The Osage Nation in Pahuska, Oklahoma, recently finalized the steps to acquire 40,000-plus acres of land from media mogul Ted Turner, returning the Osage County ancestral grasslands to the tribe.

Known as the Bluestem Ranch, this 43,000-acre parcel was sold to the Osage Nation by Turner, previously one of the top three landowners in the county that constitutes the Osage Nation’s former reservation. With this ownership change, the Nation will once again be one of the largest landowners in Osage County.

Principal Chief of the Osage Nation, Geoffrey M. Standing Bear, signed the final paperwork of the land purchase on in Bartlesville during the official document signoff. Standing Bear was joined for the historic closing at Musselman Abstract Company by Assistant Chief Raymond Red Corn and Byron Bighorse, CEO of Osage Casinos.

“We can think of no better learning environment for our children than these lands,” said Standing Bear of the purchase. “Land is central to the culture, traditions and history of the Osage people. We intend to keep the majority of the property as a working bison ranch, allowing us to connect our youth to nature.”

The tribe plans to strive to continue to preserve, protect and sustain the ranch land as a home to the bison that are sacred to the Osage. “We will need to engage in some profit-making activities to support our non-profit goals,” said Standing Bear.

“We have been discussing the possible hunting opportunities and what would be involved.”

The Nation won the bid to purchase the ranch on January 28, 2015, and entered a binding and confidential agreement to coordinate additional steps necessary to complete the transaction. The Osage News, official paper of the Nation, reported at that time that, “Osage (people) rejoiced from California to Pawhuska (upon news of the successful bid).”

“We are extremely pleased to reverse 200 years of loss of our lands,” said Red Corn in late January of the bid acceptance. Due to the nature of the sealed bid auction, the purchase price agreed upon between the Nation and Turner Enterprises, Inc. was not disclosed. Brokered by Standing Bear, Red Corn and Tim Tall Chief, Chairman of the Nation’s Tallgrass Economic Development team, and approved by the Fourth Osage Nation Congress, the bid was submitted to the Turner group on December 23 of 2015.

Projected revenues earned through the Nation’s gaming enterprises made the financing possible with financial partner Bank of Oklahoma. Included in the purchase would be all of the Bluestem Ranch lands and permanent improvements made thereon.

Turner noted in a letter to Chief Standing Bear that the Nation was the high bidder and the preferred buyer. Poignantly, Turner added, “It is my sincere hope that our transaction is the last time this land is ever sold and that the Osage Nation owns this land for all future generations.”

Called by some a “progressive ranch” for the conservation management practices employed, Bluestem is located between Fairfax and Pawhuska, south of Highway 60, at the epicenter of the tribal clan hometowns of Pawhuska, Hominy and Grayhorse. It was bought in 2001 by Turner, founder of the Cable News Network, who proceeded to acquire four contiguous properties owned by the Drummond family. To date the ranch has been used to raise more than 3,000 head of bison as well as cattle.

The Nation’s early 1900s land ownership approached 1.5 million acres. Prior to the bid for Bluestem, the Nation owned only seven percent of its original allotted lands, and those were in scattered parcels.

For more information about the Osage Nation, visit www.osagenation-nsn.gov.