

Preserve land and celebrate Earth Day

Insight

John Schlageck



Forty three years ago, when folks in the USA celebrated the first Earth Day I was stationed in Stuttgart, West Germany – the country was still divided then. Back then I had little opportunity to carry signs that championed the abstract idea of protecting something as vast as our planet. Heck, I didn't even hear about Earth Day until I returned a couple years later.

Instead, I was busy marching with a rifle in Western Europe – doing my small part to keep our planet and my country safe from the Russkies so my buddies back home could celebrate the first Earth Day for me.

Well, guess what?

Four decades later, I'm a writer and I'd like to share my thoughts with readers throughout Kansas and the Midwest as I pen this week's column on Earth Day 2013 celebrated April 22.

Protecting our planet can be somewhat of a struggle. Like each day's sunrise and sunset, we often take it for granted. Conservation of our planet can be a challenge because some regard the land as a commodity that belongs to them.

Others see the planet as a community to which they belong. They love, care for and respect the land. They adhere to an ethic that enlarges the boundaries of their community to include soils, waters, plants and animals.

There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man. Let us never forget that while our land yields fruits, grains and vegetables, it also yields a cultural harvest; one we as inhabitants all share and must nurture.

The late Aldo Leopold, who championed the conservation ethic more than 70 years ago, defined it as a state of harmony between men and the land. In his book *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold urged us to strive for such harmony and make sure our words do not override our work.

Let's make sure our progress does not consist of "letterhead pieties and convention oratory," Leopold cautioned.

Taking this one step further, let's make certain our educational and economic systems are headed toward, rather than away from, an increased consciousness of the land.

Today only a handful of our population makes its living from the land – primarily farmers and ranchers. Most people are separated from the land by several generations.

Few have a vital relation to the land. To many, the land is the space between cities on which crops and grass grow or cattle graze.

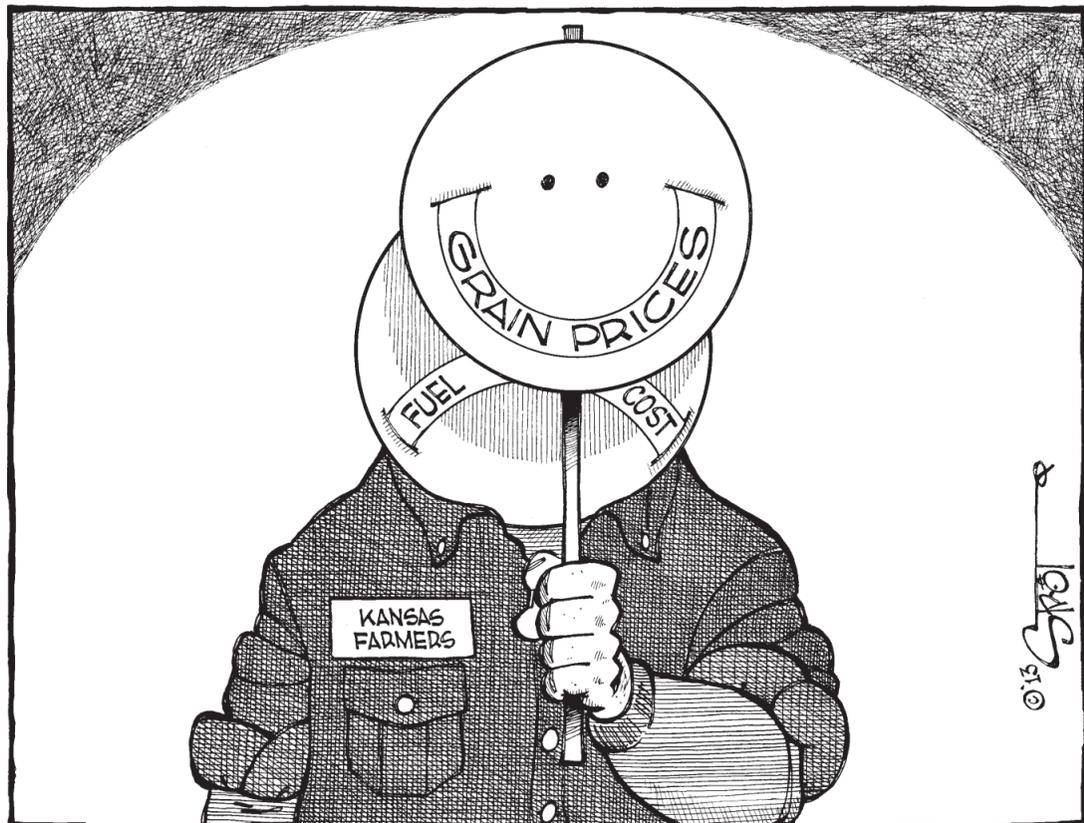
"Turn him loose for a day on the land and if the spot does not happen to be a golf links or a scenic area, he is bored stiff," Leopold wrote. "If crops could be grown by hydroponics, instead of farming it would suit him well. Synthetic substitutes for wool, leather, wood and other natural land products suit him better than the originals. In short, land is something he has outgrown."

As we celebrate Earth Day on April 22, let's remember land use is not solely an economic question. Let's think of it in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient.

Leopold said, a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the living community. It is wrong when it does otherwise.

The bulk of all land usage hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill and faith, rather than only capital investment. We have continually modernized our farms with equipment, plant food, insecticides and other production inputs. We are proud, as well we should be with the abundance of crops we produce in Kansas and across our country.

We can never throw away the tools, technology and stewardship that have provided so much for so many. On this Earth Day 2013 let's renew our commitment to their successful use in harmony with our life-giving land. Let's display for all to see we have not outgrown the land.



Is it passion that drives us

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Apple Executive Jony Ive's (ipod, iphone designer) San Francisco mansion, one of the best players in the National Basketball League, LeBron James, annual salary, world's most expensive dress, British designer, Debbie Wingham design.

Or, you can choose to secure numerous politicians in your back pocket. That is just what the National Rifle Association, aka, the NRA accomplished. This was evident in the vote on the expanded background check legislation which failed in the U.S. Senate this week. On Wednesday, April 17, 2013, alone, the NRA spent \$500,000 on an ad campaign to defeat what they termed as "Obama's gun ban."

Even with the majority, 86 percent of the public, favoring more extensive background checks, and with families of victims of mass shootings sitting in the Senate Gallery, the Senate failed to pass the bipartisan proposal. Gun

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



control is a vast subject, but the failure of this legislation defies logic. One has to wonder what the NRA fears from more extensive background checks.

Senator John McCain (R-AZ) has received nearly a half million dollars from the NRA since 2006, the most of any member of Congress. Yet, he broke from the NRA and supported this measure. Fellow Arizonian, Gabby Giffords, a former U.S. Representative, watched the vote from above. In 2011, she was severely injured in an assassination attempt which resulted in the death of six people, including a young girl.

Some opponents to the measure said they based their decision on logic,

because "passions had no place in the making of momentous policy." Does the presence of passion mean the absence of logic? I would venture to say that passion is a necessary force for any action.

Several gun measures were brought to a vote that same day, and all failed. The background check bipartisan measure co-authored by Patrick J. Toomey, R-PA, and Joe Manchin, D-WV, needed 60 votes to pass, but fell short by five votes. Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid, a gun rights advocate and NRA campaign contribution recipient, changed his vote to "no," making it possible to revisit the measure.

What opponents fear from these checks, I do not know. What I do know is this. Not everyone should have a gun. More extensive background checks will not stop every shooting, but if just one life is saved, legislation has worked and common sense has prevailed. Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

Who is really in control over us and other living things

Finally an explanation of what is going on with the weather from Shawnee Mission Kia. Jen, the spokeswoman, is dressed in a leafy green costume, holding a smart phone. She introduces herself as Mother Nature. Then proceeds to apologize for messing up the "weather app" and assures us Kia still has great spring specials.

I was looking out at an ice encrusted landscape in mid-April when I first saw this commercial and found it possible to laugh. But it set my thoughts off in a direction they had not traveled for many years.

Is life as we know it merely a petri dish in the lab of a mad scientist? An experiment gone awry?

I recall a hot summer afternoon of my youth and an ant hill. For some reason we decided to destroy the ant hill with a scoop shovel and a garden hose. We shoveled the sand off the top; then filled the complex tunnels, so carefully crafted, with water.

Our mission was not without risk. Those were big red fire ants! It's true they weren't really bothering anyone until they were attacked. And I don't recall any adult telling us this would be

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



a helpful, productive way to spend an afternoon.

What I recall is the feeling of power. We were in charge! We decided who lived and who died.

When I write it down it sounds pretty brutal. Is it weird that the sun, the laughter of my siblings, the icy sluice of water from the hose; evoke happy nostalgia for a simpler time? Why don't I have childhood memories like Liza's? What happened between the 40's and the 50's?

We don't have those big ant hills in Smith County. I wonder why? Has some change in pest control eliminated them entirely? Is there just a slight difference in the environment in 60 miles? The soil is not as sandy here? Slightly more rain fall?

Ant hills are architectural marvels. Each layer of sand revealed a

maze of tunnels. How do ants know to do this? They don't go to school or read blueprints. A good ant hill takes years to construct. Within a few square feet is all thousands of inhabitants need to survive harsh winters, wind, rain and fire. (Though not the savagery of bored seven and eight year olds)

Merciless as we were; some ants survived. Without even mourning the losses, they industriously began rebuilding immediately.

Taking faith out of the equation it is easy to draw a parallel between an ant hill and the planet Earth. Is our fate tied to some bored six year-old whose mother said "Go outside and play!"?

How do we respond when disaster strikes?

Is Mother Nature just trying to figure out a new phone?

The hubby and I marvel nightly about the contrast between the weather this spring versus last. We wish for normal weather and thinking normal is the average between the extremes. In truth normal is the extreme.

We keep our sanity by knowing it averages out over time.

Or by blaming it on Jen.

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