

Wakarusa River Valley Vision & Area Plan

Visioning Public Open House | 430-730 November 20th, 2025

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. The team visited Haskell 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, gather feedback, and discuss what the team will be working on as they draft the Wakarusa River Valley Vision & Area Plan. Below is a high-level summary of public input and reactions to the draft scenarios shared, provided by those in attendance who chose to participate. It 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.

The public open house had five stations. Each station was staffed by a planner who shared what they heard for this summary and recorded photos of the public input boards.

- **Station 1 – Welcome & Project Introduction.**
- **Station 2 – Ecology.** Identify where the ecological and water strategies are most important.
- **Station 3 – Access & Recreation.** Compare three versions of potential future access to the river valley.
- **Station 4 – Culture & Living Heritage.** Consider the ways to tie in human experience.
- **Station 5 – Map Your River.** Locate and discuss places of interest, concern, or opportunity.

Station 1 - Attendees

There were 75 recorded attendees to the Public Open House, representing a range of ages, largely from the City of Lawrence or the unincorporated area of Douglas County. Most described themselves as attending to learn more. About one-fourth of the attendees had visited the project website prior. Participants described their connection to the river as a peaceful, special place for frequent visits. Otherwise, many respondents are connected through recreation and fishing activities, or education opportunities from HINU and KU.

Age Range	Where do you live?	Previous Engagement	Connecting to the River
Silent Generation (1928-1945): 3	Lawrence: 44	Here to learn! 33	Through organization 3
Baby Boomer (1946-1964): 21	Douglas County: 23	Open Space Plan: 9	Frequent visitor 11
Generation X (1965-1980): 16	City of Eudora: 0	Visited website: 16	Kayaking 4
Millennial (1981-1996): 17	Other: 4	Read Existing	Land owner on river 1
Generation Z (1997-2010): 13		Conditions Report: 8	Walking 4
Generation Alpha (2010 +): 1			Recreation & fishing 5
			Taking students 5

Wakarusa Plan Public Open House Notes

Station 2 - ECOLOGY & WATER MANAGEMENT

At this station, attendees were given the prompt: River corridors with ample natural land cover have many benefits, such as improved water quality, wildlife habitat, and reduced flood risk. These benefits can also face challenges. Please review and share your thoughts about suggested solutions to ecological challenges. Forty written comments were recorded and several were supported by additional people placing dots of support. The most prominent comment themes included:

- Habitat, floodplain, and open space protection
- Restore connectivity between Haskell/Baker Wetlands
- Dark skies initiative (received many colored dots)

Additional ecological feedback themes (repeated, and/or with agreement indicated by dots)

Restore wetland connectivity and integrate and protect wildlife corridors.

Limit, regulate, or prohibit development in sensitive areas including floodplains and cropland. Prioritize infill development first, preserve cropland, and create zoning policies that protect open space.

Seek opportunities to coordinate land management with the Army Corps, and revisit accountability to the interlocal agreement provisions of the SLT process

Water quality and flood resilience can be supported through streambank stabilization, green infrastructure, and native plant/habitat restoration. Requests for tributary and wetland water flow monitors and future flood modeling.

Resources and incentives for land stewardship should include agroecology, regenerative agriculture, and invasive species control.

Station 3 - ACCESS & RECREATION

Station 3 presented potential scenarios of access that used only public land and rights of way (Scenario A); proposed new trails and connections from the dam to Baker Wetlands (B); or envisioned a fully-connected trail from Clinton Dam to the Kansas River (C).

Attendees were prompted to consider the elements of each potential scenario and offer their feedback. Twenty-four written comments were recorded and several were supported by additional people placing dots of support. The most prominent comment themes included:

- Trails and wildlife passageways connecting to and between the wetlands
- Interest in further exploring a water trail scenario
- Assertion that culturally led archeology should be part of access development
- Skepticism of when and how any proposed future access involving private property, including water or nature trails, would be negotiated and incentivized with landowners.
- Don't let human access for appreciation of nature and recreation interfere with restoration or impede on ecology and water quality.

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Station 3 - ACCESS & RECREATION continued

Only 21 of over 75 workshop attendees “selected” an access option. A fully connected trail (Scenario C) was preferred by 12 respondents, with 4 preferring Scenario A’s use of only public access and 5 stating that they preferred Scenario B’s focus on the dam to the Baker Wetlands with fewer new/proposed connections. Many written comments focused on preserving open space. Additional written comments suggested expanding access through trails, overlooks, & birding areas, acquiring additional public land, and working with landowners for voluntary easements. Some landowners and others preferred to share verbal comments voicing concerns about litter, trespassing, and liability that could spring from increased access.

Station 4 - CULTURE & LIVING HERITAGE

Station 4 presented less information and instead focused on engaging participants in conversation around strategies to honor culture and living heritage in the river valley. Several themes emerged from those conversations and via free-form comments on easel pads, many centered around learning and partnerships, including:

- Indigenous-led research and cultural stewardship
- Public understanding of Indigenous history
- Heritage protection and regular celebration
- Amphitheater / resource hub for culture and ecology as a City-wide asset/amenity

Additional culture and living heritage priorities

Integrate expertise, curriculum, research and learning opportunities of universities, area schools, scouts, museums, and others into both cultural recognition as well as other Vision Plan strategy areas.

Ecology and place as integral to the cultural vision. Consider ways to celebrate nature and community through stewardship activities, arts, and special events or gatherings.

Public awareness of the diversity of area history. Indigenous history and recognition of cultural trauma specifically cited. Cultural resource protection should include archaeological efforts to preserve unmarked histories.

Look to leadership in Indigenous research and land stewardship, integrating both ecological and cultural strategies.

Spaces for reflection, art, and healing can look like living art installations that honor land and people; sensory gardens; outdoor learning spaces; shared research hubs; a future amphitheater with cultural and educational functions

Indigenous leadership must guide the vision by

Haskell, tribal historians, Indigenous archaeologists to drive research and interpretation; recognition of cultural trauma, reconciliation, and accurate story telling; land stewardship values that are visible throughout planning, programming, and signage

Cultural resource protection is essential and should include archaeology oversight by Haskell before any digging occurs; include protection of cultural sites, burial grounds, and unmarked histories; and avoid disturbance from new access infrastructure without prior assessment.

Interpretation, Storytelling, and education can include audio story walks to share local history and lived experiences/ education about environment; Public talks at KU, Haskell, Lawrence Public Library, HINU Cultural Center; Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum; School partnerships, field trips, culture; ecology integrated curriculum; events like a Wakarusa Wetlands Celebration, Firefly Festival, cultural burns

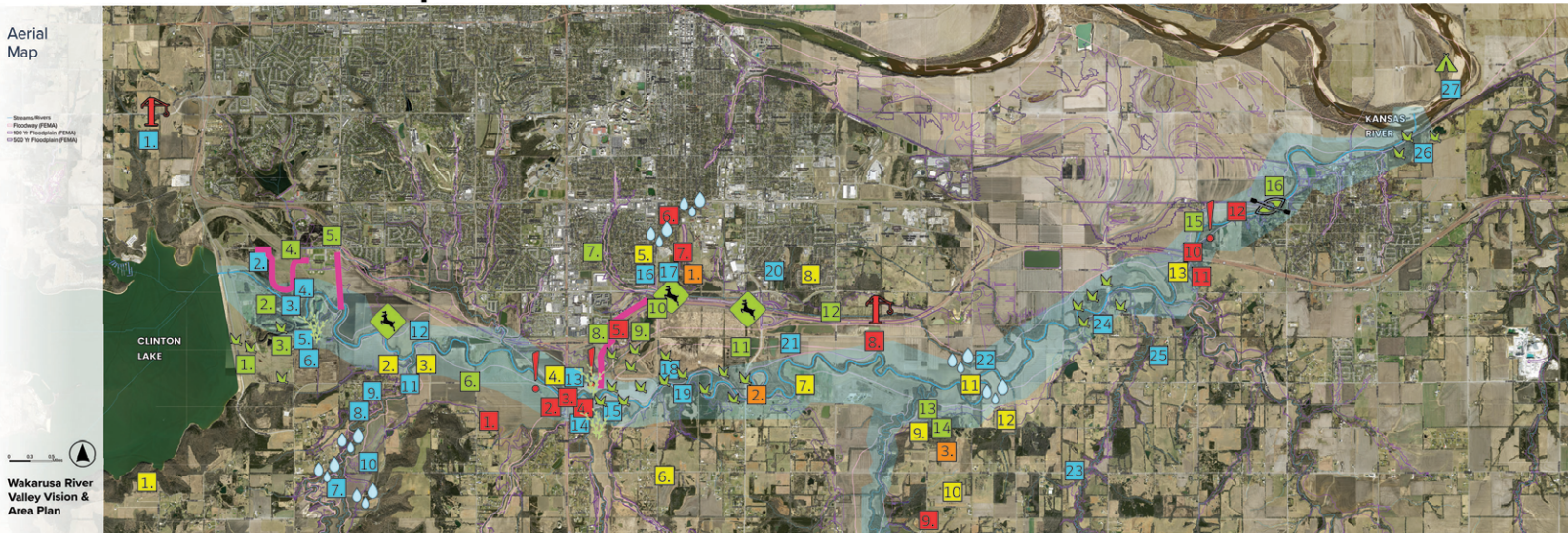
Other ideas include addressing noise and light pollution, expanding the wetlands as “Landback” opportunity for Haskell, and joint conservation programming amongst Haskell, KU, and Baker

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Station 5 - MAP YOUR RIVER

The large rollout map in the center of the room was a gathering space and opportunity to identify points of storytelling, opportunity, and connection.

Public Comments from Open House



Access and Recreation

1. Lawrence Bird Alliance stop
2. KU + Haskell class access
3. Good birding rare species
4. Would love a path to river here!
5. Walking the arboretum
6. No longer hunting access, per risk via attorney
7. Limit access
8. Trail connections here! Shared use path
9. Lawrence Bird Alliance Stop
10. Underpass! Animals, people, water
11. Lawrence Bird Alliance stop
12. Lawrence Bird Alliance stop
13. Family hunting area-- access requested from public
14. This used to be a ski hill!
15. Potential river access at rock shelf (portage). Maybe compatible with development.
16. Canoe access from property (private). It is rocky, steep. Yes to river access!

Ecology and Water

1. Development pressures on basin-- protect the east
2. Prairie milkweed large pop moved each year
3. Conservative mussels!
4. Pawpaw groves
5. Plant native veg for pollinators
6. Invasive woody species-- restore wetland prairie
7. Closed road-low water crossing
8. Flood risk further south (here)
9. Need a buffer?
10. Washington Creek H&H- Conservation as way of healing harm done to wetlands
11. Heavily flooded
12. Wildlife corridor needed!
13. Buffer for Baker Wetlands
14. Many rare plants identified here-- all to be destroyed by Boston Crossing!
15. Birds migrate and nest here
16. Remnant prairie
17. Remnant wetlands
18. Bird migrating
19. North American River Otter population is returning!
20. Remnant prairie
21. Slowly convert to more wetlands
22. Flood-prone area in the summer
23. Akin Prairie KLT easement
24. Blue Jacket crossing area
25. At least 3 bald eagle nests
26. Eagles
27. Campsite

Culture and Living Heritage

1. Sacred lands!
2. Douglas County Poor Farm of 1860
3. Blue Mound

Concerns

1. Dangerous for public-- banks, flooding, 30' drop, logjam
2. 30' Drop is dangerous
3. No New Boston Crossing!
4. Keep Boston Crossing green space here!
5. Health of the wetlands depends on New Boston Crossing staying green
6. Stormwater runoff here
7. Why do all trails bypass HINU?
8. Wetland being filled in
9. Area between 1600-1700 Road floods here
10. If canoeing, need to see where it's too shallow
11. If allowing access here, need to address dumping in the underpass and some erosion
12. Bluffs here but are hard to access

Personal History

1. J. lives west of 750
2. J. lives here-- tile drains run through property
3. Own farm land
4. J's private land-- concerned for this area
5. I live here!
6. 2019 Tornado went through here
7. Property owner invite
8. Kid's school
9. L. has deep family history past and present here
10. H's family lives here
11. We used to canoe here
12. R. lives here
13. S. lives here

