A gift from the estate of Earl and Terri Youngmeyer will give researchers at Wichita State University access to a 4,600-acre working ranch in the Flint Hills.

The land includes diverse ecosystems that biology department chair Bill Hendry calls a magnificent resource for several of WSU’s programs, including biology, geology and anthropology.

“This is truly a unique and important piece of land,” Hendry said of the ranch located about 40 miles east of Wichita, near the town of Beaumont. “There is water on the property, original prairie and grassland, woodland. The opportunities are significant for our faculty who study birds, insects, vegetation, animals.”

The Youngmeyers reached out to Wichita State through the WSU Foundation nearly 20 years ago to talk about ways the university could help preserve and conserve the vast expanse of land after their deaths. They began making arrangements to open the Youngmeyer Ranch to faculty and researchers whose work could help protect its future.

Greg Houseman, associate professor of biology, said he and his colleagues are eager to study how different ranching practices can contribute to long-term conservation goals.

“Having access to a ranch of this magnitude is a tremendous resource for WSU to make important contributions to understanding how ranching and agricultural practices may influence sustainability and even the economics of these ranches,” Houseman said.

One of the more significant projects that could be undertaken is the study of how Kansas ranchers have traditionally used controlled burning to stimulate new growth and eliminate invasive species, Hendry said. Changes in the timing and methods of controlled burns could reduce smoke pollution and safety concerns, he said.

Wichita State already owns three nature reserves where biologists and other university scientists conduct research and experiments, including the 330-acre Ninnescah Reserve about 35 miles southwest of
Estate gift gives WSU researchers access to vast acreage in the Flint Hills

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Wichita near Viola. But all are much smaller than the Youngmeyer Ranch and ecologically different, Hendry said.

In addition to having access to the ranch for research projects, Wichita State also will get a share of income produced from the Youngmeyer Trust, including from cattle leases and oil and gas leases, said Mike Lamb, WSU Foundation vice president for planned and principal gifts. This revenue will help ensure that the property is properly maintained for years to come.

Earl Youngmeyer died in 2012 at the age of 88. He was a member of the WSU Foundation’s Society of 1895 and enjoyed following WSU basketball and baseball. Terri Youngmeyer died in 1999 at the age of 76.

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Media note: Photographs can be found at www.wichita.edu/foundationphotos.

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