



A Letter from Kelley Hurst

Director of Philanthropy for AOK

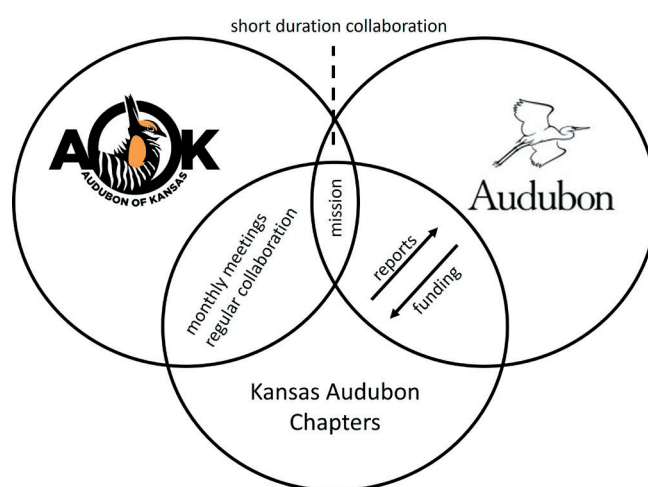
You have heard us say many times that Audubon of Kansas (AOK) is an independent, state-wide organization. I want to talk about what that means.

First, it means that AOK serves the entire state of Kansas. We are proud to have donors and board members from all parts of the state as well as Nebraska. We have a secondary (unofficial) slogan for AOK, which is All Over Kansas, to emphasize the commitment to our entire state.

Second, I hear from members that they are confused about AOK's relationship or connection to other Audubon organizations. We share part of a name, which makes us feel like family, but sometimes the shared name leads members to believe that our memberships and organizations overlap in ways that they do not. I believe that some of the confusion is also connected to the history of our organization.

The Kansas Audubon Council was a consortium of 10 local chapters of the National Audubon Society (NAS), which previously had a regional office covering Kansas and Nebraska. In 1999, when National Audubon closed its regional office, Audubon of Kansas became the successor organization to the Kansas Audubon Council, and NAS' former regional director, Ron Klataske, was hired as AOK's first Executive Director. Dr. Jackie Augustine succeeded Ron when he retired in 2021. Although AOK has a mission that is complementary to NAS, we are entirely independent and receive no funding from the national organization. Occasionally, AOK may work with NAS on a specific issue that affects the Great Plains, but has national importance. These interactions between AOK and NAS are temporary in nature.

When a member joins NAS, they also become a local chapter member, determined by their zip code. Local chapters report to and receive funding from National Audubon. AOK is not part of that relationship. AOK was founded by local chapters, and we meet with chapter leaders monthly to discuss chapter successes and issues facing chapters. Chapters also designate a representative to be a member of AOK's Board of Trustees. Although the relationship between AOK and chapters is voluntary, AOK remains committed to networking with chapters as they are the eyes, ears, and voice of wildlife in their local communities.



Memberships in AOK, donations from members, income from sanctuaries, and grants supply the funding for Audubon of Kansas to do our work. Our members appreciate what makes AOK different, both from NAS and from the local chapters:

- we are statewide
- we do not side-step controversial issues
- we are strong defenders of the environment, taking agencies to court when necessary
- we focus on Kansas and the Great Plains

- we pursue three missions in one organization:
advocacy, conservation, education

That brings us to today. All of us know that we have a myriad of interests and concerns in our great state, and that we must all work together to manage and solve the complex issues that we face. AOK steadfastly maintains a place at the decision-making table advocating science-backed support for conservation and the environment wherever those decisions are being made.

Your membership and donation to AOK means that you stand with us when we defend wildlife and habitat through our three pillars: Advocacy, Conservation, and Education.

Advocacy – that AOK will speak up and speak out for conservation in Kansas and the Great Plains. We advocate for wildlife and wildlands at the local, state and federal levels. Whether we are at a county commission meeting or writing a letter to a national body, the collective of AOK members is stronger than any one person.

Conservation – that AOK will manage its properties for the good of people AND the plants and animals that live there.

Education – that AOK will take every opportunity to connect people with animals and habitat, through birding festivals, seminars on topics from plants that benefit birds to controlled burns, and teaching about birding by ear. Just this year, we have launched a new effort, designed to go All Over Kansas, providing Nature Adventurepacks that will be available to “check out” from our Kansas libraries.

You are reading this letter from me in *Prairie Wings Magazine* – a yearly undertaking of the board and staff to bring you coverage and top thinking about issues important to all of us in Kansas and the Great Plains.

We are a conservation organization that runs on a lean budget. A major goal this year was to strengthen

AOK's organizational systems in order to maximize our use of that budget. We have worked hard to implement best practices inside of AOK, to standardize systems, and to create transparency with our larger AOK community. From internal auditing to communicating with all of you, we have examined and invigorated our methods. We have closely examined our costs and budgeted our spending in order to make the best use of every dollar that is entrusted to us. Our monthly newsletter (via email) lets you know what we are doing on a regular basis, showcases our local chapter partners, and lets you know how to get involved.

In this past year, I have heard from many of you that you appreciate and share these values. In my regular contact with donors and the larger AOK community, I get asked questions about how to address your own charitable processes and planning, such as taking mandatory IRA distributions, structuring legacy gifts and finding out about what is involved with donating property and land to Audubon of Kansas. In order to get information to our community, we started a series of informational seminars about topics related to these and other charitable giving issues. These are free sessions where there is never an obligation nor “sales-pitch.” They are simply meant to help our community connect with information and resources to address financial and charitable questions. This year, we had two such meetings - one in Manhattan that addressed donations of land and one in Lawrence that concerned general estate planning. We anticipate scheduling more of these sessions in the coming year. If you are interested in particular topics, please let me know - you can email them to me at khurst@audubonofkansas.org or call me 785.917.0400.

Your membership and donation to AOK means that you are committed to the wildlife and wild lands of Kansas and the Great Plains, and that you appreciate and support AOK's three-fold mission. Your membership and donation mean the world to us. Please renew your membership and make a donation today.