

The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve

The
Nature 
Conservancy®

OKLAHOMA
CHAPTER

Saving the Last Great Places

The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve

Originally spanning portions of 14 states and covering over 142 million acres, the tallgrass prairie was one of North America's major ecosystems. It was a complex landscape, harboring a rich diversity of plants and animals, that was shaped by the natural forces of climate, fire, and grazing.

Today, less than 10% of the original tallgrass prairie remains. Most of it has been converted to farmland and is now known as "America's breadbasket". Large, unbroken tracts of tallgrass prairie only exist now in the Flint Hills of Oklahoma and Kansas. As a functioning ecosystem, the tallgrass prairie is extinct.

In 1989, The Nature Conservancy purchased the 29,000 acre Barnard Ranch as the cornerstone of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. Over the next 5 years, the Conservancy raised \$15 million to fund land acquisition, start-up costs and an operating endowment which will cover some of the preserve's operating costs. Donations came from individuals, corporations, and foundations. The preserve now consists of 38,700 acres of land owned or leased by The Nature Conservancy.

The Conservancy's goal is to recreate a functioning tallgrass prairie ecosystem using fire and bison. Fire has been reintroduced to the landscape by using carefully controlled, or "prescribed", burns. Burns are conducted at different times of the year to mimic the original seasonality of presettlement fires. Native plants and animals of the tallgrass prairie have adapted to the influence of fire, and are dependent upon it to maintain the ecosystem. Fire removes dead vegetation, controls encroaching woody vegetation and increases the vigor and flowering of many plant species.

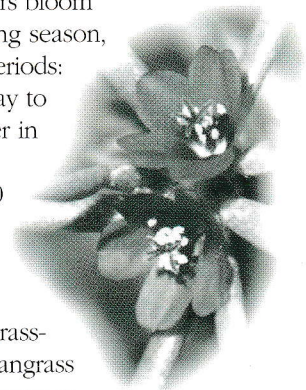


Grazing, by bison, was also one of the primary natural forces that shaped and sustained the presettlement tallgrass prairie. The 300 bison reintroduced in 1993 will eventually grow to a herd of 3200 animals freely roaming on 32,000 acres of the preserve. During the transition period, cattle will be used to provide the natural grazing influence in some areas not yet occupied by the bison herd. Grazing plays an important role in maintaining a dynamic prairie ecosystem by altering the amount and composition of vegetation, thus creating a mosaic of habitats that support a rich diversity of prairie plants and animals.

Natural Attractions

Sweeping vistas of the open prairie landscape along with incredible sunrises and sunsets are just some of the many natural attractions at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.

Although wildflowers bloom throughout the growing season, there are two peak periods: one in spring (mid May to mid June) and another in late summer (August-September). Over 700 plant species have been identified on the preserve.



The namesake tallgrasses, big bluestem, Indiangrass and switchgrass, can grow as tall as 8 feet in moist, deep soil sites. Maximum height is reached in August and September.

A diversity of grassland and forest habitats provides excellent birding. Greater prairie chickens "boom" in April and May. Numerous breeding birds can be seen in the spring, as well as birds of prey (including bald eagles) in the fall and winter.

The bison calving season runs from April through June, peaking in May. Other common wildlife species include white-tailed deer, bobcats, armadillos, beavers, woodchucks, badgers, coyotes and numerous small mammals.

Safety and Guidelines

Rough Road. The road to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is a loose, sometimes rough surface county gravel road that can become quite dusty in dry conditions and soft in wet conditions. Recommended maximum speed is 35 mph. Watch for sharp corners and curves.

Distances. 17 miles from downtown Pawhuska to preserve headquarters. 10 miles from the preserve south entrance to the headquarters.

Private Roads. Stay on the main county road. Do not venture down private roads or ranch driveways.

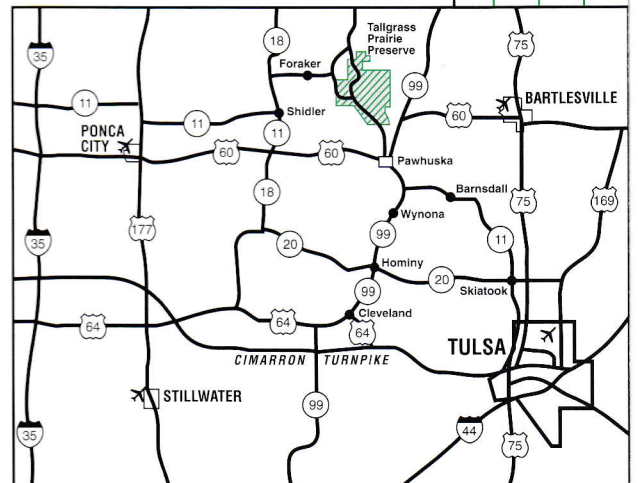
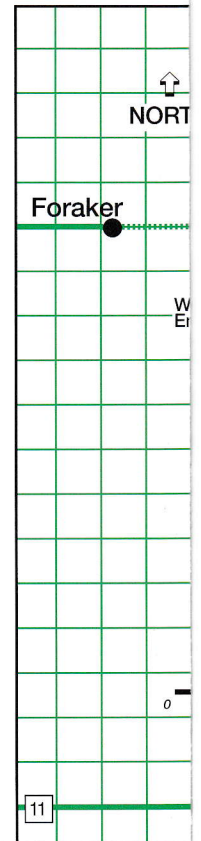
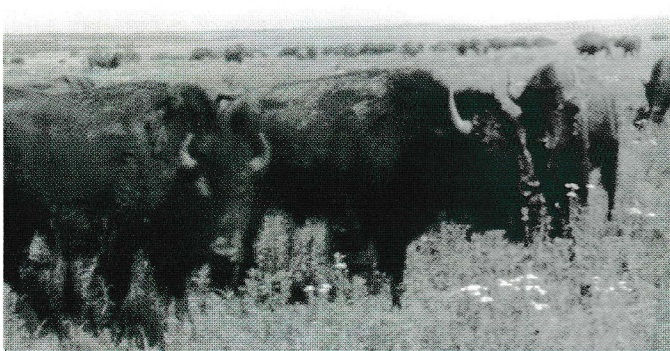
Gas & Refreshments. Fill up with gas before leaving town. There are no gas stations on or near the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. A pop machine and potable water are located at preserve headquarters.

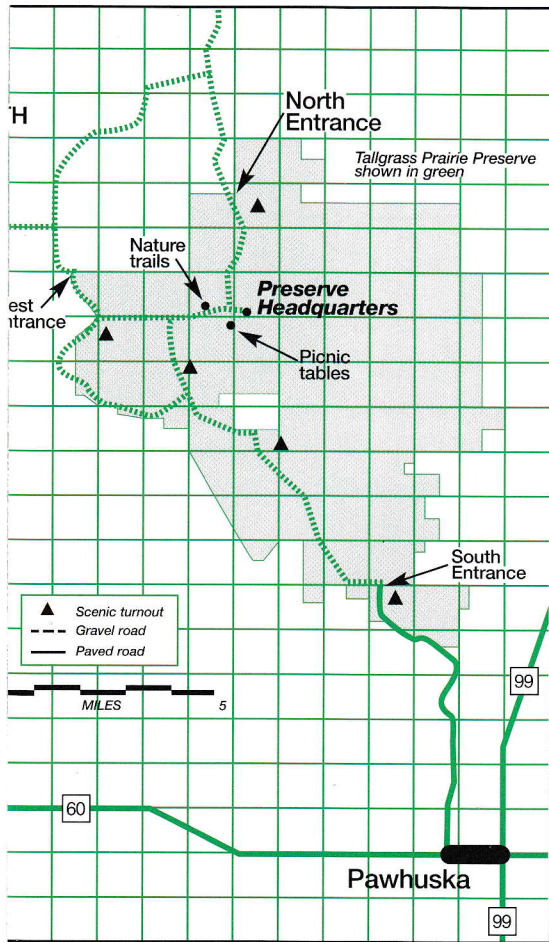
Restroom. The only restrooms are located at preserve headquarters. They are handicap-accessible.

Open Range. This is open range, so drive carefully. Bison and cattle may be standing or wallowing in the road. Avoid honking - it may have unpredictable results. Watch for narrow and rough cattle guards, as well as ranch and oil field vehicles.

Hazards. The tall grasses often conceal hidden hazards such as snakes, biting or stinging insects, ticks, rocks and holes. For that reason, please confine your hiking to the established nature trails where these hazards will be more obvious. If you venture off such trails, be especially alert.

Parking. When traveling the public road to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, park only at sites marked with "Scenic Turnout" signs. Watch for traffic when pulling back onto the road.





TO ACCESS THE PRESERVE from Pawhuska, drive north on Kihkah from where it intersects Highway 60 in downtown Pawhuska (at the corner with the triangle-shaped building). Tallgrass Prairie Preserve signs will direct you from this point to the Headquarters.

Tallgrass Prairie Preserve

P.O. Box 458 • Pawhuska, OK 74056
(918) 287-4803

Oklahoma Chapter Field Office

2727 East 21st Street, Suite 102
Tulsa, OK 74114 • (918) 585-1117

WARNING. Bison and cattle are dangerous and unpredictable. Bison can run fast and jump great distances. For your personal safety, do not approach these animals. View them from afar.

Smoking. No smoking outside vehicles due to the danger of wildfires. Please do not throw cigarettes or other burning materials out the car window.

Smoke. Prescribed burning is a commonly used land management tool in the area. Do not drive through smoke.

Respect The Land. Do not remove any natural features or artifacts, including plants, animals, rocks, fossils, arrowheads, or other artifacts. Do not feed or disturb any wildlife.

Please Don't Litter. Pack out all trash.

Private Lands. There are private inholdings within the boundaries of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. Do not climb over fences - you may be trespassing. If you are unsure about which lands are private, please check with staff at preserve headquarters. Thank you for respecting the rights of others.

Become a part of the tallgrass team!

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and water they need to survive. The Conservancy is a private, nonprofit, conservation organization with over 1,100,000 members. You can support its work by becoming a member. Donations are tax deductible. Contributions of cash, materials and volunteer labor are welcomed.



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