

# The Prairie Conservation Forum Newsletter

Issue Number 10—Fall 2011



## In this issue:

- 2011 Spring Tour Summary
- Borderless Treasures
- Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative News

Attend the PCF Fall Meeting and Tour in Wainwright on September 28 and 29, 2011. Please email [info@albertapcf.org](mailto:info@albertapcf.org) or [sasha@albertapcf.org](mailto:sasha@albertapcf.org) if you are interested in attending.

## 2011 PCF Spring Tour

The 2011 Spring Meeting and Tour were held at CFB Suffield and had a record turnout with nearly 50 participants attending. Corey Davidson, Angela Tully, and Delaney Boyd put together a full day tour that kept all of the participants fully engaged for the entire day. We were briefed about all of the do's and don'ts when visiting the military training base. Two of the tips that stuck in everyone's mind were "if you didn't drop it, leave it where it is" and "if it is shiny, do not touch it".

The tour gave participants an opportunity to experience the National Wildlife Area with many of the stops located in this area. The tour included a look at a ferruginous hawk nest complete with young, a visit to an area where the base is using beetles to control leafy spurge, and a visit to see burrowing owls where we were lucky enough to spot an owl beautifully perched on the surveying stake near its nest. Other stops included a visit to the sand dunes in search of signs of kangaroo rat activity (we found empty burrows), a short walk to a medicine wheel that overlooks the South Saskatchewan River, and a stop with representatives from Cenovus who showed us one of the many underground gas pipelines, a measure taken to protect the pipeline from practice fire and vehicle activity.



The military training village was a highlight of the tour. Participants were allowed to walk through the training area, laid out to resemble a village in Afghanistan, where soldiers are exposed to practice situations that they might encounter while on duty. They even bring in actors to complete the scenario training to make the experience as real life as possible.

The day was fantastic, with sunny skies, hot temperatures and the odd mosquito, but it was cut short and came to an end when we were faced with a storm warning and the risk of 50 people stuck pushing a big yellow bus across the prairie.

Thank you to CFB Suffield for hosting the 2011 PCF Spring Meeting and Tour and to all the participants for making it a memorable event.

Sasha Harriott



## Our Vision:

The biological diversity of native prairie and parkland ecosystems is secure under thoughtful and committed stewardship of all Albertans.

## Our Outcomes:

Maintain Large Native Prairie and Parkland Landscapes

Conserve Connecting Corridors for Biodiversity

Protect Isolated Native Habitats

# Borderless Treasures

Ian Dyson

The Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP) has its roots in a prairie-wide PCAP produced for Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan under the World Wildlife Fund's 'Wild West' program in the mid 1980s. That plan stated, "Canadians need to ensure that native prairie, with its wild plants and animals, survives in the west and is conserved for its intrinsic values, from which this and future generations can benefit." The Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) has its roots in the belief that conservation of biodiversity in grassland and parkland Alberta is not the responsibility of one organization, but of all of us.

So the PCAP/PCF was an early-adopter of a large landscapes approach recognizing that environmental riches transcend boundaries and effective stewardship must be based on broad based partnerships. But elements of this approach have earlier origins. In 1932, due to the efforts of Rotary International clubs in Montana and Alberta, the U.S. and Canadian governments combined Waterton Lakes National Park (Alberta, Canada) and Glacier National Park (Montana, U.S.A.) to form the world's first International Peace Park (IPP). And the IPP lies at the heart of a much larger trans-boundary ecosystem, the Crown of the Continent, so named because it contains the headwaters of three of North America's major river basins – the Saskatchewan flowing to Hudson's Bay, the Missouri flowing to the Gulf of Mexico and the Columbia flowing to the Pacific Ocean.

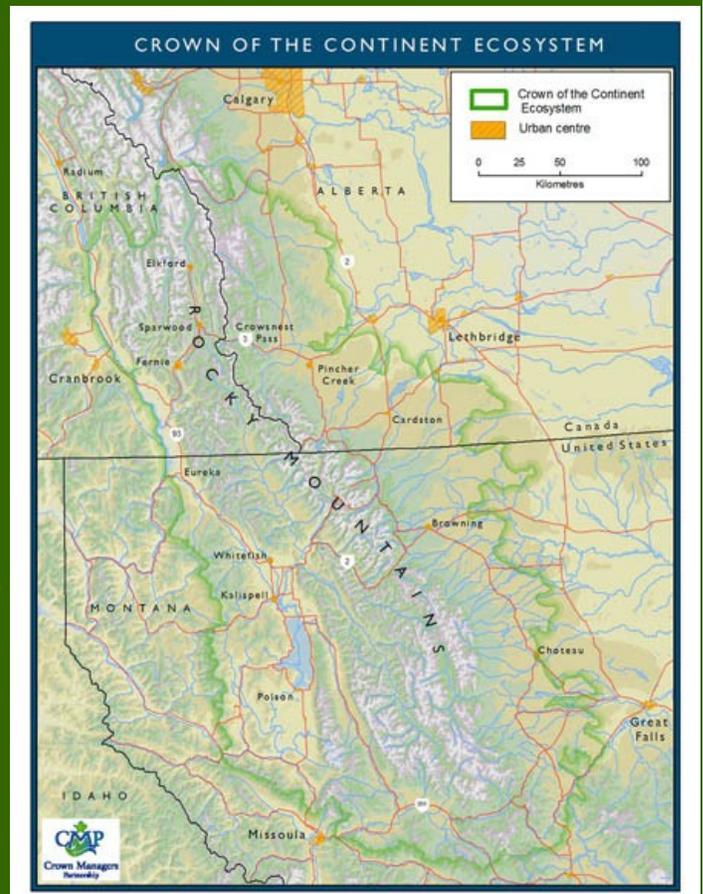
The landscapes of the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem (CCE) are characterized by a convergence of biomes (alpine, temperate forests, semi-arid grasslands) and are dominantly still in native cover. This is the place where the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains rises from the high western plains of North America and the Rocky Mountain Trench draws a dividing line between these high, jagged sentinels and the lesser mountain ranges to the west. The area has an incredible richness of microclimates and vegetation complexes, producing exceptional environmental quality – mountain water towers that serve human populations across the prairies and the inland north west, the full suite of North America's apex predators – cougars, wolverines, lynx, wolves, badgers, coyotes, and black and grizzly bears, the greatest floristic and aquatic systems diversity in the entire Rocky Mountain chain.

But the CCE is also a place of incredible jurisdictional fragmentation and complexity – two countries, two provinces and a state, numerous aboriginal lands, municipal authorities, public land blocks, and private properties, working and protected landscapes. Since 2001, multiple environmental, land and resource management agencies have been working together as the Crown Managers Partnership (CMP) to explore ecosystem-based ways of collaborating on trans-boundary issues in the Crown of the Continent <http://www.crownmanagers.org/>. We are striving to apply today, for a much larger landscape, the foundational ideas that underpinned the establishment of the IPP:

- The environment doesn't recognize jurisdictional boundaries;
- There is a need for cooperation and stewardship in a world of shared resources; and
- It is in the individual and collective interest of Canadians and Americans to work together.

In 2011, the CMP released a new Strategic Plan. Our vision is an ecologically healthy CCE, "We will collectively develop defined measures of ecological health and the adaptive capacity to meet them, across borders, amongst jurisdictions and with stakeholders by the end of the decade." To deliver this vision, the CMP is undertaking a major, multi-year Ecological Health Project and collaborating with other parties active in the CCE.

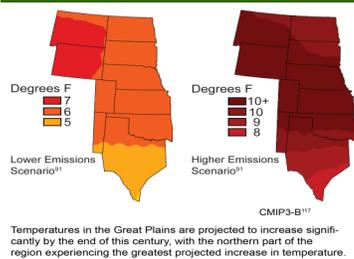
Despite the stark contrast between the prairies and the Rockies, both systems are indivisibly linked. The grandeur of the Rockies is perfectly framed by the vast, wide expanse of the rolling prairies and our prairies exist because of the rain shadow cast by the Rocky Mountains. So the work of the PCF and the CMP is the same – to demonstrate in this extraordinary place our collective capacity to be effective stewards of incredible borderless treasures.



# Plains and Prairie Potholes Landscape Conservation Cooperative

Rick Nelson

In today's ever-changing natural resource climate, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing landscape scale partnerships with federal, state, provincial, tribal and non-governmental organizations. These 21st Century partnerships are being developed to create and implement an approach that will further develop, enhance and apply tools necessary to determine how the landscape is changing. A key factor in Landscape Conservation Cooperatives is to understand how the landscape is changing but more importantly what we can do about those changes to assist in furthering conservation goals and objectives.



Land use changes and impacts such as drought, wildfire, habitat fragmentation, contaminants, pollution, invasive species, disease and a rapidly changing climate can threaten human populations as well as native species and their habitats. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state, local and non-profit partners, along with private land owners, have partnered to create 21 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) to address climate change and other landscape level stressors. One of the LCCs, the Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC, covers parts of Montana, Wyoming, Minnesota, Iowa, North and South Dakota, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Without a comprehensive, cohesive strategy and plan, the plains and prairie pothole region will not be able to sustain natural resources important to our partners.

The Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC covers some of the most productive grassland, wetland, and riparian zones in North America, and supports a vast diversity of fish and wildlife habitat. The Plains and Prairie Potholes (PPP) LCC is comprised of three sub-units. The three sub-units are; the Prairie Pothole region, the Northern Great Plains, and the Rivers and Riparian Corridors. Each of these sub-units encompasses diverse, scientifically rich areas.

The LCC concept represents a different way of thinking about strategic habitat conservation among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners. Previously, landscape level conservation was unnecessarily hampered by political borders. This often created a situation where conservation was typically planned at small, local scales. The small-level conservation focus created situations where habitat conservation areas were not cooperating with other, local and related areas and partners. LCCs create an environment that fosters collaboration among federal, state, local government and other natural resource stakeholders.

Another function of the Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC is to provide opportunities for conservation-focused, scientific and regionally-specific projects to enhance the understanding of the area. The PPP LCC funds research and monitoring projects that help scientists understand the challenges of landscape conservation in a changing climate. The outcomes of these projects are applied science tools that resource managers can use to help make more informed decisions about critical resource management questions. The results from each project help shape current and future land management practices and policies within the PPP LCC and across the network of LCCs.



The projects must address one or more of the science needs of the partnership and each partner provides input to ensure success. For example, one need from the 2011 program was for the projects to develop information to reduce uncertainty related to habitat fragmentation and connectivity, species mobility and species tolerances. Upon completion of the projects, members of the team will present findings to the partnership as part of the LCC's science sharing objective. An annual science needs workshop will help shape the direction of the next fiscal year's project themes and assist in the continuing improvement of the LCC. Findings from the 2011 science needs workshop are now being used to identify the scientific complexities in managing a large, complex area with multiple stakeholders.

The Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC is constantly changing, growing and becoming more responsive to the needs of the partnership. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and our partners will rely on the results from the various studies to shape the future of the LCC. Ultimately, we'll be increasing our conservation delivery by reducing the scientific uncertainty associated with landscape level stressors which are important to our partnership.

For more information on the Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC and to find out how to actively participate please visit <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/climate/LCC/PPP/index.cfm> or please contact:

Rick Nelson, Coordinator  
Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC  
3425 Miriam Ave.  
Bismarck, ND 58501  
701-355-8509  
Email: [Richard\\_D\\_Nelson@fws.gov](mailto:Richard_D_Nelson@fws.gov)

Mike Olson, Science Coordinator  
Plains and Prairie Potholes LCC  
3425 Miriam Ave.  
Bismarck, ND 58501  
701-355-8545  
Email: [Michael\\_Olson@fws.gov](mailto:Michael_Olson@fws.gov)

# News

## Prairie Conservation Forum Casino

The PCF will be working a casino on March 13 and 14, 2012 to help raise money for PCF projects. The casino will be in Calgary at the Deerfoot Inn and Casino, and we will need approximately 25 volunteers to run it. Please keep these dates in mind, as we very much need volunteers to help make this a success. The funds raised will allow the PCF to put money towards initiatives that wouldn't otherwise have funding (or require more), and that the board of directors believe will further the 2011-2015 prairie conservation action plan.

## South Saskatchewan Regional Plan

The South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council has provided advice to the Alberta Government on the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. We are now into the second phase of consultation on the SSRP. To read the advice the RAC has given to the government and to fill out a workbook online to share your views/thoughts of the RAC's advice, please go to the following link: <https://landuse.alberta.ca/RegionalPlans/SouthSaskatchewanRegion/PlanningProcess/Phase2Consultation/Pages/default.aspx>. Alternatively, you can print out the workbook and return it by mail. Deadline for workbook submission is 4:30 pm on December 19, 2011.



Milk River Badlands and Burrowing Owl,  
C. Wallis; Swift Fox, Lu Carbyn

Thank-you to our contributing partners:



**Government  
of Alberta**



*I*

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

*Prairie Conservation Forum  
2nd Floor, Provincial Building  
200-5th Ave. S.  
Lethbridge Alberta, T1J 4L1  
Email: [info@albertapcf.org](mailto:info@albertapcf.org)*

Visit our Website!  
[www.albertapcf.org](http://www.albertapcf.org)