travelled, both near and afar, via singletrack trails, gravel, and abandoned dirt roads, carrying only essential gear. Ride, eat, sleep, repeat, enjoy!"

"The most significant gear innovation that has helped popularise bikepacking is the commercial availability of bike-specific soft bags. Replacing traditional racks and panniers, these consist of a framebag, a handlebar bag or harness, a seat pack and peripheral bags. Light, rattle free and tailored to modern mountain bikes, they'll

optimize your bike's carrying capacity without adding significantly to its weight, or effecting the way it handles. Most are made by small-scale cottage industries; some are custom made on a piece by piece basis, and others are available pre-designed to fit certain frame brands and sizes. Consider investing in a seat pack and roll bag first, then a framebag when you've settled on a bike you're happy with. Alternatively, look at our Hobo Kit for ideas on how to get by with what you already have. Or if you have access to a sewing machine, make your own!"



KC's Rock Island Trail to feature tunnel

The planned 17.7-mile **Rock Island Trail** stretching from the Truman Sports Complex in Northeast Kansas City to Missouri 291 in Lee's Summit will feature the Vale 446-foot tunnel. The trail will connect the KC metro area with the famous Katy Trail. Construction may begin in 2016 if legal and design hurdles are resolved. (*KC Star* 11/27/15).

Greater Yellowstone Trail

According to the *Rails-to-Trails Magazine* (Winter 2016), planning for the Greater Yellowstone Trail is underway:

"The Greater Yellowstone Trail is a proposed 180-mile, non-motorized, multi-use trail system that will pass through three states, a handful of wildlife refuges and state parks, and endless tracts of US Forest Service land. Today, more than 100 miles of the route are passable." Sections that are already open include the 7-mile Victor to Driggs Rail-Trail; 30-mile Ashton-Tetonia Trail; and

the 20-mile Jackson-Jenny Lake Trail.

New Transportation Bill to increase funding for trails initially

The new federal transportation bill called FAST Act has been signed into law and increases funding for trails: The Transportation Alternatives Program — the small pool of funding for walking and biking — was the only program that was capped with no built-in adjustment for inflation. It will rise from the current \$817 million annual allocation to \$850 million and then be held constant. This is good news as there was a concerted effort to eliminate this program. TA funds are being used to complete the Flint Hills Nature Trail in Kansas.

The transportation bill also funds the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). Since 1994, more than \$20 million in RTP funds have helped build trails in Kansas.

Applicants are required to provide a 20% match.

Half Gates for Flint Hills Trail Project a Success

Half gates are being used on the KDWP's Flint Hills Nature Trail Project. The gates make it look like illegal vehicles and ATVs can't or shouldn't go on the trail. However, maintenance vehicles are able to go around the gates. According to engineer Dan Holloway, the cost for the gates "vary based on quantity ordered, manufacturer, etc. but the price has been approximately \$1,600 to \$2,000 which includes all materials and labor to construct, deliver to site, and install. Signs are also mounted on these gates. (see attached picture.)

The break-away pin/bolt prevents damage to the gate when vehicles ram it.



Land and Water Conservation Fund increased

Congress has passed a three-year allocation of \$450 million annually for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. "The money is intended to create and protect national parks, areas around rivers and lakes, national forests, and national wildlife refuges from development, and to provide matching grants for state and local parks and recreation projects." In FY 2015 \$300 million was appropriated so the trust fund, so this is a 50% increase. However, full funding would be \$900 million per annum which is what is contributed to the fund annually by revenues from oil and gas leases on the Outer Continental Shelf. The LWCF State Assistance Program in Kansas is expected to receive around \$4 million

annually which is administered by KDWPT.



More than 600 projects amounting to more than \$51 million in LWCF grant funds since 1965 have helped build outdoor recreation projects including parks and trails.

Scenic Overlook to be built on Kansas Turnpike in Flint Hills

A scenic overlook is being built along the Kansas Turnpike in the Flint Hills. It will allow the public to enjoy a scenic view of the Flint Hills. A herd of antelope is in this area. A groundbreaking for a scenic outlook and improvements at the Bazaar Cattle Pens was held earlier in December.

The Bazaar Cattle Pens are located 16 miles southwest of Emporia and 60 miles northeast of Wichita at mile marker 111