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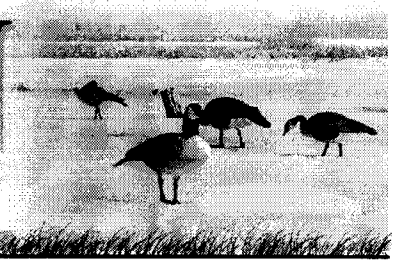
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## First agreement to purchase conservation easement completed

By **Beth Gaines-Riffel**,  
Editor

Charlie Griffin and Denise Wyrick have an intense love affair with the Flint Hills.

Griffin proudly acknowledges that he has hiked most of his property (and that of a few adjoining landowners) canoed the streams and allowed others, to learn about the prairie ecosystem by hosting wildflower walks and other programs. But with no heir to eventually inherit

ranchettes or a housing development.

That is, until Dec. 14. Wyrick and Griffin took advantage of the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) and allowed the Kansas Land Trust (KLT) to purchase a conservation easement on their 200-acre parcel of Flint Hills prairie which lies west of Tuttle Creek Reservoir.

While there are a number of donated conservation easements in Kansas

notables include the Nature Conservancy, and new to the agricultural circles, the KLA-Ranchland Trust. These are the organizations that hold the easement "for perpetuity" as stated in the contracts, assuring that the landowners' desires are upheld. It is because of the long-term nature of these legal agreements that it is important that the landowners have a certain "comfort level" with the organization that will be holding the easements. Not every conservation group is a good fit for a landowner.

The conservation work is funded in large part by donations of easements and often by cash donations of those who are having easements purchased.

Griffin and Wyrick selected the KLT to work with in part because of a familiarity with the organization and a longtime friendship with current president of the KLT, Kelly Kindscher.

"I'd known Kelly for a long time and he'd conducted many plant walks on our property," Griffin explained. It was during a conversation with Kindscher that Griffin realized that an opportunity to protect the land from development existed.

Once the idea had been planted, it came to light that working in concert with the KLT, the easement would be eligible for the federal protection program, which funds up to 50 percent of the purchase with the land owner funding 25 percent of the cost of the easement and a non-government organization picking up the remaining 25 percent. FRPP was an original product of the 1996

Farm Bill but was expanded in the 2002 Farm bill to include ranch and grazing lands — which made the Wyrick/Griffin property eligible.

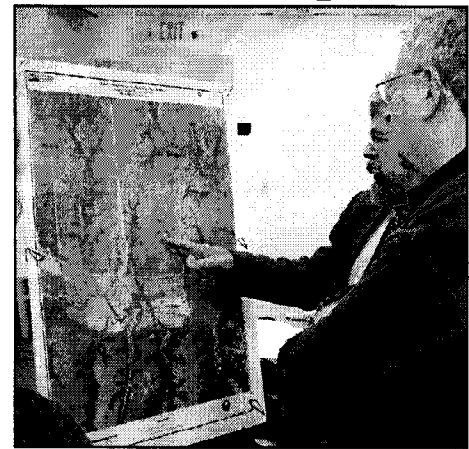
RoxAnne Miller, executive director of the KLT, said that the organization has a goal of protecting two million acres in Kansas. "We are pleased to complete the first purchased easement for the Kansas Land Trust," Miller said. "More landowners are interested in being properly compensated in a fair way for their property rights."

Kindscher noted that it is important for landowners who might be interested in protecting their land to understand how the program fully works.

"It continues to be the landowners to own, use and manage their land. They are being compensated for giving up their development rights," he said.

But, because they develop the easement themselves and control the final destiny of the property, a landowner can still set stipulations which will allow a son or daughter to return to the ranch, and build a home. The easements also allow the construction of limited agriculture structures that will allow the farm or ranch to be viable into the future, according to Miller.

The value of the easement, according to Griffin is determined by a set of appraisals. The first is a straightforward appraisal, based up on the value of the land as it is currently being used. The second appraisal is a little more problematic as it requires the



Charlie Griffin, far right, points out the areas of his property that have been placed into a conservation easement during the signing ceremony held in Manhattan.



Charlie Griffin watches as Denise Wyrick places her signature on the conservation easement agreement. The couple, who have no children, wanted to ensure that their tract of property is safe from future development.

the land (and hopefully their love of the tallgrass prairie) Griffin and Wyrick were not assured that the land that they love so dearly — and located in such a unique location just north of Manhattan — would not be carved up into small

protecting other sensitively located farm and ranch lands, this is the first time an easement has been purchased in Kansas.

There are a number of land trusts at work in Kansas in addition to the Kansas Land Trust. Other

appraiser to determine the land's value based upon development. To arrive at this figure it is based on comparable, actual sales that have taken place within the last year. The difference between the two appraisals is the purchase price of the easement.

A lump-sum payment is then made to the landowner, once an easement agreement has been reached.

According to Griffin, a cash donation to the trustholder often offsets tax implications that become an issue with the sale of the property right. But, that is a mixed blessing, he said. Griffin noted that if the easement had not been purchased, he would not have been able to afford the appraisal costs associated with the process — regardless of how sincere his desire to protect the prairie. "It simply wouldn't have been feasible," he said.

But, other large, finan-

cially strong landowners who might be seeking tax shelters are often able to donate the easements outright — providing a financial boost to the organizations interested in protecting the prairies, green spaces and fertile farm ground located around growing metropolitan areas.

A conservation easement is often the solution for a producer who feels the economic push to sell their farmground to developers. Griffin noted that often times land is used as a retirement plan of sorts for many in agriculture. By selling a conservation easement on the property, those funds can be diversified, giving security to aging landowners.

For more information on land trusts contact Mike Beam with the KLA-RT at (785) 273-5115 or RoxAnne Miller with the KLT at (785) 749-3297.