

APPENDIX D
ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERATION

Brief Description of Fifteen Sites Considered for New Visitor / Administrative and Maintenance Facilities

A total of 15 sites were considered for locations for the new visitor /administrative and maintenance facilities. The team developed a list of 18 criteria by which to evaluate the sites. “Table D- 1: Ratings for the fifteen Sites Against Eighteen Criteria” shows how the sites were rated. Criteria 1 and L1 were “screen out” criteria—the planning team considered these so important that sites not meeting the criteria were dismissed from further consideration. The planning team initially identified 10 candidate sites for the new preserve facilities in December 2003 (sites 1 through 10). Three additional candidate sites were identified in November 2003 (sites 11–13), and two sites were investigated by the team in February 2006 (sites 14 and 15).

Site 4 was dismissed due to floodplain concerns, its remote location, potential safety hazards, and inadequate space. Sites 6, 7, 8, and 9 were dismissed because they would require an amendment to the 2000 GMP (site 9 is also within the floodplain). Site 5 was dismissed because it would require purchasing a private residence, has inadequate space, and is located in a residential area (unacceptable impacts to neighbors).

In February 2003, the team narrowed the candidate sites to sites 1, 2, 3, and 10. Site 1 was later eliminated from consideration because it would destroy and fragment native prairie.

Three additional candidate sites were identified in November 2003. During public scoping, three letters from individual respondents recommended alternative sites for NPS facilities. The first suggested that the Strong City Opera House (theater building) on the city’s main street be considered for the visitor center location. A second choice expressed in the theater building letter was the team’s original site 9. The second letter pointed out that a building on the south side of U.S. 50 in Strong City (currently used as an antique mall and coffee shop) is available for sale and “could be what you are looking for.” The third letter recommended that an area just north of site 3, on the west side of SH 177, within the preserve boundary, should be considered. This area could be one of the original 10 candidate sites (site 8) or perhaps it is the area between sites 3 and 8. These three additional sites are numbered 11 through 13 in figure D- 1.

The team discussed the merits of these sites and decided to use the original site criteria to evaluate these sites as they had the original 10 (see table D- 1). Of the three, the site north of site 3 scored best, but like site 8, would require a 2000 GMP amendment. The theater building and antique mall sites did not score well compared to sites 2, 3, and 10. In summary, the team decided that these sites did not warrant additional consideration.

In January 2003, the team learned that the owner of site 3 did not want that site to be considered at this time for new NPS facilities, so it was eliminated from further consideration. Site 2 and site 10 were to be carried forward as alternatives.

During 2004, the Kansas Park Trust and the National Park Service investigated transfer of the KDOT parcel to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks for lease to the National Park Service. It was determined that if KDOT discontinued use of the parcel of land, the property would revert back to the original owner. This scenario was further complicated by the original

owner having willed the property to a family trust, including many extended family members. This site (2) was determined not to be feasible and has been dismissed.

In March 2005, the Kansas Park Trust sold their land interest in Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve to The Nature Conservancy (The Kansas Park Trust had purchased the property from the National Park Trust one month earlier). In the summer of 2005, the Kansas Park Trust expressed concerns that the remaining alternative site was located too far from the ranch headquarters and visitors would likely stop at the visitor center, but not visit the ranch headquarters. The Kansas Park Trust suggested a site closer to the ranch headquarters.

The Nature Conservancy expressed concern over the size of the site development along the southern boundary and suggested minimizing the footprint and disturbance by siting the maintenance facility elsewhere. The Nature Conservancy also expressed concern about building on native prairie. The National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the Kansas Park Trust agreed to revisit prior decisions and look at new alternatives. Due to The Nature Conservancy's desire not to impact native prairie, the remaining alternative within the preserve boundaries (site 10) was also dropped from further consideration.

Two new sites (sites 14 and 15 on figure D- 1) were investigated by the team in February 2006. The first site consists of a parcel within the preserve boundaries, south of the current visitor parking area along the west side of SH 177. This area north of the creek was the site of a circa-1950s homestead. The vegetation consists of nonnative elm trees and "go back" prairie. Also, as part of this alternative, the maintenance facility would be sited adjacent to and east of the sewage lagoons near an existing storage structure.

The team discussed the merits of the two new sites and decided to use the original site criteria to evaluate these sites as they had the other 13 (see table D- 1). Both sites scored well. The new alternative would require an amendment to the 2000 GMP; a criterion previously considered a "screen out" criterion. However, due to the recent change in ownership, the National Park Service has agreed to amend the 2000 GMP to incorporate their new partner's mission and not impact the native prairie along the southern boundary of the preserve.

The new site within the preserve, south of the ranch headquarters visitor parking lot and west of SH 177 was carried forward in this GMP revision as the preferred alternative. The no-action alternative is also carried forward for analysis.

The following are brief descriptions of each of the sites considered.

Site 1. This site is on the east side of SH 177, approximately 0.5 mile north of U.S. 50. Designated "Visitor Information and Orientation Area" by the 2000 GMP. Located north of St. Anthony Cemetery. This site has no known previous development.

Site 2. KDOT materials yard at the northeast corner of U.S. 50 and SH 177. This site has been used by KDOT for road material storage and in the past for asphalt mixing. A portion of the site is paved.

Site 3. Privately owned property at the northwest corner of U.S. 50 and SH 177. This large site was formerly used as a quarry and a cattle feedlot.

Site 4. Strong City train depot located to the south side of Strong City, to the west of the intersection of SH 177 and the railroad tracks. This site has been previously disturbed (depot, parking lots, and roads).

Site 5. Privately owned land. Located southeast of the sewage lagoons, in the northwest portion of Strong City, on the south side of a county road. Current use is residential.

Site 6. Preserve lands east of the sewage lagoons and northwest of Strong City. Designated “Day Use” by the 2000 GMP. It is undeveloped and apparently undisturbed.

Site 7. Preserve lands north of the Flint Hills rodeo grounds, on the northeast perimeter of Strong City. Designated “Day Use” by the 2000 GMP. It is undeveloped and apparently undisturbed.

Site 8. Preserve lands northwest of St. Anthony Cemetery, on the west side of SH 177, approximately 0.5 mile north of U.S. 50. Designated “Flint Hills Ranching Legacy Area” by the 2000 GMP. A human- made pond is present, but there is no other evidence of development.

Site 9. Preserve lands south of U.S. 50, along the northwest boundary of Strong City. Designated “Flint Hills Ranching Legacy Area” by the 2000 GMP. Previous development includes use for agriculture and flood dikes.

Site 10. Preserve land located southeast of St. Anthony Cemetery, less than 0.25 mile east of SH 177, and 0.25 mile north of U.S. 50. Designated “Visitor Information and Orientation Area” by the 2000 GMP. There is no evidence of previous development.

Site 11. The Strong City Opera House (theater building) on the city’s main street.

Site 12. A building on the south side of U.S. 50 in Strong City (currently used as an antique mall and coffee shop).

Site 13. Preserve lands northwest of St. Anthony Cemetery, on the west side of SH 177, approximately 0.5 mile north of U.S. 50. Designated “Flint Hills Ranching Legacy Area” by the 2000 GMP. A human- made pond is present on the west side of this portion, but there is no other evidence of development.

Site 14. Preserve land on the east side and adjacent to the sewage lagoons along on the north side of CR 227, approximately 0.5 miles from Strong City. The ground cover is previously disturbed from construction of the sewage lagoons and an existing storage structure.

Site 15. Preserve land located approximately 2.0 miles north of the intersection of SH 177 and U.S. 50, along the west side of SH 177. The area did contain mid- 1930s ranch structures that have been removed and the ground cover is generally described as “go back” prairie.

Sites 1, 6, 8, and 9 were included in a 1999 study of potential visitor information station sites conducted for the National Park Trust (RBA 1999).

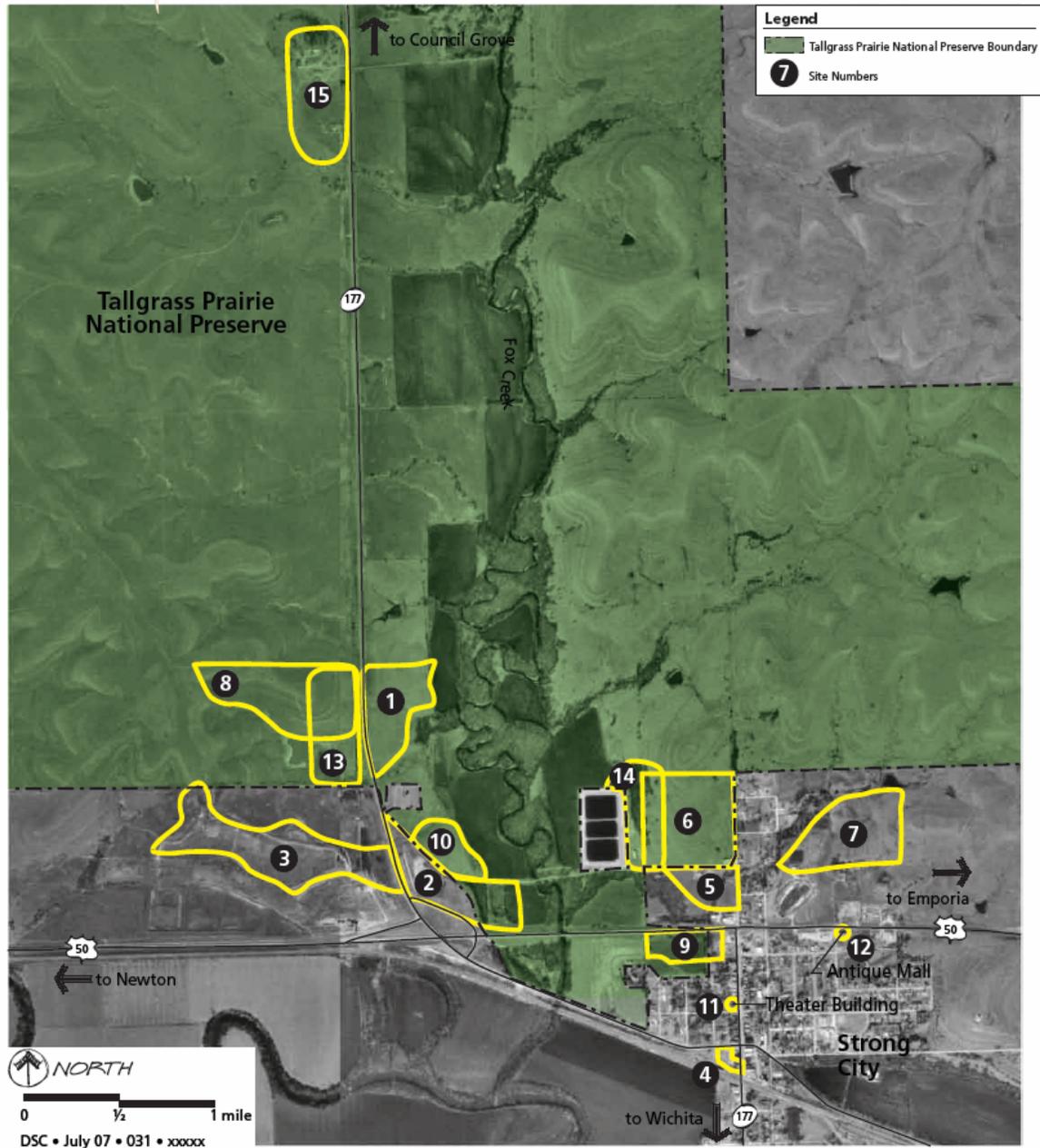


Figure D-1. Fifteen Sites Considered for New Visitor / Administrative Facilities

Table D-1. Ratings for the Fifteen Candidate Sites Against Eighteen Criteria

Criteria	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7	Site 8	Site 9	Site 10	Site 11	Site 12	Site 13	Site 14 (Visitor Center)	Site 15 (Maintenance)
A—near preserve boundary	●	●	●	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●	◐	◐	●	◐	●
B—good access to utilities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	◐	●
C—desirable views from site (includes potential future development)	●	◐	◐	○	◐	◐	◐	◐	○	◐	○	○	◐	●	N/A
D—complex is hidden or can be screened from important viewpoints	○	◐	●	●	●	◐	◐	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
E—convenient access to U.S. 50 and SH 177	●	●	●	◐	◐	◐	○	●	◐	●	◐	◐	●	●	◐
F—enough room to accommodate visitor services, administration, and maintenance	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	○	◐	○	○	●	●	●
G—good visual connection to ranch site	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	●	●	N/A
H—good connection to transportation system route (old roadbed)	◐	◐	●	○	○	○	○	●	○	◐	○	○	●	●	N/A
I—out of floodplain	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	◐	●	●	●	●

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Criteria	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7	Site 8	Site 9	Site 10	Site 11	Site 12	Site 13	Site 14 (Visitor Center)	Site 15 (Maintenance)
J—minimizes impact on prairie (site has been disturbed)	○	●	●	●	●	○	◐	○	●	○	●	●	○	●	●
K—minimizes impact on neighbors	●	●	●	◐	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	●	●	◐
L1—does not require GMP amendment	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
L2—does not require land purchase or transfer	●	◐	○	◐	○	●	●	●	●	●	◐	◐	●	●	●
M—defensible from wildland fire	◐	●	◐	●	●	◐	◐	○	●	◐	●	●	○	◐	●
N—has connection with other preserve opportunities	●	●	◐	○	◐	◐	◐	◐	○	●	○	○	◐	●	N/A
O—has expansion potential	◐	◐	●	○	○	●	◐	●	○	◐	○	○	●	◐	●
P—sustainability potential (southern exposure, protection from northwest winds)	◐	◐	●	○	◐	●	○	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	●	◐
Q—low potential for hazardous substances	●	○	○	○	◐	●	◐	●	◐	●	●	●	●	●	◐

- = meets the criteria
- ◐ = somewhat meets the criteria
- = does not meet the criteria

