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# Fort Worth is losing its natural prairie land. Here's how we can protect it

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5-6 minutes

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## Environmentalists celebrate city's purchase of Broadcast Hill wildlife area

Activists who have pushed Fort Worth to preserve its natural prairie land gathered on June 25 to recognize the city's \$610,000 purchase of Broadcast Hill.

Activists who have pushed Fort Worth to preserve its natural prairie land gathered on June 25 to recognize the city's \$610,000 purchase of Broadcast Hill. By Haley Samsel

Fort Worth is losing the last of our 10,000-year-old native prairie to development.

Once 1.3 million acres, the Fort Worth Prairie is one of North America's rarest ecosystems. Founded upon wide-open grassland, Fort Worth's Western identity is imbued in open country – sun, wind, grass and blue sky.

The Great Plains Restoration Council and the Fort Worth Prairie Park Preservation Committee, comprising local business leaders, conservationists, and educators, signed an agreement with the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Benbrook Lake to help preserve endangered native Fort Worth Prairie and provide community engagement and education. More than 944 acres east of Lake Benbrook and Rock Creek can anchor a larger wildland Prairie Park that would ensure critical ecological function into the future.

These federal lands don't include upland tabletop prairies necessary to complete the park.

Development is fast approaching. Conservation is a better alternative, protecting open prairie, wildlife, human health and water quality.

"Those of us who love the land realize what a unique opportunity we have to protect all that lives on this prairie," said Marty Leonard, a member of the Tarrant Regional Water District's board. "I plead with Fort Worth to preserve it."

Local businessman and conservationist Troy Moncrief added: "We're asking the community to help raise several million dollars to complete the Fort Worth Prairie Park. When Fort Worth sees a need ... our generous neighbors can get the Prairie Park done."

The [city's new Open Space Conservation Program](#) should prioritize the Fort Worth Prairie Park, creating the largest public prairie in North Texas.

"Those of us who have appreciated the horizon above undulating prairie grasses need to join with us to preserve the same opportunities for future generations," says Bill Fuller, rancher and investor. "Landowners can benefit from tax-advantaged strategies like conservation easements, fee acquisition, and public-private partnerships."

Several years ago, The Walton Group, a foreign developer, [bought about 1,700 acres](#) of our nearby pristine public land prairie.

Years of youth work, an award-winning national Ecological Health model, and community healing efforts with partners like AIDS Outreach Center grew on that public prairie. Walton's chief executive Bill Doherty told the Star-Telegram in 2014 that conservationists will be included in planning discussions for the property. The company has done nothing yet for conservation.

Our last wild Fort Worth prairie explodes with life. Scissor-tailed flycatchers, dickcissels, grasshopper sparrows, bobwhite quail, American woodcocks, yellow-billed cuckoos, painted buntings, northern harrier hawks, rare and amazing crested caracaras (an eagle-like bird), wild turkeys, bobcats, beaver, coyotes, Texas brown tarantulas, giant swallowtail butterflies, white and largemouth bass, slough darters, longnose gars, box turtles, narrowmouth toads, white-tailed deer, big bluestem, little bluestem, yellow Indian grass, prairie bishop, Missouri foxtail cactus, snow-on-the-prairie, Monarch butterflies and so much more are depending upon us.

Just as importantly, nature heals mind, body and soul. When you shut the car off and begin walking, the prairie sun, wind, grass and blue sky envelope the senses. Every square foot reveals an unfolding story of diversity and life. The rarest American hiking experience is wild prairie.

Additionally, the Fort Worth Prairie Park can include interpretation of the first frontier Anglo settlers, local Caddo and Wichita tribes who lived in well-built grass houses and Kiowa and Comanche who visited from the west. A trail can memorialize the 1850s

Southern Underground Railroad, whereby escaped enslaved people of African descent traveled across the Texas prairie toward Mexico and freedom.

Our world is in turmoil right now. A mass extinction looms. If we make the Fort Worth Prairie Park large enough to sustain life over generations, we are doing our part.





A group enjoys native prairie land near southwest Fort Worth that has since been sold to a developer. Fort Worth is moving forward with plans to purchase land for conservation, and some environmental groups hope it will include a tract of prairie near Lake Benbrook and the Chisholm Trail Parkway. Courtesy of Jarid Manos