



Foundation Document Overview

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

Kansas



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of TALLGRASS PRAIRIE NATIONAL PRESERVE is to preserve, protect, and interpret for the public an example of a tallgrass prairie ecosystem, the historic resources, and cultural and social values represented within the preserve, in the Flint Hills of Kansas.



Significance

Significance statements express why Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Tallgrass Prairie Ecosystem.** The tallgrass prairie once covered a vast expanse of North America; today, it is estimated that less than four percent remains. Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve protects an iconic portion of what remains.
- **Cultural History of the Prairie.** The landscape of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve contains a unique collection of natural and cultural features that tells the story of how people lived on and used the prairie from before European contact to the present.
- **Legacy of Ranching in the Flint Hills.** The Spring Hill Ranch is an outstanding representation of the transition from open-range cattle ranching to the enclosed (fenced) holdings of large cattle operations of the 1880s.
- **Outstanding Stone Architecture.** The Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters area contains outstanding examples of Second Empire and other 19th century architectural styles featuring locally quarried limestone.
- **Scenery.** Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve offers opportunities for extraordinary and inspirational scenic views of the Flint Hills prairie landscape.
- **Management Model.** The Nature Conservancy works with the National Park Service in a unique partnership to manage the preserve. The two entities provide a shared model for conservation to fulfill the purposes of the preserve.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Tallgrass Prairie**
- **Upland Prairie Streams**
- **Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters Area Historic Structures (1878–1904)**
- **Ranching Landscape**
- **Expansive Views of the Prairie**

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Archeological Resources Related to American Indians, Homesteading, and Ranching**
- **Historic Structures and Cultural Landscape Related to Ranching Activities After 1904**
- **Natural Landscape Features Other Than Tallgrass Prairie.**
- **Museum Collections**

Related resources are not owned by the park. They may be part of the broader context or setting in which park resources exist, represent a thematic connection that would enhance the experience of visitors, or have close associations with park fundamental resources and the purpose of the park.

- **Viewsheds and Undeveloped Lands Beyond Preserve Boundaries**
- **Flint Hills Ranches**
- **Flint Hills National Scenic Byway**
- **Chase County Courthouse**
- **Lantry House**

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- The once vast tallgrass prairie ecosystem, endemic to North America, is one of the world’s most endangered ecosystems.
- Tallgrass prairie is a biologically diverse association of flora and fauna, specially adapted over thousands of years to topography, soils, climate, fire, grazing, and other natural influences that comprise and sustain natural communities to provide an important storehouse of genetic species diversity that preserves the Flint Hills prairie.
- Interrelationships between the natural and cultural resources and features of the preserve reflect the influence of the land on the people and the people on the land.
- The cultural resources and features of the site illustrate the continuum of human experience in the Flint Hills region of Kansas from the first inhabitants through today’s residents.
- Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is a new model of public-private partnership for the stewardship of resources and for providing opportunities for public enjoyment.



Description

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is located in Chase County in east-central Kansas. Comprising 10,894 acres, the preserve showcases an outstanding example of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem, along with cultural evidence of American Indian habitation, and historic structures and features of the former Spring Hill Ranch. Culminating more than 70 years of interest in, work toward, and even opposition to the creation of a national prairie park, the preserve was established by legislation on November 12, 1996, as part of the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act (Public Law 104-333). At the time of its creation, the preserve was touted by its legislative champion, Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum, as a “model for the nation” in terms of being a public-private partnership.

Much of the preserve consists of pristine tallgrass prairie in the heart of the Flint Hills landscape. Spared from the plow by underlying limestone and chert (flint) and perpetuated by fire and grazing, the preserve contains a nationally significant remnant of the once vast, but now fragmented and highly altered, tallgrass prairie ecosystem. The Nature Conservancy estimates only four percent of tallgrass prairie ecosystem remains, with the Flint Hills representing the last landscape expression of tallgrass prairie. Although dominated by tallgrass prairie, the preserve is also rich in aquatic resources, with numerous springs, seeps, and intermittent and perennial streams. The entire preserve was listed as a national historic landmark in 1997 for its association with the Cattleman’s Empire period of the late 19th century and with the transition from open range to enclosed holdings of the large cattle operations of the 1880s.

Although the majority (all but 33 acres) of the preserve is privately owned by The Nature Conservancy, the entire property is managed by both the National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy as a unit of the national park system. The mission of the National Park Service is to protect resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of visitors now and for future generations. The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. This unique public-private partnership is dedicated to:

(1) preserving and enhancing a nationally significant remnant of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem; (2) preserving and interpreting the preserve’s cultural history and ranching heritage; and (3) offering opportunities for education, inspiration, and enjoyment through public access to the preserve’s geological, ecological, scenic, and historical features.

