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Testimony on SB 331 on Naming Little Jerusalem Badlands And the Flint Hills Trail as Kansas State Parks

To

The House Committee on Agriculture

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Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism

March 7, 2018

SB331 seeks to amend K.S.A. 32-837, naming Little Jerusalem Badlands and the Flint Hills Trail as Kansas State Parks. **The Department requested introduction of the bill.** The provisions of the bill would be effective upon publication in the statute book.

Little Jerusalem Badlands, is located along the Western Vistas Historic Byway in Logan County, approximately halfway between Scott City and Oakley, west of US-83.

Little Jerusalem provides a one-of-a-kind landscape in Kansas and is home to the state's largest Niobrara Chalk formation. Comprised of approximately 350 acres, 250 acres of which contain the Niobrara chalk formations called Little Jerusalem Badlands, the property is nearly one mile in length. (Addendum 1) These chalk badlands provide unique and important habitat for ferruginous hawks, cliff swallows, Say's phoebe and rock wrens, as well as many native amphibians and reptiles. Little Jerusalem is also home to the single largest population of Great Plains wild buckwheat, an endemic plant that is found in the chalk bluffs prairie of western Kansas and nowhere else in the world. In addition to the modern wildlife, fossils of swimming and flying reptiles dating back 85 million years have been found here, though ancient clams and oysters are more common.

The Nature Conservancy acquired ownership of the property in October 2016, at which time they assured the 5th generation rancher they would make every effort to fulfill his request to conserve and preserve the unique landscape while offering public access. To fulfill this obligation, the Nature Conservancy began exploring potential partnerships. After significant discussions, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism agreed to consider serving as the public access partner. The property will continue to be owned by the Nature Conservancy. The Department will enter into a long-term memo of agreement with the Conservancy to manage public access to the property, including, but not limited to access, trail management, law enforcement, emergency management, interpretive programming and marketing. The Department will work collaboratively with the Nature Conservancy and other partnering organizations to support the conservation and preservation of the fragile landscape while simultaneously providing opportunities for the public to experience and explore the unique Kansas landscape.

The Flint Hills Trail is a 117-mile rail banked corridor traversing from Osawatomie in the east to Herington in the west. (Addendum 2) The trail passes through the communities of Rantoul, Ottawa, Pomona, Vassar, Osage City, Miller, Admire, Allen, Bushong and Council Grove. The trail intersects the existing Prairie Spirit Rail Trail State Park in Ottawa.

As its name suggests, the trail crosses the Flint Hills. The Flint Hills represent one of the last remaining tallgrass prairie ecosystems in the world. It is home to abundant prairie plant and wildlife species, spectacular views, national historic sites and a diverse set of recreational areas. The eastern portions of the route travels alongside the Marais Des Cygnes River, between rushing waters and towering bluffs, through rolling farmland and riparian woodlands.

The Flint Hills Trail is the seventh-longest rail-trail in America and the longest trail in Kansas. It follows the general route of the Santa Fe National Historic Trail and forms a component of the coast-coast American Discovery Trail.

The Flint Hills Trail is built on the railway that was once operated by Missouri Pacific (MoPac). MoPac discontinued railway service on the line in the 1980's and subsequently railbanked through the Surface Transportation Board by the Kansas Horseman Foundation. After a series of events, the Kansas Horseman Foundation was re-organized and changed its name with the Secretary of State's office to the Kanza Rail Trails Conservancy.

Recognizing the recreational and economic potential of the trail, the Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy took on the monumental task of developing the trail. This group is comprised of volunteers whose energy and drive was demonstrated by their many hours of service over the years. However, to fully realize the completion and value of the 117-mile trail, the volunteers needed assistance.

In 2013, the Conservancy partnered with Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism to apply for and accept a Federal Highway Administration Transportation Alternatives Grant allowing significant development to occur. The Department serves as the administrator of the grants. This and subsequent grants have allowed significant progress. The trail is now traversable from Osawatomie to Council Grove. Work is proceeding on some sections to improve the trail to desired standards and to add expected amenities.

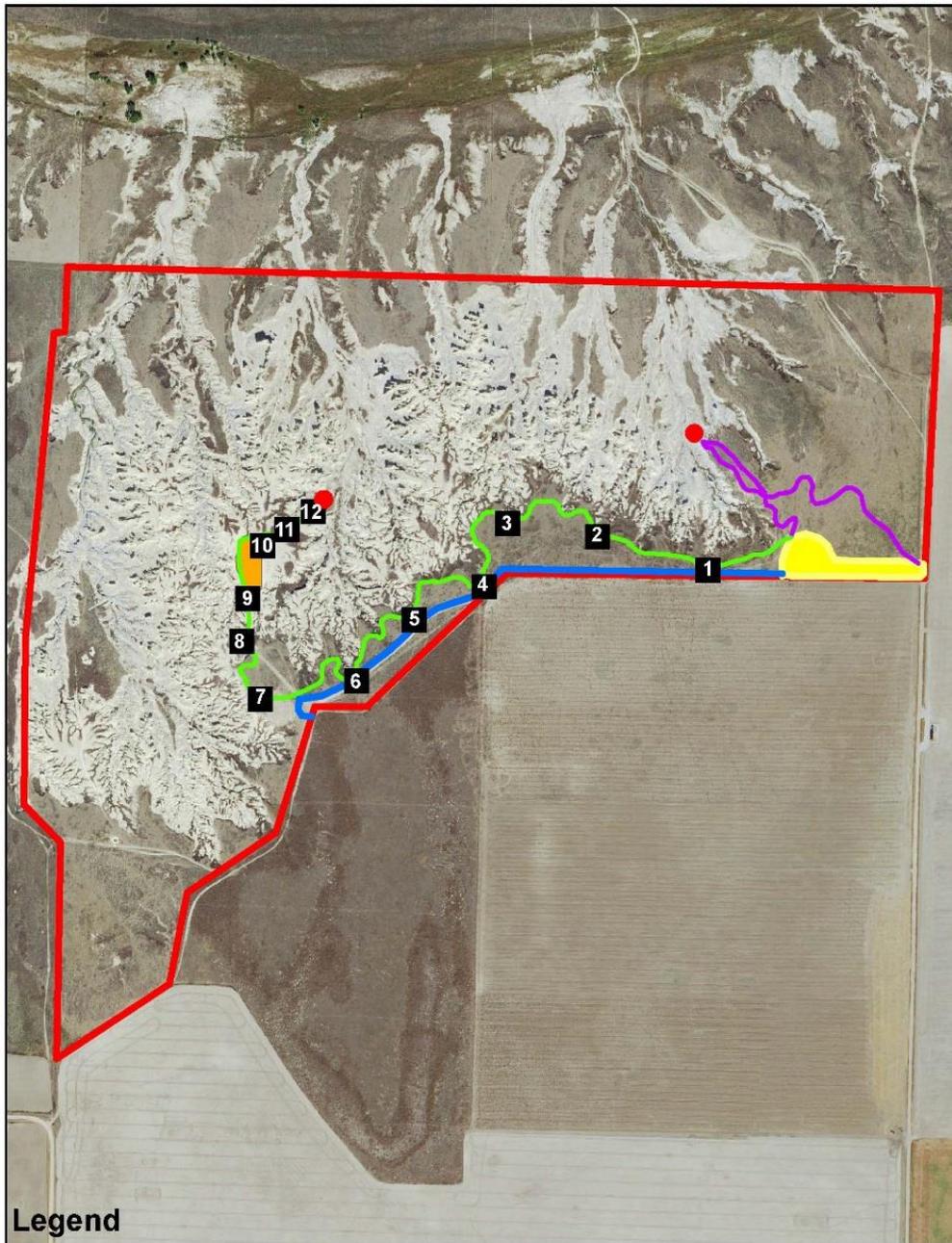
Constituent and visitor use of the trail is expanding rapidly. The Department recognizes the need to establish enhanced systems for access, maintenance, safety, community relations, programming, marketing and enforcement. Due to the proximity of Prairie Spirit Rail Trail, Pomona and Eisenhower State Parks, the Department is well positioned to assume these responsibilities.

Recognizing the recreational and economic value of Little Jerusalem Badlands and the Flint Hills Trail, the Department enthusiastically supports SB 331 to designate these two Kansas destinations as part of the state park system.

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

Addendum 1

The Nature Conservancy's Little Jerusalem Badlands
Draft Public Access Detail

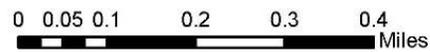


Legend

-  Post Rock Trail Markers (estimated location)
-  Rim Trail to Overlook (estimated location ~1.25 mi.)
-  Interpretive Trail (~0.56 mi.)
-  Well Pad (1.2 acres)
-  Parking Area (2.8 acres 2200' perimeter)

The Nature Conservancy 
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

 Overlook

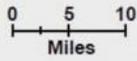


Addendum 2



Flint Hills Nature Trail

Prepared by the
 Kansas Department of Transportation
 Bureau of Transportation Planning
 June 7, 2013



- City
- State Park
- Flint Hills Nature Trail
- Prairie Spirit Trail
- Railbanked Corridor
- Trail Concept
- Biking/Hiking Trails
- Park
- Incorporated City

