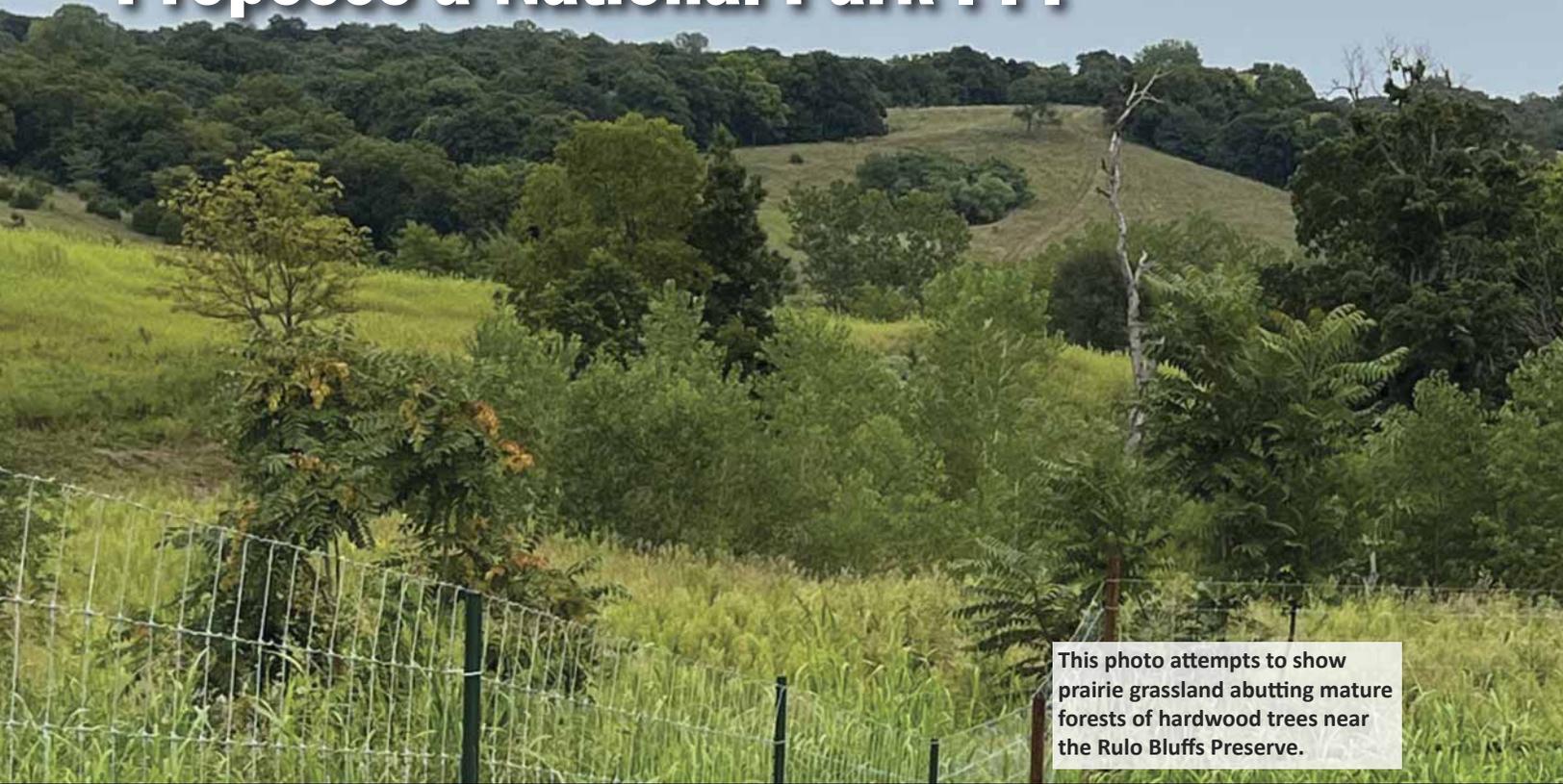


# The Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska Proposes a National Park . . .



This photo attempts to show prairie grassland abutting mature forests of hardwood trees near the Rulo Bluffs Preserve.

**W**ho are the Iowa? What does Kansas Rural Water have to do with this?

The United States Government identifies the Iowa people in the United States as two different tribes. One group of Iowa people moved to Indian Territory in the 1870s and have a reservation in Perkins, Oklahoma, south of Stillwater (Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma). Their Reservation was formally established in 1883. Before the tribe was split, they resided on a reservation of 12,038 acres that was created in 1836 in what is now Richardson County, Nebraska, and Brown and Doniphan counties of Kansas. Their ancestral lands were located in what is now Iowa, western Wisconsin, southern Minnesota and northern Missouri. When the Kansas-Nebraska Act was drafted, no regard was given to the Reservation's boundaries, or so it appears, as the boundary between the two territories (40th Parallel or Latitude 40 North) was drawn straight through the Iowa Tribe's Reservation. Just months after Kansas Statehood, the Iowa signed a new treaty that reduced the size of the Reservation to approximately 6,000 acres. Because the Reservation straddles the state line, they have the official name of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska. The Dawes Act of 1887 required the tribes to allot 160 or 320 acres tracts to the

heads of individual families if United States citizenship was desired. "Surplus" property within the reservations was then sold by the federal government to buyers regardless of tribal membership. This is primarily how land within this Reservation and many others came under private ownership and will be an important component of this article.

## What is KRWA's involvement?

The Kansas Rural Water Association was contacted in the early 2022 to assist with the development of a Source Water Protection Plan. The Tribe was already working with an agronomist employed by Understanding Ag, an organization that teaches and encourages regenerative agriculture and soil health. Their consultant was previously employed by Missouri Rural Water Association as a Source Water Specialist, so he understands first-hand how KRWA can help in this regard.

Like many public water systems in northeast Kansas, measured levels of nitrate show an upward trend in the Tribe's wells. At present, an assessment of all of the potential contamination sources has been completed. The next step is to evaluate which sources have the highest threat to the groundwater water quality, followed by an



**This two-story brick building in downtown Rulo, Nebraska will be refurbished to become a visitor center, gift shop and museum for the Ioway Tribal National Park. Rulo is located approximately three miles north of the Ioway Tribe's Reservation in Nebraska and Kansas.**

identification of the management strategies that will be most effective and have the greatest potential to be implemented.

What initially was believed by me to be easy solutions, due to the location of the wells within the Reservation, is likely going to be more difficult. The probable solutions are complicated by what most public water systems face: privately owned land being used for agricultural purposes near the wells. I still hope that some solutions will be possible to reduce the nitrate in the Tribe's drinking water. If we are successful, this project will be explained in a future article.

### **A new National Park?**

I know that is a lot of introductory information, so let's get to the story!

Approximately half of the land within the Ioway Tribe's boundary is actually under the control of the Tribe or its members. With the opening of the Casino White Cloud in 1998, the Tribe has been able to raise cash for economic development, recreation, health

care, etc. They also have a policy to consider purchasing any real estate that comes up for sale within the Reservation's boundaries. If ownership meets any of their many goals, they will attempt to acquire the land at a reasonable price.

Generally, the land use on the Kansas side of the Reservation is dominated by row-crop agriculture. The Nebraska side is primarily forested with the hilltop prairie land used for haying and grazing. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has been active on the Nebraska side of the Reservation, to preserve the unique ecological conditions

found here and on both sides of the Missouri River in the small, individual and abrupt transition zones between the woodlands and the prairies. Bluffs of loess exist on both sides of the river in Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and other locations, but much of it has been converted into agricultural land. Loess is nothing more than nearly microscopic clay particles with a very flat shape, eroded from rocks

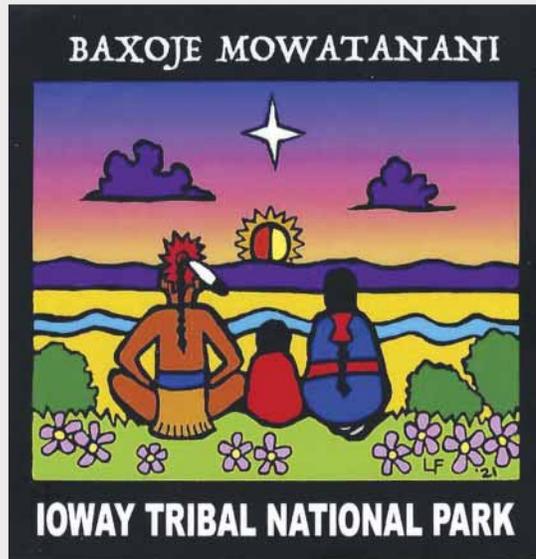
**With the opening of the Casino White Cloud in 1998, the Tribe has been able to raise cash for economic development, recreation, health care, etc.**

and larger soil particles during glacial times. As the floodplains and glacial lakes dried during glacial and post-glacial dry periods, it is theorized that wind blew these flat clay particles out of the valleys and created the steep bluffs adjacent to them. Vegetation likely growing on these slopes caught more and more of the sediment through time. Because of the flat nature of the particle, it is naturally more resistant to erosion than hills composed of rounder sediments.

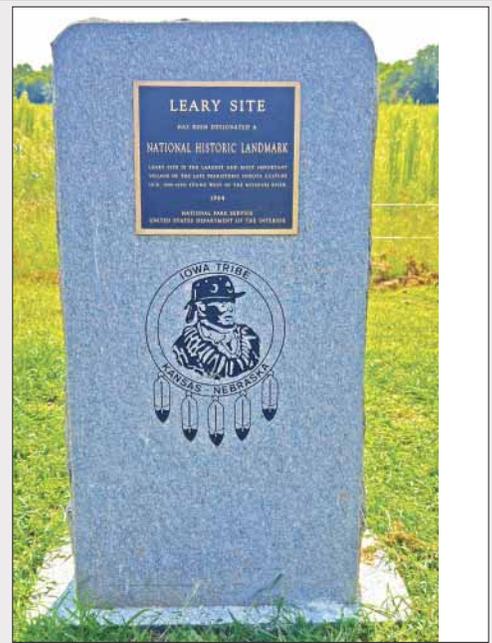
Among the features that make these bluffs unique is that the slopes are naturally covered with hardwood trees, but the hilltops have prairie grasses. In the journals of Lewis and Clark from 1804, these hills were called bald-pated, using a word seldom used today to mean an uncovered crown of the head.

### What lands are proposed to be included?

In 2020, the Iowa Tribe proposed that two properties in their Reservation be preserved as the Ioway National Tribal



This logo is that adopted by the Ioway Tribal National Park. Baxoje is the name the Iowa Tribe gives to themselves, meaning “People of the Grey Snow”. Mowatanani is not directly translatable but can be understood to mean “From where our wild food comes”.



The Leary Site was discovered in modern history by Lewis and Clark who correctly identified where a sprawling village was once located. Many archeological studies have been made of this site. It was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1964.

Park. One of these properties was acquired from the Nature Conservancy in 2018 that TNC acquired in 1994. The other property adjoined the tribal land and was donated to TNC in 1989. The originally proposed park will encompass

approximately 440 acres of mainly forested land. While the Ioway Tribal National Park won't be the first Native American national park, it will be the second and the largest by far. The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa has the honor of creating the first tribal national park, the Frog Bay Tribal National Park in Wisconsin, on the shore of Lake Superior. Frog Bay T.N.P. is only 130 acres in size. These two tracts together are known as the Rulo Bluffs Preserve. Since then, the Dupuis Hollow Tract (247 acres), which is adjacent to the east side of the Rulo Bluffs Preserve and straddles the state line,



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We measure success from yours.**



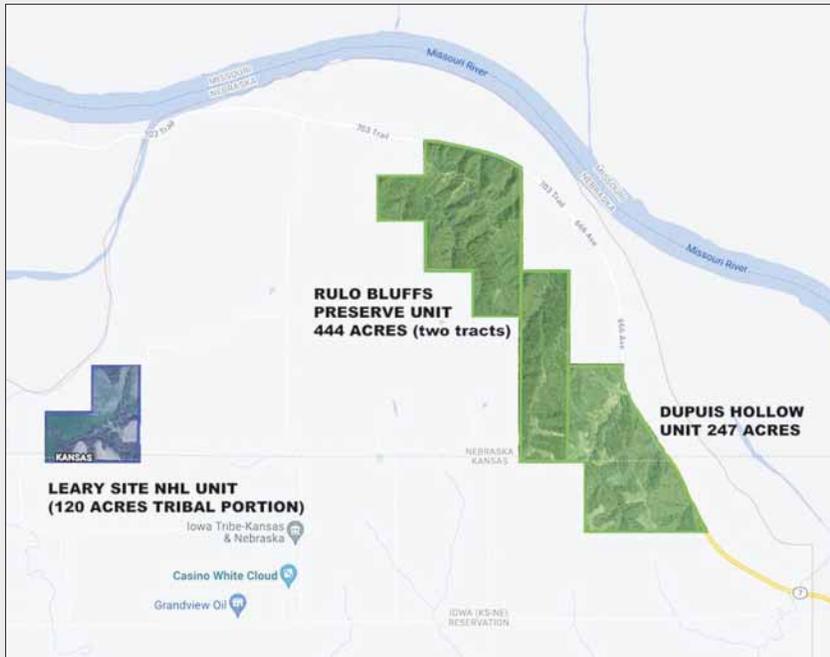
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**While the Ioway Tribal National Park won't be the first Native American national park, it will be the second and the largest by far.**

KRWA staff member Doug Helmke last wrote about the White Cloud area when there was higher interest in the feasibility of building and operating an aqueduct from the Missouri River to western Kansas. The likely route of an aqueduct would lie inside the historical boundaries of the Iowa Tribal Reservation. The article can be found online at: <https://www.krwa.net/portals/krwa/lifeline/1407/068.pdf>



The Ioway Tribal National Park will be established in three locations. The Rulo Bluffs and Dupuis Units on the east side of the Reservation, the Leary Historical Landmark on the west side, and the Iowa and Sac & Fox Mission State Historic Site near Highland, Kansas (not shown on map). The total acreage under park management will be approximately 811 acres.

has been added. Additionally, two other properties will be included under the tribal national park management. The Iowa and Sac & Fox Mission State Historic Site near Highland, Kansas, which is outside of the Reservation, will be re-opened after the State of Kansas closed it after state government revenue shortfalls. The Leary National Historic Landmark, established in 1964, will also be included. Lewis and Clark camped here on the bank of the Nemaha River and identified three burial mounds from a late pre-historic native culture. It is believed that a large Indian village existed here from 1000 to 1650 A.D.

The name of the park, Ioway, was chosen to deflect assumptions that the park was located in the state of Iowa. The name Iowa was given to the tribe (and the rest of America) by the early French explorers and traders.

Plato may have written something that looked like the oft-repeated truth that the determination of beauty is up to the individual, but I see beauty when I walk through tall trees. I'm sure I will feel this beauty in the Ioway T.N.P. too. Still, others might not, especially those who have visited the Grand Canyon, Yosemite and the Grand Tetons, and

appreciate their wide vistas, splashed in bright sunlight. Panoramic views aren't included in the preservation goals of Ioway Park, but nature and history are. When it opens in 2025, it is believed that camping and hiking will be offered in limited areas. Rare plants, like Jack-In-the-Pulpits and Yellow Lady's Slippers, and rare animals, like Southern Flying Squirrels and Cerulean Warblers will benefit from protection measures applied to the park.

The Tribe has also purchased an old two-story brick building in Rulo, Nebraska, which will be used as a Tribal National Park Visitor Center after restoration.

The goal to open the park by 2025 appears to have an aggressive timeline. Ecological and archeological studies need to be completed to locate and confirm the presence of all the species and sites that need protection and preservation. Identification of the appropriate policies and existing regulations and deed restrictions need to be documented and understood. The methods to present the park's features to the public need to be identified and publicized. The management of this project is complex and will need the effort of many people. But what a worthy effort this is for the Iowa Tribe.

### Source water protection benefits

Coming back to source water protection, the experience the Tribe is building within their leadership with the tribal national park

will lead to exceptional water system management. As mentioned, source water protection identifies strategies that result in better protected and sometimes better quality water. These strategies usually are not dependent on each other and can be pursued one at a time or simultaneously, and not in any sequential order. It is a flexible process that isn't dependent on an announced timeline, like that of the national park.

To the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, KRWA is cheering for you in this effort to protect this special and unique land in southeast Nebraska and northeast Kansas. Thank you for allowing KRWA to assist you and for teaching us our shared history.

*Douglas S. Helmke has been the Water Rights Tech at KRWA since June 2000, and also a Wellhead / Sourcewater Protection Tech since 2003.*

*He holds professional geologist certification in Kansas and Missouri. Doug received a bachelor's degree in geology from Kansas State University.*

