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# Airport Authority to Sell Nine-Mile Prairie to N.U.

Lincoln (AP) — The Lincoln Airport Authority has agreed to sell 229 acres of virgin prairie — known as the Nine-Mile Prairie — to the University of Nebraska, virtually securing its preservation.

"I'm sure future generations will be thankful for the actions of the board today," said Ernest Rousek, Wachiska Audubon Society member who has led the fight to save the land from the plow.

The board is giving the university the option to buy the prairie for \$600 an acre by Jan. 1, 1983. The agreement includes restrictions on any commercial or residential development on the site and allows for navigation, drainage and maintenance easements.

The tract, located northwest of the Lincoln Municipal Airport, has been leased to the Audubon Society for \$4,600 a year.

For the last 50 years the university has used the prairie for educational,

research and public service purposes, and the intent would remain the same, UNL attorney Dick Wood told the board.

Wood said purchase funds would come from private sources, including the N.U. Foundation. Should the money not be raised before Jan. 1, the university would not be able to exercise its option, he said.

In 1979 the board approved a resolution recognizing the uniqueness of the virgin prairie in any future disposition of the land.

Two years ago the Audubon Society offered \$61,640 for the prairie, but that bid was rejected by the board. Rousek then went the legislative route, but the authority still shied away from the sale. Early this year, Rousek began exploring the possibility of transferring title to N.U. to facilitate the purchase.

But the enterprise didn't look terribly promising despite a sympathetic act of the Legislature, and continued sympathetic review and stalling by the Airport Authority. Not until Tuesday.

It's possible the authority might come under some criticism for settling on the \$600 per acre sale figure. Reportedly, the high bid for a nearby section of land in a recent auction was around \$800 per acre. Yet the negotiated price is hardly a public rip-off, and the public will be the perpetual beneficiary of the Nine-Mile Prairie.

Strikes the Lincoln Journal as a good deal all the way around.

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## Air authority will sell prairie to N.U.

By L. Kent Wolgamott  
*Journal Staff Writer*  
Nine-Mile Prairie just northeast of Lincoln will remain virgin and be spared the plow or the blade so that future generations can know what Nebraska once was.

The Lincoln Airport Authority Tuesday decided to sell the tract to the University of Nebraska for research, education and public service, ending a lengthy fight that began in the 1960s to preserve the land near Lincoln Municipal Airport. By its 3-0 vote the authority accepted the university's offer of \$600 an acre for the 229.5 acre prairie with the provision that the land not be used for commercial or residential development.

However, the university will be allowed to construct buildings for equipment storage and to accommodate students on the property, probably on about 20 acres of the land that have been plowed in the past and no longer are virgin prairie.

Board members Don Geis, Fran Mihard and Harry Amen voted for the sale. Authority members Richard Joyce and Fred Eiche were absent. Joyce and Eiche have been the two board members most hesitant about selling the land.

In approving the university's proposal the board went against the advice of its attorney, Chauncey Barney, who said it should get a higher price for the land and should take steps to ensure that the land remains virgin prairie.

However, board member Don Geis

said that \$600 an acre probably is close

necessary to properly use the land.

Rousek said the Audubon Society would drop its attempts to purchase the prairie now that it is in university hands. The Legislature passed legislation in 1981 to help clear the way for the Audubon Society to purchase the land.

Rousek, who Geis said "has dedicated his life to that prairie" praised the authority for preserving the area, which is home to more than 200 species of plants and more than 30 kinds of birds, deer and small animals.

"I'm sure future generations are going to be thankful for the board's action today," Rousek said.

The sale approved Tuesday morning must be finalized by Barney and Wood.

Authority budget on page 6

## Native grassland saved (we hope)

Ernie Rousek pegged it rightly. Future generations surely will have cause to thank the three Lincoln Airport Authority board members who Tuesday agreed to sell 229.5 acres of mainly native prairie to the University of Nebraska, which institution essentially will permanently preserve the tract.

Specifically, what authority directors Harry Amen, Don Geis and Fran Minard voted was to grant university officials an option — running until next Jan. 1 — to purchase the so-called Nine-Mile Prairie north of Lincoln for \$600 an acre.

The university's plan, now, is to raise the required \$137,700 from private sources, or seek to apply available assets of the University of Nebraska Foundation. No state funds are available for making this investment in maintenance of a very precious Nebraska environmental resource.

Until leadership in the university family commendably focused itself upon the arrangement effected Tuesday, Rousek and associates in the Wachiska Audubon Society were engaged in a continuing save-the-land dialog with the Airport Authority.

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