



Larry Haverfield:

Memories of a True Conservationist

Article by **Randy Rathbun**

On September 21, 2014 we lost a hero to the environmental community in Western Kansas. Larry Haverfield was a humble and modest man who cast a large shadow across the shortgrass prairie of western Kansas. I am deeply honored to pen a few words in his remembrance.

One of the great joys of my professional career was representing Larry and Bette Haverfield in their six-year legal battle with Logan County and the Kansas Farm Bureau. It was not a fight they sought, but it was also not one they backed away from. Before it was over, the Haverfields, and their adjoining landowners Gordon and Martha Barnhardt, would be neck deep in a legal battle involving not only the taxpayers' coffers of Logan County, but also the Kansas Farm Bureau, the Mountain States Legal Foundation, and the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks. Those six years in the legal trenches—from Logan County District Court to the Shawnee County District Court, back to the Logan County District Court, and finally to the Kansas Court of Appeals and Kansas Supreme Court—gave me an insight into the spirit of a man that I grew to greatly admire.

I have never thought of myself as a big city lawyer, but I imagine I was perceived that way when Larry and Betty Haverfield and their adjoining landowner, Gordon Barnhardt, came to my Wichita office in early November, 2005. The County Attorney of Logan County, Andrea Wyrick, had just sent them a demand letter warning that if they had not begun “eradication” of prairie dogs on their ranch, the County Prairie Dog Director would start the eradication for them and would bill them for the costs. Larry was a true salt-of-the-earth west



Kansas rancher. He dressed plainly and seemed a bit uncomfortable in the office of a Wichita environmental litigator. But when Larry began to talk about his beliefs, I was captivated. The Haverfields are true Teddy Roosevelt conservationists. Larry spoke with passion about the value of every species on their land.

Over the next six years I watched Larry speak at public hearings, give depositions, and testify in court about his beliefs. I watched in amazement as he spoke in a clear and strong voice at a public meeting in Oakley, called by the Logan County commissioners about the “prairie-dog issue.” The meeting was a donnybrook, with the anti-prairie-dog force vastly outnumbering the few environmentalists that had the courage to show up. Scorn was heaped upon Larry as he spoke about the value of prairie dogs in our ecosystems. His reference to prairie dogs as a keystone species and their essential role in the life of Ferruginous Hawks, Burrowing Owls and other



Left: Larry and Bette Haverfield display a sheet metal ranch sign with silhouettes of a Black-footed Ferret, Prairie Dog, Coyote and Eagle. It was given as a token of appreciation from a group of friends and wildlife organizations.

Below: Larry, daughter Cathy Lucas and Bruce Kennedy of Lincoln, Nebraska relax after releasing ferrets late that afternoon in November 2008, while Marge Kennedy and Bette visit in the background.



shortgrass species was met with blank stares and disapproving grumbles from the crowd that had been whipped to a frenzy by the Kansas Farm Bureau. The chairman of the commission repeatedly threatened lawsuits against another brave landowner, Gene Bertrand, if he didn't kill the prairie dogs on his land. This was the second such meeting that year. Regarding the earlier meeting, the Colby Free Press noted that Larry was outnumbered 100 to one—which fazed him not in the least.

The story about Larry Haverfield is much more than prairie dogs and Black-footed Ferrets. Before I share my thoughts though, I wanted to talk a little about Larry's beginnings.

“Hammerhead” Haverfield

Larry was born on November 20, 1936 in Scott City, Kansas to John and Edith Haverfield. He had one sister, Ruth, who was eight years younger. His mother, Edith, was the local librarian and a gracious woman. His parents moved into town when Larry was in the second grade and he attended public schools in Scott City.

Larry was a good athlete and he excelled in basketball, tennis and baseball. Larry liked to joke that he was able to win the heart of his “trophy bride” Bette, because he was captain of

the basketball team.

It is while attending the Scott Community High School that Larry earned the nickname “Hammerhead.” It seems his head was unusually hard when he knocked heads in high school sports, and the nickname was apparently fitting. That hard head clearly served him well later in life as government officials sought to bully him into submission.

Larry's background is not exactly the stuff of a Horatio Alger's novel, but it is quite impressive and stands testament to the American ideals of hard work and ingenuity paying off. Larry started in the cattle business when he was fourteen near Scott City, feeding them before and after school. At the age of 27, Larry and Betty borrowed the money to purchase 2000 acres of pasture in southern Logan County. Over the years, Larry and Betty built the operation to a total of 6700 acres owned and about 3000 more rented for a Texas-sized ranching operation approaching 10,000 acres.

The Haverfields won a great victory for the environmental community in their battle to stop enforcement of the antiquated Kansas Statute requiring eradication of prairie dogs in Kansas. But focusing on Larry's fight with the Logan County Commission and the Kansas Farm Bureau missed the point. Larry was about much more than Black-tailed Prairie Dogs and Black-footed Ferrets. And that is the part of Larry Haverfield that I would like to focus on.

The Prairie Dog as a Keystone Species

I had the pleasure of teaching an environmental law class at Friends University in the past and one of the highlights of the class was taking these graduate-level students (mostly adults

Ranch Success Insight

A rancher, Jr. Lehmann, helped young Larry with ranching practices. Sam Brookover was another good friend and cattleman. Larry had the same banker, Bob Gaskill, for fifty years and that is a long time in the cattle business.

Early in his career as a rancher, Larry credited ranch hands, Royce and Bill Cook, with teaching him how to make repairs with baling wire and gray duct tape*. A favorite pair of pliers was essential, and if they were misplaced, everything stopped.

—Bette Haverfield

**Duct tape was developed in World War II. The concept was developed by Vesta Stoudt, a mother of two sons serving in the Navy. To overcome obstacles, she wrote to President Roosevelt to “sell” the idea to the War Department. Named “Duck Tape” at the time, it was purported to be waterproof like a duck, and was made with cotton duck fabric.*

adding a master's degree) to the Haverfield Ranch. We would time our visit in the late spring as the prairie was coming alive. We would leave Wichita in the early evening and arrive in Logan County before midnight, where we would congregate in Larry and Betty's living room. Larry would always patiently retell the story of our fight with the Logan County Commissioners—and I never once heard him embellish it. Some in the group would grab a quick cat nap and others would simply stay awake and talk until one or two a.m. when it came time to load up for the Black-footed Ferret spotting exercise.

I always was lucky enough to ride with Larry in these dark hours of early morning expeditions. It was during these excursions that Larry would regale me with stories from his early days. We talked about his family, the ranch and all things K-State. But it seems we always got back to his love of the land and all the creatures. Larry always knew whether there were Golden Eagles around, whether the count on Ferruginous Hawks was up or down and—most important to Larry—whether the prairie dog population was being maintained. It was during one of these night-time spotting excursions that Larry introduced me to the concept of keystone species.

The eminent zoologist, R. T. Paine, taught us that a keystone species is a species that has a disproportionately large effect on its environment relative to its abundance. His research, which took place in the late 1960s, focused on what happened when a species—in his seminal study, a starfish—was removed from a coastal area in Washington state. What Paine discovered was dramatic changes made to the ecosystem by the removal of a certain species of starfish far exceeded the effects predicted. Since this research, the keystone effect of certain species has been shown a number of times. Paine's research has provided a basis for our understanding the forces that organize ecological communities and has been essential to the thinking

of managers and policy makers as they set priorities in their efforts to conserve species and habitats.

Larry knew of the research on keystone species—but more than that, he saw it daily on the shortgrass prairie he ranched. He never grew tired of explaining how many different species depended on the prairie dog and their burrows, including Burrowing Owls, Cottontail Rabbits, reptiles and amphibians. Coyotes, Badgers and Swift Foxes enlarge the burrows for their use. Prairie dogs are a critical food source for Ferruginous Hawks, Golden Eagles, Coyotes, Black-footed Ferrets, Swift Foxes and Badgers. The Black-tailed Prairie Dog does not hibernate in winter, as do their eastern cousins Woodchucks and Marmots in the Rockies. Accordingly, prairie dogs are one of the few food sources for predators in the long winter months.

Larry the Rancher

As mentioned above, the Haverfield Ranch is located in the shortgrass prairie of Logan County. West of the Monument Rocks Chalk Pyramids is Lone Butte, which stands as a sentinel over southwest Logan County. The ranch lies at the base of the butte and spreads over almost 10,000 acres.

The geography and geology of southern Logan County is interesting. Fingers of the Smoky Hill Valley and associated bluffs extend west into what would otherwise be the High Plains region. About 25 miles east of the ranch, Monument Rocks rise above the floor of the Smoky Hill Valley in western Gove County. The chalky rocks of Gove and Logan counties are world famous for the notable fossils which have been discovered in them.

The tallgrass ranchers in the Flint Hills no doubt wonder how someone can successfully run cattle in an area that is lucky to get 20 inches of precipitation a year. In several recent years



Photos by Ron Klataske



November 14, 2008, Larry Haverfield is shown in these photos releasing two Black-footed Ferrets, the photo to the right shows daughter Cathy Lucas releasing another ferret. A cold wind was howling from the northwest that day in western Kansas, but the ferrets found welcoming prairie dog burrows as they were released.

Ron Klataske Photos

Losing your Dad...

is like being punched in the stomach. A good Dad lets you know your place in the world. He believes you are important and will be good at whatever you decide to do. He expects you to work hard, stand up for yourself, be kind to others, particularly underdogs. When you are a kid he can be annoyingly cheerful as he sings "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" while you are hunched over breakfast before going to school. A good Dad worries about you in a quiet way and makes suggestions about ways to be safe. He doesn't get mad when you hit his new pickup with a tractor and just tells you he's glad you weren't hurt and names the Pickup "Scratch". If you are his daughter, he boosts your self-confidence by singing "Here she is, Miss America" when clearly you are just an awkward teenager. He says "Get mad, not sad" when things aren't going your way. He teaches you to use your bony elbows when you play basketball and that any kid of his is going to know how to make a lay-up on the basketball court. He tells you you don't have to tell everyone to meet you at the hospital when a baby is coming. A caring Dad passes down your family history to you and let's you know you come from a somewhat crazy clan but a little crazy never hurt anyone. He loves your mother and thinks she's beautiful and tough as nails and just the wife for him...and it's been that way for sixty years. He shows you that cattle and cattle dogs should be treated kindly. Land and wildlife should be treated reverently.

When you ask him toward the end of his life if he would have done anything differently he says, "Yes". You wait with anticipation for his words of wisdom. He says, "Make more money!" You both have to laugh, because that is what a good Dad has taught you...that life is fun and to enjoy it.

—Cathy Lucas



there has been far less rain as the area suffered severe drought. Larry referred to his family as "steer grazers" and the operation—which will be proudly carried on by his children is unique. The operation involves buying calves in the fall of the year and grazing them.

A visit to the Haverfield's modest home was always an eye-opener. Walking in the front door, one would likely see a cattle sale taking place on a computer screen. Larry bought cattle that some might turn their nose up at. But he knew how to make his system work.

Larry always said he was successful because he grazed his pasture the same way that buffalo grazed the shortgrass prairies in western Kansas. He ran electric fence and divided the ranch into "paddocks." There are roughly 115 paddocks which average about 75 acres of grass. The operation involves moving the cattle from paddock to paddock depending on how the grass is holding up. The steers might be moved to the next paddock after a day—sometimes maybe a couple of days. Although the process was labor intensive, Larry strongly believed in it. And it is hard to argue with success.

This type of ranching is sometimes referred to as "holistically planned grazing" or "intensive rotational grazing" and the principal proponent of this system is Allan Savory. Larry was a great admirer of Savory and attended seminars on rotational grazing. The process essentially mimics what happened to our prairie when huge herds of buffalo grazed the land. Larry watched the grass carefully before moving steers to the next paddock. Each paddock was only grazed several days per year.

As you can see, Larry's interest in protecting this planet upon which we reside extended greatly beyond prairie dogs. He learned by watching and putting into practice the things that made the prairies flourish centuries ago.

His friends and family miss him greatly. His conservation legacy will be carried on by Bette and their children.

Sometimes, knowing a person is life-changing. Larry Haverfield was a man of values and vision. His vision included the concept that protecting wildlife can be compatible, even complementary, with profitable ranching. He was well read, soft-spoken, humble and welcoming. It was easy to be a friend, and to feel like a member of the family. I never heard him speak unkindly of others. He would dismiss any suggestion to do that—even regarding those who insulted his integrity for his tenacity to protect wildlife. Memories of Larry, and his visionary legacy, will always remain inspirational.

—Ron Klataske

