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RTK Photography Contest Winners Announced

By Samantha Weishaar, RTK Associate Director

Winners have been announced for the ninth annual Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK) photography contest, which concluded September 30.

Each summer, RTK invites amateur and professional photographers of all ages to submit photos that showcase the mission of RTK and Kansas' ranching heritage. The mission of RTK is "To preserve Kansas' ranching heritage and open spaces for future generations through the conservation of working landscapes."



Grand Prize photo by Dave Leiker

Dave Leiker of Emporia was the grand prize winner in this year's contest. His photo was taken at the Vestring Ranch south of Cassoday when he was on assignment for *Kansas! Magazine*.

"After I was let out of a pickup truck at the edge of the pasture, I walked across the grassland, moving quietly into their group as I studied their response. When I was low and quiet

curiosity would draw them in toward me. If I stood and moved toward them, they would move away. Soon I felt like I could orchestrate their movements to get variety and action for the camera," said Leiker.

He was drawn to a bond between two of the horses and watched for expressive moments as he captured his grand prize winning image.

"I found it beautiful how one pair moved together, a couple times displaying the head-press at the heart of this photograph. It was a good moment and I'm glad I could share it this way," Leiker added.

Crystal Socha of Augusta won the Fan Favorite category by receiving 663 votes on RTK's Facebook page. Her winning photo, titled "Caught in the Storm" was taken in Morris County. The photograph truly depicts what it is like to be cowboy for a day.

Socha said, "We were moving cattle this spring to summer pasture. We got hit by a massive storm while on a couple thousand acres. It was not only pouring rain, but high winds, lighting and hail."

A record number of photographs were submitted to the contest this year. The panel of judges narrowed the selection down to a top 25 for the Fan Favorite category voting on Facebook. All other category winners were chosen by the panel of judges, along with RTK and Wolfe's Camera representatives. The Facebook album was able to reach over 43,000 Facebook users and nearly 6,000 votes were cast for the Fan Favorite category. Thank you to all who viewed and voted for these beautiful Kansas photos.

Additional winners in each category were: Landscape – Tony Ifland, Cedar;

Livestock – Marisa Betts, Russell; People – Collin Forrest, Conway Springs; KLA Member – Jake Pannbacker, Washington; Youth – Isaac Wilber, Wamego; and Honorable Mentions – Greg Kramos, Manhattan; Mike Scheufler, Augusta; and Scott Bean, Manhattan. All winning entries can be viewed on RTK's website or Facebook page.

Prizes, sponsored by Wolfe's Camera of Topeka, are awarded to the top 10 winning photographers. The photographs will be used, with permission of the photographers, to promote Kansas' ranching heritage and open spaces.

RTK will have photo stationery cards



Fan Favorite photo by Crystal Socha

for sale throughout the year featuring the 10 winning photos. Printed on premium cardstock, the folded cards are blank inside and come in packs of 10 with white envelopes. The card packages can be purchased for \$20 directly from RTK's website or contact Samantha Weishaar at samantha@kla.org.

OUR MISSION

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

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Conservation Grants Awarded to RTK

By Samantha Weishaar, RTK Associate Director

Recently, the Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK) was awarded \$100,000 from Playa Lakes Joint Venture's (PLJV) ConocoPhillips Capacity Grant program to support the launch of a four-year project in western Kansas to educate ranchers on conservation easements. RTK was recently the recipient of two additional grants to make the project possible.

RTK received a grant from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) and a grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) by the Conservation Collaboration Grants or Agreements (CCGA) program.

Ducks Unlimited (DU) played a valuable role to help earmark NAWCA funds to secure at least one conservation easement with RTK in western Kansas as part of the PLJV conservation initiative.



"We look forward to our partnership with RTK on this project. Ducks Unlimited will help facilitate funding, outreach and connect with private landowners," said Matt Hough, DU Manager of Conservation Programs in Kansas.

Partners for the Kansas Prairie Wetlands NAWCA grant proposal are not only organizations dedicated to conserving and protecting wildlife and water, but many are city and county entities or corporations who are concerned about

Kansas and their community.

Hough said, "Within the partnership of these great organizations, we can assist in restoration, habitat improvements and payment for the easement through NAWCA."

The next grant RTK received, thanks to the progressive approach of NRCS through the CCGA program, allows NRCS to leverage funding with private partner resources increasing the overall success in achieving mutual goals of protecting and conserving agricultural lands.

"NRCS is excited to partner with RTK to spread the word on potential benefits which conservation easements can provide to producers, rural communities, and the land through the CCGA program," said Karen Woodrich, State Conservationist.

Landowners in western Kansas will now have the option to enhance, increase and protect grassland habitat through this project with conservation easements. RTK's role will be to build new relationships with ranchers to initiate dialogue between landowners and conservation partners.

Woodrich said, "Through this agreement, NRCS will be working with four non-federal partners, led by RTK, to provide outreach about the opportunities available to producers to protect and ensure their lands are healthy and productive for future generations."

This project will grow long-term project capacity and will help transition RTK from a regional to a statewide land trust. This work will take RTK to the next level of conservation and expand the footprint of conservation easements.

You Are a Part of This Story

By Lynn Gentine, RTK Executive Director

It's often said, "Time marches on." Change is inevitable, yet the Kansas prairie has somehow remained. The legacy of stewardship that protects the native grass, grassland birds, wildlife, water and scenic views never ends in a world that is changing fast. With change, the grasslands are threatened with conversion, woodland encroachment and loss of wildlife habitat. The story of both protected and forever altered landscapes continues.

You can be a part of the narrative. Join our herd. If you value the open spaces, wildlife, clean water, or the iconic ranching traditions of Kansas, you can protect the working landscapes.

For two decades, Kansas lost three acres an hour to development. Unlike many of our neighboring states, Kansas does not have a dedicated conservation fund to protect the open spaces of Kansas. Nonprofit land trusts must identify funds to perpetually protect our grasslands. Economic and urban development all have a welcome place in Kansas, but you can help ensure the narratives of stewardship and the ranching heritage will continue. Thank you for joining the RTK herd and being a part of this conservation story.

With applause and appreciation,

Lynn M. Gentine
Executive Director



P.S. Your gift of \$250 will assist RTK in conserving approximately 12 acres of Kansas grasslands.

Visit
www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org
to contribute today.

Yes, I would like to support the Ranchland Trust of Kansas!

- ☐ My one-time gift is enclosed
☐ My annual pledge is enclosed (We will bill you each November unless you request otherwise.)

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Return this form with your contribution to: Ranchland Trust of Kansas • 6031 SW 37th Street • Topeka, KS 66614

To donate online, visit our website: www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org

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