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Thursday, Feb. 27, 2014

**New initiative combines arts and sciences to study the prairie**

MANHATTAN -- Located in the northern part of the Flint Hills, the largest remaining area of unplowed tallgrass prairie in North America, and home to the Konza Prairie Long-Term Ecological Research Station, Kansas State University is a major hub of research on this important ecosystem.

Now this research is taking a new direction through a collaborative venture of university faculty, staff and students. The Prairie Studies Initiative will bring disciplines in the arts and sciences together to explore cultural and ecological dimensions of the prairie, understand challenges to sustaining grassland ecosystems, and envision the future of these important landscapes.

"The Prairie Studies Initiative explores themes of wildness, managed landscapes, human culture and creativity," said Adrianne Russell, public programs coordinator at Kansas State University's Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, a major organizer of the initiative.

"This initiative aims to strengthen dialogue and inspire creative scholarship among those engaged in understanding the natural ecosystems, history, culture and livelihoods of the prairie, and to employ the arts to make this research meaningful to a wide public," said Katie Kingery-Page, assistant professor of Landscape Architecture.

The initiative organizes both professional and public events that pair leaders in the arts with leaders in natural and social sciences and the humanities to stimulate communication and creative research among scholars. More broadly, said K-State’s Director of Sustainability Ben Champion, the initiative fosters greater understanding on the part of the public about complex issues central to the health of the prairie.

"Through actively engaging the arts with science, the initiative aims to reveal both shared modes of inquiry and the value of the differences that shape these perspectives," said Linda Duke, director of the Beach Museum.

A public kickoff for the Prairie Studies Initiative will be March 11 and 12.

Activities will start with a screening of a segment of nature photographer Michael Forsberg's "Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild" series. The theme of this screening is "Water" and will be followed by discussion with Kansas State University's Tim Keane, professor of landscape architecture and a faculty affiliate of the Urban Water Institute at K-State Olathe, and Elizabeth Dodd, university distinguished professor of English, writer and poet. The screening will be 6-8 p.m. Tuesday, March 11 in 101 Bluemont Hall.

On Wednesday, March 12, the kickoff continues with the screening of a second segment of the "Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild" series. This segment will focus on “Land” and will be followed by discussion with Tim Crews, director of research and an ecologist at the Land Institute in Salina; Shreepad Joglekar, assistant professor of art at K-State; and John Briggs, K-State professor of biology and director of the Konza Prairie Biological Station. The screening will be 6-8 p.m. in the UMB Theater at the Beach Museum of Art.

The "Great Plains: America's Living Wild" documentary series follows Forsberg as he examines the remaining wildness in the Great Plains of North America. The documentary is based on Forsberg's book of the same name.

"The Prairie Studies Initiative at K-State is using this documentary to announce itself as a catalyst for cross-disciplinary research and the sharing of discoveries among scholars, students and the public in order to better understand prairie," John Briggs said.

The documentary screenings are free and the public is welcome.

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