

Manhattan’s animal disease research facility not fully operational

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TOPEKA — The \$1.25 billion biocontainment facility in Manhattan developed for cutting-edge research on the most dangerous animal diseases is not fully operational three years after its ribbon-cutting, a federal report determined.

The Office of Inspector General published a July report stating the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility isn’t able to perform the high-level animal disease science it was designed for.

The facility wasn’t appropriately configured by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the report said.

DHS transferred the facility to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in February 2024, which accepted it without a complete commissioning report, a move that ultimately cost the USDA \$75.8 million as it fixes issues that hadn’t been addressed, the report said.

The USDA expects additional costs may be incurred to finish the 574,000-square-foot facility.

The OIG report recommended multiple steps to bring the facility to full operational status, including repairs and upgrades



The National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan isn’t using its two labs designated for handling the most dangerous animal diseases, an Office of the Inspector General Report found.

(PHOTO BY NATIONAL BIO AND AGRO-DEFENSE FACILITY)

to configure spaces to appropriately house animals and completing the commissioning process that allows the facility to handle dangerous diseases.

NBAF was built to replace New York’s Plum Island Animal Disease Center, where the USDA conducted high-level animal disease research. Plum Island was billed on its website as “the nation’s premiere defense” against accidental or intentional introduction of animal diseases into the United States.

It was considered a coup for Kansas when Manhattan was selected as the site for the facility in 2009, and a groundbreaking was held in 2015 for the laboratory. The facility was expected to employ about 325 permanent workers and to have a \$3.5 billion economic effect on the state in its first 20 years of

use, according to a 2015 announcement from Kansas State University.

The state committed \$105 million in matching state funds to NBAF and \$35 million of research funding, the announcement said.

In May, NBAF director Alfonso Clavijo told the Greater Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce that the lab would soon be hiring 150 people, to bring total employees to about 400.

NBAF was designed to handle large animals in areas that allowed for high-level containment to study hazardous diseases, the report said.

The facility is meant to support research at multiple biosafety levels, ranked from BSL-1, which allows scientists to work with microbes and biological agents that are considered minimal biosafety hazards, up to BSL-4,

which are rated as dangerous, the report said.

Currently, NBAF is operating its BSL-1 and -2 levels but is not operating the BSL-3 and -4, which require “more robust protective and decontamination equipment, and being airtight under certain circumstances (BSL-3) or always (BSL-4),” the report said.

DHS said the commissioning process was finished and distributed a commissioning report to USDA in July 2023, but the USDA knew there were deficiencies in the facility, the OIG report said.

In May 2023, the USDA asked an outside organization for an independent review. Issues discovered in the facility include air supply continuity issues, problems with sealing rooms and lack of gates to keep animals from moving around.

USDA said in a response to the report that it will have the BSL-3 lab operational by the end of 2026 but didn’t set a date to open the BSL-4 lab.

The NBAF communications department did not immediately answer phone and email requests about how research on animal diseases was affected by the delay between closing Plum Island and getting NBAF labs operational.

KWPC to meet Aug. 27 in Pittsburg

Contributed

TOPEKA – The Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission will hold its next public meeting on Thursday, Aug. 27, 2026, in the Dean Family VIP Room at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts. The meeting will begin at noon and continue until all agenda items are addressed.

The commission will hold a public hearing and final vote on proposed changes to state park fees, nonresident waterfowl hunting on public lands, fall turkey hunting seasons, and deer seasons on military units.

Proposed state park fee changes include increasing the daily motor vehicle permit from \$3.50 to \$5.50 and the annual motor vehicle permit from \$22.50 to \$37.50. Senior and disabled permit fees would also increase, with daily permits changing from \$1.75 to \$2.75 and annual permits from \$11.25 to \$18.75. The Easy Pass annual motor vehicle permit would increase from \$15 to \$30. Listed permit amounts do not include applicable transaction and processing fees.

Proposed camping fee changes would eliminate the annual camping

permit and increase the overnight camping permit from \$9 to \$15 and the 14-night camping permit from \$110 to \$165. Nightly utility fees would increase from \$9 to \$11 for one utility, \$11 to \$13 for two utilities, and \$12 to \$15 for three utilities. Listed camping amounts do not include applicable processing fees.

Commissioners will also consider a proposed regulation restricting nonresidents hunting migratory waterfowl, coot, sandhill crane, rail, or snipe on Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) lands and waters to hunting before noon. Under the proposal, nonresident hunters pursuing those species could hunt until 11:59 a.m. and would be required to leave department lands and waters, along with their personal possessions, by 12:59 p.m.

The proposed restrictions would not apply during the September teal season or to light geese during the light goose conservation order. They also would not apply to nonresident hunters on Walk-In Hunting Access areas or those participating in KDWP special hunts and events.

ARTIST

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\$3,600 during the auction. This is the third year he has made a live painting for the Kickoff Party. Growing up in an athletic family, Clark said, he felt at home at

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the event.

“My grandfather always said find something you love to do; find a way to get paid for it,” Clark said. “Sometimes I almost feel guilty about getting paid for something I have so much fun doing.”

As a full-time artist, Clark is no stranger to having an audience while he paints. He has produced live paintings in front of crowds from 30 to 7,000 people. At one point, he painted live at a softball World Series game in Kansas City.

In addition to live painting events, Clark is currently painting the PSU press box and cre-

ating a mural for Arnett Glass, which is a colorful gorilla on the side of a storage container at 10th and Broadway. He also has been commissioned for a mural at Ron’s Supermarket.

Last year, Clark hosted a Christmas pop-up shop, which he called “Seriously, Clark?” a riff on his name and the movie “Christmas Vacation.”

Clark moved to Pittsburg, which he calls home, one year ago, but his work has been in the area for years. His artwork was featured at The Meat Shed and he has completed projects for people in the Depart-

ment of Intercollegiate Athletics at PSU.

Clark was born in Pittsburg but attended elementary school in Joplin and graduated from high school in Webb City. He has been painting since he was a small child and made money in his teens by painting cardinals and murals on Webb City businesses. His murals are also featured in Crabby’s and Blackstone Gastropub in Joplin.

When Clark’s grandfather retired as a coach at Missouri Southern, he worked as a custodian for Ramsey’s in Pittsburg. Clark said he had

many fond memories of being in Pittsburg, which helped motivate him to move back to the area after spending 14 years in Kansas City. He said he was excited to move into one of the Smithsonian apartments because of their character.

Clark says he thinks that Pittsburg has the potential for people to be more creative as a community.

“I saw an opportunity for me to be able to do my artwork and develop a community that supports artists,” he said about moving to Pittsburg.

At the Kickoff Party, Clark’s painting was

such a hit that he is offering a limited run of prints. Only 50 were printed, and Clark has 25 left for sale. Each print is \$150. For more information about the prints or Clark’s work call 312-213-3550 or email nicholaskclark@me.com. His website is www.nicholaskclark.com .

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August 20
Velma Jean Stroud
Memorial service will be held at Pathway Church on Thursday, Aug. 20, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.

August 21
Donald P. Davied
Mass of Christian Burial will be Friday, Aug. 21, at 9:30 a.m. at St. Francis Catholic Church in St. Paul.

August 22
Peggy Hunt
A Celebration of Life will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 22, 2026, at The Lodge, 2312 W 4th St. Pittsburg KS.

August 29
Lance Kelly Seybold
Per Lance's wishes, a celebration of life will be held on Saturday, Aug. 29, 2026, from 2:30 to 5 p.m. at The Pitt, located at 516 N Broadway, Pittsburg, KS, 66762.

October 24
Guy Owings
A Celebration of Life will follow the PSU vs. Central Oklahoma football game on Oct. 24 and will be held at the PSU Alumni Center.

COUNTY

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Don Gutteridge Sports Complex in Pittsburg.

According to Runyon, the ECC Board unanimously approved requesting the transfer from the county commissioners. The payment will be made over a three-year period.

The rejuvenation of the ball diamonds at Pittsburg’s Lincoln Park has been on the backburner for several years, until recently. Hall described how the city commission decided to invest in the diamonds last year, committing more than \$1 million in bonds to facilitate improvements to two of the fields, repairing McNally Road, and building a parking lot across the street near the YMCA.

The city’s gesture quickly snowballed as community organizers began raising even more funds and expanding the overall project. Over the past year, more than \$7.5 million of the \$10 million project has been raised through private donations. A simple cosmetic reno-

vation has turned into a full-blown rebirth of the complex.

In total, there are seven fields at the Gutteridge complex plus the JayCee field down the street. The city intends to improve all eight, starting with new turf, fencing, and drainage. This phase, one of two, is estimated at \$1.1 million. Phase Two will expand on those improvements with new bleachers, concessions, lighting, scoreboards, and other amenities, depending on the specific field.

Hall said these improvements will help spur tourism in the area as travelling teams will want to visit the complex. It also allows the city to host multi-day tournaments without fear of muddy fields because of rainfall.

Dellasega added that the primary driver is economic development, specifically getting other people to spend their money in Pittsburg and Crawford County. His ‘proof of concept’ comes from a recent tournament held in April.

According to Dellasega’s data, 5,100 people

attended the tourney, with 3,700 coming from more than 25 miles away. Those visitors stayed an average of 106 minutes (1 hour, 46 minutes) visiting the city’s shopping and eating establishments. Receipts show they collectively spent \$215,500. In terms of tax revenue, that’s \$3,232 for Pittsburg at 1.5% and \$2,155 for the county at 1% (the remaining 6.5% goes to the state).

When asked, Runyon said the funds would come directly from the Explore Crawford County budget. It is not funded through the county’s budget in any way. ECC is entirely funded by the transient guest tax, which has averaged around \$550,000 over the past five years. In 2026, ECC is expected to top \$600,000 in guest tax revenues that are derived from renting hotel, motel, and Airbnb rooms to travelers.

Runyon also explained that the ECC Board has been putting aside money for such a project since 2020 when the pandemic shut everything down. They have only been waiting for a worthy project and they feel

the ball fields are it.

“This is what the guest tax is for,” Commissioner Bruce Blair said.

Dellasega said that the president of Mammoth Sports Construction — the company making the renovations and is responsible for the new track and field facilities at Pittsburg State — said the Gutteridge Complex, if done, would be one of the coolest parks his company would ever do, calling it “a real draw” that teams will want to play at.

It is expected the renovations, once complete, would pay for themselves within three to four years, Hall added, as word got out and the city begins to host big tournaments and championship games.

The commission unanimously agreed to allow ECC to allocate \$100,000 a year for the next three years to development of the Gutteridge Sports Complex.

This reporting is made possible, in part, by the Support Local Journalism Project Fund. Learn more at: southeastkansas.org/Localnews