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## News Release

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### **Secretary Salazar Marks Establishment of Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area**

WICHITA, KS—Today, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar joined conservation leadership, elected officials and other partners to announce the creation of the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area (FHLCA), a new unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area is the product of efforts by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, private landowners, and other agencies and partners to protect a unique and highly diverse area in eastern Kansas known as the Flint Hills Tallgrass Region.

“I am honored to stand with the diverse and visionary partners who are leading the effort to conserve the working landscapes and natural resources of the Flint Hills for future generations,” said Secretary Salazar. “I am especially proud that the first new refuge created under this Administration is the result of a partnership between governments, private landowners, and private organizations, all of whom recognize the vital role agriculture plays in stewarding our nation’s fish and wildlife resources. The Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area will serve as a living example of how wildlife conservation and ranching can successfully go hand in hand.”

Today, less than 4 percent of the once-vast tallgrass prairie remains; nearly 80 percent of what remains, lies within the Flint Hills of eastern Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma. The purpose of the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area is to help maintain the integrity of tallgrass prairie wildlife habitat, stream water quality, and the rich agricultural heritage of the Flint Hills by acquiring and protecting up to 1.1 million acres of habitat through voluntary, perpetual conservation easements. These conservation easements will protect habitat for more than 100

species of grassland birds and 500 plant species, and ensure the region's sustainable ranching culture - which directly supports conservation of the tallgrass prairie – will continue.

Service conservation easements are binding legal agreements that typically prohibit subdivision and commercial development activities, but allow for continued agricultural uses such as livestock grazing and haying. Under conservation easements, land ownership and property rights, including control of public access, remain with participating landowners. In addition, participating properties would remain on local tax rolls.

"The Flint Hills has a strong and rich history of preserving the ranching heritage and the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's conservation easement program will provide a voluntary opportunity to preserve this heritage for future generations," said Mike Collinge, a Flint Hills rancher.

The project boundary includes almost 45,000 acres of existing conservation areas managed by The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ranchland Trust of Kansas, (an affiliate of the Kansas Livestock Association), and Kansas Land Trust. For more information about the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area, including the land protection plan and associated NEPA documents, please visit: [www.fws.gov/flinthills](http://www.fws.gov/flinthills)

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