



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Tallgrass Prairie
National Preserve

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Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve News Release

For Immediate Release

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Changes at Tallgrass Prairie: Tour Fees Stopped, Hours Expanded and More Recreational Options

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve and its private- public partner, The Nature Conservancy, announced changes in operations at the Preserve today. The changes will provide greater services to visitors in these tough economic times.

The first change is stopping the collection of user fees, which is now in effect. Preserve Superintendent Wendy Lauritzen stated, “The tours have not stopped - - we’re just dropping the tour fees.” The decision to stop the fees provides an opportunity to participate in a more localized stimulus to the economy. Preserve staff hope the money saved by visitors on the tours will be translated into visitors spending those dollars in local businesses in Strong City, Cottonwood Falls, and other neighboring communities.

Visitors still have the opportunity to experience the ranger- led bus tour into the prairie, but now it is free of charge. Groups will no longer be required to pay for Spring Hill Ranch house tours. The change in operations may encourage area schools, already strapped for cash, to bring their students on field trips to the preserve without worrying about tour fees. The preserve does not have an entrance fee and that will remain in effect.

Lauritzen further identified there are many operational changes that will happen in the not too distant future. One change will be access to the park through expanding the time of day visitors may experience the resources. “We’re not quite ready yet because we have to change some signs and do some posting of the areas, but I expect the expanded hours to begin soon, maybe 30 – 45 days from

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now.” Resources such as the hiking trails and fishing areas will no longer be limited by the time of day that visitors may use them. The Day Use Area and backcountry hiking trails will remain free of any overnight camping, but the change in hours will provide greater possibilities for wildlife viewing during peak periods. The operational hours of the public buildings at the Ranch complex will remain 9 am – 4:30 pm and the Preserve’s office headquarters will remain 8 am – 4:30 pm in Cottonwood Falls.

Another change is a new 4.8- mile trail being developed along Fox Creek. This trail will originate one- third of a mile east of the Saint Anthony Cemetery (beginning at the current Bottomland Trail), and will give visitors more opportunities to experience and enjoy bottomland and stream habitats. Altogether, the Preserve will have a total of nearly 22 miles of trails. The park will also have rangers doing resource patrols. That translates into greater opportunities for visitors to ask rangers questions in the field rather than just at the Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters complex.

National Park Service (NPS) staff at the Preserve have worked with The Nature Conservancy, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a fly fishing designated area (using conventional fly fishing tackle) on the upper Fox Creek area of the Preserve. Both the fly fishing on Fox Creek, along with the pond fishing in Two- Section Pasture that began last year, will be a catch and release activity at the Preserve.

“I’m very happy to see Fox Creek opened to fly fishing,” says Brian Obermeyer of The Nature Conservancy. “This will provide anglers a rare chance, albeit a more challenging one due to the tackle restriction, to catch spotted bass and other native stream fishes in a natural, upland prairie stream.” The prospect of expanding fishing activities at the park brings back happy childhood memories to Lauritzen, who hopes that such activities in the park will encourage children to get back to nature. “Fishing at the Preserve is also an educational opportunity,” stated Lauritzen, “The NPS is stepping up efforts to ‘Get the Lead Out,’ which is an effort to reduce lead in national parks.”

National Park Service Acting Director Dan Wenk has specified that the agency wants to eliminate the use of lead in fishing tackle in parks by the end of 2010. “We want to take a leadership role in removing lead from the environment,” Wenk said in a prepared statement. Nontoxic substitutes for lead made in the United States are now widely available, including tungsten, copper and steel.

Lauritzen said, “The combination of all these changes in how the preserve operates will provide for

greater opportunity among visitors and community members alike to enjoy a broader spectrum of experiences within the Flint Hills; such as wildlife viewing during peak periods of dawn and dusk, night sky observations from prairie vistas, and the sheer enjoyment of fishing under a catch and release program.”

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is located two miles north of Strong City on Kansas State Highway 177 (the Flint Hills National Scenic Byway). The preserve’s historic Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters complex is open daily from 9 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day. For more information or to make group reservations, visit the preserve’s website at www.nps.gov/tapr, e- mail tapr_interpretation@nps.gov, or call the preserve at (620) 273- 8494. Superintendent Wendy Lauritzen can be reached at the Cottonwood Falls office headquarters at 620- 273- 6034.

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