

**EXHIBIT G**  
**PRAIRIEFIRE INTERPRETIVE TRAIL SYSTEM:**  
**A PROSPECTUS AND RATIONALE**

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The interpretive trails at Prairiefire will offer many opportunities to enrich the lives of the people who walk them. These trails will not merely be exercise trails, but they will be “trails that teach.” They also will be trails that inspire a new appreciation of Kansas landscapes and provoke stewardship of Kansas’s native plants and wildlife.

### **Rationale for Having Interpretive Trails**

Specifically this trail system will give the following “gifts” to the people who walk it.

**THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE** - This trail system will function as an outdoor classroom as it teaches about wetlands and native plants and animals of Kansas. As the citizens young and old learn about their environment they can make better political decisions. Moreover, helping people identify with their local landscape strengthens and unifies the community.

**THE GIFT OF JOY** - These trails are “factories” which manufacture a priceless product - happy experiences. Memories will be made on these trails and the lives of people in the community will be enriched by spending productive and enjoyable time on the trails. As recreational walking trails, they will contribute to community health and civic pride. By combining the joy of walking through a beautiful landscape and the educational value of the trailside interpretation, the trails will successfully achieve an “edutainment” experience – the mixing of fun and learning. Walkers will discover that trailside learning is fun and the more you know, the more fun you can have.

**THE GIFT OF BEAUTY** - These trails will give the gift of beauty. But not just in the obvious ways with pretty birds and blooming trees and flowers. The interpretive strategies will encourage people to see the beauty in the ordinary --- to see “miracles in the mundane.” Henry Miller wrote, “The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent thing.” Walt Whitman wrote that even a mouse is a miracle. Along these trails, if we can demonstrate to people that mice and leaves are indeed miracles, then we quickly convince people that they are surrounded by nature’s beauty and mundane miracles even in the city. Miracles of nature will be on display along the Prairiefire trails. The goal of the trail system will be to help people: 1) notice them, 2) understand them, and 3) live in harmony with them. This will have the very practical benefit of spreading stewardship throughout the community. Jacques Cousteau said, “People will only protect what they love.” Through these trails as people come to see the beauty that surrounds them they develop an emotional connection to it. If people care about something, they will care for it.

**THE GIFT OF HOPE** – Life in the 21st century can be full of fear from the dark news of the day and doom and gloom forecasts for the future. But the repeated refrains of nature and the intricacies of nature give hope. This was most apparent immediately after 9/11 when on the morning of 9/12 the birds were still singing and migrating, the stars were still coursing through the night sky, and the leaves were still changing

into their autumn glory. People found comfort and hope in these steadfast rhythms and resiliency of nature. Hope is critical to maintaining both conservation efforts and personal health. When communities or neighborhoods or countries lose hope they see no reason to conserve natural resources for the future. Likewise hopeless people have many more medical problems and even higher suicide rates because of not having a hopeful orientation.

The messages along the trail will focus on nature's stories that give us hope for a prosperous and healthy future.

## **INTERPRETIVE APPROACH**

The trails will be developed using a Thematic Interpretation approach. Instead of having many miscellaneous stories or facts like some generic "nature trails," a theme will be developed that will link the individual stops/stations along the trail. Research has shown that people forget facts, but remember themes. Following the principles of interpretation, signs will not merely be labels with the name of the plant, but rather an interpretive message that assigns meaning to the plant (i.e., answers the question "So what?"). Like a beaded necklace the theme will be the string that holds it all together and the colorful story at each stop/station will be the multi-colored beads.

## **SAMPLE STORIES**

### **WETLANDS**

Not all wetlands look like this. Some are wooded swamps, some cattail marshes, some moist meadows, some are coastal lagoons and estuaries, and, in fact, technically some wetlands do not have standing water at all, but may merely have soil that is saturated near the surface. Some wetlands even are farmed and grazed. However, all wetlands regardless of type and size are valuable. Wetlands are the most productive ecosystems in the world in terms of the amount of plant and animal matter produced. They're even more productive than rich intensively farmed cropland. Wetlands make up only about 5 percent of the lands in the United States, yet 31 percent of all plants in the United States are wetland plants. In Kansas, although wetlands make up less than one percent of the state's total area, these wetlands support more wildlife than the other 99 percent combined. This illustrates the rich diversity and complexity of wetland habitats.

About 56% of wetland acreage in the United States has disappeared since settlers arrived from Europe. Kansas has lost about half of its wetlands during the last 200 years, mostly due to conversion to cropland and depletion of surface and ground water due to irrigation withdrawals. Wetlands, such as this one at Prairiefire, become more critical and valuable with each passing year.

### **REDWINGS**

The most common wetland bird here is the Red-winged Blackbird. This species might be the most abundant North American bird. Male Red-wings use their red shoulder patches to defend territories and attract up to 15 different mates to their cattail kingdoms. In fact, in experiments where their red patches were painted black, the male blackbirds lost their territories to other males they had previously defeated. Male Red-winged Blackbirds fiercely defend their territories during nesting season. They will attack much larger birds, especially hawks and crows, and even people - so watch your

heads and be prepared to duck if one tries to drive you off. The males return in the spring well before the females. Females, cryptically colored to blend in while sitting on the nest, are brown with streaked breasts looking like big sparrows.

The call of the male Red-wing is a symbol of spring and part of the soundtrack of summer along this trail. Thoreau described this song as being in harmony with a wetland, “liquid, bubbling, watery, almost like a tinkling fountain, ... It oozes, trickles, tinkles, bubbles from his throat – bob-y-lee-e-e, and then its fine shrill whistle.” Watch as male Red-wings flash their red epaulets, throw their heads back and let loose with their emphatic song.

## **TURTLES**

Prairiefire managers have placed logs and ramps in this wetland for the several types of turtles found here. Soft-shell turtles have thin pancake-like shells, whereas mud turtles are olive-brown with dark lines on their dome-like shells. Painted Turtles have pretty yellow stripes on the head. Sliders have a red patch behind each eye in addition to the yellow stripes. Snapping turtles have what looks like a hooked beak, big eyes and a rough ridged shell. They act as aggressive and nasty as they look. They have been known to take off the finger of a handler. But in spite of this unpleasant demeanor, many people still like to catch them. However these folks don't just catch them to admire them; people trap turtles to eat them! In fact, humans are its main predator. One lived almost 39 years in captivity.

Watch for these turtle-covered logs and see how many different kinds of turtles you can indentify – but you have to be quick because if you get too close, they slide into the water with a soft “plop,” and disappear.

## **WETLANDS IN YOUR WORLD**

Depending on their location, wetlands can clean pollutants from water, add to precious groundwater supplies, prevent costly, even deadly flooding, stabilize banks and shorelines, reduce erosion, and provide nurseries for shellfish, sport and commercial fish species. And you've already seen the obvious benefits of wetlands for wildlife habitat and in providing outdoor recreation opportunities such as birding, hunting, nature photography, or just enjoying the miracles and music of nature.

As you return home you may notice other small wetlands. Just because they are small does not mean they are trivial. They may each be part of a large system of wetlands whose cumulative effects in the watershed are significant. Wetlands, large or small, are not wastelands; they are wonderful resources that give many beautiful and useful gifts to society.

Think about what a poorer world it would be if wetlands did not exist. Throughout the centuries, wetlands have been a treasure for both wildlife and humans. With preservation and proper management, wetlands will be treasures for future generations.