



**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 in Operations Comes Early at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve**

End of the season changes are coming a little sooner than usual this year at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve; with its complex of 1880's historic ranch buildings that are located on the appropriately named Spring Hill Ranch. "The long drought conditions have ended and with it, issues have floated to the top," stated Superintendent Wendy Lauritzen. "The guided bus tour has been affected and for a while, visitors will soon no longer have access to the Spring Hill Ranch House."

Exactly where the guided bus tours could go and visitor access to the historic buildings are just two of the issues precipitated by the wet weather received over the last few months. The single day rain event of nearly 11 inches in early August significantly contributed to long lasting conditions that continue to affect daily park operations. Mold inside the historic house has exploded and has prompted mold testing to get underway. "Even the underground springs have made the entrance into the Visitor Center parking lot a bumpy adventure," stated Lauritzen. In addition to the natural phenomenon, there is the soon to occur lead paint removal on the house that will affect visitor flow patterns. The other historic buildings, such as the barn, will remain open for the rest of the season.

When sections of the historic ranch road initially got washed out and severely rutted, the road became impassable by bus and unsafe for transporting visitors. An alternative tour route was quickly created to accommodate visitors while the road was being evaluated for repairs. Guided prairie bus tours will continue for the rest of season, they just won't happen to be conducted inside the park. Park Rangers are taking the bus tour on-the-road to view the prairies via the highway. The route travels along KS-177 of the Flint Hills National Scenic Byway to a picturesque overlook south of Cottonwood Falls, KS. Along the way, visitors get a glimpse of other area landmarks, such as the historic Chase County Courthouse, the falls of the Cottonwood River, and the Santa Fe Railroad depot. The interpretative program focuses on

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the surrounding natural and cultural history of the tallgrass prairie in the Flint Hills region. These programs will be offered on weekends through October 27, 2013 at 11:00 am and 1:00 pm. Cutbacks in the number of tours offered during the week were severely hampered by budget cuts. On occasion tours may occur during the week, if staffing levels of the day allow. To make a bus tour reservation, please call 620-273-8494. There is no charge for the bus tour.

Meanwhile, back at the park, a preliminary review of the damaged National Historic Landmark designated road was conducted by National Park Service's Midwest Regional Office staff on August 29. "What has become clear is that the road won't be fixed quickly and that significant improvements are needed to make it even basically functional again," stated Lauritzen. It is unknown if the Scenic Overlook road will reopen for bus tours in 2014. However, the 3.2 mile section of road, that is also the Scenic Overlook Trail, can still be used by hikers, wildlife enthusiasts and photographers. Trails remain open 24 hours daily. There are over 40 miles of hiking trails in the park.

Lead abatement on the Spring Hill Ranch house requires extra precautions for visitor safety. "The construction zone for the lead paint removal is a safety issue", stated Lauritzen. "For now, the building will have to be closed once the paint removal begins, which can happen anytime in the next few days." Removing the lead paint and repainting the exterior wood trim and metal roof is expected to take 6 to 8 weeks to complete. Mold testing is getting underway to determine the extent of the problem inside the house. Recommendations for mitigating the mold issue should be received during the same time frame as the lead abatement is underway. "The house was expected to be closed beginning in November for the winter season due to shrinking operational budgets. The lead abatement, along with the mold, sped up the need to close down the seasonal operation," stated Lauritzen.

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is located two miles north of Strong City on K-177 along the Flint Hills National Scenic Byway. It is a co-managed area through partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service. For more information, visit the park's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/NPS.TallgrassPrairie> , website at [www.nps.gov/tapr](http://www.nps.gov/tapr), email [tapr\\_interpretation@nps.gov](mailto:tapr_interpretation@nps.gov), or call the Visitor Center at (620) 273-8494.

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