

# PRAIRIE TRAVELERS



Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2023

Dear friends,

The National Rails to Trails Conservancy was not even a teenager when Prairie Travelers was formed 25 years ago, but just as they have accomplished their long term goals of creating safe ways for everyone to walk, bike and be active outdoors, so have we. Ours is local and focused on connecting neighbors and communities; promoting healthy active lifestyles, stewardship of nature and appreciation of the region's history. Over our 25 years we have logged over 65,000 hours of volunteer trail work as we have built 15 miles of the Prairie Sunset Trail and maintained it through individuals, families, and businesses adopting a mile, and Boy Scouts working on merit badges (including 7 Eagle Scout Projects!) In addition we have had 11 AmeriCorps NCCC members assist us for 13 weeks, and many individual volunteers who simply love the outdoors and want to make sure future generations have safe havens for folks to walk, run, and ride bikes. We have awarded 20 "Outstanding Service Awards" to individuals and groups and we received a "Community Volunteer Award" from Kansas Newman and the Wichita Eagle.



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Between the generous financial support of the Sunflower Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation, and an additional anonymous Foundation, and the ongoing support of local elected officials, businesses, and actual trail users, we believe that the Prairie Sunset Trail will improve lives for generations to come. We ask for your continued support as we work to achieve our next big goals - the extension of the trail towards Cheney to the west and Wichita to the east. Please consider a year-end tax-deductible contribution to Prairie Travelers today, [www.prairiesunsettrail.org](http://www.prairiesunsettrail.org)

With tremendous gratitude,

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

## Fundraising Updates



**Celebrate Trails Day and Earth Day** in April allowed us the opportunity to commemorate and dedicate a stone bench in memory of Donna Carrell at the Cecile Kellenbarger Statue & Memorial Brick Park Trailhead in Goddard. Donna was instrumental in the idea of a brick memorial as a fundraiser for the Prairie Sunset Trail. She was also very involved with Bike Walk Wichita and the Redbud Trail in Butler County, so we had a 30 mile bicycle ride starting on the PST in Goddard, continuing to

Bike Walk Wichita headquarters in Wichita for lunch, and then on to the Redbud Trail in Andover (with a shuttle back to Goddard.) We had approximately 50 people join us for part or most of the day.

This year found us in new territory for the annual **Oz Wicked Wind 100K**. Instead of our regular west side route, we started at the Andover Community Center to introduce participants to the Redbud Trail and its surrounding area. Including volunteers, we topped 230 participants, with many new riders enjoying the beautiful setting on the western edge of the Flint Hills. We had very positive reviews for the gravel ride option but traffic on the paved section encountered more traffic than we expected. Our plan is to alternate between Lake Afton as a starting point and Andover or Augusta, switching each year. Mark your calendars for Sunday May 19th, 2024 at Lake Afton, and for 2025 we will find better routes for the east side paved route!



The gentle rolling hills of Cowley County did not disappoint us with a beautiful day, good people, and good times for our annual **Walnut Valley Metric**. We surveyed participants after the ride, and there is a desire to make changes which will allow viewing of stone bridges for the gravel riders. Feedback is still welcome. Many shared that this is their favorite ride of the year and would not miss it for anything!

Our above fundraisers raised over **\$6,500 for each trail** and for that we are very grateful for all who participated and helped. We hope to see you again next year!

## Annual Board Meeting

Wednesday, January 10, 2024 is our official Prairie Travelers Annual Board Meeting and Election at Bike Walk Wichita at 7 p.m., 325 N St Francis. All of our meetings are open to the public.

## Trail Talk Tuesdays

K-State Research and Extension is partnering with the Sunflower Foundation and the Kansas Trails Council to bring you a series of webinars. These events are for local trail advocates of any kind - from city managers to volunteers - who want to create access to trails so their citizens can enjoy the physical, mental, and community benefits of connecting with nature.

Our Prairie Travelers President Larry Hatfield was one of the panel participants during November's session. The topic was "Let's Get Started."

The virtual sessions are once a month for 6 months from Oct to March. To see the itinerary please visit and/or register at: <https://ksre-learn.com/trail-talk>.



### Bike Walk Wichita

A special thank you to our partners at Bike Walk Wichita, who support our monthly meetings with technical assistance and meeting space, share our events and updates, and co-sponsor trail related events. Find out more about their work and get involved at [bikewalkwichita.org](http://bikewalkwichita.org).

New Kansas bicycle maps are available, with a feature focus on rail trails! Order your copy through KDOT or pick up at local bicycle shops or Bike Walk Wichita.

### Redbud Trail Update

The long anticipated Redbud Trail bridge over Highway 54/400 will be constructed in September 2024 with a \$3.29 million grant from KDOT and the support of the city of Augusta. In preparation, volunteers from Scheels celebrating their store opening spent 6 days working on the trail, taking 72 trailer loads of branches from 2 sections of the yet to be completed trail. The excitement is building as this work gets done!

On November 13, the City of Andover, with the help of a KDWP & AARTI, dedicated a restroom next to the gazebo at the Redbud Trailhead on Old Main. This location is actually the original spot of "Cloud City," before the municipality's name change to Andover.

We are proud to partner with the Andover Augusta Rail-Trail Initiative on many trail projects in the Wichita area!



For more information, check out: [www.redbudtrail.org](http://www.redbudtrail.org) or email [aarti@gmail.com](mailto:aarti@gmail.com), and be sure to follow them on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/AARTIRedbudTrailEast](http://www.facebook.com/AARTIRedbudTrailEast)



## Prairie Travelers Outstanding Service Awards 2023

In every nonprofit there are key individuals who work hard behind the scenes. Prairie Travelers is no exception and has been blessed with many of these dedicated volunteers, including Cecile Kellenbarger, who tirelessly worked to make sure the Prairie Sunset Trail became a reality before losing her battle with cancer in 2011.

This year, we want to recognize a few of these individuals – people who have gone above and beyond to make the Prairie Sunset Trail a reality.

### Green Thumb Award

Ed Catt is a local legend amongst users of the Prairie Sunset Trail. He straps on loppers and takes off on his bike to ride the PST. But instead of going for speed he goes for the endorphins he receives by trimming branches that could have a potential risk to those of us that may be riding the trail. This is not a new habit. Ed has been riding the Prairie Sunset Trail since before we opened, and he soon realized that if this was going to be a community trail he needed to do his part as well. Now we only need to find more Ed's! We asked Ed to share some history of him and the PST.



"I can't remember exactly when I first took a bike and explored what would become known as The Prairie Sunset Trail, but it was before the long railroad bridge west of 119th St. W was as it is now. My son and I first attempted to ride it from somewhere east of Goddard and slogged along till we bogged down in the loose, chunky railroad ballast and weeds.

Riding the trail now, it's hard to remember what it was like before. It's so different. But many people have put a lot of thought, and tons of hard work into making this trail go, from an overgrown, barely passable track, to what it is today.

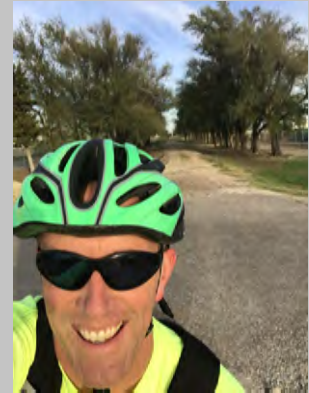
I've put in a miniscule amount of time and effort into helping maintain this particular rail trail, compared to what many others do, and have done, but I have, on occasion, taken a pair of loppers, a folding hand saw, and tried do my little bit to maintain it.

(Note: He is being very humble!)

Nature is always trying to erase whatever humans do. Rail trails are no different. Use helps reestablishing any path or trail. It doesn't take a lot to keep a trail open. A few simple tools, and some time, is all that's needed generally. So, enjoy the rail trails, but also help keep them in good condition. Everyone benefits."

## Lifetime Achievement Award

Matt Freund came on board blazing our trail with power points, photos from an in-motion camera on his bike, and presentations that were polished for the District IV Advisory Committee, when he asked for permission to extend the trail from 167th to the Big Ditch. That was 2015, and since then he has been our liaison with the City & County for questions and needs that arise. What proved the most challenging for Matt during the extension was working with Learjet who at the time was using the trail as they had buildings on both sides and had fenced it off. In 2019 he also facilitated the construction by the City for a small deviation off the Prairie Sunset Trail by allowing us to use the already existing bridge to cross the Cowskin Creek. He tends to work quietly in the background with officials so as to not call attention to himself. Clearly, our extension of the Prairie Sunset Trail into Wichita would not have happened without his help. When the AmeriCorp NCCC team was here, he held a BBQ for them and our volunteers at his house and gave those who wanted a view of the trail from his plane.



Calling themselves the “Waltanna Flyers,” he has recruited his family and a few friends to adopt a mile of the trail for upkeep. Early on he was the one installing wildlife cams and keeping tabs on usage to give us an up to date view where we needed to put more resources. Matt has been a Board member since 2015 and a tremendous asset to Prairie Travelers.



## Trailblazer Award

Gwen & Jim Whittit adopted a mile of the Prairie Sunset Trail two years ago and have attended many of our monthly meetings and workdays with youthful enthusiasm and excellent feedback.

You would never know that this is the chosen life of satisfied retirees who are super active in several organizations including helping their son, Curtis Whittit, event director for the “Exploration Place Parkrun,” an almost weekly run during the season, where they help him with registration and event details.

Gwen is our new social media manager for Prairie Travelers, and will also help us with our Adopt a Mile volunteers keeping them posted and planning our yearly volunteer picnic(s). They have 3 children and 8 grandchildren that are very lucky to have such mentors in their life!

"We enjoy the Prairie Sunset trail very much. It offers a safe place to run and ride. We often appreciate the protection from the brutal south wind in Kansas! The wildlife and beautiful foliage we often see is an added benefit. We decided to volunteer with the trail and adopt a mile so that this wonderful resource might be here for many years to come."

## Comments from Trail Users

### Brenda Mueller

I love riding and walking the Prairie Sunset Trail because the trees provide a windbreak on windy days and shade on hot days and provide cover for wildlife. The trail is away from traffic so is always quiet. I enjoy encountering people who are running, cycling and walking. I often see people I know, which is always fun. I also like the memorials that have been placed along the trail for folks who were avid workers and users of the trail. The trail is also a safe place that allows you to enjoy nature in a peaceful and quiet setting but still have contact with other trail users.

### Cindy Thompson

Riding the PST has been a wonderful place to ride for many reasons. On windy Kansas days, the tree cover provides protection, allowing an otherwise difficult ride to be enjoyable. The same is true in the winter or summer when the temperature is either too hot or too cold.

We've ridden it with an elderly relative, who enjoyed being out of traffic as well as being in a more natural setting. And having a well maintained bathroom facility in Goddard is a huge plus!



### Sherry Jones

The PST is a favorite of mine to ride. I'm in a group that rides this trail alot. It's shady for those days when it's so hot or helpful in those days when it's so cold that the trees break up the wind.

Very pretty and there's always people using it. Also has a nice bench to relax upon. I wish it was paved & longer. But it does provide a great out and back trip. Great for cycling & walking.

### Patricia Reel

I love the PST-15 miles of protected riding!!! It is beautiful, full of wild life-even a few little snakes. Riding the streets of Wichita with drivers on their cell phones can be a real challenge. No worries like that on the PST. Thank you for all your hard work making it a reality. It is awesome.

### Joan Widener

Riding along Prairie Sunset Trail has proven to be a true respite for myself and my husband. As we have aged our physical workouts have become less than they used to be. The trail has provided us with a safe, biking opportunity within a natural setting. So glad we have it!

## Welcome to New City Administrators in Garden Plain and Goddard!

Garden Plain has hired a new City Administrator, Kelly McElroy, who shares "Our family has lived in the GP area for almost 10 years, and our youngest son is in 6th grade at Garden Plain Elementary school. We've always been outdoors people and enjoy horseback riding, hiking, and riding on trails. We love to hop on the Prairie Sunset Trail where it crosses at 311th and enjoy the walk to the GP trail head. The covered bridge has always been one of our all-time favorite parts of the walk! The City would love to collaborate with our partners at the rail road and neighboring communities to not only further extend the trail but look for funding opportunities to add amenities along the way. Specific to GP, we'd love to see some kind of pavilion or structure that has restrooms and water stations, and perhaps could even be used as a small event space. We'd love to be able to host Bike Across Kansas (BAK) some year, and having the trail improvements would be a huge draw for such an event, bringing hundreds of cyclists to and through our community."

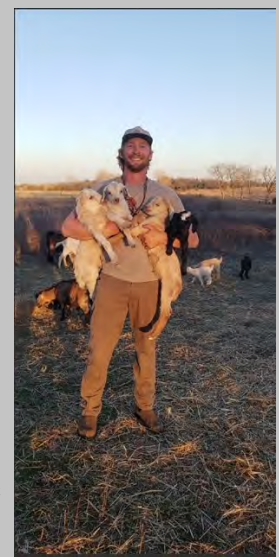
Goddard's new city administrator, Craig R. Crossette, shared with us: "One of my favorite aspects of our community is the Prairie Sunset Trail and the active lifestyle opportunities it brings our neighbors. Amenities that promote active lifestyles can improve the quality of life for our neighbors, but more importantly, they can improve their healthcare outcomes. I have a few fond memories of jogs on the trail, one of which was with my colleague and former City Administrator Brian Silcott. He is a long-distance runner while I am not. I built a little mental fortitude trying to keep up with him and he was sure to try and push me to my limit. Nothing like burning lungs and jelly legs! I am especially thankful for former Mayor/Councilmember Larry Zimmerman and the efforts he's made toward the Prairie Travelers organization and the Prairie Sunset Trail. He's volunteered a lot of his time toward the success of the trail and continues to play an integral role in promoting it within our community. When it warms up, I am excited to take some strolls on the Prairie Sunset Trail with my wife Samantha and our son Callan. Thank you, Prairie Travelers, for your care and dedication to the Prairie Sunset Trail!"

### Restoration Grazing

After purchasing 70 goats in 2022, Rex & Susan Rutledge started Restoration Grazing with the intention of starting a targeted grazing business. Targeted grazing refers to the intentional placement of goats or sheep in areas to decrease the amount of brush and unwanted vegetation.



Next May, Restoration Grazing will be placing goats close to the tunnel on the Prairie Sunset Trail to help us combat our poison ivy dilemma for about a week. We are hoping that the grazing goats will still be at work when the Oz Wicked Wind 100K gravel riders ride by.









# 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)  
 \$50 Wanderer  
 \$100 Trail Explorer  
 \$250 Trailblazer  
 \$500 Life Saver

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](http://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: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

***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

***Prairie Travelers is a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization.  
All contributions are tax deductible as allowed by law.***

# Upcoming events & meetings

**Workdays:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Sat of the month, 8:00 am at the trail-head in Goddard for work details

**Meetings:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Wed of the month, 7:00 pm via zoom or at Bike Walk Wichita, 325 N. St Francis ([www.prairiesunsettrail.org](http://www.prairiesunsettrail.org) or Facebook for updates on location)

## Prairie Travelers Board of Directors:

Larry Hatfield, *President*

Ruth Holliday, *Secretary*

Matt Moore, *Treasurer*

Renee Boyd

Larry DeBolt

Tony Flax

Matt Freund

John Moore

Kelly Wenz

Larry Zimmerman



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*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.*



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

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*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.*

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**Wichita, KS 67278-1033**

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