



Public Use Hiking Trail at Smoky Valley Ranch

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The Nature Conservancy requested assistance from the Kansas Trails Council to construct a public-use hiking trail at the privately-owned Smoky Valley Ranch in western Kansas. The Kansas Trails Council is a non-profit organization of volunteers that specializes in the construction and maintenance of natural surface trails - hiking, biking, and equestrian. Kansas Trails Council is mostly an educational organization, providing expertise and equipment for local volunteer organizations to implement natural-surface trails on public land. All such trails are for public use. The Smoky Valley Ranch was the first privately-owned property in Kansas to construct a public-access hiking trail. We also designed and constructed a separate 1-mile loop trail, which was intended to be used only by guests of the ranch. We designed and constructed two stacked loop public use trails, totaling 6 miles -- a one 1-mile loop and a 5-mile loop. Construction techniques included strict principles of conservation and sustainable trail surface on existing soil/substrate. Esthetics of landscape design and access to points of interest were also considered. The public use trail includes a parking lot area adjacent to a public roadway. Public access to the trail is unlimited, but by foot traffic only. The trails also have interpretive and navigational signage. Interpretative signs include native American history, pioneer and ranching history, geology, wildlife, and plant life. All signage had to be designed to be resistant to livestock. Combining livestock grazing on privately-owned rangeland with public recreation and education required special attention not encountered in most public parks.

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