

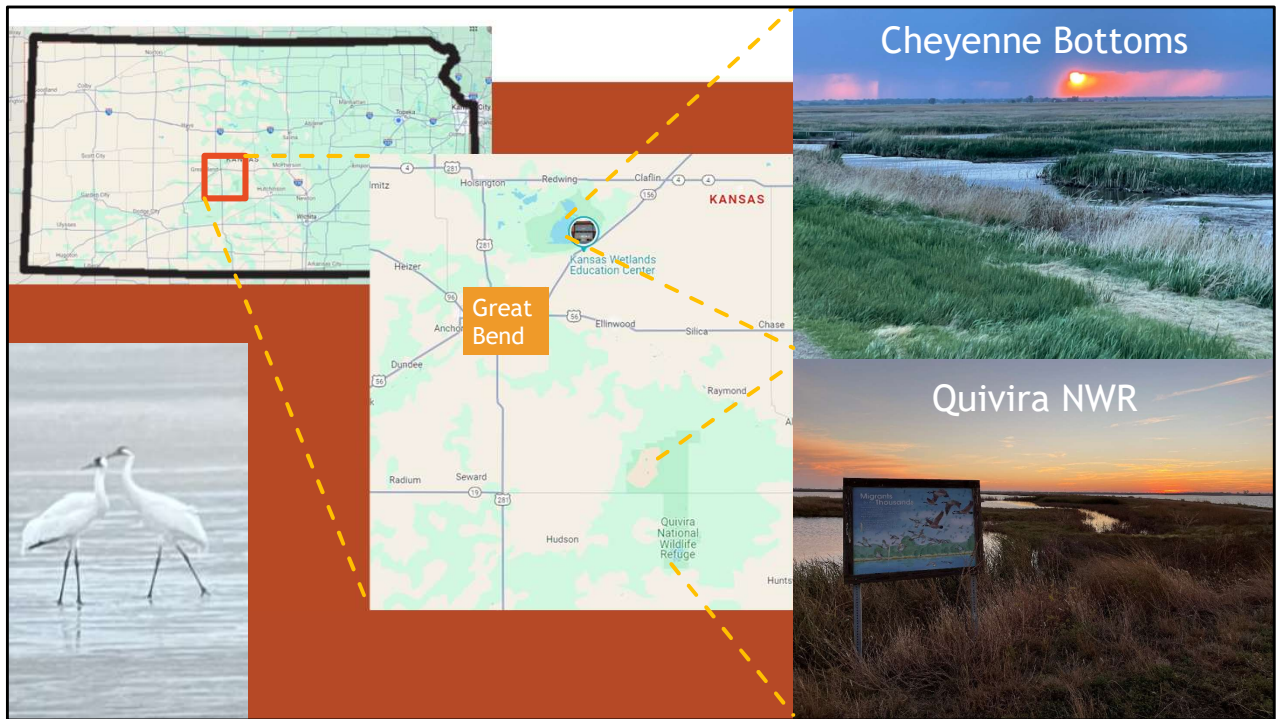
## **Audubon of Kansas and its New Executive Director: 20 years of differing environmental experiences now working together to defend wildlife in Kansas**

Audubon of Kansas' new Executive Director, Jackie Augustine, will bring her nearly 20 years of experience working on prairie-chickens in Kansas to the only environmental organization that is focused on Kansas issues. Jackie started studying the breeding behavior of prairie-chickens in 2003 while earning her PhD in Biology from Kansas State University, and has returned to Kansas nearly every year to continue her research. Most recently, she worked in western Kansas where the ranges of Lesser and Greater Prairie-Chickens overlap, and used robots and drones to study how the two species differ. Audubon of Kansas was registered as a 501c3 nonprofit in 1999. Since then, Ron Klataske and Audubon of Kansas have worked to protect prairie dogs and the federally endangered black-footed ferrets, ensure that Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge have the water they need to support migrating birds including the federally endangered Whooping Crane, combat the planting of invasive species including Old World Bluestem, and guide the siting of industrial wind energy to protect native habitat. Now that Audubon of Kansas and Jackie Augustine have teamed up, learn about the exciting new initiatives that are underway.

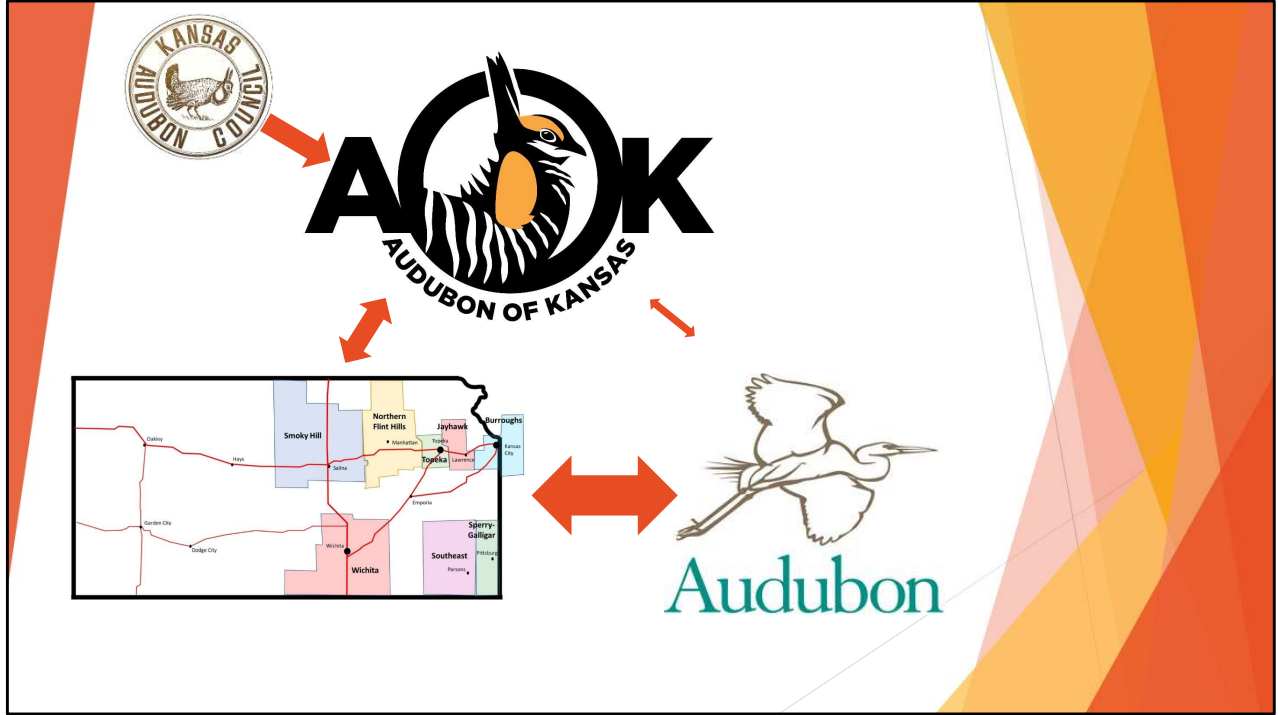
## Outline

- ▶ Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira
- ▶ So many Audubons...
- ▶ Kansas Audubon Council
- ▶ Audubon of Kansas
  - ▶ Conservation
  - ▶ Education
  - ▶ Advocacy



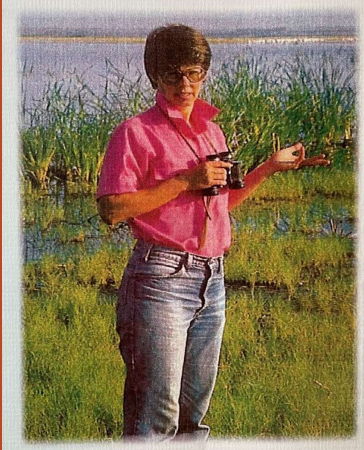


Throughout the talk, I will be referring to Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, two wetlands of international importance. They are in the central flyway and are an important stopover point for ducks, geese, waterbirds, shorebirds, and cranes to refuel during migration. Over 45% of the shorebird species in North America stop at these two refuges. These refuges are designated as critical habitat for the endangered Whooping Crane, a species that only numbers around 700 birds in the wild.



There are lots of different organizations with the 'Audubon' name. Audubon of Kansas, National Audubon, and local Audubon chapters are separate 501c3 nonprofit organizations, but we all share a passion for saving birds and their habitats. The precursor to Audubon of Kansas was the Kansas Audubon Council.

## **Kansas Audubon Council, founded in 1977**

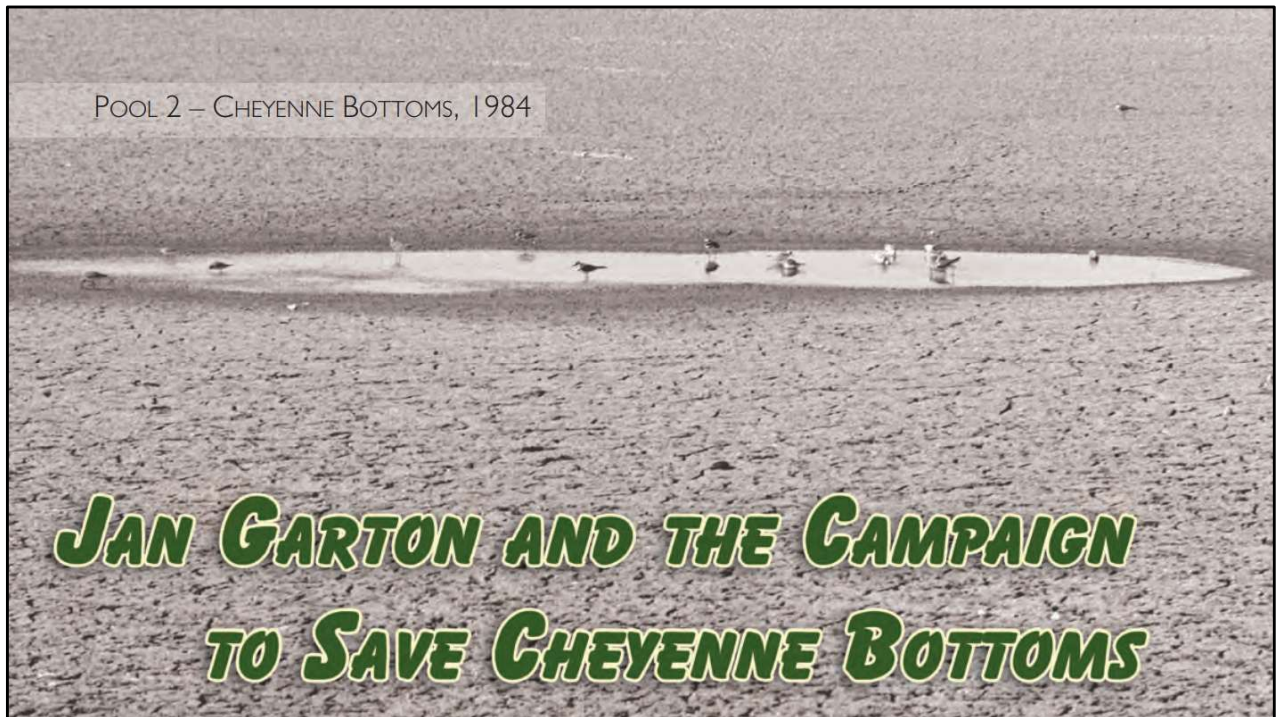


**Cheyenne Bottoms  
Restoration (1999)**



**Jan Garton & Sil Pembleton**

In the 1980s, Jan Garton and Sil Pembleton were leaders in the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, an Audubon chapter based out of Manhattan. They also became members of the Kansas Audubon Council. They looked around for an issue that would bring everyone together for bird conservation. They decided that the restoration of Cheyenne Bottoms was a key priority.



Water rights for the Bottoms were being ignored; stretches of the Arkansas River were dry; and flows from Walnut Creek, the immediate water source, were diminished.

Jan and Sil travelled to Pratt seeking a copy of a Cheyenne Bottoms restoration plan prepared years before by a former Bottoms manager. We were dismissively told, “It’s around here somewhere. Now don’t you ladies worry your pretty little heads. There’s \$2,000 in our budget to take care of the Bottoms this summer.”

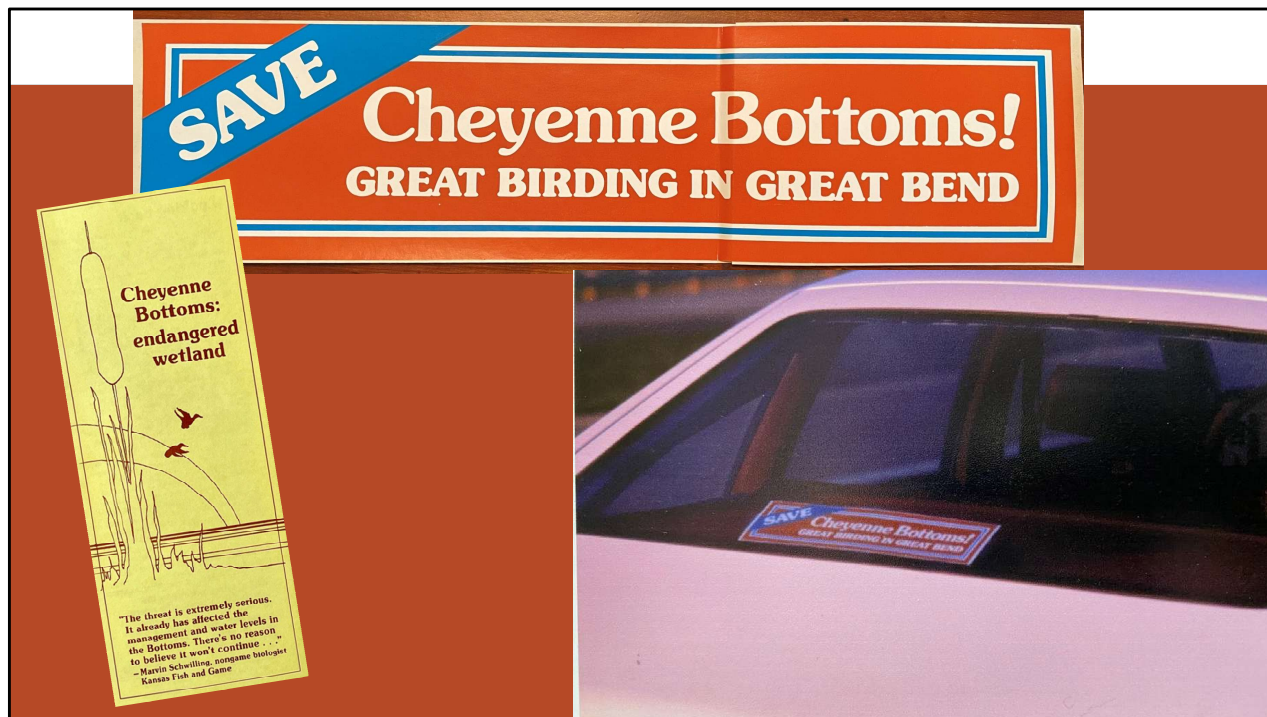
They asked Audubon chapters in the Kansas Audubon Council to write the Kansas Fish and Game Commission expressing their concern. They were invited back to Pratt after the agency received 12 letters.

“What have you been telling people? We have been getting letters from all over the state!”

They had the agency’s attention, but not their support. They were concerned that money spent on Cheyenne Bottoms would mean other areas would receive less support.

Jan and Sil gathered the Cheyenne Bottoms Task Force including:  
Kansas Audubon Council,  
Kansas Wildlife Federation,  
Kansas Chapter of the Sierra Club,

Ducks Unlimited Council,  
the American Fisheries Society,  
the Kansas Ornithological Society,  
Kansas Rural Center,  
Kansas Natural Resource Council,  
Kansas chapter of The Wildlife  
Society.



Tactics for raising public and legislative awareness statewide included: newsletters, posters, pamphlets, press releases, letters to the editor, establishment of a speakers' bureau and a prepared slide presentation, contacts with outdoor writers, resolutions, booths at public events, T-shirts, mugs and special events.

To emphasize the importance of water to the Cheyenne Bottoms wetland complex, members of the Kansas Chapter of The Wildlife Society organized an avid relay team of runners to carry water to the Capitol in Topeka. Alternately running distances of a mile to several miles at a time, members carried a PVC baton filled with water from the Bottoms. When they arrived in Topeka after a weekend of running, members provided Senators with a porcelain jug and Representatives with a beer bottle specially labeled Bottoms Up! Governor Carlin received both containers.

Jan said, "Best of all, lots and lots of just plain folks said over and over again that Cheyenne Bottoms had been a part of their childhood, an experience in their coming of age. They didn't want to see it die. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of people spoke out." The ripples became waves of public action.


Jan met with Representative Ron Fox, Vice-Chairman of the Kansas House of Representatives Energy and Natural Resources Committee, who immediately voiced his support for our project.

One of the Audubon letterwriters happened to be a woman of influence who called her son, State Senator Joseph Norvell from Hays, to explain how important those wetlands were – and to tell him to do something about it!

Now they had a champion in both the Kansas State Senate and Kansas House of Representatives.

<p>SAVING CHEYENNE BOTTOMS  A conference at Barton County Community College  Great Bend, Kansas  September 22, 1984</p>	
Friday, Sept. 21	
7:00 p.m.	Film fest Fine Arts Building Room 129
Saturday, Sept. 22	
Registration 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.	Fine Arts Building
10:00	Welcome -- Jerry Lindberg, Great Bend Chamber of Commerce
10:05	Introductory remarks Rep. Ron Fox, vice-chairman of the House Energy and Natural Resources committee
10:15	"Cheyenne Bottoms: Endangered Wetland" Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society
10:30	"What's so important about Cheyenne Bottoms?" Jean Schulenberg, Admire
10:45	"Is it all Colorado's fault?" John Campbell, Assistant Attorney General of Kansas
11:05	"Water supply for Cheyenne Bottoms" Tom McClain, Kansas Geological Survey
11:25	"How does the State Water Plan protect wetland and wildlife resources like Cheyenne Bottoms?" Clark Duffy, Kansas Water Office
11:45	Questions and answers
12:15	Luncheon -- BCCC Union "What's the legislature's role in saving Cheyenne Bottoms?" Senator Joe Norvell, Assistant Minority Leader
1:30	Kansas Fish & Game presentation Marvin Schwillig Stan Wood Darrell Montei
3:00	Questions and answers
3:30	Break
3:45	Caucus to coordinate goals and activities of interested groups Mari Peterson, Exec. Director, Kansas Natural Resource Council
3:45	Tour of Cheyenne Bottoms and the Arkansas River diversion dam
6:00	Banquet -- BCCC Union "Why Cheyenne Bottoms is of national significance" Lynn Greenwalt, National Wildlife Federation
Sunday, Sept. 23	
6:30 a.m.	Birding trip to Quivira National Wildlife Refuge
10:00	Leave Quivira

SAVING CHEYENNE BOTTOMS



sponsored by the  
KANSAS AUDUBON COUNCIL  
and  
KANSAS WILDLIFE FEDERATION  
september 22, 1984

A conference was held in 1984 to devise a plan John Campbell, Kansas Assistant Attorney General discussed Colorado's impact on the Arkansas River. Tom McClain, Kansas Geological Survey, highlighted the water supply problems for Cheyenne Bottoms. Clark Duffy, from the Kansas Water Office, illustrated how the State Water Plan protects wetlands and wildlife resources. Senator Joe Norvell and Representative Ron Fox provided insight to the legislature's role in saving the Bottoms. And Kansas Fish and Game officials discussed current situations and possible solutions.



L to R: Representative Ron Fox, Vice-Chair House Energy and Natural Resources Committee; Senator Joe Norvell; Jan Garton; and Mike Hayden, Speaker of the House.

Jan and Sil had a plan, and had state support, but the legislators were still unimpressed.

They needed something that would make a big splash!

Save the Bottoms stadium cushion was hatched. Operating on a shoestring budget from the Flint Hills Audubon chapter treasury, Jan found orange fabric for sale cheap (cloth rejected by the Denver Broncos) and designed a wetland logo for the pillow. With humor, passion and determination Jan Garton urged citizens to visit, write or call their legislators about the importance of the Cheyenne Bottoms wetlands. And with these words, she made the statewide offer for folks to sponsor a seat cushion for their senator or representative:

“IS YOUR LEGISLATOR A SITTING DUCK?” Sponsor a cushion, so while the legislators’ “bottoms” are resting comfortably, the representatives may be encouraged to think favorably about saving our “Bottoms!”

A press conference was scheduled in Topeka on Feb. 12, 1985, and with TV cameras rolling, Jan delivered the line with a coy grin, “If we save your bottoms, will you please save ours?”

This unique idea caught the attention of the legislators, who made sure they were in their offices to receive their hand-delivered seat cushions, which came with background information and the names of the local constituents who had sponsored their cushions. No longer could a Senator or Representative say they were not familiar with the issue.



1992 - \$1M to restore Cheyenne Bottoms

1985 Kansas Legislature approved a funding measure for a study of Cheyenne Bottoms, looking at its geology, biology, ecology and hydrology and making recommendations on the best way to restore the area.

1986, the Saving Cheyenne Bottoms II Conference was held in Great Bend. Researchers from the Kansas Geological Survey and Kansas Biological Survey introduced the audience to the findings of the recently completed feasibility study and provided an overview of the tentative options.

1987, the Environmental Assessment was submitted to the Fish and Game Commission.

1989, the Water Plan Fund passes with funding from the State General Fund, Economic Development Initiative Fund, Clean Drinking Water Fee Fund, fees on water use, sale of fertilizer and pesticide registration and pollution fines.

1992 funding of \$1,000,000 for restoration of Cheyenne Bottoms: 36 to 0 in the Senate and 107 to 17 in the House, the Kansas legislature voted to override the Governor's veto!  
1999, Jan donated 1.5 cubic feet of documents and associated artifacts to the Kansas State Historical Society

1990, in Washington, D.C., Jan Garton was honored with a prestigious Chevron Conservation Award. In 36 years, she was only the third Kansan to be recognized by the country's oldest private conservation award program judged by a panel of independent conservationists.

The presentation of awards began with these words:

IN SERVICE TO THE EARTH AS A CITIZEN VOLUNTEER ON MAY 16TH, HERE IN WASHINGTON, D. C., WE HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE TAKEN MEANINGFUL ACTION TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE OUR QUALITY OF LIFE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.



**Audubon of Kansas, founded in 1999**

**AOK's 3-Fold Mission  
Advocacy – Conservation – Education**

The Cheyenne Bottoms story continues to inspire Audubon of Kansas' work today.

Audubon of Kansas was founded in 1999 when the Kansas Audubon Council wanted to have a larger impact and hired Ron Klataske as its first Executive Director. I (Jackie Augustine) became the second Executive Director in 2021.

## **Audubon of Kansas 1. Conservation**



The first of Audubon of Kansas' 3-fold mission is conservation.

We enact wildlife-friendly practices on our four Protected Areas to demonstrate that people and wildlife can coexist.

At the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary near Bassett, Nebraska, Audubon of Kansas oversees a 5000-acre cattle-grazed ranch. Different grass heights are maintained to appeal to various grassland bird species which prefer grass at different heights. There is also a wetland along the Niobrara which supports breeding Sandhill Cranes and rails.

The Achterberg Wildlife-Friendly Demonstration Farm near Lincoln, KS, shows how buffer strips allow wildlife, such as bobwhite quail, to flourish alongside row crop agriculture.

At Mt Mitchell Heritage Prairie south of Wamego, we work with the Prairie Guards to preserve the prairie and history of the area while providing public walking trails.

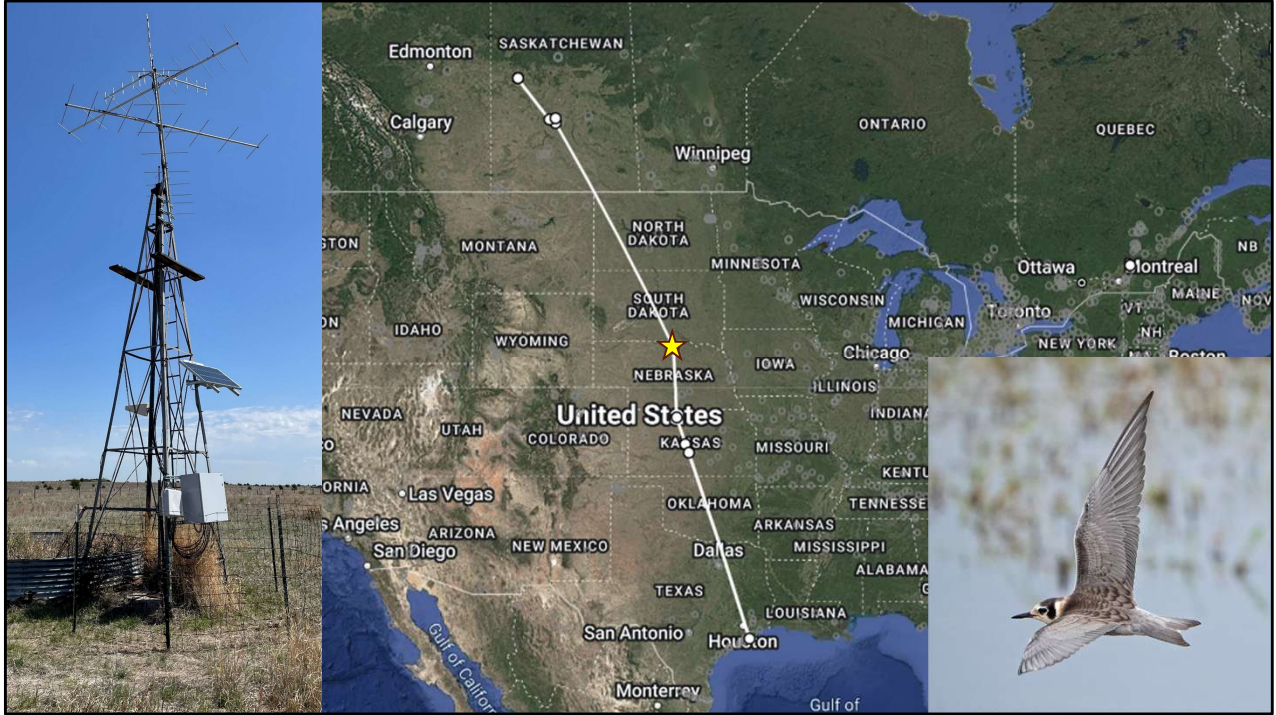
Far West Wildlife-Friendly Demonstration Farm is located near Herington, KS. The majority of the property is row crop agriculture, hay meadow, and grazed pasture. A nature trail follows Clark's Creek where 100+ year old bur oaks tower above.

# Audubon of Kansas 1. Conservation

## Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary



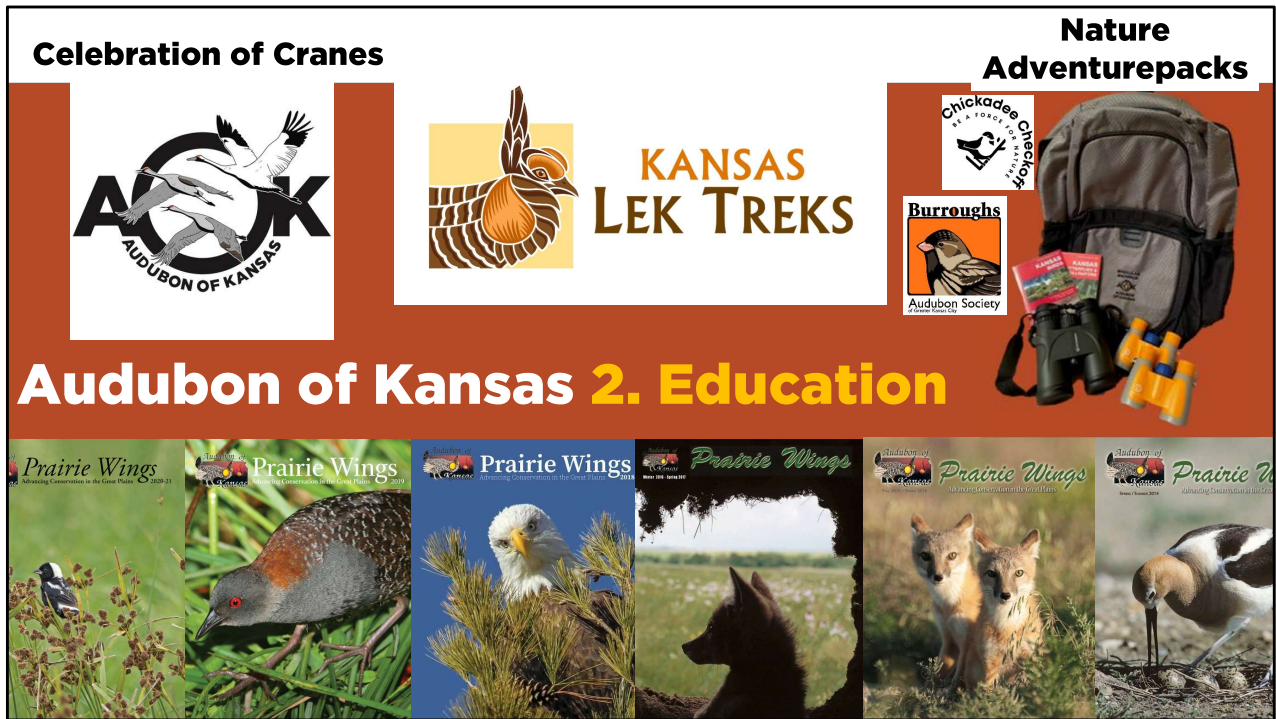
At the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary is along the Niobrara River in northern Nebraska.



At Hutton Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary, we have installed a motus tower. These towers help researchers track small birds that they have caught, affixed a lightweight transmitter, and released. A Black Tern was tagged in such a way in Saskatchewan. It passed over our property in Nebraska, continued to visit both Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira before reaching Houston.

Birds connect us!

This shows the importance of having wetland stopover points along the migration routes.



The second part of Audubon of Kansas’ mission is education.

We have two festivals each year. The Celebration of Cranes occurs the first weekend in November and provides opportunities to see cranes and other waterbirds at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. 2022 will be the first year for our Prairie-Chicken Festival. It will occur in April in Hays and offer opportunities to view both Greater and Lesser Prairie-Chickens.

Our Nature Adventurepack program is providing libraries with backpacks containing adult and children’s binoculars, fold-out guides for birds and butterflies, and a map of their county showing locations to view nature. Library patrons check them out just like books! AOK members receive our Prairie Wings Publication with educational information. We also do public outreach such as talks like I am providing today.



Viewing cranes at our Celebration of Cranes festival



At our Celebration of Cranes Festival, you will see 1000s of Sandhill Cranes.



At the Celebration of Cranes festival, you will also have a good chance of seeing the endangered Whooping Crane.



Audubon of Kansas has a 3-fold mission.

For advocacy, Audubon of Kansas has been ensuring Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms have the water they need to support large flocks of migrating shorebirds and ducks, as well as the endangered Whooping Cranes pictured.

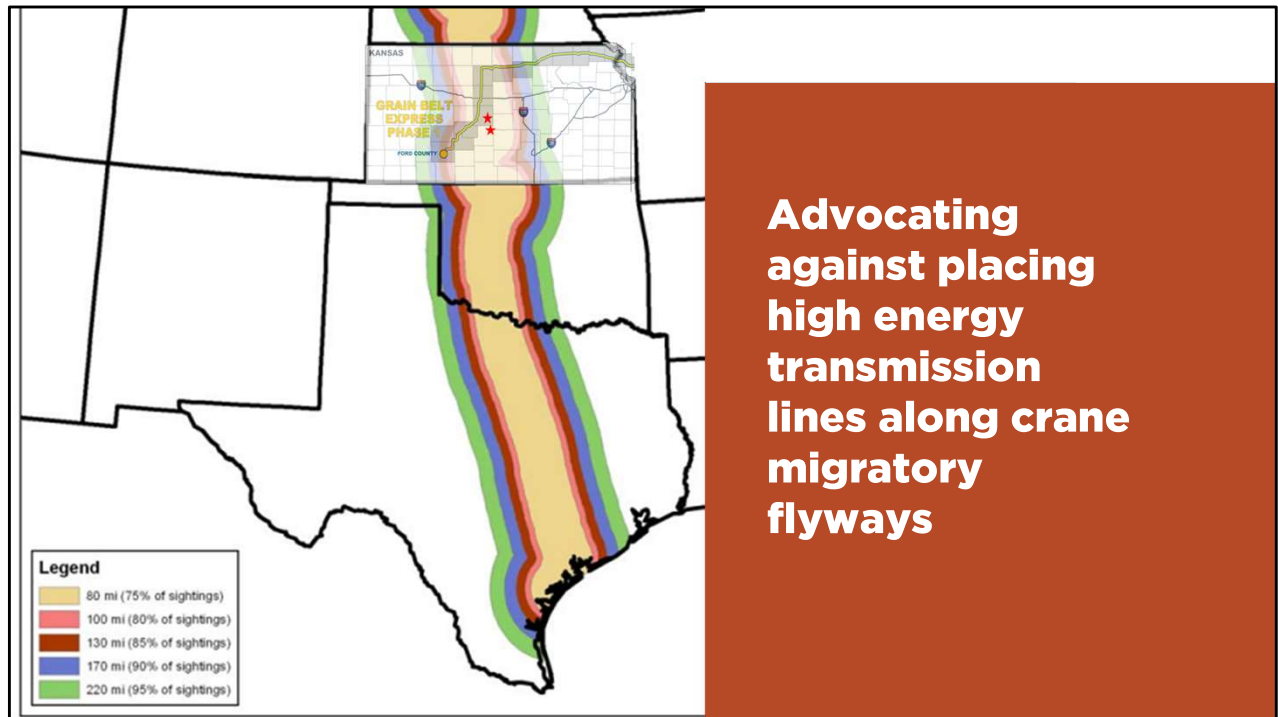
Invasive species, like Old World bluestem, threaten to convert our diverse prairies to non-native monocultures. We work with Department of Transportation to spread information about preventing their spread.

While we understand that wind energy provides economic development and is necessary to transition to clean energy, Audubon of Kansas advocates for the proper siting of the turbines to that they do not encumber natural resources.

Finally, Audubon support initiatives to conserve declining species like prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, and prairie-chickens.



The number one cause of mortality for juvenile Whooping Cranes is collision with high power transmission lines during their first migration. Juvenile cranes have poor visual acuity, and are a bit clumsy, so they have trouble detecting the power line and maneuvering around them. If the lines must be constructed, we advocate for increasing visibility of the lines by adding UV light (birds can see in the UV portion of the spectrum).



**Advocating against placing high energy transmission lines along crane migratory flyways**

Audubon of Kansas advocates for siting lines away from this important migratory corridor for endangered Whooping Cranes. The Grain Belt Express Transmission Line has a significant portion of its length in the most concentrated route for Whooping Cranes.



The left photo shows how an industrial solar energy facility can give the appearance of water. Our concern is that waterbirds will mistake the solar panels for water and try to land on them. Many waterbirds need a running start on water in order to regain flight. Because there is no water under the panels, waterbirds will be unable to fly away and die of exposure.

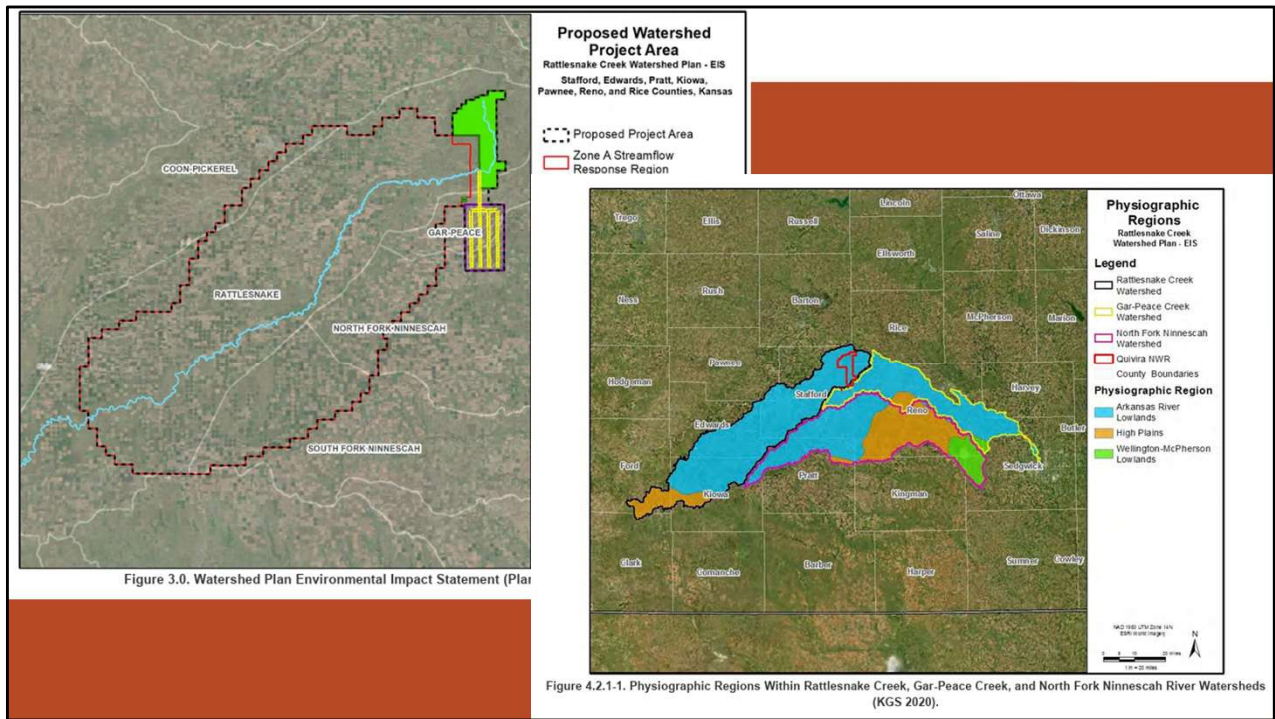
An industrial solar energy facility was proposed directly adjacent to Cheyenne Bottoms. Audubon of Kansas was the only environmental organization to appear at two in person public hearings opposing the location of the development. We were successful in advocating a 2-mile no-build buffer from the bottoms, with an additional 2-mile buffer that will undergo extra scrutiny if development were to be considered there.



**Litigation to  
ensure Quivira  
has the water it  
needs to support  
endangered  
Whooping  
Cranes**

After decades of voluntary conservation efforts that did not lead to improvements in water available to Quivira, Audubon of Kansas sued the US Fish and Wildlife Service for not enforcing their senior water right for Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Excessive groundwater pumping for agricultural irrigation has led to Quivira not having the water it needs to support endangered species, like the Whooping Crane.

Our lawsuit led to the formation of the Rattlesnake Creek Working Group – a group consisting of farmers, local businesses, the Kansas Water Office, politicians, the local groundwater management district, and Audubon of Kansas. This group is working towards getting water to Quivira. Audubon of Kansas will continue to work towards a solution that is permanent and legally defensible.



The group proposes a solution of drilling a new water wellfield in an adjacent watershed and placing the water in Rattlesnake Creek, just upriver from Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Audubon of Kansas opposes this plan. The adjacent watershed feeds water to Cheney Reservoir, which in turn helps provide water to the city of Wichita. Audubon of Kansas would like to see a sustainable solution within the Rattlesnake Creek watershed.



Audubon of Kansas has a strong legacy of protecting wetlands.



## How to help

- ▶ Advocate for private lands conservation
- ▶ Advocate for Endangered Species Act Protections
- ▶ Sign up for AOK newsletters
- ▶ Become a member of Audubon of Kansas
- ▶ Attend the Celebration of Cranes or Kansas Lek Treks
- ▶ Be a voice for wildlife

Sign up for our newsletter





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**Audubon of Kansas:  
Advocacy - Conservation - Education**  
<http://audubonofkansas.org>



Sign up for our  
newsletter



I love hearing feedback on this presentation. Please contact me with any questions about birds, native plants, or plants for birds!