

# Prairie Wings

*A Voice For Wildlife*

*An Advocate For Prairie Conservation*

## 2010

## 2011

## Achievements & Challenges

2010 has been an incredibly successful year for Audubon of Kansas' conservation initiatives. In partnership with you we look forward to new and exciting accomplishments in 2011.

## Major Legal Victory Saves Black-footed Ferret Recovery Program

Senior Judge Jack Lively released a decision in mid-September that promises to secure a future for continued conservation efforts to establish and maintain a population of endangered Black-footed Ferrets on ranch property owned by Larry and Bette Haverfield, Gordon and Martha Barnhardt, and Maxine Blank.

The Motion for Summary Judgment filed on behalf of the plaintiffs (landowners) by Randall K. Rathbun countering the continuous efforts of the Logan County Commission to eradicate prairie dogs on the property was granted in Logan County District Court on September 17.

Following the first trial, on March 3, 2008 the Honorable Charles E. Andrews of the Third Judicial District entered a restraining order limiting the extermination activities by Logan County. An uncontroverted fact was that extermination of all prairie dogs would result in the death of the Black-footed Ferrets (one of the most endangered mammals in North America) on the property. Senior Judge Jack L. Lively determined that the injunction shall become permanent, and the defendant's (Logan County Commission) request to exterminate prairie dogs on the Complex, pursuant to Kansas Statutes 80-1201 et seq., is denied.

Judge Lively noted that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and its conservation partners are providing surrounding landowners with



free control of prairie dogs on their lands for three miles out. Other measures including special fences designed and built by Audubon of Kansas, and management practices implemented by the landowners are all designed to make the ferret reintroduction project a win-win opportunity for landowners on both sides of the boundary fence. Additional prairie dog control within the property, the special "prairie dog fences" and vegetative barriers have dramatically reduced movement from the property to adjacent areas.

However, no degree of reason or results seem to deter the county commission chairman or the Kansas Farm Bureau from their obsession to eradicate prairie dogs, and eliminate the Black-footed Ferret recovery program. The commission has decided to appeal Judge Lively's decision, and the Kansas Farm Bureau has continued their exaggeration campaign against wildlife conservation programs on these private lands. As a continuation of their statement ten years ago suggesting that deer are like hooved rodents, their recent on-line magazine posting suggests that prairie dogs are "prairie rats." Under a heading of "Termites, Rats, Moles and Prairie Dogs," the article implies that KFB's Logan County president's pasture is a "moonscape" and because of prairie dogs he "doesn't have the ability to grow crops or forage grass." KFB needs to give reality a break; his pasture is fifteen miles from the Haverfield Complex!

## Ferruginous Hawks Benefiting Big Time from Ferret Program



Ferruginous Hawks and Golden Eagles are the most imperiled raptors in Kansas. They were once commonly observed throughout much of western Kansas, especially during the fall and winter, and both species nested here. Golden Eagles have essentially become exist as a nesting species in the state, and there are very few nesting Ferruginous Hawks. The primary reason for the decline has been extermination of their most reliable and significant food source: prairie dogs.

The Haverfield/Barnhardt/Blank ranch complex is more like a national wildlife refuge or an Audubon sanctuary than an operational cattle ranch in terms of the diversity of wildlife benefiting from their land. On the morning of November 21, Ron Klataske and Larry Haverfield counted 40 Ferruginous Hawks, two Golden Eagles and two Bald Eagles on the property – and much of the terrain wasn't covered in the survey. The property is an unparalleled magnet for wintering raptors. Earlier in November, several expert birders including Pete Janzen, Kevin Groeneweg and Terry Mannell visited the property and observed an estimated 24 Ferruginous Hawks and two or three Golden Eagles. In two days they traveled 900 miles in northwestern Kansas, but only saw one other Ferruginous Hawk.



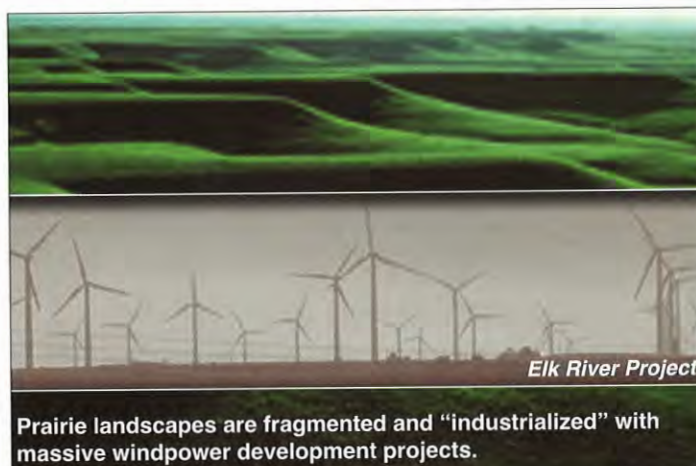
# Activism Now, and Conservation Easements Soon, May Save the Southern Flint Hills, Other Prairie Landscapes

On three occasions in the past eight years the conservation community in Kansas has failed to sufficiently mobilize in time to address major threats, and make our case for protecting significant prairie landscapes. With only three or possibly four percent of the continent's Tallgrass Prairie remaining in any form, it is like the destruction of another irreplaceable natural wonder every time another 10,000 to 25,000 acres of intact prairie landscapes are fragmented and "industrialized" with massive windpower development projects. As an added insult to sanity, developers' multi-million dollar profits are entirely dependent on the transfer of funds to feather their nests from federal taxpayers, and it is all done under the banner of "renewable energy" which developers are using to eclipse "irreplaceable prairies."

An ominous threat to the southern Flint Hills emerged this fall. Following development of one of the two most destructive and indefensible windpower projects in Kansas, the Elk River Project south of Beaumont, speculators have targeted the rest of the southern third of the Flint Hills south of Highway 400. They are suggesting it is ripe for "explosive development." Using cleverly deceptive suggestions that the KDWP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bought in to the proposed 13,618-acre Caney River Wind Energy Project in exchange for questionable "mitigation" funding, personnel with Tradewind Energy convinced officials with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) that they should sign a power purchase agreement.

Fortunately, since the TVA is an independent federal corporation an Environmental Assessment is required. Conservation organizations and Tallgrass Ranchers have rallied to respond with statements, and we all hope that TVA officials recognize that destruction of thousands of acres of prairie is not justified when alternative sites are available on millions of acres of already altered (cultivated) lands with high wind potential. The comprehensive statement presented by Audubon of Kansas can be viewed on our website.

Ironically, the comment period for this proposed project overlapped the formal announcement of the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area



Prairie landscapes are fragmented and "industrialized" with massive windpower development projects.

initiative by Secretary Ken Salazar of the U.S. Department of The Interior in Wichita on November 13. The two events clearly underscored the fact that this windpower development is poised to undermine one of the nation's most significant "landscape-level conservation projects." The Caney River Wind Energy Project is sited entirely within the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area and located on native Tallgrass Prairie grasslands of the type identified for protection. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service plan is designed to protect 1.1 million acres of native prairie grasslands with purchase of conservation easements which will "help maintain the integrity of Tallgrass Prairie wildlife habitat" in the Flint Hills ecoregion. As articulated in the plan, native prairie landscapes are being (and continue to be) lost to commercial development and other activities that fragment important wildlife habitats.

We are indebted to Jim Minnerath of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for his commitment to and promotion of the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation initiative. We also thank Bill and Jennifer Browning of Madison for hosting visiting agency officials on their ranch as the proposal was being developed. Their ranch serves as a model for the type of stewardship that is envisioned

## Prairie-chickens Benefiting from Special EQIP and CRP Initiatives

Greater Prairie-chickens are now on the verge of extinction in Missouri, with drastically declining populations kept alive in part by transfusions of birds trapped in Kansas and transferred for release. Likewise, Prairie-chickens have become essentially extinct in the eastern two tiers of counties in Kansas. Declines of 80 percent during the past three decades have occurred in the Flint Hills due largely to annual burning and a shift to intensive early season grazing practices. An absence of burning and allowance of cedars and other invasive trees to overwhelm open grasslands has dramatically diminished acceptance by Prairie-chickens and other grassland birds that require open habitat.

Now for the second year, Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds are available and can be used for practices designed to improve habitat conditions and management for the benefit of Prairie-chickens. Practices include rotational patch burning (leaving two-thirds of pastures unburned each year), tree removal from upland grassland sites, and planned grazing systems. AOK promoted establishment of wildlife as a "Resource of Primary Concern" for several years, and now that it is included under EQIP we need to encourage range landowners to explore the promise of these practices.

Several years ago we pushed for practices that would focus on the nesting and brood-cover needs of Prairie-chickens as part of a proposed 30,000-acre supplemental Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) targeting wildlife. Other stakeholders preferred a program with emphasis on vegetative field borders to benefit Northern Bobwhites, Pheasants and other species. However, with the leadership of Barth Grouch, coordinator for the Playa Lakes Joint Venture, and the support of KDWP staff and others of us involved in farm bill conservation programs, a new 30,000-acre State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) CRP authorization focusing specifically on providing habitat for Lesser Prairie-chickens was approved this fall and is now available for landowner sign up in parts of western Kansas.





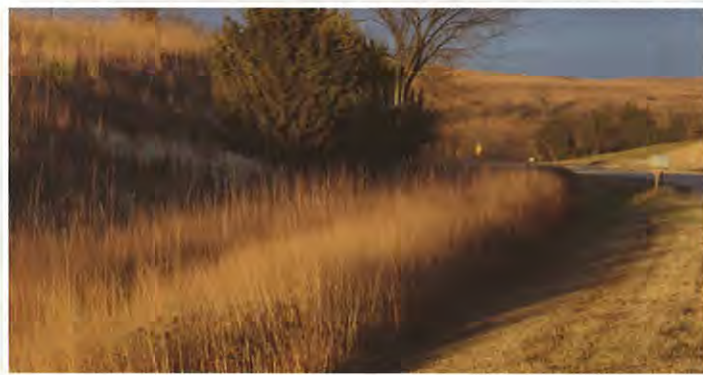
# Bobwhites and Butterflies Benefiting from Roadside Improvements

Audubon of Kansas continues to pursue every opportunity to win approval and adoption of limited mowing and herbicide spraying of 150,000 acres of vegetated roadsides along 10,000 miles of KDOT administered state and federal highways in Kansas, and separately the 8,000-acres along the Kansas Turnpike administered by the KTA.

*The reduced mowing policy resulting in more “naturalistic” landscaping and the shift to utilizing only native prairie grass and wildflower species in new plantings along rural roadways has dramatically enhanced the aesthetic attractiveness and ecological value of state highway rights-of-way. In many areas naturally occurring native grasses and wildflowers have flourished with less frequent and delayed mowing after the plants have flowered and reseeded. The undisturbed vegetation provides nesting and year round habitat for Kansas’ state bird - the Meadowlark - for Bobwhite Quail and many other species. Wildflowers provide critically important habitat for native pollinators, including Monarch Butterflies and many other species. Unmowed vegetation, especially stiff-stemmed native grasses, serve as “living snow fences” and help to keep snow from blowing across road surfaces in many areas. This enhances safety, reduces cost of snow removal and salt applications. Unmowed ROW vegetation also reduces sunshine glare from snow covered landscapes, serves as “filter strips” for runoff, helps to conceal and prevent litter from blowing to surrounding lands or washing away into streams.*

The prospect of maintaining the improvements was advanced in December with the announcement that Governor-elect Sam Brownback has chosen to retain Deb Miller as Secretary of KDOT. With our long-established interest and continuous requests for improvement of roadside management, plus the interest of other organizations, Secretary Miller appointed an “Aesthetics Task Force” in February 2008. The progressive ATF report was finalized in December 2008, and some KDOT staff have been working with AOK and other members since then to refine some of the recommendations.

Coupled with Senator Brownback’s early October statement of endorsement for limited mowing/naturalistic management of roadsides to AOK in a discussion at his campaign meeting focusing on promoting the Flint Hills for tourism in Council Grove, it is conceivable



that the limited and delayed mowing practices initiated by Deb Miller will be more widely adopted and improved by regional and district KDOT engineers. Kansas can have the most impressive roadsides in the Great Plains.

Using roadsides to demonstrate and win acceptance for rural landscapes that provide **places for wildlife** is a part of Audubon of Kansas’s mission of promoting “a culture of conservation”. Hopefully, some county and township officials, and landowners will emulate KDOT leadership. County Commissioner Joe Nold of Dickinson County is one who shares this viewpoint. For many of us who grew up on Kansas farms a half century ago, we remember that fencerows, natural waterways and odd areas with shrubs, native grasses and forbs provided much of the habitat needed by Cottontail Rabbits, Bobwhite Quail, Pheasants and an endless array of songbirds. The chatter of birds within thickets along country roads on warm winter mornings is unforgettable. Unfortunately, most of these habitats have been eliminated, and dramatic wildlife declines followed.



*You  
Can Help!*

Letters to Governor Sam Brownback complementing him on his choice of Deb Miller to head KDOT and requesting his ongoing support for limited mowing and progressive practices to enhance wildflowers and native plant communities along state highways will be helpful. The initial e-mail

address is [TransitionTeam@ks.gov](mailto:TransitionTeam@ks.gov) and the postal address is State Capitol, 300 SW 10th, Topeka KS 66612.

E-mails to Deb Miller can be sent to her administrative assistant at [PeggyH@ksdot.org](mailto:PeggyH@ksdot.org) and of course we at AOK appreciate hearing from everyone interested in stewardship of roadside habitats.



## AOK Guesthouses Will Benefit Niobrara Sanctuary

The Niobrara Sanctuary experience is incredibly inviting. There isn't anything exactly like it in this "neck of the woods". The opportunity to stay in one of two guesthouses in a wildlife sanctuary with access to 5,000 acres, miles of trails to explore, and view nature at its best in relative serenity is unique. The sanctuary's landscape includes bluffs overlooking the Niobrara River – a national scenic river and unit of the National Park System – with woodlands, wet meadows and wetlands paralleling the river, deep canyons with shady spring-fed streams, and upland prairies on Sandhills and plains.

Audubon of Kansas has completely remodeled and refurnished the Hutton House to make it exquisitely attractive and comfortable, as well as energy efficient, and to serve as the centerpiece for visitation opportunities and educational outreach. From the bay windows inside, one can look out across meadows from within a grove of trees and hear Western Meadowlarks, Dickcissels and other grassland birds. This guesthouse has four newly furnished bedrooms, three bathrooms, a new kitchen, large combination living room and dining area, a fireplace lounge, office and two-car garage.

A corral that will accommodate horses is planned for next spring. Other related sanctuary amenities soon to be established include wildlife viewing blinds and expansion of trails through the woodlands along the Niobrara valley and to bluffs overlooking the scenic river.



An addition to the Hutton House includes a gallery that will display Lucille Hutton's paintings, Harold's collection of Indian and western artifacts, copies of his published books, and educational materials on nature and conservation. Restoration and enhancement, and management of the land is guided by our commitment to make it a model for wildlife conservation, with a special emphasis on providing habitat for prairie grouse and other grassland birds.

The second sanctuary guesthouse is referred to as the "Lazy Easy" Ranch House. AOK purchased a 160-acre addition to the sanctuary and the former owner referred to the ranch as the "Lazy Easy." This ranchstead is nestled in among huge Cottonwoods and other trees planted in shelterbelts dividing the property into a series of meadows and pastures at the headwaters of Willow Creek. The Lazy Easy guesthouse also has four bedrooms, two baths, large living room, kitchen and laundry room – and a porch with a "porch swing" to add to the enjoyment of this pastoral setting.

In addition to making the sanctuary available for the enjoyment of guests, lodging fees or donations will help to provide financial resources for operations, stewardship and improvements of the sanctuary and these facilities. Ryan Klataske is developing a website for the guesthouses. More information and photos can be viewed at [www.niobrarasanctuary.org](http://www.niobrarasanctuary.org).

– All Photos by Ron Klataske



## Give the Gift of Wildlife

*Please keep AOK in mind when looking for that perfect gift! The gift of preserving our natural ecosystems and wildlife is a gift that will keep giving for generations. A gift membership in Audubon of Kansas is the perfect solution for any eco-minded family member or friend this holiday season and it can make a great Birthday present.*

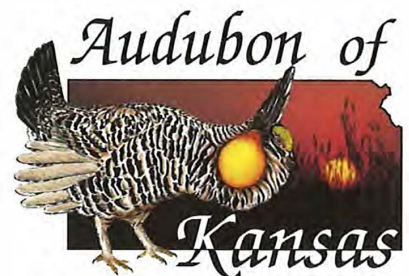


*In addition to gift memberships, Audubon of Kansas will work with you to ensure a lasting legacy through planned giving including real estate or stock donations, tributes and memorials, estate planning or through a bequest. Our new online giving program also allows you to make a monthly or yearly pledge.*

*For more information, please send*

*an e-mail to [aok@audubonofkansas.org](mailto:aok@audubonofkansas.org) or call us at (785) 537-4385.*

*Our website is [www.audubonofkansas.org](http://www.audubonofkansas.org).*



For more information and ideas on how you can be involved, or how we can assist you with your conservation interests, please contact **Ron Klataske**, Executive Director and other staff at Audubon of Kansas, 210 Southwind Place, Manhattan KS 66503. Phone 785-537-4385, e-mail [aok@audubonofkansas.org](mailto:aok@audubonofkansas.org).

Please contact **Mike Hudson** regarding membership services, gifts, planned giving and philanthropy. Visit the website at [www.audubonofkansas.org](http://www.audubonofkansas.org) and sign up for our AOK e-News for monthly updates.