

INSIDE this issue

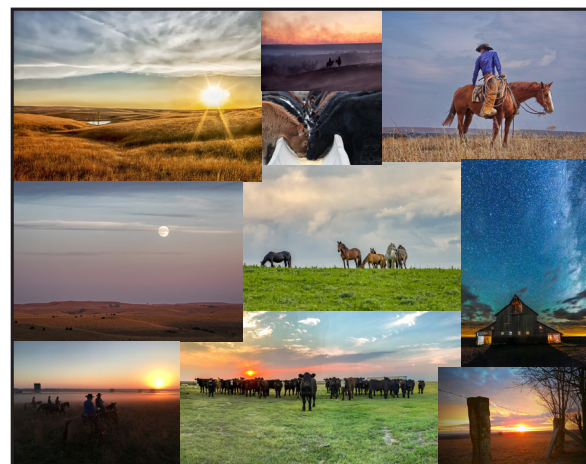
Message from our Board Chair **2**
Thank you 2017 donors **3&4**
Leopold Award Seeks Nominees **5**
Get Ready for March Madness! **5**

 Spring is Here!

Help RTK
spring forward
in 2018!

Would you like to receive RTK's monthly e-newsletter? Let us know by giving us your email address to get updates sent to your inbox!

Photo Contest Stationery Cards



\$20 per 10 card set

The 2017 RTK Photo Contest Stationery Cards are now for sale. These beautiful card sets feature 10 winning photographs selected in our 2017 photo contest. All photos were taken in Kansas and express Kansas' ranching heritage and open spaces. Printed on premium cardstock, the folded cards are blank inside, and come in packs of 10 with white envelopes.

SALE! 2015 cards **\$1 per card!**
2016 cards **\$2 per card!**

RTK Priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill

By Mike Beam, RTK Executive Director

While congressional agriculture committees are expected to start debating and writing the 2018 Farm Bill this spring, the Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK) and its partners have worked for over a year on crafting and proposing changes to the Conservation Title that benefit landowners and the agricultural land trusts who serve them. More specifically, RTK has collaborated with the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT), Land Trust Alliance, American Farmland Trust and other conservation groups to enhance the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, which is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

USDA's conservation easement funding programs, primarily the Grassland Reserve Program and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, have played a significant role in permanently conserving over 93,000 acres of private Kansas working lands, predominately native grazing lands in the Flint Hills and Smoky Hills. These two programs, merged into a new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) program in the 2014 Farm Bill, have helped RTK fund the purchase of conservation easements to the benefit of 11 families in the Smoky Hills of central Kansas.

The seven ranching land trust members of PORT have utilized USDA NRCS conservation easement funding to conserve over 240,000 acres of private farm and ranch land that will be available for future generations of farmers and ranchers.

RTK and other PORT members have identified changes to ACEP

that would improve acceptance and increase interest among landowners. In addition, these suggested changes would allow this state's landowners to have greater access to the program. Two key changes we and our partners are collectively seeking is express new Farm Bill language clarifying landowners may provide the required ACEP matching funds and a repeal of the law requiring ACEP participants to follow a conservation and grazing plan in perpetuity.


Current federal law and USDA NRCS requirements require a land trust to provide at least a 25% non-federal cash match to utilize ACEP funding. Many states have grant funds dedicated to conservation easement purchases that have been used to leverage USDA NRCS funding; consequently landowners in these states have greater access to federal ACEP funding. Sources of cash-match in Kansas are extremely limited, but in some instances a landowner would be willing to grant a conservation easement to a qualified land trust, such as RTK, if they could receive a payment amounting to 50-75% of the conservation easement value. This arrangement currently is not allowable and we are pushing for a change to facilitate such a transaction for USDA NRCS conservation easement funding.

The current ACEP law requires landowners participating in an ACEP/NRCS-funded conservation easement to have an "agricultural land easement plan" for the land encumbered by the easement. In addition, grasslands with an ACEP-funded conservation easement are required to have a "grassland man-

agement plan". Because the plans are included in the ACEP law, these plans are also referenced in the "minimum deed terms" of the perpetual conservation easement. The result is that management plans required for ACEP participation are to be followed and monitored in perpetuity. While NRCS acknowledges these plans may be amended and/or updated, this requirement is an added burden and impediment for land trusts and agricultural landowner participants. PORT always has urged Congress to repeal the management plan requirements, but in



recent years our concerns have been echoed by additional agricultural land trusts and conservation groups who realize ACEP payments are based on the diminished market value of enrolled land, and are not compensation for ongoing land management requirements.

In the coming weeks RTK will be reemphasizing the importance of these changes as the 2018 Farm Bill is written and passed, especially as it relates to Kansas. We welcome any questions or comments regarding these initiatives. In the meantime, watch for updates on this important effort in the near future. 

OUR MISSION

To preserve Kansas' ranching heritage and open spaces for future generations through the conservation of working landscapes.

CONTACT INFORMATION

6031 SW 37th Street
Topeka, KS 66614
(785) 273-5115

www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cade Rensink
Chair of the Board
Ada, KS

Raymond Sproul
Vice Chair of the Board
Sedan, KS

Brandi Buzzard Frobose
Secretary/Treasurer
Greeley, KS

Ryan Arndt
Emporia, KS

Mike Collinge
Hamilton, KS

Tim Connell
El Dorado, KS

Barth Crouch
Salina, KS

Bill Eastman
Topeka, KS

Chelsea Good
Kansas City, MO

Katie Miller
Manhattan, KS

STAFF

Mike Beam
Executive Director
mike@kla.org

Samantha Weishaar
Associate Director
samantha@kla.org

Stephanie Manes
Smoky Hills Coordinator
stephmanes@gmail.com



A Message from our Board Chair

By Cade Rensink



Dear Friends,

I hope this newsletter finds you well and eagerly awaiting the arrival of spring. Around our place, this is a very exciting season and signifies a time of plan-

ning, renewal and growth. Calves will be born, seeds sown, pastures will come alive, and many decisions will need to be made that will affect the rest of year.

As you read this correspondence, you will notice the same theme for RTK. We have many irons in the fire relating to planning, renewal and the continued growth of our organization. Needless to say, this spring will be no different than those in the past in the fact that the next few months will be a very busy and important time.

The first is planning. We have a tremendous staff and board of directors who are 100% vested in the mission of RTK. As such, everyone puts in a lot of time and effort to see that the organization is successful. Over the last couple of months, we have revisited our strategic plan and made some necessary changes that will reshape how we operate going forward. The board and staff met with a facilitator in January to more clearly define what it is that we do, who it is that we serve, what our priorities are, and how we are going to set a path to reach the many goals we have. While somewhat difficult, this has been an extremely valuable process and we are all excited to take the next steps in putting the plan into action. Starting this spring, we will be directing our efforts towards many of the key points of this plan in an attempt to be more efficient with staff resources and more effective in working with stakeholders to increase awareness about RTK and the work we do.

Jumping ahead to growth, we have big things in mind. First, we have set new,

larger goals for acreage we would like to see under conservation easements. Our original goal of 13,000 acres has been surpassed and we are now raising the bar. There is incredible demand out there and we feel RTK is well-suited to take advantage of some exciting opportunities that are on the horizon. Second, we want to strengthen our existing relationships while fostering new ones through enhanced educational opportunities, innovative professional services, and targeted partner networking. Lastly, to accomplish all of this, we have to significantly ramp up our operational, staffing, and stewarding means. All of this will start this spring.

If you are reading this newsletter, it means you have been involved in the organization at some level in the past. You may have donated money or items, volunteered your time, or simply allowed us to tell you our story. Whatever it was, we thank you. It is people like you that make the gears of RTK turn.

This brings us back to renewal. As stated above, we have set several substantial goals and we feel we have a solid plan that will be set in motion in the coming months to help us reach those. What we are asking from you this spring is a renewal of your support for Ranchland Trust of Kansas. As part of our strategic plan, the board and staff have made the courageous decision to launch a \$1 million capital campaign in order to better position ourselves for the future while still meeting the immediate operational requirements of the organization. We will be looking to you for not only monetary gifts, but gifts of guidance and participation as well. Your renewed commitment to RTK will be much needed and appreciated as we venture into these uncharted waters.

Again, I want to say thank you for all you have done to get RTK to where it is today. I am confident that this spring will be a major turning point in where the organization is headed and am hopeful that we can continue to count on you to go on the journey with us.

Kansas Leopold Conservation Award Seeks Nominees

News Release Provided by Sand County Foundation

Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK), Sand County Foundation, and the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) are accepting applications until June 1 for the 2018 Kansas Leopold Conservation Award. The \$10,000 award honors Kansas farmers, ranchers and other private landowners who voluntarily demonstrate outstanding stewardship, conservation and management of natural resources.

Sand County Foundation presents the competitive Leopold Conservation Awards in California, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah and Wisconsin.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the Leopold Conservation Award inspires other landowners and provides a visible forum where farmers, ranchers and other private landowners are recognized as conservation leaders. In his influential 1949 book, "A Sand County Almanac," Leopold called for an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage, which he called "an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity."

"The Leopold Conservation Award Program provides a valuable opportunity to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of Kansas agricultural landowners who are

committed to strong conservation practices and effective stewardship," said Dan Meyerhoff, Executive Director of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts.

"RTK is a proud supporter of the Leopold Award in Kansas. It is an honor to help recognize those conservationists who go above and beyond in the stewardship of our natural resources," said Cade Rensink, Chair of the Board at RTK.

Applications for the award must be postmarked by June 1, 2018, and mailed to KACD c/o Dan Meyerhoff, 414 Autumn Lane, Hays, KS 67601. Nominations may be submitted on behalf of a landowner, or landowners may nominate themselves.

The award will be presented on November 19, 2018, at the KACD Annual Convention in Wichita.

The Leopold Conservation Award Program in Kansas is made

possible thanks to the generous support of Clean Line Energy Partners, Ducks Unlimited, ITC Great Plains, Westar Energy, The Nature Conservancy, Kansas Forest Service, Kansas Department of Agriculture, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Kansas.

Please visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org for application information.



Get Ready For March Madness!

By Samantha Weishaar, RTK Associate Director

Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK) graciously received a Wichita State Shockers basketball autographed by this year's team!

As we get ready for March Madness this signed ball can be yours by bidding today! An online silent auction is now open for bidding. This unique item is a Nike Elite Champi-



onship full-size composite leather basketball hand-signed by the 2017-18 Wichita State men's basketball team and Coach Gregg Marshall. Display case and poster included.

Visit www.dlwebb.hibid.com and find the Ranchland Trust of Kansas Benefit Online Auction to see more photos and to bid. Please place bids before 5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 12. You must register on the Webb & Associates website before placing a bid. Click "bid" to be directed to the registration page.

If you have any questions please contact Samantha Weishaar at 785-273-5115 or samantha@kla.org. Thank you and good luck!

