

PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM

The Prairie Conservation Forum Newsletter

Issue Number 2 - Winter 2008



Photo Credit: Louella Chronkite

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Attend the Prairie Conservation Forum's Annual General Meeting in Okotoks at the Foothills Centennial Centre, Friday, January 16th, 2009. Please RSVP to info@albertapcf.org

Greetings from the PCF Chairperson, Brian Laing

I am happy to report that we have had another successful year in PCF. The Board is planning what should be a great annual meeting in Okotoks, January 16, 2009 and we have had 2 successful tours and meetings.

The first was our June meeting in Cochrane with tour sites around the city of Calgary and the second was in September at Waterton.

I would like to thank the Special Area Board and Parks Canada for stepping up when we really needed financial help to keep our coordinator position funded throughout the fall of 2008. Funding this year has been a challenge and we hope each of our member organizations is giving thought to how they can help us out for the balance of this year and throughout 2009. I know that we have had a fairly significant contribution from the following member organizations: Alberta Tourism Parks and Recreation, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Special Areas, Parks Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Petro-Canada, Alberta Wilderness Association, EnCana and the Alberta Native Plant Council.

We got very positive direction and input from those of you who attended the September Waterton meeting and the Board has reviewed that input in detail. Our organization is coming up on its twentieth anniversary and we would like to solicit your ideas on how to celebrate that important milestone.

I want to end by asking everyone to think about attending the January 16th meeting in Okotoks. The Prairie Conservation Forum is only as strong as the input and support we get from our membership. We are always looking to recruit new members so consider bringing someone with you and introducing them.

There are some exciting things happening in the province these days and some of them will be highlighted at the January annual general meeting.

There will also be opportunity to join the Board in our annual election of officers. I look forward to seeing a good list of names willing to take the torch from some of us older members this time around.

The best to you as we come upon the Christmas Season and have a very Happy New Year!

Brian Laing
Chair

Western Sky Land Trust Celebrates Land Conservation Project: Anchored on a World Renowned Rainbow Trout Fishery



Photo Credit: Wade Hawkins

Western Sky Land Trust (Western Sky) was established at the request of landowners and the general public who expressed concerns about the rate at which landscapes were being lost. The common experience of landowners was the realization that their land, representing agricultural, natural, historic, scenic, and recreational values, did not fit within the mandate of existing land trust organizations. Forming an alliance with those landowners, like-minded conservation organizations, private citizens, government and corporate partners, Western Sky was created as a way of fulfilling a vision of a more flexible, local and adaptive land trust. Unrestricted by political boundaries or parcel size, Western Sky also has the ability to work both in rural and urban areas. Driven by strong partnerships, Western Sky is active in maintaining a diversity of watershed landscapes in one of the most challenging land use areas in Canada.

The Bow River is arguably the most important natural feature in the Calgary region, and extremely prominent in the context of Alberta. Both residents and visitors from around the world are drawn to it for its natural beauty and its recreational opportunities. Equally important, is the resource this land provides for agricultural and industrial activity, drinking water, recreational activities and wildlife habitat. All of these functions, coupled with a residing population of over one million, make it a complex natural system that is balancing a variety of needs.

A parcel of land, now known as *Western Sky Land Trust's Agrium-Nodwell Nature Preserve*, was selected and secured for land conservation. This vital piece of land, located in Wheatland County, is adjacent to Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park and lies within an environmentally significant area of international importance along the Bow River extending from Calgary to the Siksika Nation Reserve.

Anchored by a world renowned rainbow trout fishery, this land encompasses 59 acres of unfragmented mixed-grass prairie ecosystems, escarpments and river valley which provides habitat for over 158 species of plants, large and diverse native bird populations, waterfowl, deer and moose.

Western Sky would like to thank Agrium, Alberta Lottery Fund, Jack Nodwell, Calgary Zoo Conservation Fund, Nature Calgary, Pengrowth Energy Trust, The Bow River Chapter of Trout Unlimited Canada, United Communities, Kayak Foundation at the Calgary Foundation, Bow River Shuttles and Individuals for making this project happen.

With continued community support, it will mark the beginning of a series of land conservation and stewardship efforts in the Bow corridor and elsewhere in the watershed. For more information regarding this property and the work currently being undertaken by the Western Sky, contact Tracy Tarves at 403 974-0756 or visit their website at www.westernskylandtrust.ca.



Photo Credit: Gary Kindrat

Grassland Vegetation Inventory Update:

by Livio Fent and Jocelyn Leger

The Grassland Vegetation Inventory is about two and half years into production and the significant development over the past year is that the data is finally becoming available for public consumption. Below is an update of the major events in the GVI world.

1. Data Access: As noted the GVI data is now publicly available and is being distributed by the ASRD's Resource Information Management Branch in Edmonton. The Grassland Vegetation Inventory (GVI) represents Alberta's new biophysical inventory for the Grassland Natural Region of the province. The data contained in this preliminary release represent 14 project areas captured in 2006 / 2007 using the 2006 ADS40 digital stereo imagery as the source data for photo-interpretation. This data set is available in geographic coordinates NAD83 as an MS Access Personal Geo-database or a File Geo-database. Updated Base Features Hydro-polygons have been incorporated into the data. These data may be requested by SRD staff through the RIMB Order Desk.

2. GVI production. Below is a map with areas completed and areas that are in progress this year. Significant fund contributions were received from the Land Use Secretariat, AENV, AFD including the core funding from ASRD. Of note to the PCF, there has not been any other significant contribution to this initiative other than provincial funds. The original strategy of a 50/50 province/other funding model has not materialized, consequently only about half the original scope is completed.

3. Wetland Adaptation/Enhancement. As the GVI program slowly moves out of the Prairie ecosystem and begins inventory in the ecotone areas to the west and north, the GVI team understood that the current classification of wetlands (based on Steward and Kantrud (SK)) would need enhancement. Based on consultations with AENV, ASRD and DU, the Canadian Wetland Classification System (CWCS) would be incorporated as modifiers to the current system. An example would be that if a fen occurred on the landscape it would be classed under the present system as a lentic semi-permanent wetland and tagged with the 'Fen' modifier. With this adaptation GVI could report wetland information by either its core system (SK) and/or the CWCS system.

4. Hand Hills semi-automated GVI pilot. Throughout the development and implementation stages of the GVI program the core team has always been conscious of the cost associated with the inventory. The provincial economy, additional requirements, and inflationary pressures have all conspired to more than double the cost of a compiling a GVI township. With the advent of digital imagery and high resolution DEM information (LiDAR) the team is some consideration that a more automated process could be employed to produce GVI and lower costs. ASRD is currently doing a feasibility pilot to test this approach in the Hand Hills. The results should be available in time for our Spring meeting.

5. Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) and GVI. The ABMI has adopted the GVI specifications (with some minor enhancement) as their monitoring protocol for the province's white area. The ABMI samples 3X6km plots on a 5 year interval to assess change in biodiversity. This work further establishes GVI as the standard the biophysical land use reference dataset.

6. GVI Project Manager: The GVI program will soon be managed by a contracted project manager. With Jocelyne Leger (the current project manager) and Livio Fent being heavily involved with the province's Land-use Framework, the Land-use Secretariat will be funding the resources needed to ensure that the GVI program is not negatively impacted.

7. Initiatives using GVI:

Alberta's Biodiversity Monitoring Program: a key components of this program's monitoring requirements as they relate to vegetation in the White area.

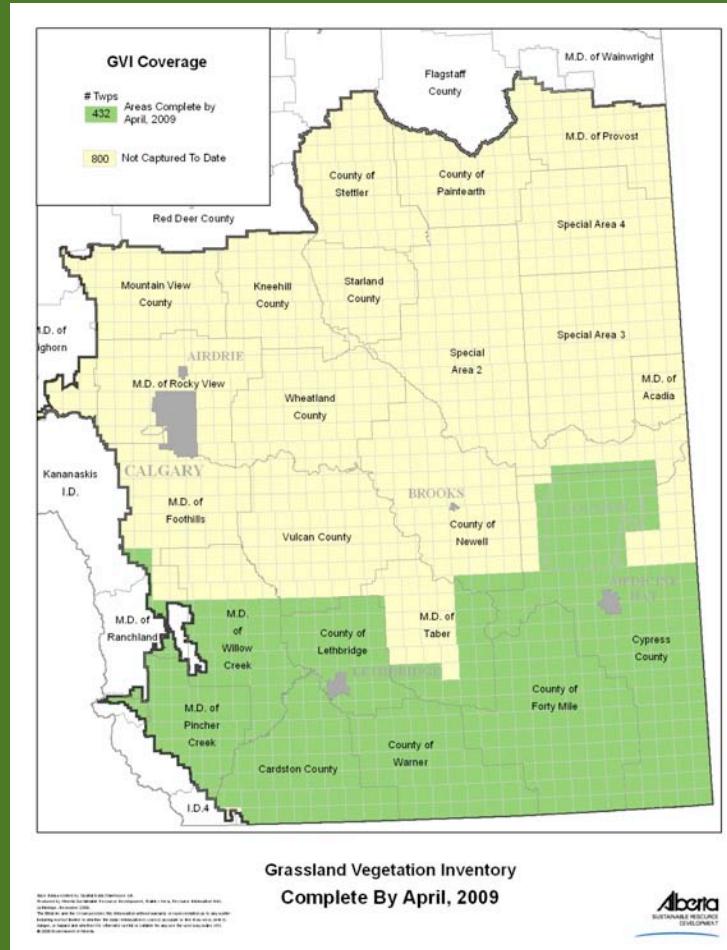
Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation: The GVI data will provide key sensitive landscape and vegetative information that is necessary to update the Ecological Sensitive Area Reports.

Research Branch of Agriculture Canada: the GVI data will be used to validate land cover classifications thus improved confidence with Remote sense data .

Reclamation Criteria: a cross ministry and industry working group (ARCG) has developed new reclamation criteria in which GVI is used in both the pre-site assessment and in the post site certification request.

Industry: GVI is now being used as a Range-health tool.
<http://www.farm.tv/videos/originals/aspb-range-health-and-ecology-workshop/>

Land-use Framework: GVI will be used within regional and sub -regional planning exercises ensure that land-use practices and management are based on appropriate and relevant conditions.



MULTISAR: Continues Stewardship of Species at Risk

MULTISAR stands for Multiple Species At Risk and reflects its multiple partners: agricultural producers, Alberta Conservation Association and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and others. MULTISAR strives to conserve habitat for species at risk and improve awareness of them on the landscape. MULTISAR began by providing detailed recommendations to landholders with large tracts of species at risk habitat through detailed Habitat Conservation Strategies (HCSs) in the Milk River Basin. These strategies are currently being implemented on over 200,000 acres of land.

In 2007 MULTISAR expanded its focus beyond the Milk River Basin and out to the Grassland Natural Region. This expansion has allowed additional landowners to become involved with the program through Species at Risk Conservation Plans (SARC Plans) which are a refined version of the HCSs that can be completed more quickly to benefit more landowners. Species at Risk Conservation Plans identify habitat for species at risk that exists on the land and give landholders tips on how to maintain or improve that habitat. Common recommendations include moderate grazing and adequate rest to maintain rangeland health, fencing damaged shelterbelts or riparian areas and minimizing the disturbance of wetlands through the use of alternative watering sites.



Field trip to Magrath with 100 grade five students during Environment Week. Photo Credit: MULTISAR

In July 2008 MULTISAR received a grant from the Greencover Canada Technical Assistance Program to help landowners implement beneficial management practices (BMPs) that were recommended through their SARC Plan. So far five landowners have partnered with MULTISAR to implement BMPs including fencing off a creek, a wetland and two shelterbelts, installing two artificial burrowing owl nest burrows and completing range health assessments to enhance a range management plan. An artificial hawk nesting structure may also be installed in the winter of 2008 at a location where an active nest has fallen. On lands with HCSs several other BMPs were also implemented including fencing two miles of a riparian area and reseeding marginal cropland back to native grasses.

Through many partnerships MULTISAR's education efforts have also led to some exciting events, including a field trip to Magrath with 100 grade five students to learn about threatened northern leopard frogs and celebrate Environment Week. Classroom presentations for grade seven science students, developing interpretive signs and helping organize workshops and tours for landowners as well as teachers complemented the program.

For more information please visit www.multisar.ca.

Our Vision:

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

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.

Thank-you to our contributing partners:



Agriculture and
Agri-Food Canada

Agriculture et
Agroalimentaire Canada

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development



Alberta Native Plant Council



Alberta Wilderness Association



Alberta Conservation
Association
Conserving Alberta's Wild Side



Environment
Canada

Environnement
Canada



Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Parks Division

EnCana

www.albertapcf.org

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

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