

Prospectus Fort Worth Prairie Park Fact and Photo Sheet

Goal: Create the largest protected public Prairie Park of several thousand acres in North Texas that helps avert the extinction crisis and provides refuge, health, clean water and a healthy ecosystem for people and wildlife.

Background: Fort Worth and the larger DFW Metroplex were founded upon virgin prairie, yet is “park poor” when it comes to Western-scale conservation lands. The Fort Worth Prairie Park will not only be a grassland park for all of North Texas, but the country’s first major city wildland park protecting ancestral wild prairie as part of its identity.

Description: The native Fort Worth Prairie includes upland tallgrass prairies in deep soil and shallower limestone soil shortgrass prairies, Ice Age wetlands, tabletop plains that provide nourishment, breeding, and resting grounds for spring and fall Monarch butterfly breeding and grassland nesting birds, pristine creeks, gallery forest and more. The Fort Worth Prairie is unique in that it lies directly on America’s “Dry Line”, the 98th Meridian, where the East meets West.

Current size: Approximately 1,000 acres through an MOU with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A public NEPA commenting process has also been completed, whereby as the USACE updated their Master Plan for the first time in 45 years. Now all remaining native prairie on their holdings is designated as Environmentally Sensitive Areas. The City of Fort Worth Open Space Department is considering an acquisition for the Fort Worth Prairie Park at the end of August.

Goal: Approximately 5,000 acres.

Needed: Critical upland tabletop plains are needed to complete the Park. The current waterway and swale prairie lands already enrolled. serve as the ecological core.

Cost: \$50 million would permanently protect a Fort Worth Prairie Park of approximately 5,000 acres. For context, the community spent \$80 million for the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. A permanent management endowment fund would be additional.

Ecosystem Status: The Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem is endangered and disappearing fast. Once 1.3 million acres, it is now one of the rarest ecosystems in North America. Native prairie of all ecotypes is the most endangered and least protected in North America, and development is threatening the last of the remaining 10,000-year old prairie in North Texas.

Location: The area around Benbrook Lake in southwest Fort Worth is the last stronghold for the embattled Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem.

Watershed protection: Remaining wild prairie protects perennial creeks, Benbrook Lake, and the overall Upper Trinity River watershed. A TCU study from former Environmental Sciences professor Dr. Tony Burgess shows that development and destruction of these remaining wild prairies will cause runoff pollution to flow directly into our waterways, whereas native prairie and its deep roots provide extraordinary absorption and filtration.

Climate change resilience: Native prairie directly removes carbon from the atmosphere and stores it in the deep-rooted soil for thousands of years. When native prairies are destroyed, this carbon is not only released into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change, but also destroys all future carbon sequestration services provided by the native prairie.

Quality of life: Natural amenities in the form of landscape-level wild open space protecting native ecosystems for outdoor recreation, biodiversity, clean air and clean water improve a city's civic attractiveness and daily well-being.

Opportunities: In conjunction with the City of Fort Worth Open Space Department and the Park and Recreation Department, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Native Prairies Association of Texas, conserve remaining native Fort Worth Prairie through fee acquisition and conservation easements.

Fort Worth Prairie Park Preservation Committee: The Fort Worth Prairie Park Preservation Committee is comprised of influential business leaders and conservationists.

Ecological Health: Great Plains Restoration Council is the founder of the Ecological Health initiative, defined as "the interdependent health of people, animals and ecosystems". In Ecological Health education, people take care of their own full-dimensional health through taking care of the Earth. Ecological Health is taught nationally with the Fort Worth Prairie Park as the model.

Youth & Youth Adult Educational Programming and Employment for Prairie Ecological Restoration and Management:

Great Plains Restoration Council does conservation through people. In the historic absence of bison and fire, some tree and brush overgrowth has begun to choke out prairie biodiversity in places, especially on Corps swales leading up from waterways, and must be removed to protect endangered biodiversity. Restoration Not Incarceration™, in partnership with Tarrant County Youth Advocate Program and others, employs formerly incarcerated young men and women on a re-entry track to restore the prairie back to 1800s conditions, while also providing life-valuable training, education and certification in Tier I, II, and III of Ecological Health practices and principles. Restoration Not Incarceration™ field crew teams cost \$1,000 a day, delivering an increase in acreage of native prairie on land already protected. A couple years of work need to be scheduled now.

Benefits to Society: Nature-based work therapy has been shown in several studies to reduce recidivism and help participants build a lifeline to a healthier, more sustainable future for themselves. In some cases, young people realize they can be leaders themselves and go on to serve others. In Ecological Health, service recipients become service providers. On a broader level, preserving wild open space dramatically improves public health and wellness physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Honoring History: As we stride into the future, the Fort Worth Prairie Park can include interpretation of the first frontier Anglo settlers (there are frontier stone homestead archaeological ruins), local Caddo and Wichita tribes who lived in well-built grass houses, Kiowa and Comanche who visited from the west, and a trail memorializing the 1850s Southern Underground Railroad whereby escaped enslaved people of African descent traveled across the Texas prairie toward Mexico and freedom.