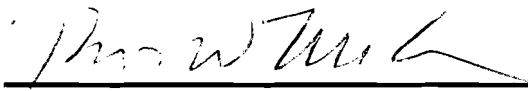


AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Gary Baldrige for the Master of Arts

in American History presented on June 14, 1991

Title: The Flint Hills: A Question of Control

Abstract approved: 

The thesis discusses early efforts at preserving the grasslands to the unsuccessful attempt in the 1970s to make a Prairie National Park in Kansas. The purpose of the study will be to see how each side tried to get its views across to the public and to the decision makers in the state and federal government. The thesis focuses on different perceptions of land usage in the Flint Hills. It deals with the landowners' attempts to preserve their ranching and farming culture, as well as those people who wanted to preserve nature unspoiled by man.

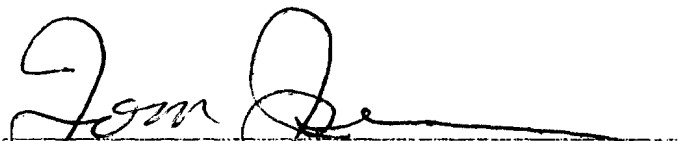
THE FLINT HILLS:
A QUESTION OF CONTROL

A Thesis
Presented to
The Division of Social Sciences
EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Gary Baldrige
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To all of you, Thanks.

PREFACE

I have lived in the Flint Hills for most of my life. Their subtle beauty has impressed me for years. I have yet to grow tired of the drive on the Kansas Turnpike from Emporia to Cassoday. The view stretches beyond sight.

I already had an interest in the proposed prairie national park when I started this thesis. Searching through private and public collections opened up the long history of this heated topic in Kansas. Historically, the various movements to preserve the grassland of the United States fit fairly neatly into three distinct time periods. The first began around the Dust Bowl and ended shortly after World War II. The second began in the mid 1950s and ended in 1963. The third period began in 1969 and ended in the early 1980s. The description of these three periods produced the body chapters in this thesis.

Each phase had common themes. One was the contention that government experts were better equipped than local citizens to make decisions about land use. Another theme was that ranchers and farmers did not want government interference in their land. They still believed in the rugged individual the Old West had created and they wanted to maintain that culture. The preservationist ideal of a

land untouched by man's exploitive tendencies was evident throughout the various proposals. This coincided with the ecological idea that nature would remain in a given climax state as long as European man left it alone. These themes clashed on the grasslands of America, and the private landowners were able to curtail the expansion of the national parks onto their land. The landowners were able to do this by convincing those people who would decide the park issue that they were taking care of the land. They also appealed to the mythology of the Old West-- the national dream of staking out a piece of land and becoming a self-sufficient landowner.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter 1: The Prairie | 1 |
| Chapter 2: Prairie Preservationists | 23 |
| Chapter 3: Secretary Udall Takes a Hike | 37 |
| Chapter 4: Pasture or Prairie? | 55 |
| Chapter 5: The Fate of the Flint Hills | 78 |
| Bibliography | 89 |

Notes are located at the end of each chapter.

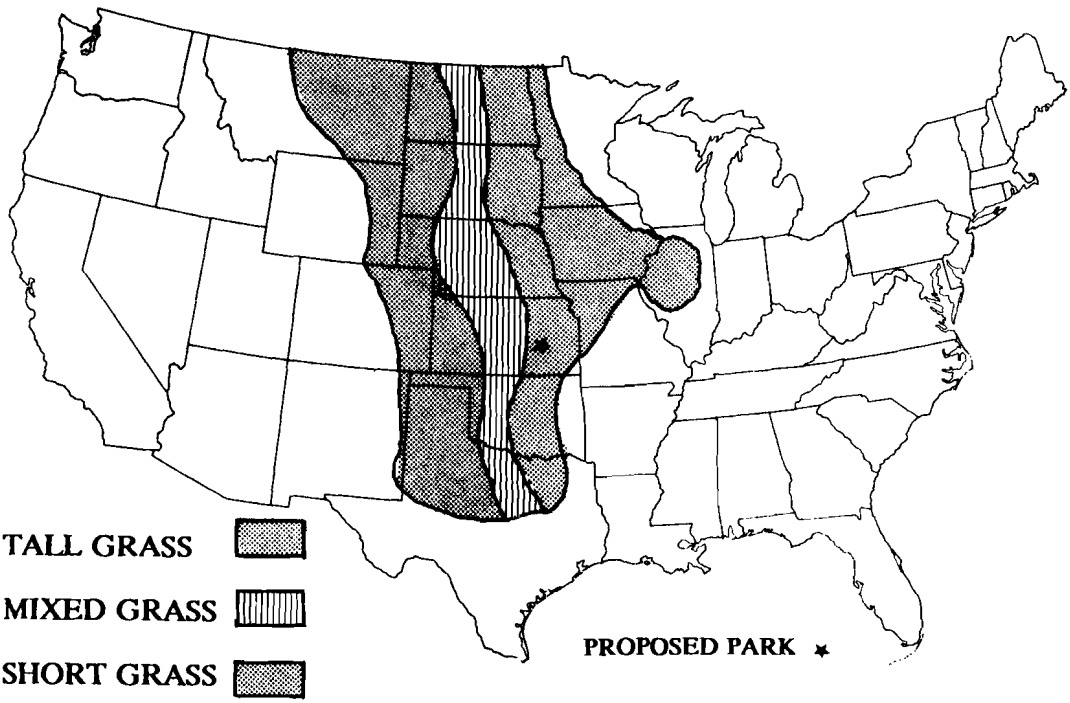
Chapter 1

The Prairie

The grasslands of North America once extended funnel-like from Illinois westward to the Rocky Mountains, and at places beyond. They stretched northward from the Mexican desert plains to the forest border lands of Canada. The dominant feature of the area was grass; trees were confined largely to river and creek valleys. The grasslands were originally made up of tallgrasses in the east, which became mixed grasses farther west, and finally turned into the short grasses of the Great Plains. A map of this area follows on page 2. This transitional zone occurred between the 96th and 98th meridians.¹

In this transitional area between the humid east and the arid west, settlers had to adapt to a foreign environment and develop new ways of dealing with nature. As the early European settlers broke out of the confinement of the forested east, they discovered another new world: a world of grass. These European settlers were used to forests and water-filled streams. The prairie had few of either, so such terms as "treeless" and "subhumid" became common. The openness of the prairie unsettled the initial homesteaders. The spaciousness and lack of landmarks also

THE GRASSLANDS OF NORTH AMERICA



often bored them. Grass stretched on in an endless expanse to the distant horizon. Even so, to some settlers, the land unfolded into an overpowering beauty that made man seem insignificant.²

This immense openness set the prairies apart from the eastern United States. The tallgrass of the eastern portion of the prairie was often compared to the rolling waves of an ocean. The transportation of this early time even had a nautical flavor to it. The prairie schooner was a means, albeit slow and expensive, to get to and across the boundless grassland. The settlers of this new land gained a new viewpoint on life that hinged on their sensation they could see virtually to the ends of the earth. This openness of the grasslands molded a new spirit for the settlers. This spirit included the belief in man independent of government influences. The wide expanses of grass also reinforced the spirit of freedom with the settlers.³

The flora and fauna of the grasslands were so different from that which people were used to in the forested East that they inspired a new school of scientific thought. New methods needed to be set up to study this misunderstood area, for scientists realized that the grasslands were a separate ecological unit. They functioned differently from the forested lands of the East. C. E. Bessey, a botanist

from Nebraska, and his students, set up a system to study the interaction of the grasses with their environment. Frederic Clements and Roscoe Pound were early products of the Bessey School. They developed new techniques of studying and analyzing the prairie. Their breakthrough came when they realized simple observation of the grasses, as done by Oscar Drude in Europe and on the plains of America, was inadequate to discern the number of specific plants in a defined area. They discovered that visual impressions of the subtle changes in the prairies' plants were too crude to classify them. Clements and Pound believed these impressions had led to incorrect boundaries between, for example, buffalo grass and bunch grass.⁴

Mathematical calculation replaced simple observation to measure changes in plant patterns. They needed to count the individual plants. A unit of measure was needed for the count. They came up with a one-meter plot, or quadrat, this comprising the number of plants they could count in a day. To get a better picture of shifts in plant composition, a large number of these meter plots were set up. They then calculated the average of those results. This would give them an indication of the plant composition in the studied area. This method could also show the subtle shifts of plant life in different grassland areas.⁵

These studies led to Clements' theory of plant succession. According to his theory all plants were organized into large units called formations. These formations experienced steady growth until they reached their climatic culmination. Climate determined the plants which would eventually inhabit a given region. In Clements' judgment, the prairie, before the white settlers arrived, had reached its final, climax form. This was disputed by H. C. Howles of the University of Chicago, who opposed Clements' view. Howles did not believe that a plant community reached a stable point. He believed in unending plant succession based on constant, albeit slow, change in a plant community over time. So here were two competing views of plant ecology, and of how stable and long-lasting the grassland ecology of the prairie might be. These two views of plant ecology would be used by groups for and against efforts to preserve part of the grasslands.⁶

The Bessey/Clements schools produced range management specialists such as J. E. Weaver of Nebraska and F. W. Albertson and G. W. Tomanek of Fort Hays State University, Kansas. They conducted important grassland studies that would help to bring out the perceived need for the preservation of the prairie.⁷

Besides physical scientists, social scientists have

studied the grasslands region. In his book The Great Plains, Walter Prescott Webb explained how the Great Plains affected Anglo-Americans. He wanted to show how this region, with its level surface, few trees, and sub-humid climate, forced settlers to change the way they lived. Webb noted that as settlers from the East entered the grasslands, they encountered a foreign and often hostile world. To live in this new land, they would change the way they worked the land and would themselves be changed. Some of the important adaptations Webb found included transportation, fencing, water, and farming. Railroads provided cheap transportation that allowed materials and people to be moved onto the Plains. Railroads also permitted ranchers and farmers to ship their goods outside of the region to sell. The invention of barbed wire permitted both farmers and ranchers to close off their land from the open range. Since water was scarce on the grasslands, a method was needed to get water to crops and livestock. The advent of mass-produced windmills helped to solve part of the water shortage problem. Finally, new farming methods needed to be introduced on the Plains. These came in two forms: one centered on the large scale ranching operations, and the other focused on dry farming methods. To Webb, then, the Plains altered the very spirit of the settlers who came to

make the land their own. The Plains gave the settlers a new sense of vastness; they made men more self-reliant; they united North and South as one nation; and finally they spawned political radicalism.⁸

Another major contributor to the study of the grasslands in social sciences was James C. Malin. In 1948 he published The Grassland of North America: Prolegomena to Its History. It focused on how science and technology, filtered through the eyes of an historian, affected the perceptions and realities of the grasslands and its people. Specifically, he questioned the "statism" and "partisan public policies" that many scientists used to affect public policy. Malin's views concerned maintaining intellectual freedom he had seen destroyed during the New Deal and World War II. One scientific thesis Malin disagreed with was that the white man exclusively destroyed the virgin grasslands. He contended that overgrazing and dust storms were an historical part of the prairie environment that preceded white habitation. Malin believed in an open society, one in which man will always be able to find new resources to better his life. He did not agree that the world was a closed society where all resources were destined to vanish from the earth. He believed "man was able to maintain a rate of discovery sufficient to reharneß natural forces to

new uses as rapidly as already known natural resources were exhausted." Malin did not believe man affected nature any more than animals or the weather affected it. So trying to keep man's "harmful" influences out of nature would not work.⁹

The ability to farm the prairie was at first limited by technology and by questions of the land's productive capacity. When homesteaders first reached the prairies in Illinois and Iowa, they lacked the cheap technology needed to break the sod. Plows that had worked in the East failed to work where the soil was often too damp and heavy because of the lack of drainage. This poorly drained soil was not productive for growing crops. So initially this luxurious grassland was used in the feeder-cattle business. Not until adequate plows were invented in the 1850s and 1860s, and cheaper methods were found to drain the lowlands, could the land be tilled cheaply and easily.¹⁰

Reaching this new land, and shipping goods to market, was not easy at first because the roads were inadequate and there were fewer rivers on which to ship goods. The railroads, therefore, had a tremendous impact on immigration into the prairie. They provided the cheap transportation which was necessary to move goods, services, and people to and from the region.¹¹

Besides technology, the major boon to the opening of the prairie was the Homestead Act of 1862. This act offered 160 acres of theoretically free land to all settlers. The major provisions for getting the land included majority (a settler had to be at least 21 years of age); a \$10 filing fee; and residency (the settler had to live there for five years, or after six months, he could pay \$1.25 per acre and get title to the land). The Homestead Act worked well until settlers began to move out onto the more arid Great Plains. The homestead of 160 acres was not enough to support the farming methods demanded on the high plains, where farmers and ranchers needed more land to compete with their neighbors in the more humid east. Even with this shortcoming, the Homestead Act helped to reinforce the belief in private ownership.¹²

By the 1920s virtually the last remaining area of grassland in the tallgrass area of the prairie was the Flint Hills of Eastern Kansas and Eastern Oklahoma. In Pottawatomie County, Kansas, lies the northern border of the Flint Hills which extends south into northern Oklahoma. The Flint Hills extend about 200 miles north to south and average about 50 miles wide. A major feature of the area is its low, rolling hills. With virtually treeless hills, an observer can often see for twenty or thirty miles to the

horizon across nothing but the hills and the grass. Big Bluestem and Little Bluestem are the major grasses of the area. Two natural elements, hills and grass, along with the belief that most of the land on the hills could not be plowed because it was too rocky, helped to shape the agricultural patterns of the Flint Hills.¹³

Today the Flint Hills are recognized as prime cattle-grazing range. The agricultural pattern in the Flint Hills began with the cattle industry, as was typical of the early prairie economic patterns. Raising cattle was seen by many small farmers as a transitional stage until all of the watersheds were occupied by them. Open range hills made excellent grazing for the small farmer's livestock. The drought of 1874 slowed the process toward smaller crop raising farms. It helped to speed up the use of the hills as grazing land for transient cattle from the southwest. While the drought would ruin a wheat crop, the native grass could survive and be used for grazing. Another reason (and for many the primary one) cited by historians and locals for continuation of grazing was that the soil on the hills was too shallow and rocky for crop husbandry. Once it was discovered that cattle from Texas could be fattened in the Flint Hills and then sent to the markets in the Midwest and East, large out-of-state ranching operations bought the

pasture land on the hills. As the pasture was fenced off, the small farmers lost out on much of their grazing land. Beginning in the 1880s, the Flint Hills were fenced off and became primarily transient grazing land. With transient grazing, the cattle were not on the grass all year long, so the pasture was not overgrazed as in other grassland regions. These features made the Flint Hills unique among grassland pastures.¹⁴

Joseph V. Hickey and Charles E. Webb looked into the reasons that this area was dominated by cattlemen. They concluded there were factors--social, cultural, and political--other than the shallow, rocky soil on the hills that contributed to the agricultural patterns in the Flint Hills. This study mentioned that many farmers from the East settled in the river and creek valleys because the bottoms were more like home and the land they were used to farming. They noted that railroads and speculators bought up large parcels of land and that barbed wire helped to establish much of the Flint Hills as range land. In the Flint Hills, ranchers fenced the farmers off the hills, as opposed to the earlier use of barbed wire, when the farmers fenced out the cattlemen. Their study noted the first settlers often plowed the hills to grow crops. These other factors, besides the thin soil, helped to discourage using the hills

for anything other than grazing. So the common belief that the Flint Hills were only good for grazing because of the shallow soil may not be entirely correct. This contradicts the contention by the landowners of the Flint Hills that the grass will always be conserved by them because the soil cannot be plowed.¹⁵

Grasslands such as the Flint Hills were seldom the concern of the early preservationists who initiated the national park system. The desire to preserve parts of the natural wonders of the United States, however, dates back to the 1860s. The urban affluent believed that crowded city life was evil and that the perceived serenity of the wilderness was good. These people had the influence to bring about a change to preserve the wilderness they believed was so beneficial to man. Most of the early preservation areas were in the federally-owned lands of the West. It was here a man could truly find peace from the turmoil of urban life. With the publication of the Turner thesis by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, another reason was found for preserving the land: with the frontier officially closed by Turner, America's pioneer spirit seemed to be waning also. But areas preserved as they were when the first white men saw them might keep the West alive for those seeking an escape from modern life. For the West was

the last American frontier.¹⁶

Three men in particular had a profound influence on the preservationist movement in the United States: John Muir, Stephen T. Mather, and Horace M. Albright. The first, Muir, was one of the major philosophers of the preservation movement. He believed there was peace and harmony in nature--a subtle, poetic beauty waiting for man to experience. He insisted that the weary city dweller needed the healing powers of nature. Muir believed man could also learn from "the university of the wilderness" and felt that all parts of nature, lowlands as well as majestic mountains, deserved protection. Muir, who was the president of the Sierra Club from its founding until his death in 1914, actively supported preservationist causes both in his actions and in his writings.¹⁷

Mather and Albright helped to establish and further preservationist ideals in the federal government. Active in the Sierra Club and an early believer in the precepts of preservation, Mather administered the national parks in the Interior Department. When the National Park Service was set up, Albright, whose heavy lobbying effort helped to set up the service, was named the acting director until Mather returned from an illness. Both men, determined to preserve the national parks for future generations, set up the

mechanisms within the federal government that would assure that there would be preservationist voices in Washington.¹⁸

The preservationist cause had some similarities to, but distinct differences from, the conservationist movement. The leading proponent and architect of conservation, the wise use of natural resources, was Gifford Pinchot. Like Muir and the other preservationists, he loved the beauty of the natural wonders of the West. Pinchot believed, though, that the federal lands of the West could not be preserved. He thought special interest groups would lobby Congress to exploit the resources of nature. Pinchot felt that the only way to keep the resources of the West from being unwisely used was through wise management practices carried out by the federal government. When he became head of the Department of Agriculture's Division of Forestry in 1891, Pinchot was able to put his belief of sustained-yield management into practice. Pinchot believed it was possible to use only as much as nature would produce, so that natural resources could be conserved for future generations. Any timber cut down would be replaced; grasslands would not be overgrazed; and streams would be dammed for irrigation and hydro-electric power. Using scientific methods and government management, Pinchot believed the federal government could improve on nature so that man could

continue efficient economic growth.¹⁹

Both the preservationist and conservationist movements began in the West, where the federal government still owned large parcels of land. Each group believed it could better manage the federal lands for the common good. Each was aware of, and concerned about, the growing cities and how nature could best serve the people. Each appealed to the public for support. Both distrusted private groups or individuals who would exploit the natural resources of the West. These two camps simply disagreed, however, on how the land should be used. The preservationists valued the land for its intrinsic beauty. It could revive a soul emptied by the confines of urban America. The conservationists saw the land as a place to get material resources to better man's life. They both agreed, though, that only the insightful Washington planners and regulators could save the West from private greediness.²⁰

The primary preservationist branch of the federal government was the National Park Service, in the Department of the Interior. On August 25, 1916, the National Park Service bill was signed into law. The national parks finally had one agency to oversee them. In 1933 the National Park Service would also gain jurisdiction over the national monuments previously controlled by the Forest

Service and the War Department. It was the job of the National Park Service both to protect the natural wonders in the parks and to open them up to the public. If the people could not see the parks, they would have little interest in saving the primitive areas. As the national parks became more popular, the service strove to acquire more land. This helped to focus new attention on what was scenic and what should be preserved since more land was needed for more parks. The spectacular areas of the country had already been incorporated into the National Park System. To expand the Park System, a new definition of "spectacular" was needed. Breathtaking mountains and gigantic canyons no longer constituted the only criteria for a national park. Preserving the wildlife of an area also became important. The focus shifted from grand beauty to protecting whole ecosystems.²¹

Meanwhile, conservation practices became an important part of the American economy, beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Using less to get more was seen as a good business move. As conservationist practices moved from the federal lands of the West to private lands, the goals remained the same, but now the federal government was working with the people who owned their own land. With the aid of the federal government, farmers built detention dams

to help store water and adopted methods that helped protect the soil from erosion and keep the moisture in the soil. In 1935 Congress created the Soil Conservation Service to be a clearinghouse for proper farming methods, or, those methods the service believed the land would best support. The service's range management specialists worked closely with landowners. This allowed for a closer understanding between the federal government and the farmer. But the specialists from Washington still believed they knew best how to manage the land.²²

Both the preservationists and the conservationists played a part in the tallgrass preservation movements in the Flint Hills of Kansas. At times, each side would blur the classic definitions of these terms. Preservationists often defined themselves as aesthetic conservationists and they defined conservationists, such as Pinchot, as utilitarian conservationists. But it is essential to the understanding of the two arguments related to the proposed parks to know the difference between the opposing sides. Preservationists believe the land and its natural resources have value in their own right which should be preserved in virgin form for future generations. Conservationists believe in sustained-yield management or using resources in such a manner that they would be there for future generations to use.²³

As preservationists came to define ecosystem preservation as a valid reason for national parks, the idea of a grasslands park grew with each vanishing acre of "native" grassland. The few remaining traces of the original prairie were being plowed up or consumed by growing cities. Backers of the prairie park concept wanted to enshrine virgin America as it was before Europeans came. The grasslands preservationists had one major obstacle in trying to get a park--the land to be preserved was productive farmland. It was not the spectacular wasteland of the West. The park proponents would need to find a compelling argument to make their proposal a reality.

The proponents had several goals in mind for any tallgrass park, goals that sometimes came into conflict with one another. They generally wanted the land returned to its pre-white man, pristine state, while some wanted to preserve America's pioneer lifestyle. The park would be an ideal place to study prairie plants and animals in their natural state. The park could also be a place of limited recreational use.²⁴

The opponents of the parks had an easier time making their views heard. Their land had been producing a tangible product for the country. The land they used was being well managed, and remained beautiful, if not pristine. Its

beauty beckoned softly to those who would listen. Often that subtle beauty flashed past unnoticed by cars zipping along the Kansas Turnpike. The ranchers ambling along on the dirt roads knew what they had, and they wanted to keep it.

So two divergent groups of people collided on one of the last vestiges of the tallgrass prairie. Each side was sure of its aim. Concepts of land use were in fundamental conflict. One side viewed those who worked with the land as exploiters of the land. The other side viewed man as a responsible steward of the land. Each side saw beauty in the Flint Hills. Both wanted to keep a part of it for the country. On the issue of a federal tallgrass park, they could not agree. The arguments for and against the parks focused on the myths of the rugged pioneer spirit of the Old West and on the myth of the virgin prairie that was soiled by settlers' exploitation of the land.

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Chapter 2

Prairie Preservationists

The prairies were not an easy target for incorporation into parks by either the states or the national government. A primary reason was that this area possessed valuable farming land. Here man could till the soil and make nature work for him. It was not unproductive land, like Yosemite or Yellowstone or the other national parks. Thus a major obstacle encountered in pursuing a prairie park was to overcome the land use priorities which existed throughout the grasslands. Scientists and government officials employed several methods to get the prairie park concept out in the open and discussed. One method was for a state itself to try to establish some prairie as state parks or preserves. This was tried in Iowa and Kansas. A second method, and as it turned out a method with broader appeal, was to champion the need to preserve the land, plants, and animals for scientific study and public observation through the National Park Service. Starting in the 1920s, preservationists began their efforts to locate a suitable portion of the grasslands for incorporation into the National Park System and to lobby for its preservation.

Typical of the preservationist movements of the 1930s

was an article in Wallace's Farmer and Iowa Homestead dated September 20, 1930. It discussed the idea by Iowa's State Board of Conservation to locate and to save a portion of the prairie as a reminder of Iowa's past. The goal was to preserve the past, real or imagined, of prehistoric Iowa. There was not much "virgin" prairie left, but the author believed any remaining prairie unaffected by civilization should be preserved. Preservationists used virgin to denote the condition of any land prior to its use by the white men. This article also compared the prairie to a fine work of art, which was destroyed the moment the plow turned over the soil. When European man used the land, according to the preservationist, he robbed the land of its pristine nature. The prairie was destroyed because it was more valuable to man's everyday needs than to his aesthetic needs. To catch this true spirit of Iowa, a large amount of land would need to be saved, and according to the article, it would be one section of land.¹

This article further dealt with how the past might have been, and the belief of a "true" Iowa permeated it. There was a perceived need to "catch the spirit of the true Iowa," the Iowa that was as white men first saw it. If this "true Iowa" could not be found, man would attempt to recreate the prairie of old. This would be done by returning farm land

to a "natural" state. Native animals would then return to their natural habitat, either on their own or with man's help. The author wanted the park to be preserved as it actually was, not as people believed it was. The difficult part was in telling what the land was like when the Europeans first arrived. The author closed, "Such a prairie park would give us a glimpse into the soul of the old Iowa which, tho buried under the surface of the Iowa of today, lies pulsing beneath the fields about us." So the "real Iowa" was somewhere in the past; the present was some hollow image of the virgin soul of a memory of the not-so-distant past.²

In 1946 the Iowa Academy of Science again discussed the Iowa State Conservation Commission's proposal to preserve the prairie. Ada Hayden wrote in an Iowa Academy of Science article, "Prairie must be preserved where it still exists. It remains to locate and describe the known areas . . . with reference to their acquisition." Again most areas to be preserved were small, around 40 acres. Large areas would be a section. This program was to be solely state supported.³

This continuing proposal gave several reasons for preserving the prairie in Iowa. A major rationale, still, was to preserve a part of the past of the state.

Preservation of animals was mentioned again also. A final reason for preservation was scientific. A prairie preserve would be a laboratory for the scientists of today and for students in the future. Little mention was made of saving the prairie on the basis of its majestic beauty. Primarily because it was a state project, it would not compete as a nationwide tourist attraction like the national parks.

Also in 1946, The Kansas City Star reported the call for a state park in the Flint Hills of Kansas by J. C. Mohler, Secretary of the Kansas Board of Agriculture. The article noted that the Secretary felt that the "Bluestem Hills" was a more appropriate name for the area. Mohler wanted a vast portion of the Bluestem Hills to be preserved. Unlike the Iowa proposals, though, he wanted the area to be saved to show it as the great cattle grazing area he believed it was. He thought there were landowners ready to give the state a section or two of land. Although the size of the park was not clearly spelled out, Mohler wanted a large enough area saved so visitors could get a feel for the vast expanse of the grasslands.⁴

Mohler's proposal for saving the land was unique in that he wanted to preserve what the settlers had done to the region, not to restore it to prehistoric times. Mohler believed that other parts of the state had developed

distinct traits and exploited those traits, and he stated, "Let us do the same for our great grazing country by also fixing it in the public mind as the Bluestem Hills of Kansas." So his proposal for saving the cattle culture directly conflicted with the other preservationist proposals. No action was taken to incorporate such a park in the state.⁵

These early park proposals in Iowa and Kansas were considered inappropriate by the preservationists in the National Park Service. The Iowa proposals did not provide enough land to preserve the prairie ecosystem. The Kansas proposal wanted to preserve the heritage implanted by European settlers in the Flint Hills. NPS wanted to remove virtually all traces of civilization in its parks except for the few roads and facilities needed by the park officials and tourists.

The Ecological Society of America and the National Research Council were early advocates of prairie preservation by the federal government. The Committee on the Ecology of Grasslands of North America headed the Ecological Society's efforts, and the Grasslands Committee led the NRC's work. Dr. Victor E. Shelford, a zoology professor at the University of Illinois, and at one time chairman of both of these grasslands committees, was

instrumental in getting the early efforts started.⁶

Shelford disseminated his ideas during the 1930s in Ecology, the official publication of the Ecological Society of America. Some of his early articles dealing with the need for preservation of "natural biotic communities" laid a foundation for preserving areas not considered breathtakingly beautiful. Shelford subsequently spread his message through other journals. He saw the need for a nature sanctuary where "a community or community fragment covering a certain area within which the fluctuations in abundance and other natural changes are allowed to go on unmodified and uncontrolled." In a letter to the Honorable Francis H. Case, U. S. Representative from South Dakota, Shelford noted:

There is special need for a sufficiently large area so that marginal effects do not influence the interior in which the natural processes of real growth of grass and the relation to animals, drouth, etc., can be studied continuously over long periods.

To accomplish this goal he believed the community needed to be one million acres so it could be studied unaffected by man.⁷

By stressing the importance of nature sanctuaries, Shelford advocated a broader purpose for the National Park Service. Grand mountains should not be the only setting for a national park. He noted:

Nature sanctuaries are essential if any of the original nature in North America is to be saved for future generations for scientific observation of, among other things, the important phenomena of fluctuation in the abundance of plants and animals, their social life, etc.

As suggested by the Iowa proposals, Shelford thought the natural "past" could teach us lessons for modern times. It was agreed by the preservationists that a climax grassland community, as defined by Frederic Clements, should be found for the Grassland National Monument proposed by Shelford. Studying plowed-up farmland would not give a true picture of the grasses. In another article dated June 2, 1933, Shelford again espoused the need for nature sanctuaries. He wanted nature to be left alone. It was his idea not only to preserve the spectacular land but also to get areas of little "breathtaking" beauty into the National Park System. The plants and animals were becoming more important to the preservationist movement. As late as 1928, some people claimed "that no areas should have a place in that park system unless they have natural scenic wonders of outstanding character." Since the grasslands did not have the powerful beauty of Niagara Falls, or the uniqueness of Yellowstone, other rationales had to be found for their inclusion into the park system. Thence came the idea of preserving the ecology: the complete natural unit of the prairie. So the grassland would be a national monument, not

a national park with outstanding scenery.⁸

In 1938 the Department of the Interior was actively searching for a grasslands national monument. Victor H. Cahalane, Acting Chief, of the Wildlife Division Branch of Research and Information in the Department of the Interior, corresponded with Shelford concerning the grasslands monument. Cahalane mentioned that the NPS committee looking into the monument wanted enough land so that large mammals, such as antelope and buffalo, would have year-round habitat. The area being considered was in the western part of South Dakota and Nebraska. Part of this group's findings and recommendations were published on November 10, 1938. The work and suggestions made by Shelford and other scientists were evident in this report.⁹

During the annual meeting of the Ecological Society in December 1938, a formal resolution was adopted to lobby for a grassland park as part of the National Park System. The resolution contained both preservationist and conservationist sections. It read:

WHEREAS: the Great Plains of North America constitute one of the nation's greatest economic problems on account of droughts, grasshoppers, and erosion, etc., and
WHEREAS: there are no large natural reserves of grassland such as exist in the case of forests;

BE IT RESOLVED: that the Ecological Society of America approves and endorses the action. . . to support the National Park Service in its efforts

to set aside a Great Plains National Monument, which will serve as a check area, which may be managed on a hands-off basis and defended because of its historical value while being available for scientific research.

So the Great Plains Monument was to be saved and at the same time used for research on how better to utilize its environment.¹⁰

In 1939 Shelford again wrote an article, this time published in Science, specifically calling for the preservation of the grasslands of America. He saw the Great Plains as easy to study. The very traits that made them attractive to settlers--few trees and relatively level land--would also aid in scientific studies. Shelford believed the federal government could play the major role in assuring a grassland research area.

For example, the National Park Service is interested in setting up a Great Plains National Monument large enough to prevent domestication of plains animals and to be managed on a hands-off basis. A laboratory adjacent to such an area would have many advantages.

Again, Shelford was stressing the need to leave nature alone so that scientists could better study it.¹¹

This first movement to preserve a portion of the grasslands encountered many of the obstacles of later proposals. Suitable locations had to be found and, if privately owned, purchased. Landowners were reluctant to sell their land to the federal government because they

wanted to develop the land for their own purposes. Local preservationist groups would have to convince Congress of the need for saving a part of the grasslands. Finally, Congress would need to be persuaded to fund the purchase and building of a grassland national monument. Each of these hurdles would need to be overcome during each attempt to make the park a reality.¹²

Besides preserving part of America's vanishing virgin grasslands and wildlife, the 1930s and 1940s focused on another reason to preserve part of the grassland--the drought that spawned the Dust Bowl. Dr. J. E. Weaver, botanist from the University of Nebraska, was a major researcher into the effects of drought on prairie grasses. Among his conclusions were that grasses were hardy plants, and that after extreme drought conditions the true prairie, a continuous stand of dominant grasses of medium stature, was replaced by a mixed prairie, a combination of medium and short grasses. A grassland national monument would be an ideal place for his continued studies to see if the true prairie would return.¹³

In December 1939, E. K. Burlew, Acting Secretary of the Interior, wrote Ross G. Harrison of the National Research Council. Burlew said that the grassland monument idea was going to an inter-departmental committee in the Interior

Department. He also mentioned, "Upon conclusion of the discussion, . . . we hope we will be favorably disposed toward the Monument idea." By January 1941, however, the grassland proposal seemed to be dead. Robert F. Griggs, Chairman of the Division of Biology and Agriculture, National Research Council, wrote to Shelford telling him of the demise of the monument. He stated that the inter-departmental committee had not functioned for a year. Part of the proposed monument land in South Dakota was controlled by the Agriculture Department, and they would not release it. He also wrote:

They (the National Park Service) have been assigned so much land in the last five years that they have aroused considerable animosity in the West and find it necessary to lie low for a while.

So the first efforts at preserving a large portion of the grasslands by proponents of federal ownership ended.¹⁴

The early grassland preservation movements, at both the state and federal levels, attempted to build a foundation for future legislation. Suitable areas needed to be located. The public, or at least preservationist groups, had to be informed about the need for preserving the grasslands. It was through this preliminary discovery process that the Kansas Flint Hills came to be considered by the National Park Service as a potential site for a national

park in 1961. The resources of the National Park Service allowed it to continue studies and unite preservationist groups to work for a "Bluestem Hills" National Park. These ideas and preservationist studies helped to set up the foundation for later attempts to incorporate the Flint Hills into the National Park System.

NOTES

1. H.P. Field, "Prairie Park for a Prairie State," Wallace's Farmer and Iowa Homestead 55 (20 September 1930): 1509.
2. Ibid., pp. 1509 and 1510.
3. Ada Hayden, "A Progress Report on the Preservation of Prairie," Iowa Academy of Science 53 (1946): 45.
4. The Kansas City Star, 6 January 1946.
5. Ibid.
6. Victor H. Cahalane, A Part of the Report on A Proposed Great Plains National Monument, 10 November 1938, pp. 2-3, private collection of G. W. Tomanek, Hays, Kansas.
7. William H. Avery to Mr. and Mrs. Alex Irvine, Manhattan, Kansas, 7 June 1960, transcript in the collections of the Riley County Historical Museum, Manhattan, Kansas; Victor H. Cahalane, A Part of the Report, 10 November 1938, pp. 3-4, Tomanek Collection; Victor E. Shelford, "Nature Sanctuaries- A Means of Saving Natural Biotic Communities," Science 77 (17 March 1933): 281; V. E. Shelford to Francis H. Case, 15 March 1939, Tomanek Collection.
8. "Nature Sanctuaries - A Means of Saving Natural Biotic Communities," p. 282; "Maintaining the Standard and the Scientific Usefulness of the National Parks," Science 68 (17 August 1928): 157; Victor H. Cahalane, "A Proposed Great Plains National Monument," Scientific Monthly 51 (August 1940): 125.
9. Victor H. Cahalane to Doctor Shelford, 5 January 1938; Victor H. Cahalane to Doctor Shelford, 15 September 1938; A Part of the Report, 10 November 1938, Tomanek Collection.
10. A. O. Weese to the American Association of Economic Entomologists, Richmond Meeting, 27 December 1938, Tomanek Collection; A. O. Weese, "Report of the Committee on the Preservation of Natural Conditions," Ecology 20 (April 1939): 324.

11. Victor E. Shelford, "Grassland as a Site for Basic Research on Terrestrial Animals," Science 90 (15 December 1939): 565.

12. A. O. Weese to Dr. Paul B. Sears, 10 October 1939; Paul B. Sears to Members of the Committee on Ecology of the Grasslands of North America, 2 November 1940, Tomanek Collection.

13. A. O. Weese to American Association of Economic Entomologists, 27 December 1938; Paul B. Sears to Committee on Ecology of Grasslands, 2 December 1940, Tomanek Collection; J. E. Weaver, "Replacement of True Prairie by Mixed Prairie in Eastern Nebraska and Kansas," Ecology 24 (October 1943): 421; J. E. Weaver, L. A. Stoddart, and Wm. Noll, "Responses of the Prairie to the Great Drought of 1934," Ecology 16 (October 1935): 614, 618, 623, 624.

14. E. K. Burlew to Doctor Ross G. Harrison, 5 December 1939; Robert F. Griggs to V. E. Shelford, 13 January 1941, Tomanek Collection.

Chapter 3

Secretary Udall Takes a Hike

Through a series of National Park Service surveys and coincidences, a portion of Pottawatomie County east of Tuttle Creek Reservoir was chosen, and from 1958 to 1963 actually promoted, as the first possible site for a Prairie National Park. Initially, the prospects for the park looked favorable. But this premature optimism soon gave way to a struggle for the control of a small part of what was once a vast grassland. The park proponents' preservationist ideals encountered stubborn local opposition from people who found effective voices and arguments. In the end, the opponents of the park prevailed. They not only convinced the public and key members of the Senate that a conservationist (rather than preservationist) approach would safeguard the prairie, but also benefited from public sympathy for rugged western individualism.

Finding suitable land would not be enough to get an area into the national park system. Official recognition of the need for a park was vital. This recognition came in March 1956, when the Advisory Board on National Parks passed the following resolution:

The Advisory Board . . . recognizing the absence of examples of the native grasslands

of the Great Plains, recommends that studies be continued in an effort to find and to acquire superlative areas of such types to be included in the National Park Service as National Monuments.

This recommendation spurred advocates of the park to get their message to the public.¹

The Manhattan Area Park Development Association (MAPDA) was an early backer of a proposed park in Pottawatomie County, neighboring the nearly completed federal Tuttle Creek Reservoir. The May 11, 1958, Topeka Capital mentioned that MAPDA believed the area around Tuttle Creek would make an excellent national reserve. A force behind MAPDA and the park idea was Bill Colvin, vice-president of MAPDA and editor of the Manhattan Mercury. His paper was owned by the family of then Secretary of the Interior Fred Seaton. According to Colvin, this opened doors for him, but it in no way guaranteed that the park would become a reality.²

During the spring and summer of 1958 the National Park Service, along with personnel from Fort Hays State University in Kansas, surveyed three prospective sites in Kansas: Pottawatomie County (Area I), Riley/Wabaunsee Counties (Area II), and Chase County (Area III). Dr. G. W. Tomanek of Fort Hays helped to conduct these studies. The two most important elements the study looked for were "the education and enjoyment of the general public, and the

preservation of a typical grassland area for posterity." The study concluded that Areas I and III more closely met the elements required for a national park. Area I had the attention of the preservationists since it was closer to park proponents. Oil was discovered in Area II. According to MAPDA, there were more objections from the landowners to locating a park in Area III than in Area I. The Kansas Turnpike also bisected Area III. So park proponents focused on Area I as the first potential site for a grassland national park.³

By the middle of July, the study had been completed. Bill Colvin wrote to Conrad Wirth, Director of the National Park Service, complimenting him on the recent survey, "Thanks to the mechanics set in motion so quickly by you the field surveys of the Grasslands areas in this vicinity have been completed under the direction of Mr. Theodor Swem of your Omaha regional office." These early studies and reports had an air of optimism in them. A MAPDA letter dated October 22, 1959, stated, "Bill(Colvin) has assured me (Dr. Hershel T. Gier, president, MAPDA) that everything is progressing better than expected and the probability of the establishment of the desired National Park is favorable." Yet they also had a sense of urgency. A 1960 Kansas City Star intoned, "Time is Running Out on the True Prairie Areas

of Kansas." The tallgrass needed to be preserved, and the quicker it could be done, the better it would be for the country.⁴

In April 1959, published reports in the Manhattan Mercury mentioned a proposed prairie national park being considered near Tuttle Creek. Colvin wrote several editorials in the Mercury voicing approval of the park, saying, "Here [in the national parks] the truly significant natural resources are protected and preserved." These resources included samples of unique areas, such as the Grand Canyon. He mentioned the positive benefits of the proposed park as recreation, economic development, preservation of the tallgrass, and scientific education.⁵

On April 30, 1959, the Westmoreland Recorder published a story with the headline, "May Take Township And A Half--34,000 Acres On West Side." This story said that the proposal "came to many as a surprise." The story went on to mention the park, in the west part of the county, would not extend to the shore of Tuttle Creek. There was to be a one-to three-mile corridor separating the two federal concerns. This corridor was included because originally the National Park Service believed the park would be large enough at 34,000 acres and Park Service officials did not want it to abut a public reservoir. This corridor would be a major

point of irritation in the future of the park proposal.⁶

Up to this point, the prairie park was simply an idea, a dream of the preservationists. Beginning in May 1959, the proposal took on a more formal air. In a letter dated May 4, 1959, Kansas Congressman William H. Avery wrote to Conrad Wirth, Director of the National Park Service. Avery requested, "I would appreciate the assistance of your office in preparing a suggested draft for a bill which would authorize the establishment of a Grasslands National Park." Within one month the National Park Service had responded to Congressman Avery's request. On June 1, 1959, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Roger Ernst sent a letter and a draft bill to Avery. In this early bill, 34,000 acres were believed to be enough to preserve part of the tallgrass prairie. Avery, along with Kansas Senators Andrew F. Schoepfel and Frank Carlson, reported that these were preliminary figures. Not all of the studies were completed, so the size of the park might change. These men issued a press release on June 9, 1960, which stated that they hoped to speed up the official process toward getting more complete studies done of the proposed park. They did not expect any action toward the creation of a park in that session of Congress.⁷

There were people in Pottawatomie County who gave at

least grudging support to the proposed park. The support was not greater because the size of the park had not yet been finalized. The cautious supporters included the Pottawatomie County Commissioners and some staff members of the Westmoreland Recorder. But their support was fragile, as was shown on March 14, 1960, when the county commissioners drafted a resolution opposing the extension west of the proposed park. Part of the resolution stated:

that said Board approve and support the location of the proposed Grassland National Park in the western portion of Pottawatomie County, Kansas; but said Board hereby officially protests the extension of the said park area, westward, to where it will join the Tuttle Creek reservoir, or interfere [sic] with the development of said strip of land.

It was when reports of increasing the size of the park were heard that many landowners and residents of Pottawatomie County started to oppose the park vigorously. According to Colvin the park had a chance while it remained at 34,000 acres. When the proposed park was expanded to 60,000 acres and extended westward to the shore of Tuttle Creek, its chances of passage dropped significantly. Colvin later recalled that he could sell the folks a Chevy, but he could not sell them a BMW.⁸

Another obstacle to the proposed park was the hard feelings engendered by the Corps of Engineers, who had recently built Tuttle Creek Reservoir on the Blue River.

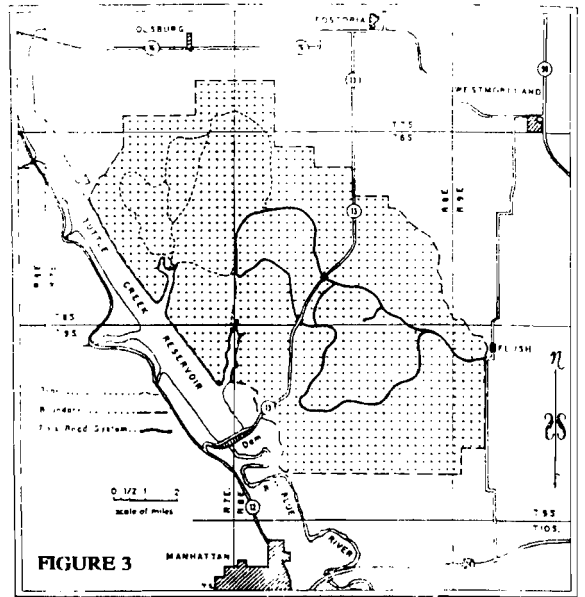
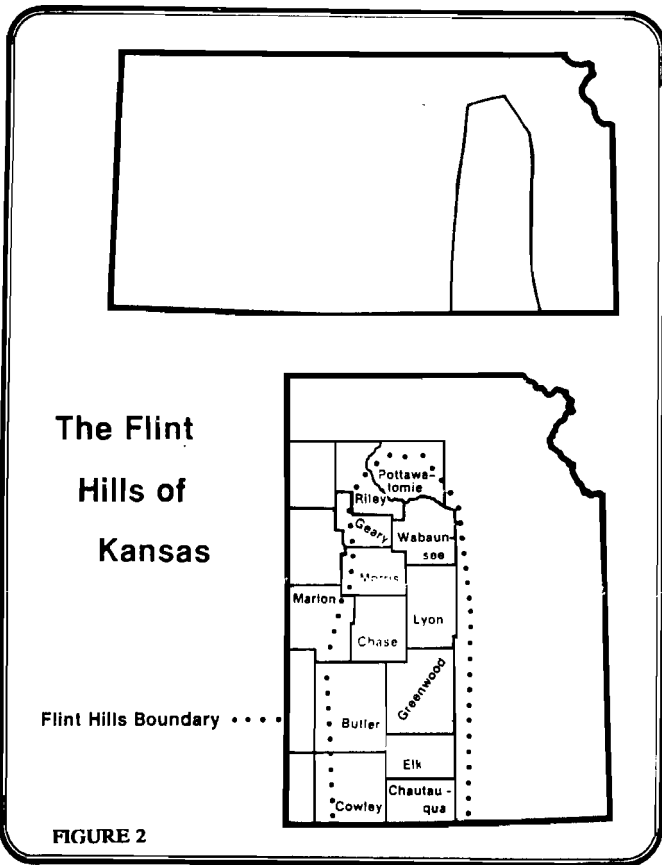
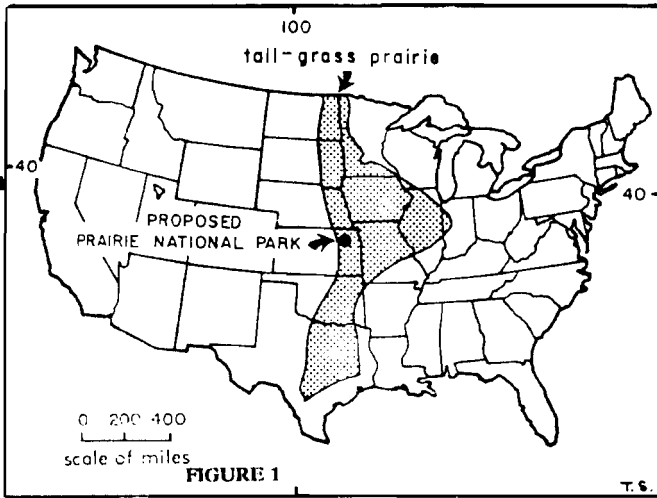
Many of the landowners of the area felt that their fertile land had been unjustly taken from them. There had been one redeeming point about the reservoir, however; the residents were led to believe during its construction that housing could be developed along the eastern shore of Tuttle Creek. Doc Maskil of the Westmoreland Recorder noted, "That the shoreline isn't just so much pasture land--it's land that may someday be lined with cabins." Residents were led to believe that this housing development would help offset the loss in property taxes caused by the lake.⁹

Tuttle Creek generated another sore point with Pottawatomie County residents. This problem dealt with the county roads that had been taken out with the construction of the reservoir. The Corps of Engineers had promised to have the roads affected by Tuttle Creek rebuilt. In November of 1961, however, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall requested that the Corps delay rebuilding the roads. Roads would distract from the attractiveness of the site as a national park. Finally, in July of 1962, after the Pottawatomie County Commissioners threatened to take them to court, the Corps let out contracts to rebuild the roads. It was within this frayed relationship between county residents and the federal government that the National Park Service and its proponents attempted to create a Prairie Park in

Kansas.¹⁰

In mid-February 1961, the Pottawatomie County Commissioners tried working out a compromise with National Park Service representatives over the size of the park. "We think we can safely say that all of Kansas wants a National Park to be located within its borders," the commissioners said, but they were "asking that a few thousand acres not be included in the National Park--area that, at one time, the National Park Service said it didn't want." In a meeting with the commissioners shortly before this statement, Chester D. Brown of the Omaha branch of the National Park Service had stated, "I can't say you can't have a corridor, but in our judgment if a corridor is in this the land cannot be justified as a national park." One reason given for the increased size of the park was that State Highway 13 was going to be built through part of it. A map of the area and the proposed park without the corridor follows on page 45. Several adamant proponents said a larger park was needed so that the road would not interfere with the view in the park and so that the prairie ecosystem could be better preserved.¹¹

During this time both the proponents and opponents of the park had been working on ways to get their views heard. In October 1961, the Prairie National Park Natural History



Association, Inc., was formed. Its objectives were to promote and to purchase land to help the National Park Service establish the park in Kansas. This group wanted the land to be restored to what it was before white men began to exploit it. The Association asked Governor Anderson for \$550,000 in state money to show state support for the project. In 1962 and 1963 a total of \$100,000 was appropriated to show state support for the park. Opponents of the park were more loosely organized at this time. Several people, however, had written to Congressmen Avery voicing concern over the federal intervention. There were also a few town meetings in Westmoreland to discuss ways to stop park construction.¹²

On December 4, 1961, a legend was made, and opponents to the park were galvanized into an effective organization. On this date Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, Director of the National Parks Conrad Wirth, other government officials, and local proponents tried to tour parts of the proposed park. Two helicopters carrying the group landed on a site known as Twin Mound. They did not get much of a tour. It was cut short by a local landowner, Carl Bellinger. On these basic facts most accounts agree. The legend grows from several conflicting reports of the incident.¹³

As remembered by a fellow opponent of the park, Dave Carlson, Carl Bellinger had permission to be on this land that he was leasing. The tour had been announced, so Bellinger knew the group would be in the area. He apparently took it upon himself to challenge the Secretary for trespassing on private property, as Udall and his group had not gotten permission to be on the land. Someone needed to challenge those people who would take land from honest working folks. Bellinger showed he was the man to do it.¹⁴

Bill Colvin, a member of the tour, recalled the incident differently. He said a resident of the area was to meet the helicopters in a pasture near Twin Mound. As the group approached the landing point, Colvin looked down to see their tour guide driving down the road; he would not be at the assigned meeting place in time. Colvin could not get in touch with the lead helicopter. At this point, the proponents of the park had some bad luck. Carl Bellinger had parked his truck near the arranged landing site. The pilot spotted a pickup and landed by it, only as the Secretary of the Interior found out, this man was not their tour guide. According to Colvin's recollection, Bellinger used a gun to persuade the group to leave.¹⁵

A 1970 article in the Topeka State Journal reported that "At one point in 1963, former Secretary of the Interior

Stewart Udall came to the Tuttle Creek Area to inspect the park but one rancher with a shotgun ordered him off some property." And during the first meeting of the Flint Hills Grass Roots Association on March 28, 1973, reports indicated that Udall was met with gun resistance when he attempted to tour the area. There were pictures in newspapers, however, showing Udall and Bellinger shaking hands as the group was leaving, no gun was pictured. Conrad Wirth noted the incident in his book Parks, Politics, and the People. Wirth wrote:

On the first setdown on the secretary's trip, however, there was a man waiting for us. Secretary Udall was first out of the plane and went right over to shake his hand. The man ordered him off the property. The secretary, without saying anything more or giving us a chance to straighten the matter out, returned to the helicopter and cancelled the rest of the trip. I talked to the man and found that he was not the owner but a tenant farmer. The owner had in fact given us permission to land on the property at this precise location, but apparently the tenant disagreed with the owner and decided to exercise a little authority of his own.¹⁶

Colvin felt that this incident was a turning point against the park. Udall did not appreciate the way he was treated, and Udall was quoted as saying, "It's too bad when a member of the President's Cabinet tries to take a walk on a hill, he is told to get off. . . . But the National Park will remedy that." This incident may have cooled his desire for a park in the area. To many landowners, it showed the

arrogance of federal officials. The story of the rugged Kansas cattleman taking on the federal government was reported nationwide by the Associated Press. Bellinger got several hundred letters in support of his actions.¹⁷

The proposed park expansion and the Carl Bellinger incident were major blows against the park. Out of this Twin Mound incident was formed the Twin Mound Ranchers, the central opposition force to the park. In an early meeting, the group set several goals to fight the park. Suggestions were made for a letter writing campaign. The group also solicited support from terminal livestock markets, and received the endorsement of the Kansas Livestock Association. Finally, members decided to send a group to Washington, D.C., when the bill was to be discussed before the Senate Public Lands Subcommittee.¹⁸

It was the ability of the Twin Mound Ranchers to make their point to the Public Lands subcommittee that led to the end of the proposed park in Pottawatomie County. In early July 1963, the members of the Public Lands Subcommittee met at Kansas State University for a hearing on the park issue. The chairman was Senator Alan Bible. Several other members of the committee were also landowners from western states. The Twin Mound Ranchers stressed the loss of tax revenues, the displacement of families, and the lack of need for the

federal government to preserve the area. They believed their conservation measures were preserving the land. Their proof of this was the desire of the National Park Service to use their land as a national park.¹⁹

By September 1963, the issue of the park was closed, when the Manhattan Mercury reported that the Public Lands Subcommittee "unanimously voted to table the matter on the grounds that, in the committee's opinion, the area does not meet the criteria of a National Park." Hopes for a prairie park thereupon subsided until the 1970s.²⁰

Several local and specific factors helped to bring about the defeat of the proposed prairie national park in Pottawatomie County. The people of the county were concerned about the decreased property tax base. They wanted the opportunity to develop the eastern shore of Tuttle Creek Reservoir. Many county residents did not like having been displaced by the construction of Tuttle Creek. Obviously, local landowners did not want their lives and livelihoods disrupted again by the federal government.

More generally, there was a conflict between the preservationists' proposals and the private conservationists' practices. Both sides wanted the area preserved, but each side believed it knew better how to save the tallgrass. The preservationists wanted man's influence

expunged from the park. The landowners wanted to keep the land a productive place for agriculture. The proponents wanted to make a park for the nation. The opponents believed that the land should be kept in private hands and that the landowners, practicing conservationists, could better decide how their land should be used. One wanted to have easy access to nature; the other wanted to make a living from nature.

The early optimism of park proponents was dashed when they did not get public opinion behind them. Their cry to save the tallgrass before it disappeared was not compelling to enough people. The opponents of the park successfully shaped the state and national debate to help their cause. It was the professionals in the Park Service and their allies against, as one opponent phrased it, "an independent group who can solve their own problems." By chance Carl Bellinger came to represent this independence, and that image was compelling, for it helped to reinforce the myth of the rugged individual against the power hungry federal government. The myth of the Old West was alive and well in Pottawatomie County, and perhaps the United States, as shown by the defeat of the first serious proposal for a Prairie National Park.²¹

NOTES

1. Department of the Interior, Prairie National Park, (July 1961), p. 11; William H. Avery to Mr. and Mrs. Alex Irvine, Manhattan, Kansas, 7 June 1960, transcript in the collections of the Riley County Historical Museum, Manhattan, Kansas, p. 5; Topeka State Journal, 21 October 1960.

2. Topeka Capital, 11 May 1958; Bill Colvin, interview by author, 7 February 1991, Manhattan, Kansas, written record.

3. G. W. Tomanek, An Analysis of Three Areas in the Flint Hills, (Study for the National Park Service, 1958), private Collection of G. W. Tomanek, Hays, Kansas, pp. 57, 91, 106, 136-138; Manhattan Area Park Development Association to Members, 22 October 1959, transcript in the collections of the RCHM, p. 1; Kansas City Star, 19 June 1960.

4. Bill Colvin to Conrad Wirth, 19 July 1958, the Frank Carlson Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas; Kansas City Star, 19 June 1960.

5. Manhattan Mercury, 29 April 1959; Manhattan Mercury, 30 April 1959; Manhattan Mercury, 1 May 1959; Bill Colvin, interview by author, 7 February 1991.

6. Westmoreland (Kansas) Recorder, 30 April 1959 and 3 November 1960.

7. William H. Avery to Conrad L. Wirth, 4 May 1959, the William H. Avery Collection, KSHS; Roger Ernst to William H. Avery, 1 June 1959, the William H. Avery Collection, KSHS, Topeka, Kansas; William H. Avery to Mr. and Mrs. Alex Irvine, 7 June 1960, RCHM.p. 1; Kansas City Star, 19 June 1960.

8. Board of County Commissioners of Pottawatomie County, "Grassland National Park," Resolution, (Westmoreland, Kansas, 14 March 1960); Topeka Journal, 9 June 1960; Westmoreland Recorder, 6 October 1960; Bill Colvin, interview by author, 7 February 1991.

9. James D. Genandt, "The People Be Dammed: The Tale of Tuttle Creek" (Master thesis, Emporia State University,

1988); Westmoreland Recorder, 23 March 1961.

10. Westmoreland Recorder, 19 May 1960, 28 September 1961, 19 October 1961, 3 November 1961, 9 November 1961, 16 November 1961, 31 May 1962, 14 June 1962, 19 July 1962; Manhattan Mercury, 22 October 1960, 21 December 1961.

11. Westmoreland Recorder, 16 February 1961; Topeka Daily, 15 November 1961; Conrad Wirth to Fred Seaton, 1 December 1959, the Fred Seaton Collection, The Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; Ron Kull, Topeka Capital-Journal, 19 February 1961; Stewart Udall to Clinton P. Anderson, 14 November 1961, the James Pearson Collection, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence, Kansas; E. Raymond Hall, "The Prairie National Park," National Parks Magazine (February 1962), p. 8; Theodor R. Swem to G. W. Tomanek, 21 August 1959, Tomanek Collection.

12. George Mack, Topeka Capital, 24 October 1961; John Anderson to Alan Bible, 18 July 1963, Governor John Anderson Collection, KSHS.

13. Doc Maskil, interview by author, 24 January 1991, Westmoreland, Kansas, written record; Dave Carlson, interview by author, 1 February 1991, Manhattan, Kansas, written record; Bill Colvin, interview by author, 7 February 1991.

14. Dave Carlson, interview by author, 1 February 1991.

15. Bill Colvin, interview by author, 7 February 1991.

16. Topeka State Journal, 21 April 1970; Minutes of the Flint Hills Grass Roots Association, 28 March 1973, from the Private Collection of S. O. Somers, Emporia, Kansas; Conrad L. Wirth, Parks, Politics, and the People (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), p. 299; "Flint Hills Ranchers Want Cattle to Roam the Prairie," unidentified newspaper photocopy, 5 December 1961, S. O. Somers Collection.

17. Bill Colvin, interview by author, 1 February 1991; Time, undated copy, the Prairie National Park Natural History Association Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library.

18. Westmoreland Recorder, 14 December 1961, and 4 January 1962.

19. Members of the committee included Alan Bible, Nevada; Milward Simpson, Wyoming; Len B. Jordon, Idaho; Frank Moss, Utah; Q. N. Burdick, North Dakota; taken from Westmoreland Recorder, 9 July 1963.

20. Manhattan Mercury, 11 September 1963.

21. George A. Irvine to William H. Avery, 18 April 1960 the William H. Avery Collection, KSHS.

Chapter 4

Pasture or Prairie?

The National Park Service, along with its allies in the preservationist movements, worked in stages to incorporate a Prairie National Park into the National Park System. They first defined a need for a Prairie National Park, and then looked for sites to meet this need. When one site--Pottawatomie County--failed to pass, another site was eventually found, and the process began again. As long as the National Park Service and its allies could get at least meager support from Congress and state officials, they continued pushing for the establishment of a tallgrass national park. Unfortunately for their cause, the preservationists failed to nurture the support of the landowners in the areas where they lobbied for a national park. In fact, they often disdained the landowners' culture and views. The National Park Service and its preservationist allies in Kansas and throughout the country apparently had not learned from the mistakes they had made in the prairie park proposal of the 1960s.

Many landowners in the Flint Hills again opposed a Tallgrass National Park on their land. They had to form an organization to counter the preservationists' already formidable lobby. The opponents of the proposed park were

able to build and maintain their own organization to lobby Congress. Thus the opponents of this new park proposal were able to get and keep the support of the key members of the Kansas Congressional delegation, and their lobbying efforts doomed this new park proposal to the same fate as its predecessor--failure.

The federal park proposal of the 1970s was spearheaded in Kansas by Dr. E. Raymond Hall, the noted mammalogist from Kansas University, and Lawrence Wagner, an attorney from Shawnee Mission, Kansas, who were members of the Prairie National Park and Natural History Association, Inc., which had pushed for the tallgrass park in Pottawatomie County. They spread the word about the importance of a tallgrass national park and answered questions about their proposals. This was done by both writing articles in magazines such as American Forests and National Parks Magazine, and in speeches they gave to interested organizations. In a June 27, 1970, letter to members of the Prairie National Park Natural History Association, Inc., Hall mentioned progress concerning a prairie national park. One important item discussed in this letter was the several meetings of the National Parks Advisory Board Hall attended during 1969 and 1970. Hall indicated the board still showed interest in establishing a Tallgrass Prairie National Park and also

mentioned that the Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel had "urged Kansans to provide tangible evidence of interest in preserving" a portion of the tallgrass in the state of Kansas.¹

Because of the efforts of Hall and his group, a few legislators attempted to establish a Governor's Commission which would show state support for any proposed Prairie National Park to the National Park Service. These renewed efforts at getting a tallgrass park in Kansas were heard in the state, throughout the nation, and even internationally. Most of the mail Governor Robert Docking received in 1970 which related to the park was favorable to the idea, but this newest proposal polarized those groups for and against the prairie park. Most of the mail Governor Docking received in 1970 relating to the park was favorable to the idea, but much of the mail came from outside of Kansas. The Governor even received ten letters from young people (nine-to fourteen-year-olds from New Jersey to California) in Nature Corps, a national preservation organization for youth. One of the few letters in opposition to the park came from Phil Stamm of Westmoreland, who stated, "The Farmer & Rancher would get along fine if it wasn't for so many Beauracrats [sic] and Army Engineers."²

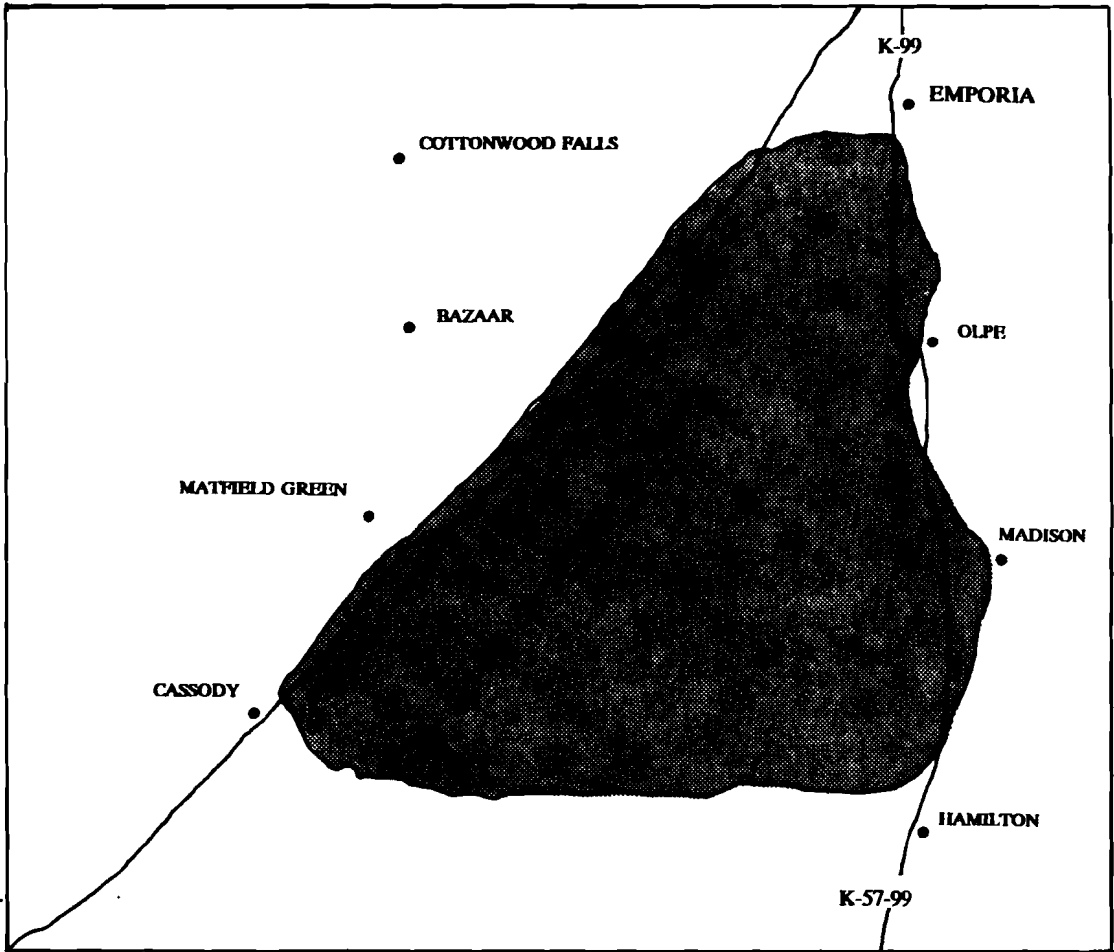
In April 1970, Docking appointed a state committee to look into the matter of a National Park in Kansas. It included Kansans who were interested in the creation of a Tallgrass National Park in the state. Among the twelve members were Bill Colvin, editor of the Manhattan Mercury, Raymond Hall, and Lawrence Wagner. The committee's purpose was to urge congressional support of a Prairie National Park, which it did on June 16, 1971, when the committee went to Washington to meet with the Kansas Congressional delegation and lobby for a prairie park in Kansas. It was the support and recommendation from the state committee that led Senator James Pearson and Congressman Larry Winn, Jr., both of Kansas, to introduce a bill in Congress for a 60,000-acre Prairie National Park. At this meeting with the Docking Commission, Kansas Fifth District Representative Joe Skubitz questioned the need for such a large park. He received no answers that convinced him a park of 60,000 acres was needed. So he refused to support this proposal. The committee also received little support from the rest of the Kansas Congressional delegation. Without strong support of the Kansas delegation, Congress did not approve the funds for the Park Service to conduct feasibility studies of a tallgrass park.³

In 1973 the Kansas Congressional delegation, led by

Representative Winn, again requested the National Park Service to look into the feasibility of a Prairie National Park in Kansas. Part of the reason for the new request was that Winn had finally obtained reluctant support from Skubitz. Park proponent Phelps Murdock explained in a memo, "it appears that he (Skubitz) considers the Prairie Park an inevitable decision of the National Park Service, and that any effort to fight the park is fruitless." Skubitz's support was vital because the proposed park would be in his district, and he was a member of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, which would determine if the park proposal would be considered by the entire House of Representatives. Skubitz's support extended only to the idea of some type of park. He continued to disagree with the need for a 60,000-acre park. A map of one of the proposed 60,000-acre parks follows on page 60. He believed, however, he could work out a compromise between the park proponents and the park opponents. Because of the at least tepid backing from the Kansas delegation, Congress approved Winn's legislation to fund the study.⁴

This funding was important because the Park Service could not begin the study of the proposed park until Congress authorized the funds. The Park Service completed and published its results in October 1975. The report was

PROPOSED TALLGRASS PRAIRIE NATIONAL PARK



PROPOSED PARK



entitled, Proposed Prairie National Park, Kansas/Oklahoma. This report looked at, and recommended, several areas that might make appropriate sites for incorporation into the National Park System. Three sites were singled out for further study. One was Wabaunsee West, a 60,000-acre study area near Alma and Alta Vista, Kansas. Another was Chase South, a 100,000-acre study area south of the Kansas Turnpike in Chase, Butler, and Greenwood counties, Kansas. The final study area was Osage, a 93,000-acre tract straddling the Kansas/Oklahoma border. Most of the Osage area was in Osage County, Oklahoma, and the rest was in Chautauqua and Cowley counties, Kansas. The sizes of these proposed areas were simply recommendations to Congress. The park proponents changed the sizes of the park proposals several times.⁵

The attempt to gain congressional support for a prairie park prompted the second struggle between preservationists and landowners for control of a portion of the Flint Hills. This time the preservationists were represented by Save the Tallgrass Prairie (STP), which filed for incorporation on December 19, 1972. This group replaced the Prairie National Park and Natural History Association, Inc., as the primary park advocate. The primary goal cited in its incorporation papers was "to bring into unity of purpose and action all

interests concerned with the movement to preserve and save portions of tallgrass prairies for scenic, recreational and wildlife preservation purposes."⁶

STP was made up generally of people from the larger cities of Kansas. All of the first officers lived in Lawrence or the Kansas City area. Some of the members were Charles Stough, an attorney from Lawrence; Timothy Amsden, a lawyer from Kansas City, Missouri; and Ron Baxter, an attorney from Topeka, Kansas. Few STP members resided in the proposed park areas. Most lived as much as 100 miles from the proposed sites. Members of other environmental groups, such as the National Audubon Society and the Nature Conservancy, supported STP. STP attempted to get a tallgrass national park in Kansas throughout the 1970s.⁷

An organization opposed to the prairie park proposal was formed several months after Save the Tallgrass Prairie, in response to STP's efforts in advocating a tallgrass park in Kansas or Oklahoma. The Flint Hills Grass Roots Association held its first public meeting on March 28, 1973, at the Cassoday Grade School in Butler County, Kansas. One hundred seventy-two people attended this meeting. Its purpose, according to the minutes of the meeting, was "to organize to be in opposition to the taking of a big acreage for a National Prairie Park." Many of the people who joined

this organization were landowners from area Flint Hills communities. Allies to their cause were mentioned in this first meeting, which included the Kansas Livestock Association, the Kansas Farm Bureau, and the local soil conservation associations. They identified their opponents as including the Governor's Committee, STP, and the Skubitz Committee, which was made up of constituents of the Kansas Fifth District. Wayne Rogler, a rancher from Matfield Green, Kansas, thought the Skubitz Committee was formed to find out what the people of the Fifth District thought about the various park proposals that had been mentioned by park proponents and Skubitz. The proposal reinforced to the people at this meeting what they believed to be the meddling nature of the federal government in regard to their land. Everett Steerman of Emporia said:

The Government apparently can do no wrong and it would probably take a constitutional order to keep them from taking the land if they want to. The way to stop the movement is to get our Congressman on our side. We have to sell our ideas to the Congress.

Steerman let the group know this fight would be won or lost--in Washington, D.C. Congress would be a major battleground in the conflict between the opposing park interests.⁸

A small concession was offered to the pro-park forces. The Flint Hills Grass Roots Association found no fault with

having scenic easements or a park of a few hundred acres. They were, however, against any large-scale federal purchase of Kansas farmland for a national park. This first meeting initiated further action against the proposed park by recommending that resolutions be drawn up against it, that petitions be circulated, that women write letters, and that further meetings be set up to oppose the park.⁹

During this time Save the Tallgrass Prairie members continued their efforts on behalf of the park. They believed in the ability of the federal government to solve the problem of the vanishing prairie. In STP's opinion, it was beyond the ability of the ranchers and farmers of the Flint Hills to protect the tallgrass in its native state. STP felt that private ownership of the land turned the land from a prairie to simply a pasture. Their interest in the prairie centered on its preservation and restoration. They had neither the experience nor the tradition of owning and using the land to earn a living. They drove out to marvel at the tallgrass, but returned to their homes in the city.¹⁰

Save the Tallgrass Prairie used several methods to further its objectives including writing and distributing books, organizing speaking engagements, distributing pamphlets, and conducting seminars. Patricia Duncan, a photographer from Lake Quivera, Kansas, displayed several of

her photographs of the Flint Hills and the prairie in exhibits and STP programs. Duncan, an original director of STP, wrote Tallgrass Prairie: The Inland Sea. The book served as a vehicle to secure support for a Prairie National Park in Kansas. It was a collection of her photographs as well as an overview of the prairie. Besides describing the beauty of the prairie, Duncan advocated federal protection of part of the Flint Hills. She stated "that many national parks have the backing of active, knowledgeable, citizens' watch-dog organizations such as STP to aid in achieving their full potential."¹¹ "Their full potential" meant the federal acquisition of private land for public use. According to Duncan, limited National Park Service funds forced private organizations to assist the Park Service in realizing its goals. In Duncan's opinion, "it is a duty for an American citizen to become involved in some way in our park system."¹² So STP lobbied Congress for NPS to help realize their mutual aim.¹³

STP, the Audubon Society, and other preservationist groups gave talks to schools, garden clubs, and other interested groups, such as the Desoto Senior Citizens, the Junior League of Kansas City, Missouri, and the Leawood Country Club, about the need for federal control of part of the tallgrass prairie. STP also sponsored annual

conferences which discussed and planned for Congressional approval of a Prairie National Park in the Flint Hills. Pamphlets issued by STP took the form of newsletters and position papers, whose titles included On Preservation of the Tallgrass Prairie and We Cannot Afford to Wait. Each of these resources raised public awareness of the perceived need for federal acquisition of Kansas land to preserve the prairie.¹⁴

The need to preserve the prairie was a major theme for STP and those who favored a national park. Dr. E. Raymond Hall stated at the First Tallgrass Prairie Conference and Action Workshop held from September 24-30, 1973, at Camp Wood, near Elmdale, Kansas, "Conditions in the Tallgrass Prairie National Park should be like they were when Coronado came in 1541--before European man's growth syndrome upset the apple cart."¹⁵ Coronado's exploration of the area was described by STP as "invading virgin land," and the group wanted to expunge any trace of the white man's influence from the area. Besides preserving the tallgrass, STP wanted to re-establish and preserve the animal life found in Kansas in 1541. There were disagreements between STP and its opponents over which animals inhabited the Flint Hills in 1541 and which ones should be returned to the proposed park. The two sides could not agree on whether the golden eagle

and the pronghorn antelope were indigenous to the Flint Hills. The ranchers opposed to the proposed park further worried about diseases buffalo could transmit to their cattle. They were also against the reintroduction of wolves into the Flint Hills. Preservation, according to STP, could only be accomplished through federal intervention in the form of a federal park. STP also believed that 60,000 acres was needed for adequate preservation of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem.¹⁶

At the same STP Tallgrass Workshop where Hall spoke, Dr. Walter M. Kollmorgen, a geographer from Kansas University, reinforced the negative attitude toward European settlement and pioneer values. Kollmorgen stated in his speech:

In this day of disillusionment and bewilderment it seems therefore appropriate to re-examine our values and deeds, confess our destructive tendencies, focus attention on the positive side of life, and enshrine the regenerative forces of nature, which may give us another opportunity to justify our existence.

A Tallgrass Prairie Park dedicated as a monument to our misdeeds and misconceptions regarding the prairie habitat and its children would at least suggest that we are capable of learning and maturing, and to be impressed by the wonders and mysteries of nature.

The true version [of history] gives us ample cause to engage in a act of penance and confession and to memorialize these confessions in a gesture that sets aside an ample acreage of the prairie, so that it might be restored to its pristine glory, and to serve as a host to its various forms of wildlife.¹⁷

On Preservation of the Tallgrass Prairie, a position paper written by Save the Tallgrass Prairie, voiced another major issue between the two sides of the park issue. STP questioned the effectiveness of private ownership in preserving the true qualities of the virgin prairie. They were also concerned that land speculators would make massive subdivisions out of the Flint Hills. STP even worried about possible future federal purchases of Flint Hills land for military ranges and federal reservoirs. The pamphlet also discussed their fear of the large Eastern banks who held mortgages on some of the land. For STP, the only way to preserve the tallgrass prairie of the Flint Hills was to bring in the federal government. On Preservation of the Tallgrass Prairie stated that "national treasures, in the long run, can only be protected by responsible, professional and non-political national institutions such as the Park Service." STP had little faith in the ability of ranchers to preserve the land that was their very livelihood. This belief, that private landowners could not preserve the Flint Hills, angered many of the farmers and ranchers of the area. In its position papers, STP wanted to clear up "honest differences" between the two sides, but there was a vast difference of opinion between the two groups over who could better manage the land.¹⁸

The Flint Hills of Kansas represent much more than just a sea of beautiful grass. They represent a culture and tradition almost unique in the United States, a tradition of independent, self-reliant ranchers and cattlemen who have lived in harmony with the tall-grass for more than 100 years.

The vast herds of cattle, the lone cowboy on his pony, the spire of a windmill far across the hills, the native stone ranchhouse and barn are as much a part of the Flint Hills tradition as the grass itself. And they are just as worthy of preservation.

If left alone, the people of the region will preserve their heritage far more effectively than any federal agency could ever do.

KGA felt the country could not afford the luxury of a big acreage park because of the need for food production. KGA agreed with Save the Tallgrass Prairie about the threat for the federal government to purchase more land for reservoirs or military reservations. Neither side favored this type of federal land acquisition. But KGA believed that a federal park was the same as any other federal purchase of private land. As each side became organized and mustered its troops, the battle for Congressional approval was at hand.²⁰

Congressman Joe Skubitz pushed for a compromise park in the first half of 1973. Larry Winn Jr.'s proposal from 1971 called for a 60,000-acre park. Skubitz proposed a park of no more than 40,000 acres: 20,000 acres was to be park and the other 20,000 acres was to be scenic easements. This compromise park would be dispersed among several smaller areas. No one county would have to bear the burden of a

large park. Skubitz did not want to take too much land from any one area.²¹

On June 2, 1973, in Emporia, Kansas, Skubitz met with representatives of KGA who voiced their opposition to both park proposals. They also questioned him as to what they could do to stop the park and what would happen if the park became a reality. Skubitz suggested that they support his compromise bill. KGA would not do this. KGA voiced their concern about the "nationalization" of their land. They doubted that the federal government could manage the land any better than did the ranchers of the Flint Hills. They used as an example what they believed to be poor land management around Tuttle Creek Reservoir. A final, and probably the major, concern for KGA representatives was that should the park become a reality, they could lose control over their land and their way of life. This prospect troubled KGA members. There were no assurances that the Park Service would not need more land for the park. This prospect troubled KGA members. They let Skubitz know that they were adamantly against the park. Skubitz failed to convince them that his compromise bill was the only practical alternative. Shortly after this meeting, Skubitz emerged firmly against any park proposal.²²

Two factors probably influenced his reversal. One was

Skubitz's belief that he had to meet the concerns of his constituents in the Fifth District. He had shown this concern by his meeting in Emporia with KGA representatives. A second reason was his belief that he had been mistreated by members of STP whom he identified as Duncan, Hall, and Mrs. Reuben Hammer of Emporia. In a letter to Duncan, Skubitz vented his anger when he stated:

They (STP) tend to accuse all who do not agree with them as being politically motivated, or ignorant of the facts. This is the type of smear language you employ. I bitterly resent you and others questioning my integrity because I do not fall over dead when underinformed zealots demand that I comply with their wishes.²³

So the primary Congressional member from Kansas had moved from a position of possible compromise to one definitely set against the park. The opponents of the park from his district visited with him, trying to get answers to their problem. The proponents of the park hurled insults at the key legislator they most needed to work with. Skubitz continued to fight the proposed park until his retirement in 1978.

In 1978 Senator James Pearson also announced his retirement. Nancy Kassebaum replaced Pearson in the Senate. While Pearson favored the park, Kassebaum did not. Senator Bob Dole of Kansas had also come out against the park. Bob Whittaker took over Skubitz's seat. Whittaker had actively

opposed the park while he was a member of the Kansas State Legislature and continued that opposition while in Washington. Whittaker and Kansas Representative Keith Sebelius, who also opposed the park, were on the House Interior Committee that oversaw National Park matters. The proponents of the park had lost support from the Kansas delegation while the opponents had gained it.²⁴

The struggle that pitted Save the Tallgrass Prairie against the Kansas Grassroots Association had begun over Congressional approval for the National Park Service to study the feasibility of a tallgrass park in Kansas. The study identified its rationale and made recommendations to Congress. A major theme throughout the assessment was that the federal government offered the best alternative for saving a portion of the tallgrass prairie for future generations.²⁵

Congress refused to approve any funding for a park under the 1975 NPS study. It refused because KGA was able to convince most members of the Kansas Congressional delegation that the park was not needed. As Senator Nancy Kassebaum stated in a letter to Dr. Karl Menninger, chairman of the honorary board of trustees of STP, "This land is presently being preserved, and has been for generations, by the ranchers and stockmen who live there."²⁶

For several years after 1975, there were continued attempts to gain Congressional approval for the park. But the forces who opposed federal acquisition of their land had gained yet another victory. They felt assured that the threat of a national park on their land had been stymied. They had garnered their forces to keep widespread support of the park out of Congress. Their conservationist ideas concerning land use had greater support with most of the Kansas Congressional delegation. For a time, they could rest knowing that they had saved their tallgrass prairie.

NOTES

1. Wichita Beacon, 26 April 1972; E. Raymond Hall to Members, 27 June 1970, pp. 1 and 5, the Robert Docking Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library, Lawrence, Kansas.

2. Kansas City Star, 9 May 1970; letters to Governor Docking from members of Nature Corps, and Phil Stamm to Robert Docking, 9 December 1970, Docking Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library.

3. Independence Daily Reporter, 22 April 1970; Junction City Union, 21 April 1970; Kansas City Kansan, 22 April 1970; Topeka State Journal, 7 April 1970 and 21 April 1970; Wichita Eagle, 18 June 1971; Arkansas City Traveler, 1 July 1971; Docking Press Release, 19 May 1971, Lawrence Wagner to Jack Steineger, 30 April 1971, Robert Docking to William Roy, 14 June 1971, Docking Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library; Virginia Pennington, aid to Joe Skubitz, to Manuel Hughes, 6 June 1973, Joe Skubitz to Dear Friend, 18 October 1974, the Private Collection of S. O. Somers, Emporia, Kansas.

4. Pennington, to Manuel Hughes, 6 June 1973, Somers Collection; memo Phelps Murdock to Board of Councillors Travis/Walz/Lane, Inc., 10 August 1973; Lawrence Wagner to the Kansas Ornithological Society, 22 June 1971, Save the Tallgrass Prairie Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library.

5. National Park Service, "Planning Directive," Preliminary Environmental Assessment Appendixes A thru N: Proposed Prairie National Park/Kansas-Oklahoma (Washington: 1975), pp. 5-28; Kansas City Times, 29 May 1975.

6. Copy of Articles of Incorporation of Save the Tallgrass Prairie, Inc., 19 December 1972, Somers Collection.

7. Ibid.

8. Minutes of the Flint Hills Grass Roots Association, 28 March 1973; listing by Wayne and Elizabeth Rogler of those attending 28 March 1973 meeting, Somers Collection, pp. 1-4.

9. Minutes, p. 3.

10. Articles of Incorporation of Save the Tallgrass Prairie; Patricia Duncan to Joe Skubitz, 23 February 1972, STP Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library.

11. Patricia Duncan, Tallgrass Prairie: The Inland Sea (Kansas City: The Lowell Press, 1978), p. 69.

12. Duncan, p. 69.

13. Kansas City Star, 2 February 1972; Kansas City Times, 5 February 1972; Duncan, p. 69.

14. "We Cannot Afford to Wait," Save the Tallgrass Prairie, Inc. News, December 1973; "On Preservation of the Tallgrass Prairie," Save the Tallgrass Prairie, Inc. Position Paper, Somers Collection.

15. Saving the Prairie Two Days at a Time, record of the First Tallgrass Prairie Conference and Action Workshop, E. Raymond Hall, 29 and 30 September 1973, STP Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

16. Saving the Prairie, Hall; Charles Stough to Vincent E. Moore, 3 July 1975; statements by biologists Robert F. Clarke, Dwight L. Spencer, and Robert L. Parenti presented at Kansas Grassroots Association, 3 April 1975, Somers Collection.

17. Saving the Prairie, Walter M. Kollmorgen.

18. "On Preservation of the Tallgrass Prairie".

19. Copy of Minutes of the Flint Hills Grass Roots Association, 1 April 1973; Copy of Minutes of Kansas Grassroots Association, 4 April 1973; Copy of By-Laws of Kansas Grassroots Association, Inc.; Copies of letters sent to government officials by KGA, 10 May 1973; Stanley W. Hulett, Associate Director, Department of the Interior, to J. Manuel Hughes, 5 July 1973, Somers Collection.

20. Leave the Grasslands Alone: A Statement Opposing a National Prairie Park, Kansas Grassroots Association, Somers Collection.

21. Copy of Skubitz's Draft Bill, 10 May 1973, Joe Skubitz to Friend, 9 April 1973, Somers Collection;

Manhattan Mercury, 3 June 1973; Emporia Gazette, 4 June 1973; Emporia Gazette, 22 October 1974.

22. "A Summary of the Meeting with Congressman Joe Skubitz," KGA, 2 June 1973, Somers Collection.

23. Joe Skubitz to Patricia Duncan, 30 September 1971, STP Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library.

24. Elaine Shea to Polly Bradley, Massachusetts Audubon Society, 9 June 1978; STP Newsletter, January-February 1981, STP Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library; Bob Whittaker to Manuel Hughes, 22 September, 1975, Bob Whittaker to Manuel Hughes, 13 February 1979, Keith Sebelius to Kermit Oakes, 19 April 1973, Somers Collection; Kansas City Star, 11 January 1979; Kansas City Star, 23 October 1979.

25. "Planning Directive," p. 5.

26. Robert G. Fisher to Elaine Shea, 20 November 1979; Charles Stough to STP Members, 21 November 1979; Nancy Kassebaum to Dr. Karl Menninger, 27 November 1979, STP Collection, Kansas Collection, Spencer Research Library.

Chapter 5

The Fate of the Flint Hills

Two philosophies of land use and land ownership met on the tallgrass prairie of the Flint Hills. The proponents of a tallgrass park worked to convince the public and government officials that part of the grassland of this country should be preserved for future generations. Their arguments hinged on both the idea of the vanishing prairie and the ideal of the virgin prairie unaffected by man. The opponents of the park, however, lobbied successfully against any of their land being incorporated into the National Park Service. They argued they were "preserving" the land already--according to practical conservationist standards--and they were preserving the culture of the rugged individual who could take care of himself.

An ocean of grass once covered much of the Midwest and the Great Plains. It was an area of beauty, mystery, and opportunity. There were three types of grasses in the prairie and plains: the tallgrass prairie, the mixed prairies, and the short grasses of the Great Plains. This was a gigantic area, encompassing most of the Louisiana Territory.

Since the grassland was foreign to Europeans accustomed

to the forests of the eastern United States, new ways of studying the land were needed. Botanists and biologists, including Frederic Clements and Victor E. Shelford, studied this new area. Debates raged concerning the true composition of the grassland. Scientists wanted to know how the settlers had altered the ecology of the area. These scientists initiated many of the ideas related to the preservation of the grasslands.

Social scientists, such as Walter Webb and James Malin, showed how settlers were affected by and adapted to the grasslands. Webb believed the new geographical area forced settlers to adjust their methods of settlement. He believed they were in turn changed by the experience of conquering a new land. Malin believed the grasslands were simply different from the forests--not better, not worse, just different. He saw the settlers as being able to adapt to their new environment. Malin did not believe that farmers and ranchers had abused the land any more than nature, wild animals, or Indians. According to Malin, man would always be able to work with nature because of its wide variety of resources.

Initially, the prairie was used by ranchers who fed out their cattle on the lush grass. Once technology had advanced enough to meet the needs of grassland farming,

homesteaders were able to farm the prairie and it became the major agricultural region of the country. The Homestead Act of 1862 helped to spread the opportunities of private ownership to more people and sped up the settlement of the prairie and plains. What was once a foreign land had become home to new group of immigrants.

The Flint Hills of Kansas remained virtually the last enclave of tallgrass prairie in the United States. Culture, economics, and geography, along with the belief that the soil on the hills was too rocky to farm, all helped to save most of the grass from being plowed under. These factors helped to conserve this tallgrass area, a small part of the once immense prairie.

The preservation movement in this country began with the final push westward on the remaining federal lands. The crowded cities of the East were seen as unnatural places. The more affluent residents looked for ways and places to get away from the corrupting influences of city life. They found their escape in the West. Such early preservationists as John Muir, Stephen T. Mather, and Horace M. Albright all worked diligently to accomplish their goal of saving the sacred land as a place for escape from the turmoil of urban life.

Gifford Pinchot, an early advocate of conservation,

also saw evil in the big cities. He, too, had a deep love for the beauty of the federal lands in the West. Pinchot, however, did not believe the land could be saved from wasteful private enterprise. He felt it was his duty, therefore, to use the Forest Service, and the power of the federal government, to manage the resources of the West for the good of the people. Pinchot wanted nature to work for man.

Both the preservationists and conservationists believed that professionals from Washington could best manage the lands of the West. Free enterprise corrupted the land; it was wasteful. The monopoly of big business ravaged public lands. But the monopoly of the federal government, they felt, would be used benevolently for the public good. And only the federal government could define the public good. These were the men Malin warned would use science as a means of shaping social and public policy through the government.

The National Park Service was created in 1933 to centralize the management of national monuments and national parks. These areas were to be preserved for future generations to see. The popularity of these parks caused problems for the preservation movement. So many people toured the parks that they often became overcrowded. NPS personnel had to try to balance between preserving nature

and making nature accessible to tourists.

The conservationists originally felt only the federal government could mandate the wise use of resources. Conservation practices, however, moved from the federal lands of the West to private lands and businesses throughout the rest of the country. Private enterprise found that using these practices to make a product often meant higher profits. At times even today, when the federal government believes the private sector is not using effective conservation practices, it has forced conservation on businesses for the public good.

Both sides in the struggle to incorporate the Flint Hills into the National Park Service applied ideas of preservation and conservation rather indiscriminately; their arguments had logical flaws. The proponents of the park used the concept of the virgin prairie. They wanted the land returned to the way Coronado first saw it. Their contention was that the Indians lived in harmony with nature and did not destroy or manipulate it. The Indians certainly did not have the technology to change the landscape as quickly as the European settlers did. The Indians, however, did change their environment. Indians cultivated a variety of plants, such as squash, beans, and corn. This involved some manipulation and destruction of the virgin

environment--trees often had to be cleared, water had to be diverted, and soil spent from too much farming had to be abandoned. Those Indians who developed agriculture in turn developed a more sedentary lifestyle. Communities from twenty or thirty people up to cities with thousands of inhabitants were built. The larger communities put more stress on their surroundings. In ancient times, the Anasazi built complex societies in the Southwest United States. They denuded the forests around their cities for the timber to build their homes. The Anasazi also simply threw their trash over the side of the cliffs. So the Indians of America may not have had any more wisdom in dealing with their environment than the white men did. They, too, affected their environment, just not as quickly as the European settlers did.¹

The farmers and ranchers, professed rugged individuals who wanted less government interference in regard to the proposed national parks, nevertheless accepted money from the federal government for several types of farm-related activities. The federal government funded most of the construction of detention dams to help control flooding on private lands. Farmers were also paid by the federal government when they stopped farming marginal lands and put them back to grass. When the federal government paid to

help the farmer improve and stay on his land, farmers accepted federal "interference," but when this same government proposed taking land for a federal park, the landowners railed against federal interference.²

The attempt to incorporate a portion of the grasslands into the National Park Service took place in three stages. The first stage began in the Depression and ended shortly after World War II. Iowa and Kansas, at least, brought out the need to preserve a portion of the prairie. The federal efforts had begun earlier, when several scientists expressed an interest in creating a grassland laboratory so they would have a place to study this unique ecosystem. The grassland had to be saved before it disappeared. This first federal attempt foreshadowed the struggles of subsequent attempts to get a part of the Flint Hills into the National Park System.

The Pottawatomie proposal of 1958 for a tallgrass national park met with early optimism from its supporters. They had the preservationist groups and several knowledgeable scientists on their side. They knew a part of the prairie had to be saved before it vanished forever. But the landowners of the area argued that they were already saving the land. They were able to convince Congressional leaders of this, and so the first serious attempt to save the prairie in the Flint Hills failed.

The proposal for another tallgrass park in the 1970s was again met with urgency and optimism by its supporters. The Flint Hills as a tallgrass prairie region was on the verge of vanishing, they contended. Time was running out on this unique ecosystem. But again the ranchers and farmers of the area were better able to articulate their arguments to Congressional leaders than were the preservationists. The ranchers showed first-hand how well they were managing the land. So while several bills were introduced in Congress, none stood much of a chance of succeeding, since key members of the Kansas Congressional delegation opposed them.

In September 1989, the struggle for control of a portion of the Flint Hills began again. This time the National Audubon Society obtained an option to purchase the Z-Bar Ranch near Strong City, Kansas. The Society wanted to transfer control of the ranch to the National Park Service. Again, a study would need to be conducted by the NPS to determine if the land was suitable for inclusion into the National Park System. So far only Congressman Dan Glickman from Wichita actively supports this park proposal. Glickman's proposal harkens back to J. C. Mohler's idea in 1946, whereby not only the prairie would be preserved, but also the ranching culture. Glickman also voices the

optimism of earlier proposals when he says, "I would say there are certainly many more for it than there are opposed to it." The past is being repeated again in Chase County.³

Many of the residents near this latest initiative for a prairie park are still not impressed with the idea. Members of the Kansas Grassroots Association have come out quickly and vehemently against federal purchase of the land. They voice many of the concerns from the earlier proposals: government interference, diseases from buffalo and elk, and mismanagement by the National Park Service. Helen Thompson of Elmdale, Kansas, voiced her feelings about the park when she wrote in the Emporia Gazette:

National Parks do not preserve, they destroy. By digging up this grassland for roads, rest areas and other Federal requirements we are destroying grass that has been there for years. Also, these roads and rest areas will be an ideal place to throw cans, paper, disposable diapers and plastic bags, and other trash.

In visiting with a businessman and friend in Emporia recently I mentioned the concern of taking 11,000 acres of land from the tax rolls. I was a bit stunned when he said, 'I never thought of it that way, I guess it would. I just now thought of that.'⁴

This latest proposal has many similarities with each of the preceding initiatives. The proponents believe that many people in the state favor the proposal. They also see a need for federal preservation of a portion of the tallgrass prairie. The opponents of the park continue to hold that

they are already preserving the prairie. Chuck Magathan, president of Kansas Grassroots Association, also notes the economic loss to the cattle industry if the park were approved. Opponents still question the need for further federal spending at a time of a governmental budget crisis. Finally, opponents encourage letter-writing campaigns and petition drives.⁵

The landowners of the Flint Hills had hoped to have ended the desire of the National Park Service to take part of their land; they have not. The desire to preserve the prairie by the preservationists has simply dwindled from a proposal for a park of one million acres to a park of 11,000 acres. The future of the Flint Hills will again be decided by that group of people who can better present their case to those officials who will decide the issue. Both the preservationists and the conservationists will be struggling to make their case heard.

NOTES

1. Paul Weatherwax, Indian Corn in Old America (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954), pp. 122, 125-129; R. Douglas Hurt, Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1987), pp. 9, 13, 21; Jared Diamond, "The Golden Age That Never Was," Discover 9 (December 1988): 71, 77-79; J. Richard Ambler, The Anasazi: Prehistoric People of the Four Corners Region (Flagstaff: Museum of Northern Arizona, 1989), p. 57. William Cronan, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang), pp. 13, 45, 48-51.

2. R. Douglas Hurt, The Dust Bowl (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), pp. 80-83.

3. Wichita Eagle-Beacon, 1 October 1989; Emporia Gazette, 24 March 1990; Emporia Gazette, 4 April 1991; Emporia Gazette, 19 April 1991 Hank Ernst, Kansas Farmer 128 (15 April 1990): 14.

4. Wichita Eagle-Beacon, 1 October 1989, Emporia Gazette, 24 March 1990; Emporia Gazette, 26 April 1991.

5. Emporia Gazette 19 April 1991; Emporia Gazette, 7 May 1991.

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