

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

February 16, 2023

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 25<sup>th</sup>, 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.

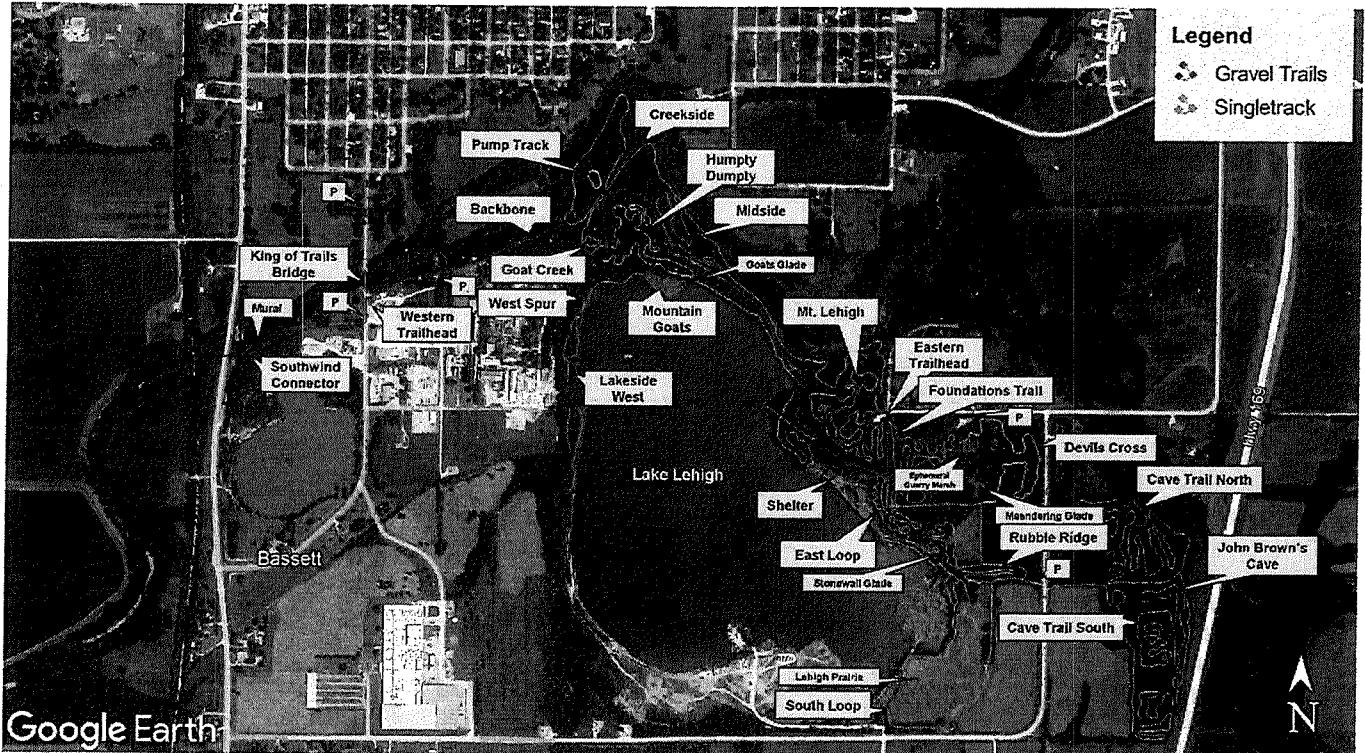
The most important value Kansas State Parks can bring to Lehigh Portland as a state park is the economic impact for the Iola area. State Parks are full of amenities that capture those that are seeking a nature-based quality of life. Activities such as camping, hiking, biking, fishing, and wildlife viewing 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



**Lehigh Portland Trails**  
Iola, KS  
March 2022  
[LehighTrails.com](http://LehighTrails.com)

Online Maps:  
 • [OpenStreetMap.org](http://OpenStreetMap.org)  
 • [MTBProject.com](http://MTBProject.com)  
 • [Singletracks.com](http://Singletracks.com)  
 • [Trailforks.com](http://Trailforks.com)



**Thrive**  
Allen County



# THRIVE ALLEN COUNTY

February 11, 2023

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

Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,  
My name is Lisse Regehr and I am writing today to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

I moved back home to Iola, Kansas in October 2014 after living in Minnesota for a decade. I made the move back home because there was so much happening to make our community a better place. I was unexpectedly surprised to see one of the biggest areas of progress was in the creation of trails and recreational areas. In a community where it's difficult to walk safely because we have few sidewalks, having access to beautiful public spaces that allow for safe walking and biking is so important. I was able to move home because I received a job at Thrive Allen County, who was leading the efforts in creating a healthier, growing, vibrant community. I have been proud and honored to be part of the efforts through my work at Thrive. This includes being a part of the volunteer group that created the Lehigh Portland Trail system. When I first started at Thrive, the Lehigh Portland Trail creation was just underway. There were no limestone screenings laid, there were just pathways cut through most of the area where we wanted to see the trails crisscross the property. To go from that to what Lehigh is today was an amazing undertaking that so many volunteers in our community took on, because they valued what this would mean to our community.

Even before the Lehigh Portland Trails were complete in 2016, we were already able to show their promise to people we were recruiting into town. In February of 2015, one of our health clinics was recruiting a dentist to Iola. We were able to take him, his wife and their three children to Lehigh, even though it was unfinished and show them what it would be. The wife exclaimed that she never thought she could feel like she was in Colorado (where she is originally from) while in Kansas. She wanted to move to a place where she could work on becoming healthier. The beauty of Lehigh and the promise of a trail system she could utilize was one of the main reasons they picked our community to live. They are still here today, and she credits Lehigh for saving her life through allowing a space for her to become healthier. Since 2016 when the Lehigh Portland trail system became open to the public, it has become our community's number one recruitment tool. Every professional candidate we are asked to tour around our community is taken to Lehigh. And every one of them is astonished at what they find. We were able to attract three doctors to town in the space of a 3 month period of time recently, and this amenity was one of the biggest reasons why. Our cross country coach at Allen Community College has credited Lehigh for winning Nationals. He has told us as soon as his recruits visit Lehigh, they tell him they are

**9 S. Jefferson Avenue | Iola, KS 66749 | 620-365-8128 | [info@thriveallencounty.org](mailto:info@thriveallencounty.org)**

ready to sign because they know they won't find a better training area. In fact, this area is used by multiple high school cross country teams and college teams.

Lehigh is also a wonderful spot to take children for educational activities. The local elementary and preschools utilize Lehigh Portland for field trips to allow for science and nature activities. Thrive created an education area on the Eastern Trailhead to assist teachers as they bring their students to the trails. In the summer, the science camp at Allen Community College utilizes Lehigh for exploring and further education. It has been mentioned that visiting Lehigh is much better than putting our kids on buses to go hours on a field trip to the city. It was so much easier and interesting to explore what our community has to offer in our own backyard: fossils, caves, birds, snakes, deer, fish, trails, flowers, and so many plant species.

Lehigh has become the gem of our community and we are very proud of that fact. We have had businesses open in Allen County because they see the value the trails have to offer. Local business owners are very excited about the opportunity to open the entire property to the public, meaning more people will be visiting our community: eating in our restaurants, shopping in our stores, staying in our airbnbs and hotels. Both Iola and Humboldt have seen growth over the past couple of years in regard to new small businesses. The creation of Lehigh Portland State Park will provide stability and growth for years to come as visitors stop into our towns as they visit Lehigh.

Lehigh Portland Trails have been credited for providing people a safe and beautiful space to become healthier and more active. We have many community members who have used Lehigh as part of their daily routine, ensuring they are walking, biking or running to stay healthy. They also use it for better mental and emotional health. Spending more time in nature allows for our residents to decompress. Studies show that time in nature allow for better overall health outcomes. During the height of the COVID pandemic we saw a massive surge in parks and recreational area usages. American Trails noted usage of outdoor space was up 79% between March and July of 2022, showing a need for these spaces, especially in rural communities where they are often lacking.

More than anything, this gift given by Iola Industries to the State of Kansas is about preserving our rural way of life. Rural communities in Kansas are on the decline. On average we are losing population and businesses. Allen County is no different, but we are working to turn this . In 2017, Allen County won the Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health Prize—to date we are the only Kansas community to receive this honor—and it wasn't because we were the healthiest community—far from it—but because we are scrappy, resourceful and collaborate to ensure we create opportunities and knock down barriers. The gift of Lehigh Portland to create a state park is one of those opportunities. In a day and age where many people can work remotely, how do rural communities become a place those workers want to live? How do we ensure awe inspiring environments like Lehigh are open and available to the public for generations to come?


Kansas ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation for access to public lands. As our urban areas grow, we want to ensure that safe havens and respites like Lehigh Portland are accessible to Kansans and others wanting to

discover our beautiful landscapes. Missouri, Oklahoma and Arkansas are in Southeast Kansas' backyard. Instead of losing tourism and dollars to these states, we can instead attract those people into Kansas with this beautiful asset located within 30 minutes of Missouri, one hour from Oklahoma, and 2.5 hours from Arkansas. We want to show our neighbors why we are so proud to be Kansans and all the beauty our state has to hold.

One of the unique opportunities with the Lehigh property is the collaboration Thrive Allen County would have with KDWP in the resources and funding areas. Thrive is a very well established grant writing organization. In the past two years alone, we have brought more than \$7 million into local government and nonprofit entities in Allen County. This is not funding that came to Thrive—we wrote our own grants as well—but instead funding that was written for the express intent of other entities in our community. As Lehigh is currently privately owned, there are few grant funding opportunities for the area, but when it becomes publicly owned, that all changes, and Thrive is excited to partner with KDWP to ensure Lehigh has abundant resources for its growth and sustainability. Thrive also currently has two team members whose sole jobs are bikes and trails. Over the past couple of years, their work has been very specific to Lehigh. We plan to continue to work with KDWP, as long as they would like our assistance. Our team already has a cadre of volunteers to work on Lehigh. Those volunteers have made Lehigh into what it is today, and they want to continue to partner with KDWP to ensure its growth and sustainability in the future.

The creation of Lehigh Portland State Park would be a game changer for Allen County, Southeast Kansas, and the State of Kansas. It holds boundless opportunities for exploration, recreation, adventure and education. I truly believe Lehigh Portland will be one of the top assets in the state of Kansas' Wildlife and Parks portfolio. I am an enthusiastic supporter of HB2331!

Thank you for your time,



Lisse Regehr

President and CEO, Thrive Allen County

Iola Industries Board Member

Resident of Allen County

02/13/2023

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

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

I am John McRae, President of Iola Industries, Inc. The fifteen-member board of Iola Industries unanimously supports the House Bill introduced by Representative Fred Gardner on February 2 proposing the creation of the Lehigh Portland State Park.

Iola Industries is an all-volunteer economic development organization that has served Allen County since 1955. The site of the proposed park was acquired by Iola Industries from the Lehigh Portland Cement Company in 1971. About ten years ago the Lehigh Portland Trails were developed north of the ninety-acre lake under the direction of Thrive Allen County. The trails have taken on a life of their own. Developed almost entirely by volunteers, they have become a unique destination unequalled anywhere else in the State. The trails would of course also be included in our gift to the State.

Until the first of the year, the Lake had been under the stewardship of our local Elks Lodge. As such it was a beautiful backdrop to the trails but was not accessible to anyone other than members of the Elks organization. We recently terminated our lease with the Elks in anticipation of transferring ownership to the State of Kansas for the benefit of the general public.

Our board had always seen the lake as a potential attraction for an industry that consumed large amounts of water. The area surrounding the lake was so overgrown that a deer would have found it difficult to find a place to lie down.

Thrive Allen County, an organization that exists to promote wellness and good health for Allen Countians, opened our eyes to the tremendous potential for recreation that combining the trails and the lake present. Our board concluded that the best use of this property would be to make it available to the public, realizing that its development as a State Park would help preserve the legacy of cement production in Kansas and undoubtedly provide an economic benefit to area businesses.

Sincerely,



John McRae, President, Iola Industries, Inc

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 John Masterson and I am writing in support of HB 2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park. I am a lifelong Kansan and except for college, the Navy, and four years on the Student Services staff at Emporia State University, a lifelong resident of Iola. I recently retired from Allen County Community College after a 40-year career at the College, the last 30 as its President.

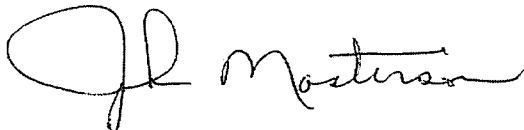
I have been on the Executive Board of Iola Industries, Inc. for more than ten years and the lake and surrounding land becoming a State Park would be a dream come true for our organization. Even though the lake area is Iola Industries' most valuable asset, our desire has always been for it to become a public place. The lake and surrounding trails' ability to attract visitors from across Kansas and provide recreation and enjoyment to our area residents would make them a great benefit to attracting business and industry to our area. It would also benefit the recruitment of potential employees for those businesses and industries.

Thinking about the 300+ students housed at the community college or nearby, I can visualize students checking out bike-share bicycles from the College, riding the two blocks to get on the Southwind Trail and then being able to ride to the Lehigh Portland Lake entirely on existing trails, where they could picnic, swim, and enjoy the outdoors. What a fantastic benefit to the mental and physical health of the young people we serve!

Selfishly, as an elderly gentleman, it is important that I, and those like me, take advantage of opportunities for healthy recreation. I have been an avid user of our trail system since it was established. The addition of this beautiful lake and its surrounding area will make me a regular there and I will add swimming and boating to my walking activities.

I urge you to support this legislation to make Lehigh Portland Lake a reality. Thank you for your service to our State.

Sincerely,

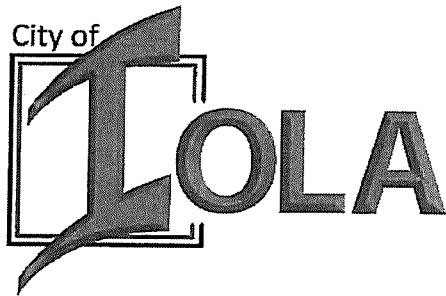
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Masterson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

John Masterson

Vice President Iola Industries

President Allen County Community College - Retired





February 14, 2023

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

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

The City of Iola is proud to express support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

The City of Iola sees Lehigh Portland's designation as an opportunity to improve the lives of the citizens of Iola and southeast Kansas. The designation will enrich the fabric of our community by increasing recreation opportunities for boating, fishing, and swimming. The state park will provide a trail system for increased physical activity for walkers, runners and bicyclists.

Additionally, the state park provides the opportunity to become an economic hub for the City of Iola and other southeast Kansas communities. Establishing the Lehigh Portland State Park also presents the unique opportunity of establishing a state park within the city limits of Iola.

Sincerely,

Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is "Steven C. French" and the second is "Matthew S. Rehder".

Steven C. French,  
Mayor  
City of Iola

Matthew S. Rehder,  
City Administrator  
City of Iola

Iola City Council Members:

Josiah D'Albini  
Nickolas Kinder  
Joel Wicoff  
Carl Slaugh  
Nicholas Lohman  
Kim Peterson  
Joelle Sallah  
Mark Peters

## PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the City of Iola is proud to be considered for a Kansas State Park, which will improve the lives of Iola and southeast Kansas citizens; and

WHEREAS, a state park will enrich the fabric of our community; and

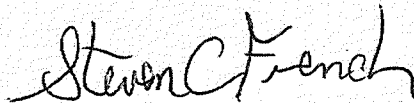
WHEREAS, a state park provides recreational opportunities for boating, fishing, and swimming; and

WHEREAS, a state park will provide a trail system for increased physical activity for walkers, runners and bicyclists; and

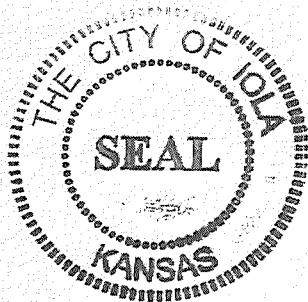
WHEREAS, a state park can become an economic hub for the City of Iola and other southeast Kansas communities; and

WHEREAS, this occasion presents such a moment with the opportunity to establish the Lehigh Portland State Park within the city limits of the City of Iola; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that I, Steven French, Mayor of Iola, Kansas, and the members of the Iola City Council, do hereby declare our support for the establishment of the Lehigh Portland State Park.



Steven French  
Mayor  
City of Iola



7 February 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman  
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
Kansas State Capital  
300 SW 10<sup>th</sup> St.  
Topeka, Kansas 66612

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

The Allen County Commissioners support the proposed Lehigh Portland State Park.

Allen County has experienced increased tourism from the existing Rail Trail systems. We believe that turning the Lehigh Portland area into a state park, and with its connection to the Rail Trails, local and regional economies will benefit. Additionally, like many counties in the Midwest, Allen County has struggled with population loss. This park will be a catalyst for reversing that trend.

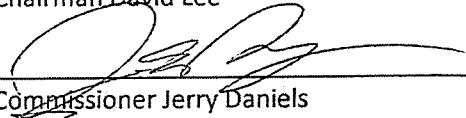
Lehigh Portland State Park would be a safe and beautiful place for families to gather for recreation. What a quality-of-life enhancer it would be for all that use it.

The proposed Lehigh Portland State Park, with its 360 acres of water, diverse landscape, and connection to the existing Rail Trails system, would benefit Allen Countians, Kansans, and all who use it for many years into the future.

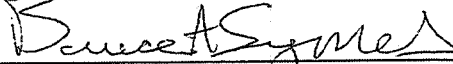
Respectfully,



Chairman David Lee



Commissioner Jerry Daniels



Commissioner Bruce Symes



02/08/2023

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

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

My name is Jeff Carroll and I am the owner of Ottawa Bike and Trail. We are a full-service bicycle shop in Ottawa, Kansas at the intersection of the Flint Hills Trail and Prairie Spirit Trail State Parks. I am writing to provide support for the State Park designation for the Lehigh Portland Trails near Iola.

I think our experience as a trail-friendly business is a testament to how investments in trails can generate economic activity and quality-of-life benefits in a community. **I believe the investment in the Lehigh Portland trails will have a significant impact on the economy in the area by attracting tourists, visitors, and new businesses to the area.**

We opened our business in October 2018 because we saw the enormous opportunity for our local trails to attract cyclists, tourists, and businesses to the area. As cycling and trail enthusiasts, we've visited trails all over the country and around the world and have seen firsthand the positive impacts that a well-planned trail system can have on the economy and quality of life in the communities that embrace it.

We decided to put our business in Ottawa Kansas because we saw the amount of investment the state, county, and city were making to expand the state park trail system. These initial investments have led to increased interest and economic activity all along the trail. For example, several new privately owned camping areas for cyclists and trail users have become big draws. Base Camp Humboldt and Base Camp Flint Hills are attracting visitors to parts of the state that were never considered tourist attractions. We've also seen many "trail-friendly" businesses starting up in towns all along the trails. We know of two new breweries, multiple coffee shops, a new bookstore, several local gift shops, and other businesses. In talking to these business owners it is clear that the increased activity and investments in the trails were significant factors in their decision to open for business.

I know that our experience with trail investments in Kansas is not unique. The same stories are happening all over the country where trail investments are being made. I recently visited Northwest Arkansas and I was blown away by the activity in the small towns like Bentonville, Rogers, and Bella Vista which have all worked together to form the OZ Trail System. Northwest, Arkansas, and the OZ Trail System has moved beyond a state and regional draw to become recognized as one of the best recreational trail areas in the world!

**I believe investments in the Lehigh Portland trails will increase tourism in the region.** In the three and a half years that we have been in business, we've seen exponential growth in the number of people using the trails in our area. We've seen significant growth not only by the local users but we've also seen people coming from all over the state, the region, and the country to enjoy the trails. This growth has been good for our business but also for other businesses like hotels, restaurants, and other stores. While we were seeing significant growth before Covid-19 the growth during the pandemic accelerated as people were seeking healthy outdoor activities for their families. This level of usage has continued to grow.

**Perhaps the biggest reason to make Lehigh Portland Trails a State Park is that it will dramatically increase the value of the connected Prairie Spirit Trail and Flint Hills Trail State Parks.** Leigh Portland Trails will diversify the trail offerings by connecting 14 miles of single-track (mountain bike trails) to the existing 200+ miles of rail trail and create an outdoor space for camping and other activities that will benefit all trail users. This additional attraction will provide a more diverse trail offering and increase tourism by attracting a much broader audience of cyclists and outdoor visitors. This will provide another reason for visitors to bring their families to extend their stay in the area.

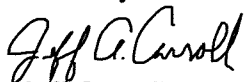
The Unbound Gravel Race in Emporia has put Kansas on the map and made Kansas a destination for cyclists. This event brings an estimated \$6 million in economic benefits to Emporia in a single weekend! Cyclists from all over the world travel to Kansas to enjoy the wide-open spaces, traffic-free roads, and beautiful scenery that Kansas provides. However, the audience for an event like Unbound Gravel is fairly narrow as riders must be fit enough to complete a 100-200 mile race on gravel roads.

**Adding the Lehigh Portland Trails as a State Park will expand Kansas's reputation as a cycling destination while adding an attraction that can draw younger riders and families to the area.** The audience for Leigh High Portland Trails is much broader and can be used by riders and walkers of any experience level. The Leigh High Portland Trails are especially important because it adds a missing element, mountain bike trails, to the existing mostly rail-trail offerings. Linear rail trails like the Prairie Spirit and Flint Hills trails are flat and cover long distances which generally attracts older cyclists. Mountain bike trails attract younger riders and families who may not be interested in riding on a linear rail trail.

I believe strongly in this project and I hope that my input is beneficial in helping move it forward.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of any further assistance with this project.

Sincerely,



Jeff Carroll

Ottawa Bike and Trail

[jeff@ottawabikeandtrail.com](mailto:jeff@ottawabikeandtrail.com)

913-951-1070

February 13, 2023

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



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

My name is Jody Hoener and I am the President of Healthy Bourbon County Action Team. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

The last ten years has led me to many community and business development activities, — including increasing access to alternative transportation and creating spaces for public recreational activities.

I am honored to be here today to support the creation of Lehigh Portland State Park. Living in a county just East of Allen County, I have had the opportunity to visit and experience the Lehigh Portland area many times: on bike and on foot. It is a beautiful amenity that allows for anyone who knows it is there to take advantage of the more than 14 miles of trails throughout the property, as well as scenic vistas and overlooks.

I see many community leaders and advocates here who have worked diligently on Lehigh in many aspects: volunteers who have created the trails, Lola Industries members who have gifted land and allowed for the creation of trails to spur economic growth in our region, county and city representation that supports these efforts because they know how important they are to the vitality and sustainability of our rural areas. So many people have had integral parts to play in the process of bringing Lehigh Portland Trails to fruition. So many people are hopeful the next step in the future of this amenity is Lehigh Portland State Park.

I have worked alongside many of the volunteers and staff who have put their literal blood, sweat and tears into creating Lehigh Portland into what it is today. Together we also created a regional trail network connecting Allen, Bourbon and Crawford counties called, Prairie Pathways. This work intermingles so well into the creation of Lehigh Portland State Park. The Prairie Pathways route runs very close to Lehigh. And Lehigh is already connected into the Prairie Spirit State Park and the Southwind Rail Trail (an all-volunteer built and maintained trail). So many paths already lead directly into Lehigh!

As a region, we have seen the positive economic impact trails have made on property value, business climate, health outcomes and overall quality of life. Beyond that, increasing access to

outdoor recreation is an evidence-based solution to health outcomes and thereby directly impacts workforce growth goals.



It is widely understood that business' follow where the talent pool is, and people live where they can enjoy a quality of life. This means living in a community that allows families access to diverse recreational opportunities and to safe non-motorized transportation options.

The creation of Lehigh Portland State Park will have positive local, regional, and statewide impacts for future generations to come. It leverages local strengths and maximizes return on investment. Infrastructure will be built to incentivize tourism, encourage rural revitalization, build healthy populations, and create business friendly environments.

As a region we have seen the positive impact on many goals whether they are economic, community, tourism, health outcomes, and so much more. We certainly have every reason to celebrate this opportunity Lola Industries is providing by gifting the state Lehigh Portland with the intent of it becoming a state park.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to future of Lehigh Portland State Park and all the benefits it will have for the state of Kansas, especially those of us in southeast Kansas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jody Hoener".

Jody Hoener

Resident of Bourbon County

02/08/2023

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

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

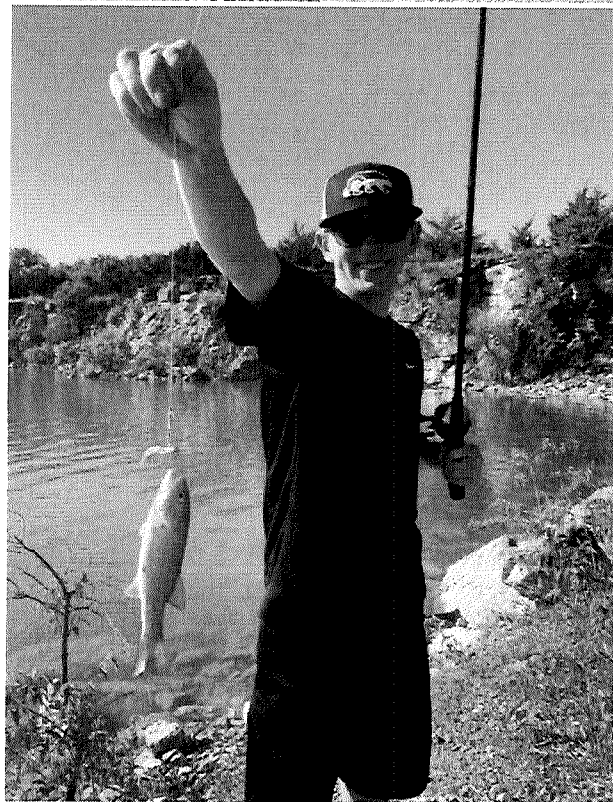
I Brock Godinez, am writing to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

- Making Lehigh Portland a state park would benefit lola and definitely the rest of the Southeast Kansas area. This is because, in the surrounding towns, I haven't seen trails as impressive as the ones in lola. Also, the other towns do have lakes however, they're not as stunning as Elks lake which is an amazing spot for multiple activities and could be even better with state funding and oversight.
- For four years and even before I was a member of the Chanute cross country team our coach would have a Saturday practice from time to time on the lola trails. These trails are perfect for cross country and any running in general. The scenery around is very beautiful and you don't get bored of it even after miles. Some of the trails are more inclosed in trees which looks stunning to walk or run through. It definitely feels like going on an adventure. My family has also enjoyed walking the trails and fishing before we were unable to due to no fishing. However, we still take our dogs down quite frequently and our dogs absolutely enjoy every bit of it as well.
- lola and the surrounding cities will benefit greatly from the tourist that will stay overnight at our local hotels and dine at our restaurants. The tax revenue generated will likely be more than any other tourist attraction in Southeast Kansas.
- The lake and trails of this park are absolutely spectacular for the surrounding cities that don't have these amazing spots where they live. It is perfect for nature lovers, fishermen, runners, and dog walkers and could be even better with the guidance of the state.

Sincerely,

Brock Godinez  
Resident of Chanute  
Chanute High School Class of 2023









# Pittsburg State University

Kansas Polymer Research Center

Tyler Research Center  
1204 Research Road  
Pittsburg, KS 66762  
620-235-6120

February 12, 2023

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

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

My name is Darrell Pulliam and I am employed by Pittsburg State University, a founding member of the Prairie Pathways multi-county bike route, local business owner, previous professional BMX cyclist, and lifelong cycling advocate. I am writing to express my support for [HB2331](#), creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

Throughout my life I have had the opportunity to ride trails, roads, and single-track trails in over 40 states. I have found the trail systems in Iowa, specifically the Lehigh Portland Trails, are comparable to some of the best trail systems in the country. I visit often, and each time I visit, I see cyclists from outside the region and state. This place has organically become a tourist destination.

Studies show that individuals will ride their bikes to places they consider a destination. This is true in my case, as I have occasionally ridden from Pittsburg Kansas to Iowa and spent the night to enjoy the outdoor recreation. The scenery and backdrop of the trail is remarkable and absolutely an asset to capitalize on.

In addition to tourism potential, trails are an amenity that enhance quality of life and encourage economic growth by building business friendly environments. Much of the workforce we are targeting to recruit, or to stay, require such readily available access to outdoor recreation activities.

A healthy community is the foundation to a thriving economy. The Prairie Pathways Bike Route connects three counties in Southeast Kansas: Allen, Bourbon and Crawford. We are actively working and collaborating as a region to address disparities, health inequities, and the social determinants of health so we can all benefit from a rise in population, property valuations, health outcomes, and more.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to the future Lehigh Portland State Park and all the opportunity it provides for those regardless of socio-economic status, background, or ability.

Sincerely,

Darrell Pulliam  
Resident of Crawford County

February 7, 2023

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

Chairman Rahjes,

Ken – Bret Greenwood here – when I said, “talk with you soon,” after our conversation during the Trails Appreciation Day on January 30, I had no idea it would be this soon!

I understand that the gifting of the Lehigh Portland park to Kansas Wildlife and Parks was hush-hush back then. Now that it’s out in the open, I want to lend my support to its receipt and designation as a Kansas State Park.

If you remember my story, I moved out to Plainville almost nine years ago to be closer to my retired parents. The first thing that I noticed, and missed, was the easy access to trails that I enjoyed in the eastern part of the state, especially Topeka and Lyndon. There simply was no place close by out here to cycle safely and easily (gravel grinding is not restful to me).

What’s been accomplished with the Lehigh Portland trails is simply delightful and inspiring for other counties and organizations across the state. It’s not about east-vs-west, but about showcasing our rural landscapes with trails and amenities that are popular with the masses.

I’m sure you’ll receive other letters which speak to the impact parks and trails have on commerce, tourism, healthy living and so on. All true! I want to emphasize the importance of this park as being accessible – a rural, or at least “small town,” destination within easy reach of other larger communities.

The initial phase of heavy lifting is complete: a beautiful location, with trails and amenities built with the local, and larger, community in mind. As a Kansas State Park, the uniqueness of the Lehigh Portland will be preserved and augmented for even greater access by all Kansans and beyond.

Please share my support with the other members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. I thank you for your consideration!



Bret Greenwood  
Kansas native living at Plainville, Rooks county

February 9, 2023

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

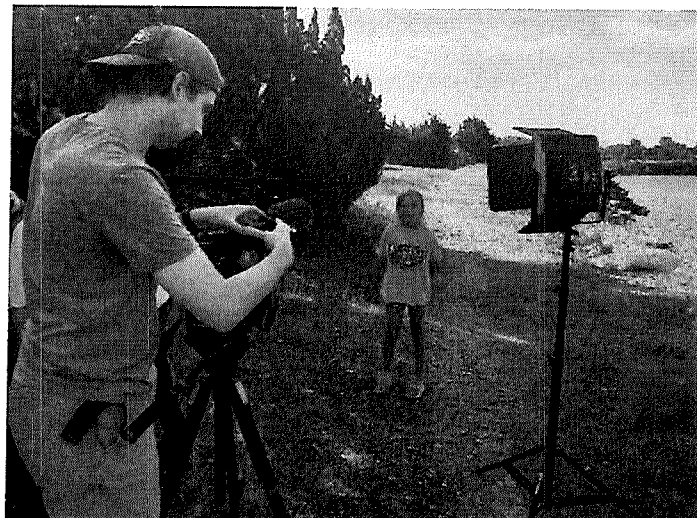
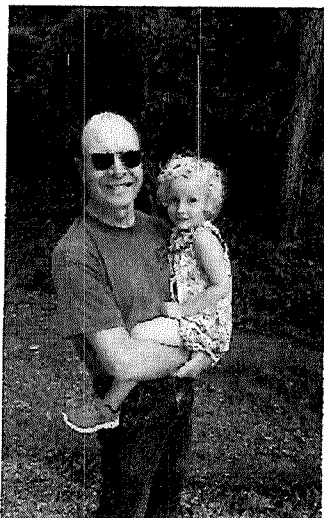
Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

Hi! My name is Moira Springer, and I am a ten-year-old resident of Allen County. I am writing to express my support for HB2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

In 2014, my dad and older brother started to help build the Lehigh Portland Trail System with many other volunteers. I would get to go out and play while they would cut trees, clear paths, and burn brush creating a new space for me and so many others to safely explore and play within. I have seen this property when there were no trails there, and I have watched it grow into the beautiful area it is today.

I have been able to explore John Brown's Cave and go all the way through it with my friends. And one night we got to see the Super Moon from Lehigh: it was beautiful!

I hope you create Lehigh Portland State Park out of this property that I love so much. This would mean that when I am older and have my own kids, we could spend time out there like I get to with my family now. It would mean that if my kids have kids...they could do the same. And it means kids from all over the state, and surrounding states, can come visit my community and see how beautiful southeast Kansas is.



*Left pic: Grandpa and me on the trails in 2016 (I was 4) a month before they opened.  
Right pic: I was asked to talk about how much I love Lehigh Portland for a video about green spaces in 2022 (I was 9).*

Thank you,

*Moira Springer*

Moira Springer  
Resident of Allen County

February 13, 2023

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

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

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

I have had the privilege of being the steward of the Lehigh Portland trails for the past year and a half, as well as the Director of Trails for Thrive Allen County. One of the most important parts of my job is to tell the story of how Lehigh Portland came to be, and where it has yet to go.

That said, I should give you a tiny bit of my background. I'm a transplant to Kansas. My fiancé and I moved from Minnesota in 2018 to be closer to family, fulfill her lifelong dream of being a teacher, and reconnect with a slower pace of life away from the Twin Cities. There was some trepidation on behalf of my friends and family because they didn't understand why I'd move to rural Kansas, but all I could see was opportunity. Willa Cather is often attributed a quote that says, "anybody can love the mountains, but it takes a soul to love the prairie," and I can't think of a better Kansas-focused analogy. I saw the opportunity to, through hard work, help nature reclaim its place in my own life, and others I care about. Ad astra per aspera. My work with both the land and people of this area has taught me Lehigh Portland is the best opportunity here to connect folks with nature. Lehigh truly has something for everyone.

One particularly unique facet of Lehigh Portland is that it is a living museum. It is as rich in history as it is in its landscape. It is the beating heart of Iola and has been for more than a century. One of the first mentions of the area is described in Zebulon Pike's journal from 1806, when the indigenous tribes of the area met the party and Pike's men hunted deer near Elm Creek. A century later the first miners would start quarrying for the newly established Iola Portland Cement Company. Quickly the area would be enveloped with the homesteads of the factory workers. In 1917 Lehigh Portland Cement Company bought the Iola plant and would continue to be Allen County's largest employer until the plant's closure in 1971. Pieces of the industrial past can be seen in the ever-present cement silos, old cars peeking in the woods, abandoned railbeds now used for parts of the trails, foundations of long-lost homesteads, meticulously stacked stone walls, a water pumping station, and old access roads marked by brown Neosho River gravel. Newspaper articles can be found on the history of the cave on the eastern side of the property that describe a popular picnic spot, and potential hideout for bootleggers during prohibition. These visual markers live in locals' minds, and they have stories generations old to share if one listens.

In the years following the cement quarry closure, nature started to reclaim the land. The quarry slowly filled with water, the rocky soil left by mining was once again covered by native grasses, and wildlife began to appear again. That's when a vision of incorporating more organic and intentional ways of interacting with nature on the land started. This manifested in trails being carefully constructed following the contours of the aforementioned history. This process is easily seen when traversing the property but what might not be as readily apparent is all the work that's gone into fostering the wonderfully diverse ecosystems in close proximity to each other. Lehigh is a tapestry of ecosystems. Along the northern edge of the property cottonwoods and sycamores line the Elm Creek riparian area, with stalwart oaks foresting the uplands. Moving eastward one will pass through the pleasantly shaded savannah grasses, then into the rugged and colorful limestone glades, remnants of unplowed prairie that likely used to house livestock. Arid outcroppings overlook the quarry lake, and the alien features of prickly pears and yucca stand out in contrast to the lush green present on the western shore of the lake. Moving southeasterly, trees become scarcer and open to the widest swaths of prairie, which with care can be restored and in Pike's words, "produce a very beautiful appearance." All these areas have been carefully curated and fought for by a different breed of volunteer: the conservationist.

It's with these volunteers that I've found my passion. Balancing the ecology of the land with carefully maintained human infrastructure became woven into the fiber of my being. I became aware of Aldo Leopold's concept of land ethic, the idea that people and land are inherently intertwined, in my college years, and it fundamentally changed me. However, it wasn't until generous volunteers passed their knowledge on how to balance diversity in the context of Lehigh's ecosystems that I truly understood it. I have spent hundreds of hours managing invasive species, collecting seeds for native wildflowers, thinning overgrown forest, executing prescribed burns, and working to feather ecosystem edges; but that's only a drop in the bucket compared to the thousands of hours volunteers have put into the sustainability of Lehigh. Working beside them to ensure the longevity of both the land and the trails is among the most rewarding work I have ever done. In fact, the gift of the voluntary exchange of knowledge passed on by community volunteers is perhaps the most valuable gift that this community has to offer. Not to mention we're working to preserve one of the fastest disappearing ecosystems in the entire world: the great American prairie. Passing on the knowledge and story of this land is key to its survival, just much as maintenance and preservation. With the folks who care for Lehigh, educating the next generation of stewards is not just about passing on knowledge, it's about giving them the tools to build upon the existing legacy and chart their own course moving forward.

The Kansas legislature has the opportunity with this bill to continue the tradition already ingrained at Lehigh Portland and cement a sustainable legacy for future generations of Kansans. If my mentors in this work have taught me anything about the work it takes to care for the land, it is that paying attention is how we show love, and that sentiment doesn't just relate to the land; it's about the relationships we build together. Lehigh Portland can be the cornerstone for future generations of those willing to connect with nature and each other.

I will forever be comforted by memories of crackling grass fires creeping into russet fields, huge flocks of waterfowl seeking refuge in hidden coves along the lake's cliffs, the serene coolness of a light misting underneath a gray sky, crisp walks following a coyote's tracks in a fresh snow, light dancing on the back of an ornate box turtle sunning itself on the trail, a doe and her fawns silently resting in a newly cleared meadow, discovering an explosion of electric purple blazing stars flowers protruding from a rocky glade for the first time, and an owl waiting high in a cherry tree for dusk to settle in. I relish the work that lets me linger on these small moments, and it sustains me when times are hard. I found exactly what I was looking for when I came to Kansas: a way to connect with nature. I have Lehigh to thank for that.

Lehigh Portland healed me, and the people I've met because of this beautiful stretch of land in rural Kansas have healed me. Lehigh Portland is the place that taught me there is always more to see if you look closer. Lehigh Portland helped me realize what I can say now with pride: I'm a Kansan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Leahy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

John Leahy

Thrive Allen County Director of Trails, Steward of Lehigh Portland Trails  
Resident of Chanute, KS