

NATURE

KANSAS

Fall 2020 • nature.org/kansas



Photos courtesy Jeff Kennedy and John Mize

Jeff Kennedy and John Mize Join Board of Trustees

The Nature Conservancy's Kansas Board of Trustees is pleased to announce two attorneys, Jeff Kennedy (Wichita) and John Mize (Salina), have joined their ranks.

Jeff's practice at Martin Pringle, Attorneys at Law focuses on oil and gas, energy, environmental and real estate law. He served on the Kansas Energy Council and was a member of the Kansas Energy & Environmental Policy Advisory Group.

John recently retired from Clark, Mize and Linville, Chartered after a long career practicing health care and non-profit law. He has served on the Kansas Commission on Judicial Qualifications and holds a master's degree in nonprofit management.

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Cattle drive in the Flint Hills, Chase county, Kansas © Ryan Donnell

From Easement to Stewardship Flint Hills ranches get a conservation boost

Conservation easements have long been an important tool to protect farms, ranches and working forests across the United States. They have been especially effective in the Flint Hills, where nearly all the land is privately owned and more than 110,000 acres have been permanently protected with conservation easements. While easements are an effective strategy to curb the threat of development of native grasslands, other conservation challenges remain.

“Invasive species and the encroachment of trees are a pressing ecological issue in the Flint Hills,” says Tony Capizzo, Flint Hills Initiative manager.

That's why The Nature Conservancy launched a new initiative to help landowners enhance the conservation value of eased properties in the Flint Hills

of Kansas and Oklahoma. Stewardship assistance may be in the form of help with prescribed burning, equipment loans, mapping of invasive species or cost-share dollars. Emphasis will be placed on enhancing biodiversity of the property, and ongoing monitoring of plant and animal communities will measure success.

“Layering this additional conservation on top of easements advances our goal of maintaining the last expanse of tallgrass prairie in a truly meaningful way,” explains Capizzo. “And we hope that by providing landowners support, more will consider the long-term protection of their land through conservation easements.

To be eligible, land must have a perpetual conservation easement, but it does not need to be one held by TNC. Learn more at nature.org/flinthills.



The vast prairie of Smoky Valley Ranch is the centerpiece of TNC's work in western Kansas. © Ted Cable

Smoky Valley Ranch Made Whole Again

For the first time in 150 years, Smoky Valley Ranch is on its way to being entirely grassland. When The Nature Conservancy purchased the western Kansas shortgrass prairie property in 1999, several parcels had been carved out of the ranch, sold to other buyers and converted to cropland. TNC always intended to acquire those inholdings and make the ranch whole again. The final 528-acre piece was purchased this spring.

“Prairie is a process as much as it is a place you can point to,” says Matt Bain, western Kansas conservation manager. “It is a process that includes fire and grazing. Now that the ranch is completely unfragmented, we can better manage those processes.”

It won't happen overnight, though.

“Reconstruction is a better word for it than restoration,” explains Bain. “Many of the native seeds we need to return this land to prairie aren't commercially available, so we've had to hand-collect some seeds. And it will take a few years of cover crops and waiting out the long-term effects of residual herbicide before we can even begin planting in some places.”

Still, it's a vision long-awaited for the ranch—where the goal is to conserve what's left of the native prairie for the native wildlife that depend on it—and also for the ranchers who depend on it for their livelihood. The now 18,000-acre Smoky Valley Ranch welcomes visitors to the 1 and 5.5 mile hiking loops on the western boundary. Learn more at [nature.org/smokyvalleyranch](https://www.nature.org/smokyvalleyranch).

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Bridging Academics and Real-World Conservation

Our summer internships and fellowships looked very different this year. Virtual training by Zoom, less field work, more space between each other when we were in the field. But nature doesn't wait, and the work went on with the program designed to bridge the gap between academics and real-world conservation.



Claire Burch University of Oklahoma
National Science Foundation Research Traineeship Fellow



Connor Champney Fort Hays State University
Smoky Valley Ranch Intern



Malachai Harris Emporia State University
Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Intern



Alex Murray University of Kansas
David T. Beals III Healthy Streams for Kansas Fellow