

stewardship notes

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The Newsletter of the Kansas Land Trust

KLT protects 7,000 acres of scenic tallgrass prairie

by Chris Green

Rod Moyer enjoys the feeling of freedom that comes with being on his nearly 7,000-acre tallgrass prairie ranch in the Flint Hills.

“I like that you’re here with nature and not with cars, people and concrete,” Moyer, 66, said from the comfort of his ranch house about 11 miles east of Junction City. “When I go to some of the large cities in California or somewhere, I can only be there for a few days and it starts to really have an adverse effect upon on me. I need green space and open air.”

The Moyer Ranch and its headquarters sit just off a gravel road, south of Interstate 70 and the Konza Prairie

near Fort Riley. In mid-July, the vista beyond the roadside fence is a spectacularly green landscape of hills dotted by trees, and a seemingly endless sky.

Because of Moyer’s work with the Kansas Land Trust (KLT) and other partners to protect his land, the entralling view will remain intact for generations to come.

The agreement represents the largest conservation easement for both KLT and the northern Flint Hills. It keeps the land in private ownership and allows its continued use for cattle grazing and recreational activities.

Moyer and KLT received assistance in creating the easement from Fort Riley’s Army Compatible Use Buffer Program, the Natural Resource Conser-

vation Service’s Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

On July 22, Moyer, KLT board members, and other distinguished guests gathered at the ranch to celebrate the dedication of a conservation easement that would preclude wind farm and other nonagricultural development on the ranch.

Speaking at the dedication ceremony were Kansas Lt. Gov. Troy Findley; Deputy Commanding General (Rear) of Fort Riley Brig. Gen. David Petersen; Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Environment, Safety and Occupational Health Tad Davis, IV; and Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks Secretary and former Gov.

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The Moyer Ranch in the Flint Hills near Manhattan is KLT’s largest conservation easement to date.

Photo by Bruce Hogle

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Mission Statement

The Kansas Land Trust is a nonprofit organization that protects and preserves lands of ecological, scenic, historic, agricultural, or recreational significance in Kansas.

KLT utilizes a variety of long-term land protection mechanisms, but primarily accepts donated conservation easements from willing landowners. Conservation easements are legal agreements by which landowners voluntarily restrict the type and amount of use permitted on their property. KLT is a §501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Donations of easements or land to KLT for conservation purposes may have potential tax benefits for donors. KLT is funded by individual contributors, foundations, corporations, and government agencies.

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KLT wins four grants to bring land protection tools up to date

by Jerry Jost, Director of Land Protection

Land trusts across the country use a wide variety of tools to make the job of land protection more effective and efficient. Four foundations have awarded grants to KLT to bring the tools for our organization up to date. With 15,500 acres of land to monitor, and several thousand more expected in the next few years, we are especially grateful for the help of these funds.

Thanks to a \$6,500 grant from **Stonyfield Farm's "Profits for the Planet" Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation**, KLT is able to upgrade the tools in our toolbox. These include:

- A new server which networks computers and stores information
- Large computer monitors that allow the staff to create very detailed easement maps.
- A fireproof file cabinet to safely archive key documents that we are required to safeguard in perpetuity.
- A state-of-the-art digital camera (complete with compass and global positioning system photo markers).
- A hand-held GPS with supporting global information system software to mark easement boundaries with precision.

New Hampshire-based Stonyfield Farm established its "Profits for the Planet" program with the intent of providing financial assistance to deserving nonprofits. It receives thousands of applications annually for this program. KLT is lucky indeed to be among the 51 recipients of an award from Stonyfield, and we are grateful for their generous support of our mission.

The William Kemper Foundation, of Kansas City, MO, has graciously funded KLT in the past, and this year approved our grant request for \$1,000 in order to purchase a new, networkable printer/scanner/copier. Our older equipment had completely broken down and this grant enables us to function again in this crucial area.

Finally, we are selected for a partnership with the **California Chapter of the Nature Conservancy** to provide feedback on a pioneering software tool that will allow land trusts to manage the myriad of details that are essential in the protection of thousands of acres of land. This provides a comprehensive database software system designed to track all the specifics of monitoring and preserving conservation easements. Known as ConservationTrack®, it is limited for use by only a handful of organizations within the land trust community. KLT is one of the half-dozen land trusts working with this software at this initial stage to improve it for the future and help other land trusts gain efficiency in tracking their conservation easements.

KLT is indebted to both the **Norcross Wildlife Foundation** as well as the **Bailey Wildlife Foundation**, each of which awarded us \$3,000 to help offset the substantial initial costs of implementing this database software. With these significant grants in hand, KLT is now completing the circle of partnerships that will launch our adoption of ConservationTrack®, putting us on the road to efficient stewardship of the lands we are entrusted to protect. 🌿

Retrospective: 20 years of steady growth

by Lynn Byczynski, Board of Directors

When the founders of the Kansas Land Trust look back at 1990, one event stands out above all others as the impetus for the organization's birth: the plowing of the Elkins Prairie.

The Elkins Prairie was an 80-acre tract of native tallgrass prairie just west of Lawrence, adjacent to the path of a proposed highway. A group of conservation-minded citizens had been trying for some time to purchase the land so that the prairie could be preserved no matter what happened with the highway. But the landowner rejected all offers. In a dramatic finale, he had the prairie plowed under the cover of night.

The loss of the largest remaining tract of virgin prairie in Douglas County galvanized the group and started discussions about ways to preserve valuable land in the future. Steve Hamburg, who was then head of Environmental Studies at the University of Kansas, suggested forming a land trust to hold conservation easements.

"I was in graduate school at the time, and had the time to work on it," recalled Kelly Kindscher, now a member of the board of directors. "The first order of business was that we found we couldn't protect land using conservation easements because there was no enabling legislation."

Sarah Dean remembers that Kindscher came to her house that year to ask for her support in getting KLT off the ground. She agreed to be involved, and recruited her brother, John Simpson, an attorney in Kansas City, to write the bylaws and articles of incorporation. Don Worster, environmental historian at KU, was also involved in the early planning, along with Ernie Eck, Marsha Marshall, Diane Simpson, Sandra Strand, Bill Ward, and Joyce Wolf.

Kindscher, meanwhile, became the point person working on legislation that would make conservation easements legal in Kansas. Over the next three years, he met with legislators and spoke to committees. At first, there was

"We've got a tiger by the tail and we'd better get organized," Sarah Dean recalls thinking.

considerable opposition, but KLT argued that a conservation easement was a property rights issue; that landowners should have the right to conserve their property if they so choose. Wint Winter and John Solbach, legislators from Lawrence, became champions of the bill and shepherded it through the process.

With Kindscher as a very part-time executive director, the fledgling organization was kept afloat primarily by the dedication of its volunteer board of directors. The board began a tradition, which continues to this day, of meeting once a month at the Free State Brewery to have dinner together and hold a business meeting.

When the Legislature finally passed the enabling legislation in 1993, KLT was able to accept its first conservation easement a year later from Tom Akin, a Douglas County farmer who wanted to preserve a 16-acre prairie in honor of his late wife, Dorothy, who loved the profusion of wildflowers on the property. Akin allowed public access to his prairie, which is still a favorite spot for KLT's annual wildflower walk.

Sarah Dean recalls that when the Akin easement closed, "We all looked at each other and said 'Now what?' We've got a tiger by the tail and we'd better get organized."

Almost immediately, the board discovered that interest extended far beyond Douglas County. The first few years brought easements in Linn, Osage, Riley, Sumner, and Wabaunsee counties. Growth was slow and deliberate, one or two easements a year for the first five years, while KLT laid the groundwork for an organization that would be able to protect land, as the easements say, "in perpetuity," which means forever. In retrospect, it seems like a daunting task, but the energetic

founders didn't dwell on the difficulties. With the land trust movement exploding all over the United States, the early directors had no doubt that Kansans would support a land trust. And they did, from the very beginning. Many of the first members of KLT continue their support to this day, and the roll of current members grows every year. It is KLT's members who provide the financing that has enabled the organization to hire professional staff to manage the complicated work of land conservation.

When Kindscher finished his Ph.D. and took a job at the Kansas Biological Survey, Joyce Wolf became the executive director until she left to head the Kaw Valley Heritage Alliance. Laurie Turrell Ward served as executive director from 1998 to 2001, when she chose to become Special Projects Director. The board hired Lawrence attorney RoxAnne Miller, who held the position for almost seven years. After Miller resigned to take a job with a land trust in North Carolina, Jason Fizell came on board and he hired Jerry Jost as director of land stewardship, and Carol Huettner as office manager.

In the past decade, the pace of preservation has picked up considerably, thanks to enhanced tax incentives and federal funding to purchase some easements. The busiest year to date was 2009, when KLT accepted eight conservation easements. 2010 marked another watershed, as the Moyer ranch became KLT's largest easement to date, with nearly 7,000 acres protected.

Altogether, KLT now holds conservation easements on 42 properties totalling 15,500 acres.

"When you're starting something like this, you can't quite conceive of its possibilities," Kindscher said. "Who would have ever thought that we'd be protecting large tracts in the Flint Hills? It really feels good that there's this foundation that is so strong; it has an energy of its own that propels it forward." 🐯

KLT events open and close summer

Hollowell easement dedication

The first day of summer dawned bright and hot at the Hollowell property west of Lawrence, where 25 people gathered for a morning of yoga and tai chi.

This was a KLT “easement experience” of a slightly different stripe from our traditional offerings of wildflower walks, bird walks, and community suppers.

In the winter of 2009, Joe and Emily Hollowell concluded a conservation easement with KLT on this 49-acre gem in Douglas County. They planned an easement dedication ceremony for the summer solstice, including yoga and tai chi exercises on the protected property. Sadly, Joe passed away nine days before the dedication.

In spite of the shock at Joe’s sudden passing, Emily felt strongly that the dedication ceremony be held as originally scheduled. Upon learning the tragic news, both instructors for the exercises waived their fees, and all proceeds generated by the event were donated to the KLT Stewardship Fund in memory of Joe Hollowell.

Thus it was, with the morning’s dew still clinging to the prairie wildflowers and grasses planted by Dr. Hollowell, that the yoga participants eagerly rolled out their mats on a hilltop overlooking Clinton Lake. The participants, about evenly divided between women and men, were drawn from Lawrence, Olathe, Topeka, and even Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

Yogini Alice Steuerwald led the group in a session dedicated to the memory of Dr. Hollowell and the arrival of the summer solstice. Over the course of an hour and a half, the students stretched, bent, leaned, curled, knelt, and reached in a program designed to make them feel the earth, the breezes, the plants, and the animals through their bodies.

Shortly afterward, David Hann, a long-time and versatile instructor of Tai Chi, commenced his hour-long session on the short form of Tai Chi. As the sun neared its zenith and the west wind carried the sound of distant thunder, seven students carefully followed David’s slow-motion ballet of choreographed, graceful moves.

The participants came away refreshed and renewed, grateful for the opportunity to experience the distinct beauty of this Kansas Prairie. Their understanding of the importance of protecting land was enhanced, and even better, all were invigorated by the experience of touching the earth, breathing the prairie’s summer air, and embracing the spiritual goodness of nature preserved – thanks to the legacy left by Joe Hollowell and his enduring love for the Kansas land.



Alice Steuerwald leads yoga on the Hollowell land overlooking Clinton Lake. Photo courtesy of Mike Yoder, Lawrence Journal World.

Wildflower walk at the Akin Prairie



KLT’s annual wildflower walk is one of our most popular events and this summer’s walk was no exception, as nearly 100 people turned out on June 23 to learn about native plants. The Akin Prairie is at 1864 N. 1150 Road, east of Lawrence. It has been protected by a conservation easement since 1994.

Kelly Kindscher, KLT board member and author of *Edible Wild Plants of the Prairie* and *Medicinal Plants of the Prairie*, led the wildflower walk. The 16-acre Akin Prairie is especially beautiful in mid-summer because of the great diversity of plant species it contains.

At left, the tour group is visible behind a closeup of Queen Anne’s Lace. Photo by Jerry Jost.

Moyer easement dedication



The Moyer Ranch conservation easement, featured on page 1, was dedicated on July 22. Neighbors, friends, local officials, and dignitaries from Fort Riley and Kansas government were welcomed by landowner Rod Moyer and KLT Executive Director Jason Fizell. Ranch manager Trey Allen read his cowboy poetry, to the delight of the audience.

At left, Fizell speaks to the gathering. Seated behind him, from left to right, are: Rod Moyer; Kansas Lt. Gov. Troy Findley; Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Environment, Safety and Occupational Health Tad Davis, IV; Deputy Commanding General (Rear) of Fort Riley Brig. Gen. David Petersen; and Kansas Dept. of Wildlife and Parks Secretary and former Gov. Mike Hayden. Photo by Bruce Hogle.

Earles easement dedication



On September 22, the autumnal equinox, Ralph and Roma Earles hosted an event to dedicate the conservation easement they have placed on their land near Baldwin. About 50 people gathered around a bonfire in a meadow on the 134-acre property to hear KLT staff Jason Fizell and Jerry Jost explain the conservation values of the land. Fizell described it as another pearl in a string of conserved lands that includes the Douglas County lake and KU Ecological Reserves. The three protected properties are in the area known as the Baldwin Woods, which is at the edge of the eastern deciduous hardwood forest. Bill Busby of the Kansas Biological Survey spoke about the species that are on the property, including post oak and black jack woodlands, large populations of reindeer moss, red belly snake habitat, and northern maidenhair ferns. As the sky darkened and the moon rose, naturalist Rex Powell provided a guided tour of the planets and stars.

At left, Ralph and Roma Earles listen while Jason Fizell, below, speaks to the guests. Photos by Jerry Jost.



Mike Hayden. Local officials, ranch neighbors, and KLT members were in the audience.

Moyer represents the third generation of his family to farm and ranch in the area. The easement allows Moyer to preserve not only the tallgrass prairie but also his family's way of life.

"My family has been in agriculture since the turn of the last century and my father worked very hard to give me an opportunity to be successful in agriculture," said Moyer, whose family farmed and ranched in and east of what is now Tuttle Creek Lake north of Manhattan. "He instilled a real work ethic in me."

Moyer and a neighbor initially bought the site of what would become the Moyer Ranch in 1991. Five years later, he acquired all of the former Simpson Ranch and sold or traded his land east of Tuttle Creek. He has since added several other tracts of land to the ranch.

Moyer said he has no family interested in succeeding him in actively managing the ranch. But the easement will help ensure that ranching remains a primary use of the land into the future.

"I would like future Moyers to understand somewhat of what their background was about," said Moyer, whose son, Grant, works in New York City as an investment banker. "Also, that other people would be able to travel through and understand something about a working cattle ranch."

For KLT, the easement represents an opportunity to permanently protect a very scenic area and prominent "viewshed" from the encroachment of development, KLT executive director Jason Fizell said.

The ranch sits in the heart of the Flint Hills, an area of several million acres where then-Gov. Kathleen Sebelius pushed for Kansas utilities to honor a moratorium on new wind farm developments. However, there is no binding



The 7,000-acre Moyer Ranch presents iconic Flint Hills landscapes at every turn. Top, a post rock fence surrounds a pasture. Above, the purple blossoms of *Baptisia australis* brighten a rock outcrop. Photos by Bruce Hogle.

legal agreement and no way of requiring out-of-state developers to follow the moratorium.

"This basically affords rock-solid, permanent protection rather than short-term political assurances," Fizell said.

Fizell said the Moyer easement will also help the Army protect the integrity of a radar system recently installed at Fort Riley's Marshall Army Airfield. The effectiveness of that system would have been diminished by a once-planned wind farm on the property.

The easement will also preserve the habitat of potentially threatened species, including the Greater Prairie Chicken, preventing the base from becoming an isolated enclave for those animals. The preservation of nearby wildlife areas can help military installations avoid or reduce any training restrictions that could be associated with complying with the Endangered Species Act.

Jeff Keating, program manager for Fort Riley's Army Compatible Use Buf-

fer Program, said the easement would help sustain the Army's training missions and secure the Army's long-term presence at Fort Riley by protecting airspace from wind farm development for helicopter traffic and by preserving large blocks of native tallgrass prairie.

Keeping the Moyer Ranch's well-managed and visually stunning tallgrass prairie intact also represents an important step forward in preserving the existence of a unique ecosystem.

Valerie Wright, a KLT board member and environmental educator for the Konza Prairie Biological Station, said the area's plant and animal species would benefit from the preservation of a large expanse of tallgrass prairie.

"If you have little islands of habitat, then it's more difficult for species to survive, to mate, and find food to live on," Wright said. "Their range shrinks terribly when they're on an island and it's easy to lose species."

Margy Stewart, who raises cattle and, along with her husband, hosts tourists on land to the east of Moyer Ranch, said she believes that Moyer's decision makes sense economically, too.

By preventing inappropriate development, Stewart said the easement would help allow this part of the northern Flint Hills to continue to flourish as ranch land and as a growing destination for agri-tourism.

"We think he's setting a great example of long-term thinking," Stewart said of Moyer.

The easement also stipulates that good conservation measures be maintained on the grassland, Moyer said. Yet it was also important to him that the agreement be flexible enough that the land remains usable for agriculture in subsequent decades.

"KLT's work with the motivated, conservation-minded landowners of today," Fizell notes, "ensures that their foresight, hard work, and selflessness—and the benefit to future generations—is carried forward, not just for tomorrow, but forever." 🌿

Intern pulls his own weight at KLT office

Sam Davis, a graduate student in Urban Planning at KU, has contributed his very able assistance to KLT part-time for the past six months and will continue until October. We are making use of his fine computer skills to assemble data from several programs into a single database. This will allow us to expand our membership and keep in touch with you all more effectively. Sam is also involved in projects to evaluate and document protected lands and those considered for protection.

Sam, a native of Wichita, had never heard of land trusts until he attended an urban planning conference, where land trusts were discussed as one of the options for restricting land use. Then a couple of his professors mentioned land trusts, specifically KLT, and he decided we might be a good fit for an internship. He believes that

by working in urban planning, he can "make a more positive impact on our living environments." Finding that elusive balance between nature and human influences is an important goal for him right now, and being involved in land protection at KLT is helping him think about that balance.

He says, "The best part of working at KLT is the small staff. As an intern, I am expected to pull my own weight, but at the same time learn as much as I can. The staff expects me to ask questions to make my quality of work better."

After graduation, Sam hopes to find a position in either the public or private sector where he will be able to improve the "livability factor" of a city. The staff at KLT is pretty sure that Sam will make a positive impact wherever he lands. 🌿

Special thanks to KLT interns and volunteers

KLT relies upon the continued assistance of both interns and volunteers to carry out our volume of work. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by these people:

Ava Azad, KLT intern, who helped immeasurably with our ongoing filing, both physical and electronic. She also put together many easement binders -- the staff records of the essential paperwork connected with the recordation of our conservation easements.

Carol Leffler, reliable volunteer extraordinaire, who has cheerfully completed every administrative task handed to her by KLT staff.

Glen Garneau and **Jesse Nelson**, for donating their time as member mailing volunteers.

Carolyn Coleman and **Chuck Magerl**, of the **Free State Brewery**, Lawrence, for their generous assistance in KLT's local promotional efforts.

Kyle Gerstner, **Edward C. Robison III**, and **Bruce Hogle**, for kindly providing photographic services and time.



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- Our largest conservation easement ever
- KLT celebrates 20 years
- New partnerships and grants
- Meet our intern
- Summer celebrations



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We update our Facebook page with the latest easement news as well as stories and commentary by landowners who love their land. Facebook is a great way to stay informed about volunteer opportunities and special events.



An expansive view of the Moyer Ranch in Riley County, now protected forever by a KLT conservation easement. Photo by Bruce Hogle.