

# New cabins dedicated at State Park

It's now possible to savor the outdoors at Prairie Dog State Park while enjoying many of the comforts of home.

Two new cabins were dedicated at the Park Friday. A large crowd, including members of the Norton Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors was on hand to hear remarks about the program from Kansas Wildlife and Parks Secretary Mike Hayden.

The cabins have been named Prairie Dog and Eagle View, and are cabins 93 and 94 completed by the program, but the first built in the area.

They are the product of the collaboration of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Department, Greenbush Southeast Kansas Education Service Center, Norton Correctional Facility and Kansas Wildscape Foundation. The Parks Department provides the location and maintenance. Inmates from a correctional facility provide the labor while receiving job training through Greenbush, and Wildscape provides funding. Inmates receive a certified education and hands-on experience in construction. Certification comes from the National Center for Construction Education and Research. The certification also helps them get a post-release job.

Each cabin costs approximately \$70,000 to build, Hayden said in an interview. Of that amount about \$38,000 is for materials. Other expenses to build the cabins include supervision of inmates by the Corrections Department, landscaping and site work.

No tax dollars are used for the program. The Wildscape Foundation borrows money from the Gardner National Bank with a revolving line of credit to buy materials and supplies. The loan is secured with the existing cabins and repaid with rent revenues.

It usually take three to five years to pay off the loan, Hayden said.

The Foundation also accepts dona-

tions from those who wish to sponsor a particular cabin or help to offset general costs of the program.

"Because it is a non-profit foundation, the current economic problems haven't affected the program," Hayden said.

The cabins have modern conveniences, including a microwave, and are handicap accessible. The Prairie Dog State Park cabins are located conveniently close to the boat ramp and the beach. Each one sleeps six.

There's a double bed, futon and pull down Murphy style bed. There is a full kitchen with dishes and utensils. Renters need bring only bedding, personal toiletries and towels. However, in true camping spirit, there is no television, internet or telephone.

Check in time is 2 p.m. and check out time is noon. Guests are asked to leave the cabins clean.

Each cabin rents for \$70 per night.

The program usually has about 10 to 12 cabins in construction at a time

with about ten completed each year. As many as four to six of them eventually could be built in Prairie Dog State Park if demand warrants.

Cabins at all of the state parks can be reserved on line. The two new ones at Prairie Dog Park are already reserved through November.

There also are two primitive cabins in the Park.

"There's a lot of folks like me who are getting older and want to come out and enjoy the area, but don't want

rustic conditions," said Frank Meyer, Wildlife and Parks Commissioner.

The new cabins can be used year round, and extend the use of the park season, bringing income 12 months rather than eight or nine months a year, for the primitive cabins, Hayden said.

Other places have seen tourism increase when modern cabins have been added to state parks, Hayden said.



A large crowd, including local and state dignitaries and Kansas Wildlife and Parks employees, attended the dedication and ribbon cutting of two new cabins at Prairie Dog State Park last Friday. Pictured are Mindy Braun, Jim Wray, Gordon Ingram, Brian Haug, Doug Sebelius, Ashley Esslinger, Frank Meyer and Toby Kuhn.

— Telegram photo by Judy Sherard

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