
A Letter From the Chair

Margy Stewart

Isn't hope as natural as Whooping Cranes, Least Terns, and Black-footed Ferrets? And shouldn't we protect hope from the risk of extinction, too?

The news is despair-inducing. Take this recent headline from the National Geographic web site: "One million species at risk of extinction, UN report warns" (May 6, 2019). The accompanying article is even more dire, for it turns out one of the species at risk is *Homo sapiens*. Plants and animals create the conditions we need to survive—and yet our appetite for natural resources continues to grow, even though destroying the habitat of our fellow creatures means we are destroying our own as well.

This devastation is not a new story. In fact, since the industrial revolution, much nature writing has featured what literary critics call a "narrative of loss." As Jan E. Dizard writes in *Going Wild*, "The narrative of loss has turned the dominant national celebration of Manifest Destiny and growth on its head—the march of progress is now commonly depicted as heading us for a cliff."

No wonder so many people prefer virtual reality, losing themselves in phones and tablets, never venturing outdoors. As Bill McKibben writes, "The end of nature makes us reluctant to attach ourselves to its remnants, for the same reason that we usually don't choose friends from among the terminally ill. I love the mountain outside my back door... But I know that some part of me resists getting to know it better—for fear, weak-kneed as it sounds, of getting hurt."

Loving nature is a good way to get your heart broken. "It is hard to bear... it goes to my very heart," wrote John Muir when he lost the battle to stop the dam that destroyed his beloved Hetchy-Hetchy valley in Yosemite National Park.

But paradoxically, love is also a good way to generate energy, determination, and action.

Ever since we in AOK decided to support Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism's guidelines for the siting of industrial wind turbines, we have sided with the people in Reno, Marion, and McPherson Counties who are resisting proposed wind developments that violate those guidelines (see pp. 26-28, below). The people in those counties love their land communities, and they treasure the plants and animals that are their neighbors. They cherish the birdsong out their backdoors, the eagles that nest nearby, the migrating birds overhead. They feel joy when endangered Whooping Cranes drop down out of the sky to feed in neighboring fields; they wish safe journeys for those magnificent birds on their hazardous migrations. They don't want to lose their sunsets to shadow flicker or their native prairies to machines.

Faced with the prospect of heartbreaking loss, they do not hide indoors in despair.

Instead, they fight for what they love.

We in AOK are proud to fight with them.

Yes, we make ourselves vulnerable by caring about a land community slated for the chopping block—but we make up for it with the joys of working with wonderful people and doing what we can, together.

We hope for the best! And our hope is *well grounded*. For if ecology teaches us anything, it is that one small interaction can affect the whole.

This is the "butterfly effect"—where metaphorically, the flap of a butterfly's wing on one side of the earth can lead to a hurricane on the other. Described half a century ago by MIT meteorologist Edward Lorenz, the "butterfly effect" is defined as "the phenomenon whereby a minute localized change in a complex system can have large effects elsewhere."

No matter how small our grassroots actions may seem compared to the march of industrialization and "development," when we advocate for nature we can never predict the outcome.

We might be Davids, yes—but didn't David win against Goliath? Doesn't our beloved AOK have a string of victories to point to—from rescuing Prairie Dogs to reintroducing Black-footed Ferrets?

And hasn't the grassroots movement in Reno County just now led the County Commission to reject the proposed industrial wind plant? However, the would-be developer has a history of suing rural communities that put obstacles in its path, so our friends in Reno County may still have a fight on their hands. Those of us who cherish land communities can never rest secure. As Wendell Berry writes, "Our present 'leaders'—the people of wealth and power—do not know what it means to take a place seriously: to think it worthy, for its own sake, of love and study and careful work. They cannot take any place seriously because they must be ready at any moment, by the terms of power and wealth in the modern world, to destroy any place."

But many others find a different kind of "wealth" in their land community and "power" in their love for it. And where love is, there too are faith and *hope*.

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