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## **Important Prairie Ecosystem to Return to Provincial Hands Canada Shirks Species at Risk Responsibilities, Alberta Asked to Protect Onefour**

The federal government announced recently that they will be transferring control of the Onefour Ranch and Research Farm back to the Alberta government. Given its significance for Canadian species at risk, conservation organizations had called for these lands to be designated a National Wildlife Area. The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is disappointed that those calls to the Government of Canada appear to have been ignored. As a fallback, the groups are asking Alberta for strong legal protection to ensure these lands have a research and protection focus.

The Onefour Research Farm has been able to demonstrate for nearly a century that Alberta's Dry Mixedgrass Prairie can support grassland species at risk while also producing livestock. The Onefour lands are home to over 23 federally-listed species at risk including the threatened swift fox. It is also the only known site in Alberta supporting Eastern Yellow-bellied Racers, the largest of only two Soapweed populations in Canada, and is the first confirmed nesting area for endangered Mountain Plovers in Canada. Dozens of provincially rare plants and animals also occur here. Overall, the land being proposed for transfer back to the province supports some of the highest densities and variety of rare species occurrences in the prairies of Canada.

In a letter addressed to AWA, the federal Minister for Agriculture and Agri-Food confirmed that operations at the Onefour Ranch, originally established in 1927 as the Dominion Range Experiment Station, would be folded into the ministry's Swift Current, Saskatchewan facility. This leaves the future in doubt for 12,000 ha of native grassland, much of which is located within the Wild Horse Plain ecodistrict which supports the highest remaining proportion of natural cover in the Prairie Ecoregion in Canada.

"Since the Government of Canada has failed to act to protect this site and meet its legal obligations regarding species at risk, we urge the Government of Alberta to recognize the ecological importance of the Onefour Research Farm and ensure it receives appropriate protected area status," says Cliff Wallis, a grasslands biologist and AWA Vice President. "We are frustrated that Canada continues to shirk its responsibilities for protecting species at risk and ongoing grassland research. It is far less expensive to maintain populations of threatened species than to bring them back from the brink of extinction once suitable habitat is no longer available. Onefour will also be important in efforts to recover grassland species like the greater sage-grouse which could soon disappear from Canada if we don't act to protect spaces like Onefour."

**For more information:**

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