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Kansas Leopold Conservation Award Winner

News release provided by Sand County Foundation

Dwane Roth of Holcomb has been selected as the recipient of the 2021 Kansas Leopold Conservation Award. Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes those who inspire others with their dedication to land, water and wildlife resources in their care. In Kansas, the \$10,000 award is presented annually by the Sand County Foundation, American Farmland Trust, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts and Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK).

Roth is a grain farmer with a strong interest in water conservation and irrigation technology. As one of Kansas' first "water technology farms," Roth began demonstrating emerging irrigation technologies, cropping patterns and management techniques in 2016. Energy-efficient bubblers, probes, cameras and drones delivered irrigation, measured soil moisture and enabled seamless data collection. He soon volunteered more of his 6,000 acres of farmland for the project and spearheaded an effort that resulted in other area farmers saving more than 35,000 acre-feet of water per year.

Roth has utilized the Conservation Reserve Program to plant native grasses on more than 100 acres of field corners to improve wildlife habitat and is experimenting to determine which cover crops

provide cattle feed while improving soil health and erosion control. He serves as a technology farm advisor to universities, state agencies and Syngenta.

"Dwane is a lifelong learner and also a teacher. His land ethic, desire to conserve water and expertise in irrigation technology make him a great representation of



Zion and Dwane Roth

this award. Congratulations to Dwane Roth and his family," said Chelsea Good, chair of the RTK Board of Directors.

Dwane and wife, Kim, have three daughters. His land ethic has rubbed off on their daughter Grace. Her FFA project began the Kansas Youth Water Advocates Program, which teaches high school students to appreciate and advocate for local water resources.

Dwane is aware that water availabil-

ity is not the only challenge facing Kansas agriculture. Poor water quality from increasing salinity and heavy metals harms soil and crops. High density cropping with limited crop diversity impacts the region's wildlife. In response, he's seeking other ways to improve the entire ecological community.

More than three decades into his farming career, Dwane has begun transitioning ownership of some of his farmland to his nephews. The greatest motivation of this tireless agricultural conservation proponent is making sure the next generation has a chance to grow food while improving the landscape.

The Kansas Leopold Conservation Award is made possible by numerous sponsors, including the Farm Credit Associations of Kansas, ITC Great Plains, Evergy, Kansas Department of Agriculture - Division of Conservation, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Kansas Forest Service, McDonald's, The Nature Conservancy, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and a Kansas Leopold Conservation Award recipient.

Sand County Foundation presents the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 20 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. For more information, visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org.

What Sets Agricultural Land Trusts Apart?

By Lynn Gentine, RTK Executive Director

Since 2003, RTK has partnered with ranchers from across the state to protect 16,850 acres of beautiful Kansas landscape. Created and governed by ranchers, facilitating a conservation tool to meet the landowner's vision is the priority of RTK.

Many know this mission in Kansas. But, there is more, much more, to RTK. We are a voice heard by other land trusts across the region and national influencers.

There are many kinds of land trusts. Some focus on forests, others on public green spaces. Many conservation tools reflect these worthy and most needed objectives. Yet, the scale and operational challenges associated with ranching when establishing conservation tools are often unrecognized. RTK does this important advocacy work through the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts, (PORT).

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OUR MISSION

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

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Photography Contest Winners Announced

By Samantha Weishaar, RTK Associate Director

Winners have been announced for the 10th annual Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK) photography contest. 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."

Justine Henderson of Minneapolis was the grand prize winner in this year's contest. Her photo was taken in the hills near Saint George at the Lazy N Ranch during an evening of checking heifers.

"Brice leaned down to give my border collie some praise for her good work that evening," said Henderson. "I've always been a sucker for tender moments between animals and man, so I pulled out my camera right as she reached up to meet his hand."

Her passion for photography began in a branding pen on the ranch where she grew up, capturing the beauty and reality of the western lifestyle.

"It feels wonderful to be chosen as the grand prize winner. I am honored that my photography can be the liaison between the agriculture community and the rest of the world, by telling its story through my lens," Henderson said.

The winning photographs will be used, with permission of the photographers, to promote Kansas' ranching heritage and open spaces.

Henderson said, "The fact that my photo has not only won grand prize, but also will be used to support the preservation of a lifestyle and community I hold dear to my heart is more than I could ever ask for!"

Rachael Sebastian of Tribune won the Fan Favorite category by receiving the most votes on RTK's Facebook page.

"I'm really honored to be included in a group of such talented photographers featured this year. RTK is a fantastic organization and resource for my family who has owned farm and ranchland in Marshall County since 1879, where my parents still run cattle today," Sebastian said.

Her winning photo was taken at Horace in Greeley County. The cowboy in the photo is Garth Bullis, who is a pen rider for Irsik and Doll at Ingalls and also a cutting horse trainer. The horse, Metallic Juice "Juicy", belongs to Laine Jenlink.

"A lot of my photography falls into the genre of western and cowboy art. This composition was inspired by cowboy artists such as Joel Phillips, who is a good friend of mine, and Tim Cox. I set up the shot and then Juicy dropped her head at the perfect angle that made the reins loop into an interesting shape, and the shot just came together," she said.

All other category winners were chosen by a panel of judges. Winners in each category were: Landscape - Tony Ifland, Cedar; Livestock - Emma Miller, Emporia; People - Greg Kramos, Manhattan; Sunrise/sunset - Bruce L. Hogle, Leawood; KLA Member - Marisa Betts, Dorrance; Youth - Emma Rohrbaugh, Caldwell; and Honorable Mentions - Crystal Socha, Augusta; and Jen Free, Randolph.

Limage is the sponsor of this year's photography contest. The locally owned photo printing and picture framing store in Wichita has been in business over 25 years, specializing in their ready-to-hang plaque mount. They also offer image mounting, metal prints, laminating, canvas gallery wraps and traditional framing. They are in the business of making the artist or photographer look their best. Prizes are awarded to the top 10 winning photographers. All winning entries can be viewed on RTK's Facebook page or website www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org.



Grand prize photo by Justine Henderson

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RTK, along with eight other agricultural land trusts across the Midwest and western U.S., work to inform policy makers of the unique perspectives and conservation challenges of working ranchers. Together, these members work to conserve agricultural landscapes and viable farms through voluntary programs. Together, we adhere to principles that respect and advocate for the private landowner. These principles include:

- Pursuit of conservation mechanisms that support the long-term protection of agricultural land, but have minimal impact on the landowner's day-to-day management decisions.
- Rejection of conservation efforts that result in a net long-term increase in public lands or employ any type of condemnation action.
- Recognition of the role of sustainable land uses as a means of maintaining open and productive landscapes.

- Rejection of the acquisition of conservation easements with the intent to transfer to governmental ownership.
- Respect the rights of individual landowners to make decisions regarding public access issues on private lands.
- In principle and except under special circumstances, avoid long-term fee title ownership as a means of land conservation.
- Acceptance of conservation easements on properties that represent a significant positive contribution to agriculture by themselves, as part of a working landscape, or to the surrounding agricultural community.

Ranching heritage are not buzz words for RTK. It is the cornerstone on which the organization is built, as it is with our partners at PORT. You can learn more about PORT and our mission at www.rangelandtrusts.org.

Q&A with ITC Great Plains

ITC recently gave a generous contribution to RTK. We would like to recognize them as a donor and partner in conservation. Thank you to ITC Great Plains for supporting land conservation in Kansas. Q&A answers provided by Brett Leopold, president of ITC Great Plains.

Q: What/Who is ITC Great Plains and your mission?

A: ITC Great Plains operates electricity transmission infrastructure in Kansas and Oklahoma. As a transmission-only utility operating in the Southwest Power Pool region, ITC Great Plains constructs, owns, operates and maintains regulated, high-voltage transmission systems. ITC Great Plains is a subsidiary of ITC Holdings Corp., the largest independent electricity transmission company in the U.S. with operations in seven states. ITC invests in a 21st century power grid to improve reliability, lower the overall cost of delivered energy and allow new generating resources to interconnect to our transmission systems.

Q: What area of RTK would you like to support or how would you like to see your donation used?

A: Landowners in western Kansas need options to enhance, increase and protect grassland habitat through the Western Kansas Initiative. ITC Great Plains supports the mission of RTK in hopes of better enabling the organization to build meaningful and lasting relationships with ranchers and conservation partners for the benefit of the environment, wildlife, and agricultural ecosystems of Kansas.

Q: Why do you decide to give back to conservation organizations?

A: ITC integrates a sustainable approach to the environment, enabling us to contribute to the well-being of the communities we serve. This ethic begins in our workplaces and extends to building, operating, and maintaining our transmission systems. Since our transmission systems cross diverse terrains and environments, it's important that we co-exist with these surroundings as stewards of the land, water and air. Partnering with con-

servation organizations ensures that we maximize responsible land, vegetation and species management in and around our transmission corridors.

Q: What impact would you like to see by giving back?

A: Our commitment to environmental stewardship and conservation initiatives is to ensure that we protect, preserve and prevent declines in natural lands and habitats and contribute to the well-being of the communities we serve.

Q: More about ITC and your initiative of interest to our readers...

A: ITC Great Plains has a unique business model. We focus only on transmission and have no geographic constraints. We view the electric grid and its current and future needs from a unique, holistic perspective.

To date, ITC Great Plains invested \$585 million in capital investments to modernize the grid across its footprint, with most of our investments in Kansas. The capital investments and improvements in system operations and maintenance have lowered the costs to produce and deliver electricity to customers and stakeholders and have also helped increase local economic activities in Kansas and Oklahoma. The benefits of these investments have been valued at \$68 million annually and have resulted in customer savings of \$29 million each year, thanks to reduced electricity production and delivery costs and improved quality of service.

ITC Great Plains' value goes far beyond ensuring a safe, reliable and uninterrupted power supply; we proudly take an active role to support local programs and philanthropic efforts that are important to the well-being of the communities we serve.