



## Flint Hills Triangle Project Overview White Paper, CBED Report 04-06-004

This is one of a series of White Papers on issues of interest to the Center of Business and Economic Development (CBED) and the ESU School of Business. Each White Paper summarizes readings, analysis and synthesis by the Director, William L. Smith, Ph.D., for discussion, to provide background information to direct our planning processes and to build content for the Center web site at:

<http://www.emporia.edu/business/ibed/center/>

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### **The Flint Hills Triangle Project**

*We are building a "Rural Entrepreneurship and Applied Technology (REAT)" program here in the School of Business at Emporia State University.<sup>1</sup> A program must be built, put together, piece by piece, over time, through a series of projects. The first project in this program, of course, is to put in place the foundation, the four phases of the REAT Project<sup>2</sup> itself. This paper presents the fundamental conceptual basis for the next project, which provides content and context for the entrepreneurial activities encouraged by the REAT program. This is a rural tourism development project, based in east central Kansas, the Flint Hills Triangle, intended to foster and encourage entrepreneurial growth and create additional economic vitality and inertia for the entire State of Kansas.*

Lewis and Clark, as they explored the Upper Missouri River, and our national founding fathers in earlier years, used major rivers as their primary landmarks and transportation decision drivers. As the former upper Louisiana Territory was being settled, wagon trails (mostly following ancient animal and Native American trails) were used. These were followed closely by the railroads. Over the past century, roads and highways have taken on the primary role, led by the Interstate Highway system. Looking at the 2003-2004 Official State Transportation Map of Kansas, our eyes quickly are drawn to what we are now calling the "Flint Hills Triangle." This triangle is formed from Wichita up the Kansas Turnpike through Emporia to Topeka/Lawrence, then west through or past Manhattan, Junction City and Abilene to Salina, south on I-135 through McPherson, through Hutchison or Newton and back to Wichita.

Enclosed within the Flint Hills Triangle, and including nearby towns and counties, are a plethora of natural, historical and created attractions which tell the story of our heritage as a people and a state that are, and can be, as important a destination tourism region as the Ozarks or the Black Hills regions have become.

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<sup>1</sup> See CBED Report 04-06-002, "Rural Entrepreneurship and Applied Technology Program Overview White Paper," for additional background information.

<sup>2</sup> See CBED Report 04-06-003, "Rural Entrepreneurship and Applied Technology Project Overview White Paper," for additional background information.



A recent study on success factors in rural tourism development,<sup>3</sup> reports that the first success factor (among ten they identified) is a complete tourism package. It was found that to be successful, the community or region "...has to be a destination rather than a place to stop off." We often hear of travelers who "pass through" Kansas to "get where they are going." This project intends to identify the Flint Hills Triangle as a **destination** for family vacations and visits by active retired persons and all persons with a curious nature who enjoy knowing more about the world around them.

It is critical to point out early in this report that we are well aware of extensive tourism promotion activities in and across the State of Kansas, led by the Department of Commerce Travel and Tourism Division, including nearly every city, town and county in the state. The intent of this project is to create, that is to move toward, the specific regional concept (branding, if you prefer) of **the Flint Hills Triangle as a tourism destination**, as documented in the balance of this paper and subsequent reports. This is a five, ten, twenty year project. We believe that the full breadth and scope proposed here has been not been promoted anywhere else in this way.

**NOTE:** Recall at this time the words in italics at the beginning of this report: *This paper presents the fundamental conceptual basis for the next project, which provides content and context for the entrepreneurial activities encouraged by the REAT program. This is a rural tourism development project, based in east central Kansas, the Flint Hills Triangle, intended to foster and encourage entrepreneurial growth and create additional economic vitality and inertia for the entire State of Kansas.*

Initially this concept will be used as content and concept to build entrepreneurial activities – or to move enterprise development toward an entrepreneurial community or region, as we will discuss it a little later on.<sup>4</sup> Some would call this "the vision thing" –visualizing "how things might be" in the future in order to organize current and near-term activities. Innovation is often initiated by recognizing "gaps" between what is, and what might be, or what ought to be. Innovation and opportunity are at the heart of entrepreneurship, and in "growing our own" businesses and future, in Kansas.

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<sup>3</sup> "Factors for success in rural tourism development," Suzanne Wilson, Daniel R. Fesenmaier, Julie Fesenmaier, and John C. Van Es, *Journal of Travel Research*, 40 (2) (Nov 2001), pp. 1342-138.

<sup>4</sup> See CBED Report 04-07-001, "Enterprise Development to Build Entrepreneurial Communities or Regions Overview White Paper," for additional background information.



A closer examination of the map of Kansas shows that 21 of the 105 Kansas counties (20%) are included in the Flint Hills Triangle. These 21 counties are listed alphabetically in Table 1, along with the 2000 population for each county and the 2003 Rural-urban continuum code<sup>5</sup> for each. For comparison purposes, we have included in Table 2 the description for each of the rural-urban continuum codes listed in Table 1. It is of great interest to note that none of the 21 counties falls into one of the five State of Kansas Enterprise Facilitation (EF) projects,<sup>6</sup> but these counties do border on four of the five EF projects.

**Table 2. List of 21 counties in the Flint Hills Triangle, with 2000 population and rural-urban continuum codes**

| County name  | Code | 2000 Population |
|--------------|------|-----------------|
| Butler       | 2    | 59,482          |
| Chase        | 8    | 3,030           |
| Clay         | 7    | 8,822           |
| Coffey       | 6    | 8,865           |
| Dickinson    | 7    | 19,344          |
| Douglas      | 3    | 99,962          |
| Geary        | 5    | 27,947          |
| Harvey       | 2    | 32,869          |
| Lyon         | 5    | 35,935          |
| McPherson    | 6    | 29,554          |
| Marion       | 6    | 13,361          |
| Morris       | 9    | 6,104           |
| Osage        | 3    | 16,712          |
| Ottawa       | 9    | 6,163           |
| Pottawatomie | 6    | 18,209          |
| Reno         | 4    | 64,790          |
| Riley        | 5    | 62,843          |
| Saline       | 5    | 53,597          |
| Sedgwick     | 2    | 452,869         |
| Shawnee      | 3    | 169,871         |
| Waubunsee    | 3    | 6,885           |

<sup>5</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, report data: rural-urban continuum codes for Kansas, from the web site: [www.ers.usda.gov/Data/RuralUrbanContinuumCodes/2003/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/RuralUrbanContinuumCodes/2003/)

<sup>6</sup> See CBED Report 04-06-001, "Entrepreneurship, Rural Entrepreneurship, Enterprise Facilitation Overview White Paper," for additional background information.



**Table 2. Rural-urban continuum code descriptions  
(used in Table 1)**

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | County in metro area of 250,000 to 1 million population                               | 6 | Nonmetro county with urban population of 2,500-19,999, adjacent to a metro area                         |
| 3 | County in metro area of fewer than 250,000 population                                 | 7 | Nonmetro county with urban population of 2,500-19,999, not adjacent to a metro area                     |
| 4 | Nonmetro county with urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area     | 8 | Nonmetro county with completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area     |
| 5 | Nonmetro county with urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area | 9 | Nonmetro county with completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area |

Examining the physical locations of the counties along with the codes and populations with a view toward our consideration of “Rural entrepreneurship and applied technology,” five sub-regions become apparent, each with individual characteristics.

The South Sub-Region consists of Harvey, Sedgwick, Butler, and Reno counties. The first three are considered part of the metro area and Reno is adjacent to the metro area.

The Northeast Sub-Region consists of Douglas, Shawnee, Osage and Wabaunsee counties, all with code 3, part of that metro area.

These two sub-regions, then, while important for cooperation and coordination purposes, effectively fall outside our defined work area. The last three sub-regions will be defined from farthest to nearest to Emporia.

The North Sub-Region consists of Ottawa, Clay, Riley, Pottawatomie and Geary counties. They range from code 5 to code 9, so are nonmetro. The northern parts of the northern most counties are largely outside the Flint Hill Triangle, but still considered part of it. These counties will be most difficult of the three remaining regions with which to work due to distance and relative interests.

The West Sub-Region consists of Saline, Dickinson, McPherson and Marion counties. Their codes are 5 to 7, nonmetro. This region along with the East Sub-Region is at the heart of the rural aspects of the Flint Hills Triangle. While some distance separates the East and West Sub-Regions, they are otherwise closely similar and efforts toward close cooperation will be worth the effort.



The East Sub-Region consists of Morris, Chase, Lyon and Coffey counties, with codes ranging from 5 to 9, nonmetro. They contain Emporia, the Gateway or Front Porch to the Flint Hills, the Flint Hills National Preserve, the Flint Hills National Wildlife Refuge, major Santa Fe Trail landmarks, and the Flint Hills Scenic Byway.

The East Sub-Region should be an excellent place to start this project, coupled closely with the West Sub-Region, and working in concert with efforts already underway, in many respects, in the other sub-regions.

Note also that there are six notable “hubs” or “nodes” on the Flint Hills Triangle: Emporia (going clockwise), Wichita, McPherson, Salina/Abilene, Manhattan/Junction City, and Topeka. A good road runs east to west from Emporia to McPherson (50-150-56). US 56 and K12 also run east and west from the Admire Turnpike exit in the east, through Council Grove and Herington to near Salina in the west. Also, three sets of roads run vertically (north and south): K177, the Kansas Scenic Highway, from Manhattan to Council Grove to the Cassoday exit on the Turnpike, US 77 from Junction City through Herington to the El Dorado Turnpike exit, and K14 from Abilene past Hillsboro to Newton. These are each significant for planning purposes.

Finally, Kansas has much to offer beyond the Flint Hills Triangle. In order to keep a sharp focus on a long-term vision, however, most of the attention of this project, based in Emporia, will be on the horizontal center of the Triangle.

### **Summary**

This conceptual view will be used as content and context to develop specific activities for many of the REAT program elements. Tangible results are very likely years in the future. The use of the concept to build entrepreneurship and stimulate entrepreneurial thinking will have substantial benefits through both the short and the long-term for Kansas.