

# Request for Intellectual Infrastructure Funds to Support Internet Connectivity and the Schoolyard LTER Program at Konza Prairie and Kansas State University

Dr. Alan K. Knapp, Professor  
Dr. John M. Blair, Associate Professor

In 1981, the Konza Prairie LTER program was initiated based on a research proposal developed by several Kansas State University scientists to work at a site with few inhabitable buildings. Growth in research, educational programs and facilities has been nearly exponential since that time. Today, 120 research projects are currently active on the site and during the past 5 years, 30 to 55 new projects have been added annually. With fewer than 10 published scientific papers produced by the site prior to 1980, today over 600 papers have been published with an average of 45 papers published each year. In addition to the more than 40 KSU scientists/graduate students working at the site, there are currently 65 visiting researchers with active projects. Total annual site research activity for Konza Prairie is typically 3,542 person-days including 1,340 graduate and 1,513 undergraduate student-days.

This growth in scientific activity and productivity has been accompanied by significant on-site facilities expansion and enhancement, with more planned for the future. At the headquarters area of the 3,487 ha research site is a large, renovated three story limestone ranch house (The Hulbert Center) that contains a conference room/library, offices, a classroom, an exhibits/collections room, an environmental education center, sleeping quarters for visiting scientists, kitchen and bathroom facilities. An adjacent large limestone barn has 5,000 sq. ft of floor space, half of which is in a unique loft for which plans exist for conversion to an expanded conference facility. Konza also has a 2,500 sq.ft. lab building, and a new all-weather, multi-purpose building is under construction at the site. Plans also exist for building additional visiting scientist housing adjacent to the headquarters area.

Finally, the growth in research and facilities at Konza Prairie has been paralleled by tremendous increases in public outreach activities and the establishment of informal and formal educational programs, especially at the K-12 level. Konza Prairie serves as an outdoor laboratory for classes and field courses for numerous collegiate institutions each year. An REU site grant (recently funded for another 3 years) supports 10 undergraduates from throughout the US each summer. Over the last four years, 40 students representing 25 different institutions have participated in this program. In addition, Konza Prairie has hosted numerous students through the Landmark Volunteers program as well as adults through the Elderhostel program. Konza Prairie has a 10 km public hiking, self-guided nature trail system open daily, and an active volunteer docent program for leading more formal public and educational tours. After a nation-wide search in 1996, we hired an on-site Environmental Educator for K-12 student programs. Since that time, over 100 tours/educational programs per year have been conducted on site. In 1998, a formal K-12 Schoolyard LTER program was begun at Konza Prairie with workshops and the first year of classroom research projects already completed. Responses of the local K-12 teachers and the school district have been positive and significant expansion of the program is underway.