



*Pondering the prairie. Photograph from A Proposed Prairie National Park, issued in July 1961 by the National Park Service*

# Tough as the Hills

## The Making of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

by Rebecca Conard

W e humans have imbued the prairie landscape with complex meaning. During the nineteenth century the midcontinental region was alternately disparaged as an inhospitable desert and rhapsodized as a lush sea of grass, depending on the mindset of the viewer and the motive for recording an observation. Thus, as others have noted, “prairies have been and continue to be among the most paradoxical of landscapes, considered to contain both nothing and everything, the repository of our culture’s rejected past and its cherished ideals.”<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of Euro-Americans who explored and settled the mid-continent, however, mainly saw the prairie’s economic potential. Louis Joliet, exploring the Upper Mississippi River Valley in 1673, noted that “a settler would not there spend ten years in cutting down and burning the trees; on the very day of his arrival, he could put his plough into the ground.” Writing 250 years later, Herbert Quick compared the fertility of Iowa’s tallgrass prairie to mother’s milk: “Bird, flower, grass, cloud, wind, and the immense expanse of sunny prairie, swelling up into undulations like a woman’s breasts, turgid with milk for a human race.” Artist George Catlin stands virtually alone among those who confronted the undomesticated prairies in suggesting that a portion of them be preserved. As early as 1832 Catlin called for a government policy that would create a “nation’s park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature’s beauty.”<sup>2</sup> Nearly a century passed before the loss of

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1. Joni L. Kinsey, Rebecca Roberts, and Robert F. Sayre, “Prairie Prospects: The Aesthetics of Plainness” in *Recovering the Prairie*, ed. Robert F. Sayre (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 15; see also Brian W. Blouet and Merlin P. Lawson, eds., *Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), a much earlier collection of essays exploring our cultural ambivalence toward the plains and prairies.

2. George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of North American Indians*, 1913 (reprint, New York: Dover Press, 1973), 289–93; Paul M. Angle, *Prairie State: Impressions of Illinois, 1673–1967, By Travelers and Other Observers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Herbert Quick, *Vandemark’s Folly* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1922).

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prairie landscapes reached proportions that triggered a critical reexamination of the prairie's inherent values. By then, the economic value of the prairie was not only fully understood; it had been fully appropriated.

#### THE BEGINNINGS OF GRASSLAND PRESERVATION: 1920–1956

During the 1920s Victor E. Shelford, University of Illinois, and the National Research Council's Committee on the Ecology of North American Grasslands began studying the prospects for a large grassland preserve in the Great Plains. They found four sites with sufficient floristic integrity to be considered true prairie. Shelford, supported by the Ecological Society of America, proposed in 1930 that one of these sites, a large area straddling Nebraska and South Dakota, be incorporated into the national park system.<sup>3</sup> This proposal marked the first effort to establish a national prairie park in the United States. It died aborning.

The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl diverted attention from a national prairie park. Instead, New Deal land-use planners and agricultural economists tackled the more immediate problems of soil erosion, soil exhaustion, overproduction, depressed agricultural market prices, and increasingly degraded farm life. Under the 1934 Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, the federal government acquired 11.3 million acres of submarginal farmland. Of this, 2.64 million acres in the Great Plains eventually were designated as national grasslands and placed primarily under U.S. Forest Service management.<sup>4</sup>

National grasslands, however, were intended to be land reclamation and demonstration areas, not substitutes for an authentic prairie park as first proposed in 1930. In cooperation with the National Park Service (NPS), the Ecological Society of America and the National Research

Council continued to examine shortgrass prairie sites for a grassland national park. By 1940 these studies resulted in a new proposal for a Great Plains national monument west of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota and a smaller area in extreme northwestern Nebraska.<sup>5</sup> World War II, however, intervened before this proposal could lead to any legislative action.

With the end of the war came renewed interest in preserving grasslands. In a 1950 report to the National Resources Council, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which had initiated acquisition of national grasslands in the 1930s, recommended the preservation of large expanses of six different types of grasslands in the West. A few years later, in 1956, the secretary of the interior's advisory board formally recommended additional studies for the purpose of identifying and acquiring grasslands for inclusion in the national park system.<sup>6</sup> Thus, during 1930 and the mid-1950s the broad concept of a grasslands national park gradually narrowed in focus to a tallgrass prairie park, which was promoted as being "true" prairie. However, just as ambivalence over the meaning and value of America's grasslands was expressed by early observers, so did ambivalence and controversy mark the long endeavor to create a "true" or tallgrass prairie national park in a specific location.

#### THE POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY PARK PROPOSAL: 1958–1963

Kansas figured prominently in the search for a suitable tallgrass prairie park from the very beginning. Between 1954 and 1958 G. W. Tomanek and F. W. Albertson, professors at Fort Hays State College, studied twenty-four prairie areas in Colorado, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Wyoming, New Mexico, Montana, Texas, and Kansas. The Tomanek-Albertson investigations became

3. V. Shelford, "Preservation of Natural Biotic Communities," *Ecology* 14 (1933): 240–45; *Preliminary Environmental Assessment, Proposed Prairie National Park/Kansas–Oklahoma, Appendix A: Planning Directive 2* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1975), published as House Doc. No. 96-12, Part II in 1979, hereafter cited as *Preliminary Environmental Assessment*, 1975; Dan L. Flores, "A Long Love Affair with an Uncommon Country: Environmental History and the Great Plains," in *Prairie Conservation*, ed. Fred B. Samson and Fritz L. Knopf (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996), 14–15.

4. R. Douglas Hurt, "Federal Land Reclamation in the Dust Bowl," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1986): 94–106; H. H. Wooten, *The Land Utilization Program, 1934 to 1964: Origin, Development and Present Status*, Agriculture Economic Report 85 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 1965).

5. "Background report for western Nebraska meeting, National Research Council, Division of Biology and Agriculture, Committee on the Ecology of North American Grasslands," April 22, 1937, "Unprocessed Materials, 1937–1988," Anthony Library, Harpers Ferry National Historic Park, Harpers Ferry, W.V., hereafter cited as Harpers Ferry Collection; "Great Plains National Monument Project," *The Council Ring* (January 8, 1940), *ibid.*; Victor H. Cahalane, "A Proposed Great Plains National Monument," *Scientific Monthly* 51 (August 1940): 125–39; *see also* James Lester Swint, "The Proposed Prairie National Park: A Case Study of the Controversial NPS" (master's thesis, Kansas State University, 1971), 33–35.

6. *Preliminary Environmental Assessment*, 1975. This recommendation correlated with ongoing grassland studies commissioned by the NPS and, more generally, with MISSION 66, an intensive ten-year development program (1956–1966) initiated during the administration of NPS Director Conrad Wirth. *See* Conrad L. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), ch. 9.



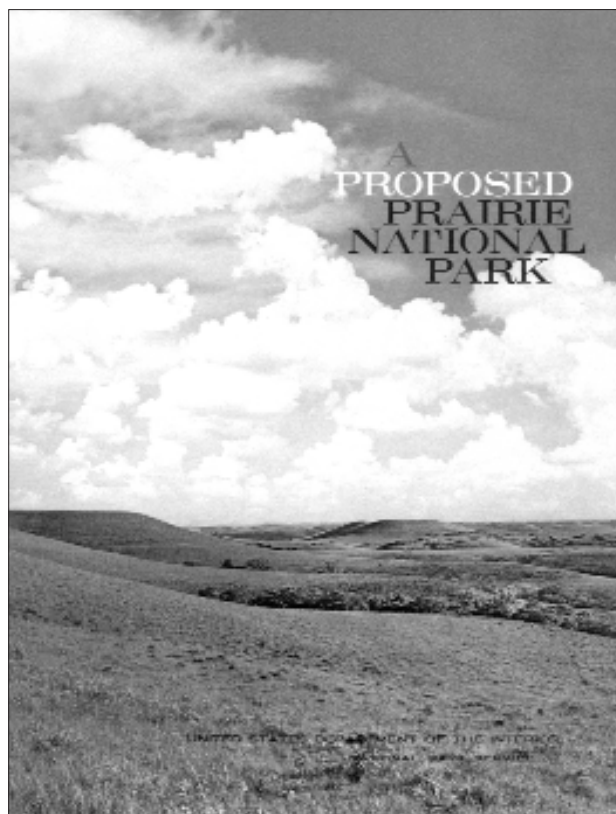
the basis for NPS recommendations issued in 1958, which called for a thirty-four-thousand-acre prairie park on a site east of Tuttle Creek Reservoir near Manhattan, Kansas. This recommendation appeared to have initial local support, at least through the Manhattan Area Park Development Association, founded in 1958 to promote both the Tuttle Creek Reservoir (an Army Corps of Engineers project) and the establishment of a grassland national park in Pottawatomie County. However, as the NPS continued to study and identify prairie landscapes of national significance, a key change emerged in its recommendations. A 1960 study called for a fifty-seven-thousand-acre site east of and abutting Tuttle Creek Reservoir. This recommendation not only called for a larger park, but more important, it incorporated a corridor of land that lay between the originally proposed thirty-four-thousand-acre site and Tuttle Creek Reservoir.<sup>7</sup>

Why two different recommendations from the National Park Service? The answer is twofold. On the one hand, long-standing opposition to the Tuttle Creek Reservoir transferred to the proposed park; and, on the other, local residents quickly realized an opportunity to exploit the recreational potential of the new reservoir. In March 1960 the Pottawatomie County Commission approved the proposed national park as long as the boundaries were not extended to the shore of Tuttle Creek Reservoir, that is, held to thirty-four thousand acres. As a result, NPS officials decided to make two separate recommendations to Congress, one with a buffer zone between the park and the reservoir and one without. The NPS clearly favored the fifty-seven-thousand-acre proposal without the buffer zone, but county commissioners were equally adamant that a mile-wide strip be established for economic development. The final 1961 NPS planning report maintained the agency's preferred fifty-seven-thousand-acre plan despite local opposi-

7. National Park Service, *Statement Analyzing Studies and Preliminary Plan for Proposed Prairie National Park*, Pottawatomie County, Kansas (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, September 1960). See also National Park Service, *Reevaluation Study, True Prairie Grasslands* (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, 1960), a companion study that identified four "nationally significant" areas, all of them in the Flint Hills region of Kansas and Oklahoma. The four sites were designated Manhattan, Chase, Elk, and Osage according to city or county names where they respectively occurred. Of the four, the Manhattan site was considered the most "feasible" for designation as a national park. G. W. Tomanek, *An Analysis of Three Areas in the Flint Hills* (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office Library, National Park Service, typescript photocopy, 1958); National Park Service, *Proposal for a True Prairie National Park* (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, December 1958); Swint, "The Proposed Prairie National Park," 37–43, 71; see also G. W. Tomanek and F.W. Albertson, *An Analysis of Some Grasslands in the True Prairie* (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office Library, National Park Service, typescript photocopy, 1959).

tion. Moreover, as NPS recommendations were being finalized, Kansas representative William Avery and senators Andrew F. Schoeppel and Frank Carlson introduced companion bills for a fifty-seven-thousand-acre park, with the proposed boundary extended westward to the shores of Tuttle Creek Reservoir.<sup>8</sup>

Area residents began dividing into proponents and opponents. Among proponents, Bill Colvin, a member of the Manhattan Area Park Development Association and



*This 1961 publication by the National Park Service promoted the need for a fifty-seven-thousand-acre prairie park within the Kansas Flint Hills region.*

editor of the *Manhattan Mercury*, was the most visible. It so happened that the *Manhattan Mercury* was owned by the family of Fred Seaton, who served as secretary of the interior from 1956 to 1961 under President Dwight D. Eisen-

8. Swint, "The Proposed Prairie National Park," 71–82; National Park Service, *A Proposed Prairie National Park* (Washington, D.C.: Secretary of the Interior's Office, 1961); Gary Baldrige, "Pottawatomie County Says No to Prairie Preservation," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 16 (Summer 1993): 99–101; see also Baldrige, "The Flint Hills: A Question of Control" (master's thesis, Emporia State University, 1991); House Resolution 12538, Avery, 86th Cong., 2d sess., 1960; S. 3651, Schoeppel and Carlson, 86th Cong. 2d sess., 1960.

hower.<sup>9</sup> The Eisenhower administration made developing multipurpose flood control reservoirs to serve a variety of outdoor recreational uses a priority. The Kansas state park system also was moving in this direction, so the idea of meshing a federal flood control project with a new national park fell in line with the thinking of the times to meet the growing demand for outdoor recreation.

Opposition was tied to the Tuttle Creek flood control project. In 1951, after a devastating flood took forty-one lives and the homes of one hundred thousand people in

prairie park became another target for those who believed the federal government had acted arrogantly in taking agricultural land to impound the waters of Tuttle Creek. The initial thirty-four-thousand-acre concept attempted to mitigate local controversy by stipulating a corridor of land to separate the flood control reservoir and the park. However, the corridor concept also conveniently allowed for considerable private recreational development, which generated local interest and support among business people. Proposed legislation in 1960, which promulgated an “ideal”

park of fifty-seven-thousand acres without the buffer zone, was thus politically risky from the outset. It did not entirely please proponents who wanted a corridor along the reservoir for private recreational development, and it confirmed the worst fears of opponents because it would take more land. In 1961, when legislation was reintroduced in Congress, the Senate bill increased the ante by authorizing the secretary of the interior to take as much as sixty-thousand acres by eminent domain.<sup>11</sup>

Despite divided local opinion, the Avery and Schoeppel–Carlson bills might have passed with some amendments, but opponents eventually captured enough momentum to kill them. The turning point came on December 4, 1961, when cattle rancher Carl Bellinger confronted Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall and NPS Director Conrad Wirth on grazing land that Bellinger leased in the Twin Mound area.

Although first-hand accounts of the Twin



*The confrontation in December 1961 between rancher Carl Bellinger (right) and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall made nationwide news. This photo of the incident on the Twin Mound grazing lands appeared in the December 15, 1961, issue of Time.*

Manhattan, Topeka, and Kansas City, the Army Corps of Engineers found enough local and congressional support to move forward with the Tuttle Creek Dam Project, first proposed twenty years earlier in 1931. The need for a large flood control dam and reservoir had been a contested local issue since then and, as the Tuttle Creek project moved to reality, passions rose higher among landowners and soil conservationists who opposed the “big dam” solution to flood control. As a result, by the late 1950s the Corps and the federal bureaucracy in general were considered “the enemy” to many citizens of Pottawatomie County.<sup>10</sup>

Before passions could cool, the proposed national

Mound incident vary in detail, Bellinger happened to be on the property when Udall’s entourage, traveling in two helicopters, landed to rendezvous with a tour guide. Instead, Bellinger met Udall as he deplaned and, wielding a gun, ordered him off the property. Caught off-guard, a stunned Udall returned to his helicopter. Reporters and photographers, however, were on hand to record the brief event, and the news traveled well beyond local headlines. Accordingly, Bellinger became something of a local legend for taking

9. Former Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall, telephone interview by author, June 4, 1998; Baldridge, “Pottawatomie County Says No to Prairie Preservation,” 98–99.

10. Baldridge, “Pottawatomie County Says No to Prairie Preservation,” 101–3; Swint, “The Proposed Prairie National Park,” 97–98.

11. Senate Bill 73, Schoeppel and Carlson, 87th Cong. 1st sess., 1961. See also Stewart Udall to Clinton P. Anderson, Chairman, Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, November 14, 1961; “Interior Department Recommends Legislation to Create Prairie National Park in Kansas,” November 15, 1961, U.S. Department of the Interior news release, Harpers Ferry Collection.

on the federal government. His “standoff” gave rise to the first opposition group, the Twin Mound Ranchers, and set the tone for the next three decades.<sup>12</sup>

#### INTERLUDE: 1963–1970

No new federal legislation was introduced during the remainder of the 1960s, but public interest continued and the prairie park idea remained a focus of study and discussion. In 1965 the NPS proposed a Prairie–Great Plains Tourway stretching fourteen hundred miles north from Oklahoma to the North Dakota–Montana border. The tourway concept included three “national parkway” segments that were considered to be of greater national significance and would be treated much like the Blue Ridge and Natchez Trace Parkways. Proposed as “parkway” segments were a 145-mile Great Prairie Parkway through the Flint Hills from Pawhuska, Oklahoma, to Council Grove, Kansas; a 100-mile Sandhills National Parkway through north-central Nebraska; and a Sioux–Badlands National Parkway in South Dakota.<sup>13</sup>

In a companion study, *The Living Prairie*, also reported in 1965, the NPS compared the aesthetic and land-management factors of three sites along the proposed Prairie–Great Plains Tourway Route (in Chase County, Kansas; Elk County, Kansas; and Osage County, Oklahoma) and ranked the three areas in terms of desirability. The report additionally noted that Dr. Raymond Hall of the University of Kansas had been contacting philanthropic sources seeking support for land acquisition. Hall served as

a member of the NPS Advisory Board and was prominent in the Prairie National Park Natural History Association, organized in the early 1960s to promote a prairie national park in eastern Kansas. No potential benefactors were named, but the idea of working with private entities to acquire land and then slowly phase out livestock use through regulated grazing leases was clearly under discussion.<sup>14</sup>

These studies helped sustain interest in a prairie national park. During the late 1960s the Kansas Wildlife Federation, the Kansas Recreation and Park Association, and the Kansas State Teachers added their support to that of the Prairie National Park Natural History Association. However, without political leadership the movement was at a standstill. The only result was the marking of a north–south highway route through Kansas as the “Prairie Parkway.”<sup>15</sup> Then, in 1970 Kansas governor Robert Docking seized the initiative by appointing a fifteen-member Governor’s Prairie National Park Advisory Committee headed by Bill Colvin of the *Manhattan Mercury*. Precipitating the governor’s action was passage of P.L. 91-462, which directed the secretary of the interior to conduct a feasibility study of lands in Oklahoma and southeast Kansas associated with Euro-American settlement in the historic Cherokee Strip. The advisory committee immediately initiated discussions with members of the Kansas Congressional delegation for the purpose of crafting legislation to create a prairie park in eastern Kansas.<sup>16</sup>

12. Udall interview, June 4, 1998; Baldridge, “Pottawatomie County Says No to Prairie Preservation,” 104–7; Swint, “The Proposed Prairie National Park,” 108–15, 141–46. New bills were introduced in 1963 (H.R. 4424 and S. 986), but by this time the Twin Mound Ranchers Association was organized for opposition and endorsed by the Kansas Livestock Association. The Senate bill died in the Senate Public Lands Subcommittee when senators from western states lined up with local opponents. See Acting Secretary of the Interior to Wayne N. Aspinall, July 18, 1963, Harpers Ferry Collection; Joe Lastelic, “Seek to Clear Way for Park,” *Kansas City Star*, March 4, 1963; “Twin Mound Ranchers Plan Prairie National Park Meet,” *Topeka Capital Journal*, April 14, 1963; Dick King, “Park Proposal Gets Protests,” *ibid.*, April 16, 1963; “Senate Group Pledges Early Decision on Proposed Park,” *ibid.*, August 9, 1963. See also Anthony Wayne Smith, President and General Counsel, National Parks Association, “An analysis of S. 986, submitted on invitation . . . at hearings of the Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the Senate of the United States,” August 8, 1963, Harpers Ferry Collection.

13. National Park Service, *The Prairie Panorama: A Proposal for a Prairie–Great Plains Tourway* (1965). This proposal appears to have evolved from a number of sources: the 1962 report of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, the Great River Road program along the Mississippi River, and legislation passed by the Eighty-eighth Congress authorizing the Lewis and Clark Tourway.

14. National Park Service, *The Living Prairie: The Opportunity for a True Prairie National Park, Oklahoma–Kansas* (N.p.: n.p., 1965).

15. Norma Northrop to Lynn Burris Jr., January 22, 1970, memo concerning January 21 meeting of the Prairie National Park Natural History Association meeting in Wichita, Kansas, Administrative Papers, Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, National Park Service Office, Cottonwood Falls, Kans., hereafter cited as TPNP Administrative Papers; Frank J. Anneberg, “A Prairie National Park in the State of Kansas,” information sheet, January 1, 1970, *ibid.*; Swint, “The Proposed Prairie National Park,” 149–50.

16. “Docking Names Manhattan Editor to Head Prairie Park Committee,” *Wichita Eagle*, April 22, 1970; John Petterson, “Tall Grass Country Seen as Prairie Park Location,” *ibid.*, November 11, 1970; John C. Higgins to Acting Director, Midwest Region NPS, December 9, 1970, memorandum, TPNP Administrative Papers; Minutes, Governor’s Advisory Committee for a Prairie National Park, December 4, 1970, *ibid.* Docking’s initiative came after the Kansas legislature rejected a bill (S. 390) to do the same thing. The congressional delegation then comprised Senators James Pearson and Robert J. Dole and Representatives Chester Mize and Joe Skubitz, all Republicans. Note that Kansas Representative Joe Skubitz introduced the bill that became P. L. 91-462, but the advisory committee did not support a prairie park in southeast Kansas.



KANSAS FLINT HILLS VERSUS  
CHEROKEE STRIP PROPOSALS: 1971–1973

In 1971 two competing park proposals entered the legislative hopper. The governor's advisory committee, backed by the Prairie National Park Natural History Association, other environmental groups, universities, and various newspapers, presented the Kansas congressional delegation with a formal request for legislation. Representative Edward Lawrence (Larry) Winn Jr. of Overland Park and Senator James B. Pearson of Prairie Village responded by introducing companion bills similar to the failed Pottawatomie County proposals of the early 1960s. Both bills called for a sixty-thousand-acre prairie park. Even though the location was left unspecified, everyone understood the intent was to establish a prairie park somewhere in the Flint Hills. Senator Henry Bellmon of Oklahoma introduced a competing bill to include the Oklahoma Panhandle in the Cherokee Strip study authorized by P.L. 91-462.<sup>17</sup>

The NPS withheld support from both the Flint Hills and Oklahoma proposals, in part because local controversy continued in Kansas and in part because the Cherokee Strip proposal was for a historical "grassland" park thematically linked to nineteenth-century cattle trails and thus was not considered a "true prairie" park concept.<sup>18</sup> Park proponents located primarily in Winn's district in northeast Kansas formed a new lobbying group to shore up support for the Flint Hills bill. The People for Prairie Park League, as the group was known, had the backing of the Prairie National Park Natural History Association and a variety of other local and state environmental groups. The Kansas Livestock Association took the lead in opposing the Winn-Pearson bills and proposed instead a six-hundred-mile "prairie parkway" loop consisting of observation viewpoints along existing highways through the Flint Hills. Hoping to unify agriculturists and environmentalists, various groups in Manhattan formed the Manhattan Citizens for the Tallgrass

National Park. The Manhattan Citizens took the position that "range abuse by ranchers," perceived or real, was "not a valid point for having a park" and proposed that some sort of landmark or museum commemorating the "ranching heritage" of Kansas be erected "in conjunction with the preservation of the natural ecosystem."<sup>19</sup>

The flurry of citizen organizing that took place in 1971 and 1972 succeeded in drawing the general lines of battle, agriculturists versus environmentalists, but it produced no evidence of strong support among Kansans in general either for or against a national prairie park. This was reason enough for other members of the Kansas congressional delegation to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, as they did. Moreover, national conservation and environmental organizations were not yet taking much interest in the proposition. As a result, the 1971 Winn-Pearson bills died in committee.

Meanwhile, the proposed Cherokee Strip historic grassland park provided cause to keep the controversy brewing. Kansas representative Joe Skubitz promoted this proposal as a "prairie park" that might appeal to both ranchers and environmentalists. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Kansas Recreation and Park Association, he made it clear that he did not support the concept of a large park focused solely or primarily on preserving an expanse of tallgrass prairie. Such a park, in his estimation, would not attract enough tourists to offset the loss of property tax revenue when land shifted to public ownership. He also announced the formation of a Kansas Advisory Team to work with the NPS to develop the "integrated park system" he had in mind.<sup>20</sup>

17. S. 1159, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971. "Tallgrass Prairie National Park, Local Problems and Possible Solutions—Questions and Probable Answers" issued by Prairie National Park Natural History Association, September 15, 1971, Patricia DuBose Duncan Papers, Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, hereafter cited as Duncan Papers; H.R. 9621, 92d Cong., 1st sess., 1971; S. 2149, Pearson, 92d Cong., 1st sess., 1971; E. Raymond Hall to George Hartzog, August 13, 1971, TPNP Administrative Papers; Robert Docking to William Roy, June 14, 1971, *ibid.*; see also E. Raymond Hall, "Tallgrass Prairie National Park," *American Forests* (December 1971). According to Patricia Duncan, H.R. 921 and subsequent bills introduced by Winn during the 1970s were principally drafted by attorney Lawrence Wagner, now deceased, of Overland Park. Patricia Duncan, unrecorded telephone interview by author, August 28, 1998.

18. J. Leonard Volz to Director, NPS, memorandum, November 22, 1971, TPNP Administrative Papers; Richard K. Griswold to Chief, Division of Legislation, memorandum, November 10, 1971, *ibid.*

19. Keith Tillotson to Patricia Duncan, October 21, 1972, Duncan Papers; "Report On Status of Legislation, and Local Expressions of Opinion," March 20, 1972, Patricia DuBose Duncan Collection, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence, hereafter cited as Duncan Collection; Minutes, Tallgrass Prairie National Park, June 22, 1972 (this appears to be the organizational meeting of STP), Duncan Papers; press release issued by Citizens Environmental Council, Kansas City, Mo., July 21, 1972, *ibid.* Inasmuch as the Prairie National Park Natural History Association's visibility seems to fade at this point, it is likely that STP also succeeded the earlier group. Keith Tillotson, "National Park Movement Revived," *K-State Collegian*, July 28, 1972; Forest Hintz, "Ribbon Concept Proposed for Park," *Wichita Eagle*, March 21, 1973; "Summary, Flint Hills National Parkway System Proposal," April 18, 1973, Duncan Papers.

20. Roger Myers, "Skubitz Boosts Prairie Park Idea," *Topeka Daily Capital*, January 26, 1973; "Skubitz Says Congress Best Hope for Parks," *Wichita Eagle*, Friday 26, 1973; see also National Park Service, "(Preliminary) Statement for Management and Planning, (Proposed) Cherokee Strip National Historic Park (Kansas–Oklahoma)," (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, January 1973); Joe Skubitz to Ronald Walker, February 28, 1973, Duncan Papers; "Park Proposal To Be Studied, Says Skubitz," *Topeka Daily Capital*, March 7, 1973. Members of his advisory team represented a broad spectrum of interests: Bill Colvin, chair of the Governor's Prairie National Park Advisory Committee; rancher Clif Barron; directors of the Kansas Park and Resources Authority, Kansas State Historical Society, and Kansas State Water Resources Board; the executive secretary of

Whatever the merits of the combined Cherokee Strip–Tallgrass Prairie proposal, it only succeeded in polarizing opposing sides. Environmentalists in northeast Kansas banded together in a new group, Save the Tallgrass Prairie, Inc. (STP). In March 1973 STP announced that while it did not exactly oppose the Cherokee Strip park concept, it felt that the tallgrass prairie segment should meet criteria established by earlier NPS studies and therefore recommended a separate national park in the Flint Hills. Ranchers and landowners in the Flint Hills countered by organizing the Kansas Grassroots Association (KGA). In May 1973 KGA chairman J. Manuel Hughes informed the NPS that the organization had “at least 6,000 signatures, gathered all over the State of Kansas” protesting a prairie park. Hughes went on to conclude that “except for a hard-core group in Kansas City and its environs, and in Lawrence Kansas at our state university, I believe we can safely say that the big majority of Kansans do not want such a park.”<sup>21</sup>

#### KANSANS DIVIDE: THE WINN BILLS, 1973–1980

Throughout the 1970s Congressman Larry Winn continued to champion a national prairie park in Kansas, while Kansans became increasingly divided on the prospect. In 1973 he introduced another bill for a sixty-thousand-acre park, after which the Special Committee on Environmental Protection of the Kansas House of Representatives called a public hearing to listen to what Kansans had to say. The Kansas Livestock Association, the Kansas Farm Bureau, and the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts lined up with the KGA to oppose a large prairie park. The Kansas Association of Commerce and Industry, the Kansas Association of Garden Clubs, and the Kansas City Junior Leagues lined up with STP in favor of it.<sup>22</sup>

the Kansas Soil Conservation Committee; the director of the Kansas District Corps of Engineers; and a private citizen from Council Grove.

21. “Flint Hills Park Draws Opposition,” *Wichita Beacon*, March 29, 1973; Jerry Engler, “Tallgrass Prairie Reserve Opposed,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 20, 1973; J. Manuel Hughes to Ronald Walker, May 10, 1973, Duncan Papers. See “Chronology of Action by the Public in Kansas Following Release of the Cherokee Strip Suitability/Feasibility Study Report,” ca. November 1973, Duncan Collection; “Tallgrass National Park” position paper, Regional Development and Natural Resources Committee of the American Institute of Architects, June 8, 1973, *ibid.*; “Chronology of Action by the Public in Kansas Following Release of the Cherokee Strip Suitability/Feasibility Study Report,” ca. November 1973, Duncan Papers; “Tallgrass Prairie Group Favors Separate Park,” STP press release, March 9, 1973, *ibid.*; “Prairie Park Citizens Lobby Proposes Park Location,” STP press release, March 13, 1973, *ibid.*

22. H.R. 9262, 93d Cong., 1st sess., 1973, H.R. 9262; “A Vital Hearing on Prairie Park Next Thursday in Topeka,” *Kansas City Times*, August 23, 1973; “Chronology of Action by the Public in Kansas Following Release of

Except for Winn, the Kansas congressional delegation stayed on the sidelines. Winn, however, continued the campaign, not necessarily because he saw a need to protect an important ecosystem, but because, in his own words, he believed that the Flint Hills “was some of the most beautiful land in the country” and that Kansans “ought to do something to put it into some kind of park or preserve.”<sup>23</sup> His perseverance paid off. As 1973 drew to a close, six members of the congressional delegation came together to



*Divided opinion over the creation of a national prairie park spawned a number of political groups, including Save the Tallgrass Prairie, Inc., formed in 1973 by northeast Kansas environmentalists who favored the development of a prairie park.*

the Cherokee Strip Suitability/Feasibility Study Report”; Ray Morgan, “Prairie Park Site Found,” *Kansas City Star*, August 30, 1973; see also Patricia Duncan to Charles Pearson, editor, *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, August 9, 1973, Duncan Papers; Duncan to Pearson, *Wichita Eagle*, September 10, 1973, *ibid.* The Special Committee on Environmental Protection, charged with recommending a position that the Kansas legislature could support to the congressional delegation, debated its options trying to find consensus and finally recommended that the legislature wait for the results of yet another NPS feasibility study. See John Petterson, “Foes of Prairie National Park Dealt Setback in Close Vote,” *Wichita Eagle*, September 28, 1973; Petterson, “Restrained Fervor: Group Cautious on Park Proposal,” *Wichita Beacon*, October 30, 1973; Ken Peterson, “Ft. Riley Suggested Prairie Park Site,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 31, 1973.

23. Former U.S. Representative Larry Winn Jr., interview by author, May 6, 1998.



support yet another feasibility study. Secretary of the Interior Rogers C.B. Morton agreed to the study, but warned that any proposal for a prairie national park in Kansas "would remain dormant until Kansans ended their division and presented a united front."<sup>24</sup>

The Tallgrass Prairie Conference of 1974, held in Elmdale appeared to signal an easing of tensions. Co-sponsored by STP, the Kansas Group of the Sierra Club, the Burroughs Audubon Society, the Citizens Environmental



Throughout the 1970s Congressman Larry Winn championed a national prairie park. He is photographed here speaking at the Tallgrass Prairie Conference of 1974, held in Elmdale.

24. Ray Morgan, "Morton Agrees to Prairie Park Study," *Kansas City Times*, December 21, 1973. Save the Tallgrass Prairie, Inc. monitored developments in the state legislature. It also mobilized a petition drive among college students to press for passage of H.R. 8726, Winn's consolidated bill, which was referred to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. In April 1974 a group of students, representing various colleges and universities in Kansas, staged a much publicized caravan to Washington, D.C. where they presented signed petitions, reportedly bearing eighteen to twenty-five thousand signatures, to Representative Winn. See Ray Morgan, "Caravan for Prairie Park," *Kansas City Times*, April 20, 1974; Joe Lastelic, "Students Petition for Tallgrass Park," *ibid.*, April 24, 1974. The six were Senators Pearson and Dole, and Representative Winn, joined by Representatives Garner E. Shriver, Keith G. Sebelius, and William R. Roy. Congressman Joe Skubitz, still the ranking Republican member of the National Park Subcommittee of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, did not join in the request.

Council, and the Sierra Club Southern Plains Regional Conservation Committee, the Elmdale conference sounded a conciliatory note. Keynote speaker Stewart Udall received a much friendlier reception this time even though he defended a sixty-thousand-acre park in the Flint Hills to "fill the last gap in the nation's park system." KGA delegates who attended the Elmdale conference gave statements to the press maintaining their opposition but admitting that "things have been easing up on both sides when the two groups get together."<sup>25</sup>

Any possible rapprochement was short-lived. In the spring of 1975 the Kansas legislature passed, by substantial majorities in both houses, a resolution requesting that Congress reject any bill authorizing the establishment of a tallgrass prairie national park in the Flint Hills. The language amplified arguments routinely put forth by agricultural interests: the federal government already controlled "a vast amount of property in Kansas" and that Fort Riley, in particular, "would be better suited" for a prairie park; a national park would remove too much land from the property tax rolls, seriously hampering school financing; and "the loss of vast grazing areas in the grasslands" would impair Kansas beef production in an "era of nationwide food shortages."<sup>26</sup>

STP, which had lobbied hard to defeat the state measure, stepped up its advocacy. A media campaign already had succeeded in gaining a modest level of national attention through the pages of national magazines and newspapers, such as *Smithsonian* magazine and the *Wall Street Journal*. Now STP formed an honorary board of prominent men and women to help advance the cause. Chaired by Dr. Karl Menninger, the board included Stewart Udall; philanthropist Katherine Ordway, then working with the Nature Conservancy to preserve prairies; David Brower, president of Friends of the Earth and past president of the Sierra Club; Charles Callison, executive vice president of the National Audubon Society; and Loren Eiseley, Professor of

25. Roger Moore, "Udall Back in Flint Hills to Promote Prairie Park," *Kansas City Star*, September 29, 1974; see also "Udall Backs Need for Prairie Park," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, September 29, 1974; Dave Bartel, "Prairie Park Backers Map Plans," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, September 28, 1974; Roger Moore, "Tallgrass Prairie Park May Be Close to Reality," *Kansas City Times*, September 30, 1974; "National Park Study to Take Until Mid-'76," *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 30, 1974.

26. "Tallgrass Park Opposition Bill Goes to Senate," *Wichita Eagle*, March 12, 1975; "Prairie Park Supporters Before Committee Today," *Wichita Beacon*, March 27, 1975; Roger Myers, "Senate Against Park," *Topeka Daily Capital*, April 11, 1975; see also "STP Action Alert," ca. April 1975, Duncan Papers; "Kansas Legislature," *Tallgrass Prairie News* 3 (June 1975), *ibid.*; Carole Ise, "What Really Happened in Topeka," *Tallgrass Prairie News, Conference Issue* (September 1975), *ibid.*

Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania and author of *The Immense Journey*.<sup>27</sup>

The park proposal finally had the endorsement of nationally recognized names. With a new level of support, Representative Winn reintroduced legislation in 1975, 1977, and 1979. However, despite a lengthening list of bipartisan co-sponsors and increasing support from mainstream environmental groups, Winn's recurring bills met the same fate as their predecessors. Significantly, Ronald Reagan's successful bid for the presidency in 1980 tipped the balance scales in favor of the opposition. During a March 1981 radio interview, the new interior secretary, James Watt, declared the Reagan administration to be "in the mainstream of the environmental movement" and announced that the Department of the Interior was asking Congress "for a moratorium on acquisitions." Larry Winn subsequently conceded that although he had not given up on a prairie park completely, there was no longer any reason to reintroduce legislation "when we know that for the next four years the administration won't approve it."<sup>28</sup> A post-mortem offered by the *Kansas City Times* noted in the headline that the "Fight Over Park is Tough as the Hills" and cited as reasons for failure an unwarranted optimism among conservationists, the inability of Kansas environmentalists to present a united front, a critical lack of support from members of the Kansas congressional delegation other than Larry Winn, and, behind all this, entrenched opposition from Flint Hills ranchers and farmers. Winn, who remained in Congress until January 1985, summed up the legislative efforts of the 1970s in much the same way. After a decade of trying, he decided that introducing further legislation was futile, and advocate groups decided not to press him.<sup>29</sup>

#### THE SPRING HILL Z BAR RANCH OPTION: 1988–1991

Eight years later, with Reagan about to leave office, the prairie park idea once again began to flower in the Flint Hills, specifically near Strong City. In June 1988 the National Audubon Society secured an option to purchase the Z Bar Ranch, historically known as the Spring

Hill Ranch.<sup>30</sup> Established in 1881, the 10,894-acre Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch included a stunning complement of limestone buildings built in the 1880s, a one-room stone schoolhouse, approximately thirty miles of stone fences, and a spectacular sweep of Flint Hills prairie-cum-grazing land.<sup>31</sup> The Audubon Society's action set in motion a complex process of negotiations that ultimately led to the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. However, the process moved haltingly.

The Audubon Society, working through Ron Klataske, West Central Regional vice president, contacted Congressman Dan Glickman about developing legislation to establish the ranch as some type of NPS unit. Glickman subsequently arranged a meeting of the Kansas congressional delegation, where Klataske outlined a proposal for establishing the ranch as a tallgrass prairie monument, and Glickman's staff began to develop his proposal into a discussion draft bill.<sup>32</sup> Meantime, the City of Strong City learned about the Audubon Society's option when it approached the trustees about purchasing a few acres of the ranch adjacent to the city limits. At that point Klataske had little choice but to go public with the information, so he called a meeting with local community leaders in January 1989. To a gathering of about eighty people he presented three options then under consideration: federal purchase with development, management, and interpretation by the

30. According to Ron Klataske, he was contacted in the fall of 1986 by Doug Wilden, a ranch real estate agent in Hutchinson, and notified that the Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch was undergoing management changes and might be for sale. Several months later, in February 1987, Klataske first spoke to Dudley Alexander, vice president of the trust department of Boatman's National Bank in Kansas City, who represented the ranch trustees. Discussions between Klataske and Alexander continued for about a year, during which time they discussed the potential of the property in terms of natural resource conservation and interpretation of the cultural history of ranching in Kansas. Early in 1988 Alexander indicated that he and, presumably, the ranch trustees he represented were willing to extend an option agreement to the Audubon Society. This agreement was finalized in June 1988. Ron Klataske, former West Central Regional Vice President, National Audubon Society, telephone interview by author, July 1, 1998.

31. The entire preserve was designated as Spring Hill Ranch National Historic Landmark on February 18, 1997. The Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970, and the Lower Fox Creek School was listed on the National Register in 1974.

32. "Scott" to Dan [Glickman], memorandum concerning tallgrass prairie meeting with delegation and Ron Klataske, December 7, 1988, Dan Glickman Papers, Department of Special Collections, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kans., hereafter cited as Glickman Papers. "Discussion draft" bill to establish Flint Hills Prairie National Monument, January 6, 1989, *ibid.*; Ron Klataske to Dan Glickman, September 27, 1988, Klataske, a native Kansan with a farming and ranching background, stated in the July 1, 1998, interview that he had been involved in the tallgrass prairie park effort since the early 1970s and had long maintained the position that any land acquisition must be on a willing-seller basis with protections against federal use of eminent domain.

27. "Top Names Join STP Honorary Board," *Tallgrass Prairie News* 3 (June 1975), *ibid.*

28. Dave Bartel, "Tallgrass Park? Not During Reagan's Term," *Wichita Eagle*, April 16, 1981; "Prairie Park on Back Burner," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, March 14, 1981. For a full account of Winn's legislative efforts in the 1970s, see Rebecca Conard, *Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Legislative History, 1920–1996* (Omaha: NPS Midwest Support Office, 1998), 16–29.

29. "Fight Over Park is Tough as the Hills," *Kansas City Times*, June 23, 1981; Winn interview, May 6, 1998.

NPS; purchase and operation by the National Audubon Society; or purchase by the State of Kansas with operation through an appropriate state agency. Before proceeding with legislation, however, Klataske proposed that a "partnership" of local leaders, landowners, and conservation groups sit down together and work out a plan.<sup>33</sup>

Initial reaction up and down the Flint Hills was encouraging. A stream of favorable editorials appeared in newspapers. The chambers of commerce of Strong City and Cottonwood Falls lent their support. Klataske made it clear that he would work with the Flint Hills National Monument Committee to obtain local consensus before the Audubon Society sought congressional action. By late February, however, local residents were drifting into different camps. Ranchers expressed their opposition at a "packed meeting" that was followed the next day by a meeting "packed with supporters." Community leaders and business owners welcomed the local economic boost that would come with tourism. Some ranchers were willing to accept a national monument in the park system if there were guarantees that no more land would be taken by eminent domain. Others just saw the proposal as an entering wedge, no matter what assurances were given. A spokesman for the Kansas Livestock Association put it this way: "There is just a deep-seated philosophy in the Flint Hills that the government should not own land."<sup>34</sup>

As local residents began taking up sides, the Flint Hills National Monument Committee, chaired by attorney Lee Fowler, worked on a legislative proposal that would fly with Flint Hills landowners who feared they might lose their farms and ranches. After several meetings, the committee forwarded a draft bill to Representative Glickman cautioning that certain provisions were considered "sacred." These provisions included "prohibiting the use of

eminent domain" to acquire additional lands or scenic easements and "protection of the local tax base." To assure that local residents and communities would be permanently involved in the management of the proposed monument, the draft bill also contained a provision to establish a twenty-member advisory committee.<sup>35</sup>

Even though the Flint Hills National Monument Committee had addressed opponents' every concern and newspapers throughout eastern Kansas endorsed the draft legislation heartily, the *Topeka Capital-Journal* nonetheless predicted that this was the beginning of "Range War in Chase County—1980s Style." The prediction proved to be accurate. When Glickman requested a congressional appropriation for another feasibility study, the Kansas Grassroots Association notified his office that it had "recently reorganized to actively and consistently oppose" turning the Z Bar into a prairie national monument.<sup>36</sup>

Congress adjourned for the summer in 1989 without appropriating funds for the feasibility study, but early in September the NPS notified Glickman that it would fund the study out of its own budget.<sup>37</sup> With the announcement that the NPS would spend its own money, tension in Chase County increased. The *Wichita Eagle* sent a reporter to Strong City to gauge local reactions, and the resulting story ran in a Sunday edition with a provocative photograph of five ranchers posed defiantly on the lawn of the Z Bar Ranch. Buried in the article a line reported that the *Chase County Leader* had stopped printing letters to the editor because of much local frustration over editorials that had appeared in newspapers throughout the state "in favor of the monument proposal without speaking to nearby ranchers." While many local residents were trying to maintain civility and calm in the face of serious community divisions, the media played up the controversy, making it much harder to

33. Informational letter outlining the historic and cultural features of the ranch and specifying key points for legislation, prepared for attendees of January 5, 1989, meeting and signed by Ron Klataske, Glickman Papers. See also George Stanley, "Flint Hills Ranch to Become Preserve," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, January 6, 1989; John Chambers, "Monumental Plans for Sprawling Ranch," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 7, 1989. These events also were discussed, briefly, in the Klataske interview, July 1, 1998.

34. William Robbins, "Stampede Is Feared on Range," *New York Times*, February 8, 1989; quotation from Dirck Steimel in "Park Plan Sparks Disputes on Prairie," *Kansas City Star*, February 26, 1989; Hank Ernst, "Flint Hills Tug-of-War," *Kansas Farmer*, March 18, 1989; Kenneth Scott, "Home on the Range," *Emporia Gazette*, January 13, 1989; "Prairie Monument: This Is the Time; This Is the Place," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, January 13, 1989; "Prairie Park's Time Has Come," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 23, 1989; see also FJB, "National Monument Deserves Support," *Grass and Grain*, January 24, 1989; "Happy Birthday, Kansas," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 29, 1989; VLA, "Editorial," *Chase County Leader-News* (Cottonwood Falls), February 2, 1989; "Prairie Prelude: Grassroots Support Monument," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, February 25, 1989; "A Monument in the Hills," *Emporia Gazette*, March 2, 1989.

35. W. Lee Fowler, interview by author, May 11, 1998. The Flint Hills National Monument Committee numbered more than thirty people, including owners of land adjoining the Z Bar and representatives from the communities of Strong City, Cottonwood Falls, Council Grove, and Emporia. W. Lee Fowler to Dan Glickman, March 31, 1989, with attached draft of "Proposed Legislation for the Creation of the Flint Hills Prairie National Monument prepared by Flint Hills National Monument Committee," Glickman Papers.

36. "Daring to Hope for Monument," editorial, *Manhattan Mercury*, April 5, 1989; "A Monument on the Prairie," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 5, 1989; "Prairie Progress," *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, April 29, 1989; "Preserve Prairie," *Salina Journal*, May 21, 1989; quotation from "Range War," *Midway*, Sunday magazine section, *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 9, 1989; Charles Magathan to Dan Glickman (undated letter stamped "Received April 20, 1989"), Glickman Papers; Magathan to Glickman, April 19, 1989, *ibid.*; "Testimony of Congressman Dan Glickman (KS) on Behalf of the Kansas Congressional Delegation Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior," April 25, 1989, *ibid.*

37. "Glickman Notified of Plans for Prairie Park Study by Park Service," media release, September 8, 1989, Glickman Papers.



find common ground. People from both sides who were willing to give statements to the press agreed on one thing: nothing had ever happened to so split the community.<sup>38</sup>

The NPS conducted the Spring Hill Z Bar feasibility study in a politically charged atmosphere that led to more angry outbursts and disruptive activities at public hearings, but the forward momentum nonetheless held. In April 1991, after the NPS completed its study, Glickman announced that he would introduce legislation authorizing the NPS to acquire the Z Bar. The Kansas Farm Bureau, the Kansas Livestock Association, and the Kansas Grassroots Association immediately announced that their opposition had not changed.<sup>39</sup>

Glickman's bill was in trouble before it was introduced. One of his staff members advised the congressman that the issue was "out of hand in Chase County." Based on incoming reports suggesting that the emotional pitch in Chase County could lead to violence, Glickman's staff suggested that the congressman "back off" for awhile, shore up support among the Kansas delegation, and let the media and environmental groups "put pressure on Chase to get with it." In the meantime it became clear that support from the Kansas delegation would not be unanimous, but Jan Meyers and Jim Slattery did sign on as co-sponsors when Glickman finally introduced the bill in May 1991.<sup>40</sup> Hearings took place in July and August. Not

38. Nickie Flynn, "Ranch's Fate Cuts Rift Through Hills," *Wichita Eagle*, October 1, 1989. Lee Fowler concurs that the media overplayed the controversy, but he also places some of the blame on the local newspaper editor. According to Fowler, "There appeared to be a lot more controversy than there really was if you talked to the people on the street. There is no question in my mind that there were people who were really upset, but at the same time I don't think it was near as bad as it was portrayed in the press. Especially the local paper." Fowler interview, May 11, 1998.

39. M. E. O'Neal, "Grassroots Association Disrupts Monument Hearing Here," *Chase County Leader-News*, March 29, 1990; "Grassroots Tactics Wound Chase County, Not Monument," *ibid.*, March 29, 1990; "Park Service Will Update Monument Study Progress," *ibid.*, June 21, 1990; "Park Service Monument Meeting Tonight," *ibid.*, June 28, 1990; "No More Black Eyes for Chase County," *ibid.*, June 28, 1990; "Park Service Says Its Parks Don't Have Buffer Zones," *ibid.*, July 5, 1990. See also Randall Baynes to Dan Glickman, May 2, 1990, Glickman Papers; "Statement of Congressman Dan Glickman, Flint Hills Prairie National Monument Proposal," media release, April 4, 1991, *ibid.*; Michael Bates, "Legislation Planned for 11,000-Acre Flint Hills National Park," AP release, April 4, 1991, *ibid.*; Sherry [Ruffing] to Dan [Glickman], memorandum re: Tallgrass Monument Strategy, April 8, 1991, *ibid.*; "Z Bar Ranch Study Completed," NPS news release, Midwest Regional Office, April 30, 1991, *ibid.* See also Matthew Schofield, "Glickman Revives Proposal for Tallgrass Prairie Park," *Kansas City Star*, April 5, 1991; Lori Linenberger, "Proposed Park Fuels Conflicts," *Wichita Eagle*, April 5, 1991; "Marnet: Flint Hills National Monument Would be Kansas' No. 1 Attraction," *ibid.*, April 6, 1991, and reprinted in *Chase County Leader-News*, April 11, 1991; "Prairie Park? Let's Try Again," editorial, *Manhattan Mercury*, April 9, 1991; "Proposed Flint Hills Monument Pleases National Audubon Society," *Russell Record*, April 11, 1991.

40. Myrre [Roe] to Dan [Glickman] and other staff members, memorandum re: Z Bar, April 30, 1991, Glickman Papers; H. Barry Massey, "Indecision Marks Plans for Z Bar," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 11, 1991; H.

only were they contentious affairs, but an unanticipated twist came when the NPS suddenly reversed its position and opposed the bill, asserting that the eleven-thousand-acre ranch was "not large enough to ensure successful management" and that there had been no "determination of the degree of natural or cultural significance." Glickman was dumbfounded. At a congressional hearing he snapped that the "total conversion of its position" was "one of the most unusual incidents to ever come out of the NPS."<sup>41</sup>



The 1989 proposal to create a national prairie monument on the Z Bar Ranch rekindled the controversy of previous decades and created a flurry of newspaper editorials supporting the movement. The above editorial appeared in the April 5, 1989, Topeka Capital-Journal.

Rept. 2369, 102d Cong., 1st sess., 1991, Glickman Papers; see also "Statement by Congressman Dan Glickman on the Establishment of the Flint Hills Prairie National Monument, May 16, 1991, *ibid.*;" "Visionary: Prairie National Monument Would be a Gift to the Future," editorial, *Wichita Eagle*, May 17, 1991, "Meyers Lends Support to Flint Hills Prairie National Monument," *Chase County Leader-News*, May 30, 1991; "Preserve a Piece of Prairie," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, June 3, 1991.

41. Sherry [Ruffing] to Dan [Glickman], memorandum re: NPS testimony, July 16, 1991, Glickman Papers; "Statement of Denis Galvin, Associate Director for Planning and Development, NPS, Department of the Interior, Before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands," July 16, 1991, *ibid.* In interviews with Steve Miller, a member of the 1990-1991 NPS special resource study team, and with Lee Fowler, the consensus is that Galvin was responding to orders that came from within the Bush administration. Within the NPS and among park proponents locally, there was disappointment, but most people viewed this development as only a temporary setback. Stephen Miller, interview by author, May 11, 1998; Fowler interview, May 11, 1998. "Statement by Congressman Dan Glickman before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands in support of H.R. 2369," July 16, 1991, Glickman Papers.

Even though the NPS no longer supported its own recommendations, officially, the hearings continued. Pat Roberts, then a representative, managed to cut through some of the emotionally charged rhetoric to articulate clearly and concisely the heart of the opposition's message. Roberts noted that the Z Bar Ranch, and Flint Hills ranch land in general, was "attractive to both environmentalists and recreationalists because of the stewardship that had been provided by the previous and current owners." If, then, the "caring of the Z Bar and surrounding lands has been a way of life for the local residents, farmers, and ranchers," Roberts wondered, "[w]hy should the government come in and threaten this delicate balance?"

Reducing the controversy to agriculture-versus-environment, as many people had done, masked complex values and attitudes that park proponents outside Chase County often did not understand, appreciate, or acknowledge. Flint Hills ranchers who opposed the monument did not assume, as did many conservationists, that the National Park Service would be a better steward. Nor could they accept the proposition that hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, no matter how much money they pumped into the local economy, would be more in harmony with the prairie ecology than cattle grazing the hills. Granted, organized opponents all too often engaged in inflammatory antigovernment rhetoric. Nonetheless, as Roberts pointed out in his remarks, ranchers who lived in Chase County were "justifiably fearful of 'outsiders' wanting to take this property and make changes that [would] dramatically change their land, their communities and eventually their lives and livelihoods."<sup>42</sup>

To this observation, one might add that when park proponents and park planners talked about interpreting the cultural heritage of the Flint Hills, they implicitly thought in terms of Native Americans who were long gone and idealized images of nineteenth-century settlers who established ranches, farms, and small communities across the beautiful Flint Hills. The heritage envisioned for interpretive centers did not extend conceptually to the culture of independent-minded ranchers and farmers who placed high social and political values on private ownership of land.

Roberts closed his remarks by noting that "Kansans continue to wonder why the Z Bar was not simply purchased by the environmental groups fighting so hard for

the federal government to purchase it."<sup>43</sup> New developments made this point hard to refute. Early in July 1991 the Kansas Farm Bureau, the Kansas Grassroots Association, and an unidentified individual approached Boatman's Bank about a private purchase of the Z Bar. Boatman's informed the group that the ranch was not on the market, and the prospective buyer was told to speak with Ron Klataske of the Audubon Society. Agricultural opponents of the prairie monument proposal immediately became suspicious that "someone" was "trying to control" the hearings "to assure a favorable outcome" for Glickman's bill.<sup>44</sup>

Controversy dragged on in the media, but all the mainstream conservation organizations backed Glickman's bill, as did a host of statewide organizations. After thirty years the balance of power had finally shifted in favor of preserving a small portion of the Flint Hills prairie for public access; the House of Representatives passed the bill in October.<sup>45</sup> The scene then shifted to the Senate, and once again the movement stalled. Senator Robert J. Dole was unwilling to support the proposal contained in Glickman's bill. Senator Nancy Kassebaum philosophically supported a park or preserve but declined to introduce legislation authorizing the NPS to purchase and manage the Z Bar Ranch. Instead, Kassebaum announced that she "would bring together the state's various conservation and agriculture groups to discuss the creation of a private foundation." Kassebaum's announcement followed private discussions with farm groups and her own firm belief that if representatives from opposing sides could join together, rational minds would prevail to create a mutually acceptable proposal for preserving the Z Bar Ranch under private ownership.<sup>46</sup>

43. Ibid.

44. Action alert to "Grassroots Members" (undated but stamped "Received July 16, 1991 in Rep. Glickman's office"), ibid.

45. Dana Neal, "County to Study Buying Z Bar ranch," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, July 20, 1991; "Chase County Studies Buying Part of Z Bar," *Wichita Eagle*, August 3, 1991; "Wells: Wouldn't Hesitate to Take Z Bar By Eminent Domain," *Chase County Leader-News*, August 8, 1991; Angela Herin and Tom Webb, "Hayden Backs Rejection of Flint Hills Park Plan," *Wichita Eagle*, July 25, 1991; "Kansas Park Approved by Interior, but Faces State Opposition," *Congressional Monitor* 27 (September 26, 1991): 4; Jack Thompson, "House Votes to Create Tallgrass Prairie Park," *Kansas City Star*, October 16, 1991.

46. Press releases, November 12, 22, 1991, Nancy Landon Kassebaum Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, hereafter cited as Kassebaum Collection; Klataske interview July 1, 1998; Nancy Kassebaum Baker, former U. S. senator from Kansas, telephone interview by author, August 29, 1998. Kassebaum sought to accomplish two things through this commission: one, to bring opposing groups together to create a set of principles for land conservation and historic preservation/interpretation on the ranch, and two, to find a way to bring the ranch under private ownership, with management and operation according to this set of principles.

42. "Honorable Pat Roberts, Statement Before the House Interior Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands Regarding the Proposed Prairie National Monument," July 16, 1991, Glickman Papers.

After Senator Kassebaum personally committed herself to finding a workable solution, all parties began to give a little ground.<sup>47</sup> A proposal began to take shape when Kassebaum convened a meeting in January 1992 at the Z Bar. The group she assembled agreed to create a private foundation, Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch, Inc., which would raise private funds to purchase the ranch and develop a plan for managing the land and interpreting its natural and cultural resources. The agreement mirrored all the stipulations that the Flint Hills Monument Committee had written into draft legislation except that the land would be privately owned. By mid-April a board of trustees had been named, and the new foundation seemed to be at work. However, during the next few months the Kassebaum group actually accomplished little more than “housekeeping details” and choosing stationery.<sup>48</sup>

The 1992 presidential election injected new energy into the process. After President Bill Clinton named Bruce Babbitt secretary of the interior, the NPS received the administration’s okay to work out an “affiliate relationship” that would establish a park on the Z Bar Ranch. Within two weeks the private foundation adopted a consent agreement with the NPS, stipulating that the Park Service would operate and manage the ranch with appropriate interpretive and educational programs focused on the natural history of the prairie as well as the cultural history of Native Americans and ranching in the Flint Hills region.<sup>49</sup> Then the

board approached Boatmen’s Trust Company with a purchase proposal. Six months of negotiations followed, but when the two sides could not agree on a purchase price, the deal fell through. Most everyone involved in the process was greatly disappointed, although Lee Fowler, a foundation board member, later realized that “even though the Kassebaum Commission failed in its ultimate goal, it actually succeeded because it provided the metamorphosis from ‘we can’t do this,’ to ‘yes, we can.’ What happened in the Kassebaum Commission [the foundation’s colloquial name] that was extremely important was that everybody signed on board, including the Kansas Livestock Association and the Kansas Farm Bureau, [agreeing] that it was okay for a private nonprofit organization to own the property.” Kassebaum also saw this as the turning point: “It accomplished bringing the diverse voices to the table, and they could be just as vehement on one side as the other.” In the end, although Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch, Inc. did not purchase the property, “it put in motion the process that did enable [the preserve] to come to fruition.”<sup>50</sup>

The ranch, moreover, was still for sale to the right buyer and under the right terms. Amid speculation that Kassebaum’s group and Boatmen’s might still work out a deal, the National Park Trust (NPT), formed by the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) in 1983 to function as a nonprofit land trust, began negotiating a separate deal with Boatman’s Bank.<sup>51</sup> Once again, events moved quickly. The NPT’s plan was to keep the ranch in

47. Jim Suber, “Ag Groups Announce Z Bar Plan,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, November 22, 1991; Steve Painter, “Farm Groups Give a Little on Z Bar,” *Wichita Eagle*, November 22, 1991; Suber, “Cattlemen Willing to Discuss Z Bar,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, December 7, 1991; “Prairie Park Proposal Brings Sides Closer,” *Kansas City Star*, December 11, 1991; “A Deal? Can Agriculture Interest Groups Compromise on Flint Hills Park?” *Wichita Eagle*, December 11, 1991; see also Mike Horak, interview by Susan Hess, May 5, 1998.

48. “Vision Statement,” facsimile transmission from Nancy Kassebaum to Dan Glickman, January 16, 1992, Glickman Papers; see also “Kassebaum Says Agreement Reached on Preserve,” *Morning Sun* (Pittsburg), January 18, 1992; “Groups Agree to Form Prairie Foundation,” *Fort Scott Tribune*, January 17, 1992; “Positive News About Z Bar,” *Manhattan Mercury*, January 30, 1992; “Prairie Pact,” *Hutchinson News*, January 25, 1992; “First Step,” *Wichita Eagle*, January 25, 1992. Press Releases, Nancy Landon Kassebaum, March 4, 14, 1992, Kassebaum Papers; see also “Fowler is Cottonwood Falls Choice for Monument Foundation,” *Chase County Leader-News*, February 20, 1992; “Flint Hills Park Has Future on the Line With Trustees,” *ibid.*, March 12, 1992. Fowler interview, May 11, 1998; Horak interview, May 5, 1998; Tom Webb, “Progress Coming Slow for Prairie Preserve,” *Wichita Eagle*, November 29, 1992; “Slow going: Inaction Threatens Park in Flint Hills,” *ibid.*, December 6, 1992.

49. Tom Webb, “Prairie Park Gets Administration OK,” *Wichita Eagle*, May 4, 1993; “Babbitt Backs Park on Prairie,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, May 5, 1993; see also Mike Horak to Lee Fowler, Bill Kassebaum, and John Oswald, memorandum re: Z-Bar Ranch, May 24, 1993, TPNP Administrative Files; “Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch, Inc. Vision Statement and Development Plan, adopted by Board of Trustees, June 9, 1993,” *ibid.*

50. Kassebaum interview, August 29, 1998; Fowler interview, May 11, 1998; Nancy Kassebaum, “Z Bar Never Was for Sale,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 9, 1994; see also Horak interview, May 5, 1998; Klataske interview, July 1, 1998; “Z Bar Future Uncertain,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 7, 1994; Tom Webb, “Attempt to Buy Z Bar Fails,” *Wichita Eagle*, January 6, 1994; Stephen Martino, “Z Bar Board Rejects Bank’s Ranch Offer,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, January 6, 1994; “Spring Hill/Z Bar Directors Reject Conditions Placed on Purchase of Chase County Ranch,” press release, Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch, Inc., January 5, 1994, Glickman Papers; “Kassebaum Disappointed that Bank is Unwilling to Accept Offer on Z Bar Ranch,” press release, Nancy Landon Kassebaum, January 5, 1994, Kassebaum Collection and Glickman Papers. Boatman’s stipulated a firm purchase price that was 15 percent above the \$3.9 million appraised fair market value. Kassebaum concluded, and publicly stated, that the bank never intended to sell the ranch to her board.

51. Paul Pritchard, interview by author, May 4, 1998; Laura Loomis, interview by Susan Hess, May 6, 1998; Bruce Craig, interview by Susan Hess, May 4, 1998. According to Pritchard, Boatman’s put pressure on him to raise the money quickly because it had another offer “on the table.” Pritchard ended up borrowing part of the money from the NPCA and the remainder from a commercial bank. Loomis speculates that the bank’s other offer came from Ed Bass, who subsequently donated one million dollars to the NPT purchase and negotiated a thirty-five-year cattle-grazing lease on the ranch, for which he paid an additional two million dollars. See “Texan Pays \$2 Million for Grazing Rights,” *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 10, 1995.



private ownership and enter into an "affiliate relationship" with the NPS to operate the ranch as a unit of the national park system. Senator Kassebaum and Representative Glickman issued companion press releases on the same day approving of the agreement.<sup>52</sup>

After the NPT completed purchase of the ranch in June 1994, Kassebaum convened a crucial meeting of the Kansas delegation with Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt and NPT president Paul Pritchard to discuss "in very candid fashion" the National Park Service's land management role and what sort of federal ownership was necessary for the Department of the Interior to establish management authority.<sup>53</sup> Once this group reached agreement, the Kansas delegation introduced companion bills to create a Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve on the Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch and to authorize the NPS to purchase a core area of 180 acres including the ranch buildings and Fox Creek School. Glickman's House bill was co-sponsored by Representatives Jan Meyers, Jim Slattery, and Pat Roberts. Kassebaum's Senate bill was co-sponsored by Bob Dole. H.R. 5000 and S. 2412, introduced during the second session of the 103d Congress, marked the first time the full Kansas congressional delegation had ever supported legislation to create a prairie park in Kansas.<sup>54</sup>

52. "Glickman Optimistic About Prospects for Flint Hills Prairie Preserve," media release, March 3, 1994, Glickman Papers; "National Park Trust Gets Option to Buy Z Bar Ranch," AP news story, March 4, 1994, *ibid.*; see also "Kassebaum Sees Initiative as Opportunity to Protect the Z Bar Ranch," press release, Nancy Kassebaum, March 3, 1994, Kassebaum Collection. Subsequent news stories stated that NPT had agreed to pay \$4.79 million for the ranch. See Maria S. Fisher, "Babbitt Says Plans for Z-Bar Still Developing," *Great Bend Tribune*, April 29, 1994; Suzanne Perez Tobias, "National Park Trust Buys Z Bar Ranch," *Wichita Eagle*, June 4, 1994.

53. Tobias, "National Park Trust Buys Z Bar Ranch"; Matthew Schofield, "Deal Is Struck for Z Bar Ranch to Become a Park," *ibid.*; Pritchard interview May 4, 1998; Horak interview, May 5, 1998; Loomis interview, May 6, 1998; Kassebaum interview, August 29, 1998. The feasibility of a partnership that would satisfy all interests was at stake in this meeting, and the intensity of discussion, as reported by those who were present, reflects as much. After the discussion "sort of went round and round," according to Kassebaum, Pat Roberts reportedly focused attention squarely on the point of how many acres the Department of the Interior needed to own in order to support legislation. The meeting ended with no final answer to this question, but shortly thereafter Secretary Babbitt notified Kassebaum's office that 180 acres was the minimum needed under federal ownership.

54. The "preserve" designation was one that allowed the National Park Service greater land management flexibility to carry out the proposed public-private partnership, an idea that was tentatively introduced in the NPS's 1975 assessment as a concept called the Flint Hills Agricultural Reserve. Based on British national park constructs, this concept envisioned regional management of privately owned land based on a "unified effort, beginning at county and state levels." In promoting the regional management concept, the NPS stressed the distinctive cultural as well as natural history of the Flint Hills prairie landscape, ranking it as "truly unique" alongside "the beautiful New England townscapes, the stark Black Hills of South Dakota, and the majestic Quetico-Superior region of Minnesota and Ontario [Canada]." See Preliminary Environmental Assessment

The campaign was not quite over, however. The Kansas Farm Bureau mounted one last effort, pressing the Kansas delegation to drop the provision authorizing NPS acquisition of 180 acres. This time, however, there would be no entering wedge to split the delegation. Still, by late September neither the House nor the Senate had scheduled hearings, and the 103rd Congress adjourned without taking action. Then, in November the Republicans captured control of Congress, a sweep that brought Todd Tiahrt and Sam Brownback into the House, replacing Dan Glickman and Jim Slattery, respectively.<sup>55</sup>

Once again the momentum slowed, but Kassebaum and her staff kept working with the NPT, the NPCA, and the NPS. In April 1995 she introduced Senate Bill 695, co-sponsored by Senator Dole. Representatives Roberts and Meyers introduced a companion bill, H.R. 1449. The Farm Bureau kept lobbying to remove the provision allowing the NPS to own 180 acres, but Dole, whom they continued to hope would become an opposition leader, quietly maintained his support without getting involved in actual negotiations. For the record, it is important to note that it required another year to secure legislation because the Spring Hill Z Bar bill became mired in partisan bickering over scores of park and land measures that eventually were rolled into a comprehensive bill.<sup>56</sup> On October 4, 1996, one month before the general election, both houses finally approved this comprehensive bill, which included the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve as one of sixty park measures. President Clinton, safely reelected to a second term, signed the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act into law at a highly publicized Oval Office ceremony on November 12, 1996.<sup>57</sup>

(1975), 33–34. H. Rept. 5000 and S. 2412, 1994, 103d Cong., 2d sess., 1994; "Z Bar Bills Introduced in Congress," *Wichita Eagle*, August 21, 1994; Curt Anderson, "Delegation United Behind Z Bar Ranch Legislation," *Morning Sun*, August 20, 1994.

55. Tom Webb, "Another Delay in Z Bar Saga," *Wichita Eagle*, September 29, 1994; Jake Thompson, "It May Be Now or Never for a Prairie Park," *Kansas City Star*, January 29, 1995.

56. Horak interview, May 5, 1998; Loomis interview, May 6, 1998; Craig interview, May 4, 1998; Linda Potter, interview by Susan Hess, May 15, 1998; 104th Cong., 1st sess., 1995, S. 695 and H. Rept. 1449; see also "Bill Aims to Limit U.S. Role in Prairie Park," *Kansas City Star*, April 7, 1995. Kassebaum interview, August 29, 1998; Horak interview, May 5, 1998; "Senate Adds Prairie Park Proposal to Bill," *Kansas City Star*, March 26, 1996. "Z Bar Park Stalls as Senate Sets Bill Aside," *Wichita Eagle*, March 28, 1996.

57. Horak interview, May 5, 1998; see also Tom Webb, "Tallgrass Prairie Park Clears Senate Hurdle," *Wichita Eagle*, May 2, 1996; "Z Bar Bill Passes Senate," *Chase County Leader-News*, May 9, 1996; "Parks Bill Approved by House," *Kansas City Star*, September 29, 1996; Evan Katz, "Senate Votes to Preserve Kansas Prairie," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, October 4, 1996. "Prairie Preserve Becomes Reality," *Kansas City Star*, November 13, 1996. Throughout the negotiations, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

Without exception, everyone who was involved in the legislative effort credits Kassebaum as the key to success.<sup>58</sup> The result was a public-private partnership unlike anything the NPS had attempted before. It placed land management responsibility in the collective hands of interests that held, and still hold, fundamentally different views on the nature of land stewardship, yet, at the same time, have made a commitment to work through these differences to create a place that protects an important grassland ecosystem and interprets the complex history of land use in the Flint Hills, including the history of ranching.

The partnership succeeded in developing a general management plan, approved in 2000, but the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is still a work in progress. Early on, Kassebaum cautioned that creating successful partnerships “isn’t as easy as it might look on paper.”<sup>59</sup> One is tempted to predict that it might take a generation or two for the battle scars to fade because the prairie is still imbued with complex meaning. Still, the partnership has managed to create a new vantage point from which to survey the prospects.

What is this vantage point? At the very least, the sharp line between agriculturalist and environmentalist has blurred. It is no longer uncommon to find farmers and ranchers supporting environmental causes. In addition, environmental scholarship has matured. On the science side, the more we learn about ecosystems, the less we know for certain. On the history side, we have come to understand that all human beings, throughout all time, have exploited and altered the natural resources

around them, either by design or by accident. Of increasingly common concern, regardless of one’s politics or world view, is the accelerating pace, scale, and effect of human interaction with the natural environment. As a society we confront a mounting list of environmental casualties. How we respond to these casualties affects future generations not only at home but often throughout the world. The implications for action are tough to fathom, but here the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve offers some reason



*With strong support from Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum, the bill to create the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve on the Z Bar Ranch (above) was finally approved on October 4, 1996.*

provisions remained intact. Officially, the preserve is authorized under Subtitle A of Title X, Miscellaneous, of P.L. 104-333. It permits the NPS to acquire not more than 180 acres by donation and to manage the preserve in conjunction with the property owner, central provisions reflecting the compromises that led to successful legislation. Title X of P.L. 104-333 also established a thirteen-member Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Advisory Committee to be appointed by the secretary of the interior. The committee’s mandated composition also reflects the diversity of concerns and interests involved in reaching compromise: three representatives of the NPT; three representatives of local landowners, cattle ranchers or other agricultural interests; three representatives of conservation or historic preservation interests; one person each recommended by the Chase County Commission, Strong City officials, and the governor of Kansas, and one range management specialist.

58. Horak interview, May 5, 1998.

59. Kassebaum interview, August 29, 1998; National Park Service, *Final General Management Plan [and] Environmental Impact Statement: Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Kansas* (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, 2000).

to believe that, as a society, we can rise to the challenge. It exists not because one side triumphed and one side lost, but because vantage points converged just enough to embrace the paradox of the prairie, meaning, in this case, acknowledging that the tallgrass prairie’s inherent value as a complex biosystem is matched by its complex cultural history. Although it remains to be seen whether this shift in perspective can sustain cooperation between the public and private entities of the TPNP partnership, it is instructive that one-time adversaries could lay aside competing ideologies and political agendas long enough to negotiate a worthy mission: restoring the biological integrity of the prairie that became Spring Hill Z Bar Ranch and interpreting the complex cultural history of the Flint Hills with equal integrity.

