

# DOUGLAS COUNTY HERITAGE CONSERVATION COUNCIL

## 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

**MISSION:** As an advisor to the Board of County Commissioners, the Heritage Conservation Council promotes and advocates for the conservation of tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage to honor the past, enrich the present, and inspire the future.

**COUNCIL COMPOSITION:** In 2025, Amy Van de Riet's term concluded (huge shout out to Amy's six years of service- her love of barns and rural architecture will leave a lasting impact!), and we welcomed Tashia Dare to fill the vacant position. HCC is comprised of seven members: Caleb Morse (Chair), Patti Beedles (Vice-chair), Nick Pumphrey, Leo Ortiz, Tim Lyons, Charlie Kuszmaul, and Tashia Dare.

**STRATEGIC PLAN:** HCC recently revisited its strategic plan that was developed in 2022. Outside of minor text edits, the Council determined that the strategic plan is still relevant and no significant revisions are needed. The HCC Strategic Plan and 2026 Action Plan are included with this report.

## 2025 PROJECTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS FUND:** Utilizing dollars previously budgeted for professional services, HCC facilitated the inaugural year of the Heritage Events and Celebrations Fund. This program is designed to support established, annual heritage events for three years. HCC received 10 applications for funding, totaling \$77,815 in requests. The following heritage events were selected for funding through 2027:

- The St. John Mexican Fiesta, \$5,667
- We Remember: Lawrence Annual Día de Muertos Celebration, \$5,667
- Juneteenth Celebration 2025, \$5,666
- Lawrence Jewish Community Congregation Annual Blintz Brunch, \$3,000
- Vinland Fair, \$4,000

**HERITAGE PARTNERS NEEDS ASSESSMENT:** Led by Coneflower Consulting, HCC initiated and participated in a comprehensive assessment of the heritage organizations supported annually by Douglas County. The Needs Assessment project highlighted existing strengths and opportunities for growth, identified possibilities for future collaboration, and outlined key next steps for strategic coalition building among the Heritage Partners.

### IN PROGRESS HERITAGE PROJECTS

PILOT LAND PROTECTION PROGRAM WITH THE KANSAS LAND TRUST

COUNTYWIDE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

LONE STAR LAKE INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE

BLACK JACK BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION

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### NATURAL AND CULTURAL HEIRTAGE GRANT PROGRAM

#### 2025 GRANT CYCLE IN REVIEW

**26**  
APPLICANTS

**\$38,580**  
AVERAGE GRANT REQUEST

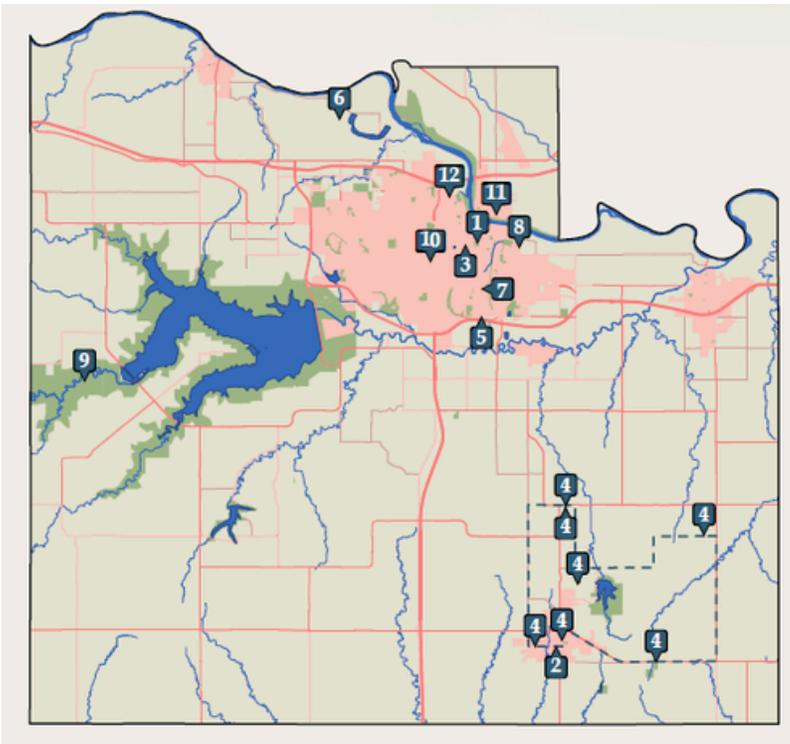
**\$1,003,086**  
REQUESTED FUNDS

**\$17,500**  
AVERAGE GRANT AWARD

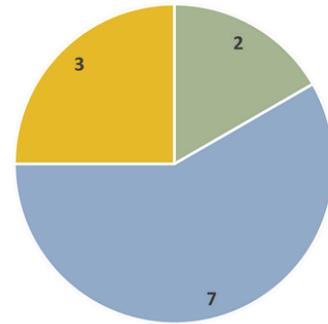
**12**  
GRANTEES

**50%**  
FIRST-TIME GRANTEES

**\$753,712**  
LEVERAGED MATCH AND IN-KIND SUPPORT

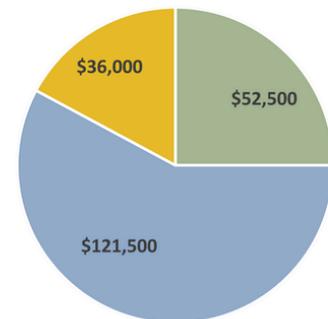


2025 Grant Recommendation: Project Category By Project Count



■ Natural Heritage ■ Cultural Heritage ■ Historic Preservation

2025 Grant Recommendation: Project Category By Award Amount



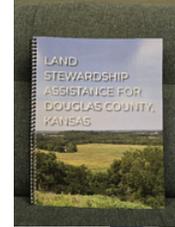
■ Natural Heritage ■ Cultural Heritage ■ Historic Preservation

ID	Applicant	Project Title
1	Lawrence Kansas Juneteenth Organization	Sharing Our Stories: Lawrence Juneteenth's Oral Histories & Underground Railroad Experience
2	Lumberyard Arts Center	Protecting and Stabilizing the Ives Hartley Lumber Building, Home of the Lumberyard Arts Center, Baldwin Cty, KS
3	Ecumenical Campus Ministries	ECM Event Hall Restoration
4	Baker University	Douglas County History Driving Tour
5	Haskell Indian Nations University	Haskell Wetlands Boardwalk Design
6	Lecompton Historical Society	National Register Nomination for the Lewis-Crowder Cemetery
7	University of Kansas Museum Studies Program	Unlocking Haskell Cultural Center & Museum's Historic Collection
8	Lawrence Branch NAACP	Markers for African-American Burials at Potters Field
9	Ducks Unlimited	Elk Creek Wetland Complex Restoration Project
10	LRM Foundation	African American and Native American Arrival to Douglas County, Kansas between 1910-1970s: The Stories, The Impact, and The Legacy
11	Somos Lawrence / Ballard Center	Building spaces and practices of inclusion through outreach and multi-generational learning
12	Children's Learning Center	Cultural Connections

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### GRANT PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2025



#### **NATIVE LANDS RESTORATION COLLABORATIVE: SEEDS OF CHANGE (\$68,430, 2023)**

Established the Kansas Native Seed Team! A community seed vault was built and over 40 community events were held across Douglas County focused on native seed collection, identification, cleaning, storage and dispersal over publicly accessible land.

#### **K-STATE EXTENSION DOUGLAS COUNTY: LAND STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (\$10,500, 2023)**

Published the resource guide Land Stewardship Assistance for Douglas County, KS and hosted the Rural Living in Douglas County Resource Fair.



#### **SOMOS LAWRENCE AND BALLARD CENTER: SOMOS LAWRENCE, BEING LAWRENCE: ENHANCING SOCIAL SPACES, DOING CULTURE (\$13,000, 2024)**

Hosted the Day of the Dead and Day of the Spring Celebrations, welcoming collectively 1,000 community members to connect with living heritage in Douglas County. Additionally, Somos Lawrence enhanced these events by hosting community workshops, leading conversarios, and elevating community leaders, or cultural promoters.

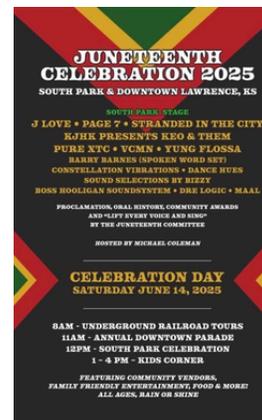


#### **PLYMOUTH CHURCH: ROSE WINDOW REFURBISHMENT (\$17,500, 2024)**

Plymouth Church, located in downtown Lawrence, repaired and restored the building's focal point rose window.

#### **WINTER SCHOOL: SEEDS AND STORYTELLING (\$5,000, 2023)**

Engaging the community with their onsite remnant prairie at the Winter School near Lecompton, this grant supported activities related to native seed education and prairie preservation. Activities included hosting Happy Hour on the Prairie, producing an educational video in partnership with Native Lands Restoration Collaborative, and a cultural burn.

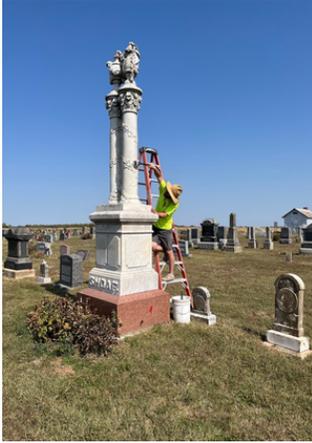


#### **LAWRENCE KANSAS JUNETEENTH ORGANIZATION: SHARING OUR STORIES: LAWRENCE JUNETEENTH'S ORAL HISTORIES & UNDERGROUND RAILROAD EXPERIENCE (\$20,000, 2025)**

Supported the production costs to host the 2025 Lawrence Juneteenth Celebration, welcoming folks to celebrate Black history in Douglas County.

# DOUGLAS COUNTY HERITAGE CONSERVATION COUNCIL 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

## GRANT PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2025



### UNITED CEMETERY ASSOCIATION: SOWERS UNION CEMETERY RESTORATION (\$10,000, 2024)

Assisted the restoration and repair of 35 flat grave markers, 14 single piece grave markers, 5 two-piece markers, and one large carved marble monument at Sowers Union Cemetery in southwestern Douglas County.



### GRASSLAND HERITAGE FOUNDATION AND NATIVE LANDS RESTORATION COLLABORATIVE: RESTORING THE PRAIRIE IN PRAIRIE PARK (\$49,921, 2022)

Five acres of publicly accessible park land were restored to native prairie vegetation through community events and educational opportunities. Over 80 volunteers participated in this project, totaling 850 hours of donated time. Additionally, this project included three interns from Haskell Indian Nations University, on-site interpretive signage, and curriculum development on prairie ecology for Kansas educators through the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education.



### FRIENDS OF THE KAW: PROTECTING THE RIVERS OF DOUGLAS COUNTY - RIVERBANK RESTORATION MAINTENANCE (\$31,600, 2023)

Additional volunteer workdays and staff training were held at riparian restoration sites previously funded by the Natural and Cultural Heritage grant program - the Lawrence East Riverfront Park/8th Street Boat Ramp and Eudora Wakarusa River boat ramp. Over 16 workdays, six educational tours, and four staff trainings, approximately 219 volunteers engaged with this project and 30 new species of plants were reintroduced. Additionally, a maintenance manual was developed for Parks and Recreation staff in Lawrence and Eudora.



### KU FIELD STATION (UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CENTER FOR RESEARCH): HERE-ING (\$10,600, 2024)

Centered around the environmentally embedded artwork (here-ing by Janine Antoni) at the McColl Tract at the KU Field Station, this project engaged 170 participants through community programming, including invasive species workdays, native plant reseeding events, a community burn workshop, and a demonstration culturally led burn. 42 native prairie species were reintroduced to the site! Additionally, nine Tribal community members were supported for their participation in this project through honoraria provided from this grant.

## **Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council**

**Strategic Plan, Updated December 2025**

**Mission:** As an advisor to the Board of Douglas County Commissioners, the Heritage Conservation Council promotes and advocates for the conservation of tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage to honor the past, enrich the present, and inspire the future.

**Vision:** The Heritage Conservation Council fosters a County in which all communities benefit from and understand the value of conserving both natural and cultural heritages.

### **Values:**

- **Collaboration:** We are committed to partnership, supportive of cross-organizational coordination, and seek out community input.
- **Inclusivity:** We have an expansive and community-driven definition of heritage and strive to be inclusive and welcoming to all of Douglas County.
- **Diversity:** We strive to represent diverse sectors of Douglas County on our Council and in our programming.
- **Accountability:** We take responsibility for our role as stewards of Douglas County heritage and welcome public feedback on our work.
- **Transparency:** We communicate transparently about Council operations and decisions.

### **Goal 1: Reducing Destruction and Encouraging Sustainable Development**

The Heritage Conservation Council strives to minimize the destruction of natural and cultural resources, cultural and agricultural heritages, and historic sites; conserves and documents their existence; and encourages smart, sustainable development and adaptive reuse.

#### **Strategies:**

1.1: Conserve Douglas County's high priority open spaces, including natural environments, cultural landscapes, and recreational spaces by providing information and recommendations on the value of those resources and advocating for their conservation.

1.2: Conserve tangible and intangible cultural heritages by inviting all Douglas County residents to see their histories as valuable, with an emphasis on uplifting historically underrepresented communities.

1.3: Conserve Douglas County's historic structures and sites by acting as a Certified Local Government (CLG) in partnership with the Kansas State Historic Preservation Office and contributing to the Kansas Historic Resources Inventory.

1.4: Model flexibility and balance by strategically compromising on lesser conservation priorities while reserving political influence for major conservation priorities.

### **Goal 2: Serving through Advising**

The Heritage Conservation Council is an essential advisory council to the Board of Douglas County Commissioners, County staff, and community and nonprofit organizations in the sector.

**Strategies:**

2.1: Maintain strong relationships with County Commissioners and County staff, working to support interdepartmental relationships especially on topics related to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and seeking and sharing advice as appropriate.

2.2: Initiate inventories and surveys and support community-driven planning processes to help Commissioners and the public understand and protect the County's natural and cultural heritage.

2.3: Advocate for conservation of natural and cultural resources as necessary, while acknowledging the County's need for balanced, sustainable growth and compromising when community needs outweigh conservation priorities.

2.4: Ensure that County efforts are in line with the Douglas County Climate Action Plan, Open Space Plan, Food System Plan, Rural Historic Resources Guide, and Plan 2040, as well as the National Parks Service, as they work to create more equitable heritage preservation policies.

**Goal 3: Uplifting Partner Organizations**

The Heritage Conservation Council uplifts partner heritage organizations and catalyzes their collaboration by providing funding and building capacity.

**Strategies:**

3.1: Administer the Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program annually, providing funding and building capacity to heritage organizations and projects from across the County.

3.2: Maintain a Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant program that is equitable and accessible to all, with an emphasis on supporting communities whose heritages have historically been underrepresented and/or undervalued in Douglas County.

3.3: Encourage partnership among Douglas County's heritage organizations as a means of providing public educational programming on conservation to the Douglas County community.

3.4: Promote the work of community heritage organizations, especially those working with underrepresented communities, and work to maintain trusted and reciprocal relationships with them.

**Goal 4: Encouraging Accessibility**

The Heritage Conservation Council encourages the accessibility of Douglas County's natural and cultural resources and evaluates their continued use and value to the community.

**Strategies:**

4.1: Recognize the importance of public access and work to ensure that, as feasible, conserved resources can be experienced by as many people as possible for as long as possible.

4.2: Acknowledge that some natural and cultural resources may require restricted public access for the sake of sustainability.

4.3: Partner with organizations that can provide insights into accessibility of resources from a diversity of perspectives.

## **Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council**

### **Action Plan, 2026**

#### **Douglas County Cemetery Preservation**

Goal: Support cemetery stewards to preserve and share the heritage stories contained within Douglas County's historic cemeteries.

- Action Item: Host a group meeting of cemetery managers, stewards, and caretakers to build community, understand current needs and challenges, and strategize current and future cemetery maintenance and preservation strategies.
- Action Item: Apply for Historic Preservation Fund funding to develop public facing material (handout, online map, tour, other deliverable) to increase public awareness of rural cemeteries and their heritage stories.

#### **Heritage Partners' Partnership and Coalition Building**

Goal: Acting on recommendations in the Heritage Partners Needs Assessment, continue to facilitate ongoing efforts to unite Douglas County's historical societies to develop a more resilient and sustainable heritage ecosystem.

- Action Item: Host a mini strategic planning session with the heritage partner organizations to plan for 2026 and prepare for tourism boost expected in Summer 2026. Connect with eXplore Lawrence to link into tourism and economic development opportunities.
- Action Item: Develop and execute a project plan to evaluate community-wide input on heritage conservation strategies in Douglas County. This project will help inform short- and long-term Heritage Partner and Heritage Conservation Council goals.

#### **Countywide Archaeological Survey**

Goal: Complete the in-progress Countywide Archaeological Survey project.

- Action Item: As appropriate, host a public meeting to communicate the results of the Countywide Archaeological Survey Project.
- Action Item: Host a meeting with relevant County and City planning/administration staff to share any information, knowledge, or resources gained from the project to inform future land use and planning projects.

## **Natural and Cultural Heritage Grant Program**

Goal: Support a greater number of projects from a diverse group of community organizations across Douglas County, embracing a holistic view of heritage conservation.

- Action Item: Implement shortened application and expanded funding available for Seed Grant proposals (<\$5,000).
- Action Item: Evaluate the impact of program revisions and solicit feedback on 2026 grant program process and outcomes.
- Action Item: Work with Douglas County Communications to share stories and feature impacts of the grant program with the public.

## **Open Space Program**

Goal: Continue to support initial projects to implement the goals of the Open Space Plan.

- Action Item: Evaluate the results of the Douglas County Land Protection Program and the partnership with the Kansas Land Trust following the project's conclusion in November 2026.
- Action Item: Complete the in-progress project to develop and install interpretive signage at Lone Star Lake Park. Use the resources gathered from this project to develop complementary online resources to accompany the signage.
- Action Item: Support the completion of the Wakarusa Vision Plan project and advise on any action items as the Plan is implemented.
- Action Item: Support the preservation of Black Jack Battlefield and Nature Park, as needed.

## **Rural Preservation and Open Space Conservation Strategies**

Goal: Understand how HCC can advise and advocate for strategies presented in the Rural Historic Resources Guide and Open Space Plan.

- Action Item: Meet with Douglas County Zoning and Codes Director to receive an overview of the County's current zoning code and protection for environmentally sensitive lands.
- Action Item: Continue to advise planning staff on any impacts to natural and cultural heritage resources for upcoming land use applications.