

stewardship notes

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The Quarterly Newsletter of the Kansas Land Trust

Stueck family conserves land in Johnson County

by Lynn Byczynski

Bill and Bo Stueck have lived on their 130-acre farm in Johnson County for more than 20 years, and have been riding horses and fox-hunting there even longer. Over the years, they have watched suburban development moving ever closer to their hilly property along the Blue River.

"Developers knock on our door wanting to buy this land all the time," Bill Stueck said, pointing to their boundary line, marked by a split-rail fence. "That's Metcalf Avenue right there. This would have all gone for development."

Metcalf Avenue is a major north-south artery through Johnson County, lined by shopping centers, office buildings, and gateways to residential developments. A new Wal-Mart Supercenter at 159th Street and Metcalf marks the southern-most limit of development today. It is one mile from the Stuecks' land.

Although the Stuecks could have made a lot of money selling some or all of their property, their vision for it was quite different. They want it to remain a refuge from the city, for people and wildlife. They want the opportunity for their adult children, who grew up there, to bring their own children to play. And they want to be able to use the land to raise money for the charities they support.

By dedicating a conservation easement on the land to KLT, the Stuecks have ensured that their wishes will be carried out in perpetuity.



Hay bales dot the Stueck's meadow.

Photo by Bruce Hogle

KLT's newest easement

The Stuecks first contacted KLT in the fall of 2006 and quickly moved forward with the process of placing an easement on their land. They were familiar with KLT because they are owner-members of the Mission Valley Fin and Feather Club, which is protected by a KLT easement. Bill Stueck also serves as a trustee for the Kansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), so he is knowledgeable about conservation easements in general and KLT's role in particular. TNC focuses primarily on large, landscape-scale easements, and purchases, especially in the Flint Hills, he said.

KLT's mission, in contrast, is to protect important Kansas lands, regard-

less of their size or location. The Stueck easement fits into KLT's portfolio because it protects water quality in the Blue River, open space in a rapidly developing county, and habitat for the many creatures that depend on riparian areas for their survival.

"We have barred owls, coyotes, great blue herons - we have a small heron rookery in one corner of the property," Bo Stueck said. Deer, wild turkeys, songbirds, and hawks are also among the more visible inhabitants.

The legal work on the easement was completed last fall, and the easement became official this summer. Excluding the land on which buildings and potential future buildings sit, the easement

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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.

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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outlook



Jason Fizell, Executive Director

KLT is excited to be working with Kenneth Muller to protect his family's 580-acre ranch in Morris County, north of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, the true heart of the Flint Hills. Ken, pictured below, is a great example of the vitality of the ranching heritage in our state. An October 2007 *Grass and Grain* article described Ken as a "lifelong cowboy...recognized over a wide area for his diverse abilities with horses, livestock, and people."

When state funding fell short of the required matching funds to make use of the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program to complete this easement, the KLT board, recognizing that Ken's land is unique and worth protecting, unanimously committed to dipping into our "Flint Hills Fund" to provide those additional matching funds. This fund was set up in 2006 to serve this purpose – to provide extra support in order to make a critical difference – through a handful of KLT's most generous donors, with Tensie Oldfather as the first contributor.

Now, we need your financial assistance to replenish this fund for future projects. You will be hearing more from us in the coming months as we ramp up our "Recharge the Flint Hills Fund" campaign and our annual membership drive. Plenty of land ripe for protection has been identified and is primed for permanent preservation. Your financial assistance will be vital to protect these lands.



Photo by Bruce Hogle

KLT's strength is powered by each of you who reads this newsletter and is supportive of the work we do. If every member simply committed to doubling their yearly membership contribution to KLT, we would meet our goal in a matter of weeks rather than months.

Act now, and mail your "double up" contribution/membership check today with the form on page 8. A conservation easement is forever – your contribution today means KLT can protect more land in the short term for the benefit of everyone in the long term. Truly a worthwhile proposition!

We are pleased to welcome Jerry Jost to the KLT team! A longtime member of the Kansas conservation community – skilled at engaging farmers, ranchers, and landowners on their terms – Jerry brings an engaging demeanor and considerable abilities to our newly created Director of Land Protection position. See page 5 for more information on Jerry's background and his family.

We have a busy fall planned – **I encourage all KLT members to attend one of our upcoming events in Johnson, Douglas, or Riley County** in the next few weeks. See the invitations on the next page for more details regarding *The Nature of Kansas Lands* publication celebration and two upcoming dedication events. ▀



mark your calendars

Please check our website for updates, www.klt.org

◆ **Saturday, September 27th, 5-7 p.m.**

Bill and Bo Stueck Easement Dedication – 6701 West 167th Street, Stilwell

A short program recognizing the Stuecks, featuring Rep. Dennis Moore, will kick off the event. Light appetizers, beer, and wine will be served. Musical entertainment provided by the Shady Grove String Band.

Located just east of Metcalf Avenue, 167th Street exit off of US-69, the 114-acre Stueck easement protects land in a developing area in the Blue River watershed. This is KLT's second easement on the banks of the Blue River, protecting water quality and also a heron rookery found in the riparian woodland area.

◆ **Thursday, October 2nd, 6:30-8 p.m.**

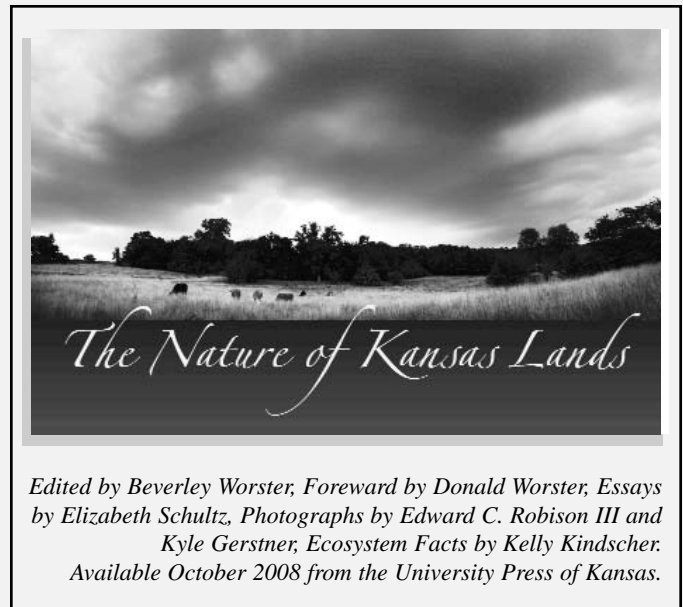
The Nature of Kansas Lands Release

The Commons (Spooner Hall), KU Campus

You are invited to attend a special event to celebrate the publication of a new book for all Kansans to enjoy – created by friends of KLT, to benefit KLT.

A presentation by the authors and photographers will be followed by a book signing and light refreshments.

The Nature of Kansas Lands is a beautiful book of photos, essays, and facts depicting the variety of Kansas landscapes. All royalties from the sale of the book will benefit KLT. Event sponsored by INTRUST Bank.



◆ **Saturday, October 18th, 10 a.m.-Noon**

Hal Kunze Easement Dedication – Riley County (see directions below)

A short program will recognize Mr. Kunze and the Army's Compatible Use Buffer Program, USDA's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, and the Kansas State Conservation Commission. Homemade rolls and juice will be served and musical entertainment will be provided.

The Kunze easement protects 630 acres of native tallgrass prairie and soils of statewide importance in the northern Flint Hills. This property will be retained forever in its natural, scenic, agricultural and open space condition.

Directions to Kunze property from Manhattan: Travel northwest out of Manhattan on Tuttle Creek Boulevard (US-24 West). Turn right (north) on Blue River Hills Road (CR-895). After traveling 1.7 miles you will turn left (west) on Stockdale Park Road for 400 feet until you resume traveling north again on Blue River Hills Road for another 1.9 miles. You will then be at the intersection of Blue River Hills Road (CR-895) and Longhorn Lane. Immediately turn left (west) into a parking area near the intersection.

Questions? Visit www.klt.org, email info@klt.org, or call (785) 749-3297.
RSVP for dedication events requested, but not required.



by Elizabeth Schultz

Lake Scott, Scott County, and Monument Rocks, Gove County

Scott City is in the center of Scott County, at the intersection of Route 96 and Route 83. Geometry seems to rule in this High Plains county, with these highways, paralleling railroads, laid out in straight lines across extensive crop and pasture lands. Nothing interrupts the horizon but the immense feedlots which explain Scott County's ranking as one of the top five U.S. counties in the multi-million dollar beef industry. Cattle trucks boom past me as I drive north on 83. I peer around them to look out across endless corn fields, green and ready for harvest in five or six weeks, and endless wheat fields, newly planted, dark brown, and waiting for growth to begin. Center pivot irrigation systems stride the land, at work spraying the water which makes agriculture on such a scale possible. Nothing in this seemingly unchanging flat land prepares me for Lake Scott.

Albeit it is among the *National Geographic Traveler's* top fifty U.S. state parks and has been a long-awaited destination on my map and in my guide book, Lake Scott unwraps ahead of me like a surprise package, an unexpected and unknown world in the middle of the Kansas High Plains. This landscape was long a home for several Indian communities – Taos, Apache, Picurie – and now is a well-known and popular camping and fishing site, but the astonishment I feel on arriving at Lake Scott makes me feel as if I am the first to discover its hidden wonders.

The lake itself, created in 1930 from the damming of Ladder Creek, fills the creek's meandering canyon and now covers 100 acres. Numerous jagged inlets, thronging with willows along the shore, appear, in their irregularity, to mirror the bluffs surrounding the lake. Outcroppings from the Ogallala Formation, composed of cemented sands and gravels, and underlain with Niobara Chalk, these bluffs protrude from among sage and yucca to tower above groves of hackberry, ash, elm, walnut, cedar. The names of the higher canyons jutting away from the drive around the lake evoke history and mystery: Horse Thief Canyon, Thunder Canyon, Bull Canyon, Battle Canyon. Thunder Canyon, which rises up like a rocky billboard from the earth, is perforated with rows of holes, suggesting an ancient text. The shadows of turkey vultures, drifting overhead on the thermal drafts, float across its surface like hands helping me to understand it.

Close to today's park entrance, at the end of the nineteenth century, Herbert and Eliza Steele built their compact four-room home of chalk blocks from nearby bluffs. The soft blocks have been gouged and inscribed with layers of graffiti, and behind the house enormous cottonwoods stumps preside like totems.

I wander along a maze of brick paths through the

Steeles' tangled garden of iris, garlic, and gaillardia, to a stone bench overlooking a natural spring, one of Lake Scott's many springs. A rivulet pours noisily into a small pond which then cascades down into the lake, suggesting perpetual renewal. I consider that long before any humans perceived this landscape, the minute riffle beetle, which is on the federal endangered species list and which lives nowhere else but in Big Springs would have known this lovely world and claimed it for himself.

The riffle beetle's antithesis is Monument Rocks in nearby Gove County. As Lake Scott is a revelation hidden in the earth, Monument Rocks seem a revelation rising straight up out of the earth. The road I take to reach them, soon after crossing Scott County border, curves and swerves, deviating from simple geometry and conforming to a different geography: the Smoky Hill Valley. A shortgrass prairie opens on either side of the chalky road, with the land beneath whitish and eerie even under a blue sky with racing clouds. It's a surprise to see a pack of llamas off to the side of the road, two large males, each standing atop a white mound and looking about imperialistically.

The road flattens out into a pale plain, and I stop to read a post rock marked with BOD for the Butterfield Overland Dispatch, the dangerous express which crossed here, going between Atchison and Denver in 1865. In the distance, then, I turn to see the Monument Rocks – called by some the Chalk Pyramids – but appearing to me from this distance like a Kansas Stonehenge, mystical and glimmering white in the sun, each rock shaped and tilted by time and weather into natural abstract statuary.

Designated by the US Department of the Interior as the first National Natural Landmark, Monument Rocks were thick oozy ocean bottom eighty million years ago during the Cretaceous Period. They filled with the shells of microscopic foraminifera as well as the remains of enormous clams, turtles, sharks, fish, and reptiles, which decayed and calcified.

Overwhelmed by their size, I stand in the shade up close to these soaring seventy-foot Rocks and in the diverse fossils imbedded in their layers of hard sediment find clues to the shapes of some of these creatures; I stand in the sun far back from them and imagine ghostly, gigantic sea-lizards swimming above them in the sky. Now, however, it is birds I see flying about them—swallows spinning away from their colony of jug-shaped nests clinging high up on one of the monuments, a Swainson's hawk kiting by. I realize that on this day of surprises in the landscape, perspective is all.

▲



new team members



Jerry Jost
Director of Land Protection
jjost@klt.org

KLT's new Director of Land Protection may be familiar to many of you. A native of Kansas, Jerry grew up on a dairy farm in Harvey County. He received his undergraduate degree in biology from Bethel College and a master's degree in conflict management and dispute resolution from Baker University. For the past two decades Jerry served as a project director for the Kansas Rural Center working with farmers on improved grazing management, conservation practices and farmers' market development. Jerry will use his knowledge of Kansas farming and ranching along with his facilitation and mediation skills to secure new easements and monitor existing easements. Jerry is pictured to the right with his wife, Deborah, and 10-year-old son, Eli. The family resides in rural Douglas County.



Photo by Tracy Rasmussen



Leah Pistorius, *Fall 2008 Intern*

Leah Pistorius is a senior at the University of Kansas from Fairway. An industrial design student, Leah's passion is bringing design and the environment together in a responsible way. She will be attending the Ecosa Institute for sustainable design this spring in Prescott, AZ.

goodbye and thank you

Steve Roels, *Conservation Associate* – Congratulations to Steve for starting his Master's degree in ecology at KU. KLT's monitoring program and landowner outreach efforts have benefited greatly from Steve's steady presence these last few years, and we wish him all the best in his further academic pursuits. We will miss him immensely. Filling Steve's boots will be Jerry Jost, KLT's new Director of Land Protection (see above).

Karen Johnson, *Administrative Assistant* – More changes are afoot as Karen has a wonderful opportunity to travel to India for several months while her husband, Alan, works on water quality issues in Delhi. Karen has deftly designed this very newsletter and efficiently managed office and membership programs. We plan to continue our association by "outsourcing" the newsletter design to Karen while she is overseas. However, KLT is in the process of hiring a full-time Office Manager to handle administrative and bookkeeping duties. Expect an introduction in the next newsletter.

Summer Interns. KLT benefited this summer from the hard work of three dedicated interns. Each added great enthusiasm and energy to our office, and they will be missed. We would like to thank:

Andrew Roland, Emporia native, Washburn University student, and editor of the Washburn Review Online, who provided technology audit, database development, and title work support.

Zack Pistora, Tonganoxie native, KSU student and president of Students for Environmental Action, who undertook more than 80 landowner interviews as part of a Kingsbury Foundation grant.

Shane McCall, Pittsburg native and a KU Law student, who developed recommendations relating to state funding for easement purchases.



Legislative victory for land conservation

Congress passes conservation tax incentive for family farms and ranches

The hotly debated Farm Bill, which Congress enacted earlier this spring, **renews a powerful tax incentive which has helped conserve a million or more acres of farms, ranches and natural areas across the U.S.** The incentive had expired January 1, 2008, but is now retroactive to the beginning of the year and will last through 2009.

A broad coalition representing farmers, ranchers, sportsmen, outdoors enthusiasts, and national conservation groups, embraced the measure. Rand Wentworth, president of the Land Trust Alliance, said: "This renewed tax incentive for donations of conservation easements is one of the best things Congress could do this year to help landowners choose the conservation option over sprawl, **especially for family farmers and ranchers of modest income, this is a great way to help them keep productive agricultural land from being lost.**"

In conserving land, Wentworth added, "We also are protecting clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, local food sources, historic landscapes and scenic beauty."

Senator Max Baucus of Montana, who originated the incentive provision, said "Simply put, this is an incentive that works: for conservation, for farmers, for ranchers, and for all landowners who want a fair deal for their tremendous generosity in donating conservation easements. Many ranchers and other landowners in Montana and across the US have told me they could not afford to conserve their land without this measure."

The Kansas delegation's votes were key to the extension of the incentive. Kansas Senators Pat Roberts and Sam Brownback and Representatives Nancy Boyda (KS-02) and Dennis Moore (KS-03) supported the measure by voting for the Farm Bill.

Rep. Boyda is joined by Reps. Moran (KS-01) and Tiahrt (KS-04) in cosponsoring pending legislation, H.R.1576, which would make the incentive permanent. Sen. Brownback has cosponsored the Senate companion bill, S.469. **KLT members are encouraged to contact these legislators to thank them for cosponsoring this legislation.**

Members are also encouraged to contact the remaining two Kansas delegation members to request that they too cosponsor these bills to make the deduction provisions permanent. For Senator Pat Roberts, the bill number is S.469. For Rep. Dennis Moore it is H.R.1576. Contact information for their offices can be found below.

The incentive, which applies to a landowner's federal income tax, will:

- Raise the deduction a donor can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allow farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increase the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.

Landowner donations to land trusts have resulted in millions of acres of working lands and natural areas being conserved for the future. According to the Alliance, many conservation groups reported an annual doubling of the number of conservation agreements completed in 2007, in response to the same incentive that had expired in January 2008. Land trusts in America have together saved more than 36 million acres from development, an area the size of New England.

The Alliance also credited the success of the measure to the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector, which has taken the lead in conserving land in recent years. Said Wentworth, "The fact is that conservation in this country now depends greatly on the generosity of individuals. It is the individual rancher, farmer or forester, working the land in a way that is conservation-oriented, who will largely define our natural heritage in the future." ▴

Adapted from the Land Trust Alliance, www.lta.org



Ask Sen. Roberts to "Please cosponsor S.469..."

Senator Pat Roberts
Phone: (202) 224-4774
Fax: (202) 224-3514
109 Hart SOB
Washington, DC 20510
www.roberts.house.gov

Rep. Dennis Moore (KS-03)

Phone: (202) 225-2865
Fax: (202) 225-2807
1727 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515
www.moore.house.gov

Ask Rep. Moore to "Please cosponsor H.R.1586..."



encompasses 114 acres. It includes a hay meadow along the road, a wooded hillside, crop fields in the flood plain, and dense forest along the river's edge.

The landowners

Bill and Bo Stueck are the owners of Suburban Lawn and Garden, one of the largest horticultural companies in the Kansas City area. Bill says he started with a lawn-mowing business when he was in elementary school, and it just kept growing. It now includes two retail garden centers in the Kansas City suburbs, at 105th and Roe in Kansas and 135th and Wornall on the Missouri side. Suburban also has two plant farms that supply 75 percent of its trees, shrubs and bedding plants. There's a 300-acre farm in Gardner, Kansas, and a 300-acre farm in Cass County, Missouri. The company also operates a yard waste and recycling center, where it processes a million pounds of organic material every year to make mulch and soil amendments.

If horticulture is the Stuecks' vocation, horseback riding is their passion. They are longtime members of the Mission Valley Hunt Club, a foxhunting club founded in 1927. Today, the Stuecks say, foxhunting is more about riding than hunting; there are few foxes in the area and the hounds are more likely to chase coyotes.

But the sport remains as much a spectacle today as it was in England in the 1800s; in fact, photos of the Stuecks on horseback for a hunt look amazingly similar to historic paintings of English foxhunts. They wear red coats, white breeches and tall black boots with tan leather tops. (For more on the history of Kansas City foxhunting, visit the Johnson County Museum's web site: <http://www.jocohistory.net/culture/11no3hunting.asp>.)

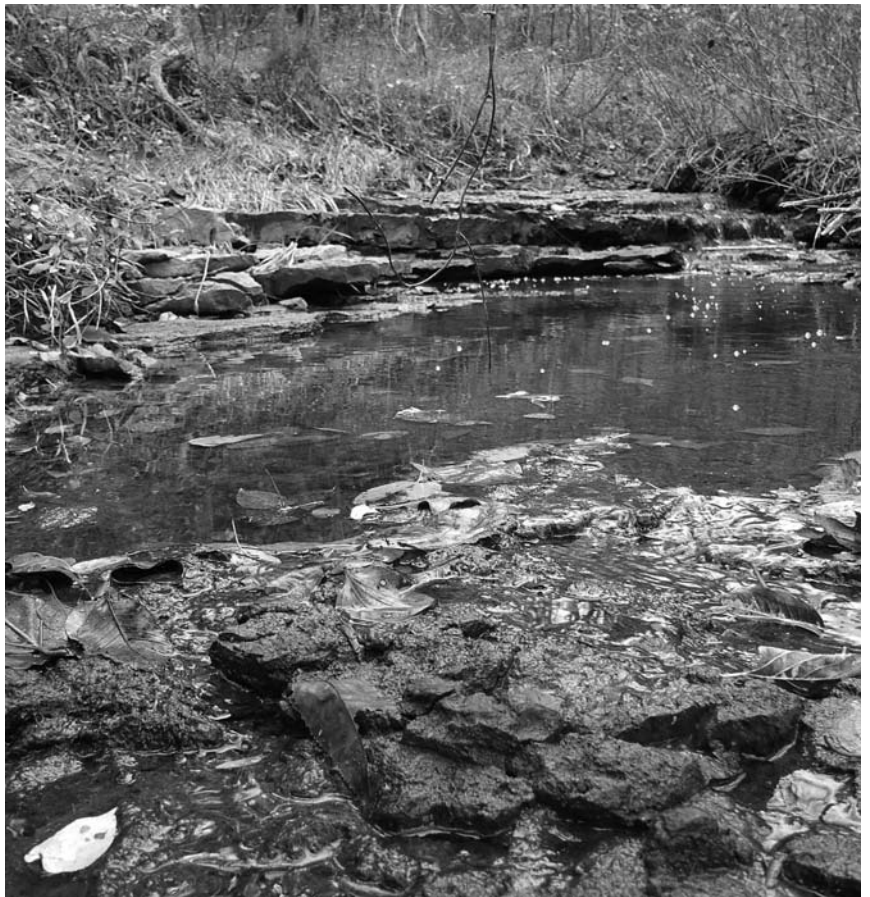
The hunt season lasts from October to April, and foxhunts are held twice a week, on Wednesdays and either Saturday or Sunday on the weekend. The foxhunters number between 20 and

50 for most hunts. Occasionally, the hunt will begin from the Stuecks' stables and traverse the land along the Blue River.

Now their farm will be home to another sport: disc golf. Bill Stueck says that he gets invited to a lot of charity golf tournaments, which tend to exclude employees and family members. He wanted to create a fundraising event that would be more family-friendly. He noticed a disc golf course at a public park and learned that it is a popular game in the Kansas City area. And so he had an 18-hole disc golf course installed on his land. Because the metal goals are scattered around almost the entire acreage, a game of disc golf might take as long as four hours.

The Stuecks plan to host disc golf tournaments to raise money for organizations they support; for example, their first event is scheduled for Sept. 20 to raise money for Ozanam, a therapy program for troubled youths and families in Kansas City.

"We want to use this ground for the enjoyment of people; we want people to be able to experience nature while raising money for charity," Bill said. ▀



A creek runs through Bill and Bo Stueck's property.

Photo by Steve Roels



Sunrise illuminates the Stueck farm.

Photo by Bruce Hogle





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Enclosed is my "double up" contribution of \$ _____ to the Flint Hills Fund to recharge the matching funds needed for the Farm & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP).

Enclosed is my annual membership gift of \$ _____ to the Kansas Land Trust for land conservation.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
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| _____ \$500 Sustainer | _____ \$250 Caretaker |
| _____ \$100 Keeper | _____ \$50 Member |

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To sign up, email your name and email address to info@klt.org or simply fill out and mail in this form.

To the extent allowed by law, dues, contributions, and donations of land or conservation easements are tax-deductible.

E-mail _____

Tel _____



Please mail this form with check payable to: Kansas Land Trust to 16 E. 13th St., Lawrence, KS 66044-3502.
 Questions? Call KLT at (785) 749-3297, email info@klt.org, or visit www.klt.org.