

CONSERVATION BECOMES A WAY OF LIFE

By Ryan Klataske

As Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, has eloquently argued, direct exposure to the natural world at an early age can be a life-changing experience, with important implications for the individuals we become. This experience can also instill lasting appreciation and curiosity for nature, along with an important perspective on our relationship with our environment and the need for conservation. Some of my

first memories involve walks in a prairie pasture near my home, tucked into a backpack from which I could gaze out over my father's shoulders. I remember the simple joys of pulling golden Indiangrass seeds from their stalks or watching silky milkweed fly into the wind.

Outdoor experiences and conservation advocacy were an integral part of

my everyday life. I traveled often, and most of these travels emerged from my father's involvement in environmental conservation campaigns throughout the Great Plains. For much of my childhood, my father, Ron Klataske, worked as the West Central Regional Vice President for the National Audubon Society. After this, he partnered with local Audubon chapter leaders to form Audubon of Kansas, an autonomous non-profit organization. This article is, in large part, an attempt to provide a brief historical sketch of my father's conservation initiatives, focusing primarily on campaigns for the protection of prairie and rivers during the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. It also shares some of my experiences along the way.

*Everybody needs beauty as well
as bread, places to play in and pray
in, where Nature may heal and
cheer and give strength to body and
soul alike.*

~John Muir

The Niobrara River

One of the places on this Earth I cherish most is the Niobrara River Valley in northern Nebraska. I spent considerable time here as a kid while my father worked on a campaign to defeat a dam proposal and win scenic river protection under the 1968 National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. We often stayed with Niobrara valley ranchers Franklin and Lillie Egelhoff, where I loved to climb and search for dinosaur bones in the steep sandy banks by their house, nestled in a shady grove of trees. Near the gate in the wire fence that surrounded their home stood a towering mountain of shed deer antlers that Franklin collected off the ranch over the years.

If this campaign to defeat the proposed Norden Dam and win national scenic river designation hadn't succeeded, Franklin and Lillie's home and ranchland would have been lost, inundated in the bottom of a reservoir. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation planned to condemn 30,000 acres.



The Niobrara River valley is truly spectacular, as illustrated by this aerial photo of the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary. This section is wide and shallow, better for roosting sites for Whooping Cranes in migration, and for wading, than for canoeing as is popular within the 25-mile stretch east of Valentine.

Save the Niobrara River Association, joined by the National Audubon Society and other organizations constituted the driving force in defeat of the dam. During this campaign, my father developed a proposal—in collaboration with landowners—to designate a 76-mile stretch of the Niobrara as a National Scenic River. This legislation passed in May 1991. Throughout my adult life, I've continued to return to the Niobrara River, although Franklin and Lillie have since passed. In recent years, I've traveled there with friends and family, and I've also had the opportunity to work with my father on the development of the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary along the river as a model for sustainable ranch management and nature-based tourism.



The Platte River

One of the events I most looked forward to every year was the annual Spring River Conference in Kearney, Nebraska (now titled Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival), founded by my father and organized by the regional office of the National Audubon Society for the first 25 years. Every March, hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts attended from across the country. Many returned as regularly as the thousands of Sandhill Cranes that congregate here during their spring migration. Field trips provided opportunities for participants—and their children—to explore the Platte River and witness the spectacle of Sandhill Cranes. An epicenter for the dawn and sunset flights of cranes to and from the river was the Lillian Annette Rowe Wildlife Sanctuary, which my father worked with landowners along the river to establish in 1974. This conference also served as an effective instrument for advocating protection of Platte River flows from numerous dam and diversion schemes, as well as protection of the Niobrara.

As a kid, the annual Spring River Conference was a time to connect with friends, to make new ones, and to explore outdoors. These excursions, along with other nature-based youth activities including the dissection of owl pellets and the microscopic investigation of river water, were organized by Kansan Tom Wolf. The welcoming and family-oriented atmosphere of the conference also encouraged me to commandeer my father's microphone during formal dinners to discuss dinosaurs and tell jokes to the crowd. Throughout my childhood, the people that attended this and other Audubon events were more than just familiar faces. Many became close family friends, part of a broader "Audubon family" that remains important in my life today.

Manhattan Linear Trail

The uncertainty before my birth in November 1983 kept my father close to home that summer. In addition to caring for my mother during her at-risk pregnancy, he used this time as an opportunity to propose and work toward the establishment of a trail system in Manhattan. His idea involved using the top of the flood control levee along the Big Blue River, Kaw River, and Wildcat Creek, and to connect this with the soon-to-be abandoned Rock Island Railroad. Previously, in 1971, he successfully proposed a similar trail system along a levee in north Lawrence. City officials and the U.S. Corps of Engineers almost immediately endorsed that project.

The project in Manhattan, however, was a race against time. He faced opposition from the City's public works administrator who claimed that the trail around the city park was sufficient for the community. While stalled by this opposition, he discovered that unknown individuals began dismantling the historic railroad bridges for scrap. This threat helped motivate the city council to keep the option of a trail alive. With a dedicated team of Audubon enthusiasts, my father and supporters overcame these obstacles. "No Trespassing" signs threatening \$100 fines came down and, eventually, an eight-mile stretch of trail was established as part of a voter-approved parks funding program. The Linear Park has become an important recreational resource, passing along the rivers and riparian forest. Growing up, my family enjoyed the trail for hiking and biking, and my siblings and I would often explore among the trees. For my father, the year of my birth presented an opportunity to focus his efforts near our home. The result was Manhattan's Linear Trail, which I take pride in knowing that my friends—and many others—enjoy with their children and families as well.

Barnard Ranch: the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Oklahoma

In 1984, my father learned that the trustee of the 30,000-acre Barnard Ranch in Osage County, Oklahoma was considering selling the property. The best way to establish a Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, my father believed, was to propose purchase of



The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is the state bird of Oklahoma. Found in south-central grasslands and open shrubby country during the summer. They often wait on a perch and then fly out to catch insects in flight—a feeding strategy referred to as hawking.

Photo provided by Jay Dee Miller ©

a suitable property on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis. This stood in contrast to proposals and large-scale acquisitions in previous decades that threatened use of eminent domain. Working closely with the trustee, my father initiated a multi-year campaign to build local, regional, and national support. He helped organize regional Audubon and prairie conferences in Pawhuska and Tulsa; increased public interest emerged from tours of the prairie. Support among members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation began to grow, but progress of negotiations proceeded sporadically due to conflicting strategies among other conservation and environmental organizations. According to my father, after reaching a tentative endorsement from all members of the congressional delegation, the promise of consensus was "torpedoed" by one of these groups. In its prominent magazine, the organization declared that it was asking all members to demand the curtailment of oil and gas operations on the ranch, a demand that threatened the mineral estate of the Osage Nation. As a result, the proposal to establish a unit of the National Park system based on the willing-seller, willing-buyer acquisition of the Barnard Ranch (and possibly the adjacent Chapman Ranch) appeared "dead in the water."

Later, with the leadership and fundraising commitment of Joe Williams, CEO of the Williams Companies, an alternative conservation plan emerged. The ranch was acquired in 1989 and The Nature Conservancy became the beneficiary. After years of effort, collaboration among stakeholders, and the involvement of new partners, the Barnard Ranch now forms part of the 39,000-acre

Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Oklahoma. It has become a model for research and management utilizing a "patch-burn" approach to prescribed burning and grazing with around 2,500 free-roaming Bison.

Z-Bar Ranch: the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas

I have fond memories as a child exploring the Z-Bar Ranch with my father, located in the heart of the Flint Hills. In particular, I remember searching for lizards and other reptiles around rock outcrops in the prairie, as well as exploring the cool, dark depths of the historic barn. These memories form part of my experience of his effort to create the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas with the acquisition of this 10,890-acre ranch in Chase County. A photograph in a 1989 New York Times article on the issue captured the two of us walking along a road on the property near the historic one-room Fox Creek schoolhouse. After many unexpected turns, this proposal to acquire the Z-Bar Ranch and create a tallgrass prairie unit of the National Park Service eventually passed Congress in 1996.

It began in 1986 when a ranch realtor, Doug Wildin, contacted my father, Wildin was aware of his commitment to a willing-seller, willing-buyer approach. The realtor asked him if he wanted to tour a piece of land worthy of preservation. Not knowing where they would go after their meeting in a Strong City truck stop, my father

THE NEW YORK TIMES NATIONAL WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1989

Strong City Journal

Stampede Is Feared On Range

By WILLIAM ROBBINS

Special to The New York Times

STRONG CITY, Kan., Feb. 1 — The Z Bar Ranch is a vast stillness of hills, valleys and tree-lined creeks where hardly a sign of human beings intrudes. A ranch house of native limestone is tucked behind a hill, and on a far rim, a few horses graze, small brown shapes outlined against the sky.

It is a scene of ranchland tranquility that few visitors to the Kansas prairie are privileged to enter, but its isolation is destined to end soon if the National Audubon Society has its way. The society, which has obtained an option to buy the property, wants it opened up to tourists as a combination wildlife preserve and working model of a historic ranch.

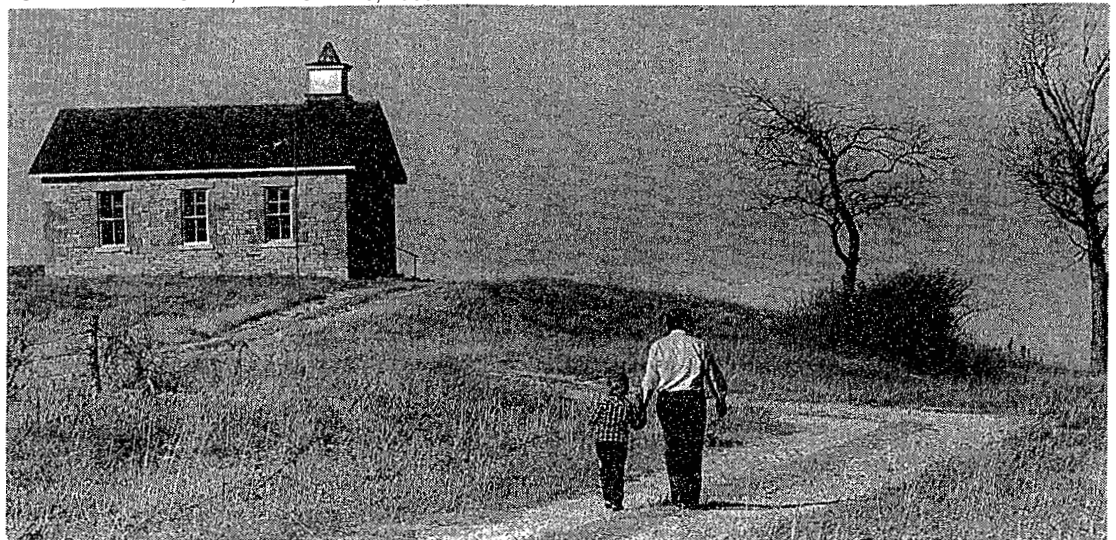
But first, it seems, the society must reconcile enthusiastic townspeople and worried ranchers.

The Z Bar borders on Strong City, a town of 640 people with a Main Street of Western-style buildings and with a stadium for an annual rodeo that attracts up to 30,000 people.

The town and ranch are on the eastern edge of a vast region somewhat inappropriately called Flint Hills. It is a region of rare beauty reaching down through east-central Kansas and into Oklahoma. Its thin sod, freckled with outcroppings of limestone, supports virgin prairie grasses and a host of wild flowers.

The ranch, covering nearly 17 square miles, was assembled by Stephen F. Jones, a pioneer cattleman who came to the area about 1880 and in 1881 built a three-story ranch house, a massive limestone barn and other farm structures. In 1882 he added a one-room schoolhouse. Both the ranch house and the barn are now registered national landmarks.

The ranch is now leased to a local cattleman by a Kansas City, Mo.,



Ron Klataske walking with his son, Ryan, to the one-room schoolhouse, which is a registered national landmark, on the Z Bar Ranch

near Strong City, Kan. The National Audubon Society wants the ranch opened to tourists as a wildlife preserve and working model of a ranch.

Prairie plan would draw thousands of tourists.

bank from which Ron Klataske, regional vice president of the Audubon Society, has obtained an option to buy for \$4 million.

The society's aim, he explained, is to get Congress to take over the option, buy the property, convert it to a "Flint Hills Prairie National Monument" and turn its operation over to the National Park Service.

As he envisions it, part of the spread would be a working model of an old ranch and part of it a preserve to be stocked with bison, elk and prong-horn antelope. The layout could include hiking and riding trails.

"I see this place being enjoyed not just by hundreds but by hundreds of thousands of Americans," Mr. Klataske said, as in a his station wagon bounced over rocky ruts down to a creekbed lined with cottonwoods and gnarled oaks, where he later knelt over footprints of coyote and deer.

Such a prospect, however, has stirred some controversy. Representative Dan Glickman, a Kansas Democrat, noted the other day. One problem, he and others explained, is that many local ranchers are still angry over a 1977 Congressional proposal for a prairie national park that would have taken over much of their land by condemnation, a proposal that their representatives managed to defeat.

"This could be one of the most American preservation projects in the country," Mr. Glickman said. "The concept is burdened by history, but if we can build a consensus, if we can minimize the personal sensitivity

to it, then this could become one of the most significant natural resource developments in this state in years."

The backers will have no trouble building support among townspeople, as Strong City's Mayor, Larry Bayer, and Marvin Adcock, the owner of The Chase County Leader-News, see it.

"I'd be hard pressed to find anybody in Strong City that's not in favor of it," said Mr. Bayer.

Mr. Adcock agreed. "I'm for it if it's good for business," he said. "And the majority of our business people are totally behind it."

Among ranchers, one moderate is Jeanne Hatcher who, with her husband, Bill, and two sons, Matthew and Gary, runs a ranch that adjoins the Z Bar along a stretch of several miles.

"They say they'll guarantee nobody's land is going to be taken over by eminent domain," Mrs. Hatcher said. "Now, if they'll do what they say

they'll do, I think we'd be selfish not to share what we have here in the Flint Hills with others."

Carol Jory, who has another adjacent ranch, was "more negative." "I'm skeptical about those promises," she said. "Besides, cattle ranching and tourism just don't mix."

Stanley Gibb, her ranch manager, was more emphatic. "We're scared to death of the eminent domain thing," he said of the government's right to take over private land for public use with just compensation.

Mr. Klataske said he was prepared to spend months trying to win a consensus before seeking action in Congress. And if that fails, he said, the Audubon Society could buy the property and run it as it now does many other conservation sanctuaries.

He is confident that won't be necessary, he said, adding, "We just hope we won't continue to be haunted by the ghosts of controversies past."



This photo of the historic ranch house was made in the early '90s prior to establishment of the Preserve. As illustrated by the "open house" tour offered, there was widespread interest in the ranchstead and all of the historic buildings.

*The tenth annual **Symphony in the Flint Hills** was held on the preserve in June 2015. It provided another venue for eight thousand visitors to experience this incredible prairie landscape--and the company of others who enjoy nature and music.*



hoped it would be the Z-Bar Ranch—a ranch with a combination of incredible historic structures and an impressive prairie landscape.

This proved to be the case. Following the dissolution of their cow-calf operation and the auction of machinery, my father worked to gain the trust and confidence of Dudley Alexander—the director of the trust department of Boatmen's First National Bank of Kansas City. Dudley was fiducially responsible for stewardship of Z-Bar properties. He wanted a sound sale, ideally in the public interest. A purchase agreement with the National Audubon Society was approved in 1988. In January 1989, my father organized community meetings in Strong City and a tour to announce the proposal to seek congressional approval for acquisition and designation as a unit of the National Park system.

According to my father, the opposition from the Kansas Farm Bureau and other entities was immediate and intense. Support, however, became strong both locally and statewide. Three members of the Kansas congressional delegation—representatives Dan Glickman, Jan Meyers, and Jim Slattery—put forth and supported legislation. In October 1991, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill authorizing the National Park Service (NPS) to acquire the property. Progress in the U.S. Senate appeared implausible with the state's senior senator aligned with the opposition. Senator Nancy Kassebaum, however, was much more receptive and willing to advance the effort if she could overcome key objections. The most strident objection throughout the process revolved around the



Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.

~Winston Churchill

federal ownership of land.

This fear of a federal "land grab" and distrust of the environmental community was not entirely unwarranted. Years earlier,

in 1977, a bill introduced in congress would have allowed the Department of the Interior to purchase—through the use of eminent domain—185,000 acres of ranchland twenty-five miles to the southeast of the Z-Bar. This flawed proposal emerged from the advice of an environmental lobbyist in Washington D.C. who recommended that proponents of the bill request three times more land than they expected, or hoped, to receive for the park. My father did not endorse this bill and urged against its introduction. A firestorm of opposition erupted after its introduction, and fear among ranchers persisted for decades. Following this debacle—fueled by a coercive, exclusionary approach to conservation—prospects for a "prairie park" seemed bleak.

In the spring of 1978 my father received a hand written letter from Bill Browning, a Madison-based rural doctor and rancher. Browning expressed his displeasure with this approach, including the condemnation of land and the

disregard for rural livelihoods. This letter arrived shortly before my parents' wedding in 1978. A few days later, my parents' travelled to meet Bill and his wife, Jennifer, on their ranch in the Flint Hills. A long-standing friendship emerged, as well as an alliance to promote the concept of conservation and the creation of a prairie park on a willing-seller basis. My father's proposals involving the Barnard Ranch in Oklahoma and the Z-Bar Ranch in Kansas both reflect this philosophy.

Finally, in 1994, the National Park Trust pledged to raise the funds to purchase and own the Z-Bar Ranch. Then, on the last night of legislative action in the 104th session of Congress in 1996, Senator Kassebaum won authorization of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. This authorization only allowed National Park Service ownership of 180 acres surrounding the historic ranch headquarters. Other compromises in the evolving plan diminished the vision of greater inclusion of native grazers including Bison, Elk, and Pronghorns. The original Audubon proposal also advocated for a focus on the “living history” of early European settlement and ranching, similar to the Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site in Montana. Although a small Bison herd was established, conventional cattle grazing remains the primary use.

The National Park Trust held title to the ranch from 1994 until February 2005, when it was purchased by the Kansas Park Trust and later conveyed to The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service now cooperatively manage this land. Despite the compromises and contours of this long and hard-fought campaign, the former Z-Bar Ranch in Chase County will continue to preserve and inspire appreciation of prairie, serving as an important educational resource on the ranching heritage of the Flint Hills.

A Second Z-Bar Ranch in the Red Hills

In 1999, my father also received advanced word of the upcoming sale of another Z-Bar Ranch, comprising 32,000 acres in the heart of the unique Red Hills of Barber County. In collaboration with the ranch realtor, he helped seek and facilitate purchase by a conservation-oriented buyer. He immediately contacted the Turner Endangered Species Fund. Turner Ranches purchased the ranch within the year and this privately owned land continues to be substantially devoted to the conservation and management of wildlife including Lesser Prairie-chickens, Golden Eagles, Black-tailed Prairie Dogs and a small remnant herd of Pronghorns.

Dewey Ranch: the Konza Prairie

As the brief histories in this article demonstrate, many of my father’s efforts have involved the cultivation of broad partnerships and the inclusion of multiple stakeholders. He has worked to facilitate conservation through collaboration, laying the foundation for important projects and the stewardship of prairie and wildlife throughout the Great Plains. In 1997, I learned about another significant initiative when my father was awarded a prestigious Chevron Conservation Award at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. This initiative, as I’ll explain, set the stage for the dramatic enhancement of the Konza Prairie Biological Station near Manhattan. The initial research area began with 916 acres along Interstate 70 in 1971.

During that evening’s award event, Pat Noonan—founder and president of The Conservation Fund, and previously president of TNC from 1973-1980—approached my father and thanked him for

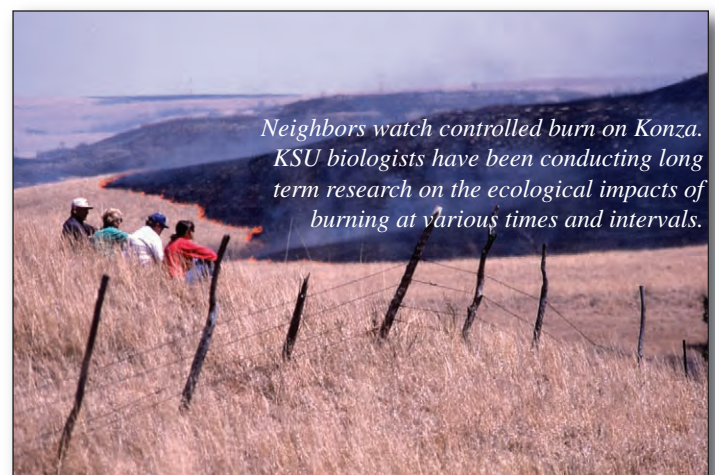
making the initial contact that led to The Nature Conservancy’s acquisition of the 7,220-acre Dewey Ranch in the Flint Hills. When this ranch came up for sale in the early 1970s, my father wrote to TNC through his contact, Dr. E. Raymond Hall, the former director of the Museum of Natural History at the University of Kansas, urging the organization to consider acquisition. Dr. Hall, however, voiced concern that an acquisition by TNC could undermine broader efforts to gain popular support for a tallgrass prairie national park. After consideration, Dr. Hall eventually passed the letter along, and TNC asked my father to obtain the legal description of the property. While gathering these details in the Riley County courthouse, he learned from a report in the Manhattan Mercury that the land had just been sold, purchased for \$125 per acre. It appeared that the window of opportunity had closed.

Undeterred, Pat Noonan—then a vice president of TNC—elected to move forward and pursue purchasing the ranch. A TNC delegation traveled to Kansas and my father escorted them on a flight in a small plane over the property. Several years later, following negotiations with the new landowner, TNC acquired the Dewey Ranch in January 1977. Philanthropist Katharine Ordway provided the funding that helped to make this acquisition possible. Her support also resulted in the purchase of 480 additional acres in 1979, culminating in the 8,616 acres that now form

the Konza Prairie Biological Station. Although the cost of the Dewey Ranch agreement amounted to the equivalent of \$500 per acre, it was a far-sighted investment in prairie conservation, education, and ecological research. The hiking trail on this land has also become an important outdoor recreational resource for the people of Manhattan and visitors.

*UNLESS someone like you cares
a whole awful lot, nothing is going
to get better. It's not.*

~ Dr. Seuss, The Lorax



Neighbors watch controlled burn on Konza. KSU biologists have been conducting long term research on the ecological impacts of burning at various times and intervals.

My Reflections

This is just the beginning of my endeavor to document the history of my father’s conservation efforts. In fact, much remains to be written. I have also chosen to constrain this account to events

prior to 2000—shortly after the formation of Audubon of Kansas—despite his continued campaigns, advocacy, and accomplishments. At some point I hope to return to this more recent history, a period of time in which I have worked closely alongside my father. Fortunately, much more of this history is documented in the pages of *Prairie Wings*. Based on what I've learned in my research and experienced firsthand, the thirty-year period between 1970 and 2000 was a foundational era of prairie conservation in the Great Plains. Non-profit conservation organizations played a pivotal role, but in most cases, successful campaigns emerged from the vision of individual leaders willing to collaborate, public activism, the involvement and support of philanthropists, and in some instances, government agencies and political leaders.

I am incredibly proud of my father's dedication and far-reaching contribution to this process, and in particular, his willingness to fight on the front lines for the rights of landowners like Franklin and Lillie Egelhoff. He has helped to give a voice to local people otherwise overlooked or excluded from participation and decision-making. This inclusive, compassionate approach to conservation, which combines a concern for rural livelihoods with an unwavering commitment to the prairie, rivers, and wildlife of the plains has proved key in his successes. As he has often underscored, however, there was always a wide range of people involved and willing to help make these outcomes possible. Throughout my childhood, I had the opportunity to spend time with many of these people, in many of the remarkable places my father worked. As a kid, tagging along, this seemed like a normal way of life.

In addition to these travels and experiences, including the time I spent playing in the prairie on the Z-Bar Ranch or exploring along the Platte and Niobrara Rivers, many of my outdoor experiences as a child took place on my family's land in the Flint Hills near Manhattan. This land is a reflection of my father's commitment to conservation, as well as the enjoyment our entire family gets from its prairie, woodlands, and wildlife. All of our qualifying cropland has been enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a program designed to maximize habitat and improve environmental quality. When Kansas authorized conservation easements, my

parents donated the first conservation easement in the Flint Hills to the Kansas Land Trust. They also became the first landowners in Kansas to enroll in the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) following congressional authorization in the 2002 Farm Bill. Most of the native prairie on our land is now protected with perpetual conservation easements. I grew up exploring and enjoying this prairie, and I took part in these programs by gathering wildflower seeds and planting trees and shrubs along the streams that traverse our land. Along with my younger siblings, Cary and Crystal, I often waded in the streams, caught crawdads, and searched for fossils on the rocky shoals. My family enjoyed picnics, camping, and fishing in farm ponds, along with bonfires under starry summer skies. In the winters, we went sledding, built snow caves, and cut down Christmas trees from the grove of pines my parents planted years before.

Outdoor experiences such as these characterized my childhood. Although my interactions with our natural environment—shaped largely by my travels and involvement in my father's conservation efforts—once seemed ordinary, I can now look back at the extraordinary impact these experiences have had on my life, my

*I think having land and not ruining
it is the most beautiful art that
anybody could ever want to own.*
~Andy Warhol

values, and my interests. This article only begins to tell this story and the interwoven history of my father's work. I grew up as his sidekick, and this remains the same today. Over the past decade, I've continued to travel and work with my father in support of his conservation campaigns and advocacy.

In 2010, he also had the opportunity to join me in Namibia, in



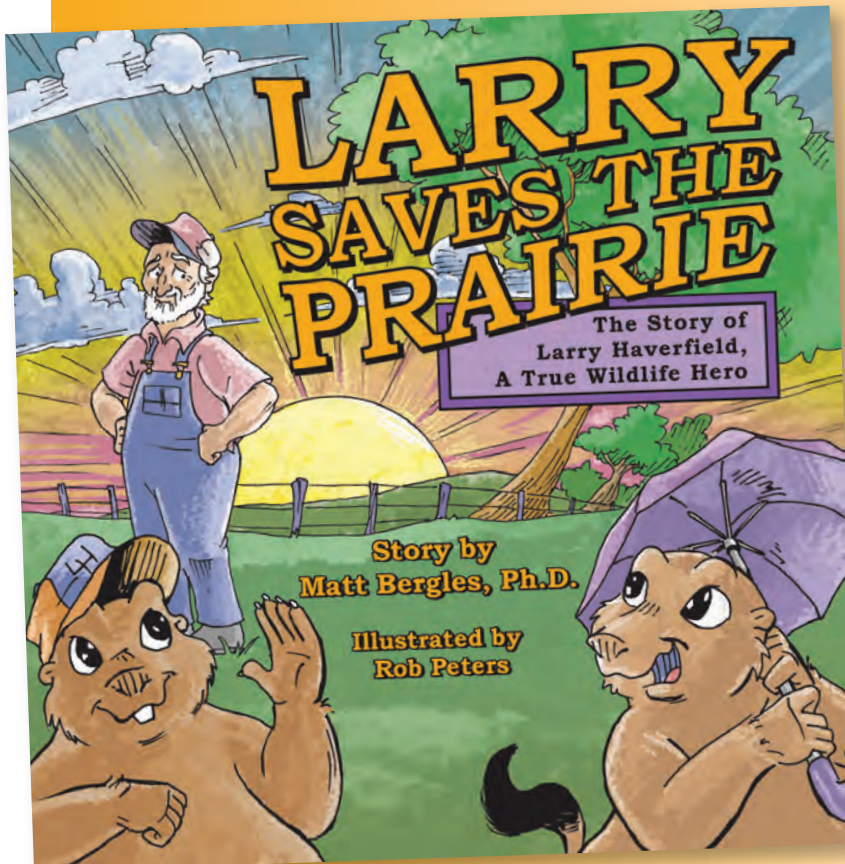
The photo on the right provides a view of our family's rangeland under a GRP conservation easement; appropriate cattle grazing is consistent with the program. The above left photo features a field enrolled in CRP with a rich diversity of native grasses and wildflowers, including cup plant in full bloom.

southern Africa, during a year of doctoral dissertation research on wildlife management and partnerships for collaborative conservation on private land. We visited ranches and farms, and he accompanied me as I interviewed a variety of stakeholders including landowners, farm workers, resettlement farmers, and organizations such as the Cheetah Conservation Fund. In many ways, this research reflects the passion we share for both conservation and the lives of rural people. Our travels in Namibia also form part of a larger journey, one in which we will continue to combine our efforts and work together toward common goals. I look forward to this future.



Ryan with landowners interested in wildlife management and conservation in Namibia.

Ryan Klataske is a doctoral candidate in Anthropology with a specialization in Environmental Science and Policy at Michigan State University. He currently teaches an online course on cultural anthropology at Kansas State University, where he completed his bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Spanish.



LARRY SAVES THE PRAIRIE

The Story of Larry Haverfield, A True Wildlife Hero

Prairie dogs Annabelle and Angus are lucky enough to have a rancher who wants to save them. Rancher Larry has to tell people how important prairie dogs are to a healthy shortgrass prairie ecosystem. Not everyone agrees and it's up to Larry to find a way to protect the prairie dogs and other wildlife on his ranch.

This children's book celebrates the bravery of doing the right thing for our prairie wildlife. It's a true story perfect for sharing with a child the importance of wildlife conservation.

The story was written by author Matt Bergles, Ph.D. (www.mattbergles.com) with illustrations provided by Kansan Rob Peters. With special contributions from supporters, AOK has obtained copies to send to public libraries and for other educational and outreach purposes. The book is also available through www.amazon.com, www.barnesandnoble.com and some independent bookstores.