



GREAT PLAINS NATURE CENTER **STRATEGIC PLAN**

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Disclaimer

The study was conducted by the Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) in the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at Wichita State University (WSU). The PPMC is an independent research body unaffiliated with the Great Plains Nature Center. This report was prepared by the research team. It represents the findings, views, opinions and conclusions of the research team alone, and the report does not express the official or unofficial policy of the Division or WSU. Information for this report was supplied by the Great Plains Nature Center and additional sources. The accuracy of findings for the report is dependent upon these sources.

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1. Planning Process



In response to a request from the Great Plains Nature Center (GPNC), the **Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) at Wichita State University** assisted the GPNC with a planning and visioning process resulting in a strategic plan. The process for strategic planning is an inclusive planning process, allowing for the creation of an organizational plan that establishes a vision for the organization, and goals and strategies to accomplish that vision. The Great Plains Nature Center has a unique composition of the following organizations: City of Wichita; Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism; the United States Fish and Wildlife Service; and Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center. The plan addresses the needs and expectations of all partners.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the plan is to create a roadmap for the GPNC to guide future policy, programming and facility priorities and decisions. The unique aspect of the GPNC being comprised of four different organizations requires careful deliberation that the purpose, mission and needs of each organization are fully considered and reflected. The plan will help guide the Center's financial decisions, resource allocation and project priorities. At the direction of the leadership representing the organizations, the PPMC worked with staff and community members in developing the plan.

PROCESS

The PPMC used the following process to facilitate the creation of the plan:

Step 1. Appoint a Strategic Planning Steering Committee

A Strategic Planning Steering Committee led the process and provided direction to the plan. The Committee was comprised of representatives of the four organizations and met throughout the duration of the planning process to develop the strategic plan and provide oversight to all parts of the process.

Step 2. Influencing Factors Report

The PPMC developed a brief Influencing Factors Report to provide a scan of current economic, demographic, programming and infrastructure issues for the GPNC. The Influencing Factors assists in providing a current overview of the work and impact of the GPNC.

Step 3. Conduct Stakeholder Interviews

The PPMC conducted interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders for the strategic planning process for the GPNC. The purpose of the interviews or focus groups was to provide input prior to developing consensus and begin to identify strategic issues for the GPNC.

Step 4. Community Engagement

The PPMC conducted community events in cooperation with the GPNC to solicit input on the plan. The PPMC used an online survey to receive general community input on the value of the GPNC. In addition, the PPMC met with District I community members at the District breakfast to listen to residents and receive input. Finally, the PPMC solicited input from members of the Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center.

Step 5. Plan Development

The PPMC facilitated six meetings with the strategic planning steering committee to prioritize issues, goals and strategies to achieve the current mission, coordinate with the master site plan and achieve the long-term vision. The strategic planning process led to the development and approval of the final document.

2. Letter from the Director

It is my pleasure to present the 2018 Great Plains Nature Center Strategic Plan. This plan is comprehensive and was developed with input from key stakeholders including building visitors, volunteers, trail users, former and current staff, Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center Board and individual members.

The Great Plains Nature Center enlisted the services of Wichita State University's Public Policy and Management Center to lead the planning process and create our Strategic Plan. The four strategic goals include: 1) Providing new and enhanced hands-on education to increase conservation comprehension and action; 2) Improving partnerships with current partners, volunteers and members, as well as looking at new sources and outlets to increase numbers in each of these areas; 3) Improve and modernize our facilities; and, 4) Develop a comprehensive marketing plan.

The Great Plains Nature Center has been in existence since 1996 and continues to be a valuable resource for individuals, teachers, school districts, conservation groups and others with an interest in wildlife and habitats of the Great Plains Region. Our commitment to outdoor/natural resource education has been evident over the last two decades and these strategic goals were identified as areas for improvement and expansion to meet the demands and interest of our constituents. We look forward to the implementation of this Strategic Plan and the Great Plains Nature Center promises to continue to be one of the most interesting, one-of-a-kind, outdoor education experiences of its kind in the country.

I would like to thank all those who played a part in developing the Great Plains Nature Center's Strategic Plan. It will guide us and provide ways to improve the information, education and experiences individuals and groups receive when they visit our facility, or take part in one of our special events or activities. It is our goal each and every visitor leave with a deeper understanding and appreciation for wildlife, habitat and the wise use of all natural resources.

Respectfully,



Marc Murrell
Director, Great Plains Nature Center

3. Strategic Plan



VISION STATEMENT

To inspire stewardship of the natural world through exceptional experiences to benefit future generations.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Great Plains Nature Center is a cooperative project between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks & Tourism, City of Wichita and Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center. These partners share a common goal of providing opportunities for the public to investigate, understand and develop an appreciation for wildlife and the environment, while promoting sound stewardship of natural resources.

GOAL 1: EDUCATION

Provide hands-on education to increase conservation comprehension and action

OBJECTIVE

» Increase conservation knowledge and practices for participants

Strategies

1. Conduct a “train the facilitator” session to expand the capacity of impact of the GPNC staff (*management team, phase 1*)

2. Strengthen connections with K-12 schools by soliciting feedback and implementing requested services (*management team, phase 1*)

3. Expand programming to diversify populations served. Including, but not limited to, organizations such as: (*management/staff, phase 2*)

- Youth organizations: Big Brothers, Big Sisters; Youth Horizons; Boys and Girls Club
- Young adult organizations: Young Professionals of Wichita; Fraternities/Sororities
- Mentoring programs that include outdoor activities such as archery or fishing
- Large employers who can welcome people to the GPNC
- Seniors – “lifelong learners”

4. Incorporate conservation into every program (*management, phase 1-3*)

- Develop conservation conversations
- Provide concrete examples of small ways to conserve and have impact to encourage stewardship
- Position GPNC as a leader and model (park, building, internal/external)
- Encourage exploration and stewardship at home (management/staff)

GOAL 2: PARTNERSHIP/ VOLUNTEERS/MEMBERS

Develop key community partnerships and increase active volunteers and new members to meet the needs of the community

OBJECTIVE

- » Increase partnerships, volunteers and memberships to expand the impact/fulfill the mission of the GPNC in the region

Strategies

- 1. Identify key corporate partners to support programming activities** *(GPNC leadership and manager, phase 1)*
- 2. Leverage partner organizations that use GPNC to increase volunteer participation and membership** *(volunteer coordinator, phase 2)*
- 3. Revamp membership program to attract more people and involvement** *(FGPNC President, phase 1)*
- 4. Formalize a community service program** *(volunteer coordinator, phase 3)*
- 5. Utilize social media and our website to communicate and engage partners, volunteers and members** *(volunteer coordinator and naturalists, phase 1)*

GOAL 3: FACILITIES

Modernize facilities to engage new visitors

OBJECTIVE

- » Increase funding for facility improvements

Strategies (5-year)

1. Develop a comprehensive “Building for the Future” initiative *(GPNC and FPNC)*

- Involve partnerships
- Update plans
- Identify sponsors
- Identify staffing plan for capital campaign
- Create “roll-out plan” for funders that will include:
 - › Exhibit area
 - › Auditorium improvement
 - › Potential introductory film
 - › Outdoor Classroom

2. Operation and maintenance plan *(GPNC and FPNC)*

GOAL 4: MARKETING

Develop a comprehensive marketing plan to promote the GPNC

OBJECTIVE

» Increase participation in facility attendance, programming, events and electronic media

Strategies

- 1. Create an introduction piece for all partners to use and core roles** (*management team and FGPNC, phase 1*)
- 2. Develop a promotion plan template for events** (*staff/management, phase 2*)
- 3. Connect park with GPNC and leverage that resource to increase building usage** (*management team, phase 3*)
- 4. Develop and share a more compelling story to increase public awareness** (*FGPNC and volunteers, phase 1-3*)
- 5. Establish a marketing budget and marketing plan** (*Director and Treasurer, phase 1-3*)
- 6. Create joint marketing campaigns with partners, such as other community attractions and nonprofit organizations** (*volunteer coordinator, phase 3*)
 - Social media plans
 - Joint activities

4. Influencing Factors



HISTORY OF THE GREAT PLAINS NATURE CENTER

In August of 1990, Senator Bob Dole, Kansas Governor Mike Hayden, Secretary of Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks Bob Meinen, and Wichita Mayor Bob Knight all visited a parcel of land in northeast Wichita with the goal of preserving the natural habitat of the Great Plains. Eventually, through a memorandum of agreement between local, state and federal officials, the land was purchased for \$479,000 and the Great Plains Nature Center was formed.

The original goals of the organization, which remain a vital part of day-to-day operations, are to provide opportunities for the public to learn about wildlife, plant species, conservation, the roles and responsibilities of its partner agencies, as well as to provide education to school districts, youth organizations, colleges and universities, and other conservation organizations.

To help achieve these goals, the organization added a membership program in May of 1998, named the Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center. The Koch Habitat Hall, a large educational center, was officially opened in September of 2000. In 2016, the vital Memorandum of Agreement was renewed to add the Friends of GPNC as an official fourth partner, helping solidify the financial backbone of the GPNC and allowing staff to plan strategically for the future through 2026 and beyond.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF WICHITA

Wichita, KS has a metropolitan area with a population of approximately 640,000. The median age is 34.7 years, which is slightly younger than the rate of Kansas as a whole. The median household income is \$49,202, which is approximately \$5,000 less than the whole of Kansas, and more than \$10,000 less than the national median.

Wichita's population is 63 percent white, 17 percent Hispanic, 10 percent black, 5 percent Asian, 1 percent American Indian, and 4 percent "other." For adults over the age of 25, 87.6 percent have high school degrees or equivalent, 30.1 percent have a bachelor's degree and 11.1 percent have a graduate or professional degree.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, Wichita Public Schools had a total enrollment of 50,566 students, 72.8 percent of which were approved for free or reduced-price lunches. The demographic makeup of Wichita Public School students is 34 percent Hispanic, 33 percent white, and 19 percent black.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE GPNC

- In 2016, 37 percent of program attendees were adults, 63 percent were youth.
- Of those youth, roughly 42 percent were at "at-risk," which is determined by free and reduced lunch eligibility. This is compared to Wichita Public School's eligibility rate of 72.8 percent.
- From first-hand observations at the GPNC, June of 2016:
 - › 45 percent of people who walked on the trail and also entered the observatory were youth
 - › 57 percent of people observed only using the trail were adults
 - › 51 percent of total visitors were female
 - › 73 percent of total visitors were white, 16 percent were nonwhite, 11 were not described
 - › Nine percent of youth were described as pre-K
 - › 67 percent of those observed were in a group, with the average size being 2.6 people and the largest being 22

USAGE (2016)

- April, May and June are the busiest time of year for events, with 38 percent of attendance occurring in these months. Additionally, 20 percent of program attendance occurs in September and October.
- April, May and September are the busiest months of the year for events, with 42 percent of attendance occurring during those months
- At-risk youth are visiting GPNC most frequently from January through May (21 percent in April)
- Trail visits ebb and flow with warmer months, with 65 percent of people visiting from May through October
- Volunteer hours are highest in March, April, May, June and September
- July is a slow month for meetings held at GPNC, with only 4 percent occurring in that month
- January through May is the busiest period for media contacts, with 59 percent occurring in that month. Only 23 percent occur from August through December.
- The GPNC website has steady visitor rates throughout the year, with 7-10 percent occurring in any given month

- Top School Visits (in number of students):
 1. Ortiz Elementary - 665
 2. Chisholm Trail Elementary - 625
 3. Gammon Elementary - 590
 4. Franklin Elementary - 554
 5. Earhart Elementary - 552
- Top Child-Related Program Visits (in number of participants):
 1. Boy Scouts - 881
 2. Head Start - 850
 3. Sedgwick County Zoo - 180
 4. Harvey County Conservation District - 133
 5. YMCA - 104
- Top Adult Program Visits (in number of participants):
 1. Flatland Fly Fishers - 716
 2. Wichita State University - 550
 3. Wichita Audubon Society - 529
 4. Chisholm Trail Antique Gun Association - 362
 5. South Central Kansas Honey Producers - 216
- Visits By Grade Level (in number of students; does not include multi-grade level programming):
 - › Pre-Kindergarten - 2757
 - › Kindergarten - 1026
 - › 1 - 1813
 - › 2 - 1625
 - › 3 - 769
 - › 4 - 2339
 - › 5 - 1059
 - › Middle School - 325
 - › High School - 375

ORGANIZATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS (2017)

- Total Great Plains Nature Center site visitation totaled 208,143 visits.
- GPNC staff presented 1,988 programs and activities to 46,616 people.
- GPNC staff reached nearly 10,000 “At-Risk” youth from Wichita and surrounding communities.
- Nearly 44,000 people visited Koch Habitat Hall, Coleman Auditorium and Owls Nest Gift Shop.
- Chisholm Creek Park trail usage was 117,539 people.
- Volunteers logged 5,765 hours of work at the GPNC.
- Nearly 5,200 people checked out GPNC Discovery Boxes, Let’s Go Outside backpacks, Junior Duck Stamp Trunks and Scout backpacks.
- GPNC staff conducted 89 radio, television and newspaper interviews on natural resource-related topics.
- The GPNC produced two new pocket guides, Kansas Amphibians, Turtles and Lizards and Kansas Land Snails, bringing the total number of popular guides to 15 titles.
- The GPNC has 6,731 Facebook friends, 727 Instagram and 442 Twitter followers.
- The GPNC web site, www.gpnc.org, had 1,672,565 total page hits.

5. Survey Summary

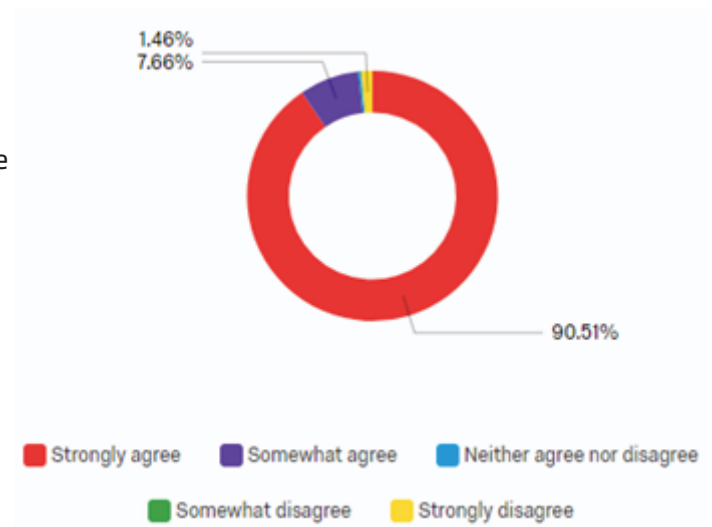


The Public Policy and Management Center at Wichita State University facilitated an online and in-person community survey in February of 2018 on behalf of the Great Plains Nature Center. This was an opportunity to engage with current users and the general public about issues that are pertinent to the strategic planning process. The survey was promoted through the social media accounts of the PPMC, Great Plains Nature Center, and City of Wichita Park and Recreation Department. In total, 276 people responded to the 10-question survey. The results are detailed in the following pages.

Question 1

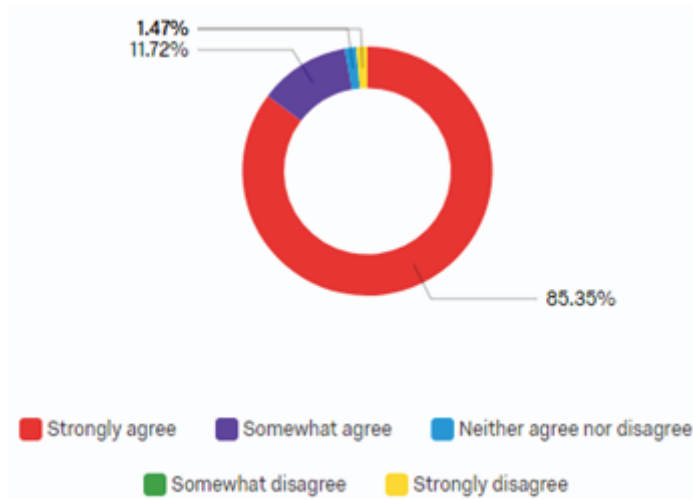
The first question of the survey asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with statements that are essential to the core mission of the Great Plains Nature Center. More than 97 percent of respondents agreed on some level that the Great Plains Nature Center is a valuable quality of life asset in our region. Less than two percent of respondents disagreed with this statement. This shows a substantial amount of support for the core mission of the organization, which is to “provide opportunities for the public to investigate, understand and develop an appreciation for wildlife and the environment, while promoting sound stewardship of natural resources.”

The Great Plains Nature Center is a valuable quality of life asset for our region



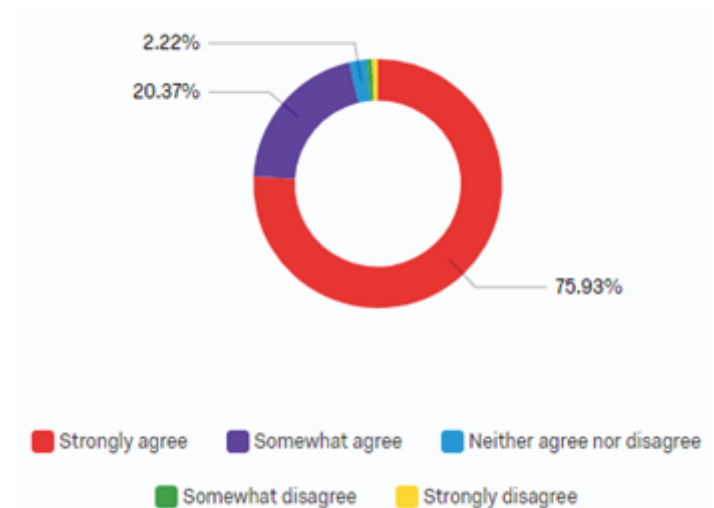
The GPNC is an important educational resource for our region

The second part of this question asked whether respondents felt that the Great Plains Nature Center is an important educational resource for the Wichita region. More than 97 percent either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that this statement is true.



The survey also asked about the importance of the recreational aspect of the Great Plains Nature Center. More than 96 percent of respondents agreed on some level that it provides important recreational opportunities for this region.

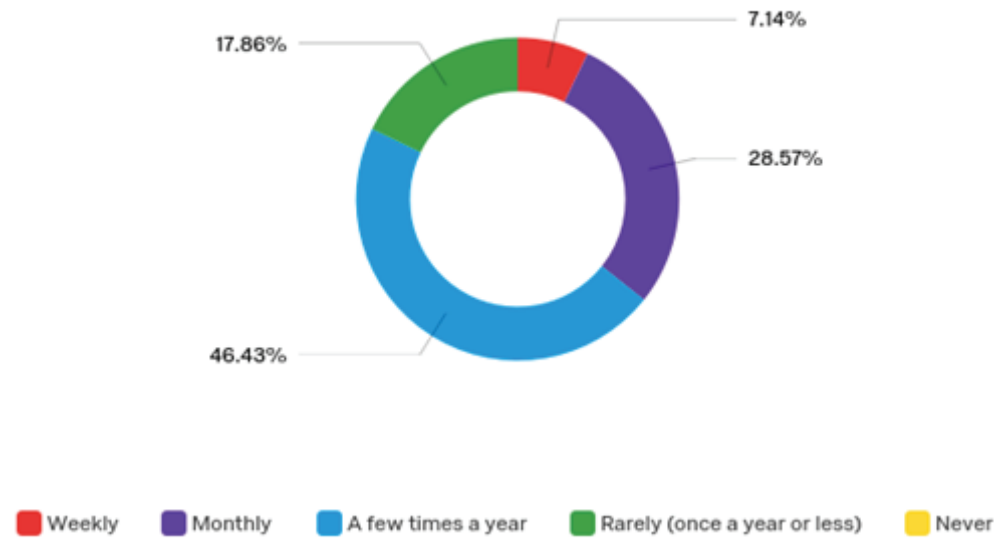
The GPNC provides unique recreational opportunities for our region



Question 2

The second question of the survey gauged how often respondents visit the Great Plains Nature Center. The majority of respondents answered either monthly or a few times a year. About 7 percent said they visit weekly, nearly 18 percent only visit once a year or less, and none of the respondents had never been to the center.

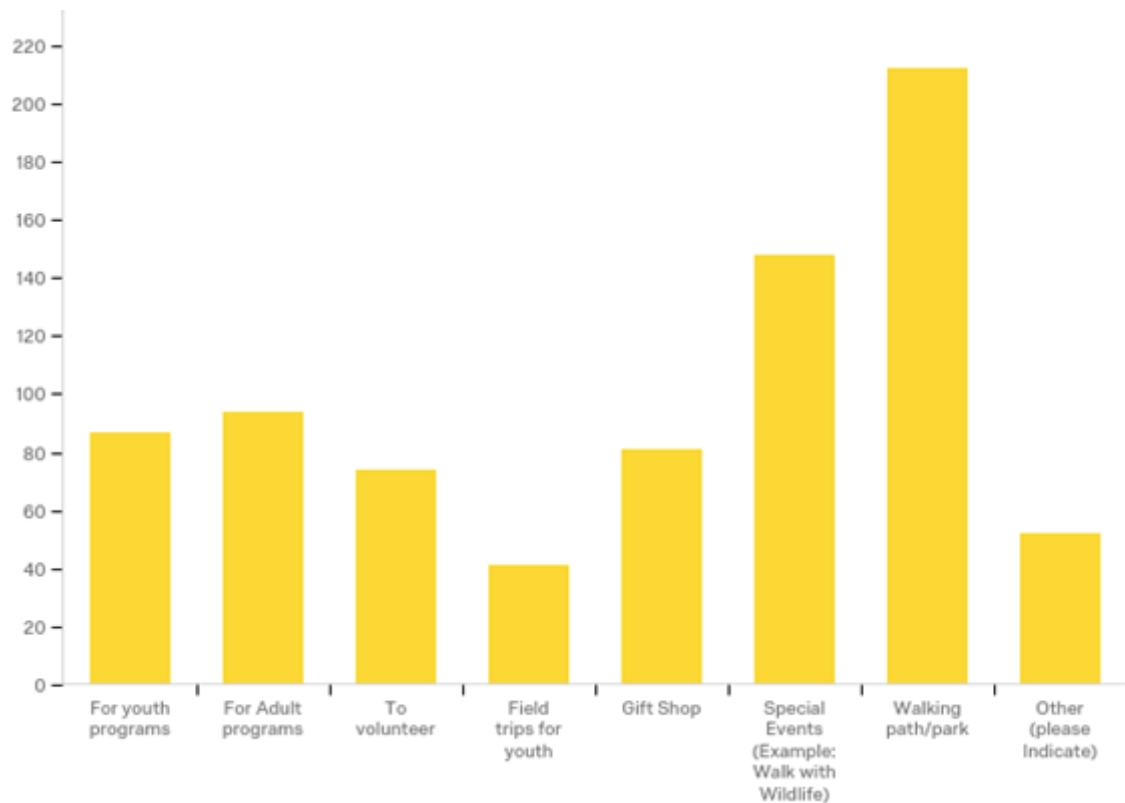
How often do you visit the Great Plains Nature Center?



Question 3

Question 3 covered the reasons why people visit the Great Plains Nature Center. This question provided seven options, as well as the opportunity to write their own. Walking path/park and special events received the most responses, followed by adult programs, youth programs, the gift shop, and volunteer activities. The most popular “other” responses were birding, attending meetings, receiving fishing licenses, photography, fishing, and geocaching.

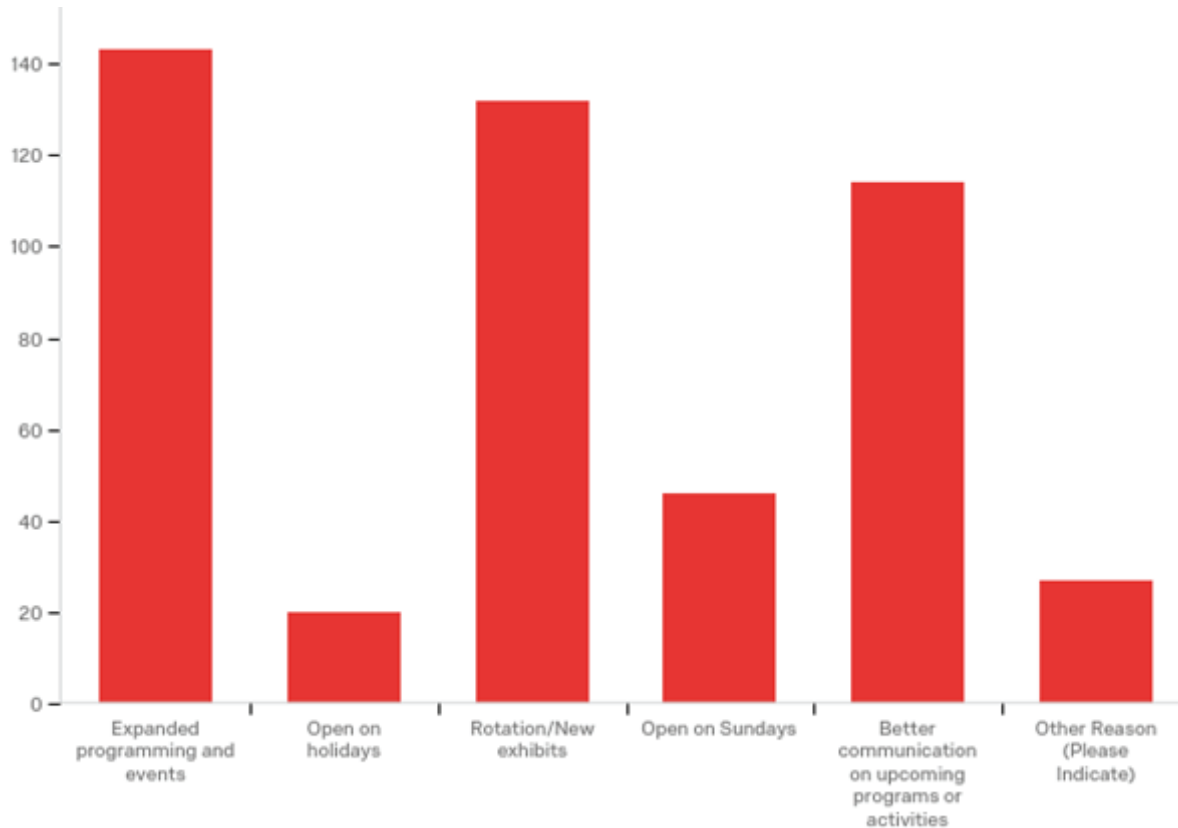
Why do you visit the Great Plains Nature Center? (Please select all that apply)



Question 4

Question 4 asked respondents what kinds of changes would prompt them to visit the center more often. This question provided five options, as well as the opportunity to write their own. Expanded programming and events, rotating/new exhibits, and better communication on upcoming programs or activities all received more than 100 responses. These were followed in popularity by adding Sunday and holiday availability. Some of the more popular “other” comments were expanded hours for fly tying classes, more adult programs, the ability to bring their dog on select trails, repaired walkways, seasonal exhibits, food and drink options, and added security.

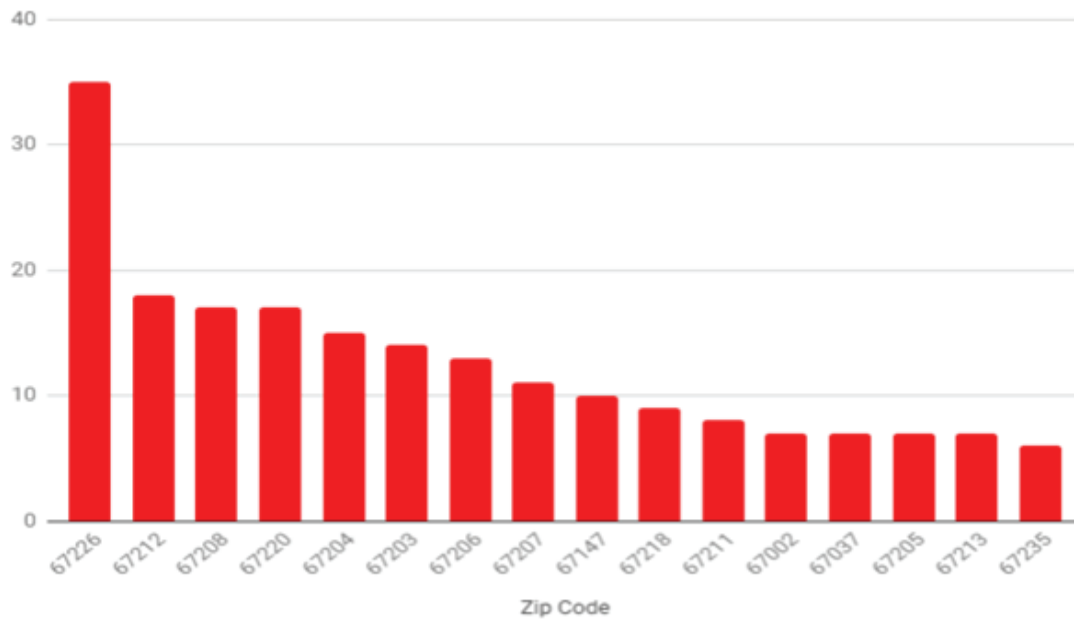
What would encourage you to visit the Great Plains Nature Center more often?



Demographic Information

Included in this survey were questions about respondents age, income level and zip code. Out of the 276 respondents, 41 percent were age 60 or older. This was followed by 31-40 (23 percent), 51-60 (13 percent), 41-50 (12 percent), and 18-30 (8 percent). In terms of income level, the largest share of respondents had an income between \$50,000 and \$99,999. The rest of respondents were spread out fairly evenly along a range of less than \$25,000 to \$150,000 or higher. The zip code question provided data on where each of the respondents lived. The majority of them indicated that they were from 67226, which is the zip code that borders the Great Plains Nature Center to the east. There were also high response rates from 67212 in west Wichita; from 67208, which is south of Wichita State University and includes the Fairmount and Ken-Mar neighborhoods; and from 67220, which includes the Great Plains Nature Center and much of its surrounding neighborhoods.

Survey respondent zip codes



Highlights from the “Other Comments” Section

- “Love coming here as a getaway. Used to bring grandchildren when they were young. Good memories of times past.”
- “A true gem.”
- “Please put trash cans in the parking lot and maybe a year-round bathroom. Thanks for all the hard work.”
- “We loved the Eagles & Ales fieldtrip and would enjoy more events like that!”
- “I love the Great Plains Nature Center. I love to walk the trails and in the Spring, I love to see all the babies. The Nature Center is very unique and I walk through the exhibits at least once a month.”
- “I volunteer and help with major programs. The GPNC is always clean and wholesome. I think it is a great place to bring families. I only wish more people in Wichita knew what all it offers in programming. Maybe more advertising is needed.”
- “It would be great to see GPNC in other areas of the city, like a regular feature on KMUW to tell us about what wildlife to look out for during the current season, or somehow represented downtown in an interactive way.”
- “I enjoy visiting with the staff - so knowledgeable and pleasant.”
- “We love to come and walk and explore, especially after craft days on Tuesdays! We have really enjoyed seeing more family friendly features like reading corners everywhere in the museum. I think the biggest improvement would be some more outdoor features for kids and families to make a whole day of a visit. More picnic table options near the main nature center building and some sort of water feature for play or a natural or Kansas themed play structure/playground. Nothing bright and crazy, but fitting in with the natural surroundings, yet engaging the experience of a walk/hike with a place to picnic and play would make this an even bigger draw to families!”

**A few of these comments have been edited for clarity*

6. Focus Groups



The Public Policy and Management Center conducted focus groups and interview with the following:

- Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Former directors
- Planning team

The following represent the general comments categorized by response:

1. What are you most proud about regarding the GPNC?

- A. Kids and adults involved in nature. (6)
- B. Free service (4)
- C. Funding partnership (4)
- D. Unique education (2)
- E. Diverse outreach (2)

2. What do you think have been the biggest accomplishments in the past five years?

- A. Programming (7)
- B. Staffing- more staff and friendly (4)
- C. Community friendliness (2)
- D. Animal exhibits (2)
- E. Volunteer growth (2)

3. What is your aspiration for the GPNC in three years?

- A. New exhibits, renovations, programming (6)
- B. Engage the community more (4)
- C. More marketing (4)
- D. Cultural diversity (4)
- E. Funding/partnership (3)
- F. Partnerships with higher education/universities (2)

4. What do you think are the strengths or assets for the GPNC?

- A. Staff/volunteers (7)
- B. Observation area (3)
- C. Passion (3)
- D. Exhibit halls (3)
- E. Live animals (2)

5. What do you think are the challenges or weaknesses for the GPNC?

- A. Exhibits/facilities and social media outdated (6)
- B. People are confused, don't know what's going on. Lack of understanding on partnership (5)
- C. Funding/fundraising (4)
- D. Some event leads aren't always clear on expectations/purpose (3)
- E. Small/ not diverse staff/ overloaded (3)
- F. Signage for nature center, rules, maps (2)
- G. Innovation/Technology (2)

6. Where do you think there are opportunities?

- A. Improve physical appearance of GPNC – outside and in (5)
- B. Marketing (4)
- C. More collaborations with organizations and businesses for programming (4)
- D. More connections to the community (3)
- E. Connection to older children/adults (2)

7. What are the risks to the GPNC? Political, economic, social, technology?

- A. Political changes (4)
- B. Lack of awareness (2)
- C. Crime (1)
- D. Urbanization (1)

8. What are the critical or transformative issues?

- A. Need to tap our own staff, more people involved (3)
- B. Creating a growth plan/strategic planning (3)
- C. How do we get people to be inspired and be part of nature, interested in what we do? (3)

9. What is your advice to the strategic planning committee?

- A. Maintain focus on our current purpose (3)
- B. Don't change things just for the sake of change, be deliberate (1)

10. Anything else?

- A. Harness the passion that our staff, volunteers and friends have (3)
- B. Be open to change (1)





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