
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT - PART II
2026 UPDATE
TALLGRASS PRAIRIE NATIONAL PRESERVE

STRONG CITY, KS



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Cover Photo: View from west window of Spring Hill Ranch Barn. Vireo, 2024

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared as an update to the 2004 Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. Chapter 6 of the CLR organized the Preserve into 11 distinct management zones, each with their own unique treatment recommendations. The analysis and recommendations in this report update are intended to supplement the 2004 treatment recommendations for the Spring Hill Ranch Barn and landscape, located in Management Zone 4, “ZBar/Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters”; and the Deer Park Place cultural resources in Management Zone 6 “Deer Park Place.” ZBar/Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters encompasses 29.9 acres and houses park administration and maintenance offices as well as the Spring Hill Ranch Home and Barn along with other historic structures. Deer Park Place includes the Deer Park Place Barn, the Urschel Tack Barn and the Urschel Poultry House and has historically been referred to as both Lanry Area and Urschel Ranch. (Figure 1-1).

Many treatment projects have been completed in Management Zone 4 since 2004, necessitating updates to the 2004 existing conditions. These projects are listed in Chapter 3 of this Update.

In November 2024, the final Historic Property Project Documentation (HPPD) and Climate Change Treatment Plan (CCTP) for the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve was issued. The Conditions Assessment and Treatment Approach chapters are summarized within this Update.

In 2024, the NPS engaged a consultant team to prepare design documents to address accessibility and cultural resource rehabilitation improvements at the Spring Hill Ranch Barn and Deer Park Place as part of project titled TAPR 334923 ‘Rehabilitate Lanry Area & Spring Hill Barn.’ These treatment recommendations are included within this Update.

SITE HISTORY UPDATE

Authorized in 1996, legislation mandated that the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve be owned by a private entity rather than the federal government. The Nature Conservancy, (TNC, a global non-profit founded with a shared vision to protect and care for nature) purchased the preserve in 2004 and manages it in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS).

The site has two periods of historical significance, which after careful consideration have been updated since the 2004 CLR. The National Historic Landmark (NHL) national period of significance is from 1878 to 1904. The Preserve is also recommended as locally significant with a period of significance between 1856 to 1955, which captures the long timespan of changing cultural use and adaptation to the natural environment.

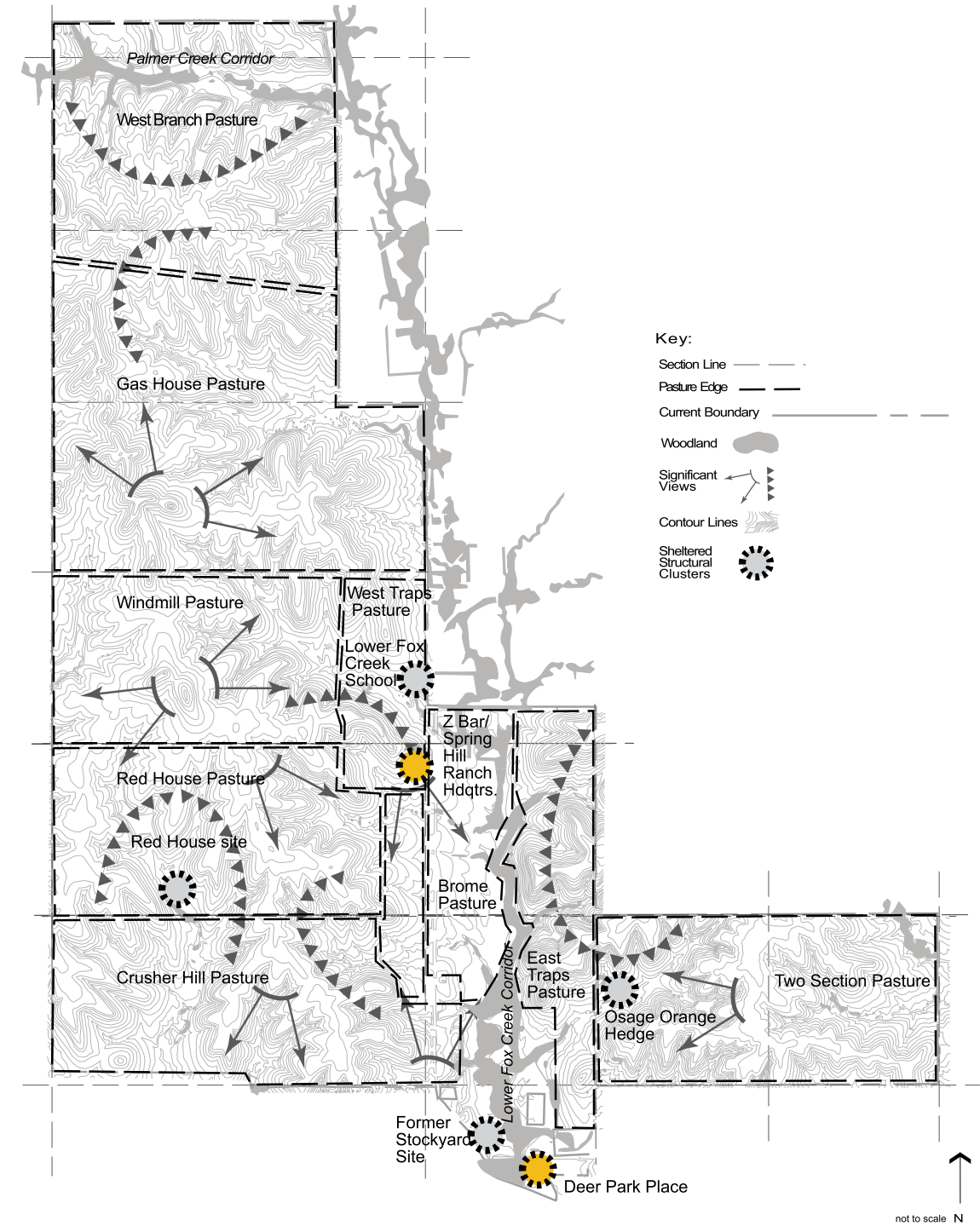


Figure 1-1. Z Bar/ Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters and Deer Park Place location within Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve (Base map prepared by Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects in association with John Milner Associates).

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CHAPTER 2: 2004 CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT SUMMARY

2004 TREATMENT FRAMEWORK AND PHILOSOPHY

Of the four treatment alternatives recognized by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes, Rehabilitation was identified as primary approach for the 2004 Cultural Landscape Report for the entire Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve landscape.

Rehabilitation is defined by the standards as: the act or process of making possible a compatible use of a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features that convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

The following is excerpted from the 2004 CLR: "*Rehabilitation meets the goals and objectives of the Preserve's General Management Plan by preserving and stabilizing features of the historic ranchlands landscape while also allowing for new uses such as expanded visitor access and interpretation, prairie biodiversity enhancement, and the reinstatement of bison herds. With rehabilitation, new design and management practices within the historic landscape must be sensitive to the nature of a resource's character, particularly the qualities that render it significant.*"¹

2004 TREATMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Treatment recommendations contained in the 2004 CLR Report are intended to guide long-term management of cultural, natural, and historic resources. The management and design recommendations are organized into 11 management zones, each defined by their resource types and level of significance and integrity. Specific strategies are presented for each zone, along with a series of recommendations.

¹ Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects, "Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Cultural Landscape Report" (National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, October 2004), 297.

The following is a summary of the recommendations for management zone 4 (ZBar/Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters) and zone 6 (Deer Park Place), which pertain to the scope of this Update.

MANAGEMENT ZONE 4

Encompassing the new visitor’s center, ranch headquarters, the Spring Hill Barn and Ranch Home and other small-scale features and structures, within this management zone it is critical to maintain the character associated with the identified local period of significance from 1856-1955. Rehabilitation is the preferred treatment approach for this zone.

The following table lists treatment recommendations identified in the 2004 CLR and the current status of each. Project numbers listed correspond to the project numbering in the 2004 CLR.

Management Zone 4			
	Completed	Ongoing	Future
1. Stabilize and rehabilitate stone walls and fences	●	●	
4. Mitigate threats to spring boxes and spring houses			●
9. Expand shuttle tour route			●
10. Improve drainage in Spring Hill main house precinct and rehabilitate terraces			●
15. Protect cultural concentrations and features from prescribed burning		●	
16. Inventory, identify, control, and remove exotic invasive plants		●	
19. Establish circulation plan, including ADA access, between buildings within Z Bar/Spring Hill Ranch headquarters			●



Figure 2-1. Management Zone 4 - ZBar/Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters.

MANAGEMENT ZONE 6

In the 2004 CLR, the GMP was referenced, noting there was no anticipation that the Deer Park Place series of buildings would be accessible to visitors, but instead would be used for park management and operations. The CLR indentified a long-term goal to establish a new maintenance facility in conjunction with a visitor contact station. The treatment approach for the management zone was preserving historic resources and patterns of spatial organization.

As part of the design process undertaken with Project TAPR 334923, the Park expressed their desire to stabilize the Deer Park Place Barn (the largest barn on the property) in order to open portions of the lower level to visitors, provide parking and visitor access to all three structures, and rehabilitate the Urschel Tack Barn for Park use. These treatment options are discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Management Zone 6			
	Completed	Ongoing	Future
1. Stabilize and rehabilitate stone walls and fences			●
15. Protect cultural concentrations and features from prescribed burning		●	
16. Inventory, identify, control, and remove exotic invasive plants		●	



Figure 2-2. Management Zone 6- Deer Park Place.

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CHAPTER 3: EXISTING CONDITIONS UPDATE

The inventory of park features undertaken in 2004 provides a snapshot of the natural resources and cultural features at that time. Guided by the CLR, many treatment projects were undertaken within Management Zone 4 since 2004, necessitating an abbreviated update to the existing conditions found within this zone as well as park-wide improvements.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

In 2012, a new \$6 million Visitor Center opened, including restrooms, a gift shop, and park headquarters, including staff offices and visitor contact. The center enhances interpretive experiences for visitors and acts as a gateway to the Preserve (Figure 3-1). As part of this project, a new paved visitor parking lot was constructed with accessible stalls and walkway to the Visitor's Center (Figure 3-2).

Other completed treatment projects included construction of a second visitor restroom building, across from the Spring Hill Barn, in 2020 (Figure 3-3), and a rehabilitation project for the Spring Hill Ranch Home completed in 2019.



Figure 3-1. Visitor's Center and Park Headquarters, completed in 2012 (Vireo, 2025).



Figure 3-2. Paved Visitor's Center parking with accessible spots, completed in 2012. (Vireo, 2025).



Figure 3-3. Accessible visitor restrooms, completed in 2020 (Vireo, 2024).

LAND USES AND ACTIVITIES

Bison grazing was re-introduced to the Preserve in 2009, with a herd that has grown to 85 animals as of 2024. Returning these animals to their native grazing lands for the first time in over 100 years offers park visitors the unique opportunity to view and interpret this historic landscape.

In 2012-2013, a bison corral was added to a previously disturbed portion of Big Pasture. Archeology surveys were completed to avoid disturbance to an existing historic home site.

SMALL-SCALE FEATURES

In 2020, a failing dry-stack retaining wall and stone steps east of the barn were rebuilt with concrete and a dry-stack stone limestone veneer, along with a new guardrail and limestone steps (Figure 3-4). New dry-stack limestone walls were added along Highway 177, and a new Park sign is located at the park entrance.

CIRCULATION AND PARKING

There have been many significant alterations to both pedestrian and vehicular circulation patterns within Management Zone 4. The entry to the Park has been shifted south, with the new paved parking lot and accessible walk to the Visitor's Center, as well as a new connection to the existing trail system. In addition, a paved visitor parking lot was added to the east of Spring Hill Ranch Barn, this lot contains no accessible parking spots.

Northwest of the Spring Hill Barn, two new accessible parking spots (Figure 3-6) were added along with a sidewalk connecting this parking to the new restroom building and the Spring Hill Ranch Home.

As part of the stone wall and steps construction, a new gravel path was added along the slope east of the Spring Hill Barn, connecting the upper level of the site with a gravel access road which provides connection to the new paved parking and Visitor's Center.

Additionally, The Nature Conservancy has added miles of hiking trails throughout the Preserve since 2004, greatly enhancing the visitor's experience. Additional trails have been added to the Bottomland ADA trail between Kansas Highway 177 and Fox Creek, along with a 2025 paved trail extension of approximately 1 mile.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT ZONE 4

Around the Spring Hill Ranch Headquarters, limited plantings were installed around the Visitor's Center including shrubs and small groupings of grasses. Additionally, the new Visitor's Center has a green roof.

Identified as part of the cultural landscape in 2004, the Cedar Plantation is a historic windbreak of cedar trees located to the north of the preserve property. Treatment recommendations for this feature were updated within the Climate Change Treatment Plan (2024), discussed further in Chapter 4 of this document.

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE NATIONAL PRESERVE

Throughout the greater preserve, and the tallgrass prairie ecosystem as a whole, encroaching woodland is threatening the integrity of the prairie landscape. Only 4% of the original tallgrass prairie ecosystem is intact and nearly two-thirds of this remaining prairie is found in the Flint Hills, making proper management of this resource a critical objective for both public and private land stewards. Woody plant encroachment undermines key grassland ecosystem services such as forage production due to herbaceous biomass loss, carbon storage, water cycling, and wildlife habitat.

Conservation partners including The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service are actively working to mitigate encroachment in the remaining prairie landscape. The USDA Great Plains Grassland Biome Framework outlines a comprehensive strategy to address woody plant encroachment. Prescribed fire is the most efficient management tool that can be implemented to maintain and restore tallgrass prairie. Within the preserve, controlled burns are an important tool to manage the Park's tallgrass prairie landscape.



Figure 3-4. Reconstructed stone veneer retaining wall and steps, completed in 2020 (Vireo, 2024).



Figure 3-5. Paved parking lot, completed in 2020 (Vireo, 2024).



Figure 3-6. Accessible parking stalls adjacent to Spring Hill Ranch Barn, completed in 2020 (Vireo, 2024).

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Figure 3-7. Gravel path at new steps, completed in 2020 (Vireo, 2025).



Figure 3-8. 2004 Aerial Photograph- Z Bar/Spring Hill Ranch (Google Earth).



Figure 3-9. 2005 Aerial Photograph- Z Bar/Spring Hill Ranch depicting shift of Park entry and additional parking (Google Earth).



Figure 3-10. 2023 Aerial Photograph- Z Bar/Spring Hill Ranch depicting Visitor Center and additional circulation (Google Earth).

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CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY OF 2024 HISTORIC PROPERTY PROJECT DOCUMENTATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE TREATMENT PLAN

In order to plan for and adapt to our changing climate, a study was undertaken in 2023-2024 to identify resources most likely to be impacted by climate-driven environmental changes. The Historic Property Project Documentation (HPPD) and Climate Change Treatment Plan (CCTP) provide updated resource documentation and supplement existing treatment plans as they pertain to natural and cultural resources on the Preserve. The study area for this plan encompasses the Spring Hill Barn and corral, as well as the Spring Hill Ranch Home, terraced gardens, the cedar windbreak, and other features within the Area of Potential Effect (APE) as shown in Figure 4-1.

An updated Condition Assessment is provided in Chapter 3 of the document, organized into seven landscape characteristics that are consistent with those found in the 2004 CLR. These are: Buildings and Structures, Circulation, Vegetation, Natural Systems and Features, Views, Small-Scale Features, and Spatial Organization. If applicable, the assessment table lists each asset's Cultural Landscape Inventory (CLI) Feature ID, Cultural Resources Inventory System-Historic Structures (CRIS-HS) Record Information, and Facility Management Software System (FMSS) Record Number. The remaining two assessment categories are Evaluation Status and Current Condition.

Updated 2024 treatment recommendations set forth in Chapter 6 of the HPPD/CCTP are guided by the Preserve's Vision Statement:

“Manage vegetation and related elements in a manner that promotes the historic context of the site, focusing on a landscape that evokes the feeling of a rural agricultural community.”

TREATMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations found in the report are:

- Enhancing genetic diversity with new tree plantings
- Prioritize planting trees that have been grown within a 250 mile radius of the preserve
- Plant native trees that are adaptable and suited to variable climate and

weather extremes

- Guidance on appropriate tree and shrub species
- Install 2” caliper trees
- Selectively prune existing trees
- Limit parking within tree driplines
- Submit wood samples of removed trees for dendrochronological analysis

These recommendations will guide the Preserve in thoughtfully managing natural resources to mitigate climate change impacts by removing invasive or declining vegetation and replacing canopy trees and other historic period plantings.

Within the APE, three distinct Landscape Areas were identified: Tallgrass Prairie, Cedar Plantation, and the Z Bar Ranch Headquarters. Within the prairie, management of dead trees, shrub thickets and brush piles are the recommended treatment to prevent the risk of fire in proximity to buildings and structures. Dead trees within the limits of the Cedar Plantation landscape also present a fire hazard. The treatment recommendation is to remove all dead walnuts and eastern red cedars without replacement, and establish a firebreak at the perimeter of the historic windbreak.

Within the headquarters landscape, the treatment recommendation is to plant new trees to provide shade and remove a declining cottonwood tree. The plan for Shade Tree additions can be found on Drawing TP-2 within the CCTP. Selected pruning is the recommended treatment for diseased or damaged tree limbs, as well as any tree branches in proximity to historic buildings.

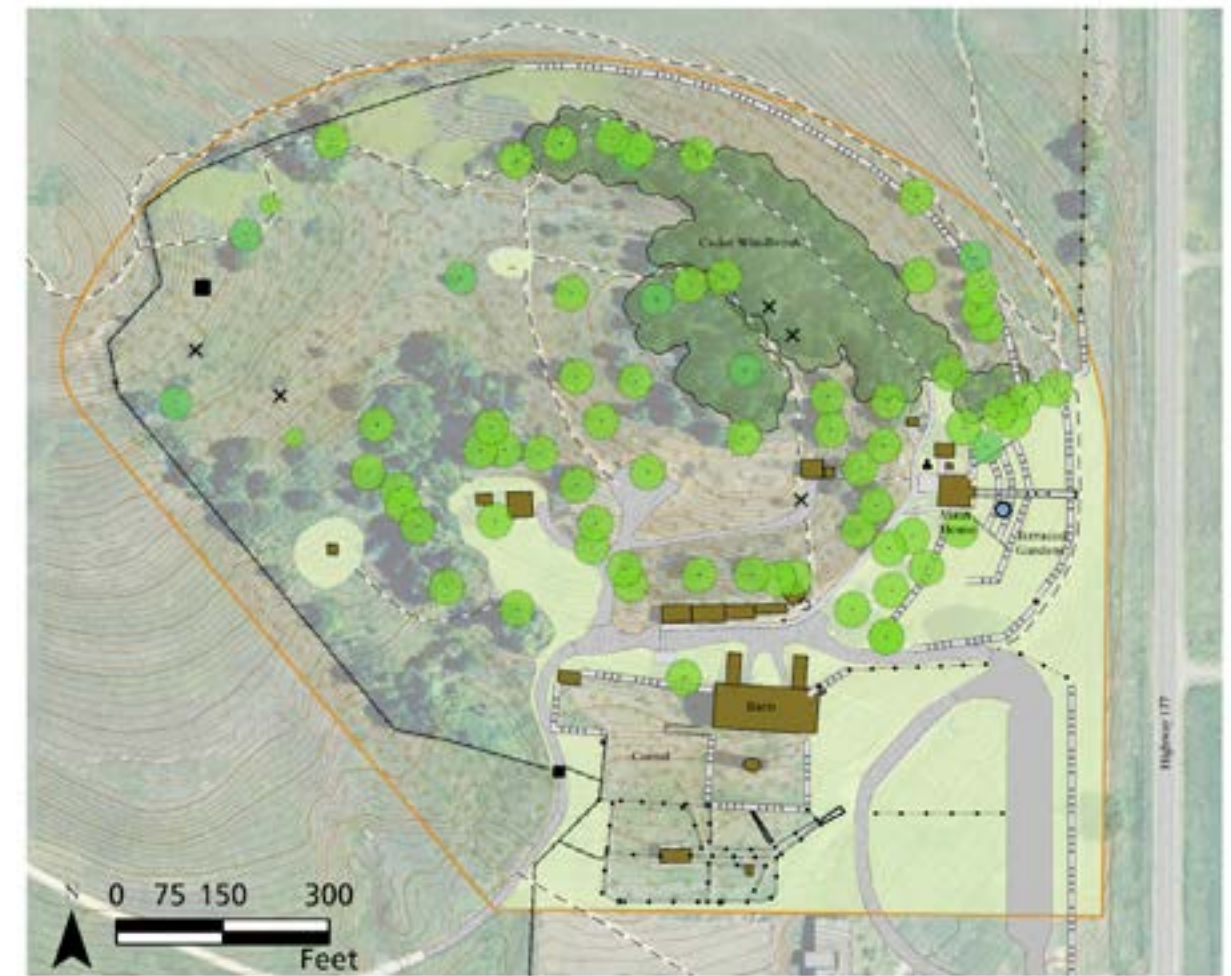


Figure 4-1. Area of Potential Effects for the 2024 HPPD and CCTP (Vireo, 2024).

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CHAPTER 5: 2026 RECOMMENDED TREATMENT APPROACH

VALUE METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP

As part of the schematic design process for Project TAPR 334923 ‘Rehabilitate Lantry Area and Spring Hill Barn,’ a Value Methodology (VM) Workshop was conducted by STRATA Architecture on August 22nd and 23rd. This virtual meeting included key project stakeholders from the NPS, The Nature Conservancy, and Denver Service Center (DSC) as well as park staff and the consultant team (See Appendix). During this VM Workshop, a Benefits by Park Priority matrix was developed in order to prioritize funding and establish a scope of work. Rehabilitation was the approach used to develop updated treatments for the site, building maintenance and repair scopes of work, preserving as much original material and character-defining features as possible. High priority was given to projects that are crucial in preserving the most vulnerable and historically significant cultural resources.

In keeping with the treatment approach of rehabilitation identified in the 2004 CLR, the Park determined that long term stabilization of the Deer Park Place Barn was necessary to provide protection of a National Historic Landmark property. Other priorities established during the workshop included replacement of the Spring Hill Barn fire protection system, providing Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standard-(ABAAS) compliant site access to the 2nd floor of the Spring Hill Barn by adding a connection to the existing compliant route, and the demolition of the cistern to provide access for repairs to the historic barn.

The complete scope of identified projects addresses systems and building elements that have reached the end of their life cycles and represents an estimated \$11.48 million of deferred maintenance and repair needs. This is also necessary to bring the facilities up to an acceptable condition to comply with structural, fire, and accessibility codes and standards. The systems addressed by the proposed projects should not require major recapitalization or modernization for the next 50 years.

BASIS OF DESIGN REPORT

The Basis of Design Report was issued as part of the Schematic Design process in December 2024. The report outlines the project scope of work for the Preserve as well as the benefits, cultural resource compliance, required permitting and the construction impact of the project. The AE Team provided Design Development and Construction Documents in 2025 to address the full scope of work for construction anticipated in 2027. All work will be reviewed through the Section 106 process with the Kansas State Historic Preservation Office.

CHAPTER 6: 2026 TREATMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of the Project TAPR 334923 ‘Rehabilitate Lantry Area and Spring Hill Barn,’ recommended treatments for Management Zones 4 and 6 are categorized by feature type applicable to each management zone.

MANAGEMENT ZONE 4 - Z BAR/SPRING HILL RANCH HEADQUARTERS

The Spring Hill Ranch Barn (Figure 6-1), part of Management Zone 4, is a key historic feature at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, and maintaining and repairing the structure is crucial to preserve the historic character of the ranch. The following treatment recommendations for the Barn as well as the surrounding landscape were identified in the Basis of Design Report and prioritized by the 2024 Value Methodology Workshop.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

- Adding code compliant interior stairs between the first and second floors in the existing stair location and upgrade to the existing west ramped entrance
- Excavation and water-proofing of limestone foundation walls
- The option to improve the visitor experience by opening part of the third floor for exhibits and adding an interior stair between the second and



Figure 6-1. Eastern and southern facade of the Spring Hill Barn (Vireo, 2024).



Figure 6-2. Existing cistern (Affinis, 2024).

- third floors
- Replacing all emergency lighting as well as electrical service, distribution, fire suppression system, fire alarm, and security systems
- Replace the existing roof with in-kind asphalt shingles
- Repair gutters and install downspout extensions
- Remove the cistern to allow for building repairs, and reconstruct a similar form in the same location (Figure 6-2)
- Overall building maintenance and repairs to masonry, windows, door, and exterior trim and ramps

UTILITIES

Site

- Replace a 6" FPD line to accommodate the fire suppression system improvements
- Replace an existing hydrant and service line to the west paddock with PVC and a frost free hydrant
- Remove select non-historic overhead lines and bury some live electric lines (Some critical overhead lines from the period of significance will remain, but will not be energized)
- A new area inlet and 12" HDPE pipe will replace an existing PVC drain by the ABAAS parking northwest of the barn
- Install an underdrain along the northern wall of the barn
- Connect downspouts to an HDPE roof drain and new area inlet
- Demo the remaining abandoned 6" gravity water service at the Spring Hill Pump House

Building

- Disconnect and remove existing wet pipe fire water service, dry pipe valve assembly, and pancake air compressor
- Provide new dry pipe sprinkler system to serve the entire barn, including all necessary piping, pumps, fuel tanks, and heat exchanger
- New electrical panelboard
- New security system
- New fire alarm system
- Replace existing lightning protection system

CIRCULATION

- Construct a new sidewalk to connect existing accessible parking to the northwest second floor entry of the barn (Figure 6-3)
- Add gravel walk along northern parking lot leading to the Visitor's Center (Figure 6-4)



Figure 6-3. Access path to the second floor of the Spring Hill Ranch Barn (Vireo, 2024).



Figure 6-4. New gravel walk along northern parking lot (Vireo, 2024).



Figure 6-5. Deer Park Place Barn southern facade (Vireo, 2024).

MANAGEMENT ZONE 6- DEER PARK PLACE

The Deer Park Place site encompasses three historic barn structures, as well as an access drive adjacent to private property and deteriorating historic wooden fencing and gates.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

DEER PARK PLACE BARN - HS301

Deer Park Place Barn is a contributing structure within the 1997 NHL nomination, and is located in Management Zone 6. The barn is in a state of accelerated degradation and is in imminent danger of collapse (Figures 6-5 and 6-6). An emergency stabilization project for the south two bays was undertaken in November 2024. Other recommended treatments include:

- Stabilize and rehabilitate the barn to offer visitor interpretation and some storage for park staff. The barn would not be fully ABAAS accessible due to elevation changes across the first floor.
- Reconstruction of Bays 5 and 6
- Repair and replacement of deteriorated wood siding
- Structural repairs to framing
- Foundation replacement
- Demolition of interior concrete
- Reconstruction of the cupolas
- Replace roof with corrugated roofing



Figure 6-6. Deer Park Place Barn eastern facade (Vireo, 2024).

URSCHEL POULTRY HOUSE - HS302

Dating from the 1920-30's, the poultry house is a contributing structure within the 1997 NHL nomination and is in generally fair condition. Recommended treatments include:

- Rehabilitation of the roof and gable structures
- Exterior masonry repairs
- Rehabilitation and replacement of windows and exterior doors
- Repair of the end gable wood-framed walls
- Restoration of the chicken doors



Figure 6-7. Urschel Poultry House (Vireo, 2024).

URSCHEL TACK BARN - HS303

The Tack Barn (Figure 6-8) is a contributing structure within the period of local significance for the draft 2024 National Register (NR) nomination. The structure is currently utilized by the Park for storage of equipment and materials. Treatment recommendations include:

- Foundation underpinning
- Repointing
- Repairs to the concrete floor slabs
- Roof truss and framing repairs
- Replacing seam roof with seam galvalume roof
- Restoration and replacement of windows and doors



Figure 6-8. Urschel Tack Barn (Vireo, 2024).

UTILITIES

DEER PARK PLACE BARN

- New electrical service and panelboard
- New LED light fixtures
- Removal of existing unused wiring and install new devices
- Replace existing lightning protection

URSCHEL POULTY HOUSE

- Remove unused wiring

URSCHEL TACK BARN

- Demolition of existing hydrant, water heater, cast-iron sink, gas-fired heaters and existing propane service
- New freeze-proof wall hydrant
- New lightning protection

CIRCULATION

- Add two concrete ABAAS accessible parking spaces
- New accessible concrete walk connecting Deer Park Place Barn to the new parking
- New reinforced concrete aprons at the Tack Barn to allow for maintenance vehicle traffic
- Stabilized soil path within Deer Park Place Barn

SMALL SCALE FEATURES

- Repair existing wooden four-rail fence
- Replace missing sections of four-rail fence in-kind with historic fence
- Fabricate and install six new custom gates inspired by historic design
- Erect a new fence to delineate boundary of private property



Figure 6-9. Existing four-rail fence (Vireo, 2024).



Figure 6-10. Existing four-rail fence to remain (Affinis, 2024).



Figure 6-11. Existing steel gate to be replaced with custom swing gate (Vireo, 2025)

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