

Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF)



The Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF) is a non-profit organization that has been working collaboratively for over 30 years towards the conservation of Alberta's prairie and parkland landscapes and species habitats. For the past 15 years I've been working with my colleague Katheryn Taylor as a Coordinator for the PCF. Together we help with the day-to-day administrative work of the PCF and have the chance to meet great people throughout the prairie provinces and United States who are interested in and work on prairie conservation.

The actions of the PCF are guided by Prairie Conservation Action Plans (PCAP) over a five-year period. Currently, we are operating under the 2021-2025 Alberta Prairie Conservation Action Plan and with the help of our dedicated members and committees, great progress was made in 2021 at tackling many of the actions listed in the PCAP.

A key outcome listed in the PCAP is to conserve connecting corridors for biodiversity. To help guide decisions, planning and management so that

connectivity is maintained, work was started on a mapping tool and centralized location for geospatial information, and is set to be completed by April 2022. The envisioned tool will help guide users, including land use planners, to recognize high value connectivity areas that should be avoided or show where appropriate mitigative measures can be used in development considerations.

Another PCAP key outcome is to protect isolated native habitats. Isolated habitats are small pockets of refuge for migrating wildlife, and the PCF is working on setting a clear definition for the term by conducting a literature review. Once defined, the PCF will seek to identify locations of isolated native prairie habitats.

PCF's State of the Prairie initiative, a collaborative effort to communicate the state and importance of Alberta's grassland and parkland has made significant progress in the past few years. Understanding the current extent and change in native cover on Alberta's prairie is critical to determining where to focus conservation efforts. Detailed information for this initiative can be found in a technical report published in 2019 or on the summary document, and a great visual of the research is displayed in an interactive map. In January 2022, a short video was released to aid in communicating the importance of Alberta's native prairie to a broader audience. Online workshops were held in February 2022 targeting municipal governments to explain the results of the State of the Prairie report, introduce and explain how to use the

interactive map, communicate approaches to managing and maintaining native prairie landscapes and provide opportunities to build awareness and relationships with other municipalities.

PCF also collaboratively delivers an annual Range Stewardship Course for ranchers and land stewards that is provincial in focus and local in delivery. For the past two years this course has been delivered online in partnership with the Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women. The course contains key range management principles and information that includes presentations and discussion around regional and local issues. The field portion of the course is the most favoured among participants, where first-hand knowledge from experts is imparted to participants through range and riparian health assessments, plant identification and sharing of best management practices. The organising committee is looking forward to bringing this course back to the field in 2022, with planning already underway for an in-person field day.

Next year, Alberta will be hosting the 2023 Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference at the Calgary Zoo/Wilder Institute. This is an important conference that brings together conservation minded individuals to collaborate and share strategies directed at prairie and endangered species conservation. The PCF is taking the lead for the conference and planning is currently underway.

Collaboration and partnerships are the most important tools that PCF has relied

on for more than 30 years. These partnerships are now reaching across international borders through the work of our Transboundary Grasslands Partnership. Work of the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership started in 2016 and has been focused on working collaboratively to sustain healthy transboundary native biodiversity and supporting grasslands ecosystems and communities ever since. The biggest strength of the partnership is continued communication across jurisdictions and with all partners including all levels of government in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana, as well as non-government organisations, landowners, Tribes and First Nations and academia.

– *Sasha Harriot*
