

## A Letter From the Chair

Elsewhere in this Issue of *Prairie Wings* readers will find an article in which I discuss what it means when Audubon of Kansas commits to accepting someone's property with the intention of managing it in its current condition in perpetuity (pp. 23-26). In addition, there is a shorter article penned by Liz Weslander of The Kansas Land Trust (pp. 27-28), in which she describes the use of Conservation Easements as a tool to protect open space and natural environs. The thrust of both options is to allow an individual, a couple or a family to take steps to ensure that property they own today will exist in a similar state long after they are gone.

The massive bur oak trees on our Far West Farm have survived since the 1860s, when they sprouted as seedlings after most of the timber along Clarks Creek was cut by pioneers from the Eastern U.S. When people ask how they have survived so long, I explain that it was most likely a matter of chance, as it only takes a decision by one person to cut down a forest, plow a native prairie, or channelize a natural stream. Once such decisions are made, the natural forest cannot be restored, the diversity of the prairie cannot be recreated and a straightened stream will never again meander in an individual's lifetime. Extirpated species can be restored, but only with great effort over time.

My wife Carolyn and I have seen the effects of economic decisions in our lifetime. Our north property would have many more large bur oaks, except for the fact that oaks on the property were logged for barrel staves in the 1950s. Had we been successful in our efforts to purchase adjacent land from one of Carolyn's relatives, our north parcel would have an additional expanse of large oaks and black walnut trees. Instead, those trees were logged within the last 15 years. The bur oaks on our south parcel got lucky. They didn't end up being cut by some fly-by-night logger who would have sold them at a bargain-basement price to a sawmill to be converted into railroad ties. The large hackberries, ash and sycamores didn't end up as pallets.

While an ill-conceived decision by one person can doom trees, prairie, a bird, an animal or even an ecosystem, the converse is also true: a positive decision by one person, a couple, a family or a business can save a forest, give life to a threatened or endangered species, or assure a diverse ecosystem remains intact.

Preservation of land is by no means the only way an individual can make a difference. Ron Klataske, who retired as AOK's executive director last year, is a hero in the eyes of many in Nebraska, for his efforts to protect the Platte and Niobrara rivers. In Kansas, he is recognized as a hero among prairie dog lovers for his efforts in Logan County.

While Ron did a lot on his own and sometimes worked without a paycheck, it wasn't publicized that when AOK was on the ropes economically at various points some board members stepped forward with gifts of \$5,000 to \$10,000 to allow AOK to pay its bills.

A prime example of how one individual can make a profound difference is the case of Joyce Davis, who lived in Dodge City. Joyce was an AOK member, but she was never on the board of trustees and she never indicated her intentions to bequest money to AOK. We were quite surprised, as an organization, when she bequeathed a quarter of a million dollars to AOK when she passed a half decade ago. Her gift, which we at AOK recently named the Joyce Davis Legacy Fund, has provided AOK with critical economic flexibility, as we can use the proceeds from that investment to assure we can make payroll as we have added new staff in recent years. Joyce's name comes up frequently and with reverence as AOK moves forward.

More recently, individuals have stepped up with special gifts in support of AOK's legal efforts to guarantee that the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge receives the water due to it. Those commitments are greatly appreciated. Not everyone has an estate that can make a huge difference, but every individual has the potential to have an impact, whether that is volunteering time, serving on the AOK board, offering expertise on conservation issues or making a financial contribution while still alive or through a bequest. When someone suggests one person cannot make a difference, don't believe it. The decision of one person can make a huge difference, whether good or bad. Our success at AOK depends on good decisions and good outcomes, and we greatly appreciate the contributions to our success made by those good efforts by caring individuals.



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*Ensure the future of AOK and Prairie Wings! Legacy Gifts ensure the future success of AOK and the continuation of important initiatives such as Prairie Wings. AOK gratefully accepts gifts in the form of stocks, bonds, charitable gift annuities, trusts, and bequests, as well as assets to be sold such as gifts of land, real estate, and vehicles. Gifts of land to be preserved as wildlife sanctuaries require an adequate endowment to fund future operations and taxes; property must meet requirements stated in AOK's property acceptance policy. See the AOK brochure, Your Land, Your Legacy, copies of which can be obtained by request.*

*To learn more about AOK or ways to support our mission, please contact (785) 537-4385 or [aok@audubonofkansas.org](mailto:aok@audubonofkansas.org). Audubon of Kansas, Inc. is an independent 501(c)(3) organization that is neither administered nor funded by the National Audubon Society. Contributions are fully tax-deductible to the extent allowable by the IRS. Contributions can be sent to: PO Box 1106, Manhattan, Kansas 66505-1106*

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