



PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM

The Prairie Conservation Forum Newsletter

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Cliff Wallis

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Attend the Prairie Conservation Forum's Spring/Summer Meeting and Tour, June 17th and 18th, 2009.

Please RSVP to info@albertapcf.org

Greetings from the PCF Chairperson, Don Watson

As spring approaches I know many of you are looking forward to continuing your field work and other important conservation activities but I hope you will take time to remember PCF and mark your calendars now spring meeting on June 17th and 18th. Your participation is vital to PCF and is an important part of our success, and I think the success of member organizations.

We have some good news to report on the conservation programming front because PCF has successfully applied for and will receive a one year grant to administer the MULTISAR program in Alberta. This successful conservation program combines the science of Species at Risk with the partnership of Alberta Conservation Association for sustainable land management with private landowners and lessees in the Grassland Natural Region of Alberta. The MULTISAR process takes a pragmatic stance toward species at risk conservation and sustainable ranching and has received favorable reviews by conservation and producer communities around southern Alberta. Although PCF will only administer the program for 2009-2010, we think this provides our organization with an important opportunity to build further programming capacity in the area of stewardship and also have some meaningful participation in supporting recovery of grassland ecosystems and biodiversity in Alberta.

We also have some good news to report on our applications for financial support. Those of you who attended our January 2009 meeting in Okotoks may recall that our Board is actively pursuing financial contributions from both our long term partners as well as some new organizations. I am happy to report that PCF is beginning to receive some contributions for the coming year and to date, the situation is encouraging. We will update you at our Spring meeting.

Our Board is also encouraged by the new member organizations represented at our recent meetings and field tours. As PCF celebrates a 20th anniversary it is most gratifying to see many new and enthusiastic conservationists and their organizations participating in our continuing mission.

Again, I look forward to seeing you at our Spring meeting and wish you best of luck with your important work.

Don Watson
2009 PCF Chair

Three Nations Continue their Work at Twinning RAMSAR Wetlands

Hay-Zama Wildland Park, Alberta and Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve, Inner Mongolia)

Three nations gathered in northwestern Alberta in late May of 2008 to celebrate the official dedication and twinning of Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park. A delegation from Inner Mongolia joined representatives from the Dene Thá First Nation and the Alberta government in order to formalize the twinning of the 468-km² Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park with the Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia, China. This September, an official delegation from Alberta will reciprocate and visit the sister reserve that lies in the Daurian Steppe near the Mongolia-Russia-China border in northern Inner Mongolia.

Both sites have been designated by the Ramsar Convention as Wetlands of International Importance, both face potential threats to their ecological integrity, and both are homes for minority peoples.

The seeds for the twinning process were planted in 2004 when Cliff Wallis, a former PCF board member, was working on a biodiversity conservation and community development project in Inner Mongolia. “It started with friendship. There was a resonance with people who were passionate, innovative, and genuine—much like the people I work with here on conserving grasslands in Alberta.”

Twinning Hay-Zama and Dalai Lake is more than symbolic. “With a global interest, eyes are watching us,” says Wallis, “and the process is less likely to founder.” The process is the phasing out of oil and gas activity in Hay-Zama. In 1985 the Alberta government acknowledged the cultural, environmental, and economic concerns related to industrial development in Hay-Zama and created the Hay-Zama Committee (HZC) to address them. Since 1994, the HZC has been successfully working toward the accelerated depletion of oil and gas reserves in the park. Its membership includes industry, three levels of government including First Nations, and Alberta Wilderness Association, represented by Wallis.

After the May 2008 twinning ceremony, Cliff took the official delegation from Inner Mongolia on a study tour of the grasslands of southern Alberta. They met with interpreters, protected area management personnel, researchers and ranchers to gain insights into Alberta’s successes and failures in grassland and riparian habitat conservation. They were most impressed with how similar the landscape appeared to Inner Mongolia. While some problems were noted, they remarked on the overall high standard of Alberta’s land management and were eager to understand how we had worked through issues that they are dealing with now—e.g. drought, over utilization, land tenure.



Cliff with Inner Mongolian researchers at Dalai Lake cliffs



Sheep grazing at Dalai Lake on the Daurian Steppe.

Cliff will be traveling with the Dene Tha’s Chief as well as the AWA’s Executive Director and senior staff from Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation. They will share experiences on how governments interact most appropriately with local communities, develop a greater understanding of how climate change is affecting Inner Mongolia’s grasslands and wetlands, and how human activities can be integrated with conservation of the Daurian Steppe. This region, like our Northern Great Plains here in Alberta, is one of less than 20 regions identified by World Wildlife Fund for Priority Conservation Action globally.

Cliff is currently doing biodiversity action planning for the City of Chongqing in southwestern China as well as volunteering his time with the Dalai Lake twinning. He will report back to PCF on Alberta’s official visit in the fall.

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Highways, fences and a fragmented landscape shape habitat use and movement of pronghorn in Alberta

by Paul F. Jones

The doe streaks across the highway at a blazing speed of 100 kilometers an hour, narrowly missing oncoming traffic. She continues on her way north, knowing that fences, highways and a fragmented Alberta landscape littered with energy wells and agricultural fields are just some of the obstacles she will face during the spring migration.

Pronghorn in Alberta have made a tremendous comeback after nearly becoming extinct at the turn of the century. With numbers approaching 20,000 strong, pronghorn are now seen throughout the province, from the Alberta/Montana border to the south, and as far north and east as the Edmonton International Airport and Provost. And even though the numbers remain steady, severe winters can cause large natural die offs for the pronghorn population. The magnitude of these winter die off events and the duration of the recovery period are likely influenced by the loss of or changes to pronghorn habitat.

A collaborative effort between the Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), the University of Calgary and the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division recently revealed new information on the ecology of pronghorn and how the Alberta landscape affects pronghorn migration. The program continues with the support of ACA, the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Alberta Fish and Game Association Zone 1, the two Alberta chapters of Safari Club International, the Canadian Forces Base Suffield, Mountain Equipment Co-Op, the World Wildlife Fund, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada.

Habitat Use Patterns in Alberta

For four years, Mike Grue and Paul Jones, ACA wildlife biologists, have been studying the habitat use patterns of pronghorn in Alberta.

“Previous studies in the province showed that pronghorn were tied very closely to native prairie grass and that the animals only used cultivated lands on a seasonal basis, mostly in the fall. What we found is that pronghorn can be grouped based on vegetation gradients,” explains Jones. “We have a pronghorn group using native grasslands, a group in cultivated land (both annual and perennial crops) and a third using a mixture of grasslands and cultivated land (Figure 1). However, the number of pronghorn in grasslands is significantly greater than in other gradients.”

Pronghorn Movement and Migration

Although it has never been fully documented, previous research has shown that pronghorn often migrate as far south as Montana, in order to escape Alberta’s severe winter weather.

“Their natural defense is to move really far and really fast to escape the conditions,” says Mike Sutor, a University of Calgary graduate student. “If the proper management is not in place to ensure safe travel for pronghorn, any pinching of the migration route from central Alberta into Montana could result in catastrophic die offs.”

During his studies, Sutor found that up to 40 per cent of Alberta pronghorn migrated annually, traveling between their seasonal ranges that were 200 kilometers long. “One doe even traveled 515 kilometers (km) from her winter range before arriving on her fawning range. Her combined migration path length totaled over 830 km for the year,” Sutor says.

Sutor also found that the remaining 60 per cent stay in an area year-round, except during those times of severe winter weather. He has identified several seasonal migration routes, along with two migration corridors that the pronghorn use to move south during extreme weather conditions (Figure 2).

Grue says that collaborations such as our efforts and investigations into the ecology and movement will be the key to pronghorn management and conservation in Alberta. “Turning our results into positive, on the ground benefits for pronghorn, will be one of the key objectives in the future of the program.”



Native grassland



Cultivated

Figure 1. Pronghorn use both native grasslands and cultivated landscapes (photos by P. Jones)

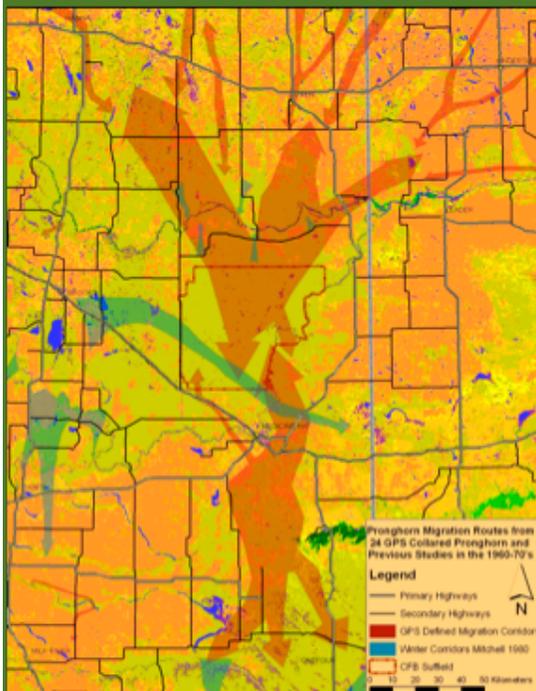


Figure 2. Seasonal migration routes and migration corridors for pronghorn in Alberta (Mike Sutor)



Lorne Fitch

Upcoming Events and Activities:

- **Environment Week:** May 31-June 6
www.environment.gov.ab.ca/edu/week
- **Prairie Conservation Forum Spring/Summer General Meeting**
June 17th, 18th Cassils Hall near Brooks and tour of the Antelope Creek Ranch
- **Alberta Stewardship Network: Stewards in Motion Conference**
Fort MacLeod June 25th www.ab.stewardshipcanada.ca
- **Milk River Watershed Council Annual Canoe Trip - June 27**
www.milkriverwatershedcouncil.ca
- **Strengthening Stewardship...Investing in Every Step 2009 Conference,** July 8-11 in Calgary. www.stewardship2009.ca
- **Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women** July 22 - 23 in New Dayton. Contact Roberta at 642-2255 or email conservation@countyofwarner5.ab.ca for more information or to register.

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



Conserving Alberta's Wild Side



Environment
Canada

Environnement
Canada

EnCana



Conserving Canada's Wetlands



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

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