

Testimony of HB 2331 on Naming Lehigh Portland as a Kansas State Park
To
The House Committee on Agriculture
Linda Lanterman
Parks Division Director
Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks

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HB 2331 seeks to amend K.S.A. 32-837, naming Lehigh Portland as a Kansas State Park. The provision of the bill would be effective upon publication in the statute book.

The trail's name pays homage to Allen County's industrial past and specifically to the cement plants present on the site. Iola Portland Cement Company opened in 1900. The plant was purchased in 1917 by the Lehigh Portland Cement Company and operated a major plant in Iola until 1970.

Shortly after the cement plant closure in the 1970s, Iola Industries, a local group of business development organizers purchased the property and proceeded to rent portions of the property. In June 2014, funding for a trails system was secured by way of the Healthy Living grant from the Kansas Health Foundation. Shortly thereafter, community volunteers along with Thrive Allen County, broke ground through an easement granted to the Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy Inc. On June 25th, 2016, the trails officially opened to the public. The following year, 2017, Iola was awarded the Trail Town of the Year by the Kansas Trail Guide, in part due to the creation of the Lehigh Portland Trails.

The main feature of the property is the abandoned quarry that has become a 138-acre lake. The lake is surrounded by riparian woodlands along Elm Creek and glades mixed with native prairie on the higher elevations in the south and east portion. Historic farmsteads are evident at various locations in the eastern portion of the property. There is also a 300-foot-long cave (John Brown's Cave) on the eastern side, a geological rarity that has a long history of being explored by locals for nearly a century. The southwest area has access to the lake for a variety of water recreation. The western side of the property features a pedestrian bridge, The King of Trails Bridge which directly connects to Iola via Washington Ave. The bridge is named after the historic route known as the "King of Trails Highway," a cross-country route connecting Canada to Mexico. The old route has largely been supplanted by US-169 highway.

Not only does the property have rich history worth of preserving, but the diverse landscape and ecosystems on the property is quite amazing and should be maintained for the public to access.

hackberry, bur oak, red oak, persimmon, pawpaw, honey locust, black locust, redbud, black

cherry, eastern redcedar, pecan, sycamore, cottonwood, ash, hickory, mulberry, catalpa, Shumard oak, gum bumelia, kentucky coffee tree, wahoo, basswood, willow, silver maple, privet, dogwood, plum, elm, and Osage orange.

The KDWP Environmental Division was consulted for Threatened and Endangered species on this beautiful landscape. It was noted that there are two species that have been recorded on or near the property. The Spotted sucker (*Minytrema melanops*) and the Ozark dropseed (*Sporobolus ozarkanus*).

Among other things Kansas State Parks are known for is bird watching. Lehigh Portland is one of the most visited spots for birding in southeast Kansas, recording at least 178 different species of birds, according to eBird.org. Fishing is also a great activity popular in State Parks and Elm Creek has been recorded to have 24 species of fish as surveyed by Pittsburg State University.

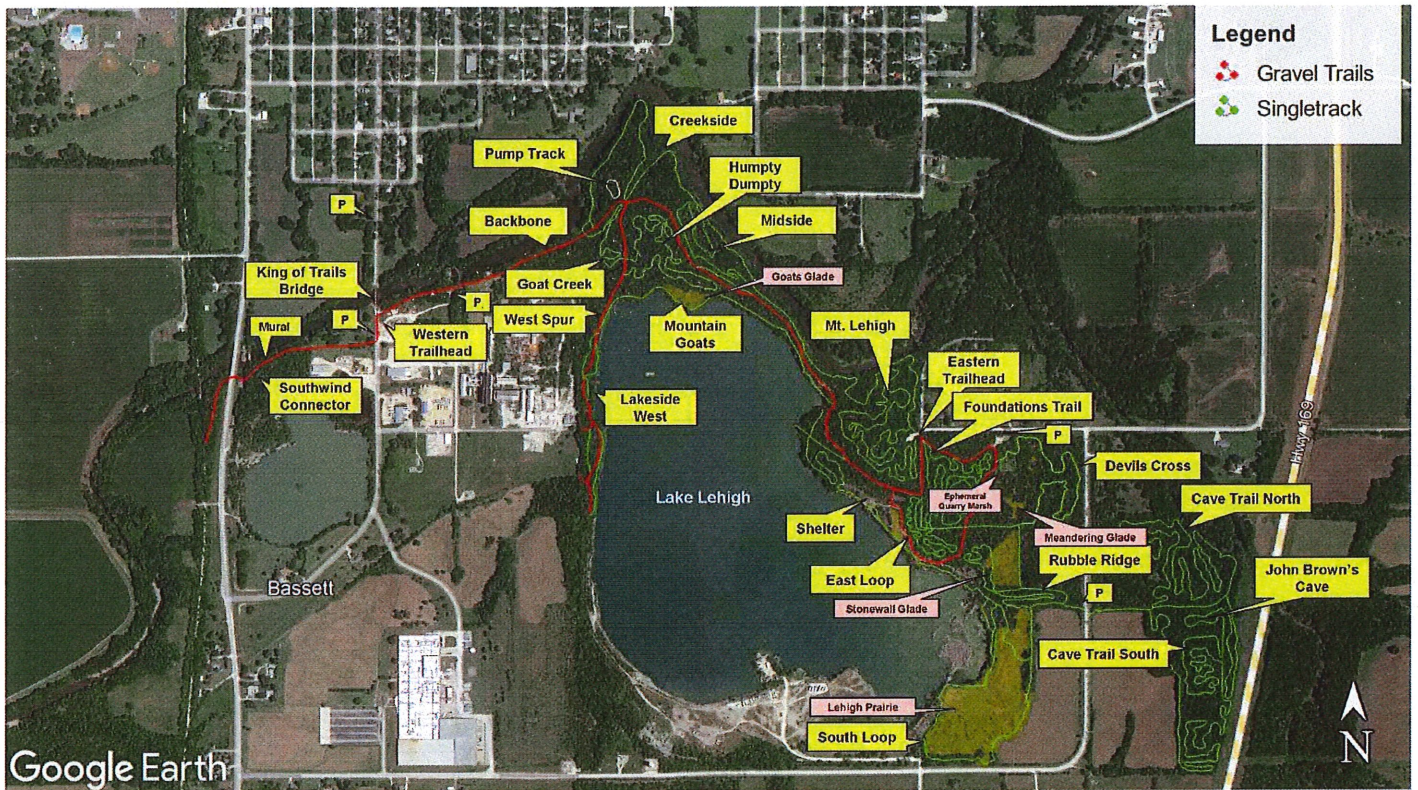
The most important value Kansas State Parks can bring to Lehigh Portland as a state park is the economic impact for the Iola area. State Parks are full of amenities that capture those that are seeking a nature-based quality of life. Activities such as camping, hiking, biking, fishing, and wildlife viewing will be part of the overall master plan. An amphitheater that can host music concerts, outdoor programs, and a gathering place for the community. The Department recognizes the need to establish enhanced facilities for access, safety, community relations, programming, marketing, and enforcement.

In 2021, Kansas State Park had the Center for Economic Development and Business Research at Wichita State University conduct an economic impact study on Kansas State Parks and its impact to Regional and the State Economies. This study showed that Kansas State Parks had a \$287,426,531 million dollar impact to the state economy. The top two activities that people sought in a state park was family time and hiking. Camping was the highest selected primary activity. A total of 6,409 jobs were generated for an estimated 167.3 million dollars in wages. The benefit of outdoor recreation that Kansas State Parks brings to both rural and urban areas are essential to the quality of life that draws in individuals from all walks of life seeking a respite from daily life challenges.

The visitation of Kansas State Parks has expanded rapidly since 2020. This growth has made it a priority to expand our footprint to give the public opportunity to visit other areas to receive the benefits of close-to-home outdoor recreation. Positions needed to oversee and manage this beautiful area into a state park will be used as match for any state or federal grant applications we apply for and receive. Our goal is to provide a beautiful space with activities that all the public can enjoy for generations to come.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to address the Committee and requests favorable passage of the bill.

Addendum



Google Earth



Lehigh Portland Trails
 lola, KS LehighTrails.com
 March 2022

- Online Maps:
- OpenStreetMap.org
 - MTBProject.com
 - Singletracks.com
 - Trailforks.com



Thrive
 Allen County

