

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE TOURISM.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Barbara P. Allen at 3:30 p.m. on February 7, 2000 in Room 522-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Rep. Annie Kuether

Committee staff present: Renae Jefferies, Revisor of Statutes  
Hank Avila, Legislative Research  
Russell Mills, Legislative Research  
Nancy Kirkwood, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Steve Williams, Secretary, Department of Wildlife & Parks  
Marian Cott, Executive Director, Kansas Humanities Council  
Victoria Sherry, Associate Director, Kansas Humanities Council

Others attending: See attached

Chairperson Allen opened the committee meeting welcoming the members. The research staff and the committee secretary were introduced by Chairperson Allen.

Secretary Williams, KDWP, was recognized by Chairperson Allen to report on the Kansas State Park System (**Attachment 1**), and specifically on 1999 **SB 316 - relating to Wildlife and park fees for persons over 65 years and persons with disabilities**.

Vice-Chairperson Larry Campbell welcomed Marian Cott, Executive Director, Kansas Humanities Council, to the committee. Marian introduced Victoria Sherry, Associate Director, to speak to the committee regarding the role of the barn in American history. Ms. Sherry explained "The Kansas Barn Again! Tour: Promoting History and Cultural Tourism Through Partnerships" (**Attachment 2**).

Vice-Chairperson Campbell informed the committee there were no more scheduled Tourism Committee meetings scheduled at this time.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

# TOURISM COMMITTEE GUEST LIST

DATE: February 7, 2000

NAME	REPRESENTING
DICK CARTER, JR	TIAZ
Victoria Sherry	KS Humanities
Marion Cott	KS Humanities
Terry Hover	KDWP
STEVE WILLIAMS	KDWP

**House Committee on Tourism**  
February 7, 2000

**Presentation on the Kansas State Park System**  
Presented by: Steve Williams, Secretary  
Department of Wildlife and Parks

Thank you for the opportunity to report on the Kansas State Park System.

Kansas' first state park was established in 1957 at Kanopolis Reservoir. Since that time, the Kansas legislature has designated and funded development for 23 additional parks. All but two of our state parks are situated on a water body, most at federal reservoir projects. The state park system hosts 6-7 million visits per year. As measured by visitation numbers, individual Kansas state parks hold seven of the top 10 spots when ranking Kansas attractions.

Kansas parks offer a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities including: single and group camping, picnicking, swimming, hiking, horseback riding, boating, fishing, hunting, wildlife-viewing, and other outdoor activities. In addition, state parks provide the location for concerts; family reunions; historical reenactments; geological, cultural, and historical studies; special events; various tournaments; and other social events. Talk to residents and business owners, Kansas parks obviously play an important role in the economy of adjacent communities and in the quality of life of our residents.

From the inception of the park system, park managers have struggled with the challenge of meeting park patrons' diversified demands for outdoor recreation. Currently the greatest demand placed on the park system is providing the facility and utility demands associated with modern recreational vehicles. Our park system was not originally designed to accommodate 40 feet long, fully contained recreational vehicles. Their power demands for air conditioning, microwaves, lighting, satellite television, electric ranges, and the like were not even contemplated in the 1960s and 1970s. Current water and sewer systems are stretched to the limit during peaks of high visitations.

In 1997, Governor Bill Graves and the Kansas Legislature approved the expenditure of \$10 million over a period of three years to improve existing infrastructures at state parks. The department is in its third year of this statewide capital improvement project. This extensive facelift has rejuvenated portions of all parks. Although this investment was substantial in scope, all of us recognized that it was not the long-term cure for the state park system. The Governor and legislature both have indicated that the project was only the first step in improving the tired and deteriorated Kansas state park system.

Other states value their state parks. State parks are considered as a gift and a valuable investment for current and future generations. They celebrate the ecological, cultural, and historic heritage of the state. They invest in and operate their state parks as proud showcases and attractions to draw visitors to their state. Sadly, Kansas does not appear to share that vision.

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I also find it sadly ironic and frustrating that some among us focus their energies and efforts on other department issues, issues that we are capable of managing. Meanwhile, they ignore the broader public policy issues of conservation law enforcement, our state parks' future, and the role parks play in our economy and quality of life. Years of insufficient funding have resulted in cutting expenses, leaving Kansas state parks with outdated facilities, reduced staffing levels, limited visitor services, and deteriorated equipment. Kansas continues to rank last or next to last in the nation when comparing state spending on parks and outdoor recreation.

In spite of this history, Kansas park managers, their staff, and volunteers continue to provide quality service with the limited resources available. These state employees and volunteers focus on customer and community service. They take great pride in their mission to showcase some of Kansas' most spectacular landscapes. High customer satisfaction ratings are testaments to their public service and commitment to providing the best outdoor recreation experience possible. As Kansans, we all owe a debt of gratitude to these efficient, effective, and hardworking individuals. My concern is the long-term viability of this work ethic.

We are all aware of the extremely difficult choices that must be made in prioritizing the spending of public monies. I certainly do not envy the difficult decisions that face this legislative body. Public demand for government service and assistance is diversified and intense. All state agencies should be considered in setting priorities and shouldering the reduction in State General Fund spending. As a result, the current reductions in State General Fund have exacerbated an ongoing and serious funding situation for our state parks. In FY2000, the department absorbed a SGF reduction at the current services level of approximately 16 percent or \$772,000. Projected FY2001 reductions from current services is approximately \$1 million. State General Fund dollars committed to state park operations have declined steadily since at least 1990. In FY1991, the State General Fund contributed 61 percent to the parks operating budget. In FY2001, the current estimate of SGF's contribution is 36 percent. The Park Fee Fund, whose revenue source is park user fees, is the only other significant fund available for our state parks.

Increased reliance on this user-fee fund source will create serious management challenges for those of us involved in administering the state park system. We accept the challenge necessitated by tight budgets and pledge our support to shoulder the burden of SGF reductions. We will manage monthly cash flows through this year and the next fiscal year. However, the FY2001 Park Fee Fund ending balance will be drawn down to a level where we must consider increased user-fees and/or alternative funding mechanisms for FY2002.

Last session, the Senate approved SB 316 which would eliminate the annual entrance fee exemptions for seniors and people with disabilities. According to our 1999 Annual Report, the department sold approximately 28,000 park vehicle entrance permits to those under 65 years of age. During the same year, we issued approximately 28,000 free park entrance permits to seniors. The value of these free permits for seniors was \$840,000. SB 316 would have established a half-price fee of \$15 per vehicle per year which could have generated as much as \$420,000 additional cash for the Park Fee Fund. This committee reported SB 316 favorable for passage by the House. However, no action was taken and it sits on General Orders. If it is the public policy of the legislature to rely on user-fees, I ask you to give the department a fighting chance. Please

encourage your colleagues to pass SB 316. It is inevitable that your constituents, under the age of 65, will be asked to pay even higher fees to operate our parks in the future. Shouldn't all park users share the expense associated with operating parks?

State parks should be a source of pride for the state and its residents. Kansas is blessed with broad vistas and beautiful landscapes. Our state parks provide residents and nonresidents with the ability to experience this beauty first hand. The limited public land in Kansas makes our 24 state parks even more valuable as a public resource. With the state's commitment to maintain these parks, future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy what we apparently take for granted. I hope we can afford the same opportunity to our children and grandchildren. At this time, however, I am sorry to report that without a commitment for additional financial support, the future of the Kansas state park system is uncertain at best.

**"The Kansas Barn Again! Tour:  
Promoting History and Cultural Tourism Through Partnerships"**

Testimony to the House Committee on Tourism  
Victoria Foth Sherry, Associate Director  
**Kansas Humanities Council**  
February 7, 2000

**Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the Kansas Humanities Council's role in facilitating and promoting the statewide tour of **Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon**. This traveling exhibition was created by the Smithsonian Institution and celebrates the role of the barn in American history and culture. During the past eight months, **Barn Again!** has toured Kansas under sponsorship of the Kansas Humanities Council, bringing record numbers of visitors to small communities across our state.

One family en route from Utah to Florida picked up our **Barn Again!** brochure at the Goodland Travel Center. As a result, they made a special detour to visit the exhibition in Fredonia. Experiences like these convinced Fredonia's **Barn Again!** coordinator, Cassie Edson, that "with enough publicity and promotion, Fredonia can compete in the tourism arena." Colby Mayor Warren Hixson, whose town hosted **Barn Again!** for seven weeks early this fall, notes that, "**Barn Again!** was the kind of special event that draws travelers off I-70 to visit Colby, lots of them for the first time. That's what every Kansas community is looking for."

In my testimony, I will highlight some of the reasons why this exhibition has been so successful in enhancing tourism for Kansas communities. First of all, let's consider the exhibition theme itself. What topic could be better suited to Kansas than the proud agricultural heritage and history represented by the barn? Our nation's

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rapid urbanization has done nothing to diminish the appeal of barns to young and old—indeed, barns are more visible today than ever as they star in calendars and quilts, games and toys, advertising and movies.

Barns epitomize the values that Americans associate with Kansas and the heartland: hard work, independence, fairness, trustworthiness, purity. They are rich in nostalgia; they are tangible ties to the labor of our parents and grandparents.

But it takes more than barns to bring tourists to Kansas—otherwise, the state would have been overrun by visitors long ago. The secret to **Barn Again!**'s success is a unique national/state/local partnership, with the Kansas Humanities Council providing the crucial link between the prestigious Smithsonian and the communities that welcome a major attraction to showcase their assets to visitors.

### **The National-State Partnership**

Let's look first of all at the partnership between the Kansas Humanities Council and the Smithsonian. In 1997, the Smithsonian announced the selection of Kansas as one of only three states to tour **Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon** in 1999-2000. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian created the traveling exhibition specifically to serve museums and libraries in communities with populations of less than 20,000

Most small institutions outside of major metropolitan areas are unable to muster the financial resources to host a "blockbuster" exhibition with the cachet and name recognition of the Smithsonian. Shipping and rental costs alone are prohibitive. Here's where the Kansas Humanities Council comes in. As the state partner, our job is to provide the financial, programming, and promotional support that allows local communities to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

## The State-Local Partnership

As state sponsor of **Barn Again!**, the Kansas Humanities Council's first responsibility was to select the host communities for the yearlong tour, which we advertised through a general call for applications. Twenty-six communities from every region of the state responded.

We chose communities that were geographically dispersed, that had not hosted major touring exhibits in the past, and that offered impressive plans for how they would make the exhibition a centerpiece for community activities. In two of the six sites, we allowed a pair of neighboring towns to share the exhibition, thus bringing the actual number of participating communities to eight: Lindsborg, Colby, Fredonia, Arkansas City/Winfield, Highland/Hiawatha, and Elkhart.

With the help of the 1999 Kansas Legislature, KHC provided the major financial underwriting for the Kansas tour. Our state FY99 appropriation enabled us to cover the exhibition rental fee of \$12,000 and all instate shipping costs (around \$2,100). State funds also provide each community with \$2,500 in programming support for special events, marketing, and the mounting of companion exhibitions.

KHC used its own programming expertise to develop speakers and book discussions programs on the **Barn Again!** theme and made them available to host towns at no cost. Equally important was KHC's role as facilitator, bringing community coordinators together for hands-on training and sharing of resources and ideas.

## Marketing and Visibility

KHC was also positioned to take the lead in developing statewide visibility for the **Barn Again!** tour. We partnered with the state Division of Travel and Tourism to



produce a brochure that markets **Barn Again!** statewide. Designed by KHC and printed by Travel and Tourism, the brochure has been distributed at travel centers throughout the state, as well as by CVBs and visitor centers in the regions of the exhibition.

KHC helped *KANSAS* Magazine develop a feature story on barns and the **Barn Again!** tour for its September 1999 issue, which has drawn many inquiries from visitors. That article in turn generated a listing in the January 2000 issue of *National Geographic Traveler*. Joan Cales of the Winfield Public Library, which hosted the exhibition last month, has reported that the article generated phone calls from prospective visitors from as far away as Canada and Mexico.

KHC has helped coordinate media coverage of the **Barn Again!** in the Wichita Eagle and Kansas City Star. Radio coverage has included WIBW, KFRM Radio, and a host of local stations. All of these efforts combined to give the exhibition a much higher profile than any individual community on the tour could have achieved on its own.

### **Benefits of Barn Again!: Tourism and Visibility**

The fruits of the **Barn Again!** partnership can best be examined through a look at the impact on the individual communities that have presented the exhibition to date.

**Visitorship.** KHC originally projected that the exhibition would draw 25,000 visitors during its 11-month tour of the state from June 1999 through May 2000—an average of 4,000 visitors per site. Our estimate was low. With four months remaining in the tour, total visitation has already topped 20,000.

**Lindsborg.** The first community to host the exhibition was Lindsborg, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Kansas for out-of-state visitors. **Barn Again!** opened at the McPherson County Old Mill Museum in Lindsborg on June 18, the first

day of the annual Midsummer's Celebration, closing on August 1. During those seven weeks, the museum had 5,067 visitors, more than double the visitorship of 2,182 during that same period in 1998. The museum gift shop, featuring many special barn-related items, saw sales surge to \$,498, 232% of sales during the same period last year.

Museum Director Lorna Batterson reports that the museum attracted a large number of bus tours during the **Barn Again!** exhibition, with many groups traveling significantly farther than the 100-mile radius used as a measuring stick by the travel industry. For the out-of-town visitors, the exhibit offered a new perspective on Lindsborg and the surrounding agricultural community, enhancing their experience of a locale known primarily for its Swedish heritage.

Equally important was the exceptional ability of the exhibition to draw visitors from the county and region who had not previously come to the Old Mill. The museum appealed to these visitors with a companion display of 75 photographs of area barns, plus three notebooks, compiled by volunteers, which documented 240 barns in McPherson County.

Other Lindsborg institutions partnering in **Barn Again!** also extended their audience. The Sandzen Memorial Gallery's exhibition of barn paintings by Kansas artists attracted visitors from every walk of life, many of whom had not visited the gallery before. At a gallery talk by one of the artists, the Gallery's meeting room was packed with 130 people whose dress ranged from bib overalls to business suits.

**Colby.** The Prairie Museum of History and Art hosted the exhibition in August and September. There, **Barn Again!** drew 5,654 visitors in seven weeks. To understand the impact of the exhibition on attendance, compare that number to the Museum's total of 10,000 visitors for all of 1998.

The Museum conducted a formal survey of visitors to determine the role of the **Barn Again!** exhibition in boosting attendance. The results showed that

- 63% of the visitors came to the museum specifically to see **Barn Again!**;
- 75% were making their first visit ever to the museum;
- 90% indicated that they would visit the museum again to see a special exhibition.

The survey also revealed that a large number of visitors had traveled significant distances. Of those surveyed,

- 53% had traveled more than 100 miles to the museum; and
- 31% had traveled more than 500 miles

**Fredonia.** The third town on the tour, Fredonia made barns the theme for its annual Homecoming, as well as for arts, school, and community activities throughout the year. The exhibition opening was timed to coincide with Homecoming weekend, with more than 10,000 spectators on hand to enjoy food, crafts, and a parade of barn-related floats.

The Stonehouse Gallery, operated by the Fredonia Arts Council, saw regular attendance increase 15-fold during the seven-week **Barn Again!** exhibition. Among the 3,000 visitors were 50 tour groups, including bus companies who scheduled tours for passengers en route to Branson, MO. The Fredonia community was so pleased by the overwhelming response to **Barn Again!** that they hope to develop another yearlong historical theme and exhibition to attract visitors in 2000.

**Arkansas City/Winfield.** **Barn Again!** officially opened in Cowley County on December 3, but throughout the fall sponsoring organizations offered an array of barn bus tours, art competitions, chautauquas, and "barn parties" featuring live music, barn talks, and barbecue. Two bus tours of 45 participants each sold out almost before public

advertisement. The sponsoring Arkansas City Area Arts Council now plans to offer the tours on an ongoing basis.

A total of 6,500 visitors toured the **Barn Again!** exhibition in Arkansas City and Winfield, tripling normal December attendance at Arkansas City's Cherokee Strip Land Rush Museum. At least 16 states were represented, along with towns throughout Kansas. The many related events and exhibitions throughout the county drew another 13,000 participants over a three-month period.

**Highland.** Barn tours have already proven successful for Highland, the smallest town on the tour with a population of 873. The Doniphan County Historical Society sponsored a "Dusty Lanes Barn Tour" in October, filling two buses with 90 participants who paid \$18 each to tour the County's historic bluff-and-byre barns and enjoy lunch at a local bed and breakfast. Over half of the tour participants were from Missouri, a trend again in evidence at this weekend's exhibition grand opening, where more than a third of the visitors came across the state line to attend.

The Museum will offer the "Dusty Lanes" tour again this Saturday, February 12. (See flyer enclosed with testimony.) A few seats are left, but anyone who wants to attend should sign up soon! Highland will also run custom barn tours this month for groups from Lawrence and Emporia. These experiences are helping move the County toward its long-range goal of contracting barn tours with a professional coach tour company on a regular basis.

## **Conclusions**

**Barn Again!** ranks one of the most successful initiatives hosted by KHC in our 27-year history. Some of the factors in its success include:

- the universal appeal of barns to young and old, and the close connection of Kansans and Americans to our agricultural heritage;
- the appeal of barns and agriculture to visitors from outside the state, who want to experience the "real Kansas";
- the reputation of the Smithsonian and the highly professional quality of the national touring exhibition, which has in turn made visitors aware of the treasures at their local museums;
- the opportunity for partnerships with Travel and Tourism and other statewide groups.

Above all, **Barn Again!** demonstrates that cultural organizations such as museums and libraries—and state humanities councils—can play a crucial role in tourism development. The success of **Barn Again!** in Kansas is very much a reflection of these local organizations' leadership, commitment, and genius. Many of our communities are looking for an opportunity to demonstrate what they can do in the field of tourism—and a partnership like **Barn Again!** offers the perfect match of resources, state promotion, and state coordination to let them shine.