February 2000

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Chairperson’s Report 1998

1998 was a year of tremendous accomplishments for the Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF). Some notable events included 2 funding opportunities with the other prairie provinces, the inaugural presentation of the Topics in Prairie Conservation Course at the University of Lethbridge, the stellar work of the Communications workgroup, the revitalization of the Prairie Ecological Research Committee, field trips, excellent presentations and the ever stimulating Round Table updates.

One item that made an impact on the Forum’s many members was the meeting in Claresholm and the Granum fire tour and presentations. Mark and Jan Daley, ranchers whose home-place and ranch were in the path of the “firestorm”, gave a presentation that put a human face on the event and the impact of the fire. The subsequent tour of areas affected by the prairie fire was sobering. It was heartening to see the rejuvenating qualities of the prairie given the right conditions.

The Round Table has always been one of the most important parts of any meeting and the presentations continue to be informative. The PCF presents a unique opportunity for diverse organizations to sit at the table and share projects that sometimes lead to partnerships. In an age of electronic and impersonal communication, “face to face” communication still wins out in my books.

My term as chair was rather painless but only due to the patience, continuity, and tireless efforts of Sam Wirzba and Ian Dyson. It was an honor to have served as Chair of the PCF.

Dave Scobie
PCF Chairperson (1998)

Chairperson’s Report 1999

Shortly after assuming responsibility for chairing the Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) in January 1999, I sat down with Ian Dyson and Sam Wirzba to identify goals for the year ahead. Reflecting back, the PCF has accomplished most of these goals, even though there are moments when one wonders how progress can occur at all given that participation on the PCF is voluntary and relies strictly on the motivation and good will of participants – all of whom have numerous other demands on their time and energy.

There were three well-attended meetings with interesting agendas developed by the Steering Committee. Through regular updates, members inform each other about prairie conservation efforts and recognize opportunities to partner on matters of common interest. Protective notations on environmentally sensitive prairie sites was one such matter. A “straight talk” session, introduced this year, enables members to speak frankly about topics on which there may not be agreement. Proposed federal endangered species policy and legislation, the control
of predators and nuisance wildlife, and grazing and fire management research in the Cypress Hills were subjects that led to interesting presentations and discussions. In June, a joint meeting was held with Saskatchewan PCAP members to explore opportunities for collaboration, and it is hoped this will become a tradition.

Most of the PCF’s substantive accomplishments are made through committees. PCF subcommittees on communications and research were particularly productive in 1999. There now is an excellent web site, pamphlet and display to help inform others about the PCF and prairie conservation as well as an Internet accessible database of prairie ecology research. And there are three succinct and informative prairie conservation background papers on which to base future communications efforts. The second successful presentation of the Prairie Conservation Course through the University of Lethbridge was another major accomplishment. A key milestone in 1999 was the completion of a digital, native prairie vegetation inventory database. It will be a valuable tool in measuring our progress towards accomplishing the goals of the Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP).

As the new millennium dawns we are awaiting a decision on an application submitted under the Canada Millennium Partnership Program for funding of a major Alberta prairie/parkland conservation initiative. We have initiated the preparation of a third occasional paper on cultural/spiritual views of the prairie. A key challenge in the year ahead will be an evaluation of our progress in implementing the 1996-2000 PCAP and the preparation of a new five-year PCAP.

An outstanding endorsement for the work of PCF was the presentation of an Emerald Award to founder and secretary Ian Dyson in June 1999. Ian and Sam’s commitment and prodding catalyze us to accomplish collectively what none of us could accomplish alone. Thank you all.

Cheryl Bradley
PCF Chairperson (1999)
Summary of Meetings

Each meeting of the PCF provides an opportunity for members to share information and discuss a wide range of issues and projects that involve member organizations. Topical updates are provided on environmental initiatives, planning activities, environmental legislation, non-government conservation projects, and various other subjects. This ensures that all member organizations are well-informed about prairie conservation issues; it also encourages networking and liaisons among member organizations.

The PCF held six meetings in the 1998-99 period, two of which were combined with field trips. Each meeting is summarized below.

**Calgary, January 1998**

A presentation was given on the National Framework for endangered species conservation and on the content of the proposed Canadian Endangered Species Protection Act (CESPA), which had been previously tabled in the House of Commons. Forum members also engaged in a ‘workshop discussion’ to identify practical ways in which the PCF can inform, assist or cooperate with rural municipalities to conserve native prairie ecosystems.

A new Steering Committee was elected and Dave Scobie was acclaimed as chair for 1998.

**Brooks, May 1998**

Cheryl Bradley was presented with the *Exceptional Commitment to Prairie Conservation Award* which had been awarded to her at the 5th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference (Saskatoon, February 1998). The final version of the 1996-97 PCF Annual Report was made available. A presentation was given on the Oldman River Basin Water Quality Initiative—a five year multi-party action plan to address the interrelationship between intensification of land use and water quality in the Oldman River Basin. A presentation was also given on the draft Native Plant Guidelines for Alberta, which are intended to promote the use of native species on disturbed sites within native plant communities on Crown lands.

An afternoon field trip was made to the Antelope Creek Ranch. Members were provided with a historical account of the acquisition and management of the property, current management philosophy, research projects, field days and DU projects on the ranch. A tour of the ranch was made, concluding at Lake San Francisco.

**Claresholm, September 1998**

The highlights of this meeting at the Claresholm Community Centre were a series of presentations on the December 1997 Granum fire. Following an overview presentation on the meteorological and ecological characteristics of the fire, two local ranchers who experienced the event first hand, Jan and Mark Daley, recounted their experiences on the day of the fire.
A presentation was also given from a ranching community perspective on the likely consequences of implementing recommendations in the Interim Report of the Agricultural Lease Review Committee.

A field tour of the Granum prairie fire was conducted the following day. Members visited several sites at the centre and southern edge of the burn area on the southeast corner of the Porcupine Hills to examine the effects of fire on rough fescue prairie. Various research efforts to document the impacts of a fire on the grassland ecosystem were reviewed.

**Calgary, January 1999**

Forum members discussed Alberta’s involvement in a joint Prairie Provinces' application to the Canada Millennium Partnership Program for grant monies to fund stewardship programs. A presentation was also given on the implementation of the federal government’s national endangered species legislation. A consultant, hired to monitor and record the first offering of the ‘Topics in Prairie Conservation’ course, shared her impressions about the course.

A new Steering Committee was constituted and Cheryl Bradley was elected as chair for 1999.

**Elkwater, June 1999**

The PCF met at Cypress Hills Provincial Park. There was discussion about the effects of recreational trapping and incidental catch of non-target species in southeast Alberta. Members agreed to introduce a new feature, ‘Straight Talk’ to PCF meetings. A joint meeting was held with members of the Saskatchewan PCAP Committee to explore potential opportunities for inter-provincial collaboration. A presentation was given on the upshot of the first offering of the ‘Topics in Prairie Conservation’ course.

A field tour of research projects currently underway in Cypress Hills Provincial Park was conducted by the Alberta Research Council and Park staff. Four projects were reviewed: different prescriptions for controlling shrub encroachment in fescue grasslands on the plateau; monitoring and controlling forest encroachment; evaluating the effects of different grazing strategies on riparian stream systems and aquatic health; and examining the historical frequency and extent of wildfires within the West Block of the Cypress Hills.

**Lacombe, October 1999**

A presentation was given on the Year 2000 Review of Water Management. The Forum’s first ‘Straight Talk’ topic addressed the control of predators and nuisance wildlife. Open discussion followed a detailed presentation by a wildlife depredation expert.

Members reviewed a proposal to designate a provincial grass as a provincial emblem. The Forum also reviewed the upshot of a multi-year reconnaissance level inventory of native vegetation in the Grassland National Region. Updates on inter-provincial prairie conservation activities were also provided.
In the period October 1998 to May 1999 the PCF worked closely with our provincial counterparts in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to craft and submit a joint application to the Canada Millennium Partnership program. Unfortunately, when the results were released in November 1999, Alberta did not receive any funding. A revised application was submitted in the same month for the final phase of the program requesting close to $300,000 for a variety of stewardship initiatives and extension and awareness activities.

The Forum continues to participate on the Prairie Conservation Working Group, which includes representatives from Manitoba Conservation, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, Canadian Wildlife Service, and World Wildlife Fund Canada. The Working Group holds periodic conference calls to share information and collaborate in coordinating implementation of the three provincial PCAPs. Representatives from the PCF attended the “Romancing the Prairies” workshop held by our Saskatchewan partners in the Cypress Hills in June 1999.

The Forum celebrated its 10th anniversary in 1998. When the PCF was constituted in 1989 (under the name: Prairie Conservation Coordinating Committee), large multi-stakeholder organizations were rare. Unlike some multi-party organizations that were formed throughout the 1990s, the Forum has been able to sustain its existence by filling a needed void, by remaining relevant, and by undertaking worthwhile conservation initiatives.

Three PCF work groups have been struck to work on key strategic priorities; they are as follows.

**Prairie Ecology Research Committee (PERC) [objectives: 1.3 and 1.4]**

Under the leadership of the Canadian Wildlife Service, PERC was struck in September 1996 to encourage research leading to a better understanding of prairie ecology and the improved management of resources, habitats and species occurring on the prairie landscape. The committee includes representatives from a broad range of organizations and institutions having research interests.

The original Terms of Reference and mandate set out for the PERC include:

- The Committee will annually produce a list of completed and ongoing research projects and also a list of priority research needs in prairie Alberta, with a view to improving efficiency and minimizing overlap and duplication. This action will also improve the science base for prairie management.

- The Committee will promote research activity beyond the species level, to include communities and ecosystems, and to focus beyond vertebrate animals and vascular plants to include invertebrate animals, non-vascular plants and fungi.

- The Committee will encourage the initiation and completion of priority research related to biodiversity conservation.
The Committee will identify areas of overlap or duplication in research and encourage efforts and opportunities to increase research efficiencies through the sharing of information and resources and conducting joint programs.

The Committee will interpret the significance of prairie research results and recommend appropriate applications.

Committee members are encouraged to make contacts, share information, and network with researchers and scientists interested in prairie research in other jurisdictions.

After a period of relative quiescence in 1998 due to personnel changes, PERC met in Calgary three times in 1999 (January, March and October). Members reviewed information gaps and needs based on a consultant’s report that had been produced for the committee in 1997. It was decided that an information inventory of literature was needed that could be updated in an ongoing fashion. It was agreed the information should be widely available electronically and a consultant was retained to develop a formal Website including:

- a bibliographic page holding a reference database with uploading and downloading capacity.
- a page with research gaps in prairie ecology.
- a page for active research with capacity for uploading and downloading of project information.
- the site would include links to other related prairie ecology Websites and information databases as an added service to its users.

At year-end the committee had met once to review the developing Website and make recommendations for improvements.

**PCF Communications Strategy** [objective: 4.1]

Under the leadership of Parks Canada, the Communications Work Group has been active producing various PCF communication products during the last 3 years. A number of education and communications projects, activities and products are identified in the Work Group’s “Awareness Campaign” document.

Given that the Work Group has successfully fulfilled its mandate, a decision was made at the October 1999 PCF meeting to dissolve the Work Group. Work Group members have agreed to complete all communications projects that are currently underway and to maintain products that require ongoing attention. With the dissolution of Work Group, the PCF Steering Committee will assume responsibility for identifying and overseeing the development of new communication products in the future. The primary communications products developed under the auspices of the Communications Work Group are as follows:

- A Writer’s Kit was prepared to introduce authors and journalists, attending the 1998 Waterton Glacier International Writers Workshop, to the PCF. Among other things, the kit highlighted various conservation initiatives that the Forum has been involved with.

- The PCF has established its own Web Site (http://www.AlbertaPCF.ab.ca), which was relocated to a new server in 1999. The Web Site contains a number of pages dealing with
the Alberta PCAP, the Forum and it members, and various conservation subjects. Hot links to PCF member organization Web Sites and to the Saskatchewan and Manitoba PCAP initiatives are in place. The Web Site will be expanded and further enhanced in the future. A commitment exists to make periodic updates to the site. The Communications Work Group will be seeking approval of “Strategic Goals and a Management Strategy for the PCF Website” at the January 2000 PCF meeting.

- Three Background Papers, dealing with prairie conservation themes, were finalized in 1999. These papers were developed by a consultant after auditing the “Topics in Prairie Conservation” pilot course, offered at the University of Lethbridge in the fall of 1998. The papers cover the following topics: What is Prairie?; Value of Prairie; and, Changes to Prairie Ecosystems. The background information contained in these three papers will be used to produce various PCF communication products in the future. The papers will eventually be placed on the PCF’s Web Site.

- The Native Prairie and Prairie Wildlife, Endangered Spaces and Species resource, which is intended primarily for educators, was updated and will be reprinted.

- The PCF has developed a display. The display is being used at trade shows, conferences, and at various public events. The display is available for use by member organizations on request to increase public awareness about the PCF, the Alberta PCAP and conservation issues.

- A draft pamphlet and bookmark have been developed to raise awareness about the PCF, the Forum’s action plan, and conservation issues.

- Communications Work Group members have shared information on the PCF and the Alberta PCAP at teacher’s workshops.

- An original grasslands poster has been developed to assist educators (grades 6-9) in delivering curricula on the prairie ecosystem.

No Occasional Papers were produced during 1998 and 1999.

'Topics in Prairie Conservation' Course [objective: 4.3]

A workgroup was struck in September 1996 to develop a senior seminar course in Prairie Conservation to be offered at the University of Lethbridge.

The course was modelled on the framework of the Alberta PCAP and also used the PCF’s Occasional Paper #2 (Prairie Ecosystem Management: An Alberta Perspective) to expose students to the dynamic nature of ecosystem processes, linkages between these processes, ranges of natural variation and indication of sustainability.

With the cooperation of the Department of Biological Sciences, the inaugural offering of the course was held in the fall 1998 semester. Detailed outlines were prepared for each module of the course (modules are listed in Table 1). Two 3 hour sessions (instruction and lab/field work) were held each week. In addition to classroom instruction, students were involved in presentation, lab work, role plays and field trips.
Student and faculty evaluations of the course were most positive and the course was offered a second time in the fall 1999 semester at the U of L. Offering the course at other Alberta institutions will be explored in the future.

A consultant monitored the first offering of the course and took detailed transcripts. This material, together with a comprehensive file of instructional materials and resources is being compiled and will be made available to other institutions that would like to deliver this course or modify it. It is the objective of the PCF to see Prairie Conservation taught widely at colleges and universities across the North American Great Plains.

At the end of the reporting period a contract was pending to add information about the course to the PCF’s website and interest in offering the course was expressed by Olds College.

TABLE 1. Outline of “Topics in Prairie Conservation” Post-Secondary Course

1. Alberta PCAP; prairie ecosystem management
2. The prairie landscape: physical environment, biotic environment, ecological processes and classification
3. The cultural environment
4. Economic and institutional context for prairie conservation
5. Information and research
6. Prairie ecosystem management in urban and industrial landscapes
7. Cultivated landscapes
8. Native rangelands
9. Protection and conservation of native prairie ecosystems
10. Revegetation of disturbed prairie landscapes
11. Influencing public policy/decisions; educating the public
12. Seminar wrap-up; public awareness survey results
**Appendix 1**  PCF Member Agencies

Alberta Cattle Commission  
Alberta Conservation Association  
Alberta Conservation Tillage Society  
Alberta Fish and Game Association  
Alberta Native Plant Council  
Alberta Wilderness Association  
Bow River Project  
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society  
City of Lethbridge  
Dryland Salinity Control Association  
Ducks Unlimited, Canada  
Eastern Irrigation District  
Federation of Alberta Naturalists

**Government of Alberta**  
Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (Public Lands Branch)  
Alberta Community Development (Provincial Museum of Alberta)  
Alberta Community Development (Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation)  
Alberta Economic Development  
Alberta Environment (Natural Resources Service)  
Alberta Environment (Environmental Service)  
Alberta Infrastructure  
Alberta Municipal Affairs  
Alberta Resource Development (Mineral Resources Branch)  
Energy and Utilities Board  
Natural Resources Conservation Board

**Government of Canada**  
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
Department of National Defence, Canadian Forces Base- Suffield  
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service  
Parks Canada  
National Energy Board

Grasslands Naturalists  
Nature Conservancy of Canada  
Operation Grassland Community  
Palliser Regional Municipal Services  
PanCanadian Petroleum Limited  
Parkland Community Services  
Sierra Club, Prairie Chapter  
Society of Range Management
Special Areas Advisory Council
Special Areas Board
University of Calgary
University of Lethbridge
Wildlife Society
World Wildlife Fund Canada
Appendix 2  Terms of Reference (Prairie Conservation Forum)

AUTHORITY

Initiated in 1989 by the Government of Alberta as the Prairie Conservation Coordinating Committee. At the discretion of individual member organizations, the committee was reconfirmed and renamed in 1995 as the Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF). The Prairie Conservation Forum is consultative and advisory to member organizations. It does not have legislative, management or program authority or responsibilities. The acceptance of Prairie Conservation Forum recommendations will remain at the discretion of individual member organizations.

DURATION

The Prairie Conservation Forum is tied to the Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP), 1996-2000. The committee will exist until 31 December 2000. This tenure may be extended at the discretion of the Prairie Conservation Forum.

PURPOSE

The purpose or role of the Prairie Conservation Forum is to encourage effective implementation of the Alberta PCAP and provide an ongoing profile for prairie and parkland conservation initiatives. This role has and will continue to focus on three key elements:

1. **Networking and Information Exchange**

   • Serve as a forum for **information exchange and cooperation** between key organizations with interests in or jurisdiction over prairie conservation initiatives;

   • Allow **key contacts** to get together periodically to review the plans, projects and programs of member organizations, to assess progress and to integrate program efforts; and

   • Where appropriate, **coordinate actions** to manage potential conflicts, avoid duplication and ensure effectiveness amongst the projects of member organizations.

2. **Steering Prairie Conservation Action Plan Implementation**

   • Constitute a **cooperative partnership** between different levels of government and non-government organizations in sharing major responsibility for implementing the Alberta PCAP, and also allowing both groups to **share their experiences** and **strengthen mutual goals and objectives**;
• Assess and make **recommendations on overall priorities** for implementation of the Alberta PCAP to those member organizations who are involved in implementation actions. Provide advice to those same members on program or project design and implementation;

• Encourage members to tailor their own programs, policies or initiatives to meet the goals of the Alberta PCAP;

• **Review progress** in implementing the Alberta PCAP;

• **Identify gaps and recommend measures** to rectify such areas as inventory deficiencies or new program requirements; and

• **Encourage coordination and compatibility** amongst major conservation-related initiatives such as the Prairie Conservation Action Plans, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Special Places 2000, Wildlands Project, U.S. prairie conservation initiatives, the Alberta Conservation Strategy, and Federal/Provincial Soil Conservation initiatives.

3. **Public Awareness and Education**

• Adopt **media communication strategies** as appropriate to ensure that significant initiatives and accomplishments are widely communicated publicly; and

• Distribute the **Prairie Conservation award** recognizing individual and group initiatives in support of prairie conservation.

**MEMBERSHIP**

There is an "open door" policy on membership in the Prairie Conservation Forum. Organizations or agencies who wish to participate in the work of the committee may join the Prairie Conservation Forum on request. Meetings will be open to the public.

**PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM OPERATIONS**

• Chair - elected annually by membership.

• Secretary - provided by Province of Alberta (Department of Environmental Protection) as per previous arrangements.

• Steering/Executive Committee - two representatives from each sector plus member at large (elected annually), chair and secretary.
Subcommittees - established to address specific tasks or issues by the Prairie Conservation Forum. Subcommittees will be disbanded once the task has been completed.

LOCAL COMMITTEES

The Prairie Conservation Forum will facilitate and encourage the development of local or regional committees. However, the Prairie Conservation Forum prefers a loose arrangement without an organizational hierarchy or sanctioning functions.

PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

1. Meetings

- The Prairie Conservation Forum will conduct three general meetings per year. Meetings will be held in the winter (January), spring (April/May) and fall (September). The chair will be responsible for chairing these meetings;

- Additional Prairie Conservation Forum meetings may be called at the discretion of the steering committee when circumstances warrant;

- Notification of the dates(s), location and anticipated agenda items will be mailed to all members at least 30 days in advance of the meeting; and

- The steering committee will meet three times per year to guide the Prairie Conservation Forum in implementing the Alberta PCAP and related initiatives and to prepare an agenda for Forum meetings. Steering committee meetings will be called by the chair with as much notice as possible between Forum meetings.

2. Decisions

- The preferred method of decision making is by consensus. However, if that approach is not feasible, decisions of the Prairie Conservation Forum will be recorded through a vote of the attending membership. All members will have an opportunity for input through discussion at a Prairie Conservation Forum meeting;

- In the event that a decision is required between meetings, membership votes will be obtained through the appropriate referral mechanism (e.g., mail, fax, E-mail, phone);

- Minority opinions will be recorded if the member(s) holding those views so request; and

- All members will receive advance notification and background information concerning upcoming decisions, at least 30 days in advance.
3. *Documentation*

- The Secretary will be responsible for developing the agendas for the general meetings in close consultation with the chair and steering committee;

- All minutes of meetings and correspondence from the Prairie Conservation Forum will be prepared, distributed and retained by the Secretary;

- Correspondence of the Prairie Conservation Forum will be factual and non-advocacy in tone.

4. *Prairie Conservation Issues*

- The Prairie Conservation Forum will register views as a committee on issues which, following discussion, the majority of members feel meet the following criteria:

  - The issue relates directly to the Alberta PCAP, and the Prairie Conservation Forum approach is consistent with this Terms of Reference;

  - The issue is significant (i.e., provincial in scope or is otherwise of a sufficient magnitude to be considered as a significant prairie conservation issue); and

  - Prairie Conservation Forum representation would be useful or will likely make a difference to the final outcome of the issue.

5. *Prairie Conservation Forum Report*

- A report summarizing the activities, projects, decisions and financial transactions of the Forum will be prepared every two calendar years, by March 31 of the following year.
Appendix 3  Vision, Goals and Objectives - Alberta PCAP

VISION 1996-2000

The biological diversity of native prairie ecosystems in Alberta is conserved for the benefit of current and future generations.

GOAL 1

Advance the identification, understanding and use of information about Alberta's prairie ecosystems.

Objectives

1.1 Complete identification of remaining native prairie by 1998.

1.2 Improve the accessibility and use of available information.

1.3 Promote research and encourage the integration of research and inventory efforts.

1.4 Ensure that research and inventory results are applied to ecosystem management in the prairies.

GOAL 2

Ensure governments at all levels have in place policies, programs and regulations that favour the conservation of Alberta's native prairie ecosystems.

Objectives

2.1 Ensure management policies applied to Crown land under grazing disposition are compatible with the retention of existing native prairie landscapes.

2.2 Amend or remove policies and legislation detrimental to the conservation of Alberta's native prairie.

2.3 Ensure all new policies and the legislation, regulations and activities arising from them are in accordance with the Alberta PCAP.

2.4 Encourage the development and implementation of new policies and programs at all levels that promote the conservation of prairie ecosystems.
GOAL 3

Adopt land use management practices and protective strategies across the whole prairie landscape that sustain diverse ecosystems.

Objectives

3.1 Encourage the adoption of ecosystem management practices to sustain and conserve all prairie landscapes.

3.2 Determine the biotic and abiotic requirements of native prairie species and communities and incorporate these in management practices to sustain these requirements.

3.3 Provide specific protection for significant, representative and sensitive ecosystems.

3.4 Actively pursue the reclamation of degraded ecosystems.

GOAL 4

Increase awareness of the values and importance of Alberta's native prairie ecosystem.

Objectives

4.1 Promote an understanding and appreciation of our native prairie ecosystems amongst the public.

4.2 Promote an understanding and appreciation of our native prairie ecosystems amongst users of prairie landscapes. Provide information and resources to assist landowners and lessees in conserving prairie habitats on their land.

4.3 Encourage the incorporation of prairie ecosystems and prairie conservation into the education curriculum at all levels.

### Financial Report as of December 31, 1999

#### Opening Balance, January 1, 1998

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