

For Designation of America's

Tallgrass Heartland

Governor Sam Brownback Deserves Our Appreciation

In May 2011 Governor Sam Brownback made a bold move that, we trust, will have lasting benefit for saving Tallgrass Prairie landscapes – and associated natural and cultural resources – in the Flint Hills and Chautauqua Hill Country of Kansas. Audubon of Kansas encourages everyone who shares our commitment to protection of these areas to thank the governor for designation of the “Tallgrass Heartland” as an area that should be off limits for additional, massive, industrial windpower-development projects.

In addition to designating the “Tallgrass Heartland,” the governor’s administration is promoting an increase in eco-tourism in the Flint Hills and preservation of tallgrass prairie. Brownback said the extreme rarity of this last large-scale vestige of the tallgrass prairie located in the Flint Hills calls for extraordinary care and attention.

Audubon of Kansas, and an increasing number of other organizations and residents, expressed alarm in 2002 when it became apparent that a tsunami of windpower projects was headed for the Flint Hills. A score of proposals, each involving

thousands of acres, extended 150 miles from near Manhattan to the south. In 2004, a report prepared by the Wind and Prairie Task Force, established by the State Energy Resources Coordination Council under Governor Kathleen Sebelius, highlighted areas of tallgrass prairie most appropriate for preservation. That led to designation of the “Heart of the Flint Hills” as an area where there would be a moratorium on commercial-windpower development. It was a major step forward. Unfortunately, the southern Flint Hills were not protected. The Elk River Wind Energy Project proceeded on 8,000 acres south of Beaumont, and another 14,000 acres are currently being sliced and diced for the Caney River Wind Energy Project.

The “Tallgrass Heartland” designation encompasses the southern Flint Hills and essentially doubles the total area of prairie landscapes “to be free from additional commercial wind farm development.” The plan received broad-based support from Flint Hills ranchers, conservationists, power companies (including Westar) and governmental officials. The most vocal and organized opposition was expressed by the Kansas Farm Bureau.

Statements included with the governor’s news release included the following:

A. Scott Ritchie, Tallgrass Ranchers:

“We enthusiastically applaud Governor Brownback’s commitment to expand protection of the Tallgrass Heartland. His farsighted initiative will pay dividends for generations to come. Saving the tallgrass prairie from industrial development is the right thing to do and is a legacy we hope to leave to Kansans and to all Americans. We thank the governor for his strong leadership to achieve this grand result.”

Ron Klataske, Executive Director, Audubon of Kansas:

“The governor’s designation of an expanded area of Flint Hills and tallgrass-prairie landscape is a wonderful development. It recognizes the area for its natural ecological character and ranching culture, and reflects the interests of most residents within the Flint Hills region and folks statewide, who support the importance of working together to build appreciation for this unique signature Kansas landscape.”

Larry Patton, President of Protect the Flint Hills:

“Protect the Flint Hills supports Governor Brownback’s plan to expand the area designated as the Tallgrass Heartland. The Governor’s proposal shows that he appreciates the significance of the Kansas Flint Hills region and that his administration is committed to preserving the last of the tallgrass-prairie ecosystem for future generations.”

