

Smokey Valley Ranch

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Web Page:<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/kansas/preserves/art63.html>

Location within Domain: Latitude: 38° 53' 24 N, Longitude: 101° 5' 24 W

History: Smoky Valley Ranch (SVR) has been operated primarily for cattle or sheep grazing for most of the past century. The Nature Conservancy of Kansas acquired the property in 1999 for conservation purposes, and continues to operate it as a working beef cattle ranch, with some bison grazing. Importantly, TNC has established a goal to expand the 1999 250-acre black-tailed prairie dog colony complex to 2,000 acres. The 16,700-acre site has included limited crop land in the past, but all has been re-established in permanent cover of semi-native plant communities.

Key Characteristics: Vegetation – Located in the Chalk Bluffs site of the Central Shortgrass Prairie, the main natural plant communities of SVR are shortgrass prairie and a riparian corridor along the Smoky Hill River channel. The ecosystem is dominated by native short grasses, including more than 30 species, and associated forbs, totaling more than 300 plant species. Climate – The climate of SVR is typical of semi-arid high plains, with annual precipitation averaging about 20 inches and temperatures ranging from -18 C to 38 C. Soils and landforms – Soils are principally derived from alluvium and wind-reworked sediments eroded from local sedimentary rock formations. Predominant ecological sites on SVR, as characterized by USDA, are Limy Upland, Loamy Upland, Chalk Flats, Sandy Lowland, and Shale Breaks. The topography is gently to steeply rolling, with some rock outcrops and steep ravines. Administration - The site is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy of Kansas, Topeka, KS.

Existing Infrastructure: SVR is the site of several ongoing research projects sponsored by universities and government agencies. Facilities on site include a newly installed NOAA meteorological station. The ranch entails numerous historical and archeological features and includes a historic stone house, shop visitor center, barn and other structures. It is also the site of adult and youth education programs. The site is generally accessible via improved public roads and is within 100 miles of laboratory facilities at Ft. Hays State University and within 250 miles of CSU.

Facilities: No on-site structures; year around road access.

Elevation: 860-890 m