

# NATURE

**KANSAS**

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Bison cow and calf © Dave Lauridsen

## **YOU Did It!**

If you're reading this, I owe you my thanks. I'm grateful for what your support has accomplished for conservation in Kansas.

Thanks to you, The Nature Conservancy completed the *Generations* campaign, raising money over the past five years to protect Kansas' land, air, and water. Because of you and your donation, another 49,000 acres of grasslands have been permanently protected. You allowed us to work side by side with the farmers and ranchers making their living in the Sunflower State, helping them adopt regenerative agriculture practices on nearly 200,000 acres. You invested in Kansas waters; we identified priority streams like the Blue River and began protecting their watersheds. Not only has your gift defended the wild places and animals of Kansas for future generations—it has made our lives better, safer, and more prosperous today. Thank you.

  
Rob Manes, State Director



Ice covers the landscape at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County, Kansas. The preserve is cooperatively managed by The Nature Conservancy and National Park Service. © Tom Gross

## **Saving the Tallgrass Prairie**

### Latest easement permanently protects 1,594 acres

In the Flint Hills of Kansas, land protection means preventing the last large expanse of tallgrass prairie from disappearing forever.

“Only about four percent of all tallgrass prairie remains in the world,” explains Tony Capizzo, The Nature Conservancy’s Flint Hills Initiative manager. “Of all the tallgrass prairie left, most of it is here in the Flint Hills of eastern Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma. If we fail at protecting it here, we risk losing an entire ecosystem.”

More than 50 years ago, TNC recognized the importance of protecting this vanishing grassland type and began purchasing land in the Flint Hills, pledging to safeguard it forever. These nature preserves, like Konza Biological Research Station (near Manhattan, Kansas) and the Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve (in Pawhuska, Oklahoma), are strategic anchors but, on their own, aren’t large enough to save a vast landscape.

“We’re working with ranchers, landowners, other land trusts, government agencies and non-governmental organizations to ensure that the Flint Hills stay tallgrass prairie,” says Capizzo. “We can only succeed at the scale we need if we’re all working together.”

The most recent success is a 1,594-acre conservation easement granted by a long-time Flint Hills ranching family. TNC holds the easement and is committed to monitoring it in perpetuity—ensuring that the land is never converted to other purposes and always stays tallgrass prairie.



Clockwise from left: Farmers gather at July 2022 irrigation field day. © Jonathan Aguilar/KSU; Birds roost at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. © Jim Griggs; Lee Wheeler demonstrates a mobile drip irrigation line. © Jake Thompson/K-State Research & Extension

# More Water for Wildlife

## Field days show farmers how to use new technology

“How do I make the most use of my irrigation water?” “What technologies can help me get more crop yield from the water I use?” “What will work best on my farm?” Recent field days brought south-central Kansas farmers and conservationists together to help answer these questions. The field days are part of an ongoing project to help farmers in the Rattlesnake Creek watershed use water more efficiently.

Rattlesnake Creek and the Great Bend Prairie Aquifer are the primary water sources for Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge was established in 1955 to protect habitat for migratory birds. The creek and aquifer are also the water sources for farmers in Edwards, Kiowa and Stafford counties, where annual rainfall is low. Here, The Nature Conservancy helps farmers adopt new tools and technology to use less water for crops so that the refuge can still have the water it needs. Participating farmers received a grant to cover half the cost of new irrigation equipment and access to a water scheduling tool developed by Kansas State University. Technical assistance helps them learn the new systems. Regular field days provide a critical opportunity for farmers to learn from each other.

“It’s about getting other producers together so they can talk about their experiences with the irrigation technology,” says Heidi Mehl, director of water and agriculture programs for TNC. “This type of information sharing is crucial if we’re going to successfully change how water is used in agriculture.”

*This work is supported by the Conservation Innovation Grants program at USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. Key partners include Kansas State University, WaterPACK and Groundwater Management District 5.*

**Motus wildlife tracking receivers have been installed in Kansas since 2020**

### Motus Network Grows



Lesser yellowlegs drawing © Robert Penner/TNC

Just two years ago, The Nature Conservancy installed the only Motus wildlife tracking receivers in Kansas. Since those two radio telemetry stations were set up to monitor flying animals in the Cheyenne Bottoms wetland complex, 10 more have come online. Students and scientists are now exploring new ways to track birds, bats and even toads in Kansas!

Researchers from all over the world use the Motus network to access a shared system of receivers. The majority of tags detected on the network in Kansas have been on TNC preserves—36 of the total 47 so far this year. Some of the species detected include black terns, common nighthawks, lesser yellowlegs, American kestrels and purple martins.



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