

Last Child on the Prairie:

A Directory for Parents and Teachers for
Returning Children to the Outdoors



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Further Reading:

Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv, Algonquin Books; North Carolina, 2005; 335 pp.

"The Importance of Naturalists as Teachers & the Use of Natural History as a Teaching Tool" by James J. Krupa. *American Biology Teacher* 62(8): 553-558.

"Into the Field: Naturalistic Education and the Future of Conservation" by Mark A. Hayes; *Conservation Biology* 23(5): 1075-1079 and www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bsc/cbi/2009/00000023/00000005/art00010.

"New Study Calls for More Farm Visits for Children" http://redorbit.com/news/science/1748689/new_study_calls_for_more_farm_visits_for_children/index.html posted September 7, 2009

"Live Specimens More Effective than World Wide Web for Learning Plant Material" by R. Taraban, C. McKenney, E. Peffley, and A. Applegarth; 33: 106-110.

LAST CHILD ON THE PRAIRIE:

A Directory for Parents and Teachers for Returning Children to the Outdoors

A NEW GENERATION

The last 20 years have seen a dramatic shift in children's experiences. Unlike their parents and grandparents who were more likely to have grown up with empty lots or nearby fields to play in, most of today's children are isolated from nature experiences. One-third of families lived on farms before World War II; today our road signs rightly attest to one Kansas farmer feeding 129 other people.

Children who grow up in non-rural areas are often further constrained from nature experiences by community covenants, social constraints, and even legal restrictions. This has been brought to the public's attention by Richard Louv's best selling book *Last Child in the Woods*.

Many children no longer play in their front or back yards and are oblivious to the squirrels, trees, and dandelions. Upon arriving home, they dash inside to get online, watch television, or use cell phones and other electronics. The time spent on electronic media by American children has grown to 10 hours and 45 minutes daily according to a survey released January 20, 2010 by the Kaiser Family Foundation: "American children in the 8-to-18-year-old category spend 4 hours and 29 minutes on TV each day..." and over six more hours on other devices.

Media have not provided a satisfactory substitute for real field experiences. In 1986, a National Park Service author hoped: "A new segment of our population has come to value habitats and species from which they may never realize any tangible benefits other than the pleasure of seeing wildlife through mass media. The wildlife seen through media have become an important natural resource, in the public's mind, and will only increase in importance with time." Sadly, this faith that indirect mediated "experiences" with nature will substitute for the real experience has not proven out over the last two decades. When decisions must be made for saving wilderness areas, only those with actual field experiences are

investing the time and effort to save them.

As parents, we want our children to make knowledgeable decisions about careers. Yet fewer and fewer are choosing to pursue field sciences since few have any experience base to generate that interest. Environmental awareness is important, for all of us can learn about, appreciate, and conserve the environment.

THE TEACHERS' DILEMMA

Over the last 20 years, veteran science teachers have seen the effectiveness of their lessons erode. The same text and lectures are no longer understood, not because the teacher is changing but because many students now lack the field experiences of the previous generation. While students in the 1980s could name 20-30 flowers, many students today cannot name a half dozen.

Even students in "farm" communities may lack a meaningful understanding of coyotes and rabbits and ragweed in classroom discussions. Some modern farm tractors use GPS systems to navigate. The farm student merely drives around the perimeter of the field and the system takes over to completely plow or seed or disc the field. The youngster is enclosed in a cab with headsets on and avoids what were common experiences.

Today's teachers are constrained to meet standards that narrow the curriculum to a small number of assessments. For both curricular and financial reasons, field trips have been dramatically curtailed. Teachers are very aware that they cannot make up for the missing field experiences of students, outdoor experiences that used to include hundreds of hours exploring the outdoors.

Nevertheless, the teacher who realizes that some minimal field experiences are essential to the healthy growth of their students, needs the educational rationale to defend nature experiences. In the following pages, the rationale is provided to explain why nature videos and in-class games are no substitute for getting students back into nature.

Can I see that?

[...which means: "I want to hold it!"]

- **Konza Environmental Education Program**
<http://keep.konza.ksu.edu>
- **Association of Zoos and Aquariums**
www.aza.org
- **Deanna Rose Children's Farmstead**
Olathe, KS
<http://www.opkansas.org/Things-to-See-And-Do/Deanna-Rose-Childrens-Farmstead>
- **Sunset Zoological Park**
Manhattan, KS
www.ci.manhattan.ks.us/SunsetZoo
- **Hutchinson Zoo**
Carey Park - Box 1567 KS 67504-1567 Hutchinson, KS
1-620-694-2672
<http://www.hutchgov.com/department/>
- **Wright Park Zoo**
Dodge City, KS
1-620-225-8160
- **David Traylor Zoo**
Emporia, KS
1-620-341-4365
www.emporia-kansas.gov/visitors/david-traylor-zoo.html
- **Lee Richardson Zoo**
Garden City, KS
www.gardencitykansas.com/zoo.htm

The most **meaningful definition** of an animal, plant or ecosystem is the actual organism or wild environment, not an abstraction. Many parents will relate their most memorable experiences in a science class included field trips to natural environments; a testimony to the lasting memories laid down by multisensory, hands-on experiences.

Can I hold it?

“Research has shown that time in nature improves a child’s academic performance, concentration, balance, coordination, and self-esteem. Unfortunately, the amount of time children spend outside has dropped by 50 percent during the past 20 years.”

Kansans for Children in Nature, 2009

Brit Spough Zoo ●

Great Bend, KS

www.visitgreatbend.com/Brit_Spough_Zoo.asp

Kansas Wildlife Exhibit ●

Central Riverside Park, Wichita, KS

Great Plains Nature Center, Wichita, KS

www.gpnc.org/kansas.htm

Rolling Hills Zoo ●

West of Salina, KS

www.rollinghillswildlife.com/rhwa_zoo.html

Sedgwick County Zoo ●

Wichita, KS

www.scz.org

Ralph Mitchell Zoo (Riverside Park and Zoo) ●

Independence, KS

www.forpaz.com/zoo.htm

Topeka Zoo ●

Topeka, KS

<http://topekazoo.org>

Touch is an important sense, no less valuable in knowing the world than sight and hearing. The information we receive through holding and manipulating natural objects forms our attitudes toward nature. Touch is a valuable exploratory and diagnostic skill that seals memories in the brain. A child who asks “Can I see that?” holds out his/her hand and is frustrated if you only let them “see” it. They want to hold and touch. We get more out of touch than just the ability to truly interact, to poke and see the response, to feel and detect more detail. We make a judgement call through feel about how this part of nature fits into our world and how we will respect it, control it, love or hate it, and commit to it in public financing and policy.



● **Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.**

www.kansasgirlscouts.org

Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place...

● **Boy Scouts of the U.S.A.**

www.scouting.org

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes

● **Great American Backyard Campout**

www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Be-Out-There/Activities.aspx

● **Kansas Wildlife Federation**

www.kswildlife.org

The Kansas Wildlife Federation promotes hunting and fishing opportunities and associated recreation for the benefit of all hunters, anglers and conservationists. KWF supports the sustainable use and management of fish and wildlife and their habitats through education, partnerships, outreach, and policy oversight.

Field experiences are **truly interactive**. “Interaction” with a computer or smartphone keyboard is a trivial use of the term, and completely unrelated to the genuine interaction of feeling the bark of a tree, smelling fresh-plowed ground, feeling the fuzzy leaves of a mullein plant, or holding a harmless snake. Through the interactions of holding a bird or poking an earthworm, we establish our relationship with the natural world. We learn what is harmless and what deserves caution, what is durable and what is delicate.

I want to camp outdoors!

Rock Springs 4-H Center: ●
**Camp, Conference
and Retreat Center**
www.rocksprings.net

Camp Alexander
<http://campalexander.org/>
Annual Summer and “School’s
Out Camps” are dedicated to
teaching appreciation and respect
for self and nature.

Nature teaches **patience**. Natural events take their time. The child who sits quietly in the wild can see wildlife resume their natural habits. When you lie on a log across a stream, you have time to think, to pose questions, to see if you can guide the minnows or crayfish by the shadow of your hand. The wild has its own annual calendar and daily clock.

How does it live?

● Kansas Eco-meets

www.kansasecomeets.org
and

www.kdwp.state.ks.us/news/Other-Services/Wildlife-Education-Services/Kansas-Eco-meets/
To Challenge and inspire an interest, appreciation and understanding of the natural sciences and the Kansas environment through interscholastic competition.

● Kansas Envirothon

An outdoor, environmental high school competition where students learn and are tested on soils, forestry, wildlife, aquatics and a current issue. Each county is allowed to send one team of five high school students to the state competition. The winner of the Kansas Envirothon will represent Kansas at the Canon Envirothon.

www.envirothon.org

● Kansas Association of Conservation Districts

www.kacdnet.org

...links to your regional conservation district and activities

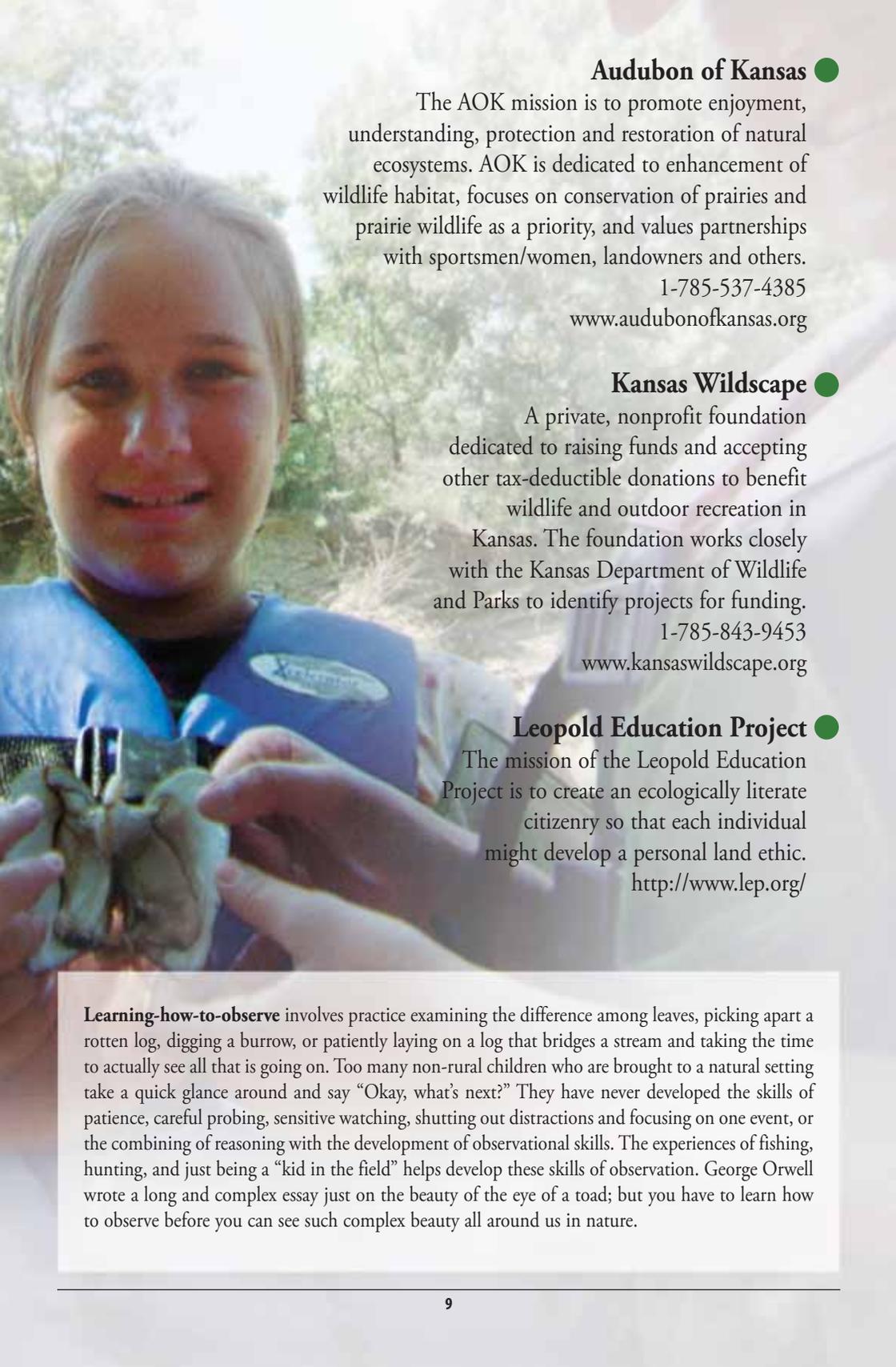
● Westar Energy Green Team

1-785-575-1706

www.westarenergy.com/greenteam

Westar Energy Green Team volunteers work with sensitive plant and animal species, improve habitat, and enhance environmental education across Kansas. They restore prairie and wetland habitats, plant trees, recycle, and build bridges and trails.

The real natural world is **test-truthful**. Textbooks, selected pictures, ecological simulations, and video programs present perfect examples. Students on a field trip never take the same trip twice; each journey exposes new plants or animals, different sets of natural phenomena, etc. The leader calls all students over to see the cocoon, the newly woven spider web, the wood rat midden. And alone, a child can discover the variation in nature—an important lesson for future citizens who otherwise will unreasonably expect a simple and predictable world.



Audubon of Kansas ●

The AOK mission is to promote enjoyment, understanding, protection and restoration of natural ecosystems. AOK is dedicated to enhancement of wildlife habitat, focuses on conservation of prairies and prairie wildlife as a priority, and values partnerships with sportsmen/women, landowners and others.

1-785-537-4385

www.audubonofkansas.org

Kansas Wildscape ●

A private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to raising funds and accepting other tax-deductible donations to benefit wildlife and outdoor recreation in Kansas. The foundation works closely with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to identify projects for funding.

1-785-843-9453

www.kansaswildscape.org

Leopold Education Project ●

The mission of the Leopold Education Project is to create an ecologically literate citizenry so that each individual might develop a personal land ethic.

<http://www.lep.org/>

Learning-how-to-observe involves practice examining the difference among leaves, picking apart a rotten log, digging a burrow, or patiently laying on a log that bridges a stream and taking the time to actually see all that is going on. Too many non-rural children who are brought to a natural setting take a quick glance around and say “Okay, what’s next?” They have never developed the skills of patience, careful probing, sensitive watching, shutting out distractions and focusing on one event, or the combining of reasoning with the development of observational skills. The experiences of fishing, hunting, and just being a “kid in the field” helps develop these skills of observation. George Orwell wrote a long and complex essay just on the beauty of the eye of a toad; but you have to learn how to observe before you can see such complex beauty all around us in nature.

This is real!

● Kansas 4-H

<http://www.kansas4-h.org>

4-H offers more than 30 project areas with unlimited opportunities for youth to experience belonging, mastery, independence and generosity.

The 4-H Clover symbolizes four actions which 4-H members try to accomplish. The four H's stand for Head, Heart, Hands, Health, as it is in the pledge.

"I Pledge My Head to clearer thinking, My Heart to greater loyalty, My Hands to larger service and My Health to better living for my Club my Community my Country and my World."

● The Pass It On—Outdoor Mentors

www.outdoormentors.org

Connecting adult mentors with children expressing an interest in outdoor activities and to provide outdoor educational opportunities for both the mentor and child.

● g2g (got 2 go) Outside

www.g2goutside.org

An outdoor play initiative to promote increased physical activity, family time, and connection to nature.

Being fearful of the wilderness, of the dark, of mice, or of snakes—is a handicap. **Normalization** is only possible through direct and real experiences. To help a child with an abstract fear of snakes—picked up from association with others who have an abstract fear of snakes—is only possible by the child observing others safely handling a snake, and then taking the risk of handling it. Only then does the fear instantly melt away. The only way to gain a rational respect and appreciation for organisms, be it rabbit or bear, or lettuce or poison ivy, is to directly and appropriately experience them up close and personal in real time.

**National Shooting
Sport Foundation** ●
www.nssf.org

**National Archery in the
Schools Program** ●
www.nasparchery.com
or archeryintheschools.org



Science is **universal** because it is based in the real world. When simulations and other abstractions are substituted for real experiences, or claimed to be equal in reality, then different and competing “sciences” can be asserted. The Russian scientist Lysenko incorrectly believed in the inheritance of acquired characteristics and he controlled the textbooks and media in the U.S.S.R. He said we could train plants to be more cold-hardy. But in the end, real plants proved him wrong.

I can do it!

Conservation organizations play a vital role in wildlife management and ensuring the future of hunting and the shooting sports. They raise money, volunteer time, provide advice, and perhaps most important, inspire outdoor-loving people to become actively involved in the future of the resources they cherish.

● Ducks Unlimited

[Youth organization is called Greenwings]

1-800-45DUCKS or 1-901-758-3825

www.ducks.org

● Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever

1-651-773-2000

<http://www.pheasantsforever.org>

● The National Wild Turkey Federation

Youth organization is called J.A.K.E.S. (Juniors Acquiring Knowledge, Ethics, and Sportsmanship)

1-803-637-3106

www.nwtf.org

● Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation Inc.

Wildlife Habitat Conservation Organization hosts Wildlife Habitat Conservation Camps and “Future of America” Youth Programs

1-417-345-5960

www.quwf.net

● Hunt4Hunger

1-620-343-0225

www.hunt4hunger.net



Real fieldwork has **real consequences**. When children have successfully become nature observers, they know they can really live and work in the natural world. It is not built on the praise of parents or teachers, but on actual success with nature. They gain confidence they can find their way in the field, locate a bird’s nest, or trace an earthworm burrow. The brain recognizes that this is real, this is “now,” and these experiences are remembered. When they watch a nature documentary or click through a simulation, today’s students recognize that they have merely watched an abstract program or completed an artificial programmed game with no real consequences—easy to forget.

I want to explore!

Flint Hills Bass Association Youth Club ●

Junior Hawgs at www.ksbass.net



The National Wildlife Federation ●

<http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside>

Inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future.

Real field work increases **involvement**. In an age of contrived media, students recognize the potential for distortion. They want to see for themselves what goes on in nature: how birds care for baby birds, how pillbugs avoid sunlight, how tree canopy shades out the saplings. It is a natural hunger to “know” real things, not another educational exercise completed to make a parent or teacher happy or to get high test scores.

I think I want to be a field biologist!

- **The Wildlife Society**
joomla.wildlife.org
- **Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education and Annual Kansas Green Schools Conference**
www.kacee.org
www.kansasgreenschools.org
KACEE promotes and provides effective, non-biased, science based conservation and environmental education to all Kansans.
- **Kansans for Children in Nature**
<http://kcn.ksoutdoors.com>



Some students could eventually become game wardens, botanists, marine biologists, or ecologists. The previous **professional generation** of field scientists always trace their initial interest to field experiences. We cannot predict who among our students will become fascinated. All children deserve field experiences so some who get “caught” in those experiences can know what vocation or avocation to pursue.



Beau Arndt was raised in the country northwest of Emporia, Kansas. From an early age Beau loved the outdoors, nature and all of its wonders. As he matured, Beau grew especially fond of observing and learning about wildlife. He studied habits of all the animals and became an ethical hunter. Beau's favorite time of year was Christmas when he would delight in delivering jerky and other harvested game to friends and neighbors. He would say, "I love to see their faces light up when I bring them turkey and deer on Christmas Day."

The last deer season Beau enjoyed was so special to him. He donated his deer to the local homeless shelter to help fill their food pantry. Taking a friend on his first turkey hunt was just as special. His passion also included fishing and horseback riding. Beau enjoyed and took pride in showing others how to have fun in the Great Outdoors.

Ten days before Christmas and three days before his nineteenth birthday, Beau was home after completing his first semester at Emporia State University. Beau was studying to be a biologist.

Early the next morning, Beau was elated to be with two close friends in goose blinds, waiting on thousands of circling geese to descend from the snow-laden sky. Then tragedy struck. A passing motorist stopped his pickup, took aim and fired into decoys that concealed Beau as he lay in the field. This illegal and unethical act took Beau from his family and friends.

Several things have happened since Beau's incident. Within a few months the Kansas Wildlife and Parks' hunter education division created a hunter education DVD titled "Tragedy at Wright's Creek." It is now mandatory viewing in several states and foreign countries. The DVD portrays the day Beau was killed and other related issues that concern ethical hunting.

Beau's family was determined his death would not be in vain. With the help of friends and donations from several local conservation groups including Hunt4Hunger (www.hunt4hunger.net), education scholarships in Beau's name are now established at Emporia State University and the Americus Recreation Organization.

The Beau Arndt Foundation, a non-profit organization, was also created to continue on with the ideals and beliefs Beau held and lived by: Beliefs cherished by many and becoming almost out of reach to others. The Foundation currently is involved in helping others get outside and in tune with our natural world. One program celebrated on National Hunting and Fishing Day is the Beau Arndt Outdoor Appreciation Day where like-minded organizations and volunteers provide local school-age children a quality outdoor experience.

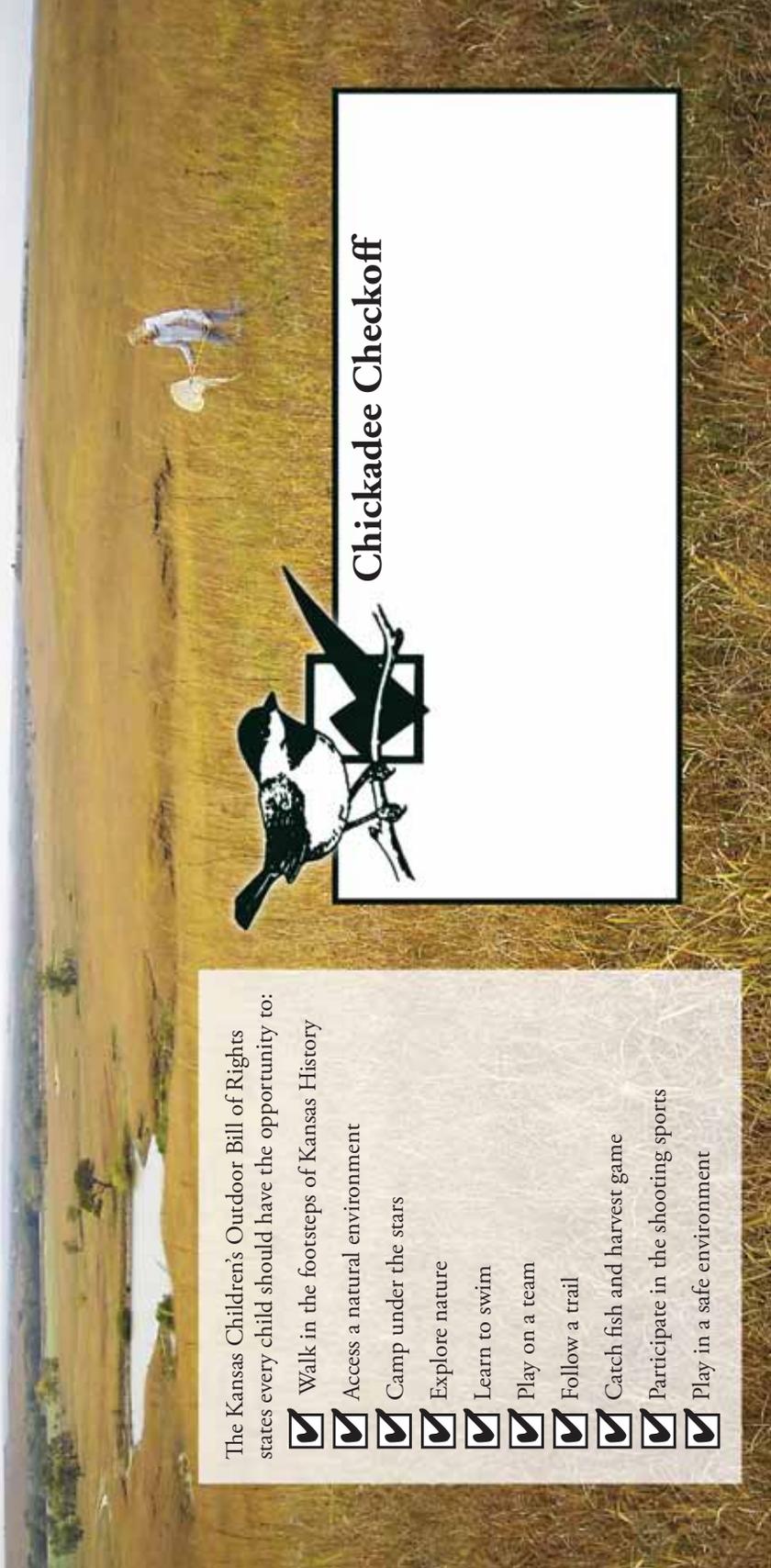
The Foundation is currently involved in acquiring land and having a facility where others can camp, fish, learn about nature, see the turkeys and deer, as well as experience other activities that were dear to Beau's heart. If you wish to find out more or would like to help move these goals and ideals forward, contact the Beau Arndt Foundation. www.BeauArndtFoundaton.org or call 1-620-443-5626.



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The Kansas Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights states every child should have the opportunity to:

- Walk in the footsteps of Kansas History
- Access a natural environment
- Camp under the stars
- Explore nature
- Learn to swim
- Play on a team
- Follow a trail
- Catch fish and harvest game
- Participate in the shooting sports
- Play in a safe environment



Chickadee Checkoff