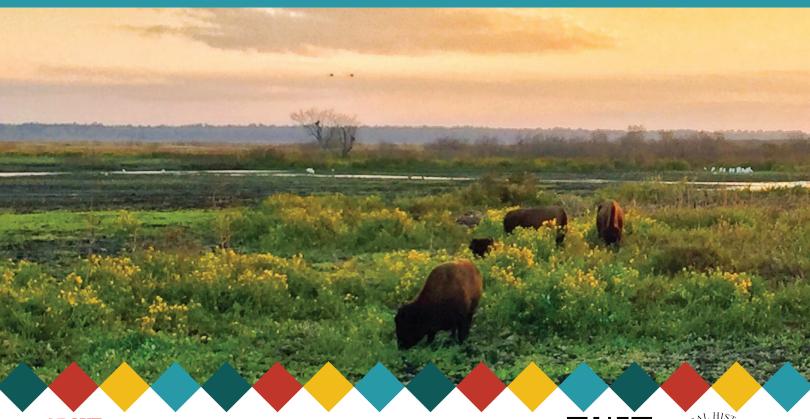# KING PAYNE OF PAYNE'S PRAIRIE

Paynes Prairie is a broad savannah and state park, just south of Gainesville, that offers an incredible glimpse into ancestral Florida. Wide grassy spaces and marshy woods are home to native birds, fish, alligators, and even bison who have only recently been reintroduced after being gone for two and a half centuries. Often untold, however, is how this region was named... not Paynes Prairie, but Payne's Prairie.

Payne (Snake Clan) was a prominent leader and spokesman among the Seminole communities of the 18th and 19th centuries. The son of Ahaya (Cowkeeper), he took on many of his father's responsibilities after his death in 1783. He would soon establish the community of Payne's Town on the southern end of the prairie. Over the next three decades he expanded on his father's cattle operations and brokered trade with the Spanish at St. Augustine. He negotiated and traded with Florida tribal communities as far away as Tallahassee, opposed joining the growing Creek Confederation, welcomed Africans who had escaped enslavement, and proposed creating a confederation of Florida tribes. Soon the Spanish and English records referred to him as "King Payne."

In 1812, the prosperity Payne helped build was threatened by expansionist American militias. Operating out of Georgia they sought to exploit the shrinking Spanish presence and claim Florida for the United States. Payne wanted to remain neutral in the war, but found himself out-voted by council. The Seminole allied with the Spanish, attacking the invading militias, and Payne himself joined the effort. In September, his soldiers trapped and routed a large contingent of Georgian militia men, a blow that helped to end what became known as the Patriot War, but Payne had taken a bullet early in the battle. He succumbed to his wounds four days later. Payne's Prairie is the land that he both lived and died for, and it is named in his memory.

ABOVE
American Bison graze in Paynes Prairie, Florida.
Photo courtesy Florida State Parks.