



PRAIRIE CONSERVATION FORUM



Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum

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Annual Report

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Photography credits:

Front Cover — Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, Katheryn Taylor

This Page — Sweet Grass Hills, Katheryn Taylor

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Page 1 — AGM and Tour, Ian Dyson

Page 2 — Ralph Klein Park, Calgary Zoo Wildlife Conservation Centre, City of Calgary Park, Devil's Coulee, Katheryn Taylor

Page 3 — Long-tailed weasel, Katheryn Taylor

Page 4 — Solar water pump, river valley, Katheryn Taylor

Page 5 — Hay field and windmills, unknown

Page 7 — Ralph Klein Park, Katheryn Taylor

Page 8 — Milk River (Writing-on-Stone), Katheryn Taylor

Page 9 — Meadowlark, Katheryn Taylor

Back Cover — Grasslands, Katheryn Taylor

<http://www.albertapcf.org>



Prairie Conservation Forum Vision

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

Guiding Principles

1. Management responsibilities for native prairie and parkland fall primarily on public agencies (i.e., Federal, Provincial and Local Governments), First Nations and private landowners. The PCF will only support and facilitate discussions concerning actions that contribute positively to the Vision and Mission of the PCF.
2. The PCF will facilitate networking, information exchange and discussion amongst member organizations and with other jurisdictions outside of Alberta.
3. Partnership activities are based on the belief that the social and economic benefits which are derived from prairie and parkland ecosystems are dependent on the ecological health of these systems. Therefore, management strategies will be promoted that ensure the ongoing health of these ecosystems.
4. The PCF Partnership draws together diverse opinions and approaches to ecosystem management. To best ensure the development of collaborative and effective solutions, the Partnership will interact in a manner that is respectful of that diversity.
5. PCF members will strive to implement PCF programs and activities in their respective organizations in support of the PCF Vision.
6. The Vision can only be achieved by the efforts of many, including the PCF itself and its member organizations, accompanied by effective working relationships with others who share the Vision.
7. The PCF supports the equitable sharing of social and economic costs and the benefits of maintaining native biodiversity and ecological services among all segments of society.

Outcomes

Maintain Large Native Prairie and Parkland Landscapes. The existence of intact and fully functioning native prairie and parkland landscapes in Alberta are the best guarantor of future regional biodiversity and environmental quality.

Conserve Connecting Corridors for Biodiversity. Habitat connectivity is essential to maintain native biodiversity and ecosystem function. The conservation and restoration of important corridors will help to maintain functional native prairie and parkland landscapes.

Protect Isolated Native Habitats. Within fragmented landscapes there exist small, isolated pockets of ecological refugia that may be as important for native biodiversity conservation as larger prairie and parkland landscapes. These need to be identified, studied, and possibly protected.

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*“Not a breath of air stirred over the free and open prairie; the clouds were like light piles of cotton; and where the blue sky was visible, it wore a hazy and languid aspect”*

*~Francis Parkman~*

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Message from the Coordinators

The PCF coordinators, Sasha Harriott and Katheryn Taylor, continue to be involved in all of the PCF committees and working groups, providing an array of support including project management, logistical help, leadership and administrative support where needed. This past year included advancing the PCAP goals of maintaining large native prairie and parkland landscapes, conserving connecting corridors for biodiversity and protecting isolated native habitats through committees such as the renewable energy committee, which worked towards producing communication materials for landholders and industry; the transboundary working group, which is developing plans based on feedback from Glasgow, MT, for the workshop to be held in Lethbridge in 2018; the education and communication committee, which delivered and sponsored 25 Deep Roots videoconference presentations and began discussions on a large media project; the connecting corridors committee, which had an initial paper written and is brainstorming how to move forward; and the state of the prairie committee, which saw the start of data analysis and looks forward to having a technical report completed in early 2019.

In addition to providing logistical and administrative support, the Coordinators maintain communications, set up both board meetings and general meetings, maintain financial records and coordinate volunteers for casino fundraising events.

We would like to thank all of the volunteers that sit on the working groups and committees for your time and efforts in helping to conserve native prairie and parkland in Alberta. We would also like to thank all of our partners, friends and family who continue to volunteer for our casino fundraiser, we are forever grateful for your time and support.

Katheryn Taylor and Sasha Harriott



PCF Meetings and Tours

The PCF spring meeting took place at Shepard Hall, Calgary, on June 28th, 2017, where we had presentations about some of our contracted PCF projects. Ron McNeil presented on Marilyn Neville's behalf about the renewable energy paper she wrote for PCF entitled 'Beneficial Management Practices for Renewable Energy Projects'. Leif Olson presented on the paper that O2 Planning and Design wrote for PCF entitled 'Connecting Habitats in the Prairies'. The tour on the 29th began at Ralph Klein Park, with a look at the wetlands that have been constructed there, and continued on to the Calgary Zoos Devonian Wildlife Conservation Centre, where we got to see where some of Alberta's (and the world's) species at risk are bred for conservation purposes. The tour ended in Calgary at Mallard Point and Sandy Beach Park where examples of riparian restoration techniques were shared with us from Cows and Fish.

The PCF fall meeting and tour took place in Milk River on September 13, 2017, with presentations from the Milk River Watershed Council Canada (Tim Romanow): New Opportunities to Build Watershed Resiliency, State of the Watershed Reporting, and Partnership Leveraging with WPCAs Across the Grasslands Region, and from the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (Corinna Copp): The Status of Biodiversity in the Grassland and Parkland Regions of Alberta. The day ended with a tour of Devils Coulee Dinosaur and Heritage Museum in Warner and a tour of Devils Coulee itself. The following day's tour took us to Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, a stop at a local ranch (Ross Ranch), and a trek across the border to see the Sweetgrass Hills.

Our Annual General Meeting took place at the Bass Pro Shop in Balzac on January 18, 2018. At this meeting, all of the PCF working committees provided updates, we held elections to the PCF Board of Directors, and did a financial review for members. Presentations were given by Courtney Taylor, the Youth Range Days Top-Hand Award Winner, on sustainable range management, by Brandy Downey, with Alberta Environment and Parks about renewable energy and wildlife, and by Tracy Lee, with the Miistakis Institute, about advancing conservation on the prairie landscape.

For PCF members, PCF meeting notes and presentations can be found on the members only page of the PCF website: www.albertapcf.org.



Transboundary Working Group

The third Transboundary Grasslands Workshop was held in Glasgow, Montana on February 13-15, 2018 and was titled; "Transboundary Conservation: Challenges and Solutions."

The workshop has been rotating between the jurisdictions in the partnership with the first workshop held in Elkwater, AB in 2016, the second workshop in Swift Current, SK in 2017, and the third workshop in Glasgow, MT in 2018. Just as the location shifted each year, the organizing committee shifted as well. In 2018, the workshop committee was led by Kelsey Molloy, with The Nature Conservancy in Montana, with help from many Montana, Alberta and Saskatchewan committee members.

The workshop had over 90 participants attend, the largest Transboundary Grasslands Partnership workshop yet! One of the key messages that were taken from participants of the 2018 Workshop is that communication needs to be improved and partner connections need to be supported. There was a work planning session held at the workshop that allowed participants to provide feedback and direction for the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership core team.

Feedback from the 2018 Transboundary Grasslands Workshop that will help in guiding the core team includes:

- Development and maintenance of a Facebook page to share stories between agencies, groups and individuals,
- Explore opportunities to develop short 30 second videos for posting on Facebook and enhancing awareness,
- Data round up to determine who is doing what in the transboundary grasslands landscape, including methods, new approaches and techniques for data sharing,
- And share information to identify opportunities where work overlaps.

The Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum will continue to provide a small administrative role (website, financial, registration and logistical support).

The Transboundary Grasslands Partnership core team continues to hold monthly conference calls to share management strategies and opportunities for collaboration as well as provide direction for the workshop committee. The 4th workshop will be returning back to Alberta at the end of 2018.

Education & Communication Committee

The Deep Roots Videoconference continued to be delivered by Alberta Parks to students across Alberta in 2017-2018. The PCF sponsors up to 25 classes to receive the presentation (i.e. pay the teacher's fee of \$100 for the presentation), and all 25 of these sponsored presentations were used in the 2017-2018 school year. The total number of students within these classes was 599, with the majority of these students being in grade 4. One field trip bursary of \$500 was awarded to a Calgary school to participate in a field trip at Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Centre.

The committee also began to explore options and brainstorm for a large media project, which is an action item in the 2016-2020 PCAP under Outcome 1: Maintain Large Native Prairie and Parkland Landscapes. This project will likely not commence until 2018-2019 so as to allow time for other PCF initiatives to be completed. Any members interested in this project are encouraged to contact info@albertapcf.org, as we are always looking for engaged and active membership on this committee.

1,000 Alberta Grasslands Event brochures were printed and distributed to Nature Centers in Alberta and to Chinook tourism for the spring/summer/fall of 2017. PCF brochures and PCAPs were taken to the Calgary Stampede MULTISAR booth, where more than 100,000 people attend events.

MULTISAR

MULTISAR is a program focused on multi-species conservation at the landscape level that promotes stewardship through voluntary participation of landholders on both Crown and private lands. The program is a collaborative effort among landholders, the Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Environment and Parks, the Prairie Conservation Forum, Cows and Fish, Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Alberta Beef Producers, the Canadian Round Table for Sustainable Beef, and Environment and Climate Change Canada.



The Habitat Conservation Program includes the development of detailed Habitat Conservation Strategies (HCS) in the core project area of southern Alberta, as well as the more compact Species at Risk Conservation Plans (SARC Plans) delivered throughout the Grassland Natural Region. In 2017-2018, a new HCS was developed on seven ranches totalling approximately 62,973 acres. Associated habitat enhancement projects were also developed to improve the habitat of key wildlife species. A number of habitat projects were developed on HCS properties. These varied from planting of native grass plugs, wildlife-friendly fencing, Japanese brome control, installation of several ferruginous hawk poles, the fencing of wetlands and dugouts, and portable watering unit use.

Species at Risk Conservation Plans (SARC Plans) and Beneficial Management Plans (BMP Plans) were delivered upon request in 2017-2018 on three properties. One property received a SARC Plan (~80 acres) and two properties received BMP plans (~35,184 acres) where landowners wanted to install ferruginous hawk nesting platforms to assist with Richardson ground squirrel control.

The Education, Outreach and Awareness program was achieved primarily by MULTISAR staff that were able to give presentations and demonstration tours to landowners, wildlife and conservation groups, college students, and the general public. MULTISAR partnered with the Canadian Cattlemen's Association to man a booth during the Calgary Stampede that was viewed by over 100,000 people. Communication material produced included one issue of MULTISAR's newsletter and a new bat BMP (beneficial management practise) fact sheet. In total, MULTISAR made over 118 different contacts with more than 2,146 people (and an additional 100,000 people at the Calgary Stampede) including landholders, the general public, academia, industry, media, government and non-government organizations and other sectors.

Under the Research and Monitoring Program, MULTISAR continued implementing its monitoring and evaluation protocol to assess the directionality of habitat improvements and management changes and the effectiveness of its habitat conservation strategies. A subsample of range and riparian sites and wildlife points were revisited on two MULTISAR HCS ranches (~41,670 acres), five years after their initial assessment, to determine if management recommendations had been implemented and their impact on species at risk habitat. Thirty five habitat enhancement projects, on participating HCS ranches, were monitored in 2017 to determine if enhancements are achieving their objectives.

MULTISAR has compiled the wildlife observation and vegetation assessment data it has been accumulating since its first Habitat Conservation Strategy. In 2018, MULTISAR will continue to focus on determining inferences between species at risk occurrences and habitat metrics and that Beneficial Management Practices recommendations can be improved to maximize habitat quality.

Renewable Energy BMPs

In 2016, PCF started the process of having a paper written on the 'Beneficial Management Practices for Renewable Energy Projects'. This contract was awarded to Gramineae Services Inc. and addresses Outcome 1: Maintain Large Native Prairie and Parkland Habitats; Approach 3: Minimal Disturbance and Restoration of Industrial Footprint on Native Prairie. A stakeholder workshop, engaging everyone from industry to government to PCF members to other organizations with invested interest, was conducted in early February of 2017 and was very successful at getting feedback into the proposed BMP's for renewable energy projects, as well as giving everyone present a clearer picture about what these industries currently do on the landscape. The paper was completed in the spring of 2017 and can be found on the PCF website: <http://www.albertapcf.org/resources-literature/pcf-resources>.



RFPs for two communication pieces were put out in March 2018. The first was geared towards landowners and is meant to highlight the benefits of native prairie and provide information about the renewable energy industry (eg. what landowners need to know, what the risks of having this industry on their land are, how to handle contracts with the industry, and what the beneficial management practises are if they do allow the industry on their land). The second was geared towards the solar and wind energy industry and is meant to highlight best management practises for these industries, with emphasis on avoiding native prairie habitats. These two communications pieces are expected to be complete by the end of August, 2018.

Connecting Corridors

In 2016, PCF started the process of having a paper written on 'Connecting Habitats in the Prairies of Alberta: What does this mean and how do we manage for it?' This contract was awarded to O2 Planning and Design and addresses Outcomes 2 and 3: Conserve Connecting Corridors for Biodiversity and Protect Isolated Native Habitats; Approach 1: Collaborate with research and practitioner parties to better understand structural and functional connectivity on regional and local landscapes and define 'isolated' habitats/fragments. The paper was completed in the spring of 2017 and can be found on the PCF website: <http://www.albertapcf.org/resources-literature/pcf-resources>.

Future plans of this committee include looking into potential mapping projects to identify where significant corridors are located on the Alberta landscape.



Change Analysis: State of the Prairie

Understanding the structural integrity of native prairie grasslands is foundational to the Prairie Conservation Forum's reason for existence – to conserve the integrity of native prairie ecosystems. To quantify the status of native prairie cover in the Grassland and Parkland natural regions and to assess what changes might be taking place over time, a major 'State of the Prairie' project began to get serious traction in the spring of 2017. Under the direction of a Steering Committee, and with the support of a Technical Team, PCF Board members, consultants, and both past and present Government of Alberta resource analysts and geospatial experts, worked collaboratively during the reporting period on the analysis phase of this project. This entailed three major pieces of work:

- First, evaluating the suitability of 13 datasets for potential use in the analysis, selecting datasets to be used, agreeing on how data will be analysed and presented and developing specifications to direct aggregation of attributes from multiple inventories so they align for purposes of analysis.
- Second, adding and adjusting a third ecodistrict level of delineation within the Alberta Natural Regions Framework in order that native cover and change data can be assessed at this level of analysis.
- Third, Maapera Analytics Inc. was retained to deploy TimeScan, developed by the German Aerospace Centre which has the ability to examine time series of any suite of remote-sensed datasets within a selected analysis period to ascertain the most significant spectral indices and calculate their statistics over time for each pixel. This methodology was used to develop a report providing and documenting native cover classifications for each of ten, three year intervals of Timescan input data between 1984 and 2016.

Looking forward, it is anticipated that by the end of 2018, the PCF will have an initial Technical Report summarizing and reporting on cover status and change by Natural Region, Natural Sub-Region, Ecodistricts, Administrative Areas, and Land Tenure (Public versus Private).



Financial Report

Statement of Operations and Net Assets (Deficiency)

March 31, 2018

Revenue	2018	2017
Casino	\$ 51,013	\$ 56,418
Alberta Environment and Parks Grant	20,000	10,000
Administration—Multisar	7,692	7,692
Workshop income	7,185	8,998
Ducks Unlimited Grant	6,000	—
Parks Canada Grant	5,000	5,000
Donations	172	280
Interest Income	129	123
Alberta Government—Alberta Parks	—	20,000
Total	\$ 97,191	\$108,511
Expenses		
Special Projects	\$ 42,724	\$ 30,178
Coordinator contract and expenses	\$ 35,384	43,077
Meeting expenses	4,512	8,021
Professional Fees	2,768	2,700
Insurance	1,842	1,842
Donations	1,000	26,000
Office	381	1,016
Total	\$ 88,611	\$112,834
Excess (deficiency) of Revenue over Expenses	\$ 8,580	\$ (4,323)

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2018

Assets	2018	2017
Cash	\$ 256,210	\$ 250,055
Accounts Receivable	7,600	—
GST receivable	22,865	11,378
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ —	\$ 3,283
Due to Multisar	10,785	10,501
Deferred Revenue	34,413	14,752
Net Assets		
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$ 81,477	\$ 72,897
Contingency Reserve	160,000	160,000
Total	\$ 266,675	\$ 261,433

Statement of Changes in Net Assets

March 31, 2018

	Unrestricted	Internally Restricted	Total 2018	Total 2017
Balance, beginning of year	\$ 72,897	\$ 160,000	\$ 232,897	\$237,220
Excess of Revenue Over Expenditures	\$ 8,580	—	\$ 8,580	\$ (4,323)
Balance, end of year	\$ 81,477	\$ 160,000	\$ 241,477	\$232,897

PCF Board of Directors

Ron McNeil — Chair. Ron McNeil, President of LandWise Inc., is a soil and land resource scientist. Ron specializes in environmental studies, with a focus on inventories, ecological classification, habitat assessments, and reclamation. He has extensive experience in Alberta and Saskatchewan, especially in soil surveys and grasslands. Ron worked extensively with the Alberta government to improve the classification and interpretation of ecological information. He was instrumental in developing the link between soils and native plant communities. Ron was scientific advisor to the Grassland Vegetation Inventory (GVI), and has developed and delivered training for ecological range sites, GVI, wetlands, and reclamation.

Marie Tremblay — Vice-Chair. Marie is a conservation scientist who has been helping to conserve Alberta's natural ecosystems for over 20 years in a variety of capacities. Previous experience includes facilitating status assessments of species at risk throughout western Canada for Parks Canada and overseeing the Nature Conservancy of Canada's conservation program in Alberta. Marie is particularly interested in evidence-based conservation focused on multi-stakeholder collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and continual learning and improvement. She has been involved with the PCF as a board member since 2014.

Karen Raven — Past-Chair. Karen was raised on a ranch in the Southern Interior of BC where she gained her love of the land. Karen is the Manager of the Land Use Unit in the Environmental Stewardship Branch of Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. Her work focuses on support to Land Use Framework regional planning initiatives, ecosystem services, agricultural sustainability initiatives, conservation offsets, and biodiversity. Grassland conservation and stewardship on working landscapes are close to her heart and drive her involvement in the Prairie Conservation Forum.

Graham Caskey — Treasurer. Special Areas Board. Graham and his wife, Marlene, operate a family grain farm near Oyen, Alberta. The farm was originally homesteaded in 1912 by Graham's grandfather, passed down to his parents, and is presently operated by Graham, Marlene, and their two children. They use a combination of crop rotation, zero-till, chem. fallow, and minimum-till continuous cropping to conserve moisture on the landscape. Graham also sits as a director on the Special Areas Board.

Nolan Ball — Board Member. Nolan is currently working as a Rangeland Agrologist in Public Land Management for the Special Areas and has been in this position for the past 3 years. Daily work focuses on helping manage 2.5 million acres of Public land that remains in native grassland and abandoned farmland that has reverted back to a native or modified condition. Prior to this position with the Special Areas, Nolan worked in oil & gas wellsite reclamation for 7 years as a consultant. Most of the work consisted of restoring disturbances from oil & gas production in native prairie environments. Nolan grew up in the Special Areas and moved back to the area following post secondary education in Environmental Sciences. He continues to be part of a family livestock business that ranches on a mixture of tame pastures and native rangeland.

Ian Dyson — Board Member. Ian has been affiliated with the PCF since its inception in 1989. He retired from Alberta Environment and Parks in July 2017, but is sustaining volunteer work with several partnerships. His interest is in collaborative approaches to achieve desired environmental outcomes. His professional experience deals with integrated resource management, water management and regional sustainable development plans in Alberta and he has helped build and sustain multi-stakeholder partnerships dealing with approaches to address environmental cumulative effects such as water quality in the Oldman River Basin, trans-boundary collaboration to sustain ecological health in the Rocky Mountains, and the conservation of prairie and parkland biodiversity.

Brian Peers — Board Member. MD of Taber.

Jeff Forsyth — Board Member. Alberta Conservation Association.

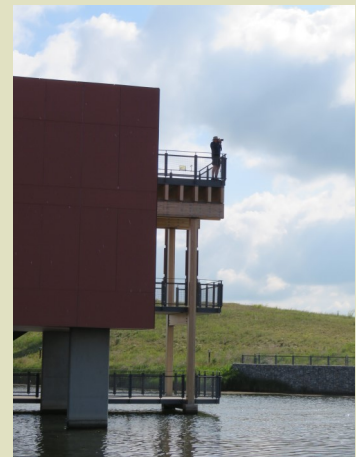
Norine Ambrose — Board Member. Cows and Fish.

Brad Downey — Board Member. Alberta Conservation Association.

Monique Wilkinson — Board Member. AltaLink Management Ltd.

Robert Oakley — Board Member. Alberta Environment and Parks, Public Lands.

Bob Gainer — Board Member. Special Areas Board.



PCF Coordinators

Katheryn Taylor — Coordinator. Katheryn obtained her MSc in biology from the University of Lethbridge in 2003 and has worked on many wildlife and vegetation research projects on the prairies, including work such as 'the effects of cattle grazing on riparian birds' and 'the effects of river damming on riparian birds and vegetation'. She also did some work with the Cows and Fish Program, conducting riparian inventories across Alberta. She has done some teaching and private consulting in the form of environmental impact assessments. She is currently one of the coordinators for the MULTISAR program. Katheryn has been with the PCF since 2007.

Sasha Harriott — Coordinator/Finance. Sasha started out her career in the environmental field as a forest fire fighter. From there she joined the Cows and Fish Program and traveled across Alberta conducting riparian inventories, engaging landowners and promoting healthy riparian areas. She worked with AMEC Earth and Environmental as a Safety and Logistics Coordinator and is currently the Secretariat for the Crown Managers Partnership. She is the mother of 4 children and enjoys living in the beautiful Crowsnest Pass. Sasha has been working with the PCF since 2008.

Recognition of PCF Supporters

Funding and support is critical for on the ground action towards prairie and parkland conservation, as well for maintaining the capacity of the PCF coordinators. Funding is also used for printing, meeting venues and meals, transportation and other operational expenses. We would like to thank our funding partners of 2017-2018 for their commitment to prairie and parkland conservation as without them, we wouldn't be the society we are today.

Alberta Environment and Parks (grants for PCF and MULTISAR)
MULTISAR
Environment Canada

And a special thanks to individuals that make donations to the PCF out of their own pockets:
Cheryl Fujikawa

We would also like to thank:

Members who incur expenses, without reimbursement, while attending PCF meetings.

Those individuals who made themselves available to serve as tour guides on PCF field trips and those that gave presentations to PCF members at meetings.

Chairpersons of PCF committees who provide valued leadership and committee members who assume a heavier workload to fulfill action recommendations contained in the PCAP.

Members that volunteer at PCF casinos.

We will inevitably have failed to identify the generous contributions of some individuals and organizations in this section. We apologize for any oversight on our part.



PCF Member Organizations

Government (municipal, provincial, federal)

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry
Alberta Energy Regulators
Alberta Environment and Parks
Canadian Forces Base, Suffield (Department of National Defence)
Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada
City of Lethbridge, Helen Schuler Nature Centre
Historic Resources Management Branch, ACT
Municipal District of Taber
Special Areas Board
Waterton Lakes National Park (Parks Canada)

Non-Government Organizations/Companies

AJM Environmental Inc.
Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute
Alberta Conservation Association
Alberta Native Plant Council
Alberta Wilderness Association
AltaLink
Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area
Antelope Creek Ranch
Battle River Watershed Alliance
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (Calgary/Banff Chapter)
Cows and Fish — Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society
Decisive Edge
Ducks Unlimited Canada
Eastern Irrigation District
Foothills Restoration Forum
Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation
LandWise Inc.
Lethbridge Naturalists Society
Matrix Solutions Inc.
Milk River Watershed Council



Miistakis Institute
Native Roofs
Nature Alberta
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Nature Saskatchewan
Oldman Watershed Council
Operation Grasslands Community, Alberta Fish and Game Association
Pekisko Group
Red Deer River Watershed Alliance
Round Rock Ranching
Salmtec
Southern Alberta Land Trust Society
Special Areas Advisory Council
Suncor Energy
Tatonga Inc.
TERA Environmental Consultants, a CH2M Hill Company
University of Calgary
Vermilion River Watershed Alliance
Waterton Biosphere Reserve Association



Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum

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