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A Note from the Editor

In this edition of *Prairie Wings*, articles look back to the history of conservation in Kansas, address current news and issues, and look forward to consider issues that must be confronted in the future. Richard Seaton reviews for us the long history of effort, reversals, and breakthroughs that gave us the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, reminding us of some of the foresightful and persistent people whose commitment finally won through to its establishment. In another article we offer a tribute to Joyce Wolf, reviewing her career spanning nearly half a century of cheerful and resolute commitment to the cause of conservation and particularly water issues in Kansas.

Water is a central concern of several articles in this *Prairie Wings*. We offer from one of our lawyers in the case a report on the filing of a lawsuit by Audubon of Kansas against federal and state authorities on behalf of the senior water right of the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, asking that they uphold the law. Rex Buchanan, Emeritus Director of the Kansas Geological Survey, provides an update on recent and current personnel changes and issues concerning water resources throughout the state. And we close our examination of water issues in this edition with a review of the recent book, *Running Out*, which provides a devastating account of the causes and magnitude of the water crisis that is depleting the aquifers under the High Plains.

Two articles present “Approaches to Conserving Kansas Lands”: a piece by AOK Chair Gary Haden on his reasons for planning to make his and Carolyn’s Far West Farm into an AOK legacy sanctuary, and an article from Liz Weslander of the Kansas Land Trust on the uses of conservation easements to secure landowners’ wishes for the future. An update on AOK’s three current sanctuaries by AOK Executive Director, Dr. Jackie Augustine, follows.

News of two AOK signature happenings is included. First, the third and fourth annual Celebration of Cranes, last year and this year, are described by Cindy Jeffrey, who has ably coordinated these events, live at Quivira when possible, virtually when necessary thanks to Covid-19. The other signature event is a new occasion for AOK, planned for this coming spring. Executive Director Dr. Augustine previews the planned Prairie-Chicken Festival, and offers as well a supporting article on the two species, their fascinating habits, and status. Turning from the prairie grouse to their habitat and the health of the larger ecosystem of which they are an iconic part, Kathy Roccaforte Denning tells of the crucial role of pollinators in the flourishing of prairie grasses and forbs.

On a happier note, Don Marler recounts how the constraints imposed by the covid pandemic renewed both his childhood interest in birds, and his hobby of photography, and Elizabeth Dodd surveys the history of river otters in Kansas, from their near-extermination, through concerted efforts at restoration, to possibly more hopeful prospects today. Finally, we close with Dave Rintoul’s stunning photo of two Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in combat, and Elizabeth Dodd’s accompanying meditative poem inspired by the picture, reaching back through associative memories and a plate from Audubon’s *Birds of America* to bring us back to the original image, and remind us of the manifold and powerful ways nature and art engage and enrich—and sober—our minds and emotions. Once again, we hope that you will find the articles and illustrations equally engaging and informative, and that you will be inspired to learn more and become more involved in Kansas’s rich environmental legacy.