

2023-02-08

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I am writing to express my support for Lehigh Portland State Park (HB 2331).

I am a board member with Thrive Allen County, and was one of the first volunteers to work on the project that became the Lehigh Portland Trails. Since 2014, I have contributed over 5600 volunteer hours in trail-building, trail stewardship, habitat restoration and management, planning, promotion, and administration.

I am proud to be part of the team that has built one of the finest trail systems in Kansas, and it has been extremely gratifying to see how many people enjoy Lehigh for mountain biking, trail running, nature hikes, bird watching, wildflower viewing, fossil hunting, and citizen science. The trail system, lake, and diverse natural environment is a showcase of the best of Southeast Kansas outdoors.

Allen County has, at this point in time, relatively little public land. Allen County has no state fishing lakes, no wildlife areas, no state parks (other than the Prairie Spirit Trail), no federal reservoirs, no federal wildlife refuges, no National Parks, no Corps of Engineer lands, and no county lakes or parks. The Lehigh Portland State Park would help to remedy that deficiency, and provide direct benefit to Allen County and the State of Kansas.

I enthusiastically support HB 2331, designating Lehigh Portland State Park, and I ask for your support.

Sincerely,

Randy Rasa
Board Member, Thrive Allen County, Iola Kansas

February 8, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I, Shellie Regehr, am writing to express my support for bill HB 2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

I am excited about the possibility of the proposed state park being available to all citizens of Kansas and surrounding states. We are not members of the Elks Club so we have not had access to the lake. Additionally, the increased visitors to Allen County will be of financial benefit to our community. We already have a number of visitors from all over Kansas and beyond taking advantage of our beautiful trails for walking and biking. The quality-of-life improvements discussed in planning the proposed park include camp sites, swimming, fishing, accessible restrooms, etc. and further amenities for local residents and visitors alike.

We have personally enjoyed using the trails for recreation and both our high school and community college athletes are frequent visitors to the trails for work-outs. The trails provide some challenging and beautiful scenery for our track and cross country runners.

Another advantage of designating the area as a state park will be to improve the safety infrastructure and maintenance of the property by including on-site park staff. Having access to state resources will also help to continue our efforts in developing a healthy ecosystem for our area wildlife.

Thank you for taking time to review our letters of support for bill HB 2331 creating LeHigh Portland State Park.

Sincerely,



Shellie Regehr
Resident of Iola Kansas, Allen County

10 February, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahnjes, Chairman
House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Chairman Rahnjes & Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I, Mary Ann Regehr, am writing to express my support for HB 233, creating Highland State Park.

As a teacher, we took the entire 4th grade class on a field trip to the natural surface trails area. The students had the opportunity to study science, observing a cave, rock formations, and local animal and plant life. They learned local history observing the artifacts of early settlers in the area. It was felt by all the teachers that this area could be easily used to develop great planned fieldtrips that would enhance all levels of school curricula, making the learning more meaningful.

Four different school districts are 20 minutes or less from this site. Many more are less than an hour away. The park would provide low cost, high value instruction for Kansas students and could inspire them to consider futures in environmental, scientific, or archeological disciplines.

Being a local resident, I greatly enjoy the opportunity to walk and bike on the trails which provide the serenity of nature so close to town.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Regehr

Mary Ann Regehr

Resident of Topeka, Kansas

February 10, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Kansas State Capitol

300 SW 10th St.

Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources

I Walter Regehr, Jr, am writing to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

I have experienced the trails and helped in different activities on the property in question. Including it in the state park system would be a great addition for the State of Kansas and the local area. The trails are wonderful and a great asset to a healthy community. People come from various areas of the country to experience them and the lake would add additional value, beyond monetary, for people of all ages to experience.

I have fond memories of the Lehigh Portland property. Growing up in the area, I knew several employees of the cement plant when it was in operation. Our Peewee and Little League baseball games were accomplished on Lehigh Portland property. Today, the trails on this property are used by more than hikers and bikers. Schools from high school through college use the trails, at times, for cross country practice. Utilizing an environment that can't be created on a city street or running track. These people are creating memories much as I did as a young boy.

Designating the Lehigh Portland as a state park should have positive economic benefit to this area. Monetarily, this could stimulate growth in a variety of local businesses, provide an area for healthy lifestyles, enjoyment of the environment around the lake and educational opportunities. What a positive way to preserve this property for all to enjoy, not only for now but for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Walter Regehr, Jr.

Lt. Colonel, USAF (Retired)

Instructor, Economics and Math, Allen Community College (Retired)

Former Allen County Commissioner

Resident of Iola, Kansas

February 13, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

Why it is important Lehigh Portland is designated as a State Park:

- Helps to improve the safety infrastructure and maintenance of the property by including park staff
- Access to state resources to cultivate a more environmentally sustainable ecosystem for wildlife Increases quality-of-life improvements, such as bathrooms, water, camping, and other amenities, for local residents and visitors alike
- Stimulates regional economic competitiveness and opportunity for businesses
- Ensures Allen County residents' tax dollars given to Kansas Wildlife and Parks are invested locally -and creates a destination for all Kansas taxpayers to enjoy
- Improves accessibility infrastructure and the community's connection to green space and recreation
- Promotes partnership between local and state entities
- Honors local history and creates a legacy for future generations in Iola, Allen County, and Kansas

What Lehigh Portland adds to the Kansas State Park System:

- 14.5 miles of wide gravel trails (2.5 miles) and natural surface trails/ singletrack (12+ miles)
- Directly connects to Prairie Spirit Trails State Park and Southwind Rail Trail
- Roughly 360 acres of diverse landscape, including a 138 acre quarry lake

Sincerely,

Annette Rexwinkle

Resident of Allen County



February 9, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

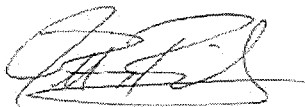
Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I, Brett Rinehart, am writing to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

I believe that making the Lehigh Portland Trails and lake into a state park would be a great thing not only for lola, but also surrounding towns and communities. I am the head cross country coach at Chanute High School, and we bring our team up to the Lehigh Portland Trails to run several times per season. It provides a great place to run on quality trails and get the kids off the roads, a benefit that I'm sure local runners/walkers/bikers enjoy as well. I also bring my family up to lola on a regular basis to enjoy the trails. Also, being an avid fisherman, it would be nice to have more local options, and the lake would be a perfect one if it becomes open to the public.

This area needs more recreational opportunities for kids and families to enjoy the outdoors. Creating the Lehigh Portland State Park would provide a close-to-home option for lola citizens and the surrounding communities, and I think would benefit the area greatly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brett Rinehart", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brett Rinehart
Resident of Chanute, Kansas

Lary A. Robinson, M.D., F.A.C.S.
Senior Member, Moffitt Medical Group
Thoracic Surgical Oncology

February 10, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Ks. 66612

Phone: 813-745-6635
Fax: 813-449-8077
lary.robinson@moffitt.org

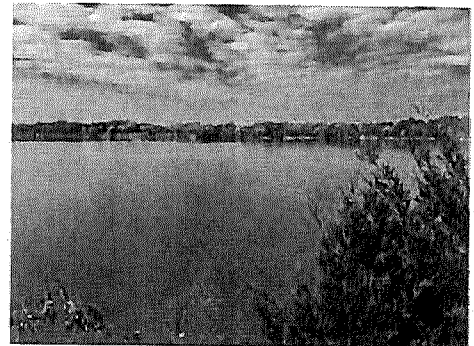
RE: Lehigh Portland State Park Bill HB2331

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources:

I was born and raised in lola Kansas, living there for 18 years, and subsequently attending University of Kansas. I currently live in Tampa, Florida but I return to lola at least every 2 years to visit since I still own farmland in Allen County (and pay taxes there). I recall quite well

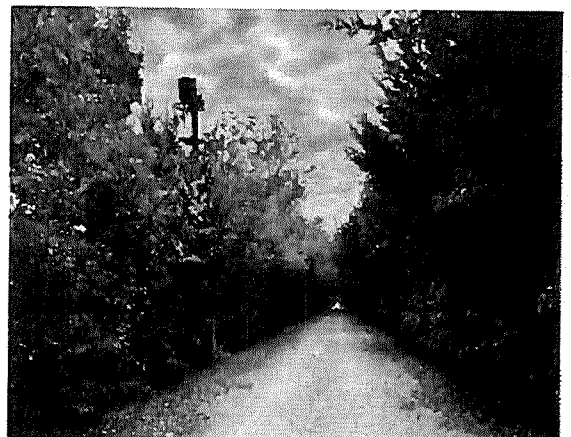


the time that the Lehigh Portland Cement Plant was operating, and - remember when it was



shut down in the early 70s. However, I was delighted when the abandoned Lehigh Cement Plant property was taken over by lola Industries who renovated the property to become a beautiful and pedestrian-friendly nature park.

Every time I return to lola, I spend at least an entire day walking and running through the park which fortunately directly connects with the Southwind Rail Trail making this area one of the most remarkable recreational locations I have ever visited.



Designating the Lehigh Portland Park as a Kansas State Park is an important step in further development of this family-friendly nature preserve. As a state park, it would greatly benefit the local Allen County community and the State of Florida. Not only

would it significantly benefit the local businesses, but also it would promote outdoor recreation and healthy lifestyles.

I **strongly** recommend that the Kansas House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources approve the pending bill to designate this area as the Lehigh Portland State Park. The cost for this measure is low, but the benefits are great.

Respectfully,



Lary A Robinson, MD
6412 E. MacLaurin Drive
Tampa, FL 33647
larobins@tampabay.rr.com



February 8, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,
I, WenDee Rowe, am writing to express my support for HB 2231, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

Following are a few of the reasons I think are worthy of supporting this bill.

- Kansas is becoming well known as a destination state for outdoor activities. Southeast Kansas in particular is a hidden gem in our state and it's time has come to play a bigger part in attracting visitors to this unique part of Kansas.
- I am an avid gravel cyclist and for my 65th birthday in 2022 I chose to travel to Humboldt, Kansas so I could ride the Southward Rail Trail and the Lehigh Portland Trail. Little did I know the incredible beauty I would encounter when I came around the corner after shortly starting the trail near Lola to see the quarry filled with water, surrounded by trees. A dream come true for a kid raised in western Kansas. These are the kinds of places that make you proud to be a Kansan. The trails were well kept and so much fun. I felt like a kid again. No mean feat for a woman turning 65 years old!
- Having worked in tourism and with small communities through my employer, the Kansas Sampler Foundation, I can confidently say that a state park will make a tremendous impact financially for those who live in this region. Already we have seen the response to how hikers and cyclists have flocked to the Base Camp in Humboldt and in western Kansas at Little Jerusalem. A new state park like in this area would continue that momentum. When visitors travel to these parks they leave a trail of dollars at convenience stores, gas pumps, restaurants, lodging establishments and downtown businesses, all adding to our tax base.

Thank you for taking time to read this letter of support and for giving consideration to this bill. I'll look forward to hearing a positive outcome in creating a new state park in southeast Kansas.

Sincerely,



WenDee Rowe
Resident of Inman (McPherson County)

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Resources
Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Ks.66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources:

Having a State Park on the Former Lehigh Cement Company Property would be fantastic addition not only to our Community; but also to individuals in other Kansas Counties, the State of Kansas and surrounding Counties in adjacent Counties of other States!

This State Park would be of great benefit for Individuals, Families, and Friends to enjoy being together and sharing fun!!! Children could also learn a lot about Nature, Water Activities, Camping and many other benefits!

Thanks you so much for all of the work that will need to be done on this Project!

Sincerely,

Jacquelyn Smith

1370 L, 2000th Street

Iola, Kansas 66749

February 13, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

It is my privilege to write to you today in support of Bill #HB2331, which proposes to accept the generous gift of the Lehigh Portland Trails and lake from Iola Industries, Inc.

As stewards of our natural resources and protectors of our state's heritage, I believe it is our duty to ensure that the trails and lake are preserved for future generations to enjoy. The proposed transfer of ownership to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks would allow us to achieve this goal, and I urge you to give this bill your full and careful consideration.

The Lehigh Portland Trails and lake are a treasure of the Iola community and a source of pride for our state. They represent the best of what Kansas has to offer, and their preservation is of the utmost importance. I am confident that the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will continue to provide the expertise, dedication, and resources needed to maintain and improve these assets for years to come.

Furthermore, I want to acknowledge and commend the generous spirit of Iola Industries, Inc. Their donation is a testament to their commitment to the community and their belief in the importance of preserving and protecting these valuable assets. I am grateful for their generosity and for the positive impact it will have on the future of Iola and the state of Kansas.

I believe that by accepting this gift, we have an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the future of our state. I urge you to give this bill your full and enthusiastic support, and to help ensure that the Lehigh Portland Trails and lake remain a source of pride and enjoyment for generations to come.

Thank you for your dedication and service to the people of Kansas.

Sincerely,

Ryan Sparks

February 9, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

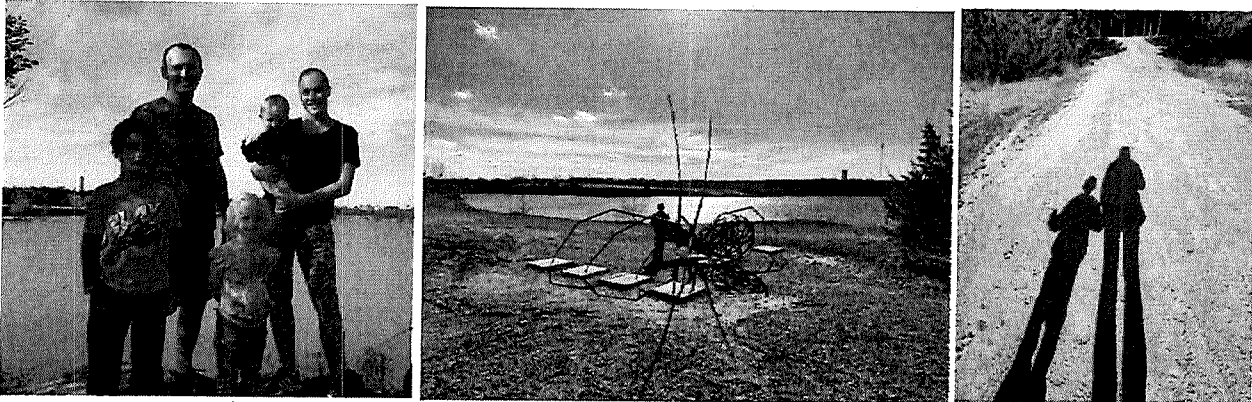
Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

My name is Declan Darby Springer. I am six years old and live in Iola. My mommy is helping me write this letter to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

I like to go out to Lehigh Portland Trails to ride my bike and walk. I like to find art out there, too. They have sculptures of lightening bugs and a big spider that I think could eat two people! I love to fish. Right now, my daddy takes me to Lake Farlington to fish, which means we have to get in the car and drive for quite a while to get there. When you create Lehigh Portland State Park, I can walk to the lake and fish. I am a very good fisherman! I know I will catch fish at Lehigh! I could send you pictures!

In the summer, my science camp visits Lehigh to explore all the cool things in nature. We have a fun time! There's even a cave we get to explore!

Please make Lehigh Portland State Park. I love to go out there to ride my bike, walk and explore. And I think it would be really fun to swim and fish out there, too. I could do this for the rest of my life!



(I've been coming out to Lehigh since I was a baby. I even bring my aunt and uncle when they visit (picture on the left). This is the spider that is so big (middle pic)! My aunt and I like to look for animal tracks, too!)

Thank you,

DECLAN SPRINGER
DECLAN SPRINGER
Resident of Allen County

My fellow Kansans,

As I write to you today, I am proud to voice my unwavering support for HB2331. As a landowner, real estate investor, economist, and community servant, I fully appreciate the immeasurable value of the gift that Iola Industries Inc. has bestowed upon our great State.

Having explored many of Kansas's State Parks, as well as half of our Nation's National Parks, and traveled to over 50 countries across 5 continents, I have come to appreciate the importance of public space that can be enjoyed by all, while also being preserved for future generations to come.

As it stands, only a select few - roughly 500 people - have access to this unique and awe-inspiring space. Yet, if the State of Kansas does not accept this generous gift, the land will be parceled out and sold off for development. I believe it would be an unforgivable mistake to let such a unique natural resource go to waste, and be enjoyed by so few.

Moreover, the socioeconomic depressed area of the State desperately needs vitalization, and HB2331 is precisely the tool we need to help move the needle in the right direction.

Therefore, I implore each and every one of you, to stand with me and support HB2331. Together, we can ensure that this precious land will be enjoyed by all, preserved for future generations, and provide a vital spark of growth and hope for this great State.

Sincerely,

Job D. Springer

February 13, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resource:

My name is Lori Stone and I am a resident of Iola, Ks. I am a resident who utilizes the Lehigh Trails many times during the week (whatever the weather) to enjoy the outdoors and the picturesque lake views while walking on the trails. I am writing to express my support for HB2331 in creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

It is my opinion the designation of the Lehigh Portland trails as a state park would benefit myself and others personally because a state park has the potential to reach many persons who currently live and/or travel to our community to experience the trails and lake amenities.

It is amazing to me how many persons I visit with on the trails who are passing through Iola, but are spending their income in our community after biking or hiking on the trails. I can only imagine the increase usage if this area was designated as a state park for the general public's usage.

I believe designating Lehigh Portland State Park will positively impact our community and surrounding areas in our region with respect to local businesses, recreation, and healthy lifestyles. Maybe other communities in the State of Kansas would take the initiative to create an area for walking and healthy lifestyles and model it after the Lehigh Trails.

Respectfully,



Lori Stone
1931 Rhode Island Rd
Iola, KS 66749

Feb 6, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

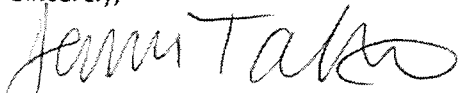
I, Jenny Tatman, am writing to express my support for HB2331 creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

I recently moved to Coffey County from Kansas City with my husband and two young children. One of the draws for us in moving to a small rural community from the city was more opportunities for local outdoor recreation. We are fortunate to have Melvern Lake, and Eisenhower State Park, just 20 miles away from where we live. We enjoy camping, hiking, and fishing as a family. My husband and I are fortunate to be able to share the enjoyment of nature with our children. My family, as well as others, would benefit from having access to the Lehigh Portland State Park as a new destination to visit, just a short driving distance from where we live.

As much as we enjoy having close access to Eisenhower, I know that in the last few years there has been an influx of visitors to our local state park. This brings in revenue from outside of our county, as people staying at the park stop at our gas stations, eat at our local restaurants, etc. With camping reservations being booked 6 months or more in advance, I believe there is a need for a state park in Southeast Kansas.

I work in Allen County, and I have visited portions of the Lehigh Portland Trails. I think that this would be an excellent location for a new state park. It would benefit all Kansas residents by providing access for everyone to enjoy the outdoor recreational activities that would be offered, and would significantly benefit residents in Southeast Kansas from an economic development standpoint.

Sincerely,



Jenny Tatman
Resident of Lebo, Kansas

Feb. 10, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I am Bruce Symes, a resident of Iola and Allen County for 37 years and currently a member of the Allen County Commission, and am writing to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

The Allen County Commission approved a letter of support, which you also have received, at our Feb. 7 meeting, but I also wanted to write a personal letter telling you why I am excited by the prospect for this state park and what it will add to our community, county and region of Southeast Kansas.

As a product of small towns up to that time, when I moved to Iola in 1986, I was drawn for several reasons: my job at the Iola Register newspaper, the Bowlus Fine Arts Center, Allen Community College, a bowling alley, skating rink, tennis courts, and a McDonald's restaurant!

Lacking for me were outdoor recreational outlets. I enjoyed fishing and hunting. Elsmore State Fishing Lake is just over the county line in Bourbon County, about 24 miles from my home. I have driven there many times to fish and it is enjoyable, but has limited opportunities.

In the decades I've lived here, many changes have occurred. I now work at the college and still enjoy shows at the fine arts center. Gone are the bowling alley and skating rink, but we have almost 15 miles of trails in our community, thanks to Thrive Allen County and the Kansas rail-trail system. A large segment of these trails are next to the Lehigh quarry, which would add to its appeal as a State Park.

Such designation of the Lehigh Portland State Park would be a great benefit to area residents looking for recreational and healthful living opportunities and would help the regional economy through tourism.

I am grateful to Iola Industries for making this donation of property to the state and for Rep. Gardner introducing this bill into your committee, and I ask that the Legislature approve its being made part of Kansas's state parks system. Iola and Allen County will be proud stewards of our resources – financial and natural – if this plans comes to fruition.

Sincerely,

Bruce Symes

Bruce Symes, Iola KS



February 13, 2023

Representative Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I am Julie Turnipseed, Director of Economic Development in Anderson County Kansas. We are the county just north of Allen County. I am writing to express my support of HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

One of the most important strategies in business recruitment is quality of life. People can put their business anywhere these days. When you look at the factors that determine location of a new business Quality of Life is in the top five on the list.

Creating Lehigh Portland Trails as a State Park would certainly stimulate regional economic competitiveness and opportunity for business by increasing our opportunities regionally to attract and retain businesses. Businesses must have a workforce and that workforce must have a place for family, friends, and guests to relax and enjoy life. This park would do all of those. The amenities of a 100+ acres of rugged woodlands, scenic views, and a spring fed quarry lake along with over 14 miles of rail-trail-style gravel surfaced trails all would be ingredients for an exceptional quality of life/ healthy lifestyle.

I urge you to please make Lehigh Portland a State Park.

Thank you for all you do for our State.

Sincerely,

Julie Turnipseed

Julie Turnipseed
Director
Anderson County Development Agency

2/8/23

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10 th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I Erik Unruh, am writing to express my support for HB 2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

My family moved back to Kansas in 2022. At the time, we were living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, surrounded by beautiful mountains filled with alpine lakes, beautiful aspens and towering pines. We were excited to move back home to Kansas, but leaving the accessibility of the mountain west was not exciting. Our search for a community in Kansas spanned from western Kansas to Kansas City and ultimately Iola. On a visit to meet my future employer, a group of community organizers took us to the Lehigh trails along the northern edge of the proposed state park. We were floored. The stunning natural beauty hooked us. Our imaginations ran wild with the opportunity to hike, swim and explore with our son. Now, whenever we have visitors in town, the Lehigh Trails are a must see. The potential to preserve the natural beauty of the entire lake and surrounding area, to incorporate educational activities and to make it an environmental gemstone for our area is an opportunity that we cannot miss. A state park in Allen county will provide much needed economic development, increased access for healthy activities and will be a destination for visitors from across the region. Investing in this park means generations will have the opportunity to enjoy the unique Kansas beauty here in our backyard.

Sincerely,



Erik Unruh, MD, MPH
Resident of Iola, KS

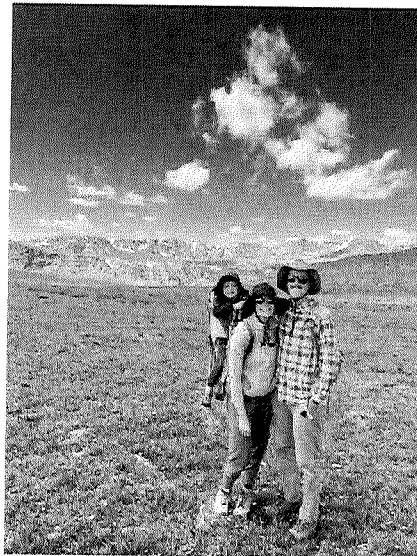
02/13/2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I, Maria Zielinski Unruh, am writing to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

In 2021 my husband began to plant the seed of a career opportunity in Southeast Kansas. At the time we were living in New Mexico. With hiking and camping at an arm's reach, I had grown accustomed to outdoor opportunities. When my son was born, we integrated him into our passion for being outdoors. He went on his first hike at 2 months old and we soon discovered being outside was more energizing with a toddler on our backs. We found community and connection when we were outdoors, and it seamlessly integrated into our lifestyle.



My husband is a family medicine physician and always had a passion for practicing in a rural setting. It was hard for me to think about giving up the options a larger City provides. Iola, Kansas – he told me, just think about it.

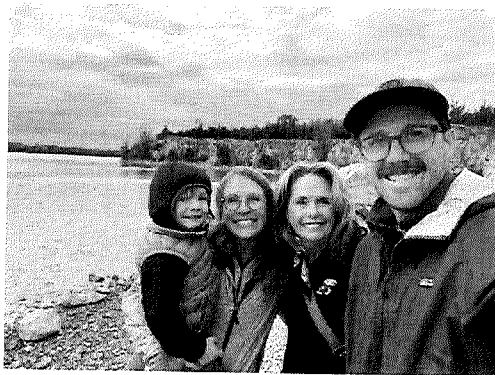
We decided to visit and learn more about the position. The day arrived, and I was encouraged to join in during the day. We were greeted with friendly faces and welcoming personalities. Over the morning we heard an extensive list aligning with Erik's professional passions, but I wasn't convinced we would fit here as a family system. What was something geared for myself and my son? How would we find connection?

The city tour concluded the visit and we were taken out to Lehigh Portland Trails. We walked to the edge of the quarry and for a few moments, I forgot I was in rural Kansas. I saw well maintained trails and a beautiful expansive lake. It was serene. It felt welcoming. It lit up the adventurous spirit within me. Our son was covered in mud with a fistful of “treasures” and a big smile on his face. The other thing I realized--it took us 5-minutes to get there.

This moment was a turning point. I began to start dreaming about living here. My guard went down, and I realized perhaps there are people passionate about the outdoors in small town Kansas too.

It opened my eyes to the energy stirring in Iola. And I then learned there are already people here who are committed to Kansas. They are driven to create community spaces in Kansas centered around healthy living, ranging from mental health to physical health.

My family and I moved to Iola Fall of 2022.



Being outdoors is becoming integral to the lives of generations. There is a strong desire to throw up a hammock or hike while listening to a podcast or shoot outdoor photography. People are looking to unplug from the influx of emails and demands. However, they don't have time to hop on a flight or drive to a neighboring state.

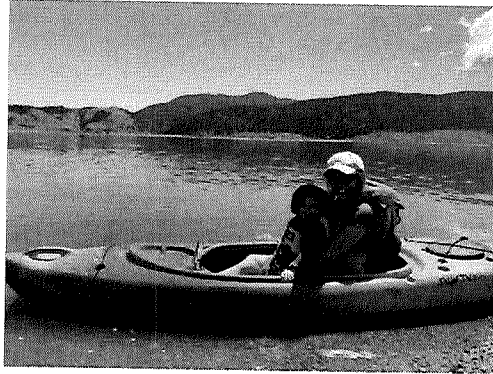
They need accessibility. They need Lehigh Portland State Park.

A few additional examples:

1. Every New Year's Eve – no matter the temperature, a group of 15+ friends hike in the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. They want to get away from the hustle of Kansas City and connect with nature. The catch? They need to be within 2 hours of the City. They could come to Lehigh Portland State Park.



2. My mother-in-law in Western, Kansas bought a kayak. She drives hours to be able to use it. She could come to Lehigh Portland State Park.



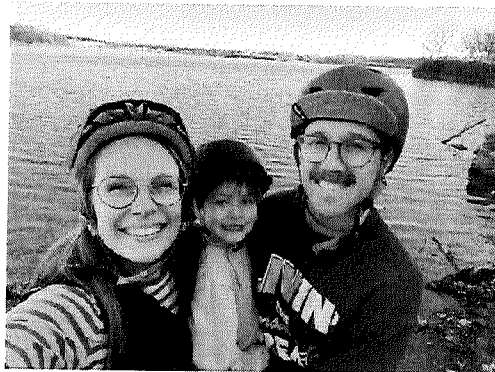
3. Over 25% of the United States employees work remotely. Many are getting drawn to places where outdoor recreation is available. They could escape to Lehigh Portland State Park.

Creating Lehigh Portland State Park will be a legacy Kansans can enjoy for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Maria D Zielinski Unruh

Maria Zielinski Unruh
Resident of Iola, KS



(Unruh family biked to Lehigh Portland Trails from our home in Iola in 10 minutes.

We did a short hike and then biked home. It was a manageable and energizing hour on a Sunday)

February 12, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

We, Curtis and Amy Utley are writing to express our support for **HB2331**, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

Our family has owned and operated a small business (Utley's Iola Auto Body, Inc.) in Iola, Kansas since 1974. Our business is located alongside one of the many new trails that connect to the proposed Lehigh Portland State Park. We see every day how people, young and old, use the trail. It helps our young and old stay active. Adding the State Park designation will further create opportunities for helping our existing businesses survive and provide a beautiful place for others to visit.

We spent a lot of time growing up at the Elks Lake. My parents were Elks members and were responsible for helping to develop the area. It will be nice to have a place where ALL people have access to its beautiful trails and lake.

We envision The Lehigh Portland Park becoming a major destination spot for people all over the country. With climate change, traffic and high cost of living affecting the coastal areas, more and more people are making their way to the central part of the Country. Having a destination like Lehigh Portland Park will make those people want to stay!

Please vote YES to support HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park!

Sincerely,



Curtis and Amy Utley
Residents of Iola, Kansas



Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas

February 10, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chair
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the board, staff and patients of the Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas, am writing to express our support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

Our organization provides healthcare services (medical, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy and related care) throughout the region to more than 72,000 individuals each year. We have sixteen sites across the region and have a full-service site in Lola (which, we are proud to say, is connected to the Prairie Spirit Trail) and a school-based health center in the new Lola Elementary School. We have provided services in Lola since 2008 and currently provide sixty-eight high-paying jobs with excellent benefits in the community.

Overall wellness is a critical focus of our efforts to increase prevention, improve health and reduce the overall cost of care. We have much work ahead of us. In terms of Kansas County Health Rankings, Allen ranks 90th in health outcomes and 93rd in health factors. Additionally, 33% are considered to be physically inactive compared to a state average of 27% and just 59% of Allen Countians have access to exercise opportunities compared to a state rate of 73%.

Designating Lehigh Portland State Park will positively impact the local community by providing additional recreational opportunities, will attract outdoor tourism and, we believe, will be a great advantage in recruiting healthcare providers, which are so desperately needed, to a region of our state that is critically underserved and unhealthy.

Thank you for considering my comments.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jason Wesco'.

Jason Wesco, President and Chief Strategy Officer

February 10th, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I Elizabeth Wilcox, am writing to express my support for HB2331 creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

My family and I recently relocated to lola from Washington State, where we had access to an extensive state park system and countless opportunities to be outdoors and enjoy nature. When we decided to move to the Midwest, we knew finding an area that had outdoor recreation opportunities was very important to us.

The lola area has a unique opportunity to become home to a new state park, Lehigh Portland State Park, where residents and visitors can experience the unique outdoor opportunities that our region has to offer. If Lehigh Portland was designated as a state park, it would ensure the land was properly maintained, improve safety, and provide access to bathrooms, water, and camping. The park would attract visitors from all over the region, state, and beyond. This would result in more opportunity for business, stimulating economic competitiveness in our region.

My husband and I visit the Lehigh Portland Trails often, with our toddler. The thought that we could essentially go camping in our backyard and wake up to the sunrise over the beautiful quarry lake is something that excites us beyond measure. I grew up camping in state parks and I intend to give my son the same opportunities. Having Lehigh Portland State Park near lola would be an enormous asset to our town, the region, and our state. This is an incredible opportunity to invest in our future and add to our state parks system.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Wilcox

Elizabeth Wilcox
Resident of lola



February 10, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

We, Chris and Elizabeth Wehlage, are writing to express our support for HB 2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

As residents of Chanute, Kansas, we regularly visit and utilize the Lehigh Portland trails and lake property for outdoor recreational opportunities. Lehigh Portland provides residents of Southeast Kansas and beyond the opportunity to engage and interact with the outdoors. Through physical exercise or imaginative exploration, the benefits of a recreational outdoor space is invaluable to mental, physical and emotional well being. With a state park designation, this would ensure that not only do Southeast Kansas residents get to continue to enjoy this space with continued improvements but also draw outside tourism to the area by highlighting it among other state parks in Kansas.

We hope that you will take all of the positive opportunities this would create for the citizens and economy of Southeast Kansas into consideration and pass HB 2331.

Sincerely,

Chris and Elizabeth Wehlage
Residents of Chanute, Kansas

February 9, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House agricultural and natural resource committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW. 10th St.
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

As chairman of the board of Thrive Allen County and as someone who has spent time volunteering to create the Lehigh Trails system, I am excited at the prospect of making the site available to a broader group of individuals interested in enjoying Southeast Kansas. My wife, Susan Lynn, and I live on Elm Creek adjacent to the property given to the state by Iola Industries. We now delight in seeing bikers and hikers on the other side of the creek enjoying the outdoors. This is what we hoped would happen when the trails were first developed.

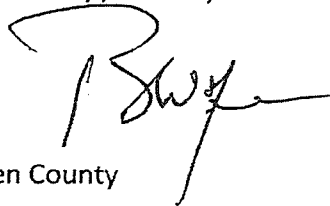
By working together with the state, we now can be assured that our efforts are going to be sustained into the future. Thrive Allen County has been working on the trail system for several years. On our staff today is a Bike and Trails Coordinator. This position, along with the continued support of volunteers, will help sustain the lake and the trail system.

The expansion of the lake's use and the trails will be a game-changer for Allen County and Southeast Kansas. I have talked to numerous people on the trails that have come from other parts of the state or even from Missouri or Oklahoma to enjoy what's been created. The beautiful lake will only add to this attraction.

We look forward to working with the state of Kansas and thank you for your time and effort looking at this wonderful opportunity.

Sincerely yours

Brian Wolfe MD
Chairman Thrive Allen County

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B Wolfe', with a large, stylized initial 'B' at the start.

Ryo Ken Rahjers
Kansas State Capital
300 SW 10th st.
Topeka Co. Mo 66612

Dear Sir

I am writing you about making
a Ko. state Park out of the T. higher
Portland state Park.

This would be very best addition
to the Kansas Park system - the Walking
trails the beautiful lake - the Proximity
to the Highways 54-75, within 100 Miles
to K.C. Wichita - Springfield. This alone
would merit having it here.

Thank you

William Wentzer

144 Meadow Brook rd. W.

Topeka, Kan. 66749

2/9/2023

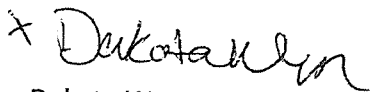
Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

I Dakota Wynn, am writing to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park. I feel by making this a State Park we will be creating a destination camping, lodging, riding area, that is free and open to the public, designed to provide a full spectrum outdoor experience for all ages and a place could hold special events programming that will provide a significant economic impact for the community. I believe that the park will have a positive effect on our community by providing exciting new recreational opportunities that promote positive, healthy, and active outdoor lifestyles, for our local youth, parents and families in addition to providing a significant economic impact by becoming an adventure tourism destination that will be unique in both the state and the region.

I frequently travel outside of the county to other state parks for the purpose of a weekend getaway, camping, fishing, etc. I would love to see this in my hometown where I grew up and would not have to travel to gain this type of experience.

Sincerely,

X 

Dakota Wynn
Resident of Woodson County Kansas