

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY'S

Joseph H. Williams

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE

OSAGE COUNTY, OKLAHOMA



The Nature Conservancy's Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is located about one hour north of Tulsa in the Flint Hills of northeastern Oklahoma. TNC acquired about 29,000 acres of the original Barnard ranch in 1989 and has purchased and leased additional acres so that the preserve now encompasses about 40,000 acres. TNC's goal is to recreate and perpetuate a Tallgrass Prairie ecosystem, using prescribed burning and natural grazing by free-ranging Bison.

The most obvious aspect of the Preserve is the broad, open grassland landscape dominated by almost 800 species of native plants. About 20% of the Preserve includes woodlands typical of pre-settlement times. This includes riparian woodlands along major streams and Cross Timbers in the uplands.

Birders from northwest Arkansas visit the Preserve because of species like Greater Prairie-Chickens (resident); Henslow's Sparrow and Upland Sandpiper (summer); winter species like Rough-legged Hawk and Short-eared Owl. For those with broader ecological interests, including botany, the Preserve is a wonderland.





The name Flint Hills is derived from the presence of so much surface rock the area has never been plowed. This means that much of the biological heritage, including a full range of native plants, is largely intact. The diverse plant community in turn is highly attractive to insects. For example, Monarchs migrate through the Preserve in high numbers in late September, attracted by numerous flowering prairie plants.

A visit to the Preserve can begin at the old ranch headquarters area. It has an attractive visitor's center, gift shop, research facilities, plus workshops and a few residences.

Because Bison are free-ranging, TNC has established several nature trails of different lengths that commence near the visitor's center. Bison are fenced off from these trails, but otherwise the habitat is much like the remainder of the Preserve. One of the trails explores the bottomlands along Sand Creek. Another courses Flint Hills prairies.

A network of graded public roads provides access to much of the Preserve, plus private lands beyond Preserve boundaries. Many birders "slow drive" on these public roads, with frequent stops for birds, plants, or Bison crossing the road. Oil and gas activity is ongoing throughout and so is ranching. There can be lots of traffic on all of these roads. If you are going to "slow drive" birding, be courteous and watch for other vehicles. Give them plenty of room.



Many side roads have signs that indicate they are closed. Please respect the closures and the reasons for them. Always watch out and respect Bison. They often rest almost totally out-of-sight in grass and so are not obvious. The Preserve encourages visitors to stay near scenic turnouts and limit longer walks into the prairie to trails in the headquarters area.

Other than the nature trails near headquarters, the best bet for a visit

to the Preserve is the scenic Bison Loop. It is a fine way to see the broad range of habitats, animals, and plants in the Preserve. The Bison Loop originates a few miles west of the headquarters area. There is less traffic along this road and a lot to see. Take your time. The birder's "slow drive" method works pretty well.

Visits to ranch lands off the Preserve are also well worthwhile. It is easy to visit areas south, north, and west of the Preserve, using graded public roads. But this is all private land, so keep your activities along the road.



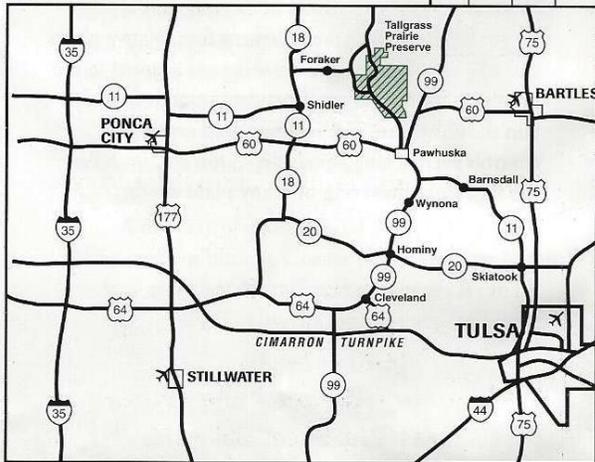
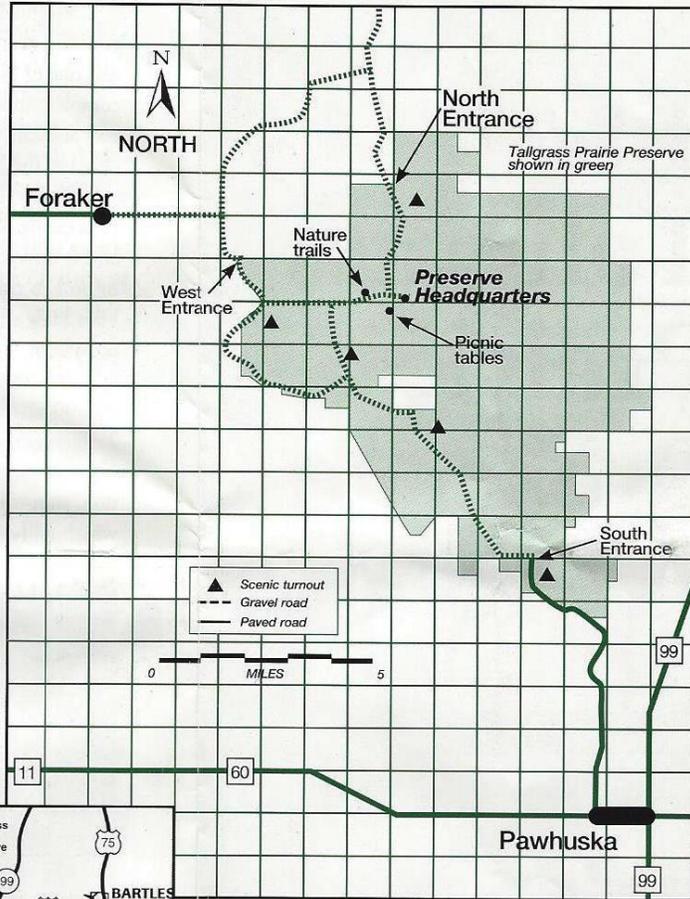
Finally, the Preserve is made possible by the generosity of folks who contribute time and money to The Nature Conservancy. If you are in a position to help fund projects like this, please do so.

For more information about Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve:

<https://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/oklahoma/placesweprotect/tallgrass-prairie-preserve.xml> .

A book well worth reading, with many wonderful photographs, BIG BLUESTEM, JOURNEY INTO THE TALL GRASS by Annick Smith, with photographs by Harvey Payne.

--Prepared by Joe Neal, April 2017



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
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The Nature Conservancy 
 Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

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