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### **Beach Museum organizes project to digitally preserve noted Smithsonian Institute traveling exhibition on tallgrass prairies**

MANHATTAN — When artist/photographer Patricia DuBose Duncan put together a national traveling exhibition on tallgrass prairies, she was widely credited with helping draw attention to the need to preserve the dwindling ecosystem.

Now a project organized by Kansas State University's Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art is preserving the exhibit Duncan designed more than 40 years ago to raise awareness about tallgrass prairies. These prairies are home to unique plant and animal species and soil microbiomes. Scientists estimate that only 4 percent of the nation's tallgrass prairies are left today, which includes the Konza Prairie Biological Station near Manhattan, a National Science Foundation Long-Term Ecological Research site administered by the Nature Conservancy and Kansas State University.

Living in Kansas City in the late 1960s and 1970s, Duncan formed friendships with researchers such as E. Raymond Hall, a zoologist, at the University of Kansas, and Lloyd Hulbert, an ecologist, at Kansas State University. They and others helped her understand the importance of the prairie and the urgency of an effort to ensure that parts of it would be protected. Duncan began to use her camera to tell this story and rally support for preservation. Over time, she convinced other artists and prominent figures to share her vision. Photojournalist, author and filmmaker Gordon Parks was one; former Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall was another.

From 1971-1976, with support from the Hallmark Corp. in Kansas City and other benefactors, and under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Duncan designed a traveling exhibition. "The Tallgrass Prairie: An American Landscape" eventually traveled to all 50 states and drew the attention of both the public and legislators. In 1996, U.S. Sen. Nancy Landon Kassebaum Baker of Kansas introduced successful legislation to create the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve near Strong City, Kansas.

The 40 panels from Duncan's Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition most recently have been stored at the Riley County Historical Museum in Manhattan. To preserve these historic artifacts, the Beach Museum of Art organized an effort to capture them digitally. Staff members from the Beach and Riley County museums worked with David Mayes, Kansas State University photographer, to make a high-resolution image of each panel. The Beach Museum plans to offer these images to the public along with a large number of resources about the Konza Prairie, the museum's regionally focused art collection and its curated garden of native plants called The Meadow.

The panels will be featured through an interactive touch-screen table that will be installed in the gallery-level lobby of the museum in spring 2015. Kansas State University's Prairie Studies Initiative, landscape architecture and regional & community planning department and the Student Government Association's Green Action Fund have partnered to develop the project.

On Oct. 9, the Beach Museum welcomed Duncan and her husband, architect Herb Duncan, for a celebration of her work as artist and environmental leader. Standing before "Red Prairie and Bison," a large painting rendered with brilliant cadmium red that was a gift to the Beach Museum from Sen. Kassebaum Baker, Duncan shared memories with an audience of museum and McCain Auditorium supporters. The evening culminated with a private performance for the group by Native American flute master Robert Mirabal and the String Quartet Ethel in the old stone barn at the university's Konza Prairie Biological Station.

The Beach Museum holds 98 works — prints, paintings, and photographs — by Duncan in its permanent collection. The Duncans now make their home in Topsham, Maine.