



BC **Grasslands**

"The voice for grasslands in British Columbia"

DECEMBER 2001

**Grasslands Under Siege —
Subdivision and Development**
The second of a three-part series
on threats to grasslands



The GCC

Established as a society in August 1999, the GCC is a strategic alliance of organizations and individuals, including government, range management specialists, ranchers, agrologists, grassland ecologists, First Nations, environmental groups, recreationists and grassland enthusiasts. This diverse group shares a common commitment to education, conservation and stewardship of British Columbia's grasslands.

The GCC Mission is to:

- foster greater understanding and appreciation for the ecological, social, economic and cultural importance of grasslands throughout BC;
- promote stewardship and sustainable management practices that will ensure the long-term health of BC's grasslands;
- promote the conservation of representative grassland ecosystems, species at risk and their habitats.

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Message from the Chair

By Bob Peart



My trusty dictionary defines *connection* as “being joined, being part of a larger thing, the logical linking together of ideas, affinity to a common vision and a group associated together because of common interest.”

This is exactly what the Grasslands Conservation Council is all about and has been trying to do over the last few years—connect and bring together people who share a larger and common interest that is the protection of BC's grassland communities!

One of the most important lessons that I have learned over the last few years has been the value of keeping working ranches working. I didn't thoroughly understand until recently how vital ranching can be for maintaining web-of-life connections and the vitality of the range. Not only can well-managed ranches be good for

nature, but they are also a force connecting the human community to socio-economic richness.

Smaller “ranchettes” and land parcels may serve the needs of a certain segment of society that is searching for rural flavour, peace and quiet, and a return to the wild. However, splitting the land into smaller parcels severs the connections that are necessary to maintain a variety of wildlife and habitat, and is a slow death to healthy grasslands.

The GCC was established to bring together people who love grasslands and to facilitate conversations about protecting BC's grasslands. We believe that keeping working ranches working is essential if we are to accomplish this goal.

In closing, I wish to once again acknowledge the hard work of Bruno Delesalle who is indefatigable in his pursuit of leading the GCC.

Threats to grasslands

What to expect in this issue

The population of BC is rising, fast.

The major urban centres of the province, mostly in the Lower Mainland, are filling to overflowing, and people are fleeing these major metropolitan cities in droves for the quiet solitude of their own little grassland lot where they can raise an acre of vegetables, maybe a few chickens, and one or two cows. Some of the major urban centres of the Interior like Vernon, Kamloops, 100 Mile House and Kelowna, still small enough to maintain a rural feel, yet big enough to have all the amenities, are experiencing rapid population growth. Rapid population growth, subdivision and development go hand in hand. New housing developments are escaping into the surrounding grassland hillsides like a newly introduced species of noxious weed that out-competes native vegetation, spreads rapidly, and, once established, is very difficult to control.

The grasslands of BC occupy a mere 1.5% of the province's land base. Unfortunately, most of these grassland ecosystems are often located in valley bottoms, and the gently rolling to flat morphology of the grasslands make them prime locations for housing developments and/or croplands.

The subdivision and development of BC's grasslands is a serious threat to the rich biodiversity of this province, our ranching heritage, and our environmental stability.

In this issue of *BC Grasslands* we look at subdivision and development, part two of our *Threats to Grasslands* series. You will read about the environmental, socio-economic, and political aspects of subdivision and development; options for preventing subdivision and development; and the first installment of a series exploring the Land Reserve Commission's role in conserving grasslands.

The Grasslands Conservation Council of BC considers subdivision and development a major threat to the long-term sustainability of BC's grasslands. Although there is no clear solution to this problem, it is clear that by opening up the channels of communication we can come up with proactive, innovative solutions that can ensure a future for one of BC's most endangered ecosystems.

Message from the Executive Director

By Bruno Delesalle



Growing Expectations a Challenge for the GCC

We have come a long way since August 1999 when the GCC was founded as a society. In August 2000, the GCC formalized a three-year Strategic Plan, and after much hard work, we have delivered on an ambitious work plan and have recently completed some key projects.

On the communication, education and extension front, the GCC has a new *BC Grasslands* website, an attractive grassland display, and continues to develop its *BC Grasslands* bi-annual publication, as well as organizing yearly *Sustaining Healthy Grasslands* symposiums. The Lac du Bois Grasslands will be home to three new grassland interpretive signs explaining the geology, ecology and history of that area. All of these efforts continue to build awareness of grasslands and provide tools to assist the GCC in collecting and disseminating grassland information around the province.

On the issue front, the GCC is addressing ATV licensing, weeds and the need for a provincial strategy, and the growing concern over development of grasslands and the future role of the Agricultural Land Reserve.

On the mapping and inventory front, the GCC is making good progress in mapping BC's grasslands and is well on its way in establishing the most comprehensive source of grassland information in the province. This in itself is a very significant endeavour.

There is no doubt that the GCC has made tremendous progress. Nevertheless, we have heard some distant rumblings that the GCC is not taking an active enough role in "fighting" key issues around the province, such as future development of grasslands in Vernon, the subdivision of Stump Lake Ranch, highway development in Kamloops, orchard and other agricultural development in the Okanagan, ATV impacts and the need for licensing, the weed invasion, and of course, forest encroachment. All of these issues are critically important and requests that the GCC actively address these issues in different regions are increasing. This presents a challenge.

Increased recognition that the GCC is a legitimate organization that can tackle various hot issues around the province reveals an important fact—we need a strong voice for grassland conservation in British Columbia.

However, the GCC is a young, small organization with a provincial mandate. It is not possible, at least at this stage in our development, to play an active role in all development and conservation issues around the province. At this time the GCC is operating without core financial resources and without full-time staff. Over the past year and a half, the GCC has worked very hard to become a charitable organization, which means that we cannot be a lobby group for local interests. The GCC mandate is to educate the public, industry and government about grasslands and their ecological values, and to inform industry and government about grassland issues. The GCC is also mandated to work proactively with industry and government on the sustainable management of grasslands, grassland monitoring and research.

Addressing the Challenge

What we are doing to further develop the organization and to provide an effective service to our membership is:

- ✓ Planning, organizing and implementing a short- and long-term fund raising strategy to assist the GCC in securing the financial resources required for GCC initiatives;
- ✓ Establishing regional committees that will represent the GCC and address grassland issues in those regions;
- ✓ Planning and developing a regionalized website that will better serve local and regional information needs; and
- ✓ Initiating a longer-term strategic planning process.

What You Can Do

- ✓ Do you feel that there needs to be a stronger voice for grasslands in your region? If so, *help* the GCC establish and organize a grassland committee in your region.
- ✓ Do you have an issue you feel the GCC should be considering, or do you think we should be doing a better job? If so, be proactive and contact a GCC Director or myself to discuss the issue or problem.
- ✓ Be prepared to volunteer your time and assist the GCC in delivering on its mandate! We need your help.

The GCC is in it for the long haul.

Join this exciting and challenging process!

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Subdivisions and Development

Grasslands are Feeling the Pressure

By Jim White, Rangelands Associates

Subdivision and development makes a permanent change in the landscape, one that affects us all and has many environmental and social impacts.

Subdivision and development can:

- Displace or endanger native plant and animal species by eliminating critical habitat
- Promote the spread of noxious weeds
- Increase soil erosion
- Reduce the amount of range and forage available to wildlife and the ranching industry
- Promote abusive recreation by providing better access to the backcountry for ATV users, mountain bikers, etc.

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The loss of large, intact areas of native grasslands to rural development is an escalating problem throughout BC, southwestern Alberta, and parts of the United States. The problem arises where there are grassland areas with large population centres nearby, good connecting highways, and a wealthy or newly mobile social class who want the country living experience and are not restricted to living full time in a big city. Combine this with a ranching economy that is marginal in good times and a monetary rat-hole in bad times, plus greatly inflated land values, and the pressure to sell off ranches to development is great.

BC, however, has a unique problem in that only 1 to 2% of the province is grassland, and of that, 70 to 80% is privately owned. BC's grasslands are largely in valleys near transportation routes and are relatively close to towns and cities. This combination simply means that all but a few larger pieces of Crown grassland are vulnerable to subdivision.

What is the solution? What options and tools are available? More regulation? What about purchases by conservation organizations? This tool is being used in areas where there is great urgency, however, large-scale ranch purchases to conserve grasslands often come with their own set of problems. Conservation covenants and the Purchase of Development Rights (PDRs) are other options available to keep working ranches working and maintain large areas of critical grassland ecosystems.

There are no easy solutions to the problem of subdivision and development, but the wake-up call is all around us as we see ranches of various sizes being bought up and subdivided. It is clear that we must work together to produce innovative solutions in order to ensure a future for BC's grasslands and the people, plants, and animals that depend on these ecosystems.

Suburbanization

The Bucolic Plague

By Don Gayton, M.Sc, P.Ag.

Peter and Mary Jones' dream had finally come true. After years of slaving away at demanding—but high-paying—jobs in Vancouver, they were about to move their family to the country. Seven acres of prime Okanagan bench land now belonged to them, their access road was

finished, and construction of the spacious, rancher-style home was nearly complete. Plans were well afoot to fence a pasture for a horse, but the kids were demanding two, so they could ride together. Everyone was looking forward to having dogs and cats, something that had been

impossible in their Vancouver home. No longer would the Joneses be surrounded by asphalt, and people. No more traffic jams, highrises and smog—back to nature!

The Jones family is of course fictional, but they typify a very



The suburban dream is a powerful and growing force in British Columbia and throughout western North America.

PHOTO BY ED HEENAN

real phenomenon. The suburban dream is a powerful and growing force in British Columbia and throughout western North America as people slip the surly bonds of cities like Vancouver, Calgary, Portland and Los Angeles.

Let's look at the destinations of these urban refugees; what areas attract them? In BC, they choose areas like the Okanagan, the Kamloops area, Cranbrook, Grand Forks, and Invermere. Further afield, they go to the Bitterroot Valley in Montana, or the high desert country of central Oregon. Instinctively, these urban refugees are drawn to dry, sunny, rural, interior valleys. Nearly all build their country dream homes (or "ranchettes," in realtor lexicon) on grasslands, savannas, and dry, open forests. For the already beleaguered grasslands of BC's Southern Interior, suburbanization is a new malaise, adding to the existing stresses of overgrazing, weeds, recreational use, and forest ingrowth. Not only does each new subdivision or ranchette eliminate another parcel of native vegetation, but it also creates a host of negative spinoff effects. New roads create more vehicular access and more disturbance that weakens native plant communities and promotes the growth of weeds. Horses are penned in ridiculously small pastures, leading to severe overgrazing and soil erosion. Uncontrolled dogs and cats become new predators on unsuspecting native fauna. Gardens and garbage bins create problem wildlife where there were none before.

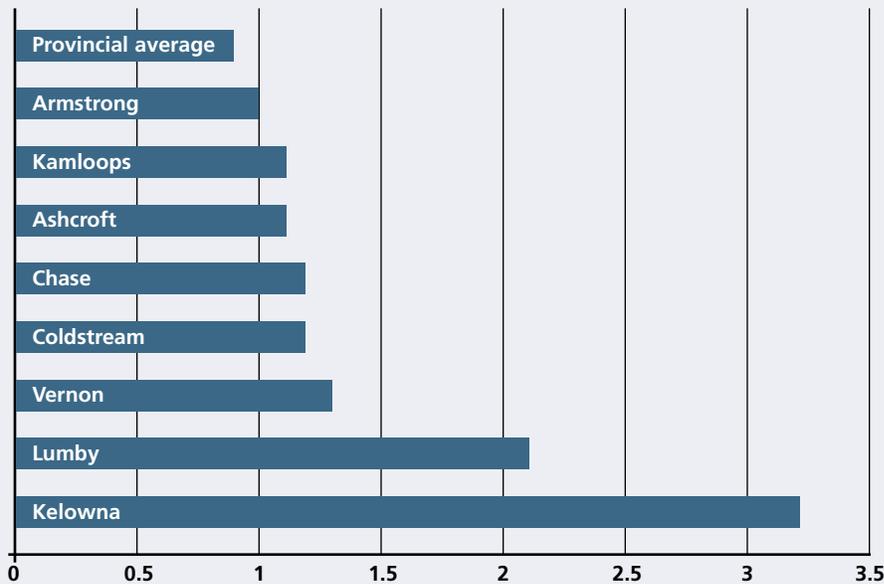
I have probably attended a dozen meetings in the last year where people agonized over how to control suburbanization (also known as the "bucolic plague") into the grasslands, and no one has any answers. Development

forces are strong; there's lots of money out there; it's private land, etc. I am beginning to wonder if we are obsessing on the rural end of the suburbanization equation, and ignoring the source end, the cities. What is wrong with our big cities that makes so many people want to flee them as soon as they are able? For that matter, what's wrong with the small towns in our grassland areas that make urban refugees want to live not in them, but outside them?

Ever since reading Jane Jacob's seminal book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, I have seen positive parallels between the human ecology of cities and the vegetation ecology of grasslands. Now, with the urban refugee phenomenon, I see negative parallels as well. As the human ecology of big cities erodes, the vegetation ecology of grasslands does too.

A thoughtful mayor once said to me, "maybe the best thing you can do to preserve grasslands is to create some kind of density bonus that encourages people to build within the city limits." This is just one example of many creative ways of addressing the city side of the urban refugee equation.

In addition to making people aware of the impacts of suburbanization, I think we grassland advocates need to begin a dialogue with our urban cousins to find out why life in their big city is so toxic, and what can be done about it. Life in BC is deeply polarized between urban and rural, but in the end, we are a single society and the Joneses are indeed our cousins. If life is not healthy in our big cities, ultimately it won't be healthy in the grasslands either.



Percent Increase in Population Estimate 1999–2000 in Selected Grassland Cities
SOURCE: BC STATISTICS

Grassland cities are growing much faster than those in the rest of the province.

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- Reduce connectivity between habitats
- Impact the hydrologic cycle by allowing water to run down asphalt and into sewers instead of being taken up by the soil, filtered, and returned to the cycle as groundwater
- Threaten our tourism industry by destroying the beauty of natural landscapes, one of the qualities of BC that is prized by tourists and locals alike
- Threaten our ranching industry, which is a vital part of the economy, history, and culture of BC

Tightening Up the ALR

By Kathy McCauley



The mandate of the Land Reserve Commission includes protecting natural grasslands suitable for grazing by cattle and wildlife by locking them up in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), the purpose of which is to protect agricultural land and to encourage farming.

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN HAYWOOD-FARMER

Change is in the air at all levels of government right now and there are going to be a lot of questions asked about whether policies and agencies are achieving the level of effectiveness for which they were designed. The Land Reserve Commission (LRC) and the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) will not be exempt from this process.

The LRC was created in the early 1970s to ensure that resource lands would always be available for BC's working farms and forests. The mandate of the LRC includes protecting natural grasslands suitable for grazing by cattle and wildlife by locking them up in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), the purpose of which is to protect agricultural land and to encourage farming. Once in the ALR, lands are dedicated for agricultural use only and theoretically unavailable for urban development. The ALR contains 4.7 million hectares or 5% of the province, 70% of which is privately owned.

Although the concept of protecting grasslands was a hard sell in the '70s, public awareness of the issues has grown. Whether or not grasslands need protection is no longer an issue, but rather, to what extent? BC's grasslands are home to more than 25% of the provincial wildlife species of concern and support more threatened or endangered species than any other habitat. The province has a higher proportion of grasslands intact and protected than any other region of Canada and much of North America. Urban development is still relatively slow in rural BC, putting us ahead in the conservation game and giving us a priceless opportunity to maintain that lead through strategic grassland management. The LRC and the ALR are our primary tools to do that.

How effective the LRC has been in supporting the preservation of grasslands depends on whom you ask.

Some of the most valuable grassland wildlife habitat was never included in the first place

"If the mandate of the LRC was to merely slow down the loss of grasslands," says Maurice Hansen of the Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society, "then I suppose it has done that. But

it has not halted urban development on grasslands altogether because there are loopholes in the legislation that allow lands of particularly high recreational and urban development value to be removed from the ALR."

In theory, the ALR protects grasslands from urbanization; however, in practice lands can be removed from the ALR through application to the LRC. The LRC receives seven hundred applications to remove land from the ALR every year, 70% of which are accepted. Each appli-

cation is individually reviewed on its own merits so there are no hard and fast criteria to determine which are accepted or rejected. Consequently, there has been some criticism in the past that decisions could be subject to the political maneuvers of developers. Lands of marginal agricultural value, such as grasslands, are far more likely to be released from the ALR than highly productive areas if there is pressure to release land for urban development. The problem may not be that there are loopholes but that decisions to remove land from the ALR may be based on subjective factors. The overall percentage of land within the reserve has only remained constant because ALR boundaries over the years have been altered and extended, the most significant additions coming from Crown land in the Prince George area.

Not only can lands be removed from the ALR, but some of the most valuable grassland wildlife habitat was never included in the first place. A prime example is the South Okanagan where more than 275 rare species of birds and other unusual invertebrates live on less than 1% of BC's grasslands. Sixty-five percent of these animals are not found anywhere else in Canada. Overall, more than 30% of BC's threatened or endangered species live in the South Okanagan. Their habitat is now seriously threatened because the South Okanagan is undergoing the most dramatic population increase in the entire province. Urban development that results in the reduction and fragmentation of natural habitats further endangers these rare species. Most of this grassland has never been part of the ALR.

The ALR does contain most of the province's ranchlands that use a high percentage of BC's grasslands for grazing. Their care depends upon proper management strategies, including pasture rotation, riparian-area management, and controlled recreational use. Ranchers' ability to adequately steward the land depends on the economic health of the industry. If ranching declines as an attractive, economically viable lifestyle, ranchers will be under increasing pressure to break up their large land tracts through removal from the ALR and subsequent subdivision, resulting in further loss of large intact grassland habitats.

It's obvious that if the LRC and the ALR did not exist, the preservation of grasslands would be haphazard, if at all, rather than part of an overall provincial strategy. The argument can be made, however, that their effectiveness could greatly increase if the rules about which lands are allowed out of the ALR were stricter, and if the LRC had the power to control *all* agricultural lands, including marginally productive grasslands.

Stump Lake Ranch and the ALR

By Taylor Zeeg, UCC Journalism Student

The Stump Lake Cattle Ranch, 30 minutes south of Kamloops in the Nicola Valley, is comprised of almost 80,000 acres of diverse grasslands peppered with pine stands, Douglas-fir forests, and wetlands. 65,000 acres are leased Crown land used for grazing and 14,585 acres comprise the deeded land base.

Derek Trethewey, new owner of Stump Lake Cattle Company (SLCC) purchased the 150-year-old ranch in April 1998 for a hefty \$10,500,000, providing a tired rancher with a handsome retirement fund. But Trethewey was interested in more than sustaining the 1000-head cattle operation. He wanted to develop.

Stump Lake Ranch was turned into a weekend getaway resort outfitted with luxury accommodations in a restored century-old manor house, cottages, and even teepee replicas. The idea was to make the ranch more lucrative by combining tourism with ranching. Trethewey wanted to maintain the ranching operation, and therefore its agricultural value, but he also wanted to develop the three-mile frontage around Stump Lake into waterfront properties to retrieve some of the \$10 million investment.

At the time of purchase, the deeded land base was comprised of 83 legal titles, all within the Agricultural Land Reserve. Development, or splitting up of the separate titles, is perfectly within the owner's rights, but subdivision of the individual titles must gain approval from the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC).

The titles not necessary to the viability of ranching operations were sold outright, reducing the deeded land base to 79 titles. Of the remaining land, the developer applied to the ALC for permission to subdivide the Stump Lake waterfront titles into 46 waterfront lots. In exchange, the developer agreed to consolidate the remaining deeds under a single "no build covenant." Those remaining deeded titles, and the grasslands they demarcate, were to remain under a "no build covenant" with an option to

be "bundled" into 13 parcels. The agreement was signed in January 1999 by the ranch owner, and good for five years.

"The commission came to a compromise with the landowner to permit subdivision," said Martin Collins, land use planner at the ALC. "It was better than breaking up the ranch," Collins added.

Since January 1999, the developer hasn't created the 13 larger properties. Rather, Trethewey proposed increasing the number of bundles to 26. The sellable parcels would be sold to private interests but then leased back for a 25-year term for ranching purposes. Future owners would be allowed to build on the parcels, but would have to agree to cattle grazing and haying on their property for the allotted 25 years.

But this initial offer wasn't acceptable to the Agricultural Land Commission. "The commission wanted to get a response from the [SLCC] about what complaints people had. At the end of the day [the SLCC] recognized their proposal wasn't exactly the most agriculturally-friendly and perhaps there was a better one out there, so they asked for advice and certainly we gave them some direction," said Collins.

The new offer, and the one agreed to in principle by the Agricultural Land Commission, will result in the consolidation of the 1300-hectare grassland portion of the ranch into a single agricultural unit, and the 800-hectare home ranch into a single agricultural unit, and the selling off about 18 of the 24 existing blocks that are peripheral to the grasslands.

The condition of acceptance of the proposal is that the parcels are leased back for 25 years and the leased lands continue to be used for grazing to sustain ranching operations.

So what happened to the original no build covenant, good for five years?

This raises the issue of the Agricultural Land Commission's impotency in matters of enforcement of land covenants.

"The problem with no build covenants, always, is that you can try and sell a parcel with a no build covenant but may not be able to sell it. Secondly, it's very difficult to enforce. Realistically, how do you enforce a no build covenant on a parcel? It's possible, but that has always been a problematic enforcement," said Collins.

Since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), only three years have passed, so the ALC must have felt another two years of review was unnecessary. "At the end of the five years we've got to renegotiate the deal. The memorandum's ended right?," Collins said. Well not quite, but with the ALC at the mercy of the developer, any agreement that sustains agriculture, even if not at the original level, is a good deal. From the time of purchase through these negotiations, Trethewey could have sold off parcels and buyers could have built houses regardless of the MOU.

Unfortunately, nothing protects the land beyond



Grasslands provide nutritious winter forage for many large ungulates, like this moose.

PHOTO BY BRIAN WOLITSKI

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Keeping Working Ranches Working

Strategies

By Shane Vincenzi

Subdivision and development is a mounting concern to the future of BC's grasslands, but what is the impetus behind this threat to our grasslands? There is a myriad of socio-economic factors at work, but the underlying issues are:

1. We have a newly mobile social class of retirees and young professionals who, through advances in technology, are no longer tied to their desks in Vancouver or wish to escape the 'rat race' of larger cities.
2. Ranchers, who have in the past managed large tracts of grasslands as viable industries, are now finding it increasingly difficult to make a living in today's economy.

The result? There are a lot of people looking to buy land in the Interior of the province, and a few ranchers who could supply this land. It is the age-old law of 'supply and demand,' and ranchers are faced with tough decisions between their own future and the future of the land they manage.

Diversification can prove profitable and at the same time help to maintain our grasslands as large tracts of intact land

So what can we do to slow down or stop the deterioration of our grasslands? Well, we must find a way to make ranching more profitable, and many ranchers throughout the country have begun finding innovative solutions to this problem by diversifying their ranching operations or by establishing conservation covenants, or easements as they are called in Alberta, with local conservation organizations.

Diversification is simply 'to expand by increasing the variety of things produced or of operation undertaken.' In the ranching industry, this can be as simple as adding a specialty breed of cattle to your herd, or as complex as operating a year-round guest ranch or resort. Whatever route taken, diversification can prove profitable and at the same time help to maintain our grasslands as large tracts of intact land.

There are many examples of successful ranch diversification throughout the province, each capitalizing on their own unique traits to expand their industries. The Quilchena cattle company of the Nicola Valley, one of the larger cattle companies of the province, provides a unique tourist experience by offering guests the oppor-

tunity to 'peek in' on cowboy life. Guests can stay in the historic Quilchena hotel and watch the cowboys at work employing some of the latest and most innovative ranching techniques available. By combining ranching and tourism, the Quilchena cattle company has not only helped to ensure the sustainability of its ranching operations, but has provided the public with a unique opportunity to see what a rancher's life is really like.

The Foster family of the Tatla Lake area, owners of Sand Creek Ranch/Waddington Challenge Enterprises Ltd., have taken a slightly different approach to diversification. In the early 1990s, the Fosters were worried about the potential loss of alpine grazing lands and the subsequent loss of the viability of the range, so they decided to venture into wilderness tourism and outdoor recreation by offering guided fishing and horse-pack trips, and 'working ranch vacations' where guests can take part in every day activities of the ranch. Although these trips have not amounted to huge financial gains for the Fosters, they have helped maintain the economic viability of their ranch and, more importantly, have given their sons an opportunity to return to the family ranching industry and maintain the ranch as a working ranch.

Mountain Meadow Ranch out of Jaffray, BC also has a history of ranching diversification. Purchased by the Street family in 1981, Mountain Meadow ranch has always maintained a significant cattle operation, but the Streets also operated a successful woodlot up until 1996. They also farmed ostriches, but gave up on this venture when their children left the ranch. The Streets have worked hard to diversify their ranching operations and maintain the viability of the ranch, but the ranch has been up for sale at various points in time. Without successful diversification, says Faye Street, this ranch is not viable and will be sold if a new plan for diversification is not successful.

Diversification of ranches is not, however, a universal solution. How you propose to diversify depends on the particular situation of your ranch. However, there are other strategies available to keep working ranches working, such as conservation covenants.

Conservation covenants involve partnerships between landowners and recognized conservation organizations such as The Land Conservancy of BC. The landowner enters into a legally binding contract with the conservation organization that limits the kinds of development that can occur on all or part of the land held by the owner. These limitations are transferred to subsequent

owners for the entire length of the contract. In return, by selling off the ability of the land to be used for other purposes, the landowner can no longer be taxed on a 'best use' basis, but rather on the current use and productivity of the land. By entering into this kind of conservation agreement, the landowner benefits financially through reduced taxes, and grasslands benefit by remaining as large, intact ecosystems.

Strategies like diversification and conservation covenants all work to make ranching more profitable for the rancher while maintaining working grasslands. Innovative solutions like these are the key to ensuring a future for BC's grasslands and our ranching heritage, because if we can maintain the land as working land, then we can sustain the grasslands into the future.

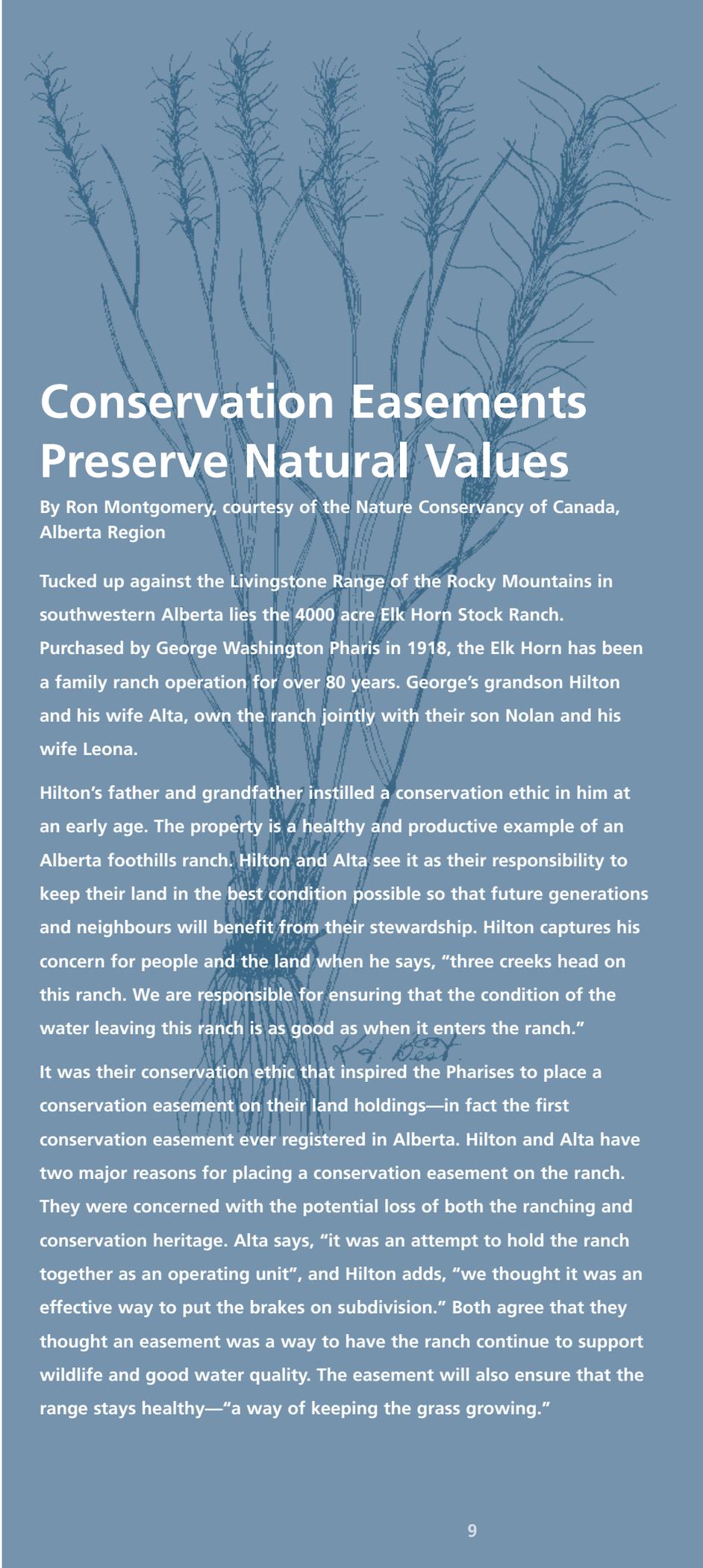
Stump Lake Ranch
from page 7

25 years except a wobbly ALC. After the 25 years, when the leases begin to expire, the ranch may once again be susceptible to development. One of the commission's original criticisms was why offer a lease-back for only 25 years and not in perpetuity? The answer is for the benefit of the owner. Potential buyers, despite being "rancher-friendly," may want to sell their property one day or even subdivide it themselves. Long-term leases would limit the speculative value of the property, and make them a harder sell.

"Most people who acquire land want to leave it to their kids," said Trethewey. "Who knows what's going to happen in 25 years, never mind 50."

This is the solution for Stump Lake ranch and although each situation is unique, Stump Lake is indicative of a larger, systemic problem facing all ranchlands in BC. Developers are circling, hoping to buy whole ranches, development rights included, just to turn around and split them up—a golf course here, a trophy house there. It may not seem significant, but the land suffers. The case of Stump Lake is an example of how powerless the Agricultural Land Commission really is, yet fortunately, for the time being, it still demands an air of formal respect from developers in this province.

Hopefully, the respect will continue in perpetuity, even if the leases don't, so the grassland interior won't one day be regarded as the "Upper Mainland."



Conservation Easements Preserve Natural Values

By Ron Montgomery, courtesy of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Alberta Region

Tucked up against the Livingstone Range of the Rocky Mountains in southwestern Alberta lies the 4000 acre Elk Horn Stock Ranch.

Purchased by George Washington Pharis in 1918, the Elk Horn has been a family ranch operation for over 80 years. George's grandson Hilton and his wife Alta, own the ranch jointly with their son Nolan and his wife Leona.

Hilton's father and grandfather instilled a conservation ethic in him at an early age. The property is a healthy and productive example of an Alberta foothills ranch. Hilton and Alta see it as their responsibility to keep their land in the best condition possible so that future generations and neighbours will benefit from their stewardship. Hilton captures his concern for people and the land when he says, "three creeks head on this ranch. We are responsible for ensuring that the condition of the water leaving this ranch is as good as when it enters the ranch."

It was their conservation ethic that inspired the Pharises to place a conservation easement on their land holdings—in fact the first conservation easement ever registered in Alberta. Hilton and Alta have two major reasons for placing a conservation easement on the ranch. They were concerned with the potential loss of both the ranching and conservation heritage. Alta says, "it was an attempt to hold the ranch together as an operating unit", and Hilton adds, "we thought it was an effective way to put the brakes on subdivision." Both agree that they thought an easement was a way to have the ranch continue to support wildlife and good water quality. The easement will also ensure that the range stays healthy—"a way of keeping the grass growing."

Ranching...an Endangered Industry?

By Agnes Jackson, BC Cattlemen's Association

Is ranching an endangered industry in BC? No. In fact, BC's ranching industry has grown in the Peace region by 37%, the Okanagan by 4%, and provincially by 19%! But the industry is definitely facing some new challenges from increasing land prices, limited forage availability, environmental legislation, and aboriginal land claims.

The high price of private land, continued pressure on Crown land, and the increased difficulty in meeting regulatory requirements means that the investment per cow is far greater in the south than in the north. Anecdotal information suggests that some impacts are irreversible. Take the Coquihalla Highway as an example. Land prices in the Coquihalla corridor have risen considerably over the past few years resulting in subdivision of ranch lands for development. In fact, real estate values are so high in the Coquihalla corridor that ranching and running cows on these rangelands is no longer economically viable.

Ranching operations in the Okanagan and Kootenay regions of the province are under considerable stress and could face permanent

decline due to increasing recreational use coupled with high demand for urban and non-agricultural land. Many ranchers are faced with tough decisions. Do I relocate my operation or do I leave the industry altogether?

Land values and growing pressure on Crown land are only part of the problem. The availability of forage on Crown range is also a limiting factor. It appears that Crown range is more or less at capacity in some areas of the province. The ranching industry may be 'capped' in these areas, meaning that there is no forage capacity for future growth of the industry as it relates to grazing on Crown range. This is particularly true of the open range or grassland regions of the province.

Environmental legislation is another important issue. It is interesting that new environmental legislation does not appear to have had a major impact on the industry as a whole, but rather, in certain areas it has impacted individual ranchers. There is a general perception in the ranching industry that environmental legislation is imposing strict restrictions and these restrictions are almost certainly influencing decisions to invest in the beef industry and influencing ranchers to leave the industry.

Finally, aboriginal land claims will have an impact on the ranching industry. Although the aboriginal land claim process has not affected existing ranching operations or existing agreements, the uncertainty around the land claim issue has resulted in considerable apprehension amongst potentially affected ranchers. Land claims will no doubt affect investment in the ranching industry and possibly individual ranching operations in the future.

The ranching industry is facing some important challenges, from land values, increasing pressures on Crown range, environmental legislation, aboriginal land claims, and the regional differences in the industry from the north to the south. However, at the end of the day, the ranching industry must look ahead and recognize the need to change and proactively work on these difficult issues.

By addressing these issues, we will be able to encourage new ranchers to join the industry, as well as allow for inter-generational transfers of ranching operations.

Keeping our ranching industry healthy and viable is the key to our future.

Land Use Planning for Merritt

By Lloyd Manchester, Parks and Wilderness Caucus Coordinator, BC Environmental Network

The recent announcement of the provincial government on land use process in this province leaves some doubt as to the type of process that will occur in the Merritt region. In 1996, the Regional Protected Areas Team identified numerous Areas of Interest (AOI) for future parks. Some of these include upgrading the Cascades Recreation Area, and extensions to Kentucky-Alleyne Park and Monck Park. Some potential grassland AOIs includes Boss-Davis and the Hamilton mid-elevation grassland. However, several of these AOIs have had portions of their areas removed from the AOI list as a result of not having proper land use processes in place.

The provincial government recently

announced that there would be significant changes to land use processes in British Columbia. In particular they stated, "The provincial government has approved a strategic shift in land use planning that provides greater government leadership and improved certainty for resource communities." The government also promised to make new land use processes more streamlined with more meaningful input and involvement from First Nations and the private sector.

The government also stated that, "science-based environmental and resource management in land use planning will ensure sustainability, accountability and responsibility. New land use planning will follow tighter timelines with more

focus, and will pivot on consultation rather than consensus through planning tables. This planning will promote a thriving private sector economy, including a leading-edge forestry sector globally recognized for its productivity and environmental stewardship."

What does this all mean for Merritt? Merritt will become one of six sub-regional planning areas. This sub-regional plan is scheduled for completion by 2004. The Merritt plan will be more of a landscape level planning process that will be somewhat different than the Land Resource Management Process (LRMP) that was supposed to detail broad objectives over the land base. The recently negotiated Okanagan-

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The Tiger Salamander typically inhabits grasslands and wetlands in the Southern Interior. PHOTOS BY WALT KLENNER

The Tiger Salamander

Ambystoma tigrinum

By Shane Vincenzi

In the grassland soils of the Okanagan valley lives one of the largest terrestrial salamanders in the world—the tiger salamander or *Ambystoma tigrinum*. Tiger salamanders can reach a total length of 40 cm and are a variety of colours, ranging from dark blotches, spots, or stripes on a light background to light blotches, spots, or stripes on a dark background. Despite this variation, it is difficult to mistake the tiger salamander for any other salamander species in BC.

The tiger salamander is part of a group of ‘mole’ salamanders, aptly named because their mostly subterranean lifestyle is spent occupying abandoned mammal dens or burrows that they have excavated themselves. Tiger salamanders are extremely hardy, so it is not surprising that these stout-bodied amphibians can be found in a variety of habitats including grassland, aspen parkland, boreal forest, and even sub-alpine areas. However, despite this apparent adaptability, in British Columbia, the Tiger Salamander is found only in the grasslands of the South Okanagan, usually not far from water.

Adult tiger salamanders are very elusive, spending most of the year underground to escape desiccation until spring rains signal the start of the breeding season and the beginning of a mass migration to breeding ponds and wetlands, where they can breed in water as cold as 10 degrees celsius. Tiger salamanders have a

complex courtship ritual consisting of shoving, nose nudging, tail nudging, and bodily undulations. During the height of breeding season they may mate as many as 37 times in one night!

The tiger salamander is widespread through most of the United States but has limited distribution in Canada, and very limited distribution in BC, where it is a provincially ‘Red-listed’ species. Subdivision, development and inappropriate grazing practices are the biggest threat to the continued survival of this species in BC. Cows can compact the soil around ponds, making burrowing difficult, and can trample salamander eggs that have been deposited on riparian vegetation. Cows also create small depressions that trap larvae in small pools that dry out faster than the main body of water. Urban and rural development often requires filling in many of the small lakes and ponds required for breeding, and puts higher demands on available water, effectively lowering the water table and causing some ponds to dry out before their time.

There is, however, still the opportunity to ensure the survival of this species into the future. Better urban and rural planning, the conservation of large tracts of managed land, and good cattle management will protect tiger salamander habitat, as well as the habitat of many other plants and animals that depend on the grasslands for survival.



Blue-listed or Red-listed, what is the difference?

Blue-listed species are designated as sensitive or vulnerable and “at risk,” but not yet endangered or threatened. Populations of these species may not be in decline, but their habitat or other requirements are such that they are vulnerable to further disturbance. Species that are generally suspected of being vulnerable, but for which information is too limited to allow designation in another category, are included in this category. Red-listed species are designated as endangered or threatened, or are being considered for such status because they run the risk of extirpation or extinction.

Thompson's Paintbrush

A Unique Sign of Spring

By Peggy Jo-Broad, The University College of the Cariboo

As fall comes to a close, it's hard not to turn one's focus to the thoughts of spring and flowers emerging in our grasslands. It is often these thoughts that carry flower lovers through the winter months. One species that always comes to mind as a definite sign of spring is the often overlooked Thompson's paintbrush or *Castilleja thompsonii*. Generally when people think of paintbrush they envision alpine meadows covered in conspicuous scarlet blooms. Thompson's paintbrush differs by exhibiting delicate early spring blooms composed of numerous subtle, creamy, yellowish-green flowers. Having an inconspicuous color like this makes it an often-overlooked species by humans but it is by no means any less spectacular than its scarlet cousins.

The lower grasslands of the Kamloops and Okanagan regions are generally extremely dry with very rich soils. This is the very habitat where you will find Thompson's paintbrush. The limiting factor for plant growth in these areas is simply water. Some of the plants that eke out their survival in this type of environment have developed strategies to assist them in reducing water loss and increasing water access when it does rain. Bluebunch wheatgrass, for instance, has a characteristic funnel shape that aids in directing moisture to its roots. Grasses are also extremely efficient at extracting moisture from the fine textured soils in this type of habitat. Some plants like ponderosa pine and even big sage have incredibly long taproots to aid in accessing deep soil moisture. Thompson's paintbrush has its own unique strategy: let the other plants do the work for you!

This little paintbrush lives in conjunction with big sage and is known as a semi-parasitic species. Big sage does the work of extracting soil moisture and Thompson's paintbrush taps into this wonderful resource of moisture by connecting its roots to those of big sage. This little trick is one of the reasons that Thompson's paintbrush is extremely difficult to transplant.

Thompson's Paintbrush

PHOTO BY KAREN MCLAREN

ILLUSTRATION BY NICOLE BRAND



Like many perennial grassland herbs, Thompson's paintbrush has fuzzy, linear-lobed leaves that aid in reducing moisture loss. Why on earth would a plant that doesn't have to go to too much effort to obtain moisture in its dry environment even bother to reduce losses due to evapotranspiration? I suppose you could say that it is this little plant's way of not "overstaying its welcome" with its host. After all, if the host dies, the paintbrush's days of carefree water access would be over and even sagebrush can only obtain so much water in this dry environment.

Ironically, even though this plant acts almost like a "parasite" or an "infection" on big sage plants, First Nations people have used this species to prevent infection in humans for centuries. Flowers from Thompson's paintbrush were collected in the early spring, dried, and ground into a powder. This powder was then applied to cuts, scrapes, and scratches in order to reduce the possibility of infection. If a cut was already infected, this plant was said to have the capability to draw out the infection.

Thompson's paintbrush not only has an ethnic importance to it but numerous early spring pollinators and nectar seekers rely on it as a source of energy. When this species blooms, each bloom is composed of numerous individual flowers snuggled within greenish bracts. Older, more established plants can have several blooming branches attached to a single woody base. Keeping this information in mind you can imagine the quantity of pollen and nectar produced by each plant. It may be a low producer compared to some species of higher

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Alastair McLean (1921–1999)

By Albert Van Ryswyk



Alastair McLean
PHOTO COURTESY OF LOUISE
MCLEAN

Alastair McLean was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1921. While still a young boy, Alastair and his family moved away from Scotland, eventually settling in Point Grey, Vancouver. It was here that he learned the landscaping and gardening trade from his father and began the practice of resource sustainability. Indeed, sustainable natural resource use truly exemplifies Alastair McLean's philosophy.

In 1944, Alastair McLean graduated from the University of British Columbia with a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture, where he studied under fellow sustainability advocate Dr. Vernon C. Brink. Alastair's academic career then took him to Utah State University where he earned his Master's degree, and to Washington State University where he earned a Ph.D. in plant ecology. Alastair began his professional career in 1944 as a student assistant with the Canada Department of Agriculture in Swift Current Saskatchewan, and four years later moved to the Kamloops Research Station where he stayed until his retirement in 1986. It was from the Kamloops research station that Alastair made his most valuable contributions to the field of sustainable range management.

In the early years of his career, Alastair addressed the problem of rangeland depletion from season long grazing of the same location. Range depletion was quite evident from Mexico to Williams Lake, especially around watering holes and at lower elevations. Alastair conducted on-the-ground plot research proving that carbohydrate reserves in native grasses were depleted early in the growing season. He also conducted research on Pinegrass ranges in open pine and fir forest that showed similar results, but with a more dramatic drop in the nutritional quality of the forage. If grazing pressure was not removed well before the mid summer drought, plant re-growth would not recur that year and many native grasses would face serious decline in a few short years. His grazing recommendations culminated in a 'white paper' to the BC government.

Besides being an accomplished and innovative research scientist, Alastair McLean was a dedicated conservationist, ambassador, and philanthropist. Alastair made valuable contributions as a member of the Society for Range Management, and ultimately became President of the Pacific Northwest section. He was one of the first directors of the Nature Conservancy of BC where he served under General Bert Hoffmeister who set up the Second Century Fund to accept donations and

bequests to purchase ecologically significant areas of BC. These areas were then held in perpetuity as reserves, sometimes in association with another sustainable operation such as a ranch, keeping them free from government influence or private sale. Alastair was also particularly involved in establishing the South Okanagan Reserve that represents the northern extension of the Sonoran Desert. He was always quick to share his knowledge with others, and because of this he represented Canada at the 12th Botanical Conference in Leningrad (1975), at the Environment Canada mission to Greece (1978), and participated in missions to China in 1982 and 1983. Alastair was also closely tied to the community of Kamloops, where he was a charter member of the Kamloops North Rotary, helped establish the McQueen Lake Environmental Education Centre, and was a long time member of the St. Andrew's and Caledonian Society of Kamloops.

Alastair retired in 1986 but continued his interest in range management and ecology. He was a son, father, husband, grandfather, and mentor to countless aspiring students, who was always willing to share his wide range of knowledge. In 1999, Alastair passed away peacefully after a protracted illness, but his contribution to range management lives on through many papers and publications, and through the people who were lucky enough to have spoken with him.

The Value of Preserving BC's Grasslands

By Robert Androkovich, Department of Economics, The University College of the Cariboo

In discussing the grasslands of BC, Mike Pitt pointed out that they “contain more than 25% of the provincial wildlife species of concern, and support more threatened or endangered species than any other habitat.” In a similar vein, G.G.E. Scudder noted that “one third of the provincially Red-listed and half of the provincially Blue-listed vertebrates” occur in the grasslands of the South Okanagan.

The potential development of BC's grasslands raises an important question for economists: is it possible to measure the ‘intrinsic value’ of the ecological diversity that would be lost as a consequence of development? Unfortunately, the answer—at least currently—is no! However, economics can measure the value that the people of BC would place on preserving the grasslands using a technique referred to as contingent valuation analysis.

Is it possible to measure the ‘intrinsic value’ of the ecological diversity that would be lost as a consequence of development?

In economics the value that an individual assigns to a particular unit of a good or service is given by the maximum amount that they would be

willing to pay for that unit. When goods and services are exchanged in markets, it is relatively straightforward to estimate the total value of a particular quantity once market data have been collected and analyzed.

However, many goods and services are of value to people but are not exchanged in markets. For instance, clean air, the maintenance of biodiversity, and the prevention of the extinction of species are very important to many people, yet they do not have a market price. In order to deal with valuation problems of this type, contingent valuation analysis is used.

The contingent valuation method is a survey technique in which information is collected through the use of mail questionnaires, telephone interviews, or face-to-face interviews. Potential respondents are given reason-

ably detailed information on the issue of concern, and are then asked how much they would be willing to pay to prevent the loss of critical wildlife habitat, for instance. Of course, the responses will be meaningful only if the respondents know precisely what it is that they are being asked to value. The questionnaire must therefore be very carefully designed. In particular, pre-testing the questionnaire is vital to ensure that the interpretation of the questions by the respondents and that by the researchers is the same.

In recent years, contingent valuation studies have been used to estimate: (1) the amount that households in BC would be willing to pay in order to increase the amount of designated wilderness area in the province; (2) the amount that households in New England would be willing to pay to prevent the extinction of bald eagles in their state; (3) the amount that households in California would be willing to pay to increase the number of grey whales in nearby waters; and (4) the amounts that households in Australia would be willing to pay to prevent logging of old growth forest.

The values reported in contingent valuation studies can be significant. For instance, the protection of northern spotted owl habitat in California, Oregon and Washington has been an important issue in the U.S. for a number of years. A contingent valuation study by Rubin, Helfand and Loomis reported that households in these three states would be willing to pay \$327 million per year to protect the owls, even though this protection would result in significant job losses. For the entire U.S. the total willingness to pay was estimated at \$1,154 million per year.

A final point and reminder: it is important to acknowledge that while the contingent valuation method would allow us to estimate the amount that the people of BC would be willing to pay to prevent the development of the grasslands, their intrinsic ecological value would not be estimated.

Thompson's Paintbrush

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elevations, but who can afford to be picky when higher elevation species are still below snow and haven't even emerged? For some time now Thompson's paintbrush has been considered a Yellow-listed species, but when you encounter it you might ask why as it is often seen in abundance. These pockets of abundance are, sadly, few and far between. For the most part this is due to the fact that much of the habitat where this species resides has

been lost to urban sprawl or other disturbances such as recreational activities. Preserving and respecting our grasslands will ensure that flowers such as the remarkable Thompson's paintbrush are here for future generations to enjoy.

So take a stroll next spring in the lower grasslands and look for this unique little treasure, maybe it won't appear as inconspicuous as you once thought!



View across the Vernon valley from the lower slopes of the Bella Vista Range.
PHOTO BY DEBBIE CLARKE

Uphill Growth Means the Downfall of Grasslands

By Debbie Clarke, Allan Brooks Nature Centre

Development, and corresponding open space planning, will occur in a series of small neighborhood plan areas—a situation that does not consider the needs of ecosystem conservation and neglects the need for habitat connectivity.

The picturesque North Okanagan city of Vernon is a small town on the verge of rapid growth. With the exception of land held by the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), urban development has already consumed most of the valley bottom, and, since the population of Vernon is expected to double in the next 30 to 40 years, urban growth will be moving up onto the hillsides of this grassland valley.

In some places, urban development has already replaced grasslands, and has impacted adjacent areas. In the process of building streets and houses, access to grassland hillsides has been indirectly provided for off-highway vehicle recreational use. Much of the open space remaining in those neighborhoods is now scarred with tracks and has become infested with weeds, and habitat values and visual qualities have suffered.

The Grasslands of the North Okanagan belong to a unique biogeoclimatic zone. This ecosystem is protected only in the Kalamalka Provincial Park as the Cosen's Bay grasslands, an area now dissected by a public road and threatened by increasing levels of uncontrolled recreation use.

The Bella Vista–Goose Lake range that extends from west of Swan Lake into the north end of Okanagan Lake is thought to be among the best quality grasslands with the highest conservation values. The Bella Vista range is about 4,500 hectares in size and supports a variety of habitat types including open grasslands, shrub steppe, aspen copses, shrubby ravines, rocky outcrops and talus slopes, dry forest and ponds. A 1993 Natural Areas inventory identified the Bella Vista range as a site that is most likely to support rare vertebrates including many small and large mammal, rodent, reptile, amphibian and

bird species. The south facing slopes of this range are the driest, hottest grasslands of the North Okanagan and support some rare plant species and communities, some of which are important to Okanagan First Nations.

The east half of the range is mostly private land, and the west half is part of the Okanagan Indian Reserve. The City of Vernon Official Community Plan (OCP) designates the east half for urban growth with rural agriculture on steeper slopes. Development, and corresponding open space planning, will occur in a series of small neighborhood plan areas—a situation that does not consider the needs of ecosystem conservation and neglects the need for habitat connectivity. A recent proposal showed development on all but the steepest of slopes and a 15 metre buffer around a seasonal pond and along a watercourse. In another area of the Bella Vista, a proposal for a large golf course and residential development are forthcoming.

While there are millions of dollars spent on conservation and stewardship in the South Okanagan, and the Central Okanagan enjoys the political support and financial resources to address habitat conservation issues, important conservation opportunities are being missed in the North Okanagan. There is no environmental staff in local government and there is minimal presence from non-government conservation organizations.

There is a need for holistic conservation efforts in the Okanagan Valley. Because of global warming, the North Okanagan may eventually be the home for many southern species. But by then, we may only be able to offer the gardens around strata developments or spaces between golf greens.

South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP) Moving Forward

By Janelle Parchomchuk



The SOSCP E-Team at White Lake, pumped up after a day of hard work. LEFT TO RIGHT, BACK ROW: Sara Schopff, Jeremy Cassidy, Charlene Pierre, Justin Terbaskett, Melanie Pavao. FRONT: Janelle Parchomchuk
PHOTO BY KEVIN DUNN

The SOSCP program is an alliance between non-government and government organizations that work together for the conservation of South Okanagan and Similkameen ecosystems. The SOSCP Partnership has just completed its first full year and it has been a resounding success, we are growing in leaps and bounds! Since April we have welcomed 29 new partners including the BC Lake Stewardship Society and the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management. In addition, a new outreach coordinator was hired to plan and coordinate the future activities of the outreach team.

Currently, we have six teams implementing the Outreach, Ecologically Sustainable Land-use, Stewardship, Land Securement, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Science strategies developed in our strategic plan. With significant funding from the HSP of Environment Canada, and in-kind contributions of the partners, we have made some excellent headway in the conservation of endangered ecosystems. One- and five-year work programs have been developed and projects

such as landowner contact, fencing of sensitive areas, weed control, and species awareness campaigns are now under way.

The SOSCP believes in community involvement, and has hired over 40 youth through the provincial E-Team program this past spring and summer. These youth helped the SOSCP to successfully manage lands, achieve stewardship and outreach goals, and obtain valuable scientific data, while at the same time learn some valuable skills.

The SOSCP is working toward future goals that include the development and implementation of an aquatics program, new land acquisitions of critical habitats, and enhancing outreach activities that increase public awareness of conservation values in the area. The program will also seek to ensure its sustainability through the work of a new committee on governance options. The winter season will be a busy time as the SOSCP organizes and secures funding for next year's numerous projects.

For more information on the program, please see our website at www.soscp.org or contact Robert Hawes, program manager at (250) 490-8225.

Pacific Northwest Weed Conference Update...

Non-native invasive plants are a serious threat to BC's biodiversity and economic well-being. Weeds are invading grassland, riparian, wetland, forest and other ecological systems, significantly impacting forage resources and the agricultural industry. The continued spread of weeds will have serious socio-economic implications for our communities, our industries and ultimately our entire province.

Historically, weeds have been regarded as an agricultural issue. However, over the past decade, we have come to realize that invasive plants do not recognize our jurisdictional boundaries, and that all land managers must join forces and work together to control and manage these plants. Effective control of invasive plants will require an integrated approach based on innovative solutions and strong partnerships between government, non-government organizations, industry and communities.

The Pacific Northwest Weed Conference (PNWC) will bring together government agencies, land managers, scientists, politicians, environmental organizations and the interested public to review the social, ecological and economic impacts of weeds; and review management issues, operational control methods, and new innovations in weed control. The specific objectives of the conference are to:

- Improve communication among all resource agencies and users
- Garner support and initiate participation from user groups, government agencies, communities and the public
- Encourage and facilitate discussion about the need for a provincial Weed Management Strategy

The organizing committee has made progress over the past few months in developing a conference agenda and a list of potential speakers.

Important Notice

The Pacific Northwest Weed Conference has been tentatively postponed to a later date due to government restructuring. Planning for the conference is on hold until January 2002, at which time the organizing committee will assess the impact of government re-structuring and determine the government's mandate and future priorities concerning weed control. A new date for the conference will be decided at that time if one is required. The conference was originally planned for October 2 and 3, 2002, in Kamloops, BC. Please note that this delay is only a re-scheduling of the conference, the need for a conference is not in question, it is more a question of timing.

Phase 1 of Laurie Guichon Memorial Grasslands Interpretive Site Project Complete

By Elizabeth Salomon-de-Friedberg

A ribbon cutting ceremony marked the official grand opening of the Laurie Guichon Memorial Grasslands Interpretive Site on August 26, 2001. The day marked the completion of Phase 1 of the grassland interpretive site project undertaken by the Nicola Watershed Community Round Table (NWCRT) in 1997.

Approximately 130 people from the Nicola Valley and beyond joined members of the Project Committee in celebrating the realization of a dream that took four years of planning, fund raising and many, many hours of volunteer time.

With Phase 1 of the project complete, the NWCRT has now turned its attention to addressing a number of outstanding matters. Gearing up for construction of Phase 1 meant that other goals of the Round Table had to be put on hold temporarily. Planning for Phase 2 of the grasslands interpretive site project is already under way but it will be some time before the Project Committee will be ready for the construction portion. Timing will depend on when the financial target can be reached, as construction of Phase 2 cannot proceed until sufficient money has been raised.

Phase 2 of the Laurie Guichon Memorial Grasslands Interpretive Site will consist of a wetlands interpretive trail that will include educational stops along its length. The trail will start just below the parking lot and follow a path through the aspen trees and around the northern edge of the pond located at the entrance to the site. The trail will traverse a creek, necessitating the building of a bridge. A platform and viewing area will be built at the end of the trail, and will provide an ideal location for viewing waterfowl and make the wetlands interpretive trail a very popular trail.

For information about this project, please call Elizabeth Salomon-de-Friedberg at (250) 378-4087. Donations are always welcome and can be made to the Laurie Guichon Memorial Grasslands Interpretive Site Project care of NWCRT, Box 400, Merritt, BC, V1K 1B8.



Guichon Grand Opening PHOTO COURTESY MERRITT HERALD

Lac du Bois Grasslands Park Interpretive Sign Project

By Frances Vyse

The Lac du Bois Grasslands Park is one of the largest grassland areas in the country. Located near the city of Kamloops, this grassland park has been used since the 1820s for livestock grazing, and, more recently, for extensive recreational use including ATV use, mountain biking, and hiking. All of these activities have taken their toll on the grasslands. The condition of the grasslands has steadily improved since the 1970s with better management of both cattle and recreationists. However, the area is still far from pristine, and to raise awareness amongst users the Lac du Bois Grasslands Interpretive Site has been created.

The site will consist of three highly visual interpretive panels currently being developed by the GCC that portray the history, diversity, and use of the Lac du Bois Grasslands. "History" reaches back to the origins of the landscape as a result of glacial erosion and deposition. The use of the area by First Nations, Hudson's Bay Company, gold miners and early ranches set the scene for more modern ranching use, research and recreation.

The incredible diversity of the natural world of the Lac du Bois Grasslands is explained with stunning photographs and a Lac du Bois Grassland cross section. Proactive stewardship messages and a park map stress the need for responsible use and protection of the unique features found in the grasslands.

The panels will be installed on a newly created pullout on Lac du Bois road at the eastern access to the Lac du Bois Grasslands area. The location is both highly visible and easy to access; it is hoped that the close proximity to houses will make it less vulnerable to vandalism.

A sign unveiling is planned for May 2002. A notice will be sent out to GCC members, GCC partners and the local media when an exact date has been set.

For further information on this project please contact Frances Vyse at vyse@telus.net or Bruno Delesalle at gcc@bcgrasslands.org

The Lac du Bois Grasslands Park Interpretive Sign Project is funded by: BC Ministry of Forests, BC Parks, Cattle Horn Fund, Chasm Sawmills, City of Kamloops, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Friends of the Environment Foundation, The Grazing Enhancement Fund, and the Kamloops Naturalists Club.

Land Use Planning for Merritt
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Shuswap LRMP went much farther than other LRMPs in the province. The Okanagan plan developed objectives that are operationally based, which is similar to this new landscape level planning process the government is proposing for Merritt. The Okanagan plan also recommended that Brent Mountain be protected when the Merritt process is convened.

Involvement in the Merritt process will be challenging. There will be a negotiation around the creation of new protected areas as well as the extent of biodiversity to preserve. We can only hope that all parties will negotiate this process in good faith.

Mapping BC's Grasslands

Producing and making available consistent baseline information on the abundance, distribution, and status of grasslands around the province.

By Ryan Holmes



LEFT: The alpine grasslands of the Spatzizi Plateau, dominated by Altai fescue, represent one of the many unique and diverse grassland communities in Northern BC.

For more information on the BC Grasslands Mapping Project please contact Ryan Holmes, GIS Analyst, at (250) 371-6207 or email: ryan.holmes@bcgrasslands.org

The BC Grasslands Mapping Project is funded by:

- BC Ministry of Forests
- BC Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management
- BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection
- BC Parks
- Habitat Conservation Trust Fund
- Terrestrial Ecosystem Restoration Program
- Vancouver Foundation

The BC Grasslands Mapping Project has come a long way from the initial project design and 'grasslands definition' phase that began over a year and a half ago. With assistance from range representatives, agrologists, ecologists, and other key experts around the province, accurate maps have been completed for approximately 80% of the province's grasslands. This initial phase of the project has built a solid foundation for the continued mapping and inventory of BC's grasslands.

Work continues on the delineation of grassland ecosystems at the 1:20 000 scale, representing the most significant Geographic Information System (GIS) layer in the database. Current mapping is focused on Northeastern BC, where meetings in Prince George will refine the mapping methods through a comprehensive

verification procedure. A similar mapping process was recently initiated for the Rocky Mountain Trench and it is anticipated that both of these processes will be completed by April 2002. The mapping of Garry Oak and other coastal grassland communities will begin early in the next fiscal year.

The incorporation of additional layers, such as land tenure, the historical distribution of grasslands, and species-at-risk locations will also be incorporated into the GIS next year.

The BC Grasslands Mapping Project is producing an invaluable tool for land and resource managers, industry, and non-governmental organizations. Numerous government agencies and other groups, including First Nations, are seeing the value of the BC Grasslands Mapping Project and how its products can assist them in reaching their resource and land management goals. The future of the BC Grasslands Mapping Project looks very positive as the momentum and impetus for completing the project builds. *The BC Grasslands database and associated maps will provide the most comprehensive source of grasslands information found in BC, including grasslands (up to 10% Crown closure) and their associated ecological features, such as wetlands, riparian areas, cottonwood and aspen stands, rocky outcrops and talus slopes, and clay banks.*

Charities Update

The GCC has almost achieved its goal of becoming a registered charity.

The GCC has worked with Charities Canada to re-word our constitution to fulfill the guidelines established by Charities Canada. On December 6, the GCC membership voted unanimously on the proposed changes to the GCC Constitution. Upon approval from the BC Ministry of Finance—Corporate and Personal Property Registries, the GCC will receive its registered charity status. This is a fundamental step in the development of the GCC, as it will allow us to apply for funding from major foundations across Canada and the U.S.

The Ratified GCC Mission: To educate and increase the public's understanding for the grassland environment by offering seminars, workshops, conferences and meetings; by collecting and disseminating information on grasslands, grassland conservation and management; and by providing education and stewardship programs. To organize and participate in environmental projects designed to:

- a) maintain and restore grassland flora and fauna;
- b) preserve, protect and restore grassland biodiversity;
- c) improve the management of grasslands.

GCC Updates

Grasslands Display Complete!

After months of revising, rewriting, and editing, the grasslands display is ready for your next conference, family fun day, symposium, or any other event. The display is a highly visual and very engaging eight-panel display that is entirely portable. We have unveiled the display at a few events already, and it has been well received. If you would like the GCC and our display to take part in your next event, please call the office to arrange a booking.

Grasslands Now on the Web

The BC Grasslands website will be the most comprehensive source for grasslands-related information in BC. Phase I of the BC Grasslands website includes information about the GCC and its projects. Upcoming Phase II and Phase III will include an *Understanding Grasslands* section that will allow users to learn about flora, fauna, and ecological processes that occur in grasslands, and a *Where are BC's Grasslands?* section that will allow users to highlight sections of BC that contain grasslands and access additional information about that area. The upcoming phases of the website will be very interactive and feature some attractive photos and illustrations.

GCC Communication and Extension Plan in the Works

The GCC is in the process of developing a comprehensive communications, education and extension plan that will help us achieve our goal of raising awareness and understanding of BC's grasslands and grassland-related ecosystems. Included in this communication plan is a proposed project that, once funding is secured, will produce a series of educational grassland Public Service Announcements to broadcast on television stations all over BC.

ATV Committee Rolling Ahead

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) have published *Alternatives for Regulation of All-Terrain Vehicles in BC*, and copies are available for a small fee by contacting their Vancouver office at 604-685-7445. The ATV committee is continuing discussions with the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management regarding licensing of ATVs.

For more information about these projects, please contact the GCC at (250) 374-5787 or e-mail: gcc@bcgrasslands.org

This Newsletter

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BC Grasslands is a bi-annual publication of the Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia (GCC). *BC Grasslands* is intended to serve as a platform for informing readers about GCC activities and other grassland programs across BC and Canada, as well as providing a forum on grassland ecology, range management, grassland conservation and stewardship.

BC Grasslands and the GCC welcome submissions of letters, articles, story ideas, artwork and photographs for each issue. Articles should be no longer than 600 words (300 words for letters to the editor) and submitted as electronic files (preferably MS Word 95 or newer).

BC Grasslands reserves the right to edit submissions for clarity and length. However, every effort will be made to work with contributors to ensure content remains unchanged. Deadline for submissions for the next issue of *BC Grasslands* is April 30, 2002.

Contributions, comments and inquiries can be made to:
BC Grasslands,
Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia
954A Laval Crescent
Kamloops, BC V2C 5P5
Tel: (250) 374-5787
Fax: (250) 374-6287
Email: gcc@bcgrasslands.org

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BC Hydro
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Grazing Enhancement Fund—Cariboo
Ministry of Forests
Thompson Nicola Noxious Weed Management Committee

Thank you to the BC Cattlemen's Association for assisting the GCC with the distribution of this newsletter.

In the next issue of BC Grasslands...

"By their very nature, ATVs are capable of going over almost any kind of terrain. Open, dry forests, wetlands, alpine areas and grasslands are all areas that offer the kind of experience ATV users are looking for. Unfortunately, many of these fragile ecosystems are being severely degraded by ATV users, particularly those close to settlements."

—ATV background document

All Terrain Vehicles

Part Three of the *Threats to Grasslands Series*

The next issue of *BC Grasslands* will explore All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and their impact on grasslands. We will present various perspectives and explore some tools and options, such as licensing legislation and designated ATV use areas, that present possible solutions that benefit both grasslands and recreationists.

The GCC is seeking submissions for this issue.

Please send your submissions to:

BC Grasslands
954 A Laval Crescent, Kamloops, BC V2C 5P5
Tel: 250 374-5787
Fax: 250 374-6287
E-mail: gcc@bcgrasslands.org

Thank You

The GCC would like to thank the following funders and donors for their generous support:

Funders

BC Hydro, BC Parks, Beef Cattle Industry Development Fund, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Cattle Horn Fund, Chasm Sawmills, City of Kamloops, Dow Agro Science, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Friends of the Environment Foundation, Grazing Enhancement Fund—Kamloops, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, Kamloops Naturalists Club, Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Mountain Equipment Co-op, North Okanagan Regional District, Unifeed, The Real Estate Foundation, Terrestrial Ecosystem Restoration Program, Thompson Nicola Noxious Weed Management Committee, Vancouver Foundation

Sponsors

Dr. Bert Brink, Genoa Environmental Consulting, Gerard Guichon Ranch Ltd., GG Runka Land Sense, In-Tech Computers, St. George's Ranch, William Stewart

Special Thanks

The GCC Would Like to extend a special thank you to Ducks Unlimited Canada for its generous assistance in providing affordable office space and giving the GCC an opportunity to continue its growth and development in a proactive and professional manner.

A warm thanks to the volunteers who have donated their time and energy helping with GCC projects and administration. These volunteers include Janet Southwell, Catherine Tarasoff, Frances Vyse, and the GCC Board of Directors.

Working together for the conservation of BC's grasslands

GCC Message Board

If you have an event or message you would like to add to BC Grasslands GCC Message Board, contact our office at (250) 374-5787. Submission deadline for the next issue is April 30, 2002.

We need volunteers!

The GCC is in need of some hardworking people to assist with database maintenance and other GCC business. If you are interested or know of someone who is interested in giving their time to a worthy cause, please call Bruno Delesalle at the GCC office.

GCC Welcomes Two New Board Members

The GCC welcomes Ian Barnett and Wendy Gardner, both of Kamloops, to the GCC Board of Directors. Ian is the Director of Regional Operations for the Kamloops office of Ducks Unlimited Canada, and Wendy is a professor of range ecology and management at The University College of the Cariboo. Both were inaugurated into the Board at the Directors' meeting on June 23, 2001, and have since taken a very active role in the Council and its activities.

Sustaining Healthy Grasslands Symposium 2002—Plan to Attend!

Next year's symposium has been tentatively scheduled for June 21 and 22 in the East Kootenays. The symposium will focus on threatened or endangered species of the grasslands, and discussion will focus on the incorporation of biodiversity objectives into range management and planning.

Directors Needed

Would you like to play a more active role in the GCC by becoming a member of our Board of Directors? Then let us know! The GCC is in the early stages of succession planning to find appropriate replacements for outgoing Directors.

Fund Raising for 2002 Under Way

The GCC has employed the services of Morningstar Enterprises to assist us in developing and implementing a fund raising strategy for next year. A four-page colour brochure is ready to be sent out to corporations and businesses across the province as part of a fund raising campaign. The fund raising campaign is planned for the New Year. If you know of a business that may be interested in donating to, or joining, the GCC, please contact Bruno Delesalle at (250) 374-5787.

The GCC is Growing

2001 membership has grown by more than 90% over year-2000 membership. It is obvious that there is a need for the GCC, and more and more people are interested in who we are and our role in the conservation and stewardship of BC's grasslands.



Yes! I would like to join the GCC in the conservation of BC Grasslands, Canada's most endangered ecosystem.

NAME (PLEASE PRINT) _____

DATE _____

ORGANIZATION _____

TITLE _____

WORK PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

HOME PHONE _____

POSTAL CODE _____

E-MAIL _____

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MEMBERSHIP: Individual: \$20 Corporations/Institutions: \$250 Donor (up to \$500): \$ _____

Donor (over \$500): \$ _____

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Mail to: Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia, 954A Laval Crescent, Kamloops, BC V2C 5P5
Phone: (250) 374-5787 • Fax: (250) 374-6287 • E-mail: gcc@bcgrasslands.org

GCC annual memberships are valid for the calendar year

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The
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Council
needs your
help!

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING BC'S GRASSLANDS