



02/08/2023

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 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.

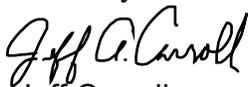
The Unbound Gravel Race in Emporia has put Kansas on the map and made Kansas a destination for cyclists. This event brings an estimated \$6 million in economic benefits to Emporia in a single weekend! Cyclists from all over the world travel to Kansas to enjoy the wide-open spaces, traffic-free roads, 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

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