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Kansas Leopold Conservation Award Finalists Selected

Three finalists have been selected for the 2024 Kansas Leopold Conservation Award®.

The award honors farmers and forestland owners who go above and beyond in their management of soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on working land.

Named in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, this award recognizes landowners who inspire others with their dedication to environmental improvement. In his influential 1949 book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold called for “a land ethic,” an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage.

[Sand County Foundation](#) and national sponsor [American Farmland Trust](#) present Leopold Conservation Awards to private landowners in 28 states. In Kansas the \$10,000 award is presented with [Kansas Association of Conservation Districts](#) and [Ranchland Trust of Kansas](#).

The finalists are:

Barby Ranch of Protection. Bill Barby rotationally grazes his cow-calf herd in Clark and Comanche counties. His year-round grazing system, supported by a solar-powered pipeline watering system, increased the carrying capacity and stocking rate by 40 percent while improving vegetative and soil health. Deep-rooted grasses rebound quickly after drought or wildfire. Prescribed fire and mechanical removal of invasive eastern red cedar trees has improved habitat for wildlife including the Lesser Prairie Chicken.

Janus Farms of Cherryvale. Dr. Phil Eastep has improved wildlife habitat and biodiversity on his Montgomery County farmland with prescribed burning, rotationally grazing beef cattle, and removing invasive species such as cedar and sumac. To prevent erosion and promote soil health he has planted more than 125,000 trees and constructed a riverbank stabilization project. He has hosted botanical and endangered wildlife studies at his farm, and established pollinator habitat of native flowering plants.

Glenn and Barbara Walker of Brookville. The Walkers are improving soil health, wildlife habitat and water distribution on their properties in Ellsworth, Lincoln, Rice, Russell, and Saline

counties. By using rotational grazing to feed their beef cattle, they are also managing grassland to improve habitat for greater prairie chickens, turkeys, and deer. Their investment in removing invasive red cedar trees improves water resources. Several of their properties are enrolled in the Kansas Walk-in Hunting program.

Kansas landowners were encouraged to apply, or be nominated, for the award. An independent panel of Kansas agricultural and conservation leaders reviewed the applications. The award recipient will be recognized at the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts' 80th Annual Convention in Wichita in November.

The first Kansas Leopold Conservation Award recipient was selected in 2015. Ray and Susan Flickner of Wichita received the award in 2023.

The Leopold Conservation Award in Kansas is made possible thanks to the generous support of American Farmland Trust, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Ranchland Trust of Kansas, Sand County Foundation, Farm Credit Associations of Kansas, ITC Great Plains, Kansas Department of Agriculture (Division of Conservation), Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Kansas Forest Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service of Kansas, Green Cover Seed, McDonald's, Ducks Unlimited, and a Kansas Leopold Conservation Award recipient.

"Kansas Association of Conservation Districts is excited to recognize these outstanding landowners who are committed to conservation on their land," said Dan Meyerhoff, KACD Executive Director. "We are proud to partner with Sand County Foundation and the Ranchland Trust of Kansas to give these families the recognition they deserve."

"Ranchland Trust of Kansas is proud to be part of recognizing Kansas ranchers and farmers for their stewardship of their land," said Barth Crouch, Ranchland Trust of Kansas Chairman. "All of the finalists are deserving of the award which is really recognition of their management efforts and sacrifice to bring their land to its highest potential."

"These award finalists are examples of how Aldo Leopold's land ethic is alive and well today. Their dedication to conservation shows how individuals can improve the health of the land while producing food and fiber," said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and CEO.

"As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation's Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust, celebrates the hard work and dedication of the Kansas award finalists," said John Piotti, AFT President and CEO. "At AFT we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three."

“ITC Great Plains applauds these exceptional stewards of the land. They not only recognize the immediate benefit of conservation but also the benefits derived for future generations,” said Dusky Terry, President ITC GP. “We are committed to environmental responsibility, and we are pleased to help recognize their outstanding commitment.”

For more information, visit www.leopoldconservationaward.org.

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LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARDS recognize landowner achievement in voluntary conservation. Sand County Foundation presents the award in California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and in New England (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). www.leopoldconservationaward.org

AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST is the only national organization that takes a holistic approach to agriculture, focusing on the land itself, the agricultural practices used on that land, and the farmers and ranchers who do the work. AFT launched the conservation agriculture movement and continues to raise public awareness through its No Farms, No Food message. Since its founding in 1980, AFT has helped permanently protect over 6.8 million acres of agricultural lands, advanced environmentally sound farming practices on millions of additional acres and supported thousands of farm families. www.farmland.org

KANSAS ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS is a voluntary, non-governmental, non-profit, incorporated organization composed of members from the conservation districts located throughout Kansas’ 105 counties. Through partnerships with federal, state, and local entities, the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts has brought together groups that share the common goal of wise and efficient conservation practices that protect Kansas’ natural resources. The Kansas Association of Conservation Districts promotes and supports the establishment of programs dedicated to conservation and the organized development of Kansas land, water, and related resources. www.kacdnet.org

RANCHLAND TRUST OF KANSAS is a private, non-profit organization founded by members of the Kansas Livestock Association in 2003. The organization was created to provide assistance to ranchers and landowners who desire to conserve their land with conservation easements. Guided by their mission to preserve Kansas’ ranching heritage and open spaces for future generations through the conservation of working landscapes, the Ranchland Trust of Kansas values a commitment to conservation, respect for private landownership, integrity, organizational excellence and collaboration with those who share their values. The Ranchland Trust of Kansas remains an affiliate of the Kansas Livestock Association. www.ranchlandtrustofkansas.org

SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION inspires and empowers a growing number of private landowners to ethically manage natural resources in their care, so future generations have clean and abundant water, healthy soil to support agriculture and forestry, plentiful habitat for wildlife and opportunities for outdoor recreation. www.sandcountyfoundation.org