



Kansas Land Trust

Stewardship Notes

To landowners, preserving Flint Hills prairie is 'a sacred trust'

The first property in Kansas to be considered for a purchase of development rights under the federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) is a 200-acre parcel of native tallgrass prairie in northern Riley County, west of Tuttle Creek Reservoir. Under the FRPP, the federal government contributes 50% of the cost of development rights, a local land trust contributes 25% and a landowner donates 25%. Land considered for this program must meet stringent requirements, and KLT must closely monitor its future use.

Kansas Land Trust was one of the first organizations to submit a proposal under FRPP in Kansas, and has received the go-ahead from the federal government. More than \$25,000 has already been donated by our generous KLT supporters, leaving an additional \$50,000 to raise in order to win \$150,000 in federal funds. Completing this easement is a high priority for several reasons. First, a beautiful, 200-acre piece of Flint Hills will be preserved forever. Second, our success with this project also will smooth the way for Kansas to obtain more federal funding in the future for preserving our agricultural lands.

Our first FRPP easement is owned by Charlie Griffin and Denise Wyrick. Charlie is a research assistant professor in the School of Family Studies and Human Services at Kansas State University, and director of the Kansas Rural Family Helpline, a toll-free telephone assistance and referral program based at K-State. Denise has a background as a family therapist, and now manages the couple's herd of 19 llamas, along with assorted poultry and other animals.

We recently asked Charlie and Denise to talk about their land, and their reasons for putting a conservation easement on it.

Q. What can you tell us about the history and ecology of this land?

A. The oldest land records show a portion of the property being deeded over from the U.S. government in the 1860s. Some portions were owned by the Union Pacific Railroad as part of the land deals which funded rail expansion. One acre was deeded to the local school district for a one-room limestone school building, the only remnant now being a barely noticeable grass-covered rubble of limestone rocks and a few pieces of metal from the old coal stove and the student desks.

We rented the 1880s limestone house for 15 years, and purchased the 260-acre parcel in 1989. The 260 acres is all native tallgrass prairie, with the exception of the immediate home and farmstead. The hilly Flint Hills pastureland consists of upper grass-covered highlands with a central creek drainage with mixed timber, meadows and a 3-acre pond. The land was grazed by cattle continuously "as far back as anyone in the neighborhood remem-

bers," conceivably since the 1800s. It has not been grazed the past four seasons, offering a period of recovery and haying off the top meadows for brush control. And of course, like much of the pasture in the Flint Hills, the land has been burned in the spring most years.

Q. How did you get into the llama business?

A. We purchased our first three llamas in 1995, mostly with an interest in animals that fit with our backpacking and outdoor activities. When we learned they were quite personable and fascinating animals, we increased the herd to the current level. They provide fiber for weaving and spinning, carry packs, and help with brush and weed control. One even has a "job" as a guardian animal with a nearby angora goat herd, keeping away predators that had become a severe problem a couple years ago.

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Photo by Tom Leopold

Charlie Griffin and Denise Wyrick lead llamas across a ridge on their ranch.

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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." 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

Conservation of the Flint Hills Requires Collective Effort

by RoxAnne Miller
KLT Executive Director



"Conservation is the foresighted utilization, preservation and/or renewal of forests, waters, lands and minerals, for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time." - **Gifford Pinchot**

KLT continues steady efforts to preserve the Flint Hills. The excitement is to see the dramatic momentum building for preserving this important ecosystem, with its working ranches and scenic landscape. The challenge is, how can we preserve as much of the Flint Hills as possible?

Less than 3% of original tallgrass prairie remains in the United States. Most of it is in Kansas. Some estimate that Kansas has about 2 million acres of high-quality tallgrass. Conservation entities cannot buy 2 million acres even if it were all for sale. All of the landowners will not donate conservation easements; even if they did, who would fund the stewardship? There is not enough funding to purchase conservation easements on even 10% of the 2 million acres. Many people want this landscape to remain productive and generally oppose additional large public lands, even if public money were available (which it's not).

So how can we protect a significant portion of the 2 million acres of Flint Hills? It is possible if all conservation efforts support each other, if we tap all of the available resources and use every available tool. Some may doubt, even then, whether we can accomplish preservation of this significant landscape.

"What the mind can conceive and the heart can believe -WE can achieve." - **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

To be successful, conservation organizations, public entities, individuals and businesses must work together. We need to use a combination of methods. These methods include:

- Conservation easements with land remaining in private ownership;
- Creation of preserves owned by conservation entities or individuals;
- Public lands.

The Kansas Land Trust stands ready to work with landowners to create conservation easements. A successful system must compensate landowners for voluntarily protecting such large and ecologically significant areas. No single entity, government, person or corporation can accomplish or fund this task. We need all of our capabilities and capacities. So, I urge you to participate, keep an open mind, listen to the dialogue and seek commonality. And during the journey, remember we are all connected.

"Tug on anything at all and you'll find it connected to everything else in the universe." - **John Muir**

Collectively we have the capacity to create a system for preserving the Flint Hills, one of our most significant landscapes.

How can YOU be a part of preserving the Flint Hills?

Make a contribution:

If you are interested in helping fund the preservation of the Flint Hills tallgrass prairie, please send your contribution to the address at left. To the extent allowed by law, your contribution is tax deductible.

Preserve your Flint Hills land:

If you own significant Flint Hills property and would like to apply for future funding for the sale of a conservation easement, please contact KLT.

Upcoming events

Prairie art exhibit touring state

Kansas Land Trust is a sponsor of the art exhibit "Homage to the Flint Hills," which will be traveling throughout Kansas during the next two years. The exhibit features 34 works of art, each depicting the Flint Hills and each by a different artist. It includes paintings, photographs, fiber, ceramic and video works.

The artists chosen for the exhibit mostly live in Kansas, and a few from other states have lived here previously. The exhibit includes works by Lisa Grossman, a Lawrence painter, and James Nedresky, a Lawrence photographer, both of whom have donated art to benefit the Kansas Land Trust. Other artists in the show include Robert Sudlow, a Lawrence painter; Judith Mackey, a Cottonwood Falls painter; Stan Herd, Lawrence crop artist; Larry Schwarm, Emporia photographer; Marilyn Grisham, Wichita fiber artist; Jim Richardson, Lindsborg photographer; and John Charlton of the Kansas Geological Survey in Lawrence who has created a CD-ROM so that Teter rock in Greenwood County can be seen from 360 degrees. The exhibit was organized by Don Lambert, a Topeka writer and arts promoter.

An 84-page, full-color catalog will be printed, which will provide additional exposure for the Kansas artists.

The exhibit has already been shown at the Topeka-Shawnee County Public Library. It is currently on display at Cowley County Community College in Arkansas City. Future exhibit dates:

- Manhattan Arts Center, April 16-May 28, 2005
- Lawrence Arts Center, June 1 - July 15, 2005
- Emporia Arts Council, Aug. 15-Sept. 30, 2005
- Barton County Community College, Oct. 15-Dec. 15, 2005
- Wichita Art Museum, February and March, 2006

October forum focuses on remaining natural areas

KLT President Kelly Kindscher will be the featured speaker at the third annual Community Forum on Kansas Environmental Issues to be held on Thursday Oct. 7 at the Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village. This year's program is "Preserving Biodiversity in Northeast Kansas: What You Can Do!"

Dr. Kindscher will report on a just-completed survey of the remaining natural areas containing habitat for rare species in northeast Kansas (Johnson, Leavenworth, Douglas, Miami, and Wyandotte counties). This region is already home to close to half our state's residents and the population is growing at nearly twice the national average in some of these counties. There is an urgent need to identify and preserve the few remaining biologically diverse areas before they are lost forever. Dr. Kindscher will report on where these remaining high-quality remnants of tallgrass prairie and woodlands are located and what we can do to protect them.

KLT is a co-sponsor of the event, which is presented by Kansas Natural Resources Council and the Prairie Village Environmental Committee.

The event begins at 6 p.m. with a community supper featuring locally grown food, followed by Dr. Kindscher's presentation. There is a charge of \$8 (\$5 for students) for the supper and program, payable at the door. Reservations are requested in advance by contacting Kathy Riordan at 913-383-7882 or emailing Margaret Thomas at MGT84Roe@aol.com by October 1.

RAIN IN DOUGLAS COUNTY, EARLY JULY

Sun reigns in Kansas during summers: we are his subjects from June through August. The color of his majesty is yellow: His sign is ubiquitous—in fields of sunflowers, in "amber waves of grain," in grasses increasingly parched and sere as summer advances. His consort is the wind, and their combined arousal can raise up dervishes as well as fortresses of dust. They can flatten us and leave us longing for sherbet, oceans, and night. We always yearn for rain. It comes rarely, the occasional interloper, arriving accompanied by drum roll and flashing sabers and assisted by wind, but rain stays only briefly, soon giving way to sun's dominance.

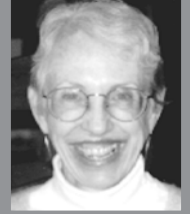
Until this year. With intermittent rains through June and into July, my senses of Douglas County in the summer have been revised. Rain's hallmark is green, and fields, woods, gardens, and lawns are everywhere thick with greens. Maples, oaks, and sycamores—broad-leafed trees—hold up plates and saucers of green; the seedpods of redbud and locust dangle in a profusion of exotic jade jewelry; pines bulge with shining green needles. It seems, my friend points out, that the trees have been given a second spurt of green, apparent in a second set of light green tips.

For the most part, the rain this summer has arrived steadily and regularly—without fanfare and drama—appearing like an ordinary mercy, not the danced-for, yearned-for miracle it is in summer drought. It has kept the county's rivers—the Kaw and the Wakarusa—swiftly moving and the Haskell-Baker wetlands full of turtles, snakes, and singing frogs. Wildflowers are luxuriant this summer: orange daylilies and butterfly weed, white yarrows and asters, pink echinaceas, gayfeathers, clovers, and milkweed blooms. Through a scrim of rain, the flowers form constellations of color against the prevailing green. Rain itself is both seen and heard. As it falls and as it connects with the earth and its waterways - puddles, ditches, ponds - it slashes, splashes, smashes; it dribbles, drips, dimples; it may appear as mist or in long silver threads. And in the beads of rain along a blade of grass, the sky-fields with their colorful stars are multiply reflected.

In the summer in Kansas after a long dry spell, rain can have

SENSES OF PLACE

by Elizabeth Schultz



the smell of moist loam, lemons just cut, crushed violets; the flavor of lavender ice.

If there isn't too much of it. Which on the first Friday in June in Douglas County there was. Without its accomplice the wind, rain clouds situated themselves over the county and opened their valves. Neither cloudburst, shower, downpour, tempest: this was a celestial waterfall or, more accurately, walls of water. Although usually transparent, this time the rain was a white opacity. Too much, too fast, the earth could not absorb it, and green gave way to mud. In the country, dry ditches filled and rose; grasses were mashed, and long fingers of water spread into fields. With walls of rain collapsing into them, the rivers pressed close to the tops of their banks and swirled across their sandbars, vertical white rain transformed to liquid horizontal brown, with beige foam marbling it. The news would later report that a mother and two boys were surrounded by water, stranded, and another boy was caught in a culvert. Who counts the creatures drowned in their underground burrows or on their noontime journey in search of lunch? Doves, usually ground-feeders, perched on wires, waiting for the signal to set out to try to identify dry land.

In the wetlands, brackish water was creeping toward the road. A few plastic bottles and containers, like toy boats, drifted about at random, loose from their moorings in the ditches. Shrubs stood more than knee-deep in the water, and the dark charcoal trunks of hedge and hackberry kept their green canopies high above the slowly circling water. Cattails and sedges speared the water in countless places. Amongst them, a great white egret stood in her element, an elegant living statue indifferent to the deluge. Overhead, the massed clouds began to part, revealing a lake of innocent blue. A great blue heron rowed his way serenely and evenly across it. As this lake expanded, and the rain diminished to dots and dashes, steam began to rise from the wetlands. The sun once more was dominant.

Easement...

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Q. What kind of discussions did you have as you considered the possibility of selling development rights to your land?

A. At first, we didn't see the need to "protect" this land. But rapidly growing suburbanization in the area is having its impact. Recently the division of an adjoining property into smaller tracts brought the concern close to home. Located 12 miles from Manhattan, the area increasingly is becoming a neighborhood of commuters on smaller and smaller tracts. The local ranch and

farm nature is changing rapidly. While we've had a strong sense of respect and appreciation for the land itself, involvement in recent years with a Native American elder who pays frequent visits to our land led to a even stronger sense of this land as a "sacred trust" for which we carry responsibility. Indeed, it's the reciprocal nature of our involvement that leads us to developing the easement. We're nurtured in many ways by the land, so we also have a responsibility in return. Finally, the raging debate about wind energy development through the Flint Hills heightened our understanding of the difficulty of preserving that sacredness beyond the immediate reach of our ownership and finances. The notion of a conservation easement suddenly offered a clear and

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Easement...

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obvious approach to ensure that this land could remain as prairie in its native state regardless of local development. While we might not be able to control what happens in the region and what happens on others' land, there was no need to feel helpless about preservation and protection of our own land. It simply takes a clear decision that it is important and worthwhile.

Q. Ultimately, what made you decide to do it?

A. Why do it? Why now? We don't have children, so it eased one hesitation, which was a mild concern about what we might do to potential future market value of the land. Once we stop thinking about land as commodity and start thinking about it as the place we live, the equation changes. Planning to live here for the rest of our lives (uncertain as life is...), our concern is more for the value the land has in its present form, not as a commodity to be sold. The value of our estate for us, so to speak, is in the present, rather than in the future at some unknown point where it might be sold or passed along to the next generation as a financial asset. The ability to leave land that will remain as tallgrass prairie in the future is the legacy we plan to leave, with its value to be most appreciated by future owners who would have interests similar to our own.

Q. Could you describe a scene or experience that will help people understand the beauty and significance of your land?

A. There are rational business-based decisions to preserve land and there are emotional and values-based experiences that support those decisions, easily understood by people with similar experience and at times frustratingly puzzling to those who don't.

A defining moment happened at the "picnic tree". It is a rather small red elm, rooted on the edge of a limestone ledge overlooking our pond. That tree has lived a precarious existence in the full force of the wind and weather, barely larger now than it was when I first moved there in 1974. It still amazes us that anything can grow in that place. This spot is perhaps one of our favorite places to stand at sunset. One can see the setting sun to the west and look out over the pond far below. If you are lucky a great blue heron might fly by, and most certainly night hawks will be about.

One hot August evening we decided to celebrate Denise's birthday with friends at that spot, complete with table, the formal china and an elegant meal. As the sun set, the air glowed hazy red across the valley and left no doubt about the connection we felt there. Our guest commented that she was reminded of travels far away, that it seemed as though we should be speaking French, and finally in the red glow she said that it was a scene directly from the movie "Out of Africa."

Shouldn't we do everything we can to preserve those experiences and those landscapes for the future?