



## **PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM**

# *The Prairie Conservation Forum Newsletter*

Issue Number 1 - Fall 2008



Ian Dyson

### ***In this Issue:***

- *Greetings from the PCF Chairperson, Brian Laing*
- *Overview of the 2008 PCF Spring/Summer Meeting and Tour*
- *Committee Updates*
- *Feature Story:*
  - *Sandstone Ranch - An Inspiring Example of Conservation Partnerships*
- *Message from the PCF Coordinator, Sasha Harriott*

### ***Greetings from the PCF Chairperson, Brian Laing***

I know the summer and fall are the critical time for many of you to get your fieldwork done and sometimes it is difficult to take the time to keep up with our Prairie Conservation Forum business. With that in mind, I would like to briefly catch you up on some the things that have been going on and encourage all of you to try and attend our fall meeting and tour on September 11th and 12th in Waterton.

First of all, this is our first year under our new constitution and by-laws. We have moved to a Registered Society from our relatively loose knit association that served us well over the first 18 years or so. This, in combination with hiring our coordinator, has created a need to access longer term commitments for funding from our membership. We have reached a point this year where some of the planned support has not materialized when it was expected and therefor we could really use some additional donations, grants or other sources of funding. We will be addressing this concern at our fall meeting and it is important that as many member organizations are represented as possible.

As we approach 2009, we will need to start thinking about the next 5 year Prairie Conservation Action Plan PCAP. The Board of Directors would like to see how we can tie the next PCAP to the Land Use Framework. Your ideas and input on this would be most appreciated.

We had a good March meeting to review Deloitte Touche's report on our Ecological Goods and Services (EG&S) project. We are currently looking at putting together a written proposal and budget that will enable us to solicit support for getting our project underway and completing it over the next 2 to 3 years. There are excellent funding opportunities for this project, however we need secured funding so it is appreciated if the PCF membership considers making a contribution to support this project.

Our Education Committee has been busy and is developing some very interesting and creative approaches to working with school teachers and getting the message on prairie conservation out to the general public, especially Alberta's children. They have submitted a grant application that could fuel their efforts in spreading awareness and education about the importance of native grasslands and parklands.

I would like to end by encouraging all of you to try and attend our fall meeting. The PCF belongs to its members and needs your ongoing support. Our fall meeting and tour promises to be a great opportunity for learning and networking.

## 2008 Prairie Conservation Forum Spring/Summer Meeting and Tour Overview

The PCF 2008 Spring/Summer meeting and tour kicked off with a tour of the Cross Conservation Area just southwest of Calgary off of highway 22X. We were educated on the various projects taking place within the Cross Conservation Area by a short presentation and tour of the area led by Jon Schmidt and Meryl Herbets. They are keeping themselves busy working on a native grassland restoration area, weed control and wildlife monitoring in addition to their roles of educating the visitors on the importance of the Cross Conservation Area.



Sasha Harriott

We left the Cross Conservation Area to meet Bridget Couban at Bowmont Park in northwest Calgary. Here we were introduced to a variety of projects and issues within this urban park including off leash dog areas, weed and erosion control and other improvement projects with in the park.

The meeting was held at the beautiful Cochrane Rancho House. In addition to the valuable member updates we heard about the Biodiversity Monitoring Institute from Jim Herbers, the Western Sky Land Trust from Tracy Tarves and the market-based conservation easement tool that the Southern Alberta Land Trust is working on. In addition to these

presentations there was also an exciting discussion around developing a “grasslands appreciation campaign” for Alberta.

Thank-you to all those who took time away from their busy summer schedules to attend the PCF Spring/Summer meeting and tour.



Sasha Harriott

## Prairie Conservation Forum: Education Committee - Fall Update

The PCF Education Committee partnered with Inside Education in the planning of the Teacher’s Grasslands Institute. The Grasslands Institute ran from June 9th through to June 13th with around 25 teachers from across Alberta attending. The teachers began their tour in Lethbridge with a barbecue sponsored by the PCF and MULTISAR and then were led by the Helen Schuler Coulee Centre representatives on a tour through the coulees. The teachers were kept on the move across the Alberta prairie visiting the Waterton Park Front Project with Nature Conservancy Canada, the Waterton Lakes National Park Bison Paddock, the Irrigation Demonstration Farm at the Lethbridge Research Centre, a coalbed methane development with EnCana and the Blackfoot Crossing at Siksika Nation.



Grasslands Institute 2008

Shannon Frank

Shannon Frank attended the Elevate 2008 conference in Banff on behalf of the Education Committee. The conference focused on educational videoconferencing and will benefit the Education Committee’s research and planning for future distance learning education broadcasts. The Education Committee intends on developing a curriculum-based distance learning broadcast that will allow students to experience grasslands in a unique way.

## Prairie Conservation Forum: Ecological Goods and Services (EG&S) - Fall Update

Ecosystem Goods and Services (EG&S) represent the benefits human populations derive, directly or indirectly, from ecosystem functions. Examples of ecosystem goods include clean air and abundant fresh water. Examples of ecosystem services include water treatment, decomposition, pollination, pest and disease suppression.

The PCF EG&S committee is developing a project that will support the conservation of biodiversity within the prairie and parkland regions of Southern Alberta by increasing the understanding of EG&S and their value among stakeholder and decision-makers through developing and testing of tools that help them account for these goods and services.

Phase one included the design of a strategic approach with input from key stakeholders, this phase of the project is now complete and planing is underway for subsequent phases.



Lorne Fitch

## *Sandstone Ranch: An Inspiring Example of Conservation Partnerships*

*By Dana Blouin*



The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) celebrated the conservation of Sandstone Ranch, an ecologically significant property in Southern Alberta's Milk River Ridge together with partners and local ranchers on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The over 4,200 acre (1,700 hectare) property is located 10 kilometers northwest of Del Bonita, AB. It was acquired with support from the Government of Canada through the Natural Areas Conservation Program, Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Fish and Game Association, EnCana Corporation, the David and Leslie Bissett Fund through The Calgary Foundation, and a private donor.

The Sandstone Ranch was conserved to maintain and enhance important habitat for species at risk in the area. A successful spin-off of this property is that it will create a unique opportunity for further stewardship and support for the local community.

Sandstone Ranch is an extraordinary property featuring dramatic cliffs and hoodoo rock formations bordering the North Fork of the Milk River. It is located in the most extensive area of native Foothills Fescue grassland in Canada. The region is one of the most threatened in the country. Foothills Fescue grasslands once occupied about 3.8 million acres (1.5 million hectares) of southwest Alberta. Today only 17% of those grasslands remain and most viable tracts are in the Milk River Ridge.

The property provides a home for an extraordinary array of wildlife including the Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, and Sprague's Pipit. The threatened Western Silvery Minnow also inhabits the North Fork of the Milk River, which runs through the property. Sandstone Ranch is one of the few sites in southern Alberta with a historically documented Peregrine Falcon nest. Large wide-ranging mammals such as Black and Grizzly Bear, Elk, Mule Deer, and Pronghorn Antelope are also found on the property. In fact, the Milk River Ridge Foothills Fescue Natural Area hosts an impressive 404 species, 68 of which are provincially rare.



The Sandstone Ranch Grazing Co-op was recently created to hold the provincial grazing lease land associated with the property and will manage the deeded portion of the property as well. This will allow the property to be managed as a whole. Through the MULTISAR program, a management plan will be devised for the property taking into account the multiple species at risk found on the property and the goals of the partner agencies and the Grazing Co-operative members. Members of the Grazing Co-op will have the opportunity to participate in a proposed Stewardship Credit Program in which they will receive credits for positive stewardship projects and practices on their own ranches which can be credited against their grazing fees on the Grazing Co-op.

The property will be jointly stewarded by the by NCC, Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Fish and Game Association, MULTISAR, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development – Fish & Wildlife Division, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development-Public Lands Division, and local landowners.

## Message from the PCF Coordinator - Sasha Harriott

### Our Vision:

To conserve the biological diversity of Alberta's native prairie ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations.

Thank-you for reading the Prairie Conservation Forum's first newsletter. This is one of the many advances that I hope the PCF coordinator will be able to provide the PCF.

It has been a busy year, we have been working on bringing the PCF forward and putting us in a better position to start taking more action as an organization on the prairie and parkland landscape. We are doing this by having the PCF committees complete yearly work-plans, which will play an important role in developing an overall business plan for the PCF.

Coming into the coordinator position in January, covering for Katheryn Taylor's maternity leave, I have been busy traveling across the prairies attending conferences and general meetings in addition to planning and attending the PCF's meetings.

Working with the Education Committee with funding from Alberta Conservation Association we completed a beautiful, new three panel display, that is ultra light and will be easily transported to events throughout the prairie and parkland. You will be able to take a peak at the new display at the PCF Fall Meeting in Waterton.

PCF promotional items have been purchased with grant money and will be used to help spread the message about the PCF's conservation initiatives at various trade shows and conferences throughout Alberta.

I have enjoyed working with all of you over the past several months and look forward to continuing our relationship into the future. I welcome all feedback and suggestions, please contact me at: [info@albertapcf.org](mailto:info@albertapcf.org).



Ian Dyson



Delaney Boyd

## Attend the Prairie Conservation Forum's Fall Meeting and Tour in Waterton Lakes National Park, September 11th and 12th, 2008.

Thank-you to our contributing partners:



Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada



Alberta Sustainable Resource Development



Environment Canada

Environnement Canada



Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Parks Division

### Our Goals:

**Research:** Enhance the information base for Alberta's native prairie and parkland landscapes.

**Stewardship:** Conserve Alberta's native prairie and parkland landscapes.

**Education:** Increase awareness and importance of Alberta's native prairie and parkland ecosystems.



Lorne Fitch

If you have any comments, questions or ideas, please contact the PCF Coordinator at:

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