

Flint Hills Ranching Impact Oral History Project, Phase I
Partially funded by the Kansas Humanities Council
Jane Koger Interview, 7 July 2008

1 **Interview conducted by Bill Smith; Recorded on Marantz Digital Recorder;**
2 **Transcribed by Bill Smith**

3
4 **Track 73**

5
6 **Bill:** This is Bill Smith with the Heritage Task Force of the Flint Hills Tourism Coalition
7 working on the Ranching Impact Study partially financed by the Kansas Humanities
8 Council. I am with Jane Koger at her ranch, southeast of Matfield Green in Chase
9 County. How long have you been here, Jane?

10
11 **Jane:** I've been on this particular ranch since 1979. I have a lot of history here. My great-
12 grandparents homesteaded just over the hill. Probably one of the most interesting things
13 about the ranch is that my sister and I decided to buy some land here in Chase County.
14 Listed in the Grass and Grain, a local publication, was some property; it happened to be
15 owned by the Bell Family, of Cottonwood Falls. They'd started Jim Bell and Son, and
16 Tom was working at the bank. We went in and visited with Tom and decided, yes, we
17 would buy that piece of property. Well, back in those days, if I can use that expression...

18
19 **Bill:** This is just fine.

20
21 **Jane:** ...we had just had abstracts; there wasn't title insurance. So, when the abstract
22 went to the abstracting office, where our aunt worked, she was going through them: Low
23 and behold! Our great-grandparents had owned that property, originally. They had
24 homesteaded it, in the 1870s, and lived there until about 1915. And, they had sold the
25 property to some other folks, and then it had sold again to the Bells. When my great-
26 grandparents sold it, they moved up to some land near Bazaar. My mother and her four
27 sisters were born up there. They had just assumed that was the Beedle homestead. But,
28 the original Beedle homestead was out here. We did not know that. Nobody knew that;
29 when we bought that.

30
31 **Bill:** Isn't that something! You've got to look at the records.

32
33 **Jane:** It's like: Am I where I belong? I absolutely think so. And, another story that tied
34 into that was the High Prairie Cemetery and the High Prairie School are... if we'd get up
35 and look out the window, the cemetery is still there... they moved that school house to
36 property I bought about 1984, I believe. It is called the Talkingtons; because the
37 Talkingtons had lived there. They had taken that High Prairie School and made it into a
38 garage, so it had two garage doors in the side. I wanted to put another building there, so I
39 was going to tear it down. We knocked the ceiling out, and a box of books fell out. That's
40 where my grandfather had gone to school, and all his siblings.

41
42 **Bill:** Oh, my goodness.

43
44 **Jane:** So, I have the ledger from 1899 to 1903 and I know when my grandfather was
45 tardy to school.

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46

47 **Bill:** Oh, isn't that wonderful!

48

49 **Jane:** So, I really do have that feeling, that I am where I belong, doing what I should be
50 doing.

51

52 **Bill:** So, what are you doing?!

53

54 **Jane:** So what am I doing? I'm managing tall grass prairie.

55

56 **Bill:** Good!

57

58 **Jane:** Lots of times I probably just respond that I'm a rancher, but the reality is, and I
59 came to this rather slowly, I guess, because when I started out, it was the late seventies, I
60 was in my mid-twenties. I was fighting with my family, and the rest of the world. Also,
61 about what women ought to be able to do.

62

63 **Bill:** Sure.

64

65 **Jane:** And, at that point, I probably wanted to be president of the livestock association,
66 and that was my goal.

67

68 **Bill:** I've had three daughters who have fought the same battles. They've followed you
69 by a few years, but... the one that was born in 1960 still thinks that she can do anything,
70 anywhere.

71

72 **Jane:** That's right!

73

74 **Bill:** And, she's right!

75

76 **Jane:** And, we ought to be able to. But, over time, I shifted from it just being about
77 cattle, and maybe breaking some barriers... into really looking at what responsibility we
78 really have. In the last several years, probably in the last five, there was a slow shift, but
79 it has gotten bigger in the last five years... really, what are we doing? Part of it happened
80 with the creation of the national park, at Strong City.

81

82 **Bill:** Good.

83

84 **Jane:** Because there's not much difference between what we see out the window right
85 here and what they have in the national park system.

86

87 **Bill:** You are pointing south, and the park is north!

88

89 **Jane:** I'm pointing right out the window...

90

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91 **Track 74**

92

93 **Jane:** ... and the park is twenty miles north.

94

95 **Bill:** We are looking out a beautiful scene of tall grass prairie land, as we look out the
96 window.

97

98 **Jane:** And the point being, I've got to not look at that as a pasture. As a rancher, I have
99 too narrow of a view – I look at it as a pasture; and I need to look at it as an ecosystem.

100

101 **Bill:** Yes

102

103 **Jane:** So, I am managing an ecosystem. And, it is not just whether or not we can get Big
104 Macs off of it. It is whether or not we can keep our Greater Prairie Chickens, our Regal
105 Fritillaries, our caterpillars, our insects, our butterflies, our birds...

106

107 **Bill:** The whole ecosystem. [Pause on the tape, interruption] Ok, we're going again.

108

109 **Jane:** We're going again. I think what I was talking about... it is the entire ecosystem, it
110 is not just a pasture for cattle. That has been one of the biggest shifts.

111

112 **Bill:** That is why I wanted to talk to you, particularly; to discuss that thought process, and
113 what it has brought about and evolved into and what you still see coming forward.

114

115 **Jane:** Ok. It comes from several different directions. I'll start with the ranching aspect.
116 That is, I calve in May and June, which is not traditional.

117

118 **Bill:** That's unusual.

119

120 **Jane:** Almost everyone would calve in February.

121

122 **Bill:** An earlier interview said they were calving in the fall, and that shocked me. And
123 now, I'm hearing a new one. That is good.

124

125 **Jane:** And it is a simple question, the why is simple. Why would I ask my cows to have
126 their nutritional needs when my grass is at its lowest nutritional output? In February, it
127 just doesn't get much lower. That cow was designed to be a grazer. And, to me, hauling
128 hay to cattle is like cutting wheat and hauling it twenty miles to throw into a combine.

129

130 **Bill:** It is, isn't it!

131

132 **Jane:** That's what it seems to me. So, it was thinking about that shift in my ranching
133 mentality, that got me to looking at the whole system. Why are we bucking the system?
134 ...or manipulating the system? When do deer have their young?

135

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136 **Bill:** Go with the flow!

137

138 **Jane:** You don't see deer having fawns in February! So, I took a class to work through
139 this and to see what was really there; and it just made sense to me that to let that cow
140 have that calf and have her highest nutritional needs be when that grass is at its highest
141 nutritional output. So, we shifted that to May. So, that is one piece of it, how it works in
142 the ranching community. Another one is I put the ranch in a conservation easement; so
143 that it would always be prairie. Basically, that means I sold the development rights to this
144 ranch. So, it is not going to be in a subdivision. It is not going to have oil or gas wells on
145 it.

146

147 **Bill:** And a lot of your fellow ranchers have done that; and a lot of them think you are
148 crazy.

149

150 **Jane:** Yes. There are some on both sides.

151

152 **Bill:** I think it is wonderful!

153

154 **Jane:** I really want my nieces and/or nephews, or family members, to see this land the
155 way I see it. Because my great-grandparents homesteaded here, does it look like it did
156 when they were here?

157

158 **Bill:** Does your place include where they homesteaded?

159

160 **Jane:** Yes, it does. It includes that. And then, the other piece of it is, we started a
161 program a few years ago called "patch burning." And with it, we talk about we're doing
162 "patch learning" too; because, as we've been studying that, first we started doing a bird
163 survey. Well, when we started doing the bird survey, we discovered there was a Prairie
164 Chicken booming ground on the ranch. For years, about fifteen years, I had a program
165 called Prairie Women Adventures and Retreat, where people came to help me work
166 cattle. Then I discovered all kinds of people would like to see Prairie Chickens at a
167 booming ground, because nobody gets to do that anymore, that is kind of rare. And then,
168 we started doing a butterfly survey because we found out that there are certain butterflies
169 that need really good prairie to exist. The Regal Fritillary is to the butterfly world what
170 the Greater Prairie Chicken is for the birds. And, historically, where we have burned
171 everything every year...

172

173 **Track 75**

174

175 **Jane:** ... we are burning off... all those butterflies lay their eggs in the fall. So we are
176 just wiping them out, before they have a chance.

177

178 **Bill:** That's why the counts are down.

179

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180 **Jane:** Oh, our bird counts are down. Even our Meadowlark counts are down. All prairie
181 birds are ground nesting birds. Due to our burning, and our double stocking, which came
182 out of K-State in the mid-70s, I believe, there is no nesting habitat. That is where we have
183 just overlooked one whole part...

184

185 **Bill:** ...part of the ecosystem.

186

187 **Jane:** Yes, we have. I have talked to people. If you are a rancher, wanting to make
188 money, burning your pastures and double stocking it will probably put more money in
189 your pocket than anything else. But, how long can we keep doing something that keeps
190 putting dollars in your pocket and wiping out several different species at the same time.

191

192 **Bill:** And we really don't know what the loss of those species will do to the prairie over
193 the long run.

194

195 **Jane:** And that is what brought me back to "I'm managing an ecosystem" I'm not
196 "running a pasture." We have to be able to see it...

197

198 **Bill:** Running a pasture is just a portion of the responsibility.

199

200 **Jane:** It is just a part of it, absolutely. And, the patch burning allows us... Patch burning,
201 for us, is to divide the fields into three areas of about equal size. You only burn one third
202 of it each year. So, in a three year period, you've burned the whole pasture once. We
203 have been even happier than I ever thought we would be with it. When I first saw it, I
204 thought, this might be good. There are a lot of people who do rotational grazing by
205 putting in hot wires. To me, that seemed like a waste of good management; too much
206 labor. So, what we are doing, we are getting them to go where we want by just burning it.

207

208 **Bill:** My interview with Paul Seeley, he was one of the first to mention the patch burning
209 concept, at different times of the year, different parts, is really more natural; what the
210 Native Americans did, what lightning does, naturally. If you stop and think about it, it
211 really makes more sense, for the whole system, than to do the whole thing, every year, at
212 the same time.

213

214 **Jane:** That is the challenge: How you get people to stop, and think it through; and not
215 just do what we've always done. And, many time, in agriculture, who got the ranch... the
216 son. And, when did the son learn how to do everything? From the time he was old
217 enough to follow his dad around.

218

219 **Bill:** Absolutely.

220

221 **Jane:** And, he wasn't ever going to anything different than his dad, and his dad never did
222 anything different than his dad, so all of a sudden, nobody's...

223

224 **Bill:** You've gone through a hundred years.

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225

226 **Jane:** You've gone through easily a hundred years.

227

228 **Bill:** And if you didn't have a maverick in the group, you've got no change.

229

230 **Jane:** That's absolutely! So I've look back at those...

231

232 **Bill:** I've lived through 70 of those years, myself...

233

234 **Jane:** Well, I can see how it happens, and with my nephews here this summer, I see how
235 the challenge comes too, when one of the young people says: "Well, Aunt Jane, why
236 can't we do it this way?" And, whether I can be big enough to say: "I think that's a good
237 idea, let's try that."

238

239 **Bill:** Let's try that. Yes.

240

241 **Jane:** Instead of saying, I've been ranching here for thirty years; I know what I'm doing.

242

243 **Bill:** Instead of getting into the long argument about...

244

245 **Jane:** That's right.

246

247 **Bill:** "I've never been incorporated on my farm, why should I..." That was my dad and
248 my argument...

249

250 **Jane:** Oh. Yep.

251

252 **Bill:** Back in the 60s and 70s. I was starting to read about business...

253

254 **Jane:** Of course.

255

256 **Bill:** ...and it seemed to me that for long-term planning purposes, the farm ought to be
257 incorporated. His dad had never done it that way, and he'd never done it that way; and
258 he'd been real successful. His biggest concern was... and this is irrelevant, but... Every
259 year, when he went into the bank to renew his loans, his net asset value had increased...

260

261 **Jane:** Yes.

262

263 **Bill:** ...for forty years. And, he wasn't going to anything that was going to jeopardize
264 that. Of course, the world changed about that time, and whole thing went to pot anyway;
265 so those new ideas might have been useful.

266

267 **Jane:** That's right. We have to be open to that. We have to keep reading. Because I
268 mended a cross road with my dad when I first started ranching, over the very thing that he

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269 was... and this issue has been brought in my family a lot... I think, rather than have them
270 take it personally, we need to see that was the way it was done.

271

272 **Bill:** Oh, yes.

273

274 **Jane:** And, where was a father gonna' ...

275

276 **Track 76**

277

278 **Jane:** ... learn, or even why would he think: "I ought to see if one of my daughters wants
279 it." So after those years of not speaking, then I had to learn somehow. So, I went to a
280 lot... I asked people. Plus, if you are a woman, and you go in and you ask, they don't
281 think you know anyway, so I could go in and sit at the parts store and ask anything that I
282 wanted. I could go to any meeting on cattle...

283

284 **Bill:** You turned it to your advantage.

285

286 **Jane:** Yes. They didn't expect me to know anything, so I could ask any question I
287 wanted. And I did! And, I was never embarrassed the whole idea is, you ought to learn.
288 And, as long as you are always learning that is what is important.

289

290 **Bill:** As the father of three daughters, I appreciate that. I know what you were going
291 through. Good for you!

292

293 **Jane:** You learn new ways. There were people along the way who really got me started
294 in the right direction, I think. There were three guys in the Soil Conservation Service, and
295 I still know them. They were like: "Jane, you've really got to think about grass
296 management." And it is hard...

297

298 **Bill:** And I would think they probably appreciated you asking those questions. Did they?

299

300 **Jane:** I think so.

301

302 **Bill:** I would assume they were learning new things as they were coming into business
303 and saw many of the existing ranchers resist even trying new ideas. Is that correct?

304

305 **Jane:** Right. Yes. Somebody that all of sudden was willing to listen...

306

307 **Bill:** ...listen and try it, and check out some of those new theories.

308

309 **Jane:** And that especially happened...

310

311 **Bill:** And I'm sure they weren't all right, either.

312

313 **Jane:** Because there aren't any right answers. We don't know.

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314

315 **Bill:** At different times, different things work; different weather conditions.

316

317 **Jane:** That's right. And to me, that is the beauty of the patch burn. We know it is not
318 THE answer, but it is better than what we have been doing.

319

320 **Bill:** Right.

321

322 **Jane:** And, it gets us started... in a certain direction.

323

324 **Bill:** Maybe your nieces and nephews will find a better way, by having an open mind.

325

326 **Jane:** And, it's fun; if they learn that. It is the same as you learn the way that may not be
327 right. They are learning the names of the plants. They are seeing that it really does work.
328 And, they have a ranch. So they can go there and say: "Wait a minute. I don't have
329 Prairie Chicken here, and I don't have any nesting cover." You find out what people are
330 interested in. If they like quail hunting, if they like deer hunting, then, it is a management
331 issue. You manage for all of those.

332

333 **Bill:** Work for the best results. So, what have you been working on for the last four of
334 five years?

335

336 **Jane:** We call it the Homestead Range Renewal Initiative...and that is the other big
337 change on this ranch. You know, normally... you might have noticed when you walked
338 in the back door, there is a sign there that says: "This is my ranch; I'll do as I please."
339 [Laughter] And, that's what we've all believed through the years, but when we started the
340 patch burn experiment, we named it the Homestead Range Renewal Initiative, and
341 instead of it just being me, we put together a team.

342

343 **Bill:** That's great.

344

345 **Jane:** We had somebody from the Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife
346 Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, another rancher, a youth partner
347 (my nephew), and a researcher. All the decisions were made by these six people. Now, of
348 course, ...

349

350 **Bill:** Getting both input and the output goes back to them?

351

352 **Jane:** Right! We meet, and we discuss things, because we want to be sure water quality
353 has a voice. And that wildlife had a voice. And, ranchers... there was a rancher, to say:
354 "You guys do that, and you're going to wreck everything." Or, you can't do that. Or, you
355 discover little things. An experiment, that doesn't allow for the flexibility you need in the
356 real ranching world, isn't going to work. So, if you have a set-up, and your neighbors
357 look at you and say: if you can't do thus and so... if you can't winter in that pasture what
358 good is that experiment. So, we wanted everybody to have some input. You know, we

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359 talk a lot about diversity: plant diversity, especially, diversity in everything, the flora and
360 fauna. The fastest way to get that is to have diversity in your management.

361

362 **Bill:** In the people who are making the decisions.

363

364 **Jane:** Right. Plus, who on earth thinks they are smart enough to know all you need to
365 know to manage a ranch. It is beyond me. I was always overwhelmed. If I started
366 learning about veterinary things, what do I need to know about health...

367

368 **Bill:** Even just the number of species you are dealing with...

369

370

Track 77

371

372 **Jane:** Right!

373

374 **Bill:** Really. It is not just the cows, and it is not just one kind of grass. And you can't
375 learn all that. Rather than just go to these people; I can just see me, going to one person,
376 they'd say you've got to one thing for wildlife, and then you'd go the next person and
377 they'd say: "You can't do that because your water quality is going to go down." The next
378 person says you can't do that because of this. So, by having everybody in the same room,
379 there aren't any right answers, but we get to talk everything through.

380

381 **Bill:** Open discussions.

382

383 **Jane:** If something comes up that I really can't do, I can always revert to: "It's my ranch,
384 I'll do what I want." But, I am really proud of what this ranch looks like, today. It's
385 exciting to me. I never thought at fifty I'd start an experiment, and I'd be as excited about
386 ranching as I was at twenty-five when I was a "girl" – and I was going to ranch, and
387 nobody else was doing that.

388

389 **Bill:** You were going to take on the world.

390

391 **Jane:** Yeh! I was going to take on the world, then. But now, it is just fun, what I am
392 learning!

393

394 **Bill:** That keeps you going every day, though.

395

396 **Jane:** Sure it does.

397

398 **Bill:** So, what comes next?

399

400 **Jane:** I don't know. I'd like to learn to fly fish. I don't know what that's got to do with
401 ranching. [Laughter] I'm still having a lot of fun with this.

402

403 **Bill:** You are still in the first cycle of your initiative, aren't you?

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404

405 **Jane:** We committed to a seven year experiment and we are on year five.

406

407 **Bill:** Ok. You are well into it, but you are not through the first cycle yet.

408

409 **Jane:** We did a presentation for the Society for Range Management. I was, like, I can't
410 believe this. Because, that was just never... I'm really just a rancher. That was an honor.
411 That was in January. We're doing a presentation for the Soil and Water Conservation
412 Society. That's on pollinators. The presentation is called: "From Beef to Butterflies:
413 Ranching for Diversity in the Kansas Flint Hills." I think I kind of see us doing several
414 experiments. Actually, I'm an experimenter.

415

416 **Bill:** I can see that!

417

418 **Jane:** My house is made out of hay bales. We're living off the grid. I'm sure something
419 else is going to come along and say: "Well, have you ever wondered about this?"

420

421 **Bill:** What have been the pluses and minuses of living off the grid? Was it harder than
422 you expected, or easier?

423

424 **Jane:** No. It was easier than I expected. I think it is because, we in America, are
425 accustomed to living with excess. We don't understand the term "abundance." And, how
426 much electricity do you really need? You just need what you need for today.

427

428 **Bill:** All that you have is the one small windmill?

429

430 **Jane:** No. It's a thousand watt wind generator and two thousand watts of solar panels.

431

432 **Bill:** Ok. Solar panels...

433

434 **Jane:** And, we also use water... the water is heated by the sun. So we have solar hot
435 water panels on this house, and the solar electric panels are on the garage. But, you know,
436 you feel really good about it. And, you have to learn to live a new way.

437

438 **Bill:** You're learning without a lot... that would have previously thought to be normal.

439

440 **Jane:** Yeh. But, instead of, the REA wants you to do the extra stuff in the evening, when
441 there isn't just a high demand for electricity, well, we want to do our laundry during the
442 day, because we have more electricity and we're going to dry them on the line. We do not
443 do without. There are two computers on right now, and they've been on all day. We have
444 a stereo, we have a microwave, we have television; we live just like everyone else. I get a
445 kick out of always trying something new. One of the things I can see happening on the
446 ranch is, there is a different between lighting a perimeter fire, which is what we all do,
447 you light the outside and let it burn to the middle, and a point fire, where you just light it,
448 and you let it go where it wants to go. And that idea, even within burning, that some

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449 pastures get burned the same way every year; because of the way the road goes around it
450 or whatever. Somebody might always burn it with a south wind. If you live along the
451 turnpike on the south side, you ALWAYS burn with a north wind. Cause, if you don't,
452 you're going to get in trouble.

453

454 **Bill:** Interfere with the traffic...

455

456 **Jane:** So we've even started talking about: what would it mean if we burned differently.
457 What is the science of fire?

458

459 **Bill:** What are the impacts?

460

461 **Jane:** Yes.

462

463 **Bill:** As I was look at the materials, it was the first time I had thought about the...

464

465

Track 78

466

467 **Bill:** ... habitat issue, with the burning. You are still burning habitat when you burn that
468 patch?

469

470 **Jane:** Yes.

471

472 **Bill:** Does some of that wildlife have an opportunity to get out of the way, while you are
473 doing it?

474

475 **Jane:** This is one of the exciting things we learned. On the patch burn, you've got what
476 you burned this year is really, really short. What was burned last year is kind of high, and
477 kind of short. What you burned two years ago is really thick. Well, the prairie chicken,
478 when she is nesting, a hen prairie chick needs about 40 acres, really, deep enough to hide
479 a football. Because, it is not hawks that are after her, it is every bull snake, every raccoon,
480 every skunk, every egg-eater in the country is going to get into that nest. So the thicker
481 the thatch is, the more protected she is going to be. But as soon as those little chick hatch,
482 they move away from the nest, that day. They need what we burned a year ago; where
483 there is some tall and where this some short because they are going to be after insects.
484 But, they need to be protected from the hawks, which are now interested in them. And the
485 males, that are going to be booming; they are on top of the hills, anyway. They are trying
486 to get that boom to carry as far as it will and to attract hens. So, that prairie chicken needs
487 every one of those habitats that we have. That is one of the real beauties of the patch
488 burn. Now what we have discovered is that our cattle use it the same way. They will go
489 into what was burned two years ago, the really thick, thatchy stuff; and they will calve in
490 there and they will go lay down. That is going to be the coolest grass there is. It is going
491 to retain more moisture, it's thicker, and so that is cooler. They will graze about 75% of
492 the time on what you burn this year and about 25% of the time in what you burned the
493 year before. And so, they utilize all three burn areas, as well. More and more we are

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494 learning that the timing of burns is something we are going to start to focusing on. If you
495 want to keep trees out, you want to burn as late in April, or early May, as you can; but
496 then, you do risk burning nests, and different things. And you get more forbs, which are
497 the wild flowers, if you burn earlier. And, of course, when we were talking about
498 butterflies and pollinators, then we want more forbs. And, you know that's one of the
499 things; a lot of ranchers just want to see all green grass. They don't want to see any color
500 at all. We want to see all kinds of color; because, every one of those plants has a reason
501 to be here.

502
503 **Bill:** Their unique contribution.

504
505 **Jane:** They do. One of the things I love about trying to ranch, sustainably, is: "I'm not
506 fighting mother nature." You know, this prairie has been here for 10,000 years. That
507 prairie can handle a drought, or a flood, or a late hail storm, or whatever. It's going to be
508 fine. It's not like production farming, or agriculture, where you are fighting for the
509 soybeans or wheat or whatever; that you have to worry about everything. The prairie is
510 going to take care of itself. I just need to let it do it.

511
512 **Bill:** Neat! I just heard a podcast! [Laughter]

513
514 **Jane:** Alright.

515
516 **Bill:** What comes next?

517
518 **Jane:** I don't know. I think the steps will come.

519
520 **Bill:** Are there things that have come out of your discussion of this first four or five
521 years...

522
523 **Jane:** Yes!

524
525 **Bill:** ... that weren't thought of earlier, that you're probably going to want to... or have
526 you gone ahead and implemented some of those things, or...? Is there a "to do list" that
527 you are thinking about? Which you may or may not do?

528
529 **Jane:** I think... It is so hard... One time I had a young NRCS, Natural Resource
530 Conservation Service, young man ask me: "What's the hardest thing about patch
531 burning?" And I said the hardest thing about patch burning is between your ears. Because
532 you've got to unlearn what you thought was the absolute truth... and try something
533 different. When I went down to OSU, which is where the research had been done, I
534 looked at what they had burned this year, and what they had grazed down; it was like:
535 "You want my pasture to look like that?" It just looked scrubbed; it's short. There were
536 like, but look, see that patch over there? It looked just like, two years ago. You have to
537 learn to look, to take the prairie into several years. What you do in one year, the truth is,

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538 what I will do on this prairie for fifty years, I probably wouldn't destroy it, as long as I
539 didn't plow it up. I could overgraze it...

540

541

Track 79

542

543 **Jane:** ...I could mismanage it. It is resilient.

544

545 **Bill:** And it is going to come back.

546

547 **Jane:** In one person's lifetime, they are probably not going to make it really bad. But, I
548 want to really make it good. And so, seeing how that was done, and you have to look at it
549 over a several year period, ... and back to that burning... the idea that, you have to
550 change your mind... and, so we were really worried about every burn plot had to be just
551 right, or whatever. And now we have realized, no, a patch is a patch is a patch. Marva,
552 who is really the one keeping track of the butterflies, when we burn, if we leave a little
553 strip someplace, she'd say, don't worry about it, it becomes like a mini-refuge... micro-
554 refuge. You don't know who goes there. Someplace doesn't burn because it's a naturally
555 wet area; what we have there in dragonflies, is really interesting. So I think, one of the
556 things I see happening is we're going to be less intense about... we're not going to worry
557 so much about the lines... a patch is a patch, however it burns. And then, I can almost see
558 us going to smaller animals. Learning more about insects, and soils, and finding out what
559 happens there. Because, I think, when you start taking care of butterflies... it is like they
560 say with the Greater Prairie Chicken; if you'll manage for the Greater Prairie Chicken,
561 everybody else is going to be just fine. Because, they need the variety of habitats...so if
562 you have the variety of habitats, everybody's going to get covered. So, I started to say a
563 minute ago that all of our ground nesting birds have lost habitat; because they've lost that
564 one niche of the nesting habitat. If you look at the top twenty Audubon birds, the top six,
565 that we are losing, are prairie ground nesting birds. ... including our state bird. Well,
566 that's not true. Maybe the state bird is the western meadowlark, not the eastern. The
567 eastern meadowlark falls into that category.

568

569 **Bill:** You mentioned the Nature Conservancy is one of the partners in your team. How do
570 you see their role, in what is being done now, in moving forward? Do they talk about
571 that, or just focus on what they are doing here?

572

573 **Jane:** No, I think the Nature Conservancy,... I could get ripped... ridden out of town on
574 a rail for this, probably, but... I think they have done as much, because of their individual
575 people, who are on the ground, locally, to preserve and conserve, tall grass prairie. They
576 have been an integral part, and a very important player, because them along right at the
577 time when we needed to be doing something.

578

579 **Bill:** That seemed to be my feeling. I've talked to... a few of the people I've talked to
580 have nothing good to say about the Nature Conservancy.

581

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582 **Jane:** That's right. I understand that. My conservation easement was done through the
583 Nature Conservancy; but, I knew that a lot of ranchers would do conservation easements
584 with the livestock association, which hadn't even set up a land trust at that time. They
585 have one now. But, there again, when I started looking into conservation easements, if
586 you didn't have them in the 17 western states you wouldn't have nobody ranching. In
587 Wyoming and Montana, if you couldn't protect that...

588

589 **Bill:** From development...

590

591 **Jane:** From development, with a conservation easement, much of it would be serious...

592

593 **Bill:** And we're facing that around here quite a bit.

594

595 **Jane:** We are. But it has just gotten here. You know, one of the biggest ironies is that my
596 grandmother was one of the biggest opponents to a tall grass prairie park, that every
597 walked the Flint Hills.

598

599 **Bill:** Really?!

600

601 **Jane:** Oh my gosh! I've got... from the 50s on, she fought 'em, religiously, every 20
602 years! ...went it would come up.

603

604 **Bill:** Because it was government?

605

606 **Jane:** Because it was government. My cousin and I have talked about this. Of course, I'm
607 on the Kansas Trust Board, to help establish such a thing.

608

609 **Bill:** Good. Good!

610

611 **Jane:** I know. But when I did my conservation easement, I told several people: "I can
612 hear my grandfather in one of my ears, saying: 'What in the hell are you doing, Jane?' –
613 dealing with the government and an environmental group?" But...

614

Track 80

615

616 **Jane:** ...the tall grass prairie in the year 2005 was not what we had in 1960 when my
617 granddad was here.

618

619

620 **Bill:** That's right; the world had changed.

621

622 **Jane:** They had threats they had never even considered. And now... and they were
623 against eminent domain, and so am I... but it was a willing buyer and a willing seller that
624 established that park. That's fair:

625

626 **Bill:** That's fair; yeh!

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627

628 **Jane:** And, I don't think my grandfather would have objection. He loved to hunt. He was
629 an avid fisherman, and he loved the prairie. And I think if he thought I was doing
630 something to protect that as ranch land for generations to come, he'd say: "Right on!"

631

632 **Bill:** If he would stop to think about it, and think through it.

633

634 **Jane:** And he would. But you do hear those voices. And I know there are a lot of
635 ranchers out here that are only seeing the one side of it; the side that, kind of, they've
636 always seen...any outsider. But our biggest threat hasn't been an environmental group.

637

638 **Bill:** I don't think so.

639

640 **Jane:** So. They've had good people on the ground. They've just done really well.

641

642 **Bill:** Do you have farm land, or all prairie, on your particular piece; as I look, it appears
643 to be?

644

645 **Jane:** I have re-seeded. Starting in 1980, I think I have re-seeded nearly 160 acres back to
646 native grass; forty acres here, twenty acres there. Three years ago we reseeded some
647 fields down along the creek.

648

649 **Bill:** So you don't even have hay?

650

651 **Jane:** I have fifty acres of brome that I hay. But even this spring, because of the cost of
652 fertilizer, we reseeded thirty-five acres. I had eighty-five acres originally, we reseeded
653 thirty-five acres to native grass.

654

655 **Bill:** Do you keep cattle year around?

656

657 **Jane:** I have a cow-calf herd. So I have cows year-around, but I sub-lease most of the
658 ranch. And that is part of the experiment. One of those pastures is double-stock, and one
659 of them is full season. So we have three nine hundred acre pastures, twenty seven
660 hundred acres all together in the experiment. One is double stocked, one is full season
661 yearlings, one is cow-calf; so, we have good idea what is going on.

662

663 **Bill:** Good.

664

665 **Jane:** ...with all three. Yeh.

666

667 **Bill:** Fantastic. A lot of good data being collected...

668

669 **Jane:** I hope so. We do photo points, three times a year; the end of May, end of July, and
670 in September. There are six photo points in each pasture; two in each burn sector. There
671 are three pastures, so there are eighteen photo points. Going out and taking the photos is a

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672 lot of fun. They are done at certain measurements. Like we do a one meter square. Then
673 we do a shot of that; then we go back twenty meters and take it again and two landscape.
674 And we identify how much cover we have. In other words, how much dry dirt can you
675 see? How many forbs to grass; what that ratio is? And then we identify the forbs and the
676 grass in the one meter square. And that way, over time, we can see whether burning it
677 over time, the way we are, and grazing it, if we are changing the species composition
678 there, in the pasture. We love the outside work. It is keeping the photos organized and
679 getting them on the sheet that is not quite as much fun.

680
681 **Bill:** It becomes a task.

682
683 **Jane:** Right. Six years of data, we'll know.

684
685 **Bill:** Absolutely.

686
687 **Jane:** So.

688
689 **Bill:** How about ponding? Do you have natural ponds, have you made ponds, have you
690 added ponds?

691
692 **Jane:** There were always ponds on the ranch. I haven't built any new ponds in the time I
693 have been here. But there are springs, everywhere. So if we have water, we have springs
694 that are flowing. There have been two winters when we had a drought, and we were
695 chopping ice. I think the two most dreaded jobs by ranchers are putting in water gaps or
696 chopping ice.

697
698 **Bill:** Yes, I've heard that before. [Laughter] ...particularly the chopping ice. I think we'll
699 just stop right now.

700
701 **Jane:** If we've answered all the questions.

702
703 **Bill:** We've done very well...

704
705
706
707
708