

GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
STRATEGIC PLAN 2018 - 2021
A three-year vision for BC's grasslands



Photo: Chris Harris

TOWARD 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

On behalf of the Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia (GCC), I am pleased to introduce our 2018 - 2021 Strategic Plan which sets out our priorities for the next three years, as we seek to achieve our vision of healthy, life-sustaining grassland ecosystems in British Columbia. In pursuing this vision, we aim 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 BCs grasslands; and,
- promote the conservation of representative grasslands ecosystems, species at risk and their habitats.

This strategic plan presents an achievable broad plan of action in pursuit of our vision.

In 2019 the GCC will have been in existence for 20 years. The GCC's first formal strategic plan was prepared in 1999 and over time the GCC has changed dramatically as an organization, enjoying periods of relative strength and success and periods when, following the loss of major funding support, we just managed to survive. Like the grasslands themselves, the GCC has proven resilient in the face of adversity and over the past two years we have broadened our funding base and re-focused our aspirations and activities to match our capacity. This plan represents the fruit of that effort.

The fire season of 2017 dramatically affected grasslands ecosystems and the communities and economies dependent upon them. Climate change effects are likely to continue this process for the foreseeable future with fire likely to re-assert itself as a shaper of BCs grasslands. How we respond to these changing circumstances, whether we learn to work with them or against them, will greatly influence the continued health of the grasslands.

As former GCC Chair David Zirnhelt noted in 2009, "the time is right for a paradigm shift...", words that seem just as true today. Good stewardship and sustainable ranching practices will play a significant role in maintaining grasslands health, as will focused efforts to protect and sustain representative grasslands and key grasslands corridors, to facilitate species migration in response to a changing climate. The GCC aims to play a constructive role facilitating our adaptation to these changes in ways that conserve BCs grasslands for future generations.

As we move into our 20th year the GCC looks forward to laying the foundation for a more sustainable organization focused on a concise list of priorities where we offer a unique perspective and the best opportunity to make a difference, working with like-minded partners to take action toward the protection, stewardship, conservation and sustainable use of BCs grasslands.



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Chair, Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia

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&

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Forward

BC's grasslands are unique and important ecosystems. Along with the other diminishing temperate grasslands of the world, they have been internationally recognized as an ecosystem at risk.

Covering a mere 0.8% of the province, BC's grasslands have local, regional, provincial and federal significance to species at risk. More than 80 of the 200 federally listed species at risk found in BC (more than 40%) are associated with grassland ecosystems.

Further, Okanagan and other interior grasslands are a continuation of the Great Steppe Grasslands that extend through the United States to Mexico and provide a critical corridor for species movement between Mexico and Canada.

As for the significance of grasslands to BC, a major finding in the Taking Nature's Pulse: The Status of Biodiversity in British Columbia states that low elevation grasslands are the rarest land cover type in the province. Maintaining grassland diversity and integrity, as well as species at risk, are high priorities within the BC Conservation Framework.

As human populations increase throughout the Interior and land use pressures mount, it is essential that organizations like the GCC work with all levels of government, First Nations, and industry to build a better understanding of the ecological, economic, cultural and social values of grasslands and to forge proactive solutions, whereby grasslands are maintained and stewarded as a provincial heritage and a resource for current and future generations.

In the fall of 2017, as part of an internal and external review of GCC programs and priorities, a series of interviews were completed with board, staff, stakeholders, funders, and other key individuals. The results of the interviews were synthesized and provided guidance for a strategic planning workshop held over two days in October 2017 at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops. At this workshop, GCC board and staff fleshed out the key components of a new plan, including strategic priorities and over several months developed this strategic plan document.

It is important to note that two new strategic priorities emerged from this process (1) stewardship and sustainable ranching, and (2) protection. The workshop also confirmed that the GCC Vision, Mission, Mandate and Core Values as included in this strategic plan are still accurate and relevant in 2018.

The "Toward 2021" strategic plan will guide the GCC over the next three years to implement its long-term goals and objectives and will guide the development of strategies, tactics, annual action plans, budgets, and the delivery of programs. Most importantly, the plan will provide the GCC with the ability to measure progress, success and failures. A strategic approach ensures that the GCC stays focused on key priorities

and maintains a leadership role in grassland conservation and stewardship in British Columbia.

Vision

The vision of the Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia (GCC) is of healthy and life-sustaining grassland ecosystems in British Columbia.

Mission

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; and
- Promote the conservation of representative grasslands ecosystems, species at risk and their habitats.

Mandate

The mandate of GCC is to:

- Increase awareness and appreciation for BC's rare and imperiled grassland ecosystems;
- Work with land managers and land-use decision makers to achieve sustainable land use and management practices;
- Protect the grasslands against threats from a number of sources; and
- Implement proactive projects that will ensure the conservation and stewardship of BC's grasslands.

Core Values

The following core values are fundamental to the development of the GCC and to the effective delivery of its strategic priorities (programs) and serve to guide decision-making as an organization and our actions as individuals:

- **Innovation.** We introduce, evaluate and embrace new ideas;
- **Respect.** We respect each other's interests, values, goals and aspirations;
- **Trust.** We foster trusting relationships;
- **Diversity.** We support an inclusive environment;

- **Impact.** We will measure our effectiveness against science-based, defensible, goals and be able to demonstrate tangible, on-the-ground, results at the appropriate scale;
- **Collaboration.** We embrace the opportunity to work with and learn from each other;
- **Regional Equity.** We ensure appropriate representation from the regions of the province that contain grasslands including broad geographic representation on the GCC Board of Directors;
- **Continuous Improvement.** We strive to do better tomorrow than we did today.

GCC STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

Education and Outreach Program

This program will ensure British Columbians have an understanding of and appreciation for the ecological, economic, and cultural importance of British Columbia's grasslands and take action toward protection, stewardship, conservation, and sustainable use of those grasslands.

Science and Research Program

This program will ensure that government, industry, land use planners and managers have an understanding of, and appreciation for, the ecological importance and significance of British Columbia's grasslands and have the necessary tools to make informed decisions or to take conservation action. This includes defining and designating grasslands of high ecological value for protection, stewardship, or special management.

Land Use Planning and Policy Program

This program will ensure that British Columbia's grasslands are conserved and sustainably managed through the application of appropriate land use and policy and that all land managers and users of private and public grasslands are aware of the impacts of their decisions and actions and are implementing grassland-focused stewardship and management activities.

Stewardship and Sustainable Ranching Program

This program will ensure that stewardship and management of British Columbia's grasslands are enhanced on both private and Crown land through voluntary agreements with willing landowners and land managers.

Protection Program

This program will ensure that grasslands of high ecological value are protected in perpetuity on both private and Crown land through voluntary agreements with willing landowners and land managers.

1. Education and Outreach Program

Goal: Individuals and organizations that play a role in grasslands stewardship have the information they need to take action towards the stewardship, conservation and sustainable use of grasslands.

Objective 1: Provide targeted audiences with information, tools and education to support on-the-ground action for stewardship, conservation, and sustainable use of grasslands using appropriate media types.

Objective 2: Develop and disseminate grassland stewardship information that is targeted towards individuals and organizations that can play a role in grassland stewardship.

Objective 3: Build a constituency of support for the long-term health and sustainable use of grassland ecosystems through relationships and strategic partnerships.

2. Science and Research Program

Goal: Land use planners, managers, and decision makers have the information and tools available to make decisions on grassland conservation.

Objective 1: Lead, and or support, collaborative and applied research focused on grassland ecology, management, restoration and monitoring.

Objective 2: Develop and leverage strategic partnerships with all levels of government, universities, and industry that will result in the conservation and sustainable use of grasslands.

Objective 3: Complete the province-wide Priority Grassland Initiative (PGI) and develop a State of British Columbia Grasslands report card.

3. Land Use Planning and Policy Program

Goal: Grasslands are conserved and sustainably managed through the development and application of appropriate land use planning and policy at the municipal, regional, provincial, federal and First Nations level.

Objective 1: Land use decisions consider the conservation and sustainable management of grasslands.

Objective 2: Participate on committees, advisory boards, panels to promote awareness and use of information and tools for conservation and sustainable management of grasslands.

Objective 3: Where appropriate, advocate and lobby government to develop legislation and policy or take direct action to enhance sustainable management of grasslands.

4. Stewardship and Sustainable Ranching Program

Goal: Grassland management and stewardship is enhanced on private, Crown and First Nations land.

Objective 1: Evaluate the feasibility, risks and opportunities for GCC to become a service provider to enhance stewardship of private, Crown, and First Nations lands. Pilot and test fundability.

Objective 2: Develop, capitalize, and deliver a province-wide **and/or** regional Grassland Stewardship and Enhancement Fund.

Objective 3: Develop, capitalize, and deliver on-the-ground projects that enhance management and stewardship of high priority grasslands throughout British Columbia.

5. Protection Program

Goal: Grasslands are conserved and sustainably managed through the application of appropriate tools on both private and Crown lands.

Objective 1: Evaluate the feasibility, risks and opportunities for GCC of playing a role in protection of grasslands. Pilot and test feasibility and fundability.

Objective 2: Establish a ranching focus group to assess the value of and support for a protection program delivered by GCC within the ranching community with particular reference to purchase of conservation covenants.

Objective 3: Where appropriate, advocate and lobby government to develop legislation and policy or take direct action to protect high priority grasslands throughout British Columbia.