

PRAIRIE TRAVELERS



Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2022

Dear friends,

Our goal to proceed westward has experienced some stumbling blocks but our aim to proceed is as strong as ever. Cheney, Murdock . . . here we come! Our volunteer list, interest, and support have increased tremendously.

We have recorded over 3500 volunteer hours this year, with all miles “adopted” by local users and businesses that aim to help keep the trail safe as well as clean. They are our eyes and ears for trail conditions and needs, and crucial to our mission of making the Prairie Sunset Trail a haven for the health and vitality of our community. The support we receive from the City of Wichita, Goddard, and Garden Plain with mowing is also key in keeping the PST an asset to all who enjoy its use.



A couple times per year we install counters on the trail for usage assessment along the length of the PST. Over 54 days average usage at different locations was 50 to 114 walkers, joggers or bikers per day, reinforcing the tremendous value of the Prairie Sunset Trail as a free and healthy refuge to enjoy nature at its best. The trail also functions as hands-on environmental classroom for people of all ages. Deer, coyotes, racoons, beavers, skunk, armadillos, birds, butterflies, turtles, squirrels, and foxes are regularly spotted on the PST. For local photography enthusiasts, the photos shared of the trail, sunsets and the covered bridge are breath taking.

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So onward we go! We depend on your support – financial, service, and gifts – to achieve our mission. Please consider a year-end tax-deductible contribution to Prairie Travelers today, www.prairiesunsettrail.org

With tremendous gratitude,

Larry Hatfield, Pres
Rick Sroufe, Vice Pres
Ruth Holliday, Sec
& Prairie Travelers Board of Directors

Bicycling Events Promote Trails

Our 2 annual bicycle rides and virtual bicycle auction are fundraising events with our sister organization Andover Augusta Rail Trail Initiative (AARTI). AARTI helps build the Redbud Trail in Butler County. All proceeds are split 50/50.



The **Oz Wicked Wind 100K** in May and the **Walnut Valley Metric** in September offer both road and gravel options. This year we raised close to **\$11,000**, including the auction bikes that folks donate.

A **huge thank you** to our **volunteers** and **businesses** that helped make these events successful. **Jimmy John's, Blendrich Nutrition, City of Goddard, Bicycle Pedaler, & Bike Walk Wichita (BWW).**

We would love to hear your opinions on whether we should change the Oz Wicked Wind 100K to the east side this year (May 21st) as opposed to its current Lake Afton start, and whether the Walnut Valley Metric date should remain the last Sunday in Sept. The WVM starts in Winfield and the route does not change due to its beauty and because it is a favorite traditional route. Please email prairietravelers@yahoo.com with your thoughts and feedback.

Redbud Trail Progress Report

In October, Governor Kelly announced **\$28.5 million in KDOT funding allocated for 32 Transportation Alternative projects for 2023-2024 years.** The **Redbud Trail connection to Augusta was one of the 32 projects, and is being awarded \$3,286,974** for the pedestrian bridge over Highway 400/54 and the engineering to Augusta. A 20% local match is required. The City Manager of Augusta, Josh Shaw has been working tirelessly on this project.

The City of Augusta just received transfer approval from the Surface Transportation Board this month, which will make it possible for AARTI to work on the last 4 miles.

For more info about AARTI:

www.redbudtrail.org

aarti@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/AARTIRedbudTrailEast

Adopt a Mile 2022

Are you looking for a way to contribute to the Prairie Sunset Trail regularly? Consider adopting a mile! Adopting a mile means you agree to help Prairie Travelers with trash pickup, tree trimming, and keep us posted damage to the trail or signs. (*We estimate the annual commitment is approximately 40hrs.*)

The following is a list of our adopted miles:

- **Michael Oden – Design One Upholstery**
Hoover to Ridge Rd
- **Gwen & Jim Whittit**
Ridge Rd to Tyler
- **Jim & Michelle Harms & Becky Phelps – Compelled to Care Foundation**
Tyler to Maize Rd
- **Ken & Angie Locke & Clay Hoberecht – Best Body Shop**
Maize Rd to 119th St W
- **Koray & Christy Wilkes & Michael & Valarie Gomm**
119th St W to 135th St W
- **Kelly Wenz – Muerto Bicycle Club**
135th St W to 151st St W
- **Blankenship Family**
151st St W to 167th St W
- **DeBolt Family**
167th St W to 183rd St W
- **Boy Scout Troop #776 (Goddard Lions Club)**
183rd St W to 199th St W
- **City of Goddard**
199th St W to Walnut
- **Larry, Jean & Christopher Zimmerman**
Walnut to 215th St W
- **Matt Freund – Waltanna Flyers**
215th St W to 231st St W
- **Jon & Katelyn Covey**
231st St W to 247th St W
- **Tom Kelley – APS KS**
247th St W to 263rd St W
- **Mike & Karen Walsh – In honor of Bobby Thompson**
263rd St W to 279th St W
- **Mike & Karen Walsh**
279th St W to 295th St W

Railroad History of the Prairie Sunset Trail

During a visit to the Sedgwick County Fair in Cheney I saw an old train track. Being an avid railroad fan, I excitedly called the owning railroad to see when the next train was coming. I was informed that the track was out-of-service. I followed the line back east on Google and found the **Prairie Sunset Trail**.

The Wichita & Western Railroad began construction of this rail line in 1883, reaching Goddard in 1884. It was then purchased by the Atchison Topeka Santa Fe Railroad (ATSF) in 1898. After operating the line for 92 years, ATSF sought to shed its branch lines and listed what is now our trail as an abandonment target. In 1992, the line was purchased by Central Kansas Railway (CKR) along with several other train tracks in the area. ATSF wanted to concentrate on fewer, more active lines, while allowing short-line operators to handle the lighter, branch line traffic. CKR officially began operating what is now our trail on January 4th, 1993.



On June 5, 2001, Kansas & Oklahoma (K&O) acquired CKR. They rehabilitated the track from Wichita to Kingman via Conway Springs, and what is now our trail was no longer needed. The line was then “railbanked” for possible future railroad use, while permitting “interim trail use”. This action allows the right-of-way to remain intact as an inactive railroad line.

From Wichita & Western, to ATSF, to CKR, and to us, hopefully the line will continue to carry people for years to come, only now with no tracks! **Renee Boyd** (Volunteer & Board Member) History source: *Ex-Santa Fe, the Story of a Prairie Regional: Central Kansas Railway, 1993-2001, written by Sam Andrews*

Kansas Nonprofits in Pivotal Roles

Sunflower Foundation out of Topeka has been a tremendous asset to trail groups throughout the State as it aims to help “Kansas communities achieve and maintain optimal health.”

This year Sunflower Foundation sponsored an online zoom gathering of 16 trail groups for a 14-week weekly session called the “**Trail Champion Cohort.**” Wichita was represented by PT, AARTI & Bike Walk Wichita and designated the “South Central Trail Collaboration.” The goal of this gathering was to “help with opportunities once the trail is in place through assessment, analysis and messaging so that communities can generate data that is relevant to decision makers for economic impact analysis and quality of life benefits.”

The **Trail Champion Cohort** culminated with a gathering of all participants at their Headquarters in Topeka for a day of “networking and sharing of ideas related to trail projects and their benefits to the health, well-being and vitality of communities.” As participants we are eligible to apply for a grant to further our social media exposure and knowledge. We will keep you posted.

Prairie Travelers has been the recipient of 3 matching grants with Sunflower Foundation since 2006 and we are very grateful for their dedication and effort in promoting safe greenways throughout the State.

Bike Walk Wichita (BWW) has moved into a larger space in Old Town at 325 N St Francis and has offered space for meetings available to non-profits. **Prairie Travelers** will alternate meeting by zoom, Goddard picnic shelter (weather permitting) and Bike Walk Wichita’s new location during 2023. If you would like to attend our monthly meeting and our yearly Board of Directors meeting (Jan 11th, 2023) please email us at priarietravelers@yahoo.com for update on our meeting location or go to our website at www.prairiesunsettrail.org

Upcoming events & meetings

Workdays: 2nd Sat of the month, 8:00 am at the trail-head in Goddard for work details

Meetings: 2nd Wed of the month, 7:00 pm via zoom or at the Goddard picnic shelter, east side (www.prairiesunsettrail.org or Facebook for updates on location)

Prairie Travelers Board of Directors:

Larry Hatfield, *President*
Rick Sroufe, *Vice-President*
Ruth Holliday, *Secretary*
Matt Moore, *Treasurer*
Renee Boyd
Larry DeBolt
Tony Flax
Matt Freund
John Moore
Kelly Wenz
Larry Zimmerman



We exist because of supporters like you: your donations and your volunteer labor. Please join us in making Kansas trails accessible to everyone. Use the enclosed membership form and envelope for a tax deductible contribution. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Contact Us

Larry Hatfield,
316-253-1807
Ruth Holliday
316-641-4030

Prairie Travelers, Inc.
P.O. Box 781033
Wichita, KS 67278-1033
www.prairiesunsettrail.org
prairietravelers@yahoo.com

The mission of Prairie Travelers is to develop, maintain and promote the Prairie Sunset Trail. Our vision is that the Prairie Sunset Trail connects neighbors and communities; promoting healthy, active lifestyles, stewardship of nature and appreciation of the region's history.



[facebook.com/
prairietravelers](https://facebook.com/prairietravelers)

Prairie Travelers, Inc.

P.O. Box 781033

Wichita, KS 67278-1033

PLACE
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Prairie Travelers Outstanding Service Awards 2022

Trailblazer Award – Boy Scout Troop #776



It was Sept 2009, a month prior to our official ribbon cutting for the 7 miles from 279th to 167th when Kendall Lundy, then Service Coordinator for **Boy Scout Troop #776** reached out to us to ask whether they could help us on “**National Public Lands Day**,” the last Saturday in September, to pick up trash on what would soon open as the **Prairie Sunset Trail**. The first mile from Garden Plain had been open since 2007 and the popularity and excitement around the trail was palpable. By December of that same year, **Boy Scout Troop #776 became the first group to adopt a mile**, chartered by the **Goddard Lions Club**. The mile they chose was 199th to 183rd St W, the first mile east of Goddard Trailhead. Adopting that mile entailed trimming, weed pulling, trash pickup and tree planting at each entrance to that mile.

The involvement of the Boy Scouts meant increased trail exposure to a lot of families, and we believe this increased the trail usage tremendously. This past spring, **Troop #776** helped us install two memorial benches for Board members that were an integral part of our trail network, Bob Lavelle (trail manager) and Bobby Thompson (the voice of the Owls).



Current Scout Master, **Dan Kallman** & Assistant Scout Master **Jim Richburg** are great advocates of the trail, encouraging their Scouts to join them on workdays and to use the **Prairie Sunset Trail** for adventures, exercise, family time and exploration of nature. Since 2007 we have had 6 **Eagle Scout Awards** for trail projects, including one from Troop #776. In a given year, volunteer Boy Scout hours on the **Prairie Sunset Trail** could easily top 800 combined hours.

Trailblazer Award – Mike and Karen Walsh

Since 2007, when the first mile was opened on the Prairie Sunset Trail, **Mike and Karen Walsh** have been great supporters and the eyes and ears of the trail (they live adjacent to the trail.) Prior to their official “adoption” of a mile they helped maintain Bobby Thompson’s mile since his passing in 2016. This year they doubled their workload by adding to their “**Adopt a Mile**” the first mile east of Garden Plain.

It is because of help and support such as this that we can truly call this a **community based and supported trail**. In Bobby Thompson’s honor and memory, the sign for the Thompson family adopting the second mile remains at Mike and Karen’s request. “Bobby Thompson was a great friend of ours. Even in the midst of his cancer diagnosis and battle, he never stopped thinking of others. We are honored to take care of his mile of the trail. He was such a good man!!”

In Memoriam

This year we lost **Donna Carrell**, our stalwart social media manager and board member. However, it was not just behind the scenes work that Donna did, she was hands on during workdays or helping plan how to increase trail exposure and usage. When Parkinson's disease made bicycling difficult she switched to a recumbent tricycle, still leaving many of us in the dust. The **memorial brick park** surrounding the Cecile Kellenbarger memorial statue was the brainchild of Donna and her partner Rick. Donna was always thinking of new ways to reach the community and expand trail health benefits and usage, so all can enjoy the trail for decades to come. Despite Donna's physical challenges, she thrived (and loved) being outdoors. Donna was an inspiration and joy to all who knew her. She was equally active with our sister non-profit, Andover Augusta Rail Trail Initiative and the Redbud Trail.



Our hearts go out to Rick Sroufe, her partner of 28 years, who is also an active trail volunteer. There are many people who come and go in our lives but only a few who touch us in ways that change us forever. Donna was one of those individuals, making us all better for knowing her.



Bench Dedications

The spring of 2022 was busy, with **4 bench dedications** that were made possible because of memorial donations for trail advocates and users. Boy Scout Troop #776 helped with the installation of all 4 of these benches, with two being Tanner Crego's Eagle Scout project last fall.

April 23 (Rails to Trails Conservancy "**Celebrate Trails Day**") was the perfect day to **dedicate 2 benches** to former Board members:

- **Bobby Thompson** (Voice of the Owls in Garden Plain, City Council member & Adopt a Trail volunteer who passed away in 2016) and,
- **Bob Lavelle**, our Trail Manager that loved to spend days mowing, trimming, weeding, painting and visiting with all who used the trail. Having battled cancer for over 20 years, the trail was his place to find peace and tranquility as he continued his treatment.

Both these benches and a butterfly garden are between 279th St W and 263rd.

On May 4, we honored the memory of friends and trail supporters **Wanda Groves and Janice Mowat** with a potluck and walk to view the 2 benches and butterfly garden. The sign by their benches sums it up: "**A friend is one of the nicest things you can have, and one of the best things you can be.**" – Douglas Pagels

Reflections from Trail Manager Kelly Wenz



Boy was I naïve. I used the trail for years under the assumption that the adjacent municipalities maintained the trail. It was not until the fifth or sixth time I rode past the legendary Bob Lavelle and asked what his role was with the trail. After an hour-long conversation, my naiveté was cured.

The easiest explanation for the maintenance goes like this; the City of Wichita mows from Hoover Road to 167th, then the City of Goddard picks up and mows to the mid-point of 215th and 231st. ALL other maintenance falls on volunteers. Mowing from where the City of Goddard stops all the way to Garden Plain. Trimming the tree canopy, yep, volunteers. Volunteers try to keep up with the cracks in the gravel. It is donated time that helps with signage, felled trees, litter, bridge maintenance, etc.

It takes time and coordination to keep up with the trail needs. While it is a tremendous amount of work, our awesome volunteers are the secret sauce. We have the Adopt-A-Mile volunteers, those that show up for the monthly workdays, and those that simply pick up litter as they use the trail. And for this, we are forever thankful. With that being said, we are always in desperate need of additional help. If you think you can be of help, please join us for our monthly workday, the 2nd Sat of every month. Generally, we meet at 8:00 am in Goddard at the trailhead park, close to 199th. However, many times we meet at the mile we will be working on and the time may change due to weather conditions. Our goal is to post updates on FB and our website 5 days prior. You may also email us at priarietravelers@yahoo.com with any questions.

The Prairie Sunset Trail According to Boy Scout Troop #776 families:

We asked the families of the troop what the trail means to them — and here are their responses! *(Photo below is of clean up day back in 2009)*



- To be with Nature, view wildlife, walk peacefully... the **Prairie Sunset Trail** means so much!
- Our son enjoys running *the trail* with the Cross-Country team and just for fun. The family enjoys bike rides there. It's a quiet and safe place to get out. Convenient to where we live
- Long flat rides, very peaceful and safe!!
- An opportunity to serve the community and an excellent recreational destination for exercise and beauty.
- An opportunity to unwind
- A peaceful and safe trail to go to enjoy being outdoors. A place to walk, run, ride bikes, and have family time too.

Comments from trail users and volunteers.

“The **Prairie Sunset Trail** is a diamond in the rough. It gives me a chance to relax and get away from everything. I love getting close to nature. **Larry DeBolt** (Board member and Adopt a Mile volunteer)

“The trail is a great recreation source, and sort of a critter highway for deer and coyotes and such hopping between pastures, we also enjoy the plums and occasional walnuts and apricots! In the warmer months we go for a bike ride or from our house into and around Goddard and back 3-4 times a week, usually about 2 hours worth of riding, and a few times we’ll go to Garden Plain and back...” **Wade Blankenship** (Adopt a Mile volunteer, lives adjacent to the trail)

“I’ve lived less than ½ a mile from the railroad track since 1996. I remember running the old track with my dog when it was all railroad ties and rough rock that trains never used. I was excited when the Prairie Sunset Trail came into existence; right here in conservative Kansas we had a ‘greenspace’ and a ‘linear park’; all things that many forward-thinking states crowded about. One of the homeowners saw me picking trash and offered his own trash can for me to use whenever I pick up trash. We had a great conversation about conservation and how many people use the trail.” **Ken Locke** (Adopt a Mile volunteer who lives near the trail)



“We first discovered the **Prairie Sunset Trail** around 2020, our son had told us about it, but we hadn’t used it. We like to run, but I had hurt my foot and wanted to “re-learn” to ride my bike somewhere safe. So, we tried the trail, while Jimmy ran, I biked, and we have been using it ever since! That first day, I rode 4 miles from Goddard west and back. My son had told us about the tunnel and I really wanted to make it there, so the next week we went back I rode farther and the next week farther still! We were hooked! We love the trail because it offers safety away from traffic and a wind break most of the time. We enjoy watching the different seasons, seeing the animals and seeing other people using the trail. We are just in our first full year of helping with the trail and we Love it! So much goes into the trail that the normal user may not understand.” **Gwen & Jim Whittit** (Adopt a Mile volunteers)

“My family and I absolutely love the trail! And since we live so close to here, and obviously work close, we use it as often as we can.” **Becky Phelps** (Compelled Fitness & Adopt a Mile volunteer)

"One day we were working on the trail and we saw people "dumping" a couch. We were thinking “OH NO”, so we hurried as fast as we could to see if we could stop them. Upon arriving at their vehicle, we were pleasantly surprised when the door opened and out stepped a lovely young lady in her bridal gown! They weren’t dumping at all, they were using the beautiful Prairie Sunset Trail as a backdrop for their professional wedding photos!" **Sharon & David Hewitt** (Volunteers since 2002)

During our October workday, we met a bicyclist from Oklahoma City who drove up as he had heard of the **Prairie Sunset Trail** and wanted to know what it was all about. His comment was that they had urban bikeways but nothing as beautiful and as tranquil as this, and wondered if the locals realize how lucky they are! **Ruth Holliday** (Volunteer & Board member)

Best Body Shop has hosted 2 trail cleanup days followed by a cookout and open house at their shop afterwards. Clay shared: “We are excited to be a part of the group and to have the opportunity to help take care of the trail.” **Clay Hoberecht** (Adopted the mile adjacent to the shop)

Prairie Travelers Membership Form

****Please consider an end of the year tax deductible contribution to Prairie Travelers****

Just imagine a network of interconnecting trails in Kansas available to anyone for walking, bicycling, and jogging. You would discover a world of wide-open skies, rolling prairie, wildflowers, forests, and wildlife. Envision traveling from town to town, exploring Kansas' natural and historical heritage. With your help, this and more can be realized.

Check dues level below:

- New Renewal
 \$25 Pathfinder (student or limited income)
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 \$100 Trail Explorer
 \$250 Trailblazer
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Other gift \$ _____



This gift is in honor of _____

(Please include address if you want notification of gift sent.)



Donations can now be accepted online through PayPal!

Visit www.prairiesunsettrail.org and click on the "Donate" button.

Remember: Please note t-shirt size with donation of \$100 or more.

T-SHIRT SIZE: Unisex Women's
 XS SM MD LG XL XXL

Name: _____ Date: _____

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_____ ***Please include me on communications related to the Andover-Augusta Rail Trail Initiative***

YES! I would like to help Prairie Travelers in the development of rail trails in Kansas. Please send me more information on _____



Make checks payable and send to:

Prairie Travelers, Inc.
P.O. Box 781033
Wichita, KS 67278-1033

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