



**Release Date:** October 25, 2010

## **“Potatogate” Continued**

### **What We Have Here is a Failure to Communicate**

There appears to have been a major failure to communicate within Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (AB SRD). A new report, *Canadian Biodiversity: Ecosystem Status and Trends 2010*, was released by the federal, provincial and territorial governments last week.

And yet the same Alberta government department (AB SRD) involved in this report is currently mired in the “Potatogate” saga: the potential sale of public grasslands of continental conservation significance in the Bow Island area to grow potatoes. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) believes that, in light of the new ecosystem assessment in which AB SRD participated, it is inconceivable that the Alberta government would even consider going ahead with the proposed public land sale.

“It is time for the Minister of AB SRD, Mel Knight, to drop any further consideration of this sale and start communicating with biologists in his department who have been working hard on trying to protect grasslands,” says Cliff Wallis, AWA vice-president. “This minister has the bulk of responsibility for biodiversity conservation in Alberta and it is high time he took that responsibility seriously.”

A key finding in the new report emphasizes that natural processes have been compromised and increased stresses are reaching critical thresholds in Canada’s grassland ecosystem, where grassland bird populations are dropping sharply. The report notes that “Native grasslands have been reduced to a fraction of their original extent . . . Grassland losses exceed those of other major biomes in North America . . . Other stressors include invasive non-native species, forest encroachment, fragmentation, and intensification of agriculture (AWA’s emphasis).”

The irreplaceable native grasslands, which will be lost if the proposed “Potatogate” land sale goes ahead, are habitat for a number of species-at-risk, including burrowing owl and ferruginous hawk (identified by the province as ‘at risk’), as well as Sprague’s pipit, long-billed curlew, short-horned lizard and prairie rattlesnake (‘special concern’).

Although the land scheduled to be sold and ploughed up is public land, the Alberta public has been kept in the dark about the entire process. Up until now, the sale process has taken place with no public scrutiny whatsoever.

The report can be found at [www.biodivcanada.ca/ecosystems](http://www.biodivcanada.ca/ecosystems) .

#### **For further information contact:**

Cliff Wallis, AWA Vice President: (403) 271-1408 (office); (403) 607-1970 (cell)  
Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist: (403) 283-2025

