

Pottawatomie County Says *No* To Prairie Preservation

by Gary Baldridge

The recent controversy over the proposed Flint Hills Prairie National Monument near the Z-Bar Ranch, located north and west of Strong City, Kansas, has ignited old arguments for and against the National Park Service preserving part of the Kansas prairie. The issues surrounding this latest preservation movement have nearly a forty-year history. Many Kansans may remember attempts in the 1970s to preserve part of the Flint Hills south of Strong City, but most may not remember the first serious attempt at prairie preservation, which occurred in Pottawatomie County in the 1950s.

The proponents of the Z-Bar proposal, an attempt to incorporate Flint Hills ranchland into the park system as a national monument, reinforce many of the ideas and positions raised first in the Pottawatomie case. Arguments by Rep. Dan Glickman and other monument backers in the recent Z-Bar recommendation hark back to that first park proposal. One such argument, which Glickman stated at a Park Service hearing at Emporia State University on August 23, 1991, was that the tallgrass prairie is "one of the only ecosystems missing in the national park system." Concern was also expressed in this latest proposal about acting quickly to save a vanishing resource.

Other rationale for the monument, also reflected in the earlier proposal, are economic development, tourism, and educational and scientific studies. An advertisement, paid for by the Flint Hills Prairie National Monument Association, urged proponents to attend an August 23, 1991, congressional hearing reviewing the proposed monument. According to the ad, "there will be irrefutable economic benefits to the region. . . in excess of \$2.5 million a year in new tourism." It goes on to plea, "It's time to speak out for a Flint Hills National Monument. There will be no tomorrow. Friday is the day of decision."¹

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1. *Emporia Gazette*, April 4, May 7, 20, August 21, 24, 25, 1991; *Special Resource Study: Z-Bar (Spring Hill) Ranch, Chase County, Kansas* (N.p.: National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Midwest Region, March 1991).



Man With the Hoe

A 1961 Los Angeles Times cartoon captures the controversy over the proposed prairie national park in Kansas.

In the ongoing case of attempted prairie preservation, the future and the past become a mirror image of one another. A look at the first attempt to preserve a portion of the tallgrass prairie can help bridge the years and provide some often useful historical context for the recent controversy.

Unique features of prairie states like Kansas are the abundance of grass and the scarcity of trees. These features encouraged the expansion of private farms and ranches after the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862. But despite generous land policies and other types of federal assistance, distrust of an intrusive government seemed to grow as settlers moved west. The farther west people moved, the farther they were from federal government controls. The settlement of the prairie was a time for man to conquer nature, and a time when a family wanted to make a lasting mark on the land. It was a time of bitter struggle against the forces of nature and of opportunity to own a piece of America.

The grasslands of North America once extended funnel-like from Illinois westward to the Rocky Mountains and at places beyond. They stretched northward from the Mexican desert plains to the forest borderlands of Canada. The eastern part of this area, roughly to the ninety-seventh meridian, included the tallgrass prairie. By the early part of the twentieth century, virtually all of the tallgrass prairie had been put under the plow. Yet one part of this vast area, through a combination of geography and economics, remained—the Flint Hills of eastern Kansas. Thus, from the 1930s to the present,

those advocating the creation of a federal tallgrass prairie park came finally to focus their efforts on the Flint Hills.²

Through a series of National Park Service surveys and coincidences, a portion of Pottawatomie County east of Tuttle Creek Reservoir was chosen and, from 1958 to

1963, actually was promoted as the first possible site for a prairie national park. Initially, the prospects for the park looked favorable. But this premature optimism soon gave way to a struggle to control a small part of what was once a vast grassland. The park proponents' preservationist ideals encountered



The most recent prairie preservation movement concerns the Z-Bar Ranch near Strong City.

2. James C. Malin, *The Grassland of North America: Prolegomena to Its History* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1948), 1-2; E. Raymond Hall, "The Prairie National Park," *National Parks Magazine* 36 (February 1962): 6; see also Patricia D. Duncan, *Tallgrass Prairie: The Inland Sea* (Kansas City: Lowell Press, 1978); O. J. Reichman, *Konza Prairie: A Tallgrass Natural History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987).

stubborn local opposition from people who found effective voices and arguments. In the end, the opponents of the park prevailed. They not only convinced the public and key members of the United States Senate that a conservationist (rather than preser-

vationist) approach would safeguard the prairie, but they also benefited from public sympathy for rugged western individualism.

The groups who battled with the idea of preserving part of the tallgrass prairie can be divided into two camps: the preservationists and the conservationists.

land was worth more than simply its natural resources. The conservationists saw a need for the federal government to conserve, or wisely use, the resources of the West. To this group, the land had a value when its resources could be used wisely to the betterment of hu-

rate widespread conservation measures to protect their endangered lands. Plains-state farmers and ranchers often received help from the federal government to pay for conservation projects on private land. Conservation had moved from the federal lands of the West to the private lands of the rest of the region.³



Many may remember attempts in the 1970s to preserve part of the Flint Hills as the Tallgrass Prairie National Park.

Both groups had their beginnings in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Each was concerned with the perceived abuse of western federal lands by shortsighted capitalists. The preservationists saw in nature alone a value worth protecting by the federal government for future generations. To them the

mankind. In their initial stages, each group saw the federal government as the protector of nature against ruthless exploitation by private concerns.

With the coming of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, and the implementation of numerous New Deal agricultural programs, many private landowners helped incorpo-

Also during the depression decade, members of the Ecological Society of America and the National Research Council had advocated the incorporation of a portion of the prairie into the national park system. This dream was kept alive into the 1950s when, through various sources, the National Park Service had cataloged several possible sites for a prairie national park. The National Park Service contracted Drs. F. W. Albertson and G. W. Tomanek of Fort Hays Kansas State College in 1954 and 1956 to study these cataloged areas.⁴

3. Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 69-70, 87, 123-26, 143, 265; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1987), 87, 294, 307; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 26, 56; see also James Lester Swint, "The Proposed Prairie National Park: A Case Study of the Controversial National Park Service" (Master's thesis, Kansas State University, Manhattan, 1971), which offers the only other historical analysis of this proposal to establish a prairie national park in Pottawatomie County and some history of the park service.

4. Victor H. Cahalane, "A Part of the Report on A Proposed Great Plains National Monument," November 10, 1938, p. 2-3, G. W. Tomanek private collection, Hays, Kans. (hereafter cited as Tomanek Collection); William H. Avery to Mr. and Mrs. Alex Irvine, Manhattan, Kans., June 7, 1960, Riley County Historical Museum, Manhattan, Kans.

Finding suitable land would not be enough to incorporate an area into the national park system. Official recognition of the need for a park was vital. This recognition came in March 1956 when the Advisory Board on National Parks passed the following resolution:

The Advisory Board . . . recognizing the absence of examples of the native grasslands of the Great Plains, recommends that studies be continued in an effort to find and to acquire superlative areas of such types to be included in the National Park Service as National Monuments.

This recommendation spurred advocates of the park to bring their message to the public.⁵

The Manhattan Area Park Development Association (MAPDA) was an early backer of a proposed park in Pottawatomie County, neighboring the nearly completed federal Tuttle Creek Reservoir. According to the *Topeka Daily Capital*, the MAPDA believed that the area around Tuttle Creek would make an excellent national reserve. A force behind the MAPDA and the park was Bill Colvin, vice-president of the MAPDA and editor of the *Manhattan Mercury*, a newspaper owned by the family of then Secretary of the Interior Fred Seaton. Although editor Colvin admitted that this opened doors for him, he insisted it in no way guaran-

teed that the park would become a reality.⁶

During the spring and summer of 1958, the National Park Service, along with personnel from Fort Hays State College, surveyed three prospective sites in Kansas: Pottawatomie County (Area I), Riley/Wabaunsee coun-

ted that Areas I and III more closely met the elements required for a national park. Area I had the attention of the preservationists since it was closer to park proponents. In addition, oil was discovered in Area II, and the Kansas Turnpike bisected Area III. Furthermore, according to the MAPDA, more



Bitterness over the proposed national park sprang in part from the construction of Tuttle Creek Dam. Although many local residents opposed the reservoir, the floods of 1951 joined forces with those who supported it. Shown here is a Topeka street under floodwaters in July 1951.

ties (Area II), and Chase County (Area III). Dr. Tomanek helped to conduct these studies in which the two most important elements were "the education and enjoyment of the general public, and the preservation of a typical grassland area for posterity." The study conclud-

landowners objected to locating a park in Area III than in Area I. Thus, park proponents focused on Area I as the first potential site for a grassland national park.⁷

5. U.S. Department of the Interior, *A Proposed Prairie National Park* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, July 1961), 11; Avery to Mr. and Mrs. Irvine; *Topeka State Journal*, October 21, 1960.

6. *Topeka Daily Capital*, May 11, 1958; Bill Colvin, interview with author, Manhattan, Kans., February 7, 1991.

7. G. W. Tomanek, "An Analysis of Three Areas in the Flint Hills," a study for the National Park Service, June 19, 1958, p. 57, 91, 106, 136-38, Tomanek Collection; Manhattan Area Park Development Association to Members, October 22, 1959, Riley County Historical Museum; *Kansas City Star*, June 19, 1960.

By the middle of July the study had been completed, and Bill Colvin wrote Conrad Wirth, director of the National Park Service, complimenting him on the recent survey: "Thanks to the mechanics set in motion so quickly by you the field surveys of the Grasslands areas in this vicinity have been

National Park is favorable." Yet they also had a sense of urgency, as the *Kansas City Star* intoned in June 1960: "Time is Running Out on the True Prairie Areas of Kansas." The tallgrass needed to be preserved, and the quicker it could be done, the better it would be for the country.⁸



Farmland as well as major Kansas towns were devastated by the 1951 floods.

completed under the direction of Mr. Theodor Swem of your Omaha regional office." These early studies and reports had an air of optimism in them. An MAPDA letter dated October 22, 1959, stated, "Bill [Colvin] has assured me [Dr. Hershel T. Gier, MAPDA president] that everything is progressing better than expected and the probability of the establishment of the desired

In April 1959 published reports in the *Manhattan Mercury* mentioned a proposed prairie national park being considered near Tuttle Creek. Colvin wrote several editorials in the *Mercury* voicing approval of the park, saying,

8. Bill Colvin to Conrad Wirth, July 19, 1958, Frank Carlson Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; *Kansas City Star*, June 19, 1960.

"Here [in the national parks] the truly significant natural resources are protected and preserved." These resources included samples of unique areas such as the Grand Canyon. While not as impressive as some of the earlier national parks, prairie park proponents saw a vital need for this new park in Kansas. Colvin mentioned the positive benefits of the proposed park as recreation, economic development, preservation of the tallgrass, and scientific education.⁹

On April 30, 1959, the *Westmoreland Recorder* published a story with the headline, "May Take Township And A Half—34,000 Acres On West Side." This story reported that the proposal "came to many as a surprise," and that the park in the west part of the county would not extend to the shore of Tuttle Creek Reservoir. There was to be a one- to three-mile corridor separating the two federal concerns. This corridor was included because originally the National Park Service believed that the park would be large enough at thirty-four thousand acres, and Park Service officials did not want it to abut a public reservoir. This corridor and the construction of Tuttle Creek would be major points of irritation in the future of the park proposal. Richard P. Royer presented the concerns of Tuttle Creek area residents in a letter to Cong. William H. Avery:

9. *Manhattan Mercury*, April 29, 1959; *ibid.*, April 30, May 1, 1959; Colvin interview.

I would like to present, for Pottawatomie County and the people and cities therein, a dissenting opinion to this reservation. Since the acquisition of the Tuttle Creek lands, and with the potential acquisition of 34,000 acres for this grass-land reservation, Pottawatomie County will find itself decreased by one tenth.¹⁰

To this point, the prairie park was simply an idea, a dream of the preservationists. Beginning in May 1959, however, the proposal took on a more formal air. In a May 4, 1959, letter, Congressman Avery made a request of Park Service Director Wirth. "I would appreciate," Avery wrote, "the assistance of your office in preparing a suggested draft for a bill which would authorize the establishment of a Grasslands National Park." Within one month, the National Park Service had responded; on June 1, 1959, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Roger Ernst sent a draft bill to Congressman Avery. In this early bill, thirty-four thousand acres were believed to be enough to preserve part of the tallgrass prairie. Avery, along with Kansas senators Andrew F. Schoeppel and Frank Carlson, reported that these were preliminary figures; as not all of the studies were complete, the size of the park was subject to change. In a joint press release of June 9, 1960, the

three men stated that they hoped to expedite the completion of the proposed park studies. They did not, however, expect any action toward the creation of a park in that session of Congress.¹¹

Some Pottawatomie County residents gave at least grudging

commissioners and some *Westmoreland Recorder* staff. But their support was fragile, as was indicated on March 14, 1960, when the county commissioners drafted a resolution opposing the extension west of the proposed park. Part of the resolution stated:



Following the summer rains of 1951 came outcries for flood control. Here Rep. Albert M. Cole inspects flood damage in Manhattan. Subsequently he supported the Tuttle Creek project.

support to the proposed park, but it was limited because the park's size had not yet been finalized. Cautious advocates included the Pottawatomie County

that said Board approve and support the location of the proposed Grassland National Park in the western portion of Pottawatomie County, Kansas; but said Board hereby officially protests the extension of the said park area, westward, to where it will join the Tuttle Creek reservoir, or interfere [sic]

10. *Westmoreland Recorder*, April 30, 1959, November 3, 1960; Richard P. Royer to William Avery, April 30, 1959, William H. Avery Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as Avery Papers).

11. William H. Avery to Conrad L. Wirth, May 4, 1959, Avery Papers; Roger Ernst to William H. Avery, June 1, 1959, Avery Papers; Avery to Mr. and Mrs. Irvine, *Kansas City Star*, June 19, 1960.

with the development of said strip of land.

When reports became public that the park's size might be increased, many landowners and residents of Pottawatomie County vigorously opposed the proposal. Avery received a petition contesting "the continued encroachment by the government upon our people by taking our lands." According to Colvin, the park had a chance while it remained at thirty-four thousand acres; but when the proposal was expanded to sixty thousand acres and extended westward to the shore of Tuttle Creek Reservoir, its chances of passage dropped significantly. Colvin later recalled that he could sell the folks a Chevy, but he could not sell them a BMW. In other words, Colvin and other park proponents had little chance of convincing the people that a sixty-thousand-acre park was necessary.¹²

At this point, earlier actions of another federal agency, the Army Corps of Engineers, contributed to the growing opposition and lobbying efforts against the proposed park. As early as 1931 the corps had proposed a major dam project on the Blue River near Manhattan. At first, Congress heard only the views of the project's proponents. These early

supporters included elements within larger communities downstream from the proposed reservoir, including Manhattan, Topeka, and Kansas City. It was not until 1944 that Blue River valley residents learned of the Tuttle Creek Reservoir project, at which time they formed the Blue Valley Study Association to lobby Congress to stop the project. Landowners opposing the dam believed they had a good chance of defeating the project that would flood their valley and take their land. A letter from Frank Horalek to Rep. Albert M. Cole summed up the feelings of many of the congressman's constituents: "Seems like the Engineers with any sense would not even think of covering a valley with fertile land that is part of the bread basket of the good old U.S.A."¹³

In May of 1951, however, nature joined forces with the project's proponents; rain came to Kansas. Through May and June the state received between 30 and 250 percent above its normal rainfall. Northeastern Kansas averaged twelve inches of rain from May to July, but in 1951 the area received just over twenty-eight inches during this period. By July 9, 1951, the Kansas River receded within its banks; the lowest it had been since June 4. That July

day, however, was the death knell for the Tuttle Creek project's opposition. Between the ninth and the thirteenth, rain waters of over twenty inches in places inundated the Kansas River basin, of which the Blue River is a part. Marysville, for example, received over six inches of rain from July 10 to July 13, and Randolph, several miles downstream, was swamped with just over eleven inches in three days. Manhattan, Topeka, and Kansas City were devastated by the ensuing flood. Forty-one people were killed, one hundred thousand people lost their homes, and the estimated cost of the flood was \$1 billion.¹⁴ The approximately thirty-five hundred opponents of the dam became whispers in the cities' roar for protection from the floodwaters.

The Army Corps of Engineers, citizens' committees, and many businessmen came together to voice their support for the flood control project on the Blue River. Col. L. J. Lincoln of the corps spoke at a flood control forum at Kansas State University on November 27, 1951:

Those who saw the Kaw Basin in July 1951, with floodwaters extending from bluff to bluff, must sense that nothing short of great works are needed to control torrents that will otherwise flood the low

12. "Resolution" by Board of County Commissioners of Pottawatomie County on "Grassland National Park," March 14, 1960, Commission Journal K, Pottawatomie County Clerk, Westmoreland, Kans.; *Topeka State Journal*, June 9, 1960; *Westmoreland Recorder*, October 6, 1960; "Protest Petition Against Grasslands National Park in Pottawatomie County, Kansas," sent to William Avery, March 31, 1960, Avery Papers; Colvin interview.

13. R. C. Crawford to J. C. Christensen, Randolph, Kans., November 6, 1944, Glenn Stockwell Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as Stockwell Papers); Philip E. Meyer, "Tuttle Creek Dam: A Case Study in Local Opposition" (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1962), 12-14, 118; Frank Horalek to Albert M. Cole, February 11, 1946, Albert M. Cole Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as Cole Papers).

14. Meyer, "Tuttle Creek Dam," 23-25; U.S. Department of Commerce, Weather Bureau, Technical Paper No. 17, "Kansas-Missouri Floods of June-July 1951," 6, 10-11, 16-18; Corps of Engineers, "Interim Report on Storms and Floods in the Kansas City District, May-July 1951," 4; Glenn D. Stockwell, speech to Blue Valley Study Association, August 20, 1951, Stockwell Papers; L. J. Lincoln, speech to Kansas Reclamation Association, Salina, Kans., September 20, 1951, Stockwell Papers.

lands of our rivers and their tributaries.

It is also inconceivable that anyone who witnessed the devastation left in the wake of those floodwaters would consider anything less than the maximum effort to effect those controls as conscientious discharge of our obligations to mankind.

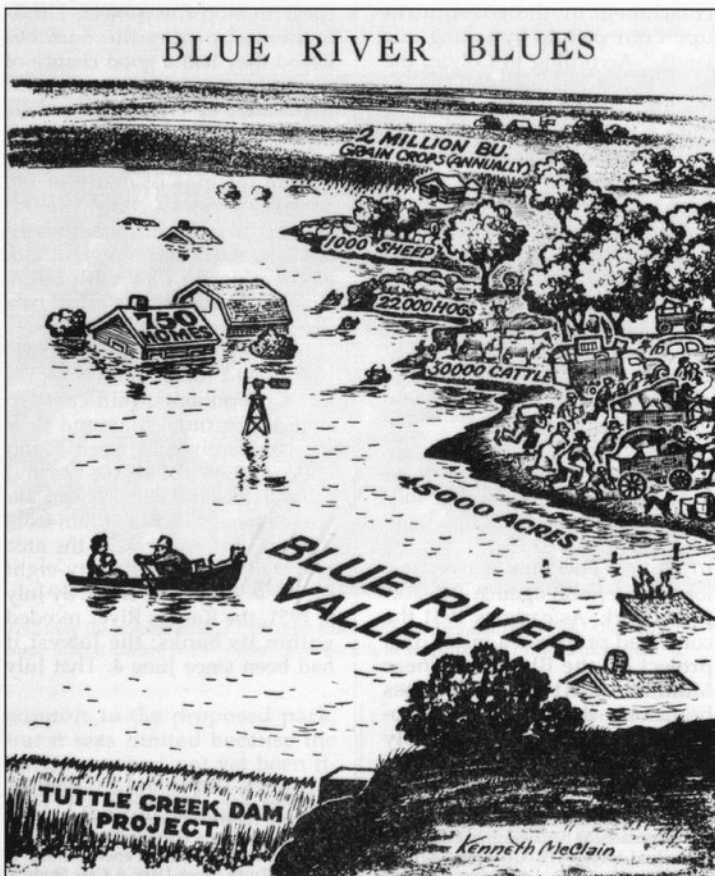
Angered at the slow progress of resolving the watershed issue, the North Topeka Reconstruction Committee wrote to Congressman Cole on September 15, 1951: "Two months have passed since the greatest of all flood disasters made thousands of people homeless." The partners of a restaurant supply company in Kansas City wrote to Gov. Edward Arn voicing their view of those who opposed the Tuttle Creek project:

Is that portion of the Blue Valley which will be adversely affected by the construction of the Tuttle Creek Dam such a garden of Eden that it can produce goods of a value equal to that portion which has been lost in the past, which will be lost in the future, that need not be lost if the Tuttle Creek Dam is Constructed?¹⁵

15. L. J. Lincoln, remarks at Forum on Flood Control, Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science, Manhattan, November 27, 1951, Stockwell Papers; North Topeka Reconstruction Commission to Albert Cole, September 15, 1951, Cole Papers; E. V. Kreipe and W. D. Bateman to Governor Arn, February 20, 1953, Edward Arn, Governor's Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as Arn Papers); L. D. Wadsworth to Governor Arn, May 11, 1953, Arn Papers.

Both groups concerned with the Tuttle Creek project agreed that the 1951 flood was a major disaster. They simply disagreed on the solution. The corps and the cities wanted several large reservoirs built in the Kansas River basin. The landowners and soil conservationists wanted to

use small detention dams and terraces to stop flooding. The hard feelings and misunderstandings engendered during this struggle lingered and subsequently found their way, only a few years later, into the prairie park controversy in Pottawatomie County.



With the 1951 floods, the construction of Tuttle Creek Dam, and the proposed prairie national park, the residents of the Blue River valley battled the "blues" off and on for a decade.

During the Tuttle Creek episode, landowners focused primarily on the Army Corps of Engineers as their "enemy"—an arrogant federal bureaucracy that wanted to take their land. Rep. Howard S. Miller, who defeated Cole in a contest for northeastern Kansas' congressional seat when Cole came out in favor of Tuttle Creek, wrote to Gov. George Docking in 1959:

Following this (1953 defeat of appropriation funds for Tuttle Creek) the Corps of Engineers resorted to a policy of black-mail of members of Congress. One Senator, whose name I am not at liberty to divulge, stated that he was threatened that "If you don't go along with us on this matter, you don't need to expect anything from us for your district." The General in charge of the Corps of Engineers in the Missouri River Basin in Omaha, on an occasion when I was still in Congress, told my son, "We intend to clobber your Dad."

Whether or not these charges were true, the people of the Blue River valley believed them. As they saw it, big government was out to get their land; they did not as easily see the strong urban forces at work against them. Additionally, congressional officials from Missouri believed that Tuttle Creek could help protect their people from future flooding. Simply too many people saw a need for the reservoir and had the political clout to get the project approved and completed.¹⁶

It was this still recent experience with, opponents were convinced, a government agency gone berserk, that contributed to the distrust by those who stood to lose their homes if the proposed tallgrass park became a reality. In the Tuttle Creek battle, the citizens of the Blue River valley did not focus on the true threat—the people in the cities downstream who believed Tuttle Creek and other federal reservoirs would save them from disaster in the future. The citizens against the tallgrass national park, however, were able to focus their energies against both the dreaded National Park Service and the private preservationists who wanted to save the land in Pottawatomie County for future generations. This sentiment was expressed by Mary Beth Irvine in a letter to Congressman Avery:

We have seen people lose their homesteads for this Tuttle Creek Dam project and exactly what good will it do for us? Will this happen again to establish the so-called Grassland Park.

My husband and for two generations before him have worked hard to keep in the

farming business and now a few pressure groups are trying to uproot him and for everything they have worked for.¹⁷

For Pottawatomie County residents, Tuttle Creek generated one final sore point—rebuilding the county roads that had been destroyed with the reservoir's construction. The Army Corps of Engineers had promised to rebuild the roads, but in November of 1961 Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall requested that the corps delay construction. Roads would distract from the attractiveness of the site as a national park. Finally, in July of 1962, after the Pottawatomie County commissioners threatened court action, the corps let out contracts to rebuild the roads. It was within this frayed relationship between county residents and the federal government that the National Park Service and its proponents attempted to create a prairie park in Kansas.¹⁸

The one redeeming aspect of the reservoir was the potential for housing construction along the eastern shore of Tuttle Creek. Doc Maskil of the *Westmoreland Recorder* noted, "That the shore line isn't just so much pasture land—it's land that may someday be lined with cabins." Resi-

16. Corps of Engineers, "Statement on Small Watershed Projects," May 25, 1954, Howard S. Miller Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society; L. J. Canfield to Edward Arn, May 5, 1953, Arn Papers; Arthur H. Carhart, "The Future Course in Water Management," presented before the Annual Conference of the American Water Works Association, Kansas City, Mo., May 6, 1952; "Forum on Flood Control," Kansas State University, November 27, 1951, Stockwell Papers; Kansas Watersheds Association to Clarence Cannon, ca. January 1955, Miller Papers; Howard S. Miller to George Docking, June 16, 1959, Miller Papers.

17. James D. Genandt, "The People Be Dammed: The Tale of Tuttle Creek" (Master's thesis, Emporia State University, 1988); *The Blue Valley Presents The Tuttle Creek Story* (no impr.); Mary Beth Irvine to William H. Avery, May 1, 1960, Avery Papers; Meyer, "Tuttle Creek Dam," 118.

18. *Westmoreland Recorder*, May 19, 1960, September 28, October 19, November 3, 9, 16, 1961, May 31, June 14, July 19, 1962; *Manhattan Mercury*, October 22, 1960, December 21, 1961.

dents were told that this housing development could help offset the loss in the property tax base. So with this one glimmer of hope, some Pottawatomie County residents gave at least tepid support to the park.¹⁹

In mid-February 1961 the Pottawatomie County commis-

corridor is in this the land cannot be justified as a national park." One reason for the increased size of the park was that State Highway 13 would be built through part of it. Several adamant proponents said a larger park was needed so that the road would not interfere with the view in the park

Park Service establish the park in Kansas. This group wanted the land to be restored to what it was before white men exploited it. Ultimately the association asked Governor Anderson for \$550,000 in state money to show state support for the project.²¹ Opponents of the park were more loosely or-

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Arguments Against National Park Fail To Sway Secretary Udall, Director Wirth High Officials Pleased With Choice Of Prairie Park Location In Pott. Co.

Mixed feelings surrounded the issue of the national park. But one issue was clear: the "high officials" were determined to locate the park in Pottawatomie County.

sioners tried compromising with National Park Service representatives over the size of the park. "We think we can safely say that all of Kansas wants a National Park to be located within its borders," the commissioners said, but they were "asking that a few thousand acres not be included in the National Park area that, at one time, the National Park Service said it didn't want." In a meeting with the commissioners shortly before this statement, Chester D. Brown of the Omaha branch of the National Park Service had stated, "I can't say you can't have a corridor, but in our judgment if a

and so that the prairie ecosystem could be better preserved.²⁰

During this time the park's proponents and opponents had been working to have their views heard. In October 1961 the Prairie National Park Natural History Association, Inc., was formed to promote the project and to purchase land to help the National

ganized. Several people, however, had written to Congressman Avery voicing concern over the federal intervention, and a few town meetings had been held in Westmoreland to discuss stopping park construction.²²

Then, on December 4, 1961, an incident occurred that galvanized the opponents of the park into an effective organization. On this date, Secretary of the Interior

20. Ibid., February 16, 1961; *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 15, 1961; Conrad Wirth to Fred Seaton, December 1, 1959, Fred Seaton Collection, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans.; *Topeka Daily Capital*, February 19, 1961; Stewart Udall to Clinton P. Anderson, November 14, 1961, James Pearson Papers, Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence; E. Raymond Hall, "The Prairie National Park," *National Parks Magazine* 36 (February 1962): 8; Theodor R. Swem to G. W. Tomanek, August 21, 1959, Tomanek Collection.

21. In 1962 and 1963 a total of \$100,000 was appropriated to show state support for the park. John Anderson to Alan Bible, July 18, 1963, John Anderson, Governor's Papers, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

22. George Mack, *Topeka Daily Capital*, October 24, 1961.

19. *Westmoreland Recorder*, March 23, 1961.

Stewart Udall, Director of the National Park Service Conrad Wirth, other government officials, and local proponents tried to tour parts of the proposed park. But when two helicopters carrying the group landed on a site known as Twin Mound, the tour was cut short by local landowner Carl Bellinger.²³

Many of the subsequent particulars regarding this soon-to-be "legendary" incident are in dispute; according to fellow park opponent Dave Carlson, Carl Bellinger was leasing the Twin Mound area and had permission to be on the land. As Udall and his group did not have permission, Bellinger apparently took it upon himself to confront the secretary for trespassing on private property. Someone needed to challenge those people who would take land from honest working folks. Bellinger demonstrated that he was the man to do it.²⁴

Bill Colvin, a member of the tour, recalled the incident differently. According to Colvin, a resident of the area was to meet the helicopters in a pasture near Twin Mound. As the group approached the landing point, Colvin saw their tour guide driving down the road and realized the guide would not be at the assigned meeting place when they arrived. Colvin, however, could not relay the information to the lead helicopter. Unfortunately for the incoming group, Carl Bellinger had already arrived and had parked his truck near the landing site. The pilot of the lead aircraft, which carried the

secretary of the interior, spotted a pickup and, thinking it held their tour guide, landed beside it. As the secretary soon discovered, this man was not their guide. According to Colvin's recollection, Bellinger used a gun to persuade the group to leave.²⁵



Pictured in the December 7, 1961, Westmoreland Recorder is Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall "listening intently" as area residents protest the proposed national park.

A 1970 article in the *Topeka State Journal* reported that "At one point in 1963, former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall came to the Tuttle Creek Area to inspect the park but one rancher with a shotgun ordered him off some property." And during the first meeting of the Flint Hills Grass Roots Association on March 28,

1973, reports indicated that Udall met with armed resistance when he attempted to tour the area. Photographs in the newspapers, however, depicted Udall and Bellinger shaking hands as the group was leaving, and no gun was visible.²⁶ Conrad Wirth noted the incident in his book *Parks, Politics, and the People*:

On the first setdown on the secretary's trip, however, there was a man waiting for us. Secretary Udall was first out of the plane and went right over to shake his hand. The man ordered him off the property. The secretary, without saying anything more or giving us a chance to straighten the matter out, returned to the helicopter and cancelled the rest of the trip. I talked to the man and found that he was not the owner but a tenant farmer. The owner had in fact given us permission to land on the property at this precise location, but apparently the tenant disagreed with the owner and decided to exercise a little authority of his own.²⁷

Colvin believed that this incident was a turning point against the park. Not appreciating how he had been treated, Secretary Udall was quoted as saying, "It's too bad when a member of the Presi-

23. Doc Maskil, interview with author, Westmoreland, Kans., January 24, 1991; Dave Carlson, interview with author, Manhattan, Kans., February 1, 1991; Colvin interview.

24. Carlson interview.

25. Colvin interview.

26. *Topeka State Journal*, April 21, 1970; Minutes of the Flint Hills Grass Roots Association, March 28, 1973, S. O. Somers private collection, Emporia, Kans.; "Flint Hills Ranchers Want Cattle to Roam the Prairie," unidentified newspaper photocopy, December 5, 1961, Somers Collection.

27. Conrad L. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 299.

dent's Cabinet tries to take a walk on a hill, he is told to get off. . . . But the National Park will remedy that."²⁸ For many landowners, the incident and the secretary's reaction to it demonstrated anew the arrogance of federal officials. The story of the rugged Kansas cattleman taking on the federal government was reported nationwide by the Associated Press. In response, Bellinger received several hundred letters in support of his actions.²⁹

The proposed park expansion and the Carl Bellinger incident were major blows to the park. Out of this Twin Mound incident the Twin Mound Ranchers were formed and became the central opposition force to the park. In an early meeting, the group set several goals. Suggestions were made for a letter-writing campaign, the group solicited support from terminal livestock markets, and it received the endorsement of the Kansas Livestock Association. Finally, members decided to send a group to Washington, D.C., when the bill was to be discussed before the Senate Public Lands Subcommittee.³⁰

The Twin Mound Rancher's argument against a national park led to the end of the proposed park in Pottawatomie County. In early July 1963 members of the Public Lands Subcommittee met at Kansas State University for a hearing on the park issue.³¹ The

Twin Mound Ranchers stressed the loss of tax revenues, the displacement of families, and the lack of need for the federal government to preserve the area. They believed that their conser-

vation measures were preserving the land; their proof was the National Park Service's desire to use their land as a national park.

By September 1963 the issue of the park was closed; the *Man-*



The showdown at Twin Mound between landowner Carl Bellinger (left) and Conrad Wirth, director of the National Park Service, was a major turning point against the national park. Photo from the *Manhattan Mercury*.

28. Quoted in *Time*, 78 (December 15, 1961): 19.

29. Colvin interview; *Time*, 19.

30. *Westmoreland Recorder*, December 14, 1961, January 4, 1962.

31. Several members of the Public Lands Subcommittee were landowners from western states. They included chairman Alan Bible, Nevada; Milward Simpson, Wyoming; Len B. Jordon, Idaho; Frank Moss, Utah; Q. N. Burdick, North Dakota, *Westmoreland Recorder*, July 9, 1963.

hattan Mercury reported that the Public Lands Subcommittee "unanimously voted to table the matter on the grounds that, in the committee's opinion, the area does not meet the criteria of a National Park."³² Hopes for a prairie park thereupon subsided until the 1970s.

Several local and specific factors helped bring about the defeat of the proposed prairie national park in Pottawatomie County: the people of the county were concerned about the decreased property tax base and wanted an opportunity to develop the eastern shore of Tuttle Creek Reservoir; many county residents had not liked being displaced by the construction of Tuttle Creek; and obviously, local landowners did not want their lives and livelihoods disrupted again by the federal government. More generally, a conflict existed between the preservationists' proposals and the private conservationists' practices. Both sides wanted the area preserved, but each side believed it knew better how to save the tallgrass. The preservationists wanted man's in-

fluence expunged from the park. The landowners wanted to keep the land a productive place for agriculture. The proponents tried to make a park for the nation. The opponents believed that the land should be kept in private hands and that the landowners, practicing conservationists, could best decide how it should be used. One wanted to have easy access to nature; the other wanted to make a living from nature.

The early optimism of park proponents was dashed when they failed to generate public support. Their cry to save the tallgrass before it disappeared was not compelling to enough people, and park opponents successfully shaped the state and national debate. It was the professionals in the Park Service and their allies against, as one opponent phrased it, "an independent group who can solve their own problems." By chance, Carl Bellinger came to represent this independence. That image was compelling and helped to reinforce the myth of the rugged individual against the power-hungry federal government. The myth of the Old West was alive and well in Pottawatomie County, and perhaps in the United States, as shown by the defeat of the first serious pro-

posal for a prairie national park.³³

Similarly, the landowners of Chase County are currently fighting to stop what they believe could be large-scale federal preservation of their land. For them, acquisition of the Z-Bar Ranch represents a stepping-stone for further federal encroachment on their way of life. The preservationists, however, have learned some lessons from their earlier attempts to save the land from its owners—besides preserving the grassland, the ranching culture would also be preserved for people to see. The Z-Bar would not become a national park; it would be designated a national monument. By keeping part of the ranching culture, the park proponents could hope to mollify landowners' fears that the area would be returned to its virgin state. The park proponents will only succeed in this latest attempt to save the tallgrass prairie if they can convince the state's landowners that the monument is in their best interest.

(KH)

32. *Manhattan Mercury*, September 11, 1963.

33. George A. Irvine to William H. Avery, April 18, 1960, Avery Papers.