

Tallgrass preserve begins to take shape

BY JEAN HAYS
The Wichita Eagle

In a few years, visitors to the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve near Strong City will be able to get lost in 8-foot-tall grass and see the prairie as it was in the late 1800s.

Tuesday, the National Park Trust broke ground on its first project designed to make Tallgrass Park live up to its name.

The trust and the National Park Service will plant native grass on 800 acres of land that is now grazed by cattle.

Once the grass is planted and the nature trails built, the land will be off-limits for grazing.

"All we want to do is grow beautiful varieties of grass," said Paul

"Hopefully when people come, they won't see their families. They will disappear in the prairie."

Paul Pritchard, National Park Trust president

Pritchard, president of the trust. "Hopefully when people come, they won't see their families. They will disappear in the prairie."

Koch Pipeline Co. donated \$150,000 to the project as part of a settlement with the federal government over oil pipeline leaks.

The Cloud Foundation in Kansas City, Mo., donated an undisclosed amount to build the one- to two-mile nature trail, which will be wheelchair-accessible.

The park, 85 miles northeast of

him the rights to graze cattle on park land for 35 years. Bass donated an additional \$1 million to the trust.

To develop the park, the trust must buy back the lease.

Koch's donation allowed the trust to buy the lease on 800 of the park's 11,000 acres.

Pritchard said the group's next project will be to raise money to return bison to 1,000 acres. It will cost about half a million dollars to buy the lease and build fences strong enough to hold the animals.

IF YOU GO

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is about 85 miles northeast of Wichita on K-177.

The historic ranch buildings, nature trail and school are open for self-guided tours from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.

Donations for the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve may be sent to Farmers and Drovers Bank, P.O. Box C, Council Grove, KS 66846.

For more information about the fundraising drive, call the National Park Trust at (620) 273-8139.

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