



# Letter from the Chair

## Gary Haden

Considerations from two different points of view occupy my mind as I think about drafting my “Letter from the Chair” for this issue of *Prairie Wings*. As Chairman of the Board of AOK, I am tasked with assuring that the organization realizes its mission while maintaining its financial stability; as a potential donor of property to the AOK sanctuary program, I am interested in seeing that the realization of my wishes for the preservation and management of my property in perpetuity are assured.

Sanctuaries contribute to the conservation goal of AOK’s three-pronged mission of defending wildlife and habitat through environmental advocacy, conservation, and education.

We envision AOK sanctuaries throughout the state - All Over Kansas. That way, people can connect with nature in their local area and be inspired to help AOK protect natural areas throughout the state.

Our sanctuary program also demonstrates how people and wildlife can coexist. For example, the Achterberg Wildlife-Friendly Demonstration Farm shows how prairie buffer strips along agricultural fields protect riparian woods and provide habitat for bobwhite quail.

As readers may recall, the property my wife Carolyn and I call Far West Farm in western Morris County is an Audubon of Kansas legacy sanctuary, which means it is in the pipeline to become an AOK sanctuary.

Generally, the first criterion for determining whether AOK would accept land as a permanent sanctuary is whether the property fits the AOK mission. Ideally, any land AOK accepts should offer benefits to wildlife, opportunities for education and recreation, and maybe even contributions to science. Once AOK’s board has determined that a property would enhance AOK, the next step is to determine how much time, effort and money are going to be needed to manage the property in perpetuity in accord with the donors’ wishes. Donors could, of course, voluntarily donate an unrealistic amount to assure that AOK accepts the property, or AOK could determine that the property is so valuable that it would accept the property with an obviously inadequate endowment, but the former is unlikely and the latter risky for AOK.

Property owners approach AOK for various reasons. While Carolyn and I want to know that our majestic bur oaks and their successors will be available for the public’s enjoyment and appreciation in the future, others want to see a family name preserved, wish to see the environmental improvements they have made to their property recognized and retained, or wish to make property available in the future for educational or recreational endeavors.

In negotiations over possible property donations, AOK’s interests, on the other hand, are assuring that we have the financial wherewithal to manage a future acquisition, for which we may inherit the financial responsibility relatively sooner or at some time in the

more distant prospect. Also, we must be able to make legal arrangements that would allow donors to sell some of the property they wish to transfer to AOK if in the future some unforeseen financial emergency should arise for them.

AOK cannot make management commitments it cannot keep. While there is no house or other lodging on Far West Farm, some of the properties brought forth as potential sanctuaries for AOK have attractive modern homes that would come with the property. Some of those homes would be ideal for visitors to the sanctuaries, but managing lodging adds a whole new element to the process.

If the issues I have described haven't convinced you of the complexities involved in AOK's evolving sanctuary program from both the donor's and AOK's points of view, consider that AOK doesn't get to choose where potential properties are located, so that AOK could easily have properties scattered throughout the state requiring staff to manage them. In fact, that is exactly the ultimate goal of AOK's Sanctuary Initiative: to have sanctuaries located throughout the state and staff to manage them.

It is an ambitious commitment, but as complicated as it might be, we at AOK think it is a worthwhile validation of the conservation goal in our mission statement.

AOK's 5,000-acre Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife

Sanctuary along Nebraska's northern border hosts nesting Bobolinks and a pair of Sandhill Cranes, affords viewers opportunities to see elk or performing Greater Prairie-Chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse, and currently is part of the range of a collared mountain lion that is being tracked by Nebraska Game and Parks. So, yes, our commitment has definitely shown that the results can be worth the effort.

Among AOK's goals in the near future is to have enough sanctuaries and enough accompanying endowments to allow us to hire a full-time property manager. That individual and future staff would not only manage current and future sanctuaries but would also be able to advise and assist property owners who might want to consider AOK as a landing site for their properties.

If you don't have property but believe in our vision and wish to help, you can designate that a donation you make be directed to AOK's Sanctuary Initiative where it will be included in an endowment fund that will go towards hiring and supporting a full-time AOK property manager to improve and maintain habitat on our sanctuaries. That will help AOK and the natural environment and will eventually make more land available in Kansas for public recreation.

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*Ensure the future of AOK and Prairie Wings! Legacy Gifts ensure the future success of AOK and the continuation of important initiatives such as Prairie Wings. AOK gratefully accepts gifts in the form of stocks, bonds, charitable gift annuities, trusts, and bequests, as well as assets to be sold such as gifts of land, real estate, and vehicles. Gifts of land to be preserved as wildlife sanctuaries require an adequate endowment to fund future operations and taxes; property must meet requirements stated in AOK's property acceptance policy. See the AOK brochure, Your Land, Your Legacy, copies of which can be obtained from the AOK office on request.*

*To learn more about AOK or ways to support our mission, please contact (785) 537-4385 or [aok@audubonofkansas.org](mailto:aok@audubonofkansas.org). Audubon of Kansas, Inc. is an independent 501(c)(3) organization that is neither administered nor funded by the National Audubon Society. Contributions are fully tax-deductible to the extent allowable by the IRS. Contributions can be sent to Audubon of Kansas, PO Box 1106, Manhattan, KS 66505 or visit our secure website: [www.audubonofkansas.org](http://www.audubonofkansas.org)*