

# stewardship notes

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## New partnerships boost Flint Hills preservation

By Lynn Byczynski

In just nine months – nine frenetically busy months – the Kansas Land Trust has forged new partnerships with federal agencies, pioneered innovative funding, and won unprecedented support from the Kansas Legislature. As a result, KLT is positioned to protect large parcels of land in the Flint Hills by purchasing conservation easements from willing landowners.

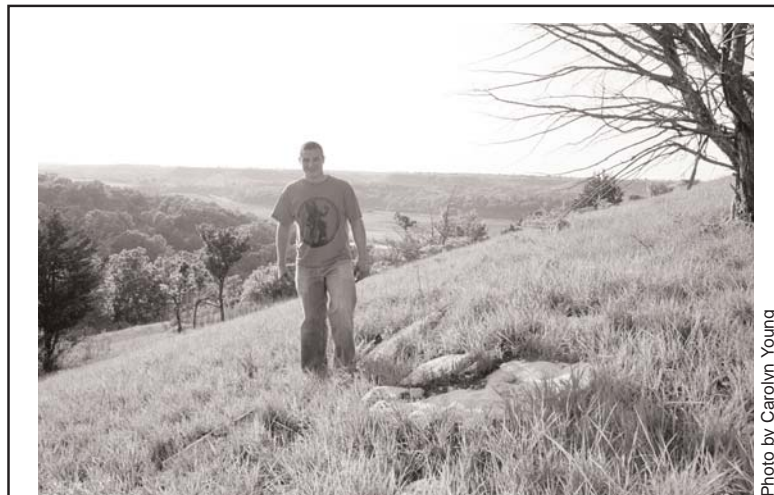
The backstory for this past year's activity really begins in 2002, when federal funding for purchasing conservation easements first became available to Kansas. The first few years, the money went unclaimed. Although there may have been landowners interested in selling conservation easements, there was no money for the required 25% local match. In the next three years, \$1.8 million that could have been used for land conservation in Kansas was returned to USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

The Kansas Land Trust made a leap of faith when it submitted its first proposal for FRPP funds. KLT turned to its members for the matching funds – and members came through, donating the \$41,000 needed to win \$82,000 in federal FRPP funds. With that money, and a \$61,000 donation by the landowners, KLT was able to purchase the development rights on a 200-acre tract of tallgrass prairie in Riley County north of Manhattan.

That initial investment by members provided the impetus for more conservation easements in Kansas. Two years later, KLT won approval for FRPP funding for a 500-acre Flint Hills ranch, and this time, the Kansas Legislature provided the matching money.

"Other states have been bringing these federal funds into their economies and using

them to protect land for many years," said KLT President Bev Worster. "It's taken us this long to bring some of that federal money to Kansas. KLT did it, and we did it because our members stepped up to the plate."



*Gray Adams, the son of John and Sheri Adams, walks on his family's land near Tuttle Creek Reservoir. KLT has secured funding for a purchased conservation easement on the 770-acre property.*

Photo by Carolyn Young

Now KLT has entered a new era of Flint Hills preservation, using yet another source of federal funds to purchase conservation easements – a Department of Defense program known as the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program. ACUB provides money to purchase conservation easements on land surrounding Army installations, which otherwise might be developed for housing and other uses that are incompatible with military training. Between 2004 and 2006 Congress has already appropriated over 57 million dollars for the buffer program nationwide, and funding is expected to continue.

At Fort Riley, the Army identified a 50,000-acre buffer area that it hopes to keep as open space and agricultural land, primarily to

prevent complaints about noise from training exercises and helicopters. As it turns out, about half the land in the Fort Riley buffer zone is native prairie, and half is prime agricultural land – exactly the kind of land the FRPP is designed to protect. It also fits squarely within the KLT mission.

No other land trust had ever used the Army money as the match for the FRPP money, so KLT Executive Director RoxAnne Miller took the idea to Harold Klaege, state conservationist with the Natural Resource Conservation Service, which administers the FRPP. He cleared it with his agency, and gave KLT the go-ahead.

"Some of this land needs to be protected, and this is one of the tools that can be used," Klaege said. "It's a good partnership."

In the meantime, KLT began working to let landowners around Fort Riley know about the program. After hearing about the push to purchase conservation easements,

52 landowners contacted KLT to express interest, and KLT selected seven parcels for the first phase of the project and hired appraisers to determine their value.

Working against a tight deadline, KLT staff submitted a proposal and in May won approval of \$246,000 in FRPP funds and substantial funding from the Army. Because of the success of the multi-agency strategy, Miller has been asked to speak about it at the National Land Conservation Conference in Nashville in October.

The total funds KLT received was less than requested, but that doesn't discourage Miller. "Although Kansas' requests will exceed the amount granted for the year, there may be a chance to get year-end FRPP funds that are

*continued on back cover*

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## mission statement

“The Kansas Land Trust is a nonprofit organization that protects and preserves land of ecological, scenic, historic, agricultural, or recreational significance in Kansas.” As a land trust, the organization uses a variety of long-term land protection mechanisms but primarily accepts 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. The Kansas Land Trust (KLT) is tax-exempt as described in Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations of easements or land to KLT for conservation purposes may have potential tax benefits for donors. KLT is funded by individual contributors, private foundations, corporations, and government agencies.

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# outlook



RoxAnne Miller, Executive Director

Summer is here and I am reminded of the summer five years ago when I began working with the Kansas Land Trust. My head spins when I reflect on the remarkable things accomplished since that summer. During this change, I am thankful to be grounded by important things that have remained constant, my passion for preserving nature for future generations, the mission of KLT and the quality of people I am privileged to work with.

Everyday we all face a litany of demands. Being clear on what recharges us is as much a priority as accomplishing the work. Simply being out on the land and in nature restores me. All concerns of “doing” fall away. In April I joined Jan Jantzen’s Prairie Fire event and for the first time experienced up close a night prairie burn. I also joined dear friends and hiked up to the ridgeline of Rose and Kent Bacon’s 500 acre ranch in Morris County and sat looking out over the Flint Hills landscape. I could see for many miles, rolling hills, native grass that was a mix of smoldering pastures just burned and grass waking up from the winter. In May I visited other KLT new project areas, Flint Hills grasslands in Riley County adjacent to Tuttle Creek Reservoir. I also visited a little native prairie gem in Douglas County. By this time the wildflowers were out and the native grass was lush and green from the rains. You, the KLT members, are the reason I am confident these places will be here years from now to restore others. That’s what it is about.

## Fort Riley: A surprisingly rich environment

It’s an alliance that may seem like a mismatch: the Kansas Land Trust and the U.S. Army. But KLT, like many land conservation organizations nationwide, has entered into a partnership with the Army based on a common interest in preserving land.

The Department of Defense manages 30 million acres, in every type of landscape in the United States. It needs to preserve the character of its land, so that it can provide an accurate backdrop for training exercises; it needs deserts, swamps, mountains and prairies so that soldiers can learn to conduct military operations in those environments. As a result, their land is surprisingly well-stewarded: nearly 330 endangered or threatened species are found on military property, more than on any other federal lands.

Fort Riley is considered particularly successful at preserving biodiversity. Last year, it won an award from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for its natural resource conservation achievements. The Service cited Fort Riley’s efforts to conserve the tallgrass prairie ecosystem, its assistance with monitoring and assistance of endangered and threatened species, and its development of several wetlands projects.

Jeff Keating, a civilian biologist at Fort Riley, provided the following information about the ecological highlights at the base:

“Fort Riley is a 100,656 acre military installation situated in the northern Flint Hills and is the largest federally-owned tallgrass prairie tract. The grasslands on Fort Riley are comprised

*continued on page 3*



Photo by Carolyn Young

*The Cobea penstemon is one of many native plants found on Jane Laman’s property near Fort Riley. KLT is working to preserve her land with funding from the Army Compatible Use Buffer program.*

## Fort Riley continued from page 2

of high-quality native prairie, tame pastures and former agricultural fields. Land-use activities on Fort Riley produce a mosaic of light disturbance to localized, substantial impact. The grasslands are interspersed by woodlands that are associated with streams, relatively small ponds, and wetlands. Fort Riley abuts Milford Lake to the west and the Republican, Smoky Hill and Kansas rivers to the south.

"Altogether 233 plant species from 178 genera and 59 families have been collected and preserved from Fort Riley in recent years. Fort Riley habitat supports at least 43 species of mammals, 223 species of birds, 40 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 50 species of fish. Among these are the largest free-ranging elk herd in Kansas, four Federally-listed and eight Kansas-listed threatened or endangered species, and 23 other species considered by Kansas to be Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

"The American Bird Conservancy designated Fort Riley as "A Globally Important Bird Area" in 2001 in recognition of the installation's value to the

conservation of birds and their habitats. Fort Riley was recognized as being the best site for Henslow's Sparrows in Kansas and one of the very best sites in the world, as some years over 2,000 Henslow's Sparrows may be found on the installation. The fort also contains a complete association of tall-grass prairie birds including the Greater Prairie-Chicken, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper Sparrow and Dickcissel.

"The American Bird Conservancy's Important Bird Areas (IBA) program is founded on the premise that some places are exceptionally important, even essential, for bird conservation. Identifying these sites and directing protection and management efforts towards them is crucial if viable populations of many species are to survive. From the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge to the Everglades National Park in Florida, IBA sites embody the ongoing effort to conserve wild birds and their habitats throughout the nation, and the importance of preserving America's avian heritage for future generations."

## Senses of place

### MID-DAY, LATE APRIL, DUNLAP ROAD, MORRIS COUNTY

Dunlap Road veers southeast from Council Grove, following the Neosho River's eastern bank. Signs along the road warn drivers that in times of heavy rain, it is impassable. Typical of other flood plains, the land here stretches out flat and black and rich. This afternoon is dense with dampness, a drizzle coming and going as I travel. But after months with little precipitation, there is no chance of flooding, and the moisture intensifies the earth's deep browns and spring's bright greens. Some fields have been plowed and planted. Winter wheat at this stage has a velvet plushness, while young corn sprouts growing in curving parallel rows seem like meticulous embroidery. All is not tidy in the fields, however. I stop the car to watch a congregation of turkey vultures nodding their bright red heads as they feed on a raccoon carcass in the middle of a field. The vultures' presence reminds me how dependent spring growth is on winter decay.

Through the scrim of haze to east and west of Dunlap Road, beyond the fields, I see the wooded areas and the low stoops of the Flint Hills. My first stop on Dunlap Road is the Flint Hills Nature Trail, created on a former Missouri Pacific Railroad bed, which winds its way three- and-a-half miles through increasingly thick woods, rusted rail spikes visible among the chert chips. I walk through cedars and shrubs—honeysuckle, buck bush, sumac—with purple flox, yellow prairie groundsel, and the stalks of dried mullein and gayfeathers standing tall among them. As if blazing the trail are 807 young bur oaks, planted as living memorials to the 807 Kaw Indians

who were listed in the 1862 census. With the drizzle turning to rain and an absence of bird and insect sound, I am conscious that thoughts are my primary company today. Something stirs in the underbrush, and I catch the glimpse of a mysterious grey back—feral cat, possum, old raccoon come back to life?

Deciding not to walk the entire trail on a day when the rain is now taking on a chill, I return to Dunlap Road and drive to the trailend in the Allegawaho Heritage Memorial Park. On a high hill, green with new prairie grasses, a thirty-five foot limestone obelisk rises up before me. I have read that this land, which was part of the original Council Grove Kaw Reservation, continues to be owned by the Kaw Indians, who were forced to move, despite the eloquent protests of Chief Allegawaho, to their present reservation in Oklahoma in 1873. At the base of the obelisk, raised in 1925, the remains of a Kaw which were discovered nearby have been re-interred. On either side of the hill paths lead me to different vantage points. I choose the left, and discover a large circle inlaid with a geometrical pattern and with words in an unknown language bordering it. On this grey day, with only the hush of rain and vultures cruising above the trees, the land around me feels haunted. I turn, and three deer, flashing their white tails, leap away into the woods as if embodying the presence of those who are absent. I walk toward the other vantage point, a similar circle, but the words, this time in English, I can learn by heart: "Wakanda. Bless All Who Walk Here. May We Know And Respect All Your Creation And What You

Have Taught Us." A pair of bluebirds, tokens of the spring sky on another day, guides me back to my car.

At the end of Dunlap Road is the town of Dunlap, population eighty and, I would guess from the evidence of abandoned buildings and deteriorating playground equipment, diminishing.

Dunlap, with its rich alluvial soil, was one of the places in Kansas Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, the millenarian mover and shaker of the Exoduster movement, had designated in 1879 for settlement by former slaves. On neighboring hillsides outside of town, I visit two cemeteries, both with signboards identifying them as "Dunlap Cemetery," one for blacks and one for whites. Between them there are more monuments than there are citizens of the town. In the white cemetery, the monuments are erect; many are massive marble blocks; a stone white angel in fluttering robes presides here. In the black cemetery, many appear as worn teeth protruding from the ground, or exist only as a burgeoning of iris or peonies in the grass. Abutting a burned prairie scattered with limestone slabs, they are mostly stones among stones. I note that the inscribed epitaphs are similar in both cemeteries—"Dear Mother," "Beloved Father," "Rest"—and the dates are similar—1860-1907, 1831-1903, 1824-1894, 1839-1910, 1851-1951. On my journey down Dunlap Road, I have not met a living human soul.

*I am indebted to Marci Penner's The Kansas Guidebook for Explorers for my inspiration and information about Dunlap Road.*



by Elizabeth Schultz

New Partnerships continued from page 1

turned back by other states. In any case, we have sent a clear signal that Kansas is ready for a higher allocation next year," she said. While working with landowners, Miller also spent time with various legislative committees, testifying six times about how land conservation can benefit the state.

"Fort Riley is one of the largest economic engines in the state," she said. "The state clearly has an interest in ensuring that the Army can continue its training mission on its land and in promoting compatibility with neighboring agricultural land."

The Legislature appropriated \$311,000 to help with the easement purchase program. It was nearly 10 times the amount appropriated for easements the previous year.

With that final piece falling into place, KLT is now positioned to move forward with preserving the state's ecological jewel, the tallgrass prairie of the Flint Hills.

"This is a huge leap forward for our organization," President Bev Worster said. "We have the potential to dramatically increase the number of easements we have done in the past."



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