

Wakarusa River Valley Vision & Area Plan

Visioning Haskell Open House | 4-6 PM November 19th, 2025

Haskell Open House Purpose & Structure

The week of November 17, the Wakarusa River Valley Vision & Area Planning Team led a multi-day workshop to explore the river corridor characteristics in depth with the Institutional Planning Partners, river valley landowners, Haskell campus community, agencies, and local experts. Two of these events included broad invitations. The team visited Haskell Indian Nations University to discuss the project with faculty, students, and staff on Wednesday the 19th. On the 20th, the team hosted a Public Open House to share progress from the week and discuss what the team will be working on as they draft the Wakarusa River Valley Vision & Area Plan.

The Haskell Open House was very similar in structure and materials to the Public Open House, but the invitations were focused on Haskell and Indigenous communities and there was more of a combined focus on Ecology with Culture & Living Heritage, with subject categories drawn from interviews and research undertaken by Haskell alumnus Tyler Moore, who worked with the consulting team and for Biohabitats in the summer of 2025 to compile a history of the wetlands and document university community perspective on strategies and scenarios, particularly as they impact the campus and surroundings, which is available on the County project website. The high-level summary below attempts to capture themes and is not a record of all individual comments. The consulting team continues to study a detailed record of feedback as they work toward a draft Vision Plan.

ACCESS AND RECREATION. Comments on three versions of potential future access to the river valley.

Scenario A: Uses only public land and rights of way

- Trails should be low-impact materials with safety considerations. Underpasses for water, people, and wildlife. A participant wrote that “3-4 tunnels at SLT were not implemented.” The water trail should be limited to certain areas, while broader access along the river can include signage and wayfinding created by students and faculty, as well as academic collaborations.

Scenario B: Proposes new trails and connections from the dam to Baker Wetlands

- Look to precedent programs for trail building and water rights collaborations in neighboring states (NE, CO). Look to natural trail construction methods and start with technical assistance for landowners or other resources in exchange for land access. Community events can be fitness events such as triathlons, or even Farm-to-Table events.

Scenario C: Envisioned a fully-connected trail from Clinton Dam to the Kaw

- Camp grounds, kayak and canoe rentals are desired, and it was mentioned that Haskell has a canoe fleet. There was concern about “discomfort around using spaces through private land.”

ECOLOGY + CULTURE & LIVING HERITAGE.

- **Reconnecting the Wakarusa Wetlands** should start with a “meeting of the minds” between Haskell and Baker. Participants suggested ‘default Haskell stewardship if connecting to Baker’ and called for long term study of natural and manmade areas of the wetlands. Reconnecting efforts can be achieved through durable walkways, underpass, and waterways.
- **Expanding wetlands in the Wakarusa River Valley** can involve wetland scientists, hydrologists, and students during wetland construction and restoration, and more broadly with restoration teams or work day events. Participants also expressed preference for stopping development and urbanization south of the SLT.
- **Events and celebrations** can celebrate water, be seasonal, inclusive to all ages and backgrounds, and through various mediums including talks, float trips, webinars, field classes, group cleanups, art and music festivals – events that appeal to wider audiences
- **Cultural Burns and Land Stewardship** can be a collaborative effort, especially between landowners, HINU and Baker, and more broadly with KU through co-stewardship agreements with recognition that the practice is a real environmental management strategy– reconnect students to traditional teachings and strengthen relationship to the land.
- **Addressing Noise Pollution and Stressors** should first conduct a noise study, include new strategies and explore possible redesign or relocation of existing barriers, as well as harsher penalties for dumping and vandalism and considerations for light pollution. “Improving this issue shows respect for Haskell’s cultural and environmental spaces.”
- **Student engagement** should include all universities (HINU, Baker, KU), as well as K-12, with inclusion of local tribal organizations. Universities can work together on research, educational opportunities, and art initiatives; host cleanup events, be ambassadors to the broader community, especially the youth, and lead initiatives that bring community together to improve the overall health of the river through initiatives like “adopt-a-trail.”
- **Cultural Resource Preservation** can be identified as “Areas of Cultural Significance,” include established working groups to develop and distribute information with guidance and leadership from Haskell faculty, staff, and students (“Field Guides”). Future collaborations could include the Cultural Center and art installation opportunities.
- **Open dialogue on traumatic past:** Looking forward, create events specifically for having open dialogue. One participant suggested: “acknowledge trauma, open apology, and [say] what you are doing to prevent further hurt.” Other suggestions included signage of land acknowledgment along the river, and histories and storytelling informed by elders, HINU faculty, staff, and students.