

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



(R - Kansas)

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DOLE, KASSEBAUM SEND LETTER ON PRAIRIE NATIONAL RESERVE TO HOUSE INTERIOR MEMBERS

WASHINGTON -- Kansas Senators Bob Dole and Nancy Kassebaum today sent a letter to House Interior Committee members, in which they express some of their views on the proposed Prairie National Reserve for Kansas and Oklahoma. Following is the text of that letter:

Dear _____:

Our colleague and fellow Kansan, Congressman Larry Winn, has introduced legislation (H.R. 5592) to create a Prairie National Reserve in Kansas and Oklahoma. We are writing you, as a member of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, to express our concerns regarding this bill.

Like every rancher, farmer and visitor who has seen the tallgrass prairies of Kansas, we can attest to the beauty and splendor of these age-old grasslands. Preserving this unique area of land is certainly a commendable objective. But we are not convinced that a national park is necessary to preserve the tallgrass prairie.

This land is presently being preserved, and has been for generations, by the ranchers and stockmen who live there. The Flint Hills of Kansas are not threatened by either commercial or residential development. Present ranching practices pose no threat to the beauty and health of the land, and the soil is not capable of being cultivated by existing agricultural technology. In fact, the ranchers have been excellent stewards of the land they live on.

Moreover, large portions of the Kansas prairie have already been set aside in the 105,000-acre Cimarron National Grasslands, 8,700-acre Konza Prairie Research National Area, 2,188-acre Flint Hills Tallgrass Prairie, and numerous other county and state parks. In addition, there already exists a Kansas Prairie Parkway established by state statute which cuts through much of the area proposed for this reserve.

The 374,000-acre Prairie National Reserve proposed in H.R. 5592 is exceedingly large. Proposals for parks in the Flint Hills have grown tremendously in size over the sixty years such a park has been discussed. A 1961 National Park Service report recommended a 57,000-acre preserve. A 1970 National Park Service report recommended a prairie park of no more than 60,000 acres in which government ownership would not exceed 20,000 acres. Yet, no justification has been offered for the six-fold increase in size.

H.R. 5592 does address some concerns previously raised by opponents of the park -- elimination of condemnation authority, allowing owners to transmit property to family members, and providing for purchase from willing sellers only. However, in light of the concerns we have enumerated and the fact that the reserve proposed in H.R. 5592 could idle thousands of acres of food-producing land, drastically reduce local tax revenues, pose a threat to the economies of nearby communities and entail considerable cost to the federal government, we are not convinced that creation of a Prairie National Reserve is necessary.

We hope that you will consider our views and those of other Kansans before committing yourself on this legislation.

Sincerely,

BOB DOLE

NANCY LANDON KASSEBAUM