

02/13/2023

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,

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