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Midwest Region News Release

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Wendy Lauritzen selected as Superintendent for Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

OMAHA, Neb. – Wendy S. Lauritzen has been selected as the new Superintendent for Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, Cottonwood Falls, Kan. Currently Superintendent of Washita Battlefield National Historic Site in Cheyenne, Okla., she will begin the new assignment November 9. Lauritzen replaces Steve Miller, who retired from Federal service in August.

In announcing the appointment, Ernest Quintana, Regional Director of the National Park Service (NPS) Midwest Region, stated, “Wendy’s strong background in resource management, most notably range conservation issues, and her experience in managing developing parks make her an ideal choice for Tallgrass Prairie. We look forward to welcoming her as a part of our Midwest management team.”

In her 29 year Federal career, Lauritzen has served in three land management agencies within the Department of the Interior – the NPS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). She began her career as a seasonal Park Ranger in 1976 at Badlands National Park, S.D.; then transitioned to the BLM as a seasonal Range Technician at the Winnemucca District in Nevada. Lauritzen returned to the NPS as a seasonal Park Ranger in 1982 at Great Smoky Mountains National Park, N.C. and then to Valley Forge National Historical Park, Pa., in 1983. Her first permanent position came later in 1983, as a Park Ranger at Independence National Historical Park, Pa. Lauritzen took a Park Ranger position with the FWS in 1984, before returning to the NPS as a Park Ranger at Big Thicket National Preserve in Texas in 1987. Moves to Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument, Colo., as Park Ranger, and Great Basin National Park, Nev., as a Range Conservationist, preceded Lauritzen relocating north of the Arctic Circle where she served as Management Assistant for the Northwest Alaska Areas in 1993. She

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was named Chief of Education and Visitor Services at Pecos National Historical Park, N.M., in 1997, then completed the 1-year U.S.D.A. Graduate School Executive Leadership Program in August 2001. Lauritzen has served in her current post as Superintendent at Washita Battlefield National Historic Site since January 2003, where she oversaw the development and construction of a shared administrative building with the USDA Black Kettle National Grasslands and the park's visitor center that was completed in August 2007.

During her career, Lauritzen has twice represented the United States and NPS in the international arena. A member of the International Ranger Federation, she was selected as a Congressional delegate for both the 1st International Ranger Federation Conference held in Zakopani, Poland, in 1995, and for the 5th World Congress in 2006 in Stirling, Scotland; both trips were at personal expense rather than using tax-payer dollars. During the 1st Conference, 125 delegates participated, representing 33 countries. By the 5th Conference, the numbers had risen to 300 delegates representing 40 countries. A commissioned law enforcement ranger for 22 years, she retired her commission in 2000. Lauritzen is an adjunct Professor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, Okla., which offered an opportunity to advance NPS recruitment potential for underrepresented student populations and with students directly interested in becoming park rangers.

Lauritzen said of her new assignment, "The opportunity to be a part of the management of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve history would fulfill a lifetime dream that I set my sights on at Arkansas City High School in 1975. The tallgrass area of Kansas fills my childhood memories from many family outings into the Flint Hills. I look forward with great anticipation to this opportunity to be part of the tallgrass history."

Lauritzen, an Arkansas City, Kan., native, first attended Kansas State University (KSU) and Cowley County Junior College before graduating in 1981 from Utah State University with a bachelor of science degree in range science. Most of her immediate family remains living in Arkansas City, with others scattered throughout Kansas, Oklahoma, and Oregon. Lauritzen identified that much of her career choices have been greatly influenced by her early experiences in Future Farmers of America (FFA), the Student Conservation Association (SCA), and later the

Association of National Park Rangers, the latter of which she is a lifetime member and has served as

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a former board member. She and her sister, Cindy, joined the FFA in 1972 when females were first allowed into the organization. One of the State FFA Officers at the time is now the honorable Senator Sam Brownback. In 1975, a family member came across an article about the SCA that gave Lauritzen a first hand look at what working for the NPS could be when she volunteered in her high school program working trail construction at Rocky Mountain National Park. The SCA crew leader was from Kansas and told Lauritzen that in his many years of working for the SCA, he had not seen a person from Kansas apply before. Being from Kansas is what got her the job and focused her career choices. Lauritzen is looking forward to returning to home soil and also closer to family members and long-time friends who have remained in Kansas. "I was honored to have been able to attend my niece Jayme's May 2008 graduation from KSU with her degree in milling science, and at which Senator Sam Brownback was the keynote speaker. Along with doing the work needed at Tallgrass Prairie, moving closer to home will also allow me greater opportunity to participate in future family events," stated Lauritzen.

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, established in 1996, protects a nationally significant example of the once vast tallgrass prairie ecosystem. Of the 400,000 miles square miles of tallgrass prairie that once covered the North American continent, less than 4 percent remains, primarily in the Flint Hills, which run north and south through the east-central Kansas. Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is a new kind of national park. The preserve is 10,861 acres, but most of that land will remain under the ownership of the Nature Conservancy, which purchased the land in 2005. The land's original purchaser in 1994, The National Park Trust, donated approximately 32 acres to the NPS in 2002. The NPS may own up to 180 acres, yet the preserve's establishing legislation calls for the entire acreage to be managed cooperatively by the NPS and the private land owner. The preserve includes historic buildings and cultural resources of the Spring Hill Ranch, including the 1881 historic ranch house, limestone barn and outbuildings, and one-room schoolhouse. This is a new park under development with visitor opportunities continually expanding.

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