

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chairman Owen Donohoe at 3:30 p.m. on March 11, 2009, in Room 711 of the Docking State Office Building.

All members were present except:

Representative Pat George- excused
Representative Lana Gordon- excused
Representative Don Myers- excused
Representative Sharon Schwartz- excused
Representative Joe Seiwert- excused
Representative Valdenia Winn- excused

Committee staff present:

Jason Long, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Doug Taylor, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Mike Steiner, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Ann Deitcher, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the Committee:

Richard Dykstra, Asst. Director, Geary County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Mike Harris, Owner, Acorns Resort on Milford Lake

The Vice-Chair introduced Richard Dykstra who told the Committee that historic tourism is growing and Kansas has it all. From early pioneer history to Bioscience, the history of Kansas is being written each day. (Attachment 1).

Mr. Dykstra said that the publication Outdoor Life posted the "Top 200 Towns to Live in America for Anglers and Hunters." Kansas had four on the list; Junction City, Emporia, Dodge City and Parsons. Anglers from around the world have traveled to Kansas to compete in the BASS Federation National Championship. CastingKids National Championship, Federation Nation Directors Conference and the Federation Nation Youth Championship have also been hosted.

In closing, Mr. Dykstra also commended Kansas Travel and Tourism as well as the Department of Wildlife and Parks for being active in outreaching and assisting communities,

Questions and answers followed.

Appearing next on the agenda was Mike Harris who explained that Acorns Resort was the culmination of a grass roots effort at Milford Lake to develop additional recreational opportunities via private concessionaires on Corps of Engineers land. (Attachment 2).

Mr. Harris said that they have had recurring guests from all the surrounding states as well as Texas, New Mexico, Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, South Dakota, Pennsylvania and even from South Africa and China.

Saying that lakeside resorts in Kansas were viable, Mr. Harris said he was tired of hearing about the great resorts in Oklahoma and Missouri and watching our tourism dollars leave the State. He said that not only should those dollars be kept here, we should be recruiting and competing for those tourism dollars from other states as well.

Questions and answers followed.

Vice-Chair Donohoe announced the formation of Sub-Committees to work **SB 119** and **HB 2358**.

Thee meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for March 16, 2009.

Geary County
Convention & Visitors Bureau

**Kansas House Economic Development & Tourism Committee
Written testimony concerning Tourism Partnerships**

**By:
Richard J. Dykstra
Assistant Director**

Chairman Gordon and Honorable Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the citizens of Junction City, Geary County and the Board of Directors of the Geary County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

I'm here to share with you the results of some great state and local partnerships and the energy the Geary County Convention and Visitors Bureau has concerning tourism in Geary County and Kansas.

As we move forward in 2009, we would like to share with you some of our past successes and a little about what is planned for the future.

One of our biggest highlights locally was the 150th Birthday celebration for Junction City. Historic tourism is growing and Kansas has it all. From early pioneer history to Bioscience, the history of Kansas is being written each day. As you notice in our new 2009 visitor guide, we did not run from our history.

Other publications took notice of Kansas in 2008. Outdoor Life posted the "Top 200 Towns to Live in America for Anglers and Hunters." Kansas had four on the list, Junction City, Emporia, Dodge City and Parsons. How was the list compiled? Andrew McKean, hunting editor for Outdoor Life and author of the report, said a variety of factors were considered when selecting America's top hunting and fishing towns, including the quality of hunting and fishing, average income, proximity to shopping, higher education offerings, availability of public land, unemployment rate, crime rate, degree of taxation, average commute to work, and the community's friendliness toward hunters and anglers. Having restaurants that open early to serve breakfast to hunters and anglers was a consideration.

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Without a doubt, the outdoors of Kansas is gaining increased national recognition. Just look at the visit count for Milford Lake. In 2006, the visit count for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers parks at Milford Lake was 681,085. In 2008 it was 876,741....a growth of 185,656.

This past November, anglers from around the world traveled to Kansas to compete in the 2008 BASS Federation Nation Championship. This event would not have been done without the help of Kansas Travel and Tourism and Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. We say "THANK YOU."

Besides hosting the championship, we also hosted the CastingKids National Championship, Federation Nation Directors Conference and the Federation Nation Youth Championship. Anglers, family, friends and spectators all spent money!

The Flint Hills Film Festival kicked off its first year and plans are already being made for 2009. Film makers from Kansas gathered in Junction City for a weekend of film making. One of the winning videos from the family division of the film festival is currently posted on the Geary County CVB website. Once again, we could not have accomplished this festival without the guidance and assistance of the Kansas Film Commission.

Speaking of film making, in 2008, the Geary County CVB won two Telly Awards for its in-house film making. The two winning videos were, "Land of the Giants – Whitetail Deer of the Flint Hills" and "Kansas Upland Bird Hunting." Currently we have six videos on our website, to include the Land of the Giants.

Row, row, row your boat was the theme for the second annual "Float Your Boat" cardboard boat races. This event was held in conjunction with the Extreme Outdoor Water Festival. And once again, this event would not have been a success with the help of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, especially the "Boating Education Coordinator."

In 2008, we had about 22 boats. In 2009, it could get a little scary with the number of boats entered. A new category was added, the extreme boat. The extreme boat must be able to carry four or more persons.

Consumer trade shows provided an outlet for us to speak one-on-one with consumers and show them what a great state Kansas really is. We were excited to see our own Kansas Travel and Tourism at the 2009 Denver, Omaha and Kansas City outdoor shows. We look forward to partnering our efforts with Travel and Tourism and other communities in the future.

In 2009, we added two new consumer travel shows, both having an affiliation with National Geographic.

As most of you know, the Flint Hills were highlighted in the April 2007 edition of National Geographic. We wanted to keep that spark alive, not only for the Flint Hills, but for Kansas.

The "Adventures in Travel" shows allowed us to get exposure to the non-consumptive consumer market....hikers, bird watchers, horseback riders, campers, etc. Though we highlighted the Flint Hills, we did have Northwest Kansas Tourism Association as a partner and they featured Northwest Kansas..

When you look at the photographs, you'll see Kansas and/or the Flint Hills on our display. We learned long ago, when you go to major consumer shows, you have to highlight the state to sell your community!

You'll also notice in the photographs, other states and communities which continue to work hard to bring visitors to their states.

As we move forward in 2009, each of you can be assured our passion and excitement for Kansas tourism will not waiver. We are already working on a new national event for 2010. We've already secured a 30-minute seminar slot at the 2010 Los Angeles Adventure in Travel Show, which will highlight the Flint Hills.

We know by having active partnerships we are growing tourism in Kansas. We commend Kansas Travel and Tourism and Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks for being active in outreaching and assisting communities.

In closing, I look forward to seeing each of you at the 3rd Annual Sportsmen's Caucus Capitol Classic Invitational Fishing Event on April 27 at Milford Lake.

**Kansas House Economic Development & Tourism Committee
Written testimony concerning Resort Development**

By:

Mike Harris

Owner, Acorns Resort on Milford Lake

Chairman Gordon and Honorable Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the citizens of the State of Kansas and those citizens residing outside the state who want to visit lakeside attractions within Kansas.

Acorns Resort was the culmination of a grass roots effort at Milford Lake to develop additional recreational opportunities via private concessionaires on Corps of Engineers land. In the summer of 2005 the COE solicited rfp's (request for proposals) from interested developers on 98 acres of lakefront property in the Farnum Creek Campground area of the lake. This event in and of itself was fairly significant, as it was the first new lease on COE property in the Kansas City District for over 20+ years. Acorns Resort was awarded the bid in October of 2005 to build cabins, lodge buildings, campsites, docks, yurts, and other outdoor recreational pursuits. Construction on cabins and campsites started in the Fall of 2006 with the first cabin and campsite rentals occurring in April of 2007. Current facilities include 7 cabins (two of which are 5 bedroom, 2 bath units with over 2,000 sq. ft. of space), 29 campsites, pontoon boat rentals, kayak rentals, camper rentals, boat and rv storage, picnic shelters, over 3 miles of hiking and biking trails, and all of the associated infrastructure. I have recurring guests from all the surrounding states and also Texas, New Mexico, Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, South Dakota, Pennsylvania, just to name a few. I have also had guests from South Africa and China. I am currently in the approval process to build a nine room "mini-lodge" with great views of the lake and associated amenities. Pictures of the cabins and other facilities can be seen on my website at www.acornsresortkansas.com.

I believe the State of Kansas is also interested in the development of a lakeside resort. The Kansas Legislature has funded at least two feasibility studies to determine if a resort on the shores of a Kansas Lake is feasible. One of those studies was in the late 1970's with the most recent study being completed at the request of HB 2350 in 1997.

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A preliminary report from that study was to focus on building a sustainable competitive advantage in order to capture our market share of the business and leisure travel spending in this country. It also noted that tourism will enhance economic development and quality of life opportunities for Kansas. The Kansas Water Office even commissioned a feasibility study in 2006 to determine if Kansas lakes could support a resort. The resounding answer to all of these was "yes!" I had high hopes that these studies could help "kick-start" my project as it was fresh in the minds of many. I had my own feasibility study performed in 2007 by the same company, bbp Associates, who were hired by the Kansas Water Office. My study concluded that an additional 40 overnight lodging units on Milford Lake were immediately needed. Boy was I fired up. All of these reports pointed to the same thing, tourism in Kansas was alive and well.

Fueled by these statistics I hit the road to develop financing options and find outreach services, grant opportunities, utility assistance, and other economic incentives. This is about the point where the rubber meets the road and most of those who were adamant about creating a lakeside resort in Kansas fell to the wayside when asked for assistance. I have had too many meetings to count with the County Commissioners, City Commissioners, Fort Riley officials, bond counsels, KS Dept. of Commerce and Housing, Kansas Water Office, US Army Corps of Engineers, local bank officials, USDA Rural Development, SBA folks, etc. One agency that has been very helpful has been the Geary County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). The CVB helped with marketing strategies, networking and helping me make tourism related contacts.

Many obstacles have been faced, with some being overcome. Straight up bank financing is difficult because the ownership of the land is held by the COE and no mortgage can be placed on the property. Several grant opportunities are available, but ownership of the land again prevents this from occurring. The project approval process through the US Army Corps of Engineers can be a lengthy timeframe. And don't forget utilities. Part of the demand for rustic resorts in Kansas is for some peace and solitude in a remote setting. That is why people will travel across many states to get here. This remote setting, however, is not equipped to handle electric, water, and sewer issues. Bringing these three utilities to remote sites is very cost prohibitive. And once again, the ownership of the land can get in the way of submitting grant applications for utility extensions.

Even with all of the stumbling blocks incurred, I still believe that lakeside resorts in Kansas are viable. I would suggest that the next committee being appointed to research this particular topic get all the folks to the table.

This would include the US Army Corps of Engineers who own the land, local utility companies, county commissioners, KS Dept. of Commerce and Housing, Tourism, this Tourism Committee, Kansas Water Office, KS Dept. of Wildlife & Parks, local CVB's, local interest groups, and probably some others which I am forgetting. I for one, am tired about hearing about the "great" resorts in Oklahoma and Missouri and watching our tourism dollars leave the state. Not only should we keep those dollars here, we should be recruiting and competing for those tourism dollars from other states as well.