National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received JUN | 8 | 1986 date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Nam	e			
historic	N/A			
and/or common	Nine-Mile Prairie		(NeHB	S # LC00-75)
2. Loca	ation			
street & number	N/A		N	✓Anot for publication
city, town	Lincoln	X vicinity of		
state	Nebraska code	031 county	Lancaster	code 109
3. Clas	sification			
Category district building(s) structure _X site object	Ownership public _X_ private both Public Acquisition N/A in process being considered	Status occupied unoccupied work in progress Accessible yes: restricted yes: unrestricted no	Present Use agriculture commercial _X educational entertainment government industrial military	museum park park private residence religious X scientific transportation other:
4. O wn	er of Proper	ty		
name	University of Nebra	aska Foundation		
street & number	P.O. Box 30186			
city, town	Lincoln	N/A vicinity of	state	Nebraska
5. Loca	ation of Lega		on	
courthouse, regi	stry of deeds, etc. Lancas	ster County Courth	ouse	
street & number	555 South 10th Stre	et vii		
city, town	Lincoln		state	Nebraska
6. Rep	resentation	in Existing	Surveys	
title Nebraska	Historic Sites Surv	reý has this pr	operty been determined eli	gible?yes _Xr
date	On-going		federal X stat	e county loc
depository for su	urvey records Nebraska	State Historical		,
city, town	Lincoln		state	Nebraska

7. Description

	Check one \underline{X} original site $\underline{N/A}$ moved date $\underline{N/A}$
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Nine-Mile Prairie is located in rural Lancaster County, Nebraska, situated northwest of Lincoln, the state capital. The tract of native prairie is bounded by plowed agricultural land to the east, west and south and by an old ammunition storage facility to the north. The irregularly-shaped tract of rolling land is a typical upland tall-grass prairie with a small number of trees in ravines, and numerous species of plant and animal life. The nomination consists of 228 acres, that portion of the native Nine-Mile Prairie that remains intact and retains its integrity.

Nine-Mile Prairie, a tract of land consisting of 228 acres of native prairie, is located northwest of Lincoln, the state capital of Nebraska. Situated in a rural setting, the prairie is surrounded by plowed agricultural land to the south, west and east and bounded on the north by a World War II bomb storage Nine-Mile Prairie was so named in the 1930's because of its location exactly nine miles from the Lincoln city square. The irregular shaped tract of land is predominantly covered with blue-stem or tall-grass prairie of upland sites (not to be confused with mixed-grass prairies and short-grass prairies, which are still available in abundance from central Nebraska westward), and is the largest intact virgin prairie in eastern Nebraska, and one of the largest such prairies in the prairie states (.e.g. Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma). A small number of trees (cottonwoods, willows) are found in area ravines. Flora consists of approximately 350 species of higher plants, including two rare orchids, and fauna comprises some 80 species of birds, (no data at hand on numbers of nesting species). Presently no information on the numbers of reptiles, mammals or insects is available, but there is evidence of their existance in typical abundance for a prairie of this The terrain consists of rolling slopes facing in all directions, three spring-fed streams, and optimum drainage (no natural standing water). The soil is of loessial nature (windblown deposits) and lies over glacial deposits. thousands of years ago, the prairie has changed and evolved without interference by man since that time. The prairie was first used as an educational and research site in the 1920's, and has continued to be studied since that time. The University of Nebraska Foundation purchased the prairie from the Lincoln Airport Authority in 1983 in order to perpetually preserve its character and integrity as a virgin prairie. Since its purchase, the prairie has been used for research and study by thousands of college, secondary and elementary school students.

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root systems knit together and responded to climate. Weaver regarded the prairies as similar to a written record:

Nature is an open book for those who care to read. Each grass-covered hillside is a page on which is written the history of the past, conditions of the present, and predictions of the future. (Adams, 1984, p. 9-10).

When Weaver began his root studies, much of the tall-grass prairie lands had been disturbed by man in previous decades, and the 1920's brought even greater destruction. This cultural encroachment found disfavor with Weaver as he viewed the prairie lands as the best available means of conserving the soil and its fertility (Adam, 1984, p. 10). Studying plant root systems in various prairie communities his work constituted the first scientifically accurate reports on prairie flora.

Weaver had three test prairies near Lincoln, and numerous others elsewhere in the state and Great Plains. The other two near to Lincoln were known as Black's Pasture and Umberger's Pasture, both named for the farmers upon whose land they were located. Both are extant but in poor condition. The only tallgrass prairie site studied extensively by Weaver that retains its integrity is Nine-Mile. Further, it was at Nine-Mile that Weaver and his students performed his famous trench studies, wherein they dug deep and painstakingly careful trenches to observe the rooting morphology of prairie plants. That study is a classic in plant ecology. The photographs they took and the drawings they made are still being reproduced in textbooks. exhumed entire prairie plant roots sytems intact and mounted them in glass cases. The University still has these, and they are much sought after by various researchers and by museums for display. Since prepared, no one has performed similar work, and they stand as the definitive work on adaptations of prairie plants for seeking water in deep prairie soils.

Weaver's work has been most influential in scientific, rather than government or private circles. His papers are still cited and his concepts are still widely accepted. Of course ecology has developed enormously since Weaver's time, but his work established experimental and analytical methods that are fundamental in ecological work. He was among the first to go beyond descriptive analysis to develop interpretive research. His research on the effects of the 1930's drought are the definitive efforts on the topic and are still widely cited.

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The Great Drought devastated midwestern agriculture in 1934, the worst year of the Great Depression, when the water level had fallen to such an extreme low that vegetation could not reach it. Many regions of the midcontinental grasslands lost from 50-95% of their basal plant cover by 1935 (Tobey, 1955, p. 191). economic times forced farmers to shift their capital investment into cattle raising to compensate for the dropping prices of wheat. This shift led to a greater need for pasturage, thus overgrazing, precisely at the time the drought had severely weakened the grasslands. As a result, it was pasturage that the drought first destroyed. During the years of drought (c. 1933-42) the grassland school of scientists was preoccupied with the crisis, carrying on intensive scientific research on the problems of range management and grassland conservation. Dr. Weaver became the leader in the academic research effort in the struggle to save the Great Plains. Weaver, above all other individuals, was responsible for the training of more academic scientists in the study of the drought crisis. Weaver's research and his collaboration with Clements provided a substantial portion of the disciplinary knowledge needed to contend with the drought (Tobey, 1955, p. 192).

Under Weaver's guidance, over forty doctorates in plant ecology were completed at the University of Nebraska (more than any other University). Many of these graduates were then hired by United States government agencies (e.g. U. S. Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Forest Service), helping to develop the policies and methods used today in soil conservation and range management (Adams, 1984, p. 13).

Though much of the original tall-grass prairie in eastern Nebraska has long since been converted into agricultural croplands, this nomination recognizes that part of the original Nine-Mile Prairie that remains intact as virgin prairie land. 228 acre parcel was acquired by the Department of Defense as part of a fenced buffer zone around a World War II bomb storage depot. When the base was deactiviated it was sold to the City of The Lincoln Airport Authority assumed management of the Lincoln. In 1981 the Nebraska legislature passed new legislation allowing the Airport Authority to sell the land to an institution which would preserve the land as original or virgin In 1983 the University Foundation acquired the property (Adam, 1984, p. 13, 15). Today the prairie still functions as a research and educational site, making it possible to compare scientific studies done 50 and more years ago with those per-

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formed today. Organizations that regularly use Nine-Mile Prairie for teaching include: University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Department of Agronomy, School of Biological Sciences), University of Nebraska-Omaha (Department of Biology), Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Doane College in Crete, and various public schools. Groups that use the prairie for nature study and conservation ecology include the Wachiska Audubon Society in Lincoln, Bluestem Sierra Club in Lincoln, and the Omaha Audubon Society in Omaha. Currently there are five research projects (flora and fauna) underway at the site.

A former student, Dr. A. Stoddard, in writing a review of one of Dr. Weaver's books said:

There comes occasionally to every scientific field a man who is so enthusiastic, and so devoted to his work that it becomes his very way of life. To him nature seems to unfold her secrets in response to his devotion; his ability to understand and communicate with nature becomes an inspiration to students and fellow workers alike. Such a man is John Ernest Weaver in the field of American grassland ecology.

(Lincoln Journal, June 10, 1966, p. 4).

Nine-Mile Prairie gains significance as the most important site directly associated with Dr. Weaver's career. His University office is unrecognizable today, lacking in historic integrity, while his residence in Lincoln lacks specific associations with his fieldwork, research and writing. Today Nine-Mile is retained in part as a monument to Weaver, representing his devoted and invaluable work in behalf of the Midland prairie.

8. Significance

1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric agriculture architecture art commerce communications	community planning conservation economics X education engineering exploration/settlement	music	religion X science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1917–36	Builder/Architect N/A	<i>I</i> .	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Nine-Mile Prairie is significant in the areas of science and education for its associations with the life of Dr. John Ernest Weaver (Criterion B), a University of Nebraska professor known as the "founding father of modern plant ecology." Dr. Weaver became internationally known and respected for his work in the field of plant ecology, authoring or co-authoring more than 100 technical papers and a dozen books to become the world's top authority on prairie vegetation. The period of significance (1917-1936) is derived from the time Weaver began his initial study of the prairie, through 1936, the last year in which the property continues to meet the 50 year criterion.

Nine-Mile Prairie is significant in the area of science as a principal site for the pioneering studies of plant ecology by Dr. J. E. Weaver and the University of Nebraska. As one of the largest tracts of virgin prairie remaining in eastern Nebraska, the prairie attains significance for its associations with Dr. Weaver (Criterion B) who performed much of his work on this virgin tract of prairie land, the only site in the state that holds such a long history of continuous scientific study. The property also attains significance in the area of education as the site used for University of Nebraska student resarch projects starting in the 1920's under Dr. Weaver's direction, and nature study by numerous public and private individuals. The prairie has not only served (and continues to serve) as a useful and invaluable teaching and research tool, but also as a part of the area's natural heritage.

John Ernest Weaver was born May 5, 1884. He graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1909 and then received his doctor's degree from the University of Minnesota. In 1915 he joined the faculty of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and began a career which was to last over 35 years there. His career was to make the University a leader for over 20 years in the scientific field of plant ecology. Starting in the summer of 1917 Weaver, who was vigorously studying prairie plant roots at that time, began digging grave-like pits on prairies around Lincoln, excavating individual plant roots like an archaeologist, studying how

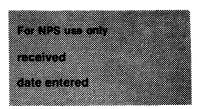
9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

GPO 894-785

10.	Geograp	hical Data		
Acreac	ge of nominated prope	erty 228 acres		
	angle name <u>Emeral</u>			Quadrangle scale 1:24000
UTMR	eferences			
A 1		4 ₁ 5 2 ₁ 6 3 ₁ 8 ₁ 0 Northing	B 114 Zone	6 8 14 9 17 16 4 15 2 15 7 18 11 Easting Northing
c 1,4	4 6 8,3 3,3,8	4 15 2 15 7 18 11	D 114	6 8 3 3 3 3 8 4 5 2 6 4 0 5
F			F	
G			н []	
Verba	l boundary descrip	tion and justification		
	See contir	nuation sheet.		
List a	II states and count	ies for properties overl	apping state or co	unty boundaries
state	N/A	code	county	code
state	N/A	code	county	code
11.	Form Pr	epared By		
name/t	itte Soo contin	nuation sheet		
	tte bee contin	idacion sheet		
organiz	zation		da	te March 1985
street &	& number		tel	ephone
city or	town		sta	ate
12.	State Hi	storic Pres	ervation (Officer Certification
The ev	aluated significance o	of this property within the	state is:	
	X national	state	local	
665), 1	hereby nominate this		he National Register a	ric Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89– and certify that it has been evaluated vice.
State H	listoric Preservation (Officer signature	es W / lans	m
title]	Director, Nebras	ka State Historica	1 Society	date June 10, 1986
	NPS use only			0
	· ·	s property is included in t	he National Register	-
15	Peth Grovens			date 7/30/86
N Kee	eper of the National F		and the second s	///
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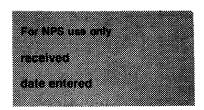
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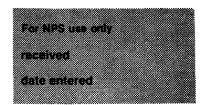
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Verbal Boundary Description

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A tract of land in the Northeast Quarter (NE1/4) of Section 2, Township 10 North, Range 5 east of the 6th P>M> Lancaster County, Nebraska, more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the southeast corner of the said NE 1/4 (an aluminum cap in a concrete monument stamped "LAFB C E AS-7"); thence with the east line of the said NE 1/4 which is assumed to bear north 00 10'32" east, a distance of 1113.35 feet; thence south 89 58'16" west, a distance of 211.90 feet; thence north 30 00'16" west, a distance of 89 58'16" west, a distance of 1248.29 feet; thence north 00 00'34" west, a distance of 411.54 feet; thence north 89 59'25" west in a line parallel with and 33.00 feet southerly from the north line of the said NE 1/4, a distance of 1814.29 feet to a point in the west line of said NE 1/4; thence south 00 09'08" west with the said west line, a distance of 2582.32 feet to the southwest corner of the said NE 1/4 (A #8 REBAR which lies 2.03 feet southerly from a concrete monument); thence south 89 29'12" east with the south line of the said NE 1/4, a distance of 2654 feet to the point of beginning; containing an area of 136.10 acres more or less; and a tract of land in the Northwest Quarter (NW 1/4) of Section 1, Township 10 North, Range 5 East of the 6th P.M., Lancaster County, Nebraska more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at the southwest corner of the said NW 1/4 (an aluminum cap in a concrete monument stamped "LAFB C E AS-7"); thence with the west line of the said NW 1/4 which is assumed to bear north 00 10' 32" East, a distance of 1113.35 feet; thence north 89 58' 16" east, a distance of 735.97 feet; thence north 60 10' 54" east, a distance of 1697.03 feet; thence south 89 24' 50" east, a distance of 450.26 feet to a point in the east line of the said NW 1/4; thence south 00 17' 37" west with the said east line a distance of 1958.88 feet to the southeast corner of the said NW 1/4 (A #8 REBAR which lies 7.88 feet southerly from a concrete monument); thence north 89 52' 22" west with the south line of the said NW 1/4, a distance of 2651.95 feet to the point of beginning; containing an area of 90.93 acres more or less.

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