

## Editorial Comment:

Conservation of endangered species is currently beyond the realm of “priority species” in Kansas. Much of the “time” and energy in recent years by KDWPT was devoted to trying to keep the declining Lesser Prairie-chicken population from being recognized as threatened, while the department simultaneously expanded hunting seasons in 2012. The new push by KDWPT is to *utilize* the EQIP funds designated for wildlife to construct fencing around expiring CRP fields so they will remain in grass as grazing land. After ten to thirty years of federal payments to landowners (easily totaling up to \$1,500 per acre), it is good when they decide to keep established grass on the land. However, it is most clearly a *livestock practice* more than a wildlife practice, and a large percentage of EQIP funding (a target of 60%) is already obligated to grazing lands and livestock waste practices. These two categories obligated \$6,604,301 in 2015. NRCS staff no longer consider the needs of wildlife as a secondary resource concern with “grazing lands health” practices—unless requested by a landowner. The emphasis is often on maximizing forage production and uniform grazing—often to the detriment of wildlife habitat needs.

It is true that there won’t be a requirement for “much work and time” for KDWPT and NRCS to promote fencing practices—we know how to build fences! However, I objected to the proposed idea of funding woven wire fences in Pronghorn range. Normal 4-strand barbed wire livestock fences with the bottom one barbless and 16-inches above the ground should be used, as we recommended several years ago.

If “numbers” of landowners involved is used to judge the environmental value of a practice and the associated cost, we note that only 32 applications for livestock waste were filed—and they used \$2,742,589 in EQIP funding. In the past there have been occasions when only a handful were funded in a year, and some of those feedlot and confined hog operations (both new and established) have required hundreds of thousands of dollars each.

Ag organizations routinely state that conservation of threatened and endangered species on private land should be based on ***voluntary incentive programs***. Since Kansas landowners are presented with an absence of leadership from KDWPT, we are hoping that the Kansas Livestock Association can provide it in a way that their members have done with phenomenal support for conservation easements.

The cost of the BFF program is very low on a per acre basis (less than \$15 per acre annually for a three-year EQIP contract). That is a small fraction of the per acre payments made to thousands of landowners for CRP contracts. Additionally, in spite of any suggestion to the contrary, the program involves control of dispersing prairie dogs and Safe Harbor Agreement protection for adjacent landowners. If the Colorado wildlife agency can work with NRCS and interested landowners to make it “a resounding success,” surely it can be accomplished across the state line in Kansas, Nebraska and other states.

Who would have ever thought that our state’s wildlife agency would become a primary roadblock to conservation of imperiled species?

—Ron Klataske

## TAKE TIME TO ENJOY OUR NATURAL WORLD, AND ONE ANOTHER.



As illustrated in this photograph, this young couple is enjoying the shallow waters of the Niobrara River at the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary.

Appreciation of our natural world is important. Don’t hesitate to be more actively involved. Join this young lady and **MAKE THE JUMP!!!** Olympia joined the Audubon of Kansas family as a “Wildlife Partner” when she became our youngest member.



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