Wetlands and Wildlife
National Scenic Byway
Kansas

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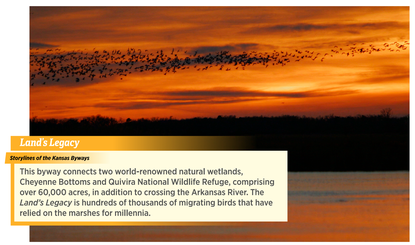
Welcome to the Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway, showcasing the life of two of the world's most important natural habitats.



Land's Legacy

Storylines of the Kansas Byways

This byway connects two world-renowned natural wetlands, Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, comprising over 60,000 acres, in addition to crossing the Arkansas River. The *Land's Legacy* is hundreds of thousands of migrating birds that have relied on the marshes for millennia.

Cheyenne Bottoms in the winter.

The Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway is one of a select group designated by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation as "America's Byways," offering special experiences of national and international significance. The byway connects two distinctly diverse types of wetlands that attract a worldwide audience of birdwatchers, lovers of wildlife, photographers, naturalists, and visitors in search of the quiet beauty of nature undisturbed.

Cheyenne Bottoms is America's largest inland freshwater marsh and hosts a staggering variety of wildlife. It is considered one of the most important stopping points for shorebird migration in the Western Hemisphere, hosting tens of thousands of North America's shorebirds during migration periods, as well as the seasonal stayovers by sandhill cranes, egrets, great blue herons, whooping cranes, and bald eagles. Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira are home to nearly half of America's bird species, 19 reptile species, nine amphibian species, and a variety of mammals. At the superb Kansas Wetlands Education Center, along the byway and adjacent to Cheyenne Bottoms, state-of-the-art exhibits and expert naturalists will introduce the subtle wonders of the area.

On the southern end of the byway, the 22,000-acre Quivira National Wildlife Refuge offers a contrasting wetlands experience – a rare inland saltwater marsh. The refuge's marshes, sand dunes, prairies, and timber support such endangered species as the least tern and snowy plover and provide habitats for quail, meadowlarks, raptors, and upland mammals. For a close-up view of this distinctive environment, follow Big Salt Marsh Wildlife Drive.

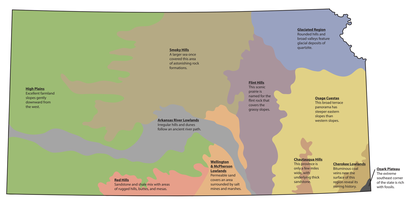
The Landscapes of Kansas

Kansas includes a wide variety of landscapes, shaped by both geologic processes and human activities, such as farming and mining. Many of our byways are based on unique landforms and habitats that provide wonder and pleasure to resident and visitor alike. On the Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway, visitors will discover two of the largest wetland systems in North America, along with seven communities providing an authentic rural experience. Filled with wildlife, this byway is a nature lover's paradise.

The view from an overlook at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.

Physiographic Regions of Kansas

Based on common landscape features and geological history, geologists have divided Kansas into the 11 different regions shown on the map. These regions (sometimes called physiographic provinces) each tell its own story about Kansas' geology.



A scenic view along an area bike path.

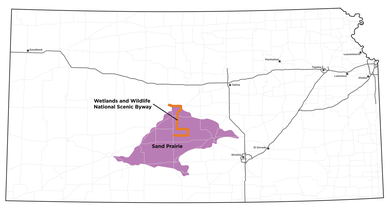
The history of this corridor is rich, varied, and ancient with tenacious residents and astounding natural resources. It is a byway through the worlds of both man and nature.

But the attractions of this byway are by no means limited to wetlands and wildlife. The region, once part of the hunting territory of the Plains Apaches and traversed by the freighters of the Santa Fe Trail, includes seven distinctive communities with unique resources. Explorers can venture through the underground tunnels of downtown Ellinwood or visit Brit Spaugh Zoo in Great Bend. View the comprehensive collection of 29,000 glass photographic negatives chronicling the story of early settlers and liberated post-Civil War slaves in Stafford. Enjoy the hospitality and attractions of all seven towns. For those interested in physical activity, the byways region offers some of Kansas' best road cycling opportunities along quiet, paved county roads. Whatever visitors' interests may be, the Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway offers a truly fulfilling experience.

Immigrants All

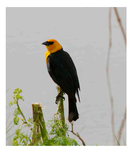
Storylines of the Kansas Byways

While Zebulon Pike's description of the "Great American Desert" discouraged settlement, the Santa Fe Trail in 1821 and the trains that followed brought *Immigrants All* who discovered that crops could thrive. This area attracted homesteaders of all kinds, among them Germans, Mormons, African-Americans, Irish, and Hispanics.

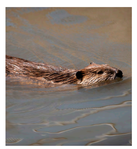


There are over 800 bird species in the United States with over 450 found in Kansas and over 350 in Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira. Besides birds, there are 23 species of mammals, 19 species of reptiles, and nine species of amphibians.

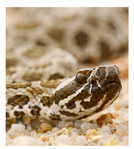
American Avocet



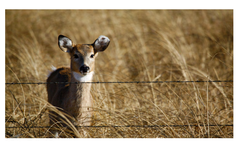
Yellow-Headed Blackbird



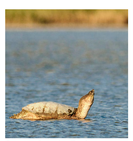
Beaver



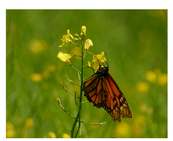
Massassauga



White-Tailed Deer



Common Snapping Turtle



Monarch Butterfly

Wetlands and Wildlife

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The Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway

Tour the byway or venture into wetlands of international importance at Cheyenne Bottoms and the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, two of the largest wetland ecosystems in North America. As the byway moves through breathtaking wetlands teaming with wildlife, endless skies, and vibrant flora, one will find the charming rural communities shaped by nature with histories as rich and varied as the area's natural resources. While the ancient wetlands have attracted wildlife for millennia, they eventually brought Native peoples who occupied the land for hundreds of years, though little remains of their presence today. As immigrants and homesteaders were drawn by the area's natural resources, the Native peoples were displaced, often forcefully. Traveling by the Santa Fe Trail starting in the 1820s and the railroad in the late 19th century, settlers were attracted to the fertile ground for wheat production. Abundant oil also provided a livelihood for many in the bustling rural communities. Today, the byway draws on this past, especially its rich natural habitat for birds and wildlife. Using innovation to protect the wetlands, promoting ecotourism, and honoring its history through art and community activities, this byway provides a natural and human experience that is second-to-none.

Welcome to the land of Wetlands and Wildlife, a place where everywhere you look shows evidence of motion and change.

1890 Storefronts, Claflin

A view of Cheyenne Bottoms from the K-4 Overlook.

Cheyenne Bottoms viewing tower

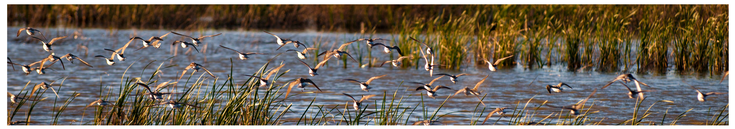
Brit Spaugh Zoo, Great Bend

Past Forward

Storylines of the Kansas Byways

The loss of the prairie ecosystem during the Dust Bowl lessened the area's resilience during the Great Depression, so to help, the Work Projects Administration was formed to create jobs and lasting structures, many of which are still found on the byway. Modern efforts also enhance the byway's nature and history while protecting and sharing its wildlife, moving the *Past Forward*.

Kansas Wetlands Education Center at Cheyenne Bottoms, Great Bend



First People, First Nations

Storylines of the Kansas Byways

The area's wetlands are ancient, drawing *First People, First Nations* as they had wildlife. Inhabited by the Wichita and their ancestors since before 1100 AD, pressure from other tribes, including the Kiowa, led to shifting tribes along the Arkansas River's "Great Bend" until the U.S. government removed them to reservations.

Wolf Pond in Ellinwood

Underground World, filled with abandoned businesses connected by underground tunnels, is available for tours in Ellinwood.

Big Salt Marsh at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

Hudson Cream Flour, Hudson

Learn More Along The Route:

Hoisington
- Interpretive Signs
  Southwest of US-281/N. Main Street and 2nd Street Intersection

Barton County West - Nature Conservancy Entrance
- Interpretive Signs & Nature Conservancy Kiosk
  Southeast of K-4 and NE 20 Avenue Intersection

Barton County East - K-4 Overlook
- Kiosk and Interpretive Signs
  K-4, 8 miles east of Hoisington between NE 80 and 90 Avenues

Claflin
- Interpretive Signs
  Northeast of K-4/W. Front Street and 5th Street Intersection

Kansas Wetlands Educational Center
- Interpretive Signs
  1851 NE K-156 Hwy, Great Bend

Cheyenne Bottoms Offices
- Interpretive Signs
  2014 NE 60 Road

Barton County Jack Kilby Square
- Interpretive Signs
  1400 Main Street, Great Bend

Barton County Historical Village and Museum
- Interpretive Signs
  85 S. US-281, Great Bend

Ellinwood Wolf Pond
- Interpretive Signs
  Southeast of US-56 and S. Fritz Avenue Intersection

Quivira National Wildlife Refuge
- Kiosk
  South of NE 140th Street between 120th and 130th Avenues
- Interpretive Signs
  North of NE 140th Street between NE 100th and 110th Avenues

Hudson
- Interpretive Signs
  Southeast of Main Street and Highland Avenue Intersection

Stafford County Courthouse
- Interpretive Signs
  209 N. Broadway Street, St. John

Stafford County
- Kiosk
  Southeast of US-50 and 20th Avenue Intersection

Stafford
- Interpretive Signs
  Northwest of Broadway Street and Main Street Intersection
  Northwest of S. Keystone Street and US-50 Intersection

Beginning Your Byway Tour

Claflin

This small town sits near the geographic center of the state of Kansas. Its geology boasts a legendary vein of limestone, an internationally important wetland for migratory birds, and steadily producing oil fields. Day-to-day life mixes hard working farmers and oilmen with shoppers who drive distances to experience Claflin's 100-year old business on Main Street and its block-length façades reproducing the 1890 downtown storefronts.

First United Methodist Church Building, Stafford

Clayton L. Moses Memorial Band Shell, Great Bend

Ellinwood

Ellinwood, between Cheyenne Bottoms and the Quivira Wildlife Refuge, attracts nature lovers and hunters alike. Developed as the railroad came through in 1872, the city grew quickly with German and Austrian descendants. Located on the Santa Fe Trail, it also became a social and cultural center in the 1890s. The architecture of Main Street and its underground shops, which still draw visitors, display the area's proud heritage as a tribute to its determination and a postcard for small town America.

Stafford

Stafford, "Gateway to Quivira National Wildlife Refuge," is rich in architecture, history, and small town charm with a strong connection to nature. Founded in 1878, the city vied for the county seat in four separate elections, including the 1883 election, which occurred during a tornado that destroyed the town and ballots. Ultimately, St. John won the county seat. Undaunted, the city continued as a place where tourists could rest on their way to visit the whooping cranes, and enjoy places like the Stafford County Museum and notable buildings such as the First United Methodist Church, designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright and is on the National Historic Register.

Great Bend

Great Bend, founded in 1871 near Fort Zarah on the Santa Fe Trail, was named after the Arkansas River's "great bend." A cowtown in the late 1800s, it transitioned into a regional commercial center as the cattle trade shifted. The discovery of oil helped the town boom, and by 1930, it boasted over 3,000 wells. The city not only sent their boys off to war, but was also a training center for B-29 bomber personnel during World War II. Great Bend remains a regional center with a robust downtown featuring events like the Art and Wine Walk with artistic birdhouses, and an array of retail and food shops.

St. John

Picturesque St. John sits near the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Established in 1875 by Mormons, the city's first building, a small white church on a hill, still stands. With the building of the courthouse in 1886, St. John settled the county seat dispute. Today the courthouse is still located in the downtown, adjacent to the stately town square, fountain, and historic commercial buildings. Visitor highlights include the Lucille Hall Museum and Martin Cemetery for Exodusters.

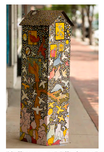
Hoisington

Hoisington, "Heart of Cheyenne Bottoms," has a story tied to the railroad. The area's first train arrived in 1886, but Hoisington became the main station in 1889. Today visitors are attracted to the city and region for exceptional experiences like the 62-handcrafted metal pole art installations along Main Street or a visit to Cheyenne Bottoms' unique eco-system. Values like respect for nature, community hard work, and optimism persist in a city truly in the hands of nature.

Metal Pole Art Installation, Hoisington

Hudson

Along a quiet road sits Hudson, a timeless rural town. Platted in 1887 by a New York migrant, Hudson suffered several fires from 1904 to 1921, one of which destroyed the "Flats" business district. However, Hudson persevered. Today the town sits near the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and TransAmerica Bicycle Trail, surrounded by prime hunting area. Home of Hudson Cream Flour and Wheatland Café, the town continues welcoming visitors to the authentic heart of America.



Birdhouse Art Walk, Great Bend

Bridging the American Divide

Storylines of the Kansas Byways

Fleets of wagons carried settlers over the plains through the byway, including massive freight wagons traveling the Santa Fe Trail. As the rail lines were completed, they replaced these former "highways". Later, automobiles and local oil reserves helped to populate the byway, *Bridging the American Divide*.

Byway Facts:

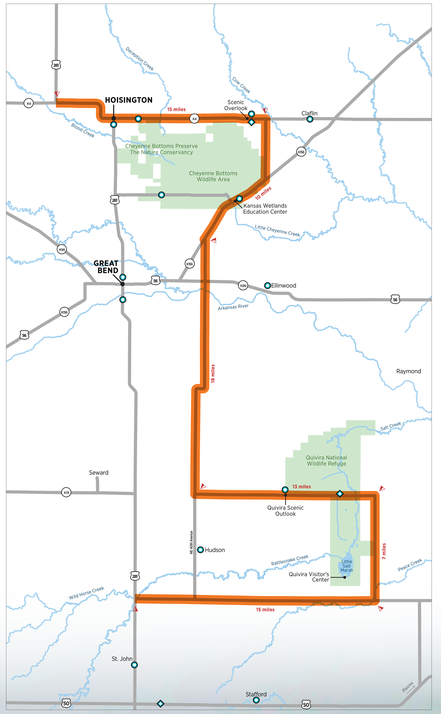
Length: 77 miles

Time to Travel: 90 minutes

Roadway: Kansas Highway 156 and Kansas Highway 4, US Highway 281, Barton County's NE/SE 60 Avenue and NE 100 Avenue, Stafford County's NE 40th Avenue, NE 140th Street, and NE 70th Street; and Reno County's Raymond Road

Connect: KansasWetlandsAndWildlifeScenicByway.com

Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway Map



Points of Interest

Martin Cemetery
175-50 1.5 miles west of US-281
This historic cemetery is where the Exodusters, African-American settlers of Stafford County, were buried, several in unmarked graves.

Lucille M. Hall Museum
39a N. Main Street, St. John
Lucille M. Hall museum on St. John's Square offers a Victorian Tea event showcasing different themes and interests of the early pioneers of the area. Hall was a teacher and world traveler and her museum carries on her passion of introducing children to cultures outside their community.

McCandless Prairie Dog Town
175 abs Stafford County
As you drive south on US 281 to St. John look to the west for the McCandless prairie dog town. Home to scores of black-tailed prairie dogs, the "town" stands out on the landscape. Many animals utilize their interconnected burrows, including snakes and burrowing owls.

Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (QNWR)
1434 NE 60th Street, Stafford
Encompassing over 22,000 acres, QNWR provides migratory waterfowl with food, water, and shelter. In addition to harboring other wildlife. Over 300 species of birds have been observed on the refuge, including the endangered whooping crane. It acts as a significant staging area for migratory birds traveling to traditional nesting grounds. The area features hunting, fishing, and the Refuge Visitors Center.

Stafford County Museum
300 N. Main Street, Stafford
The Stafford County Museum is housed in several buildings in downtown Stafford, the most impressive of which is a former 1905 bank. Inside are thousands of artifacts, including a genealogy research center, an auto museum, historical newspapers, rural school displays, and a collection of antique farm implements. Of special interest are the 29,000 glass photographic negatives produced by Mr. Gray. His studio in St. John is on the National Historic Register.

Stafford County Flour Mill
208 S. Church Street, Hudson
For over 100 years, this mill has specialized in making "flour without a fault." Visitors to the mill learn grain production and milling history from one of the nation's most experienced and knowledgeable millers. This informative program includes history, methods, and a tour of the working mill.

Underground Tunnels
1 N. Main Street, Ellinwood
Ellinwood, home to an underground world of tunnels, offers a journey back in time to discover its past underground businesses. One could get a haircut and bath, then travel under Main Street to the saloon underneath the historic Wolf Hotel. Tours of the tunnels also include the underground livery stable, barber, and bath house.

Great Bend Brit Spaugh Park & Zoo
2021 Main Street, Great Bend
Founded in 1952 and home to over 100 mammals, birds, and reptiles, the Brit Spaugh Zoo preserves and rescues animals while educating and entertaining all visitors. The zoo offers two main exhibit areas.

Barton County Historical Village and Museum
85 S. US-281, Great Bend
The Museum and Village provide a fascinating glimpse into the past with nine buildings including an 1873 stone house, an 1898 church, a 1910 railroad depot, and a 1915 school house, all authentically furnished. The museum also displays exhibits on topics like the Santa Fe Trail and Kansas anthropology.

Kansas Wetlands Education Center
1851 NE K-156, Great Bend
This visitor center for Cheyenne Bottoms contains state-of-the-art interpretive and educational exhibits. Providing a unique nature experience overlooking Cheyenne Bottoms, the Center explores the region's story including its geological formation, management challenges, and magnificent animals and plants.

Rosewood Ranch and Winery
1171 TW 20 Road, Great Bend
Nestled in the rolling plains just west of Great Bend is the Rosewood Ranch & Winery, a champion stallion service, and therapeutic riding program. Tour the facility and ride the horses. Don't forget to try their special wines, named after the horses, at their tasting room in downtown Great Bend.

Kansas Oil and Gas Hall of Fame & Museum
1944 10th Street, Great Bend
Oil was first discovered in 1886 nearby. The museum displays various phases of the oil and gas industry, including geology, drilling, well completion, production, refining, and products manufactured with oil. Included in this museum is the Hall of Fame containing biographies and pictures of inductees.

Shafer Art Gallery
242 NE 30 Road, Barton County Community College Fine Arts Building, Great Bend
The Shafer Art Gallery houses intricate Western-theme bronze sculptures by internationally prominent artist Bill Shafer, a native of the Great Bend area. The Gallery contains a permanent collection of more than 400 works along with various other traveling exhibits, including some from the Smithsonian.

Heartland Farm
1049 County Road 390, Bush County
Heartland Farm is an 80-acre spiritual retreat center owned and operated by Dominican Nuns, which shares the peace and abundance of country life. Visitors can explore straw bale buildings and an acoustically perfect silo, while learning about organic and sustainable farming practices and its herd of alpacas. A gift shop offers unique and natural gifts.

Cheyenne Bottoms
7 E.4.4 Hoisington
Cheyenne Bottoms contains about 41,000 acres of wetlands, including protected and restored natural marshes which act as a resting and feeding destination for millions of waterfowl and birds that seasonally migrate along the Central Flyway. It is considered the largest marsh in the interior of the United States and is designated a "Wetland of International Importance."

Hoisington Community Historical Society Museum
128 E. 2nd Street, Hoisington
A 1905 bank houses the Hoisington Historical Society Museum and displays a variety of memorabilia showcasing Hoisington's birth, growing pains, and greatest achievements. The museum highlights the city's vibrant history, bringing it to life and providing an understanding of its rich heritage.

Numerous hiking, biking, and driving trails provide an up-close experience of the wetlands.