



Story & Photos by Terrie Clark

One evening in February 1989, Angus breeder Jan Lyons, Manhattan, Kan., sat down to relax and read her evening newspaper. Instead of the usual news, however, she found a shocking story.

A land expansion to neighboring Fort Riley was being proposed. It could claim as much as 100,000 acres of Flint Hills pastureland.

As she read about the proposal, Lyons realized the land the Fort deemed ideal for expansion was right where her ranch's pastures lay. A feeling of urgency overcame her. Like others she immediately telephoned more ranchers. They planned a meeting to discuss what could be done. With the thought of losing their precious land as motivation, the consensus was "we have to do something."

That evening was the beginning of what will be a lengthy battle for Flint Hills ranchers. Their objective is to "just say no" to further private land acquisition by the federal government.

A few days later, about 25 Flint Hills ranchers gathered together for the first time and formed "Preserve the Flint Hills." One of three area grass roots organizations fighting federal land acquisition in the Flint Hills, it has grown this past year to a membership of about 1,000.

Although they wanted and achieved a broad base of support, the group has focused most of their efforts in Washington, D.C. If land acquisition is the Army's chosen alternative, the final battle in this dispute will be made in Congress with the Kansas delegates determining the direction of any votes.

Historically, Americans have seen the right to own land as the cornerstone of economic life and personal freedom. Public domain was used by the government to promote settlement,

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Ft. Riley:

We require more space to maneuver modern equipment in combat exercises.

build railroads and open markets.

The land acquisition dispute involving Fort Riley is more than just an effort on the part of the landowners/ranchers and citizens of the communities involved to protect their own land and livelihood. It is also an affirmation of land ownership philosophies that historically have been a part of this country — the belief that land belongs in the hands of private citizens, not the federal government.

At the end of 1989 about one-third of the United States was owned by the federal government. This includes national parks and forests, military bases and public domain. As the decade of the '90s got underway, the U.S. government, through its various departments and agencies, had proceedings started to remove from the private sector yet another 14 million acres.

The U.S. military, as of 1989, owns 25 million acres used in national defense. Currently proposed expansions, such as 240,000 acres to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., and 63,000 acres at Fort Lewis, Wash., would increase this acreage by another 3.4 million acres.

In addition to the land it owns, the federal government has access to public lands, which are managed by the Bureau of Land Management, for military purposes. BLM land withdrawals of up to 5,000 acres for federal use can be accomplished administratively. Currently, military requests for BLM lands involve more than 4.6 million acres in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah and Washington.

The federal government, historically, has shown that under its control, the land suffers. The open grazing ranges, when controlled by the government, suffered from overgrazing and erosion.

It was the livestock producers who were concerned about protecting the public domain. They learned on their own land that to continue producing a renewable resource year after year, the land had to be properly cared for. It was the livestock producers who encouraged Congress to enact the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934. Management of the land, private and public, has continued to be their goal.

These concepts are still firmly held throughout agricultural America and in the Flint Hills of Kansas.

More recently, the government has proven not to be a good neighbor. Public lands designated for multi-use activity have often become single-use military when that is one of the designated multi-use activities. Federally-owned land is not subject

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Jan Lyons:
*Our land is not for sale.
The Flint Hills belong in the
hands of the ranchers.*

to the same noxious weed control laws as privately owned land and often serves as a source point for infestation. Judging by past buy-out prices, purchase prices for private land acquisition is often only about 35 percent of the fair market value.

Fort Riley, just one of several military expansion projects currently under consideration, is located in the heart of the Kansas Flint Hills. The Flint Hills are a part of the tall-grass prairie region that once reached from central Illinois southwest into Oklahoma and northwest into Saskatchewan and Alberta, Canada. It covered more than 250 million acres. Roving herds of 400 million buffalo once thrived on these verdant grasslands.

Today only 1 percent of this highly productive grassland region remains. The major portions are located in the Flint Hills of Kansas and the Osage Hills of Oklahoma. Grazing remains the principal use of these prairies. Yearling cattle graze the big and little bluestem, Indiangrass, switchgrass, and grama grasses, gaining an average of two pounds per day during the grazing season.

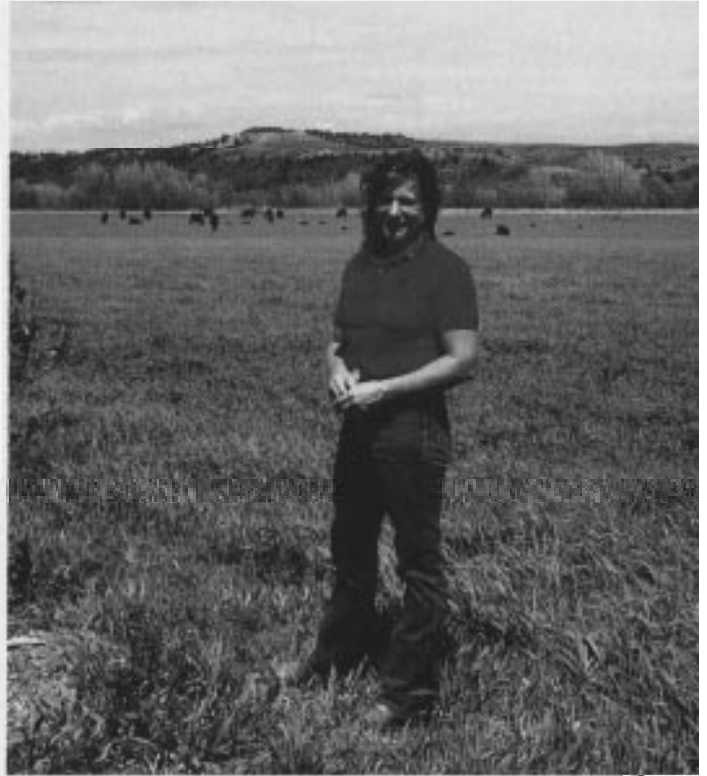
The primary effort of Preserve the Flint Hills has been lobbying their cause to Kansas Senators Nancy Kassebaum and Bob Dole and Congressman Jim Slattery. As a result of the efforts of Preserve the Flint Hills, Senator Kassebaum requested a study by the General Accounting Office of the Army's land acquisition process. The final report is due this summer and is expected to address the Army's formula for determining necessary training space and the consideration of alternatives to expansion.

"If nobody says, 'my land is not for sale,' and (we) don't try to stop the Army," says Lyons, "then the Army's process just goes ahead unquestioned."

Lyons and other members of Preserve the Flint Hills are saying their land is not for sale. They are confident that, given the times and budget constraints, other alternatives will be chosen. If not, they at least know they fought for their land and other alternatives were explored.

On the other side of the debate is Fort Riley. A part of Kansas history for 155 years, Fort Riley is home of the 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized). 1st Division's primary purpose is a commitment to NATO and support of Western Europe.

Fort Riley was established in 1853 as a base for operations against Indian raids on wagon trains traveling through the



Kansas territory on the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails. Following the Mexican War, it became home to the 1st Cavalry, then to the 4th Cavalry prior to the Civil War. In 1866 it saw the organization of the 7th Cavalry.

The 1st Infantry Division came to Fort Riley in 1955 from Germany. It had been serving there as an occupation force following World War II. The division also served in Viet Nam between 1965 and 1970, returning to Fort Riley in April 1970. The 1st Division continues its commitment to NATO and support of Western Europe through "return of forces to Germany" exercises that occur every two or three years.

Currently, Fort Riley encompasses 100,000 acres, having doubled in size in 1965. Housing and business offices occupy 30,000 acres on land that once was available for training. A total of 16,000 acres is designated an impact area for mortars and artillery shells. Some 25,000 acres are used in a multipurpose range complex where the M1 Abrams Tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles are fired. Another 29,000 acres are available for training. However, only 7,000 acres are contiguous and suitable for maneuvers.

Officials at Fort Riley first submitted a Land Use Requirements Study in 1980. No action was ever taken. The study was updated in 1985, again without action. Then in early 1989, Fort Riley was asked to update the study once more. Fort officials reported that with the influx of new equipment, such as the Bradley Fighting Vehicles and the UH60 Blackhawk helicopters, they required more space to maneuver this equipment in combat exercises.

Colonel Gary LaGrange, Garrison Commander at Fort Riley, has commented that the Army has sufficient space to train individuals but not the space to go beyond that; they need additional land for battalion-level training.

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This native prairie hillside, located within Fort Riley, shows encroachment of cedar trees and other woody vegetation, a symptom of neglected grassland management.

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Once the Land Use Requirement Study was approved by the Secretary of the Army, Fort Riley initiated an Analysis of Alternatives Study. This study is in the current stage of the project and is expected to be completed by November 1990.

Alternatives the Army sees open to them to solve Fort Riley's training space shortage are:

- 1) Deploy to other installations — the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.; Fort Carson, Colo.; or Fort Bliss, Texas, — to practice battalion-size maneuvers.
- 2) Increase use of training simulators.
- 3) Reconfigure the current range complexes.
- 4) Rely on maneuver agreements with local landowners.
- 5) Decrease the training tempo and reclaim land used for other purposes.
- 6) Permanent transfer of units or missions to other locations.
- 7) Acquire land contiguous to the Fort.
- 8) Acquire land not contiguous to the installation.
- 9) A combination of the above options.
- 10) Do nothing.

Four proposed sites of acquisition have been identified in this alternative study stage. None are contiguous with the Fort, however all are within an hour's drive.

Additional alternatives Preserve the Flint Hills sees open to the Army include:

- 1) Remove ROTC training from Fort Riley to make those training days available for the 1st Infantry Division.
- 2) Adopt the Integrated Training Area Management Program which would allow the Army to determine scientifically whether land expansion is actually necessary.
- 3) Reconfigure from mechanized infantry to light infantry.

Just as in land wars of the past, the debate over Fort Riley's proposed expansion has landowners pitted against the government and the towns opposed to the farms and ranches. The farmers and ranchers don't want to give up their land and livelihood, the townspeople don't want to lose the money the military spends with their businesses.

Primarily an agricultural area, much of the land in each of the proposed acquisition sites is native prairie grasslands. These grasslands are the primary source of income for

the farmers and ranchers of the area. When used to produce beef, this grassland has the gain potential of 65 pounds per acre. The proposed 100,000-acre expansion of Fort Riley translates as an economic loss of 6.5 million pounds of beef per year.

The landowners' opposition to the expansion of Fort Riley is based on the current state of affairs in eastern Europe; the federal budget deficit — expanding Fort Riley will cost between \$50 and \$100 million; the proposed military personnel cutbacks; modern technology and means of training available to today's Army; the agricultural value of the Flint Hills; and the unique Flint Hills ecosystem.

Besides taking 100,000 acres of prime agricultural land out of production, the destruction of this land by military exercises may seriously affect the quality and quantity of water in the region. This can affect the families and communities downstream that rely on the Kansas River as their water source.

Locally, the impact is emotional as well as economic. Displaced farmers and ranchers will need to find new land in an area where pastureland is already difficult to locate, even for a grazing season. It is estimated that up to 500 families could lose their homes, 11 to 13 cemeteries would have to be relocated, and \$10 to \$20 million per year in agricultural products would be lost.

In Clay and Dickinson Counties, the proposed site closest to Fort Riley and most populated, 20 percent of Clay County's tax base falls in the area. Those residents are asking, "how are tax dollars going to be made up?" Expansion into the southern site would take 30,000 acres out of the Centre School District, leaving the remaining landowners with the added tax burden.

Although the Army has stated, and the Government Accounting Office preliminary report requested by Senator Kassebaum confirmed, that Fort Riley will not close if the expansion does not occur, many local businessmen don't believe there are any guarantees. They cite the current state of affairs in eastern Europe and the federal budget deficit as reasons to support expansion of Fort Riley. Given those two conditions, along with announced cutbacks of military person-



Lyons Angus Ranch's improved pastures and sleek Angus cattle are set against a backdrop of Kansas Flint Hills.

nel, they see the possibility of Fort Riley closing its doors and moving out if troops are sent elsewhere for training.

Fort Riley is responsible for putting \$750 million per year into local economies. In addition, 68 percent of students in the Junction City school district are military related.

Should the base close, according to Gerald Geringer, chairman of the board of the Junction City Chamber of Commerce, the military-related student population would be lost. A corresponding number of teachers, 66 percent of whom come from the agricultural sector, would lose their jobs as well.

The Junction City Chamber of Commerce has gone on record in favor of the Fort's expansion

Geringer expresses it this way, "The business community supports Fort Riley and any action needed to keep the 1st Division a trained unit and a viable part of Kansas."

After the Analysis of Alternatives Study is released, Fort Riley will choose the most feasible alternative and make a recommendation to the Department of the Army. If land acquisition is the chosen alternative the Army will then request an Environmental Impact Statement.

The public will have 45 days to comment after release of the EIS; another 30 days after revisions are made.

If acceptable, the Army will then decide whether or not to request a land acquisition. If they do formally request land, the request will be sent to Congress for appropriations where the final fight will take place. The position of the Kansas del-



Prairie wildflowers brought to bloom by spring rains, like this Wormweed Mustard, are one of the treasures of the Flint Hills.

egates will determine the outcome. To win this land war, the Flint Hills ranchers must have the support of their Senators and Congressmen.

Lyons and other Flint Hills ranchers have more than just the Army to face in competition for their land. A few miles to the south, the National Audubon Society has a purchase option on a 10,000-acre ranch they propose to make a National Park. The ranchers are also facing a county group that wants to build a landfill.

Cattlemen nationwide will see the same fight to some degree. Preservationists are spending \$150 million a year to save millions of acres of land in the United States. Opposed to multi-use designation, they advocate no use.

The National Park Service has proposals pending to establish 86 new national parks, to expand existing parks with 10 million acres of both private and

public lands, and to add hundreds of millions of acres to the more than 90 million acres of existing National Forest wilderness.

In the 1980s cattlemen learned that to survive they had to become businessmen and marketers. In the 1990s they will learn they need to become politically aware and adept, as well.

As land use and the environment become a higher priority issue facing the country, competition for land and its use will also increase. Cattlemen will face even greater challenges in maintaining their livelihood.

