

A portrait of Gary Haden, an older man with a mustache, wearing a purple polo shirt, standing with his arms crossed in front of a background of autumn leaves.

Gary Haden

A Letter From the Chair

In my four years on the board of AOK I have come to know most other board members and to understand what is important to them. What I find so interesting is the uniqueness of each board member in terms of interests and skills, and the commensu-

rate strength our organization derives from that diversity.

how relentless the need to raise funds to meet AOK's expenses, I know I can always get an emotional lift when I can find time to walk our nature trail under those massive bur oaks. Now we need to find a way to save them

so others can enjoy them in the present and the future. Perhaps some of them will reach their natural life expectancy of 300 to 400 years. For my wife Carolyn and me, that's where AOK's Sanctuaries Initiative comes into play.

AOK harbors different priorities for other people...all of them important. We have educators who want to get children into natural settings, families who want to recreate amidst native prairies and along uncontaminated streams. We have prairie dog lovers, avid birders, photographers, naturalists, writers, and attorneys willing to sue the state and federal government if that's what it takes to assure that Quivira National Wildlife Refuge gets the water it is entitled to under existing Kansas law.

We on the board and the 4,300 individuals who donate to AOK or otherwise support the organization don't always agree on what to do next, and we might not have the resources to do everything we'd like, but when all of our diverse parts pull in one direction, we get things done. As chairman of the AOK Board of Trustees I'm proud of that. With the support of AOK members and donors, we look forward to continued success.

—Gary Haden



Gary contemplating his woods in Morris County

Photos by Ron Klataske.

I find all aspects of science and nature to be interesting—from what happens in my own body, to the organisms at my feet and in the air, to our climate and cosmology. But there is one thing more than any other that keeps me involved with AOK, and that is trees.

I don't know how I came to love trees. It happened at an early age. Perhaps it is atavistic, going back to Adam and Eve's apple tree or when my early ancestors climbed down from the trees on the African savannah—take your pick. One of my earliest memories was when I was four years old and my family planted a shelterbelt on our farm in Ellsworth County. A couple years later I cried when my father pulled out some fruit trees he had planted between the road and utility poles—spots he could not reach with farm equipment. I never did understand that.

Now my wife and I have trees worth saving—180-year-old bur oaks and other mature trees along Clarks Creek in Morris County. No matter how depressing I find national environmental affairs, how vexed I might feel as I deal with fellow humans,

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Cover image Male Bobolink by Dave Rintoul

Back cover Burrowing Owl scowl by Dave Rintoul