

Improvement of the Kansas River Access Locations

DAS/DEN/GENAG 582

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Developing Strategies to increase recreational use of the Kansas River Draft

Introduction

The task of examining the Kansas River access points for the recreation and benefit of the people of Kansas was assigned to our group. After researching the river along with visiting the closest sites, we were able to identify the main problems with the locations and create solutions to better the access points. This report documents the analysis and improvement of the following river access points: Ogden, K-177 Manhattan, Lanier Park Manhattan, St. George, and Wamego.

Analysis

The Friends of the Kaw is an organization which aims to protect and preserve the Kansas River. The Kansas River, also known as the Kaw River, stretches 173 miles beginning in Junction City where the Republican River and the Smoky Hill River intersect, and ends in Kansas City where it dumps into the Missouri River (Friends of the Kaw).

One of the goals of the Friends of the Kaw is to increase the recreational use of the river. Popular forms of recreation includes canoeing and floating where recreationalists can drop off at one access point and flow downstream to the next access point. According to the Friends of the Kaw, there are 19 access points which can be found off of local highways and underneath bridges that cross over the Kaw. Some of these access points are fairly close, spanning just a few miles apart from each other. These points are attractive to recreationalists because they can be traversed in a few hours. Though these locations are ideal, some points can range from 10 to 38 miles apart. These wide spans are difficult to travel in a short period of time which can be uninviting unless the users were intending to camp either on the sandbars or row back up stream. The Friends of the Kaw believe that establishing more access points at closer intervals will increase canoeing and floating along the river. The eventual goal is to have an access point at every 10 miles. Enacting these access points has been a struggle due to lack of public land and funding along the river (Friends of the Kaw).

The main focus of this project is to develop a strategy for increasing recreational use along the river using the access points currently in place due to issues in finding funding and land for new access points. For the project, the Ogden, St. George, Wamego, and two Manhattan access points were analyzed. These access points are all within 15 miles of Manhattan, Kansas. Manhattan has a population of 52,281 citizens plus an enrollment of 22,140 students at Kansas State University (City of Manhattan). Floating

is popular among college and high school students whom are ideal targets when it comes to promoting and increasing the recreational use of the Kaw River. Improving the access points to minimize their drawbacks and promoting the benefits of these sites are a few goals which will appeal to citizens interested in enjoying the Kaw River.

Ogden

The Ogden access point is located outside of the city of Ogden. From Highway 18, the access point is a quarter of a mile east on Walnut Street. The next access is the boat ramp under Highway 177 in Manhattan, KS, which is 13 miles downstream.

Benefits of the Ogden access point

The Ogden sight is maintained by the Kansas Department of Wildlife. It has a well-developed concrete ramp on which a boat trailer is easily maneuverable in and out of the water. The parking lot allows for three boat trailers and adequate parking for regular sized vehicles. The site has a bathroom and a shelter with two possible camping sites. There is a small grassy area near the parking lot available but more attractive camping spot would be on the large sandbar on the opposite side of the river of the boat ramp. This sandbar provides seclusion from the parking lot and the highway while still near the amenities of the access point.

Drawbacks of the Ogden access point

There was no signage for this access point off of Highway 18 making it difficult to find. To get to the park, a 100 yard stretch of dirt road that was poorly maintained had to be crossed before reaching the parking lot. This could potentially cause a struggle for cars attempting to reach the parking lot on a dry day or if the road turned muddy the two-wheel drive vehicles could get stuck. Another problem at this site was that the bathrooms were locked. The boat ramp also developed some maintenance problems with the silt build up. When the silt builds up too high it causes difficulties when launching motor boats. This maintenance problem can be easily fixed with a system which will catch the silt and prevent build up on the ramp. The final drawback of this site is its distance to the next downstream access point, which is 13 miles away in Manhattan, KS. This stretch could take hours for a recreationalist to cover in a canoe or a float, depending on the pace.

K-177 Manhattan

The K-177 access point is just outside of Manhattan, underneath the K-177 bridge on the east side. The boat ramp is inside of Fairmont Park which is maintained by Riley County. The next access point 1.8 miles downstream at Lanier Park, off of Highway 24 east of Manhattan.

Benefits of the K-177 access point

Riley County has done a great job maintaining Fairmont Park and the boat ramp. There are paved roads all the way to the parking lot and the boat ramp so cars can easily access the area. The bridge provides shade and shelter for both the parking lot and the boat ramp, keeping the area cool during the summer times. The next access point downstream is just a short distance away making this an attractive option to users who want to only spend a small amount of time on the river.

Drawbacks of the K-177 access point

Like Ogden, there were no signs off of highway of K-177 acknowledging that there was an access point underneath the bridge or that there was a park. Fairmont Park is closed from 10 pm to 6 am and has a gate at the entrance to enforce this policy. This means no camping is allowed in the area and that those camping would have to find a nearby sandbar. The park being closed at 10 pm also restricts late night fishing. Catfishing is popular on the Kaw River and many fisherman fish at night. Unfortunately, the park will not allow for late night fishing causing fisherman to go down to the Lanier Park access point if they would like to set fishing lines. The parking lot is adequate for the amount the river is used however it is not boat trailer friendly. There are no slots designated for trucks with boat trailers and maneuvering around the parking lot with a trailer could be difficult. The bridge may provide shade and shelter benefits but can also be a nuisance. The constant noise from the traffic is a distraction along with the hundreds of birds' nests that line underneath the bridge. A significant nuisance is that there are no bathrooms in the area.

Lanier Park Manhattan

The Lanier Park access point is just east of Manhattan, on the south side of Highway 24, on the west bank of the Big Blue River. The Big Blue River is a non navigable river so recreationalist cannot go north up through the Big Blue River but are allowed to float south of the boat ramp to the Kaw River. The next access point is St. George, which is 11.5 miles downstream.

Benefits of the Lanier Park access point

It was very easy to find the Lanier Park access point because there were signs pointing out the park and the parking lot was big enough and easy to see from the highway. The large parking lot allows enough room for trailers and for any vehicles that use the river or the trail for recreation. This site is probably the most recreationally used site due to its connection to the Lanier trail. From this site recreationalist can bike or jog along the Lanier Trail or access the river. This site provides a great opportunity for development. On the south side of the parking lot are the railroad tracks and public land that can be developed for camping. The area is mowed and maintained by Riley County. The area is secluded and can be an attractive site for camping. Any cost to develop this site would be justified due to the amount this site used.

Drawbacks of the Lanier Park access point

There is no bathroom at this site. If this site is going to be developed for camping then installing an outhouse bathroom needs to be the first priority. Highway 24 and the railroad tracks can be a distraction at this site but many of the access points are going to have this problem because Highway 24 and the railroad tracks run along the Kaw River. The long distance between the Lanier Park access point and St. George could also be a turn off for recreationalist but it could be the perfect distance if users wished to relax and float all day on the river.

St. George

The St. George access point is located in the St. George River Front Park, just south of St. George off of Old Highway 24. The area is maintained by the City of St. George. The Wamego Bridge access point is 8.5 miles downstream of St. George.

Benefits of the St. George access point

The St. George River Front Park is well maintained and provides a beautiful view of the river. The park has benches and grills which makes it a great sight to have a picnic. In the parking lot there is a light which can help fisherman load and unload boats when its dark. The site has two outhouse style bathrooms and there is no ordinance against camping. The park was also easy to find due to the signage notifying the access point provide from the highway.

Drawbacks of the St. George access point

The park may be well maintained and appealing but right next to the park is the water treatment facility. It did not smell bad but the fact that the plant is there could turn citizens wanting to enjoy a picnic and campers away. The parking lot is fairly small and does not have a designated area for boat trailers and could be a hindrance for those maneuvering a trailer.

Wamego

The Wamego Bridge Access point is on the south side of Wamego under the Highway 99 bridge. The park and the area is maintained by the City of Wamego. The next access point is 38 miles downstream at the Kaw River State Park in Topeka.

Benefits of the Wamego access point

The Wamego access point provides another access to the Kaw River. The park is close to downtown Wamego for users wanting to shop or eat at the local restaurants.

Drawbacks of the Wamego access point

Finding the Wamego access point was very difficult. There was no signage and the park was tucked back in a neighbor hood. The parking lot was small and not adequate for recreationalist pulling a boat trailer. The park had a nice bathroom on site but the bathroom was locked. The park had a sign at the entrance stating the park was closed at 10 pm therefore not allowing camping on the site. Even if camping was allowed, campers may be turned away by the urban

feel. The park is surrounded by a neighborhood and provides no room for expansion. Of all the sites, Wamego was arguably the worst when it comes to outdoor appeal.

Signage

One of the main problems with all of the access points is the lack of signage on the roads leading to the access point. The only two sites that we looked at that had signs were the Manhattan 177 access point and the Wamego access point, but the signs were not in easily viewed locations.

The Manhattan 177 access point is located under the 177 bridge leading in to town. To access the ramp, you must turn on to McDowell Creek Road and they turn into the access point's drive. The only signage for this access point is on McDowell Creek Road and only on the side of the street go toward 177. So if you are driving on 177 trying to get to the access point, you never see a sign for the access point.

The Wamego access point is located right next to the Highway 99 bridge, but is off of side roads. You first have to turn off of Highway 99 onto Valley Street, and then turn down an un-named residential street. The access point is at the end of this street. The only sign for this access point is located at the end of the un-named street, a small blue sign that says "boat ramp" and is no bigger than a foot across. It is almost impossible to see from Valley St. and is not visible from Highway 99.



We believe that a simple solution to improving/increasing the recreational use of the river as well as the use of these access points is to provide adequate signage that leads people to these access points. This is the cheapest and easiest to maintain solution to promote the access points. All that is needed is a simple sign, the one at the Wamego site is adequate, to be posted on the main roads leading up to the access ramps with arrow pointing the visitors in the right direction. These signs would be a small one time cost and would not require any maintenance.

Campgrounds at Highway 24 access ramp

After analyzing the multiply sites, we determined that the Manhattan Highway 24 access point is the best site to propose a campground addition. This site was chosen for multiply reasons. First, It is the one site with most available open green space. Second, it is not located right next to or in view of any buildings, giving it a more secluded feeling. Third, We believe is it the one site that will get the most use out of a campground because it is located in the biggest of the cities we looked at (Manhattan), as well as being located next to the Linear Trail as well as the river access ramp. Lastly, the land is already government owned land, so it should not be as hard to use the land compared to if it was privately owned.

For the design of the campgrounds we determined that what is needed are bathrooms and the campgrounds themselves. Parking will not need to be added because the parking already on-site for the access ramp is large enough to accommodate both the need for parking for the campground, the ramp, and the Linear Trail.

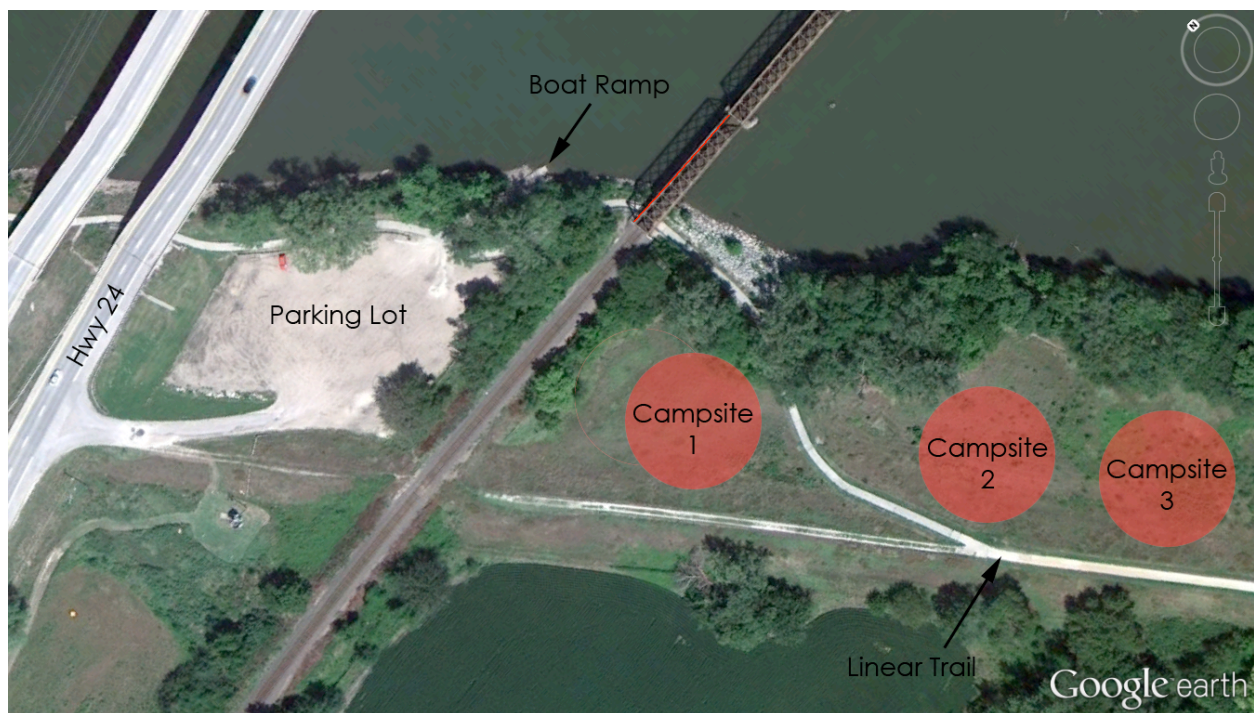
The first step in the design process would be to put in the bathrooms. We believe these should be put in first because other visitors to the site, such as anyone using the Linear Trail or the boat ramp, can use the bathrooms before the campgrounds are finished/installed. Because the bathrooms are being used by multiple visitor groups, we recommend the location of the bathrooms be next to the parking lot. This will allow everyone visiting the site easy access to the bathrooms, as well as make access to the bathrooms for maintenance easier. It will also help to cut down on vandalism of the bathrooms because it will be within eyesight of Highway 24.



For the design of the bathrooms we recommend no more than two bathroom units be placed on the site. Even with the multiple user bases, this should be adequate amount of bathrooms for the area. We also recommend that the bathrooms use waterless toilets because of the remote location of the site and the cost of installing plumbing to the site. ROMTEC, a company that sells pre-engineered buildings was contacted about pricing for waterless restrooms. These buildings require no water, sewer or electric and meets ADA requirements. Each building is a single toilet restroom. The pricing for a typical unit is around \$11,000 plus \$8,000 for installation. Also, it will keep down the maintenance costs because there will be not water bill as well as no moving parts, so possibility of major functional problems (burst pipes, clogged pipes, etc.).



For the design of the campgrounds, we are recommending no more the three campsites be installed at first. The site has plenty of room for more campsites, but to keep initial installation costs as well as maintenance costs down we are recommending that the number of sites be limited.



The site of the campgrounds will be on the southeast side of the train tracks that run threw the site. There is a clearing just north of the embankment for the Linear Trail before you reach the woods on the bank of the river. The site is not visible from any buildings nearby and is barely visible from Highway 24. The site is well protected from the wind, which is always a concern in Kansas, by the embankment to the south and the woods to the north.

Each campsite should be no less then 250 square feet (adequate room for a 4 person tent) and each have their own fire pit. We recommend at least 1 permanent grill and at least two park benches for the whole campground, but they are not needed for the campground to work

properly. These amenities would improve the quality of the campground though and draw in more campers.



Design guidelines for future sites

When designing a park, two thoughts should come to mind. Those thoughts are who and how. A public park design should consider who will be using the park, and how they will be using it. A river access park is a special use area, which utilizes a regional resource (the Kaw River). The Kaw River is an underutilized recreational resource. More access points and advertisement of the recreational opportunities should increase the use of the river.

Before designing the park, all existing resources should be inventoried. The more utilities that are already available would result in less construction, thus reducing the cost. If utilities are not available, then the distance required to install them will be a factor. For example, an optimal camp ground would not be deep in the woods. Reducing construction not only reduces cost, it also reduces impact on the ecosystem.

Public involvement is crucial in the development process. After all, why build something that the public doesn't want? Meetings, surveys, and general conversations need to be conducted to get the opinion of the public. Often, the best parks are designed by the people that recreate in them.

The next thought is how the public can access the park. Simple is always best. The easier it is to get to the park, the more likely it will be used. When they finally get there, they need a place to park their vehicle. This can become problematic when dealing with water access. Vehicles with trailers attached to them can take up space in a parking lot quickly. Special spots should be designated for trailers. This not only reserves them room, but can also reduce congestion/confusion. Designated trailer spots that allow vehicles to pull through are invaluable. The only time someone should be backing a trailer should be when they are on the boat ramp. The boat ramp is also a very important aspect of park access. After all, this is the main reason behind a River Access Park. Sediment build up on the ramp should be removed regularly. Foot traffic is an entire category of access in its own. Restrooms should always have ADA approved handicap access. This means that there needs to be concrete (or hard surface) paths from the parking lot to the restrooms. Ideally, a wheel chair should be able to get to anywhere people would normally occupy in a park setting.

Site specifics are the variable in any park. Obvious concerns should be examined, but no one can foresee the future. A river access park would have to consider flooding potential, effect on wildlife, erosion, etc. Posting signs that warn of potential dangers are not enough. If a potential access point is specifically dangerous at night, or is the nesting sight of a rare bird, the entire designing process can be halted in its tracks.

When all of the designs are finished, and all the red tape is cut, construction can begin. Many different contracts will be drawn out for different aspects of the park (facilities, concrete, etc.) Donations are always welcomed, such as benches, picnic tables etc.

Conclusion

Through the work from the Friends of the Kaw, the users of the Kansas River have been given more access points to the river with a small variety of amenities available. After reviewing what is available, our group has focused on what is still needed. The sites included in this report can all benefit from increased signage and community promotion to inform the public of the existence of these parks. Additional improvements at sites including, but not limited to, boat ramp development, bathrooms, and campsites would be best to increase usage. After the current sites have seen rise in use, there will be need for more sites which will encourage future growth and development for the Kansas River.

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