



"The voice of grasslands in British Columbia"

SPRING | SUMMER 2025

BC GRASSLANDS

MAGAZINE OF THE GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Spreading Seeds
of Knowledge

Who We Are

The **Grassland Conservation Council of British Columbia (GCC)** is the only provincial environmental not-for-profit dedicated to increasing and sustaining the ecological health and vitality of BC's rare and highly at-risk grasslands.

Since 1999, we have been a dedicated collective of passionate organizations and individuals committed to protecting BC's grasslands—underrepresented yet remarkably biodiverse ecosystems. Our community includes ranchers, ecologists, conservationists, and concerned citizens who recognize the irreplaceable value of these threatened landscapes and work tirelessly to ensure their preservation for future generations.

Through education and outreach, we inspire practices that create and maintain healthy grassland ecosystems. We bring together diverse stakeholders—from ranchers to recreationists—to develop practical guidance like our Grasslands Monitoring Manual for Ranchers and Best Management Practices for Motorized Recreation. We engage with all branches of government, sharing expertise and advocating for policies that protect these sensitive ecosystems.

Looking forward, we're building a sustainable organization with dedicated staff and a growing community of supporters whose generosity complements our project-based funding—ensuring we can continue this essential work for generations to come.

At the heart of everything we do is a steadfast commitment to conserving BC's grasslands for future generations—a mission fuelled by collaboration, knowledge, and passion!

The Grassland Conservation Council of BC respectfully acknowledges that our work takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of many First Nations—from the Peace River region to the Okanagan Valley, and from the Cariboo-Chilcotin to the East Kootenays. The degradation of grasslands and the crisis of biodiversity loss have resulted directly from colonization and the ongoing barriers to Indigenous stewardship practices, which have sustained these once-abundant ecosystems for all remembered time.

We are committed to building respectful, reciprocal relationships with First Nations and Indigenous organizations. We seek to work collaboratively to support Indigenous-led conservation efforts and to honour and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge in the protection and restoration of these legacy grasslands.

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BC GRASSLANDS

Spreading Seeds of Knowledge

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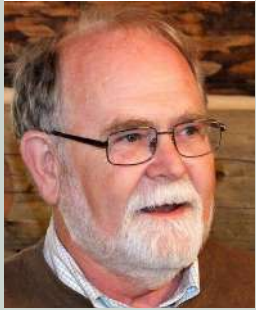


South Okanagan protected area
PHOTO: Katelyn Michaud



Educating *Everyone* about BC's Grasslands

Tom Dickinson



On behalf of the Board of the **Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia (GCC)**, I'd like to welcome you to our annual magazine, *BC Grasslands*! Since 2000, through these pages, we've had the privilege of introducing just a few of the many remarkable animals, plants, fungi, lichens, and more that live their (easy to overlook) lives in these grassland communities, some of which are found nowhere else on Earth.

The GCC's current Strategic Plan emphasizes public education on the importance of our rare and highly at-risk grasslands, along with initiatives in conservation, restoration, research, and sustainable management. In this issue, we aim to highlight (for members, for educators, for everyone) the ways we've brought grasslands into the spotlight and hope to inspire questions and collaboration with people of all ages.

Education creates connection. By helping people understand grasslands—from their role in providing habitats and sustaining clean air and water, to the complex ecological processes that create and maintain these precious ecosystems—we foster deeper appreciation and care. As understanding grows, so too does our collective commitment to protecting these irreplaceable landscapes.

Outside of the classroom, through farmers' markets, social media, on our website, professional conferences, and meetings with landowners and managers, we aim to make sure that the public at large understands how limited grassland ecosystems are and how threatened they are by so many kinds of human activities.

It has been said that '*Education Changes the World.*' We hope that by doing our part to create a broader awareness of the importance of BC's grasslands, these core ecological values will be conserved forever. 🌿



Grassland wildflowers

PHOTO: Tullstar Ranch



AGM Field Tour

PHOTO: GCC



Sage Thrasher

PHOTO: Carolyn Monastra

Keeping Grasslands in the Spotlight

Mike Dedels



This issue of *BC Grasslands* is focused on community engagement, education, outreach and communications, an important part of the GCC's Strategic Plan, and an area where we have partnered with many organizations over the years. We reach out on many levels to improve awareness. From preschoolers to seniors groups, and from those who have been on the land for generations to those who aren't even aware that BC has grasslands.

In these times of political turbulence, the environment, including grasslands conservation, is taking a back seat. It is incumbent on the GCC to continually remind people of this finite and sensitive resource that is so important if we want to enjoy living in harmony with our environment instead of dominating it.

Since the beginning of the GCC in 1999 and for the past 25 years, outreach has been a focus. For the past 15 years, those efforts have largely been supported through Community Gaming Grants from the Province of BC. The GCC is very grateful for that support, which has allowed us to print our *BC Grasslands* magazine and get out to communities across the province. In 2025, we are thrilled to have the support of a dedicated private foundation to increase our capacity and reach a broader audience to initiate interest, develop knowledge and drive further long-term engagement. It has enabled us to employ Heidi Wismath to work with us in Kelowna to assist with some of our education and outreach projects, including this magazine. A big thank you to Heidi for assembling another engaging edition of *BC Grasslands*.

In this issue, you will hear from some of the organizations involved in grassland education and read about some of the great work being done across the province. It has been a privilege to work with so many folks dedicated to grasslands conservation from diverse communities and interests. It is also rewarding to be involved with new stewardship projects, developing a report on native grassland plant supply, and especially to be embarking on an upgrade to BC grassland mapping. These are indeed exciting times to be working on the grasslands. I look forward to connecting with you over the next year. 🐾



108 Mile Lake grasses
PHOTO: Julianne Leekie

Nurturing Future Grassland Caretakers

Heidi Wismath

Elementary Curriculum

We are thrilled to announce an innovative educational program developed through a remarkable partnership: environmental educator Sonya Rokosh, working with Royal Roads University, Thompson Rivers University, and the Stober Foundation, has created a unique curriculum that connects Kamloops elementary students with the grasslands in their community.

What makes this program special is its hands-on, place-based approach. Rather than just learning about “nature” (which rarely refers to BC’s rare grasslands!), students actively explore their local ecosystems through biome identification, watershed mapping, and field exploration.

The program grew from Sonya’s field journaling practice—a method combining external and internal observation. Students learn to document what they see carefully, hear, smell, taste, and feel, including subjective observations like how shade relieves by cooling or how sunsets stir emotions. Through this grassland practice, they develop qualitative and quantitative research skills. The curriculum features 10 engaging lessons for grades 3–5.

Students develop keen observation skills and spatial awareness by creating their own maps while exploring landscapes. They use computer simulators to investigate watershed dynamics and human impacts on water systems. During

grassland field trips, they participate in hands-on activities like Biodiversity Bingo and colour scavenger hunts while maintaining their field journals. One highlight is the “Create a Creature” activity, where students design imaginary species adapted to grassland environments, demonstrating their understanding of ecological adaptation while exercising their creativity.

As we roll out this thoughtfully designed program, we’re fostering the next generation of grassland caretakers in Kamloops. Students build lasting connections with their local ecosystems while developing skills that will serve them and their communities for years. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Secwépemc Nation, our educational partners, and all the dedicated teachers, especially Sonya, who make this exciting and transformative work possible!

Early Learning Resource Box

We’re excited to introduce a new educational initiative that brings the wonder of BC’s grasslands to even younger children! The **Grasslands Discovery Box** we created is now available for free through the YMCA of Kamloops’ Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) program.

This curated collection includes grassland animal figurines representing local species, from burrowing owls to badgers. The box features

complete life cycle sets for salmon and toads, along with some native wildlife figures that are often hard to find.

Beyond the figurines, the box contains educational materials for guided outdoor activities, including animal track cards, plant identification resources, and a handbook with age-appropriate grassland concepts and activities.

Anyone in the community can borrow the Grasslands Box, typically for a few weeks.

We are very grateful to the Kamloops YMCA for offering this service to the community, and we hope to work with other CCRR centres and environmental groups in grassland areas to create similar resources tailored to their regions. 🐦

A photograph of a dark-colored horse grazing on a grassy hill. The hill is covered in dry, yellowish-brown grass and some green patches. In the background, there are rolling hills and a few bare trees under a clear blue sky. The horse is positioned on the right side of the frame, facing right and slightly down the hill.

Bring the Grasslands Discovery Box to your Community

Visit the YMCA CCRR center in Kamloops this fall to arrange to borrow this new resource! Contact your local CCRR center to learn more about bringing this program to your community.

For more information about the Grasslands Box or supporting this initiative, please contact Kamloops CCRR at **250-376-4771** or **kamloopsccrr@bc.ymca.ca**

Grazing in the grasslands

PHOTO: Olsen Imaging

Field Days: Connecting with Landowners and Communities

At the heart of the GCC is a dedication to improving the health of BC grasslands through community involvement and education. We know first hand that ecological balance depends on humans recognizing the impacts of their presence and actively working with the land to foster reciprocity.

Since the grasslands in this part of the world are so diverse, intricately interconnected, misunderstood, and taken for granted, it remains a top priority for the GCC to connect with anyone who has jurisdiction over these limited refuges—especially private landowners—to collaborate on restoration and conservation.

In BC, over 40% of the remaining grasslands are privately owned. This presents a unique challenge, as we can't rely solely (or even mainly!) on provincial or federal governments to carry out the necessary protective measures. Instead, we need our message to reach the eyes and ears of the thousands of people who call these diverse grasslands home. We believe that through the relationships we build, we can support healthy, resilient grasslands.

The Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD), Cenovus Energy, and the GCC collaborated on a project that offered free land tours to empower private landowners and community groups to understand and better care for their grasslands. This initiative has now concluded.

During outreach efforts, we visited Tullstarr Ranch, hosted by the Scott family, where we explored the diverse species inhabiting their land. These 'home visits' are high on our list of priorities for good reason—they allow us to see firsthand how the ecosystem is doing, share this information to help manage the ranch, foster connections, and gain insight into their conservation goals. We want people to think of the GCC first for grassland management and to make sharing best practices among landowners readily available.



Tullstarr Ranch & the Scott Family

Elizabeth Scott

In June 2024, Mike Dedels and Heidi Wismath of the GCC visited our property. They kindly shared their knowledge and identified many of the grasses and wildflowers that grow on our land, and we were impressed by the wide variety we have here.

The *BC Grasslands* magazine played an important role in our decision to purchase and ultimately move to Tullstarr Ranch, located in the Northern Nicola Valley. Despite growing up on the coast, my husband, Randy, and I had strong emotional ties to the grasslands and their accompanying ranches. Randy had spent childhood summers at his uncle's ranch, while I spent much of my youth venturing near and far, including many bus trips to Ashcroft to visit Sundance Guest Ranch.

Finding ourselves empty nesters with three grown daughters, we saw our next move as an adventure — and perhaps, rather naively, decided that ranch life would suit us well. Randy subscribed to *BC Grasslands*, and receiving his first copy was the final deciding factor. "We've got to make this happen!" he declared, flipping through the edition. The next morning, we bought Tullstarr Ranch.

Nearly five years later, no day goes by without learning something new. We've welcomed GCC friends who have generously taught us about the land and how we can protect it. We've learned about the diverse and rich assortment of grasses and wildflowers that return each spring. We've developed a deep appreciation and respect for the changing weather, the vibrant mountain bluebirds, the abundant birds of prey, and the resident moose who occasionally appears.

Over time, our understanding of conservation has evolved, and we are committed to meaningfully contribute to the health and preservation of these special grasslands.



"Over time, our understanding of conservation has evolved, and we are committed to meaningfully contributing to the health and preservation of these special grasslands."



Big Bar Lake Community Outreach

Linda Manning

Harry Marriott, author of *Cariboo Cowboy*, was a well-known cowboy and rancher in the Big Bar Lake area, famous for its natural beauty and recreational opportunities. His wife, Peg Marriott, operated a successful guest ranch on the lake's shores for nearly 40 years. After selling in 1980, much of the lakeshore was developed into strata lots. Over time, many families have moved in, building homes and spending time at the lake. A provincial campsite exists at the north end. Consequently, the nearby grasslands and forests have seen increased activity from ATVs, dirt bikes, mountain bikes, hikers, and bird watchers.

A local landowner, aware of GCC's outreach work, invited Mike Dedels and Heidi Wismath, as well as representatives from range and invasive weed management, to visit the area in late July 2024 and share their knowledge and resources regarding these sensitive and vulnerable grasslands with residents and other interested parties. The

information session was a resounding success, addressing numerous questions about identifying native plants and invasive weeds, as well as suggestions for the best stewardship of the area moving forward.

"Awareness is key to changing behaviours, and GCC planted a seed by making those gathered more aware of the precious resource in their backyard."

We thank the TNRD and Cenovus Energy for their support in delivering essential grassland education to communities. We aim to be a helpful resource for everyone, including private landowners, professionals, and the public. If you wish to organize an event, please reach out to us! 🐾

Big Bar Lake

PHOTO: F. Kronlogy



Big Bar Lake
PHOTO: Heath Robertson

The Voice of the Grasslands

Heidi Wismath

The Rich Legacy of *BC Grasslands Magazine*

For more than two decades, BC Grasslands Magazine has been the leading voice for British Columbia's precious grassland ecosystems. Our coverage spans the entire province—from the iconic bunchgrass slopes of the Okanagan to the lesser-known “pocket grasslands” of Cape Scott on Vancouver Island. We've documented conservation successes in regions like the Cariboo-Chilcotin while advocating for threatened sites such as Churn Creek. We aim to connect grassland advocates and communities through these pages, while showcasing the uniqueness of each region and our shared challenges.

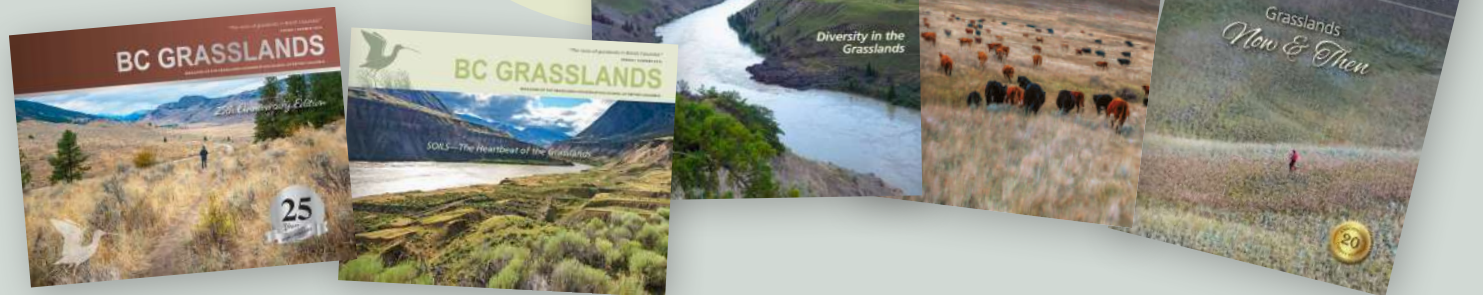
In today's climate-conscious world, BC Grasslands Magazine remains more relevant than ever. Our recent coverage addresses pressing challenges, examining research on biological soil crusts and the carbon-sequestration potential of grassland soils. We showcase innovative conservation strategies, from carbon credit systems to collaborative approaches for grassland protection and restoration.

The magazine has been a first glance into the grasslands, introducing readers to endangered wildlife, including the Burrowing Owl, Badger, Great Basin Spadefoot Toad, and Long-billed Curlew—species that depend on healthy grasslands for survival. Our botanical coverage is diverse, highlighting everything from the spring-blooming Sagebrush Buttercup to hardy native grasses like Rough Fescue.

As we prepare to upgrade our website search capabilities and refresh our digital archives this winter, we're reminded of the importance of easy access to information – essential for raising awareness and appreciation for these fragile and endangered ecosystems.

We hope this edition, which highlights some of our educational initiatives, will serve as a starting point for educators, organizations, and individuals to find inspiration for collaboration. 🐦

“For many readers, these pages may be their first encounter with iconic and endangered wildlife.”





Amplifying Voices for Grasslands through our Webinars

Heather Richardson

Over the years, the GCC has invited various experts to speak in our webinar series. The topics of our webinars range from management issues to wildlife species-at-risk to grassland ecology. These webinars are an important means of networking and sharing information about issues that affect grasslands and grassland species, which often face marginalization.

View featured videos on our website: bcgrasslands.org/videos-2/ and be sure to follow our YouTube channel for new additions.

Here, we highlight just a few of the recent webinars:

An Introduction to Grasslands

Dr. Wendy Gardner, Professor, Thompson Rivers University

Grasslands are ecosystems dominated by native grass and/or forb species, resulting from a specific climate and high levels of disturbance. Grasslands occur in warm and dry climates that prevent trees from taking over. Fire is another important driver in maintaining grassland ecosystems. Due to the recent history of fire suppression on the landscape, and as the natural fire regime has been disrupted, grasslands are being overtaken by tree encroachment.

Since colonial occupation, 70% of the grasslands in Canada have been lost, and only 6% are under any form of protection. Grasslands are endangered ecosystems threatened by development, agriculture, invasive species, and poor management. They are the basis for numerous ecosystem services and need our help to stay healthy and functioning.



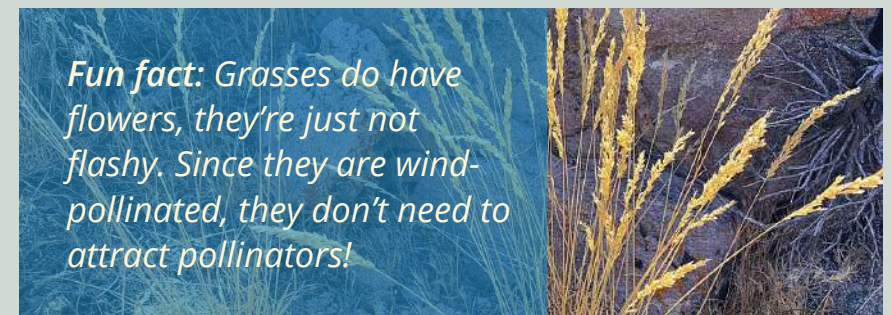
Western Burrowing Owl
PHOTO: Frank Schulenburg

Bringing back the Burrowing Owls in BC

Lauren Meads, Executive Director,
Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC

The Western Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia hypogaea*) is a Species at Risk in Canada and was lost, or extirpated, from BC in the 1980s. Its populations have declined due to the loss of grassland habitat, reduction in prey populations, vehicle collisions, and severe weather events.

For 30 years, the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of British Columbia has been working on reintroducing Burrowing Owls to the grasslands of BC through captive breeding and habitat enhancement. The Society has breeding facilities in Kamloops, Port Kells, and Oliver. After a year in the breeding facility, young owls are tagged, paired, and released to a nesting burrow in the wild.



Fun fact: Grasses do have flowers, they're just not flashy. Since they are wind-pollinated, they don't need to attract pollinators!



Western Rattlesnake, Spences Bridge
PHOTO: Fern To graph



Knapweed
PHOTO: Gaidale

Conservation Concerns and Research for the Western Rattlesnake

Karl Larsen, Professor, Thompson Rivers University

Western rattlesnakes (*Crotalus oreganus*) reach their northern limits in BC, facing cooler climates, longer migrations, and a reduced prey population. These northern populations experience additional challenges from development, habitat loss, vehicle collisions, and persecution. Karl and his students have initiated research to gain insights into rattlesnake behaviours and support their conservation.

In one such project, they examined the effects of vehicle collisions on rattlesnakes by conducting road surveys to count road kills and track populations. Collaborating with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, they implemented culverts in key areas to facilitate rattlesnake crossings.

For 16 years, Karl and his students have partnered with the Osoyoos Indian Band and Environment and Climate Change Canada to explore how fencing and development affect rattlesnake populations and their migration patterns.

In collaboration with Trans Mountain, they have researched ways to mitigate den destruction and reconstruct new dens when damaged during pipeline construction. Ongoing research is essential for the conservation of this at-risk species.

Knapweed: History, Impacts, and its Future in BC

Dave Ralph, Senior Operations Manager, Invasive Species Council of BC

Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*) and diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) propagate through their prolific seeds. Their distribution occurs through various means, including wildlife and numerous human activities such as vehicles, outdoor recreation, livestock movement, and contaminated forage. These species were accidentally introduced from Europe and Asia, spreading quickly across North America, where they have had a detrimental effect on native ecosystems, particularly grasslands. Knapweeds and other invasive species diminish biodiversity, affect forage availability, degrade water quality, contribute to wildfires, and disrupt traditional land use and food sources for Indigenous Peoples.

The Invasive Species Council of BC works alongside partners and industry stakeholders to identify, monitor, contain, and manage invasive species through methods like herbicide application, re-seeding after disturbances, and biological control. Additionally, they aim to raise awareness about invasive species, offer training, and coordinate research initiatives. 🐾

Students of the Grasslands

Heidi Wismath

This spring, we launched our first student-centred webinar series, “Students of the Grasslands,” hosted with the BC Chapter of the Society for Range Management. In this series, viewable online, we introduced five students who are refining and presenting their cutting-edge research in BC’s grasslands.

I’m truly pleased to see such a great number of registrants and viewers already interested in our webinars. It shows that such spaces are truly valuable and much needed. We all benefit when we come together to share ideas and learn from one another. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has contributed!

Many thanks to the BC Chapter of the Society for Range Management and to the Thompson Nicola Conservation Collaborative for their support in providing us with a platform.



Katherine Johnson is pursuing her master’s in Agricultural, Food, and Nutritional Sciences at the University of Alberta, focusing on Rangeland and Wildlife Research. Her research examines how invasive plants respond to prescribed fire and herbicide treatments in southeastern British Columbia. This project collaborates with Kikomun Creek Provincial Park and the Yaqit ʔa·knuqʔi’it First Nation, aiming to address invasive species management while respecting traditional land practices.



Thomas Alexander, a first-year Master of Environmental Science student at Thompson Rivers University, applies his Southern Alberta ranching background in research by using drones and virtual fencing systems for rangeland management. While still in early stages, preliminary research shows promise for livestock containment and sustainable land practices. Thomas discusses how virtual fencing operates, its applications for enhancing rangeland health, and its potential to reduce traditional ranching labour and infrastructure costs.



Jef Vreys, a master's student at UBC Okanagan, specializes in ecological restoration. His thesis develops protocols to assess the environmental integrity of antelope brush habitats in the South Okanagan, which face threats from human activities and environmental changes. This webinar introduces ecological integrity, its importance in conservation, and insights from Jef's research.



Maria Bayliff, a fourth-year Natural Resource Science student at Thompson Rivers University, provides insights from her upbringing on a Chilcotin ranch and her forestry experience in BC and cattle station management in Australia. Her research explores wolf predation dynamics on livestock in BC's Chilcotin region, addressing a complex conservation challenge. Using a mixed-methods approach, she combines government predation records with rancher interviews to understand wolf management effectiveness, predation trends, and ranchers' perspectives.



Carley Dolman is in her fourth year as a Natural Resources Sciences student at Thompson Rivers University. Her research focuses on resilient ephemeral ponds in arid grasslands, where she develops habitat enhancement strategies for the Great Basin Spadefoot (*Spea intermontana*) to address climate change challenges. This research occurs on unceded Secwepemc territory, in partnership with Skeetchestn Natural Resources. 🦋

The Canadian Grassland Awareness Coalition

Dr. John Wilmshurst

There's an enduring irony in grassland conservation work—while North America's great plains play a central role in the legends, stories, and real struggles of its people and wildlife, the general public has little understanding of what Turtle Island's natural grasslands truly are. Indigenous nations' deep cultural relationships with the great bison migrations are fundamental to these ecosystems. Subsequent stories of explorers, homesteaders, the railroad, the Dust Bowl era, and Eastern European and Asian immigration have also shaped the history of these grasslands. Yet, this rich landscape remains poorly understood by many today.

Grasslands are beautiful and iconic but they are disappearing, and too few people know about them. This prompted the Canadian Wildlife Federation, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and the Prairie Grasslands Initiative of the Weston Family Foundation to take two key steps: measure the gap between Canadians' interest and awareness of grasslands and build a coalition of organizations ready to act.

Our first step was straightforward yet revealing. Through a professional polling agency, we surveyed Canadians about their knowledge of and concern for grasslands. The results showed Canadians deeply care about grasslands but understand little about them. Though not surprising, this finding provides concrete data to support our call for greater awareness and confirms the potential for positive change. Our

second step is an ongoing initiative to unite Canada's leading communications experts in grassland conservation and management to address this awareness gap.

The Grasslands Conservation Council of BC is an essential partner in this effort. British Columbia has some of Canada's most significant and spectacular grasslands. BC's bluebunch wheatgrass and rough fescue ecosystems stand alongside Saskatchewan's mixed-grass prairie, Alberta's foothills, and Manitoba's tallgrass prairies, among Canada's finest grasslands.

Our work extends beyond those who already know and love our grasslands. Through our Coalition's nationwide network of organizations, we aim to reach all Canadians, including those who live far from grasslands, sharing insights about these mysterious ecosystems, their wonders, their valuable contributions, and the threats they face.

In 2026, during the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, we'll collaborate internationally to enhance Canadians' awareness of our magnificent grassland heritage.

Though grasslands have always been central to Canadian history and popular culture, our mission is

to elevate them beyond mere backdrops for historical events and drama.

Canadians should recognize the grassland wilderness beneath their feet and alongside their highways and railways as more than space without trees—it is a landscape of intricate values that deserves our attention, appreciation, and protection. 🌿

Dr. John Wilmshurst is the Native Grassland Conservation Manager for Canadian Wildlife Federation.

"Though grasslands have always been central to Canadian history and popular culture, our mission is to elevate them beyond mere backdrops for historical events and drama."



Lac du Bois Grasslands Protected Area

PHOTO: Heidi Wismath

Reflections on Our 2024 AGM

Mike Dedels



In June 2024, a gathering of grassland enthusiasts converged upon Kamloops for our two-day Annual General Meeting and the much-anticipated grassland tours. Thompson Rivers University (TRU) hosted our meeting, and we offered an online alternative, enabling attendees from across the province to tune in to the proceedings. In addition to the regular review of finances and activities, we welcomed Shawna LaRade and Meghan Allan to the Board of Directors. We also expressed our gratitude to Toni Boot and Cathy Mumford for their service on the Board. Toni had been our editor for *BC Grasslands* magazine for several years, expertly putting together our flagship annual production.

On a beautiful Friday afternoon, we headed over to Lac du Bois Grasslands Protected Area to witness a prime example of conifer and sagebrush encroachment in the Prudens Pass area. Several guests, including experts from the Forest Service and BC Parks, joined us. There is a broad consensus among non-government organizations, First Nations, and government that encroachment affects habitat values and fuel loads in many areas that should be grassland or open forest. The GCC looks

forward to continuing this conversation and working towards increased control over encroachment.

We also explored GCC's Spotted Knapweed treatment demonstration site at Red Hill. After two years of various mechanical and chemical treatments, the results are beginning to emerge. We anticipate continuing this demonstration site for the long term. Over the last two years, it has welcomed visits from various groups, including agrologists, naturalists, students, and the Boards of the BC Conservation Foundation and Invasive Species Council of BC. After a long, hot day on the grassland, the group relished refreshments and camaraderie at the Yew Street Food Hall.

On Saturday, June 8, we enjoyed a wealth of information and engaging experiences in the beautiful grasslands. The day began with a welcome from Chief Eddy Jules of the Skeetchestn Indian Band, who spoke about the Secwepemc peoples' traditional understanding and deep connection to these lands. At the eastern edge of the Tobiano development and below Six Mile Point, we discussed lower grasslands, the use of crested wheatgrass,




grassland restoration, and the impacts of development on the grasslands. Thousands of people stop at the viewpoint above, providing overviews of grasslands and the effects of agricultural, residential, transportation, and golf course developments.

From the hot, dry slopes above Kamloops Lake, we travelled south to the upper grasslands surrounding Tunkwa Lake. Here, we examined historical and current grazing use and the land-use planning that led to the establishment of Tunkwa Lake Provincial Park from a viewpoint on Dominic Ridge. From there, we proceeded to the Tunkwa Lake campground for lunch and a walk to Bluff Lake. Excellent discussions on the 2021 Tremont Creek wildfire and its impacts ensued, along with a review of the now-burned Bluff Lake ungrazed area fence.

The final stop of the day was at the two grazing exclosures south of Tunkwa Lake. Built in 1959 and 1994, both were burned in 2021 and subsequently rebuilt. Fortunately, the Range Branch had sampled them just prior to the fire, providing valuable data on long-term grazing impacts

in those grasslands. A walk into the adjacent burned pine forest revealed that natural recovery can be slow in heavily burned areas.

A wonderful day with over 30 participants concluded with a barbecue hosted at Indian Gardens Ranch by Bob and Kathleen Haywood-Farmer and their family. The Haywood-Farmers' dedication to the GCC is truly appreciated. Our AGM and tours are a highlight every spring. We look forward to reporting on our Kootenay 2025 tour in next year's *BC Grasslands* as we plan for our 2026 AGM next spring.

Watch for event details on our website: bcgrasslands.org 

The GCC is eager to continue the conversation and is working towards greater control over areas where they are encroaching on grassland habitat.

How Much Big Sagebrush Should There Be in BC?

Nancy Elliot

As I wander through the dry, windswept grasslands of British Columbia in search of birds and plants, I often wonder: How much big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* Nutt. subsp. *tridentata*) should exist here? The easy answer is “less,” but the bigger answer is complex, shaped by human activity, fire suppression, and climate change. We must consider history, ecology, and intervention to understand its rightful place.

Historically, big sagebrush thrived in lower grasslands with well-drained soils, while both natural and cultural fires kept it sparse in middle and upper elevations. Indigenous knowledge, settler accounts, and scientific records suggest that frequent fires suppressed sagebrush, maintaining open grasslands for ungulates (Blackstock & McAllister, 2004; Cawker, 1983; McLean, 1966). However, colonial land use, fire suppression, and overgrazing disrupted this balance, allowing sagebrush to expand, even creeping into rough fescue zones with the aid of a warming climate.

BC's grasslands are diverse, shaped by elevation, soil, and moisture. As I walk, I notice that some areas are better suited for sagebrush than others. Climate models predict warmer temperatures and shifting precipitation patterns—could this push sagebrush beyond its historical range?

The future of sagebrush in BC is not just a question of numbers but of balance. Understanding the past, adapting to change, and listening to Indigenous knowledge may help us restore equilibrium. As the sun sets on my walk, I realize the answer isn't a fixed number but a relationship—one that respects history, responds to the present, and prepares for the future. 🌄

“BC's grasslands are diverse, shaped by elevation, soil, and moisture. As I walk, I notice that some areas are better suited for sagebrush than others. Climate models predict warmer temperatures and shifting precipitation patterns—could this push sagebrush beyond its historical range?”

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Acknowledgements: Thank you to Brian Wallace and Nick Hamilton for their contributions.

Bob on Big Sagebrush

Bob Haywood-Farmer

When it comes to sagebrush, we ask, “Is it good or bad?” As a rancher, I appreciate the advantages of sage on the landscape.

My father always claimed that sagebrush provides better rustling opportunities for cattle on a snow-covered range, preventing the snow from completely covering the grass and forming an impenetrable crust. During calving season, sage provides great shelter for newborn calves. For a trouble-free, disease-free calving experience, a range with some sagebrush areas is hard to beat. The Thompson Valley can be a cold, windblown area in the spring months, and sage can offer some ground-level protection from the elements.

Big Sagebrush has been recognized as a significant sign of inadequate grazing practices in regions like the lower Thompson Valley. Range management professionals have labelled sagebrush a “problem species” in grasslands, as it competes for resources with bunch grasses. Kept in balance with the grasses, sagebrush has many positive attributes. From an ecological point of view, sage can add a level of biodiversity to the grasslands. It can provide habitat for ground-nesting birds, rodents, and reptiles alike.

Big Sage ranges from being a major element of grasslands, occasionally reaching heights of two meters or more, to having a minimal presence among bunchgrasses. Successful fire management depends on ground fuel, mainly grasses and decaying matter, but year-round grazing reduces this fuel, leading to a notable rise in sage due to unsuitable grazing practices in the late 19th century. Intense summer fires can completely eliminate sage, followed by a lengthy recovery period that may take over 50 years for significant reestablishment.

The 2021 Tremont Fire severely impacted our low-elevation grasslands, destroying the majority of Big Sage. While grasses have shown remarkable recovery, the landscape now lacks its former diversity. Is this development beneficial? I have mixed feelings, although the grasses do appear impressive. Conducting controlled burns in early spring with adequate soil moisture might provide better management, and targeting smaller patches for burning could help maintain overall diversity.

Good grazing management in the grasslands can help maintain a better balance between sagebrush and grasses. Manage the grass well, and the sage will take care of itself. Grazing in early spring, prior to the rapid growth stage, allows for good recovery in the grasses. Dormant season grazing, in fall or winter, is less impactful on the grasses than grazing during active growth periods. For any grazing done during the growing period, a rotation that allows complete rest every second year is beneficial to the grasses. Winter grazing can be useful for keeping sage in balance since the stock will browse the sagebrush and keep it in check.

Sagebrush enhances grasslands’ beauty with its silver-green foliage and the unforgettable aroma that lingers for anyone hiking or driving cattle through the grasslands, particularly after rain—its scent is part of my DNA. Despite being vilified for overgrazing, Big Sage is vital to grassland ecosystems. With proper management, including burning, it provides essential benefits. I appreciate its presence, and I’m sure many rattlesnakes and meadowlarks agree! 🐍🐦

Restoring Balance in Big Sagebrush Ecosystems: A Collaborative Approach with the Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation

Baylie Sjodin

The vast grasslands of British Columbia, particularly within the Bunchgrass ecosystems, have long relied on fire as a natural regulator. However, decades of fire suppression have disrupted this balance, leading to excessively dense patches of big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*). While sagebrush holds cultural significance for the Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation (SXFN) and provides critical habitat for wildlife, its unchecked expansion has begun to outcompete native grasses like bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), diminishing biodiversity and altering the natural functions of the ecosystem.

Recognizing these ecological changes, SXFN has taken proactive steps in land stewardship since acquiring the BC Cattle Company in 2022. The Nation is currently in the planning phases, collaborating closely with the community to ensure that potential treatment sites and strategies align with community needs and respect cultural values. SXFN thoughtfully assesses where and how to restore balance while preserving the plant's vital cultural and ecological roles through a long-term commitment to sustainable ranching, enhancing biodiversity, and honouring cultural values.

A key element of this initiative is the potential reintroduction of cultural burning—a practice historically employed by Indigenous communities to maintain healthy ecosystems. By refining treatment areas and engaging in meaningful discussions with community members, SXFN aims to develop an approach that effectively reduces excessive sagebrush density while allowing the natural ecosystem to thrive once more. These efforts enhance ecosystem health and provide sustainable solutions for ranching operations, ensuring a productive and resilient landscape for future generations.

This initiative is an inspiring example of how Indigenous sovereignty and traditional knowledge can be harnessed to address contemporary ecological challenges. By integrating cultural practices with ecological restoration, SXFN demonstrates that land stewardship can honour tradition and sustainability, benefiting local communities, ranchers, and the diverse species that rely on these grassland ecosystems. 🐾

Baylie Sjodin is a forest ecologist with Keefer Ecological Services in Cranbrook, BC.





Ecosystem Transitions in BC's Boreal: Planning for the Future

Nick Hamilton

The spring and early summer of this year brought another severe wildfire season to the southern boreal forests that extend across the northern prairie provinces and the northeast of British Columbia.

Although cooler conditions and rain have reduced wildfire behaviour this summer (so far), a warming climate is predicted to cause a trend of increasing fire intensity and greater average area burned per year. Northeast BC has seen extraordinary wildfire behaviour in recent years. Two summers ago, we experienced the largest wildfire in the province's history. The 2023 Donnie Creek wildfire burned an area of 620,000 hectares. After an initial ignition near Fort Nelson in May, the wildfire continued burning until at least the end of August 2024.

These new wildfire behaviours are emerging because the north is drying. In boreal (northern) forests, there is a 2-3 week period in early spring when last year's plant growth is dry and exposed because the snow has melted, but new plant growth has not yet emerged from the soil. With warmer and drier conditions, fires continue to burn deep in moss layers throughout the winter, leading to wildfires that can persist for multiple years.

By the 2050s, large areas of the boreal northeast are projected to have climates typically associated with aspen parklands, plains fescue grasslands, and mixed-grass prairies, according to Mackenzie and Mahoney (2021). Shifts in ecosystem types and functions are likely to be driven by the complex relationship between fire disturbances and forest floor or soil surface conditions at the local level.

"In boreal forests, there is a 2-3 week period in early spring when last year's plant growth is dry and exposed because the snow has melted, but new plant growth has not yet emerged. With warmer and drier conditions, fires continue to burn deep in moss layers throughout the winter, leading to wildfires that can persist for multiple years."



Figure 1. Grassland on a south-facing aspect near Pink Mountain, BC, with purple reedgrass (foreground), fuzzy-spike wildrye, northern wheatgrass, Altai fescue, and willows (background).

Coniferous boreal white and black spruce forests typically feature mossy understories that develop over decades of cool, shaded conditions, where wildfires might not occur for over 100 years. Aspen and grassland sites have rapidly growing forb and grass communities, characterized by rapid buildup of fine fuels, which support more frequent fire return intervals. This shift to a parkland habitat would create a mosaic of aspen stands, grasslands, and coniferous forests.

Wildfires in boreal forests are often high-severity and high-intensity stand-replacing events. Conversely, parkland fires are more frequent, low-severity and serve the function of maintaining the ecosystem's biodiversity. While parklands have the same habitats as boreal forests, the proportion of habitats across the landscape is different; boreal forest landscapes are conifer-dominated with smaller proportions of aspen and grassland, and parkland landscapes have relatively greater proportion of aspen and grasslands with coniferous stands persisting on cooler sites such as north aspects and along riparian corridors.



Figure 2. Meadow near Pink Mountain, BC, with Altai fescue, northern wheatgrass, sedges, and willows.

Plant propagule availability will be a crucial factor in determining the success or failure of a transition to a parkland landscape. In many cases, altering disturbance regimes could lead to a natural shift towards grassland and aspen-associated plant communities. However, since agronomic species are present on thousands of kilometres of industrial developments and roads across the northeast, there is a risk that newly formed grassland and meadow habitats will be dominated by exotic species, such as smooth brome, creeping red fescue, and alfalfa, among others. Native grassland plant communities are also found throughout the northeast (*Figures 1, 2*), occurring on steep slopes with warm aspects, in the warmer climates of the Peace River Valley, in alpine and subalpine areas with less tree cover, and at sites with edaphic conditions that limit tree growth such as heavy clays and gravelly soils.

Key species include northern wheatgrass (both grassland and meadow varieties), Richardson's needlegrass, slender wheatgrass, Pumpell's brome, western wheatgrass, porcupine grass, Altai fescue, fuzzy-spike wildrye, tufted hairgrass, spike-oat, various sedges, numerous forbs, willows, roses, snowberry, and others. Extensive aspen stands are found in the South Peace (*Figure 3*), representing the legacy of Indigenous burning practices.

Strategies to support the transition to parklands include experimentation to better understand the effectiveness of introducing local seeds to



Figure 3. Aspen stand near the confluence of the Beatton and Peace Rivers with high-brush cranberry (*Viburnum edule*), prickly rose, willows, peavine, and fireweed.

wildfire-affected areas, as well as implementing prescribed burning regimes to sustain habitats. In this context, local native plant collectors and growers could play a vital role in managing ecosystem changes towards a more sustainable and fire-resilient landscape of predominantly native species.

A managed transition to parklands in certain areas could also serve as a much-needed firebreak near communities. All these initiatives would require careful planning and collaboration between Treaty 8 First Nations and the government of BC. Finally, parkland habitats could offer new opportunities for forage for wild ungulates and livestock, including reintroduced bison. 🐾

Nick Hamilton is a rangeland ecologist with two decades of fieldwork experience in the southern interior and northern regions of British Columbia.

For those seeking additional information about the species composition of Peace grasslands, Nick's new research note on the topic was published in the *Canadian Field Naturalist*:

Hamilton, N.P. 2023. Description of a relict aspen parkland-associated grassland in the Peace River region of British Columbia, Canada. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 137(4): 327–333. <https://doi.org/10.22621/cfn.v137i4.3057>

GCC Partner Spotlight: Allan Brooks Nature Centre

Just south of Vernon, the Allan Brooks Nature Centre (ABNC) sits on a grassy hilltop at the meeting point of the Okanagan and Coldstream valleys. Since 1996, it's grown from a former weather station into a full-fledged interpretive centre that offers various educational programs and events on-site and off-site. With a sweeping view of the surrounding grassland ecosystems and the impact of human activities in the area, the centre serves as a hub for environmental education and awareness about the importance and threats to the Okanagan grasslands.

ABNC welcomes visitors to discover the fascinating world of BC's grasslands, highlighting their unique features and the importance of conservation. Through guided trail tours, participants get to explore and learn about the rich diversity of local plants and animals in a friendly, engaging way. The Centre also offers community programs like summer camps and school field trips, which provide fun, hands-on learning experiences that bring the natural world to young people. Plus, with its interactive educational programs and a handy E-Learning portal, the Centre invites everyone to explore topics like habitat fragmentation, degradation, and loss through engaging exhibits and materials."

ABNC has been an important partner for us at GCC. They host community events like The Raptors, which is a thrilling way to see live birds of prey up close. This helps connect community members with these specialized predators that keep grasslands clean and help control pest populations.

We visited The Raptors in June 2025 and shared local raptor knowledge, along with colouring sheets. By creating opportunities like these and working with environmental organizations in the region, the ABNC is spreading the word about the importance and interconnectedness of grassland ecosystems in the Okanagan. 🦅

Worldwide, nearly 30% of raptors face threats. Our native raptors, including burrowing owls, red-tailed and Cooper's hawks, and peregrine falcon, rely on healthy, biodiverse grassland ecosystems for survival.





Short-eared Owl on broken tree

PHOTO: Puneet Sehgal



Stormy skies over the grasslands

PHOTO: Olsen Imaging

Loving the Grasslands

Fundraiser Event 2025

This year, we were thrilled to be completely sold out! The event was held at Mason's Kitchen & Bar in Kamloops on February 6, 2025. Our guests enjoyed a lively live auction led by Russell Allison, along with a tasty assortment of snacks and drinks.

In today's changing environmental landscape, organizations like ours face challenges in securing sustainable funding, especially from those who may not appreciate the value of grasslands. The current political climate complicates our work, as environmental issues often split opinions along political lines. This division makes our advocacy for British Columbia's grasslands more important than ever. For this, we rely on consistent financial support beyond specific project grants - this is why we have memberships and hold an annual fundraiser - we need to raise the funds we use to sustain our conservation and advocacy efforts.

Your support enables us to pursue our mission to speak and care for BC's rare and endangered ecosystems, today and for future generations.

Thank you to our advertisers, MLA Peter Milobar and MLA Ward Stamer. Watch for "Loving the Grasslands 2026" at Thompson Rivers University on February 5, 2026. Contact us regarding sponsorship opportunities. 🐾



Many thanks to Russell Allison for performing the auctioneering duties.



Thank you to Jennifer Davy of Spectrum Resource Group for the support.

THANK YOU SPONSORS!

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GCC Leadership Spotlight: Getting Your Name Out There

Ian Barnett

I have spent 45 years in conservation, including 38 years with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC). For the last 6 years, I have volunteered with the BC Grasslands Conservation Council (GCC). I often think about my experiences with the two leading conservation organizations in Canada and now find joy in contributing to a smaller but highly effective one.

In the realm of conservation, whether an environmental non-governmental organization (ENGO) is small, medium, or large, donations tend to be limited compared to those directed to NGOs in health, education, and religion. The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) reports that annual contributions to environmental charities rarely go beyond 5%, and that percentage is fiercely contested, with numerous ENGOs vying for greater revenue and recognition.

For an ENGO like the GCC to truly excel, establishing a strong, positive reputation and consistent public respect for our organization and brand is crucial. The GCC is remarkable; as we like to say, we “punch above our weight.” Those familiar with us often see us as larger than we really are. While this perception has its advantages and disadvantages—it’s flattering that people wish to partner with us—it can occasionally present challenges in capacity when opportunities arise. To

boost our capacity, we must enhance public education, fundraising, and partnerships. Our aim isn’t to transform into a large organization, but to achieve our goals, we need to grow and pursue greater self-sufficiency.

Public education is essential for GCC to broaden our influence and effectiveness in the grasslands ecosystem. The GCC’s Strategic Plan outlines five main outcomes and actions, with a significant focus on capacity building. The other four outcomes encompass community engagement, on-the-ground conservation, research support, and influencing policymakers. Achieving any of these long-term targets necessitates our persistent efforts in conveying our messages diligently and credibly.

Drawing from my experiences with DUC and NCC, I believe public education can be effectively executed in various ways. Our three successful GCC fundraisers in Kamloops engaged the public, enabling them to learn more about our work. Quality displays and clear messaging in our materials are crucial to ensure attendees understand our mission and how their donations contribute.

In my early days as a field biologist at DUC, many were unclear about who we were until we began hosting local, enjoyable fundraising events. This effort significantly boosted DUC’s recognition, understanding, and respect.

While NCC isn't as event-centric as DUC, it has built its public visibility and respect through substantial investments in large landscape projects, involving various land users, government, and partners in conservation planning and management. Consequently, landowners and donors observe success stories in certain areas, prompting them to support further initiatives. Though the GCC does not buy or lease land like DUC and NCC, it is key that we showcase our accomplishments. Like other thriving organizations, this strategy will bolster public awareness of our work and enhance revenue, supporting our core objectives.

Over the past six years, GCC has significantly expanded our social media outreach by bringing in skilled personnel to communicate effectively. We have also organized field days at various locations, including Walhacín and Tunkwa Lake, featuring experts who share valuable insights into numerous grassland issues. Over the years, we have published a wealth of materials, such as *"Best Practices for Motor Vehicles on BC's Grasslands"* and ecological assessments of key grassland regions, alongside an abundance of information related to grassland ecology, management, and stewardship. Please visit Resources on the GCC website for historic magazines, publications, and more.

The GCC can lead grassland conservation by prioritizing capacity

building and effective communication. We are the only organization in BC dedicated to grasslands. Although grasslands occupy less than 1% of BC's total area, they house over 30% of species at risk. They also support our livestock sector and provide significant recreational opportunities. Informing the public about these rare grasslands and their many benefits is crucial for maintaining, managing, and enhancing our invaluable grasslands.

As a friend once said, "You write your own reference," emphasizing that we bear the responsibility of excelling and promoting our cause accordingly. 🐾

"Achieving any of these long-term targets necessitates our persistent efforts in conveying our messages diligently and credibly."

Annual Report 2024/25

Governance and Capacity

The last year was a year of growth for the GCC as we connected with even more people and groups across the province and planned for a very busy year ahead. With significant support from donors and foundations, we have increased our budget from under \$100K a few years ago to over \$200K in the last fiscal year. This growth presents both opportunities and challenges, requiring us to dedicate significant time to developing projects and finding the right people to implement them. Partnerships with other non-governmental organizations remain crucial.

At our AGM in Kamloops last June, we welcomed Meghan Allan, a recent TRU graduate working with Citxw Nlaka'pamux Assembly as a new director. Allen Wootton, Executive Director of the BC Conservation Foundation, joined us late in 2024, and in February, Lindsay Jones from Nanaimo brought a wealth of experience across many sectors. Our active and diverse Board continues to contribute in many ways. We also bid farewell to Tony Boot, whose presence is much missed—especially when it comes to assembling our magazines, which she edited from 2021 until this year.

The GCC held its third “Loving the Grasslands” event in February, raising over \$40,000, which will be used to leverage additional funding support for the upcoming year. We also hosted our second online auction alongside this event, giving donors across the province a chance to support us and providing sponsors with a broader reach. This event remains an annual highlight, and in 2026, we will move it to a larger venue at Thompson Rivers University, where we can better showcase our activities in BC grasslands. Many thanks to Masons Kitchen and Bar for supporting us as we established our fundraiser.

Funds received from Community Gaming Grants, BC Parks, Outdoor Recreation Council, TNRD, Cenovus Energy, and other valued donors kept us busy across all areas. Sponsorship for our fundraiser was outstanding this year, and we plan to enhance sponsor recognition in 2025.

Recently, we engaged HunterInk to focus on connecting with potential funders, which will be increasingly important as we navigate uncertain

times ahead. We are deeply grateful to an anonymous donor who has provided funding over three years to boost the GCC's capacity. It is heartwarming to see the support for our cherished grasslands.

Partnerships are a term we frequently use at the GCC. Indigenous collaborations are especially valuable to our organization across all strategic areas. We are proud of our engagement efforts and look forward to developing these important relationships in the coming years. We were very pleased and grateful to have AEWLP, an Nlaka'pamux consulting firm, join our Loving the Grasslands event as a sponsor this year.

Last but not least, we enjoyed the beautiful spring weather for our Kamloops AGM in June 2024, with well-attended tours at Lac du Bois and Tunkwa Lake, culminating in a barbecue hosted by long-time Chair Bob Haywood-Farmer with Kathleen and the family. Tom Dickinson stepped into the Chair role after the AGM, as Bob concluded eight years of serving on the GCC board in 2025. We cannot thank Bob enough for guiding the GCC through challenging years and positioning us for a much brighter future.

Education and Outreach

Through the support of a Community Gaming Grant, fundraising, and many partners, members, and volunteers, the GCC continued a very active outreach program in 2024-25 to raise awareness of the importance and value of grasslands and their stewardship.

Kristi Gordon began the year by engaging with a variety of audiences and supporting the Board in reaching a broad group through a number of local events. Heidi Wismath, a recent TRU Environmental Studies Honours Graduate, started as a volunteer in the spring and took on the role of coordinating our outreach in August. Heidi has started developing a communications strategy for the GCC, including our social media presence, creating reels, and managing our newsletter and magazine. Additional funding allowed Heidi to continue through the winter, engaging with school groups and introducing innovative ideas to spread the word about grasslands.



Churn Creek area

PHOTO: Kristi Iverson

Our outreach team interacted with over 1700 people over the last half of 2024, including fairs, markets, conferences, and other gatherings in the Kootenays, Cariboo, Okanagan, Thompson, Nicola, and Vancouver Island.

Executive Director Mike Dedels collaborated with various organizations for presentations and tours, including: Friends of Black Mountain and Society for Senior Learners in Kelowna, the Osoyoos Desert Centre, a cycling group, NVIT class, and Society for Range Management at the Laurie Guichon Memorial Interpretive Site, as well as an invasive species event with CSISS at Tsutswecw Provincial Park. He also delivered talks at the Living Cities, Collaborative Communities event at TRU, and the BCIA Okanagan Branch AGM this winter. A notable highlight was initiating landowner visits that led to engaging stops near Stump Lake, at Big Bar Lake, and a visit to the Douglas Lake Cattle Company.

Youth education continues to be a priority. The GCC supported ongoing grasslands curriculum development with Thompson Rivers University. The Laurie Guichon Memorial Grassland Interpretive Site (LGMGIS) hosted Merritt Nature Kids on a cool May day to learn more about the ecosystems we find in the Lundbom. Heidi's efforts to boost youth engagement

included classroom visits in Kamloops and Merritt, as well as collaborating with South Kamloops Secondary School's senior art class to create grassland-inspired artworks.

Our GCC e-news and social media platforms saw a continued boost in engagement through various successful campaigns. We actively use social media to promote events and share grasslands-related information from the GCC and other organizations.

Our outreach efforts include 1041 e-news subscribers, 1500 Facebook followers, and 1791 Instagram followers. Two grassland reels produced by Nerdyaboutnature in spring 2024 received over 20,000 views. Our LinkedIn page has grown to 710 followers, mainly professionals, NGOs, and Indigenous organizations. We also secured segments on CBC Daybreak and The Midday Show (CFJC) in Kamloops, which consistently received positive responses. The GCC published an engaging magazine, the 25th Anniversary Edition, thanks to Director Toni Boot's efforts, supported by Community Gaming Funds. We distributed 2200 copies to GCC members, outreach event attendees, and BC Cattlemen's Association members, who manage a significant portion of BC's grasslands.



Western Meadowlark perched in Sagebrush

PHOTO: Anish Lakapragada



*2025 Field Tour
Lac du Bois Grasslands Protected Area*

PHOTO: Mike Dedels

Stewardship and Protection

The GCC continued with invasive species management and grassland restoration in the Lac du Bois Grasslands to support the Friends of Lac du Bois stewardship efforts with \$6,000 from the Parks Enhancement Fund. We also used PEF funds to initiate invasive plant inventory and planning at Tunkwa Lake. Directors Dennis Lloyd, Mandy Ross and Ian Barnett have led efforts in fund development and project implementation at Lac du Bois. Our trial at Red Hill has been a very useful demonstration project. This year our AGM stopped there as well as the Invasive Species Council and the TRU Range Management class. We propose further restoration work and, to aid in planning, and have initiated a retrospective study of air photos from the last 100 years to look at changes in forest and sage cover.

An ongoing focus of the GCC has been one of the few Crown grassland areas in the Nicola Valley, the Lundbom, primarily in the Laurie Guichon Memorial Grassland Interpretive Site. Spotted knapweed has been expanding quickly there over the last 20 years, and the GCC has undertaken demonstration work there. On October 1, 2024 we hosted an engaged group of First Nations and other participants onsite to examine the problem and discuss alternatives. Engagement on proposed

treatments has occurred over the winter and we hope to see some treatments in 2025.

Across the province there are many other local groups, such as the Friends of Churn Creek, working on grassland stewardship. The GCC continues to engage with many of these groups and will be looking to enhance partnerships over the coming year. If you are interested in partnering on a project please reach out to us.

At the end of the fiscal year the GCC was proud to support the BC Parks Foundation in protection of 517 acres at Juniper Ridge on the southeast edge of Kamloops. This crowd-funding effort was promoted by the GCC and supported financially through member and director contributions. We are looking forward to working with the Foundation on future planning work.

Science and Research

The GCC has been an active participant in the Thompson-Nicola Conservation Collaborative (TNCC) as they work towards developing a Conservation Action Plan. We had a productive session with Thompson



Pacific Jumping Mouse among the Daisies

PHOTO: Fern Tograph



Coyote on the move

PHOTO: Alice J. Kenney

Rivers University faculty to review potential research projects that will guide future efforts.

We look forward to engaging more students in project work moving forward. We also presented to TRU master's students about restoration planning for a small demonstration site, focusing on restoring grassland habitat in old hayfields at Monte Creek Winery.

We are thrilled to announce the launch of a Native Grassland Plant Project, examining demand, supply, and limitations in the use of native plants. Monitoring grasslands continues to be a top priority. We're planning a thorough, in-depth monitoring of grassland sites at Lac du Bois for 2025.

Policy

Grassland loss remains a major concern. In September 2024, we spoke at a Kamloops Public Hearing about rezoning a property next to the Lac du Bois Protected Area. Unfortunately, the development was approved despite being within travel corridors for at-risk species.

GCC Bob Haywood-Farmer also addressed the Penticton City Council about the rezoning of Naramata Bench. Heidi Wismath brought local grassland conservation to the forefront of the election by questioning MP candidates at a town hall hosted by CPAWS-BC at TRU.

We visited Harewood Plains near Nanaimo and continue to advocate for its protection, collaborating with groups on the potential preservation of the Vernon Commonage. Concerns remain over mine proposals in the East Kootenays and on the rare West Kootenay grasslands at Record Ridge near Rossland, with the GCC actively engaging with local governments. We meet regularly with the Ministries of Forests, Environment, and Land, Water and Resource Stewardship to emphasize the importance of BC's grasslands.

This fall, we contributed to the WLRS Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework. We also met with Kamloops MP Frank Caputo to highlight the value of the grasslands in our region. As the only NGO representing these lands across the province, the GCC must ensure that these agencies understand the ongoing, permanent biodiversity loss we are causing, as well as the benefits of healthy grasslands.

Treasurer's Report

The GCC's financial situation is better than it has been in nearly two decades. Our financial well-being depends on the combined support from corporate, individual, and NGO donations, BC Gaming, project-specific grants, and the annual 'Loving the Grasslands' fundraiser. We are especially grateful to an anonymous donor who committed \$300K this year to be distributed over three years. These funds offer significant flexibility, including enhancing the GCC's capacity to deliver programs. The GCC directors, members, and volunteers also contribute between \$75K and \$100K in in-kind donations of time, labour, professional expertise, and talents to help us achieve our goals.

Our strong financial outlook has enabled us to establish contractual agreements for a part-time executive director, a part-time executive assistant, and a part-time education and outreach coordinator. We plan to hire 3-4 summer students to support research, stewardship, grassland mapping, and educational programs.

Overall, our assets have nearly doubled from last year, reaching \$211,530, with plans to make additional term deposits in the coming year. This includes a net operational surplus of \$78,960 for the year, plus \$41,279 of committed funding to be used in the next fiscal year.

I would like to thank our Executive Director, Mike Dedels, who contributes many unbilled hours annually and should be recognized for his significant role in the organization's growth, financial stability, and increasing

awareness of the value of BC's grasslands. Lastly, I want to acknowledge Hallie MacDonald, our bookkeeper and financial expert, who maintains detailed income and expense records, produces year-end statements, and provides timely financial summaries for the Board.

The GCC's outlook remains bright as we continue raising awareness about the ecological, social, cultural, and economic values of the grasslands while partnering to achieve key conservation, stewardship, education, and research objectives. 🐦

Become a Member

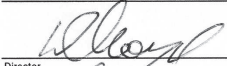
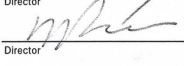


We are a long-standing community with many members who have come and gone, but also returned, and that's why it's important to us to keep our members connected. The Grasslands Conservation Council has brought together ecologists, ranchers, Indigenous groups, naturalists, students, and government representatives dedicated to preserving BC's rare and at-risk grasslands. Today, we're thrilled to offer more flexible membership options, including a new student membership price and a corporate membership.

- Student Rate - \$10 for 3 years
- Annual Individual Membership - \$35
- Four-Year Membership - \$100
- Annual Corporate Membership - \$250
- Lifetime Membership - \$500



Membership fees are invested in youth field days, educational materials, support for event attendance, and student awards, ensuring a legacy of grassland education. To simplify management, membership expiry dates will be set to December 31. Existing members will be extended to the end of their current term, while new memberships will run through 2026 or 2029. Lifetime members support our grasslands for generations to come!

We invite you to get involved in GCC projects such as native plant reporting, mapping updates, and invasive species control. Businesses can sign up for corporate sponsorship at \$250/year, with funds going to support GCC youth education activities. Your support gives a voice to BC's precious grassland ecosystems: bcgrasslands.org/membership

| Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| BALANCE SHEET as at March 31, 2025 | | | |
| | current March 31 2025 | last year March 31 2024 | |
| Assets | | | |
| General Bank Account | 122,334 | 46,310 | |
| Gaming Bank Account | 24,748 | 26,206 | |
| Etransfer bank account | 29,079 | 7,062 | |
| Investments & Term Dep ** | 25,186 | 40,186 | |
| Accounts/Interest Receivable | 7,350 | 247 | |
| GST Receivable | 1,933 | 2,014 | |
| Prepaid expense (insurance) | 600 | 600 | |
| Total Assets | \$ 211,229 | \$ 122,626 | |
| Liabilities & Net Assets | | | |
| Account payable | | | |
| Deferred Revenue (Gaming 24-25) | 22,350 | 16,469 | |
| Deferred Project Funds | 14,015 | 15,468 | |
| Net Assets: | | | |
| Opening balance | 90,690 | 74,683 | |
| Net surplus in operations | 84,175 | 16,006 | |
| Total Equity | 174,864 | 90,689 | |
| Total Liabilities & Net Assets | \$ 211,229 | \$ 122,626 | |
| <div><div> _____ Director</div><div> _____ Director</div></div> | | | |
| <div><div><small>Auditors' Report: We have examined the books and records of the Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia and found no significant errors. We conclude that these statements fairly represent the financial position of the Council as at March 31, 2025.</small></div><div> Dennis LloydMichael Dedels April 22, 2025</div></div> | | | |

HELP US PROTECT BC'S GRASSLANDS BECOME A MEMBER OF GCC

~ Donate Today ~

Print and mail or apply online:
bcgrasslands.org/membership

Grazing in the grasslands
PHOTO: GCC

At the **Grasslands Conservation Council**, we count on our diverse community of membership to help us carry out our mission through education, outreach, stewardship, policy, and research. We invite you to keep your membership with us current or consider our lifetime membership option. You can also support us through Canada Helps (www.canadahelps.org/en/) by making a donation.

MEMBERSHIP: ☐ Student Rate - \$10 for 3 years ☐ Annual Individual Membership - \$35
(circle one) ☐ 4-Year Membership - \$100 ☐ Annual Corporate Membership - \$250
☐ Lifetime Membership - \$500

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

DONATE: I would like to make a donation of: \$ _____

TOTAL: (Membership + Donation) \$ _____

All donations over \$25/yr will receive a tax receipt. The \$35 annual membership fee to the Grasslands Conservation Council of BC is not tax deductible.

Payment: Cheque or money order - payable to Grasslands Conservation Council of BC

Mail to: P.O. Box 3341, Kamloops, BC V2C 6B9

Signature (REQUIRED):

Date: _____

We value our members and supporters, and are committed to rewarding your support with increased member services.

☐ Please add me to the email notification list.

☐ Please remove me from the email notification list.

The GCC is a registered charity in Canada
(Charitable Registration Number:
870042777RR0001).

Help keep BC's GRASSLANDS FOREVER

for you

for your children

for your grandchildren

Consider making a gift to the Grasslands Conservation Council as part of your yearly giving. We are the only non-profit society in BC dedicated to conserving the province's grasslands. All of our resources go directly to projects that help preserve these irreplaceable ecosystems. Your donation to GCC will support ongoing outreach, stewardship, and research efforts.

Together, we can ensure that BC's diverse grasslands and the biodiversity they support endure for future generations. Learn more about GCC and our projects at: **www.bcgrasslands.org**



Prickly Pear Cactus
PHOTO: Olsen Imaging



California Quail
PHOTO: Frank Cone



Balsamroot
PHOTO: Ken Hagen



**Grasslands Conservation Council
of British Columbia**

gcc@bcgrasslands.org

www.bcgrasslands.org

P.O. Box 3341, Kamloops, BC V2C 6B9

