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## Review of *Living Landscapes of Kansas* Text by O.J. Reichman

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*Living Landscapes of Kansas*. Text by O. J. Reichman. Photographs by Steve Mulligan. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995. Map, photographs. x + 154 pp. \$29.95.

Co-authors O. J. Reichman (text) and Steve Mulligan (photography) have produced a book illustrating the natural beauty of Kansas. This prairie state known to many through its rich history of outlaws and cattletowns has an

equally rich but sometimes overlooked natural landscape. To the casual observer the landscape may appear "relatively flat and uniform," but Reichman has an appreciation for this "midrange" scale, more accessible perhaps than the monumentality of mountains or coasts. Reichman and Mulligan have surveyed the state selecting natural sights formed through a combination of earth, fire, wind, and water. Through Reichman's visual perception and impressive linguistic style, he presents a diverse view of the Kansas landscape. His keen sense of observation is evident in descriptions of natural features and how they were formed, for the relatively placid geologic history of Kansas has created a marvelous stratigraphic history. Color, texture, and structure are recorded using value systems far more complex than simple shades of black and gray. Mulligan adds substance to the text with superb natural photographs of spaces and places that evoke images of nature at its fullest.

A major portion of the book is concerned with a description of the vegetation of the prairies, forests, woodlands, and wetlands. Kansas is made up of three distinct groups of prairie grasses: tallgrass, mixed-grass, and short grass. "For the casual observer, recognition of these three primary prairie types will suffice." As might be expected from the author of *Konza Prairie*, the description of the tallgrass prairie and Flint Hills is excellent.

Reichman's prose is evocative (the magnificent Ogallala aquifer "seeps water as though it were wounded"), and he quietly builds a solid case for the importance of this region. "If any place in Kansas can be said to have global significance, it is Cheyenne Bottoms," one of the last wetlands in North America providing food for six hundred thousand migrating birds, "one of the most spectacular events in the natural world." The chapter "Processes" discusses the effects that natural elements, notably weather, have had in the shaping of the current landscape. "Kansas, at the crossroads of the continent, is touched by virtually every weather pattern in North America, and its landscapes are all the more interesting for it."

Reichman and Mulligan have provided written and visual proof that the natural beauty of Kansas is more complicated and impressive than fields of sunflowers and waving wheat.

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