



## **PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM**

# *The Prairie Conservation Forum Newsletter*

Issue Number 4 - Fall 2009

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**Attend the Prairie Conservation Forum's Fall Meeting, 20 Year Celebration and Tour, October 21st and 22nd, 2009. Please RSVP to [sasha@albertapcf.org](mailto:sasha@albertapcf.org)**



Gordon Court

## **COMMITTEE UPDATES**

### **PCAP/LUF Committee**

The PCAP/LUF committee put together a two-page document for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP), Regional Advisory Committee (RAC). The first page of this document detailed our recommendation of 'establishing place-based policy to retain native biological diversity and ecosystem function' by explaining the importance of three of our goals: 1) maintaining large native landscapes, 2) conserving connecting corridors, and 3) sustaining disconnected habitats. The second page of the document showcased some maps of southern Alberta showing the native grassland inventory, environmentally significant areas, and ecosystem services that can be found in the prairie region. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, two members of the SSRP RAC attended the PCF board meeting, where a presentation about the history of the PCF and the document detailing how the PCF can contribute to the SSRP was given. It went very well and the RAC members asked many questions. The PCAP/LUF committee will be meeting again to discuss the results of that meeting and to decide where to go from here. To see a copy of the SSRP RAC document, please go to the 'members only' page of the PCF website ([www.albertapcf.org](http://www.albertapcf.org)).

### **Ecological Goods and Services Committee (EGS)**

The EGS committee has been busy over the summer months deciding where to go next. A few different possibilities were discussed, including doing an on-the-ground, small-scale research project, or an educational project. It was decided that given the lack of knowledge of EGS by landowners and land managers, that the best way to use our resources at this point in time is to undertake an educational campaign. This will help us fulfill the PCAP goals of both stewardship and education, and to this end, we have submitted a letter of intent to the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP) to help fund this initiative. Part of the project would involve translating current EGS technical knowledge into a common language that everyone can understand. Targeted in our campaign will be acreage owners, who are often overlooked as land managers and stewards of the land, and as a result, don't have the same resources available to them that large landowners have. Also targeted in our campaign will be large landowners and land managers of native prairie grasslands. Simply being educated about the values of some ecological goods and services can go a long way to sustaining healthy, functioning ecosystems, and can provide strong links between rural, urban, and urban-fringe (i.e. acreage owners) peoples. For example, everyone plays a role in maintaining good water quality, whether you live in the country or the city, and helping people understand that gives us a common goal to work towards. If you are interested in learning more about this EGS project, or would like to become a member of the EGS committee, please email [info@albertapcf.org](mailto:info@albertapcf.org).

### **Education and Communications Committee**

The Education Committee is still pursuing funding for an educational video broadcast that will be directed at educating grade five youth on the importance of grasslands. The Grasslands Appreciation sub-committee created a survey that was distributed over the summer to determine peoples knowledge of grasslands. This survey will aid in determining the steps forward to establishing a grasslands appreciation event in 2010.

# Landscape-scale Conservation Planning to Save Celebrated Ecosystems

by Robert Sassor (Water Resources and Biodiversity Manager for the US Forest Service Office of International Programs.)

It is amazing how different and distant ecosystems can have so many similarities.

Take, for example, the prairies of Alberta – with their subtle but rich ecology – and compare them to the woodland-grassland mosaic and forests of the greater Gombe ecosystem in western Tanzania. Both landscapes feature steep-sided hills with rambling grasses, and both are internationally recognized and yet endure increasing pressure from natural resource extraction, and degradation and fragmentation due to settlement expansion and infrastructure development.

Luckily, both are also the focus of a Conservation Action Plan (CAP) which articulates the stresses to the ecosystem, methods for evaluating ecosystem health and opportunities to either improve the viability of key ecological values or abate critical threats facing them.

The Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) began their CAP process in 1988, when the field of adaptive management was young. Since that time, PCF has adapted and revised their CAP three times to ensure that their strategies remain relevant and that progress is being made.

The Conservation Action Plan for the Greater Gombe Ecosystem (GGE CAP) was completed in April 2009 and utilizes lessons learned by organizations such as PCF, whose early implementation of CAP methodologies helped adapt the very field of adaptive management.

The GGE CAP was championed by the Jane Goodall Institute-Tanzania (JGI-TZ), a non-governmental organization which promotes wildlife research, education and conservation. In order to conserve Gombe's famous chimpanzees, JGI-TZ and other ecosystem stakeholders developed comprehensive strategies to conserve not only chimpanzees, but also the ecosystem on which they rely as well as conservation values of local communities, particularly related to the regeneration of forests and natural vegetation on ridge tops and steep slopes in order to improve the quality and quantity of surface water.

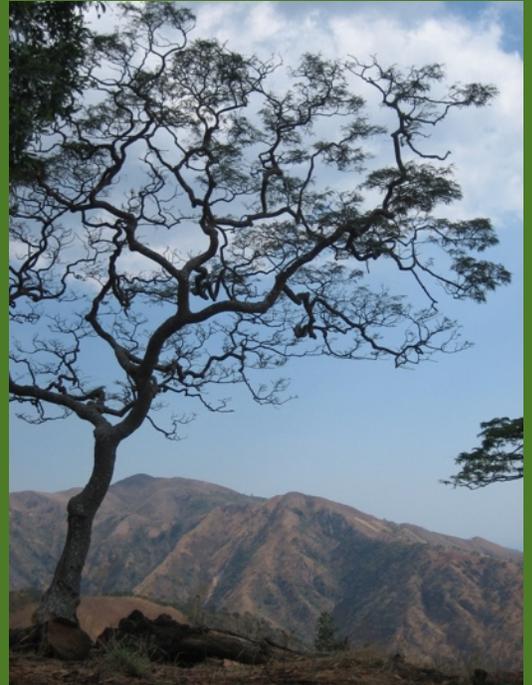
Perhaps not surprisingly, both the Prairie CAP and the GGE CAP have similar key strategies, including awareness-raising regarding ecosystem values among the public and decision makers, and land-use planning to protect wildlife corridors.

This may be due to the fact that in order to achieve conservation, often a few variables are constant: balancing the needs of a functioning ecosystem with the real and immediate natural resource needs of local communities, the desires of local and/or international industries, and the increasing pressure due to human population growth.

Conservation planning is challenging, and only the first step. PCF and JGI-TZ are working with stakeholders in their respective parts of the world – one in Alberta, and the other in the Albertine Rift, which was named after the father of Alberta's eponym – in order to implement key strategies, measure effectiveness and adapt their plans over time.

“Success” is often a distant vision – one we may imagine on the other side of hills and mountains carpeted with grasses higher than our heads. But with support, these visions can be realized. The plans exist; now we must work together to achieve them.

For more information about the Jane Goodall Institute, please go to: [www.janegoodall.ca](http://www.janegoodall.ca).



Tree in the Greater Gombe Ecosystem



View from Jane's Peak



Greater Gombe Ecosystem

# Crossing the Imaginary Line: Understanding Connectivity of the Northern Sagebrush Steppe

by Paul F. Jones

From the research on pronghorn in Alberta, being conducted by the Alberta Conservation Association, the University of Calgary and Alberta Fish and Wildlife, an understanding of connections and complexities of ecological systems are coming to fruition. Mike Grue, a biologist with the ACA states “that pronghorn management in Alberta expands beyond our border and is impacted by management of wildlife and their habitats in both Saskatchewan and Montana”.

To illustrate this, Grue gives an example of a pronghorn doe, collared near Wild Horse, Alberta during the winter of 2003-2004. After the doe spent the winter in the southeastern corner of Alberta, she seemed to disappear into thin air once spring arrived. During those spring months, the doe had moved southeast into Montana and had summered there until her collar dropped off in December. “She was a unique animal in that she moved south in the spring of 2004 (Figure 1) when the rest of our collared migratory pronghorn moved north,” explains Grue. “But the key to the movement was that it showed us how connected our population is to Montana.”

To help with the information exchange and management of sustaining wildlife populations, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was put in place between Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana management agencies under the name of the Northern Sagebrush Steppe (NSS) Initiative. The concept in making the MOU a realization was that wildlife do not identify human induced boundaries. As such, management agencies should consider an ecosystem management approach across provincial and even international boundaries. Thanks to the efforts of University of Calgary professor Dr. Cormack Gates, and Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division biologist Dale Eslinger, both collaborators with the Alberta work, the MOU fosters collaborative initiatives and information exchange between these three jurisdictions. Because of life history traits, the pronghorn is a well suited species for investigating and identifying important habitat needs and migratory connections between the three jurisdictions.

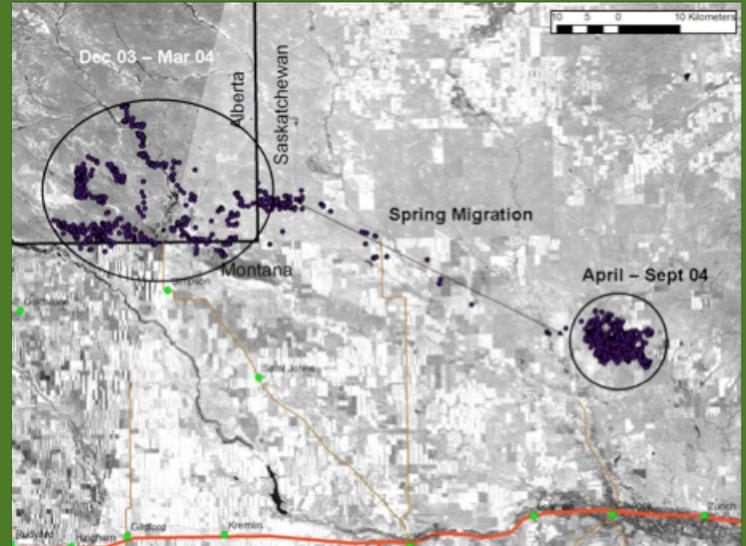


Figure 1. Movement of a pronghorn doe from southern Alberta to Montana in the spring of 2004.

Since field research was conducted in Alberta on pronghorn from 2003-2007, the overall pronghorn research program has expanded to encapsulate the large sagebrush steppe habitat shared by the previously mentioned jurisdictions. In the winter of 2008, nineteen pronghorn does were captured and fitted with GPS collars in northern Montana, thanks to assistance from World Wildlife Fund in the U.S, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Saskatchewan Environment and U.S. Bureau of Land Management. These collars were programmed to collect pronghorn locations every four hours and fall off after one year. In the winter of 2009, the project was expanded upon to include 40 additional captured does in Montana from two study areas. Does were fitted with GPS collars which collect relocations every two hours and programmed to fall off after one year. In addition, nine does were captured and collared with GPS collars in Saskatchewan, again collecting relocations every two hours, making this a truly international project.

Andrew Jakes, with the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary, is spearheading the study with support from the Petro-Canada Sustainable Grassland Program. His research investigates both environmental and anthropogenic variables that pronghorn, and potentially other northern sagebrush steppe species, must mitigate in selecting seasonal habitats and migratory pathways. He hopes to create a landscape scale conservation design that allows for both wildlife and economically valued resources to remain sustained. Jakes states that the results of his first two years of collaring are already showing how connected and complex the NSS between Saskatchewan and Montana really is. “The relocation data recovered from pronghorn collared during 2008 showed that only four of nineteen individuals (21%) made long-distance migrations, defined as movements over 50km in length, during spring and fall migrations. However, during December 2008 through January 2009, we observed massive movements occurring as pronghorn faced severe winter conditions. Several hundred pronghorn were tracked moving south past the Milk River in Montana, to the banks of the Missouri River, over 100km in distance in just over a week”

Sharply increased numbers of pronghorn were observed on the breaks of the Milk River, undoubtedly hundreds to thousands traveling from Saskatchewan to find reprieve from frigid temperatures and deep snow. The following spring 53% of our collared animals migrated back north into Saskatchewan (Figure 2), suggesting that approximately half the animals observed the previous winter in Montana reside at least part of the time in Saskatchewan. Of the remaining collared animals from Montana, 72% have made long-distance migrations from wintering to summer home range. We have one pronghorn doe moving from Glasgow, Montana to areas around Pangman, Saskatchewan, a distance of over 200km” states Jakes.

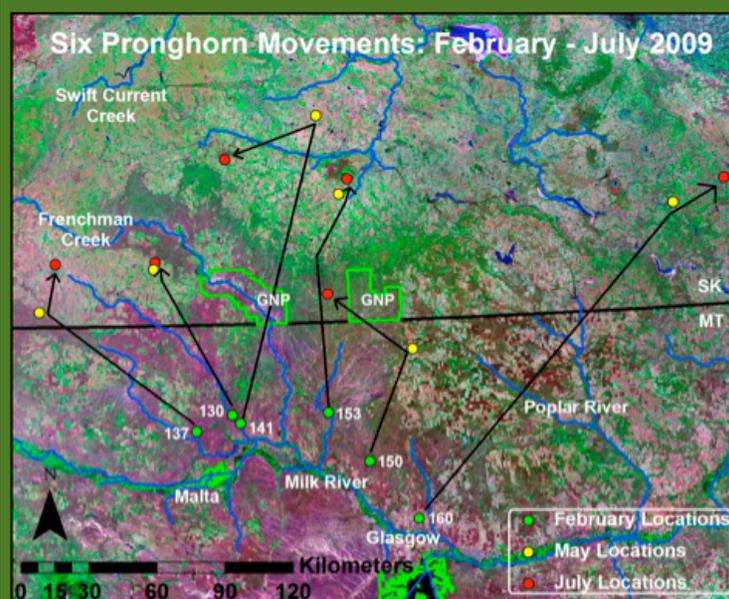


Figure 2. Movements of 6 collared pronghorn does from Montana to Saskatchewan between February and July of 2009

“It will be interesting to see what the conditions are like this coming winter and whether these animals return to wintering areas in Montana or remain in Saskatchewan” ads Jakes. Additionally, how will these animals navigate their way through the increasing anthropogenic pressures being placed on the region? “Whatever the case, it shows how important a holistic ecosystem approach is needed to manage pronghorn across the NSS.”



## Upcoming Events and Activities:

- Prairie Conservation Forum Fall General Meeting and 20 Year Fall Celebration October 21st, 22nd Legion in Hanna, AB
- November 3-5 Sustainable Water and Sustainable Energy, Saskatoon Inn, SK
- Alberta Conservation Association is holding a car raffle to raise money to purchase the Golden Ranch bordering North Cooking Lake just 27 kilometres east of Edmonton.. Tickets are \$25 each and only 5000 tickets are being printed. Buy your ticket online at <https://secure.ab-conservation.com/getYourTicket.cfm>
- November 5 & 6 The Buck Starts Here Funding Conference 2009, Lethbridge, AB. For more information and to register visit the Lethbridge Community Foundation.
- 9th Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference, Winnipeg, MB. February 25-27, 2010. Register online at [www.pcesc.ca](http://www.pcesc.ca)

## Participation

The PCF participated in the quilting bee to create a patchwork quilt for the upcoming Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference. The quilt will be made up of 30 squares, 28 of which will be contributed by volunteers featuring various prairie themes. Linda Cerney, Leta Pezderic and Sasha Harriott submitted a square under the invasive species theme.



## Calendar

A big thank-you to the organizations who sponsored the Prairie Conservation Forum 2010 Calendar (Suncor, Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment and Helen Schuler Coulee Center) and to all of those individuals who submitted pictures. Members attending the PCF Fall Gala will be receiving a free calendar. Additional calendars are available for purchase, please contact Katheryn at [info@albertapcf.org](mailto:info@albertapcf.org).

### Our Vision:

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

### Our Goals:

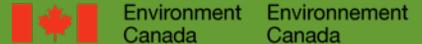
**Research:** Enhance the information base for Alberta's native prairie and parkland landscapes.

**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:*

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development



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

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Lethbridge Alberta, T1J 4L1*

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Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Parks Division

*Web Page: [www.albertapcf.org](http://www.albertapcf.org)*