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For Immediate Release

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Conservation Easement Increases Amount of Protected Land in the Flint Hills

Two Johnson County families place nearly 2,000 acres in a conservation easement.

The Kansas Chapter recently closed on a nearly 2,000-acre conservation easement in Chase County, Kansas located in the Flint Hills. The Conservancy acquired the easement from the C.E. and Lonah Birch and the Robert and Linda Mooney Families, both of Shawnee, Kansas.

“This easement is especially important as it borders nearly three miles of Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. Securing this easement adds a buffer of protection for the park,” said Brian Obermeyer, Flint Hills Initiative Director.

Easements are one of the best tools when ensuring lasting preservation. A conservation easement is a voluntary contract between a landowner and The Nature Conservancy to preserve the land in perpetuity from incompatible development. Because the land remains in private ownership, with the remainder of the rights intact, a property protected by a conservation easement continues to provide jobs, property taxes, and other economic benefits to the area. A conservation easement is legally binding whether the property is sold or passed down to heirs.

Landowners find this method the most practical way to safeguard the prairie from incompatible development, which can lead to loss of wildlife habitat and an increase of invasive species. The Conservancy has protected a total of 22,357 acres through conservation easements.

The land has been in the Birch Family for a hundred years. C.E. Birch and Linda Mooney are siblings. While the Birches retain the majority of the land, the Mooneys share a half interest on a smaller portion. However, this easement was a family affair from beginning to end.

“My family has a history with this land that dates back over a 100 years. My grandfather and my great-uncle were both ranchers in the Flint Hills. I can remember working the land with my grandfather. We had many exciting experiences including riding fences, looking for cattle. We even had a cattle drive through Strong City in the 1950s,” remembers C.E. Birch.

The connection the Birches have to property was one of the main reasons they sought to protect it. Of all the land-based habitats in the world, grasslands are the most imperiled. Less than five percent is protected. Urban development, invasive species, and incompatible development continually threaten grassland habitat.

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“This conservation easement will help us protect our ranch, so we can keep the land in our family. We believe in the principles that led us to the easement, and we appreciate the support conservation gives us toward long-term protection,” said C.E. Birch. “Our family’s history is steeped in this land. Even now, we have relatives who live and work there today.”

If you would further information, please contact Shelby Stacy at stacy@tnc.org or 785.233.4400.

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The Nature Conservancy’s Kansas Chapter was established in 1989, and has more than 7,000 members. The Kansas Chapter has helped protect more than 79,400 acres and owns six preserves comprising over 46,500 acres across the state. Learn more at www.nature.org/kansas.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 15 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 102 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at www.nature.org.