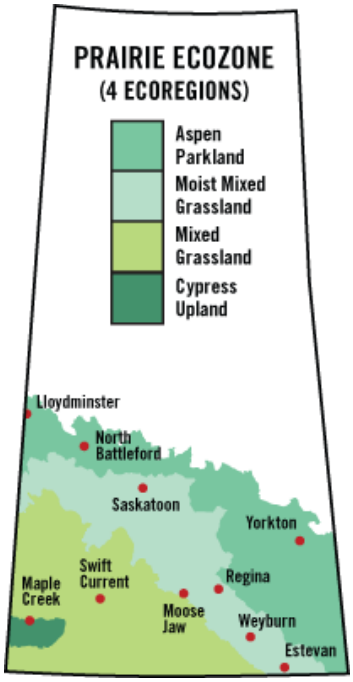
Saskatchewan
Prairie Conservation Action Plan

What is Native Prairie?



Native prairie is a grassland ecosystem. It refers to the land in its original or natural state. "Prairie's Got the Goods" Week is a celebration of native prairie in Saskatchewan and its flora and fauna, cultural, historical and recreational value, and current economic value. Native prairie is an important part of Saskatchewan's culture and economy.

Grassland ecosystems cover between 41-56 million km^2 (31- 43%) of the earth's surface. They represent one of the earth's major biomes and, historically at least, are one of the most productive and diverse terrestrial ecosystems.

Native prairie in Saskatchewan refers to native aquatic and terrestrial habitats within the Prairie Ecozone which includes four Ecoregions: Aspen Park-land, Moist Mixed Grassland, Mixed Grassland, and Cypress Upland.

Native prairie refers to the grass species that have existed in the area for thousands of years. There are over 70 different species of grass on the prairies!

These grasses are the heart and soul of the prairie ecosystem. They provide a home, food, nesting material, and protection for prairie wildlife. Needle and Thread Grass is Saskatchewan's Provincial Grass. Other iconic grasses include Blue Grama Grass, wheatgrasses, porcupine grasses and more. The prairie ecosystem also includes shrubs such as the symbolic Silver Sagebrush. In the spring, prairie wildflowers dot the landscape with beautiful colours. Native grasses are an important part of the Saskatchewan economy and culture; they are the foundation of a sustainable ranching lifestyle and the main food source for grazing cattle.

Native prairie is also home to common wildlife, as well as rare and endangered species such as the Burrowing Owl, Piping Plover, and Greater Sage Grouse. The largest mammals include Elk, White-tail Deer, Mule Deer, Pronghorn Antelope and Moose. Plains Bison which once roamed the prairies are now found in a few select areas.

Native prairie is also home to hundreds of bird species. From birds of prey, such as Red-tailed Hawks and Golden Eagles, to prairie songbirds like the Western Meadowlark and Sprague's Pipit. The Endangered Greater Sage Grouse, with its famous courtship dance, is a symbol of the prairies and endangered species conservation as

Riparian areas, which include areas with wetlands and streams, provide a crucial source of water for prairie flora and fauna. Riparian areas provide habitat for common species such as the beaver, and rare species such as the Northern Leopard Frog. Wetlands provide refuge for migratory birds such as snow geese, Canada geese and many waterfowl and shorebird species. In the arid prairie environment, water can be scarce, so anything from small creeks to large lakes are all important parts of the native prairie ecosystem.

Despite its significance, grasslands are one of the world's most threatened ecosystems, making them a conservation priority. In North America, tall-grass prairie has been reduced to 1%, and mixed-grass and short-grass prairie to 20-30% of their former range, together exceeding losses reported for any other major ecological community on the continent. In Saskatchewan, it is estimated that between 17% and 21% of the original native prairie remains intact. Despite increasing awareness of the value of healthy prairie ecosystems, loss of native prairie continues.

Our remaining native prairie is a valuable resource that touches many lives and many interest groups. Some, such as ranchers, rely on the sustainable use of prairie for their very livelihood. For others, native prairie may be of cultural, spiritual or recreational importance. Many landowners, government and non-government agencies play a role in the stewardship and protection of native prairie as well, representing many interests. Integrating these efforts and defining common outcomes among the players is fundamental to effective prairie conservation.

What can you do?

- Learning about native prairie in Saskatchewan is the first step
- Plant a native prairie garden
- Join a naturalist group and volunteer
- Visit one of Saskatchewan's provincial or recreational park or conservation area
- Go for a hike and share your enthusiasm with those around you!

The Beauty of the Prairies

In celebration of Native Prairie Appreciation Week, SK PCAP is hosting a Youth Native Prairie Poster Contest. Draw a picture of your favourite prairie scene! It can be about anything, from wildflowers or wildlife, to the living sky of sunsets and starry nights, to the First Nations groups who first lived on the wide open prairies. The contest is free to enter and is for youth under the age of 16. Try to capture the beautiful prairie colours, inspiring wildlife or iconic vistas! Have fun!
For more information: http://www.pcap-sk.org/native-prairie-appreciation-week/2016-native-prairie-appreciation-week

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