



**P.O. Box 3863
Topeka, Kansas 66604-0863**

www.kanzatrails.org

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Written Testimony in Support of SB 331

My name is Scott Allen; I am a resident of Council Grove and the Vice President of the Kanza Rail Trails Conservancy, Inc. The Kanza Rail Trails Conservancy currently manages the Flint Hills Trail and the Landon Nature Trail. I would like to voice my support for SB 331 and encourage the Committee to pass it without amendments.

The 117-mile Flint Hills Trail runs from Herington to Osawatomie and is the major artery in a network of trails throughout eastern Kansas over 200 miles long. The network includes the 51-mile Prairie Spirit Trail State Park which begins south of Iola and ends shortly after crossing the Flint Hills Trail in Ottawa , and the 38-mile Landon Nature Trail that begins at the Brown v. Board National Historic Site in Topeka and ends where it meets the Flint Hills Trail near Quinemo. These three trails allow bicyclists, equestrians and hikers to travel east from Herington to Osawatomie and South from Topeka to Iola. The Flint Hills Trail is the seventh longest rail-trail in the country and is part of the American Discovery Trail that runs coast to coast.

For many communities along the trail the railroad was the only industry in town. When the rails were removed the communities were devastated. The trail provides an opportunity for those communities to make a name for themselves and recoup the dollars that were lost when the railroad left. Businesses and communities along the trail regularly receive calls from trail users looking for recreational opportunities and places to eat and sleep while they are traveling along the trail.

The Kanza Rail Trails Conservancy have been maintaining and developing the trail since 2001, opening almost 80 miles of the trail. In 2012 we began working with the KDWPT, leveraging federal grants to upgrade what has already been developed and open new sections. The goal is to create a trail that is as good or better than the world famous Katy Trail in Missouri. Today the trail is traversable 96 miles from Osawatomie to Council Grove and the Kanza Rail Trails Conservancy has accomplished a great deal in developing and maintaining it, but in order to reach the goal of creating a world class trail that attracts users from all over the planet and maximize its economic development potential it needs the professional management, law enforcement, and promotion that the State can provide.

It's time to take the Flint Hills Trail to the next level. I encourage you to support SB 331 without amendments and add the Flint Hills Trail to the State Park System.

Scott Allen

Vice President, Kanza Rail-Trails Conservancy, Inc. Council Grove, KS (785) 466-1417