



Grasslands Conservation Incentives Guide

A Guide to the Incentives and Programs
Available for Prairie Working Landscapes

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Male Sharp-tailed Grouse compete for mates at a lek, a patch of prairie where they dance and vocalize to attract the attention of female grouse.



1. Introduction

Prairie grasslands provide essential habitat for grassland birds and other prairie wildlife. However, most of the prairies that once covered of southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have been plowed and even the remaining tracts of native prairie grasslands are under threat. Ranchers are under tremendous market pressure to plow and cultivate rather than maintain traditional pastures. As farmers and ranchers, you are the guardians of one of the world's most endangered ecosystems, the prairie grasslands. Grazing is essential to keep grasslands healthy, and in the absence of the once free-roaming bison, cattle become vital to manage the health of the prairie ecosystem. As farmers and ranchers, you are the guardians of the one of the world's most endangered ecosystems, the prairie grasslands. Birds Canada has compiled this guide to help prairie producers and landowners access the financial incentives that are available to help preserve, enhance, or restore grasslands and other important prairie habitats.

Prairie Canada is at the confluence of three migratory flyways forming a 'bottleneck' in the hourglass of North American bird migration where millions of migratory songbirds, shorebirds, and others stopover to rest and refuel on their long migrations between the arctic and boreal regions of Canada and their southern wintering grounds. Waterfowl and prairie shorebirds often nest in the grass and then raise their young in or near the pothole wetlands. Several species of grassland birds are only found on North American grasslands and rely on the grasslands for nesting habitat where they raise their young. The abundance of such a variety of species that rely on the prairie ecosystem throughout their annual cycle highlight its importance for birds in North America and because of their varied roles in the ecosystem.

Birds are important parts of our ecosystems, and because their varied roles in the ecosystem and that they are mostly easy to spot, birds serve as important indicators of ecosystem health – our present day “canaries in the coal mine”. Some of the ecosystem functions that birds facilitate are control of ‘pests’ such as rodents and insects, nutrient cycling through foraging and waste processing, seed distribution, and even pollination. In fact, birds contribute billions of dollars every year to the global GDP through these ecological services. They can also provide us with moments of beauty and simplicity in our hectic and complicated lives: the sight of a hawk drifting silently overhead, the melody of a meadowlark on a still evening.

But the conversion of grasslands to annual cropping systems is making life very difficult for these birds (Green et al. 2005). We have lost nearly 60% of our grassland birds in Canada since 1970 (State of Canada's Birds 2019). In the Northern Great Plains, an acre of native prairie is converted to annual cropping every minute (WWF Plowprint Report 2020). To put this into context, a Chestnut-collared Longspur needs to stake out around two acres on a grassland in order to raise its young (COSEWIC 2009). So, by the time you have finished reading this introduction, at least one of these birds will have lost its home.

Preserving native grasslands is the best thing that we can do to help birds and other prairie wildlife. There is no substitute for intact prairie. However, restored prairie or tame forage mixes can also provide habitat for many of these birds. If you are participating in incentives that fund tame forage mixes, we encourage you to seek out mixes that will provide the best habitat for our prairie birds.

Birds do a lot of good things and the programs in this guide will help you do a lot of good things for them. By participating in some of the programs described in this guide, you help ensure that our winged neighbours have a space.

Thank you for your commitment to our prairie and our birds.

Ian Cook
Grassland Conservation Manager
Birds Canada





Original extent of Canada's native prairie grasslands



Between 75-90% of Canada's native grassland has been lost and we continue to lose more of it every single year. Alberta has approximately 43%, Saskatchewan 17% and Manitoba has less than 1% of its original grasslands remaining. Canadian producers and landowners can help to protect Canada's remaining grasslands.

Source: Alicia Carvalho/The Narwhal

1.1 About This Guide

This guide outlines financial incentives that will help you conserve, enhance, or restore prairie habitat, including grasslands, wetlands and riparian areas.

The guide first explains several programs that are available at the national level, and then lists incentives by each prairie province. Ducks Unlimited Canada is a national organization, but because their programs differ quite a bit among provinces, we list their programs under the provincial sections.

This guide aims to give you an overview to help you make a decision on what organizations and programs will suit your individual situation and goals.

The programs and incentives described in this guide are subject to change. Before moving ahead with planning, making purchases, or beginning enhancement or restoration work, it is important to contact the organization to confirm eligibility and program details. Please visit the Birds Canada website for the most up to date version of this guide.

In the final section of this guide there are photos, descriptions, and interesting facts about these birds that may be already your neighbours. You might want to print the Prairie Birds section and keep it in the truck for reference!

If there are questions or comments regarding this guide, please contact:

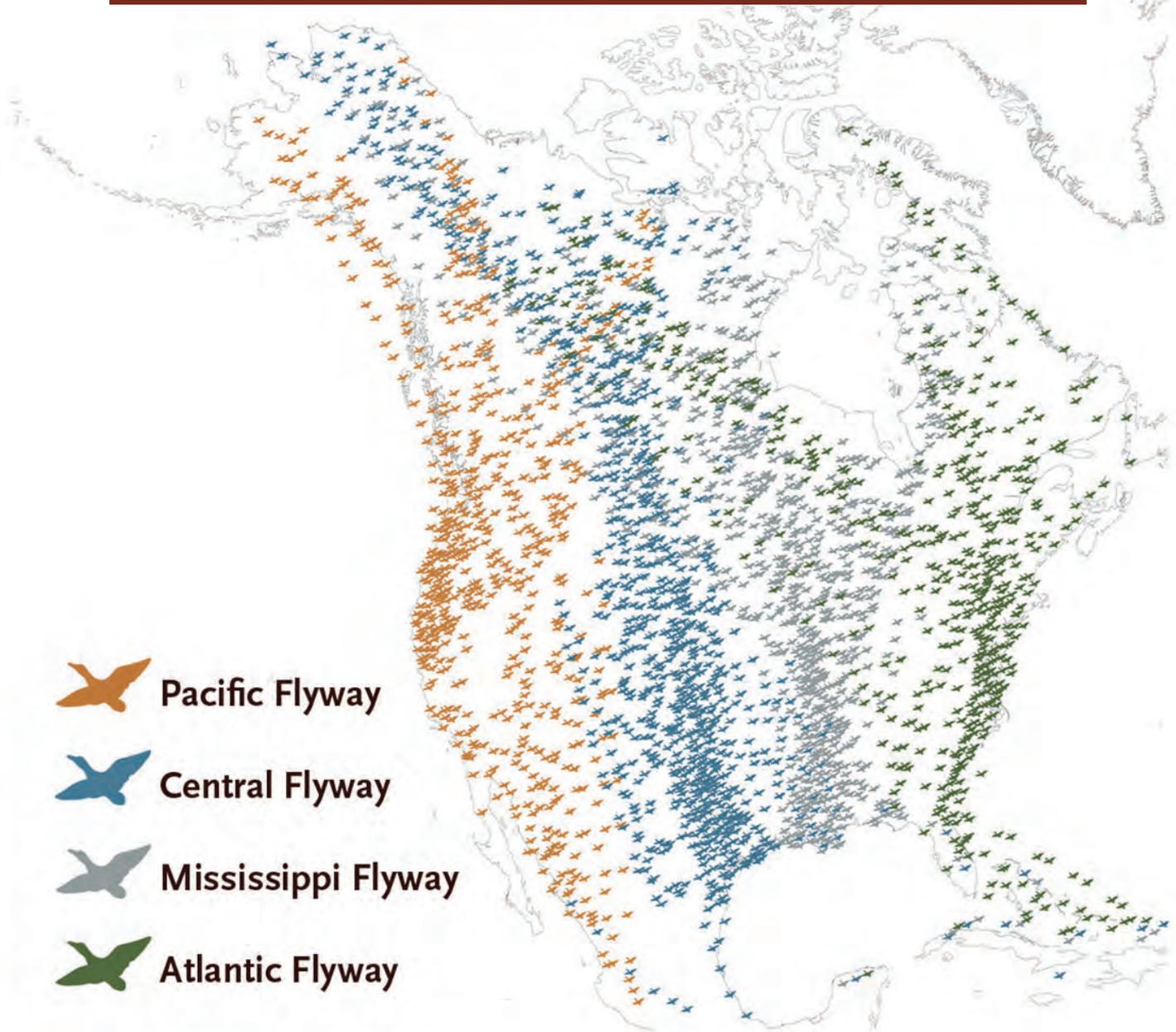


Ian Cook, Grassland Conservation Manager
Birds Canada
(204) 720-9161
icook@birdscanada.org



This map shows the four major routes migratory birds follow to migrate back and forth from their wintering grounds to their breeding grounds. Each bird symbol represents a banded bird that was recaptured and recorded. Birds from all four of the major routes use the Canadian Prairies as their summer nesting grounds or to rest and refuel on their long journeys!

Source: Ducks Unlimited





Baird's Sparrows like this one are only found in the North American grasslands and 60% of them rely on the Canadian Prairies to breed and nest.

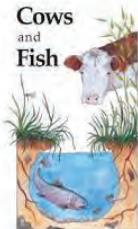
Photo: Nick Saunders

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Changement climatique Canada

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2. National Programs

2.1 ALUS – Alternative Land Use Services

ALUS Canada, A Weston Family Initiative, (ALUS) helps farmers and ranchers produce ecosystem services on their land. These include cleaner air, cleaner water, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, Species at Risk habitat and support for native bees and pollinators.

With more than 900 participants nationwide, the ALUS program is currently* funding projects that cover more than 27,000 acres of land across Canada. A farmer-deliver, community-developed initiative, ALUS puts producers and their communities first.

The ALUS program works by getting projects in the ground. ALUS Canada channels funding provided by individuals, governments, foundations and corporations to where it can have the greatest real-world impact for the environment: by investing it in farmers and ranchers who are the stewards of Canada's working landscape.

Here are some of the important ecosystem services provided by ALUS projects:

- **Cleaner Water**
 - ALUS creates, restores, enhances and maintains Canadian wetlands and expands riparian buffer zones to provide protection for watercourses, helping to improve water quality both locally and for communities downstream.
- **Wildlife Habitat**
 - ALUS establishes and maintains wildlife habitat, including wetlands, riparian areas and native tallgrass prairie, enhancing critical habitat for Species at Risk.
- **Pollinators**
 - ALUS establishes and maintains buffer strips, hedgerows and meadows to provide food for native bees and pollinators, which in turn pollinate agricultural crops and wild plants.

How Does It Work?

ALUS Canada partners with local organizations to deliver the program on the ground in Canadian communities. Local ALUS communities are run by PACs (Partnership Advisory Committees), made up of local farmers, ranchers and environmental experts. The PAC identifies their own environmental priorities and selects ALUS projects to meet these goals.

ALUS helps farmers and ranchers plan, organize and establish new projects, with funding and logistical support from ALUS Canada. Participating farmers and ranchers receive annual payments to recognize their effort in managing and maintaining their ALUS projects in good working order, during what is usually a five-year agreement. Participants have an opportunity to renew after the five years have elapsed.

For more information, please contact your local ALUS Program Coordinator, or if there is no program in your area, contact the ALUS Canada Hub Manager for your region. All ALUS communities are listed here:

<https://alus.ca/home/communities/>

**Updated April 1, 2020*



2.2 Canada Grassland Projects Protocol

What is the Canada Grassland Protocol?

The Canada Grassland Projects Protocol outlines the requirements for generating carbon offsets from the conservation of Canadian grasslands. It provides guidance on how to quantify, monitor, report, and verify GHG emission reductions associated with the avoided conversion of grassland to cropland. The protocol was developed by the Canadian Forage and Grasslands Association (CFGAs), the Climate Action Reserve, and Viresco Solutions.

This is an exciting potential opportunity for ranchers, farmers, and landowners to generate carbon offsets to sell in the voluntary carbon market to companies wishing to offset their greenhouse gas emissions.

These carbon offsets could provide an additional revenue stream, keeping livestock producers competitive and helping to keep pastureland, hay land, and rangeland intact.

This protocol is currently entering its pilot phase. Please watch Birds Canada's, Viresco Solutions', and CFGA's websites for progress and updates.

What are carbon markets and carbon offsets?

- A carbon offset (or carbon credit) is a tradeable unit representing one tonne of Carbon Dioxide reduced or sequestered.
- Carbon offsets can be sold to emitters to offset their greenhouse gas emissions in a Registry's (Climate Action Reserve) or Regulator's (Alberta Government) carbon market.
 - Offsets from this protocol would enter the Climate Action Reserve voluntary carbon market.

Why did we include it in this guide if it is still in its pilot phase?

We included this information to help prairie producers get familiar with carbon markets, so that when this and other carbon credit opportunities become available, you are able to take advantage of them right away to help your operation and birds thrive.

It is worth noting that this protocol requires a conservation easement be placed on the title of the land. Obtaining an easement can take up to two years. See the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, or Saskatchewan Stock Growers' Foundation sections for more information regarding Conservation Easements.

Is my land eligible for this protocol?

- Land must have been in grassland (tame or native) for at least ten years
- Land must be at risk of conversion to cropland, so it must be mostly Canada Land Inventory class 1-4 land with no major restrictions to annual cropping (topography, moisture).
- Land must be worth more as cropland than pasture, hay, or rangeland, as assessed by a real estate land appraisal.
- Land can be in multiple discrete parcels, so it does not have to be one large area.

What are the requirements for land management?

- A conservation easement or conservation agreement must be registered on land title, ensuring permanence of the grassland and carbon sequestered.
 - Term easements are eligible but the payment to the landowner would be discounted.
- No breaking of ground.
- Moderate haying and grazing is allowed.

If you have further questions, please contact:

Birds Canada
Ian Cook
Grassland Conservation Manager
Email: icook@birdscanada.org
Phone: (204) 720-9161
<https://www.birdscanada.org/>

Or visit the following websites:

Canadian Forage and Grasslands Association
<https://www.canadianfga.ca/>
Viresco Solutions
<https://www.virescosolutions.com/>



Marbled Godwits use prairie wetlands to feed and raise their young. They wade through shallow water, using their long sword-like bills to probe for aquatic insects and snip off plant tubers.



Photo: Nick Saunders



2.3 Ducks Unlimited Canada

Since 1938, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has completed more than 11,890 projects and conserved, restored, and positively influenced more than 163.5 million acres of habitat but conserving wetlands and other natural habitats across North America is a challenge.

DUC provides expertise and resources to help landowners make a lasting difference. Through the forage and rangeland programs, DUC helps producers use grasslands for livestock. Through tenders, DUC invites producers to use portions of our land, investing their rental fees in local conservation programs. Through the Revolving Land Conservation Program, we convert annual crops to perennial cover then sell it with a conservation easement to ensure that cover is maintained.

For more information on DUC programs and for contact information in your province please visit the Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or Alberta sections of this guide.

2.4 The Nature Conservancy of Canada

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is Canada's leading national land conservation organization. It is a private, non-profit organization, that partners with individuals, corporations, foundations, Indigenous communities and other non-profit organizations and governments at all levels to protect our most important natural treasures — the natural areas that sustain Canada's plants and wildlife. NCC secures properties (through donation, purchase, conservation agreement, and the relinquishment of other legal interests in land) and manages them for the long term. Since 1962, NCC and its partners have helped to protect 14 million hectares (35 million acres), coast to coast to coast. Conservation Easement

A conservation easement (referred to as a conservation agreement in Manitoba) is a legal agreement by which a landowner voluntarily limits or restricts the type and amount of development that may take place under the agreement in order to conserve specific natural features in perpetuity.

It enables you to formalize your commitment to the long-term conservation of your land while retaining ownership of it. These agreements may apply to your entire property or just a portion.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada has three options for implementing a conservation easement:

Donate:

- NCC accepts donations of conservation easements. The donation amount is equal to the difference between the value of the land before the registration of the conservation easement and after the registration of the conservation easement.

Purchase:

- NCC will consider purchasing conservation easements in areas of critical ecological importance.

Split-Receipt:

- This allows landowners to split the compensation for a conservation easement between a cash payment and a tax receipt. The Canada Revenue Agency allows for 80% of the value of the conservation easement to be paid in cash and the remaining 20% to be claimed as a charitable donation.
- For example, if the value of the conservation easement is \$100,000, the landowner can receive up to \$80,000 in cash and \$20,000 in the form of a tax receipt.

It is recommended that you seek independent legal and tax advice before entering into a conservation easement.

Land Purchase or Donation

There are several options for donating or selling your ecologically critical lands to NCC:

- Donating land for conservation;
- Donating land through your estate;
- Selling land for conservation;
- Retaining a life interest after donating or selling land.



2.4 The Nature Conservancy of Canada cont...

Prior to receiving the gift or NCC purchasing your land, your land will require assessment to determine whether it fits within NCC's programs and science-based conservation priorities.

Ecological Gifts Program

Donations of land and conservation agreements to the Nature Conservancy of Canada may also qualify as an Ecogift by Environment Canada. This federal program provides extra tax benefits to the landowners who wish to donate ecologically-significant land.

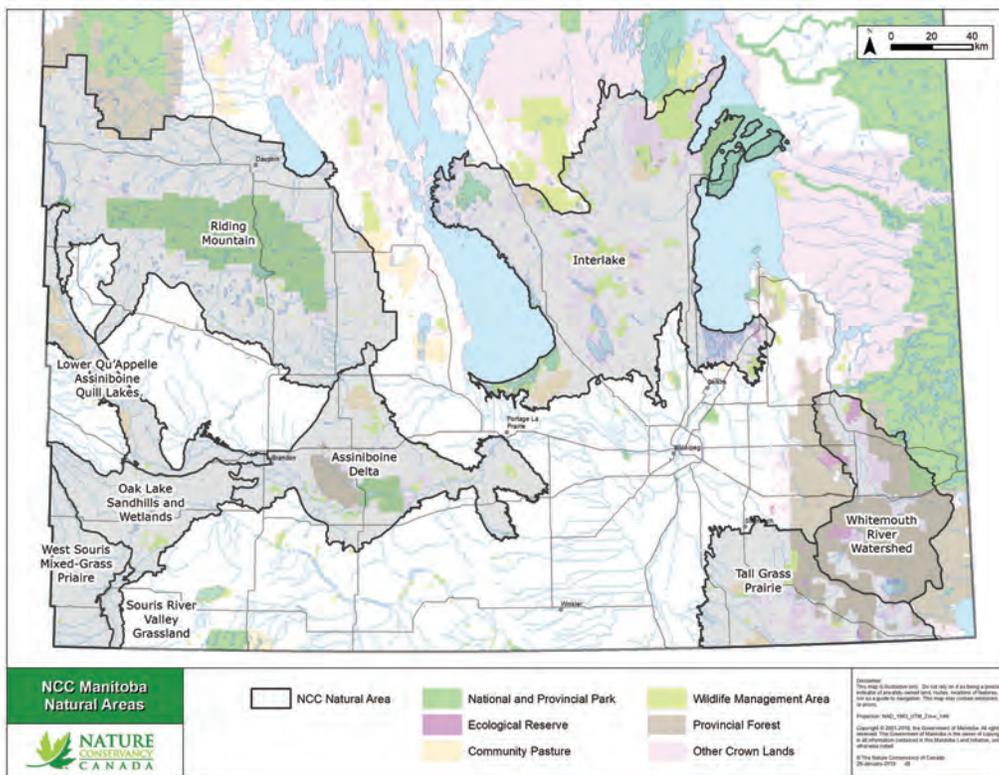
Income Tax Benefits to Conservation Easements and Tax Benefits of an Ecogift

- There are income tax benefits to registering a conservation easement on your land or donating land. Usually the donation can be credited against 75% of your annual income.
- If your land is considered ecologically sensitive by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Ecological Gifts Program, then it may qualify as an Ecogift.
- An Ecogift charitable donation can be claimed on 100% of your annual income. Lands considered ecologically sensitive are also exempt from capital gains tax.
- All other lands donated are considered a disposition and may be taxed depending on the change in the value of the land over the years of ownership.

Please seek independent tax advice for specifics on tax benefits and implications of donating land and Ecogifts. Below are maps of NCC's Natural Areas in which they prioritize their land securement activities.

If your property is located in or near one of the Natural Areas located on the below maps and you would like more information on Conservation Easements, Land Donations and Purchases, or any of NCC's work please contact NCC in your province.

Manitoba



611 Corydon Avenue, Suite 200, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3L 0P3 - (877) 231-3552
 manitoba@natureconservancy.ca
<https://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/manitoba/>



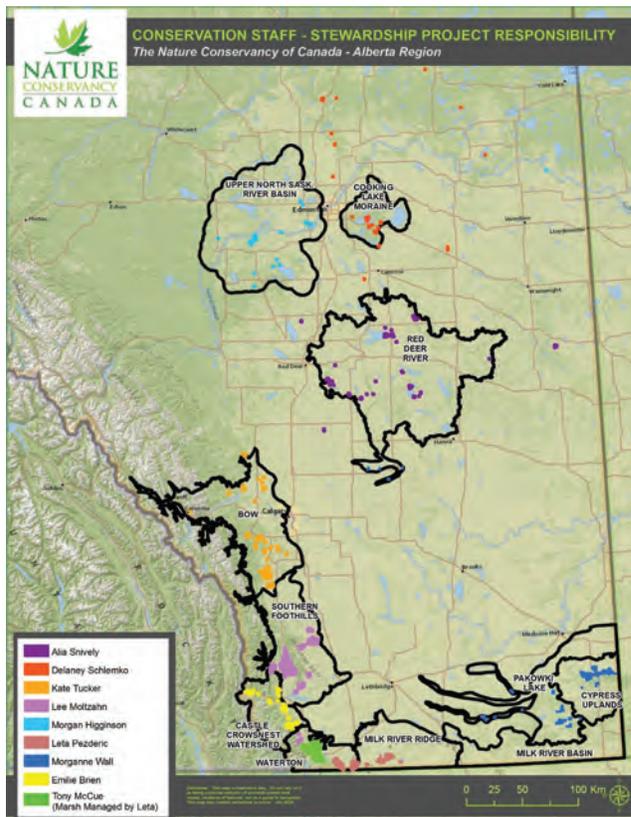
2.4 The Nature Conservancy of Canada cont...

Saskatchewan



2230A-6th Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 0S1 - (306) 347-0447
 Toll Free: (877) 231-3552 ext. 9001
saskatchewan@natureconservancy.ca
<https://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/saskatchewan/>

Alberta



Calgary office
 Suite #890, 105 - 12th Ave. SE
 Calgary, Alberta
 T2G 1A1

Edmonton office
 106 Compass Place, 10050 - 112 St. NW
 Edmonton, Alberta
 T5K 2J1
 (877) 262-1253
alberta@natureconservancy.ca
<https://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/alberta/>



A Loggerhead Shrike, nicknamed ‘The Butcher Bird’, is perched on a shrub. Although it is a songbird, it acts like a raptor, feeding mainly on small rodents and insects like grasshoppers.

Photo: Arthur Beague



3. Provincial Programs

3.1 Manitoba

This large, intact native prairie pasture in western Manitoba is home to these cows as well as Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Sprague's Pipits, Western Meadowlarks, and many other grassland birds.

Photo: Tim Poole

3.1.1 Ag Action Manitoba

The Ag Action Manitoba program offers activities for farmers that support the growth and sustainability of primary agriculture in Manitoba through Canadian Agricultural Partnerships (CAP) funding. Under the category of “Assurance: Beneficial Management Practices”: farmers can apply for funds for the adoption of beneficial management practices (BMPs) identified in Environmental Farm Plans to help farmers improve sustainability and reduce environmental risks on their farms. The Assurance: Environment grant helps farmers implement and adopt BMPs as identified in Environmental Farm Plans. The purpose is to enhance Manitoba’s and Canada’s reputation as a supplier of safe, high-quality foods that are produced in an environmentally responsible manner.

Please check the Ag Action Manitoba website for application deadline information.

BMP: Increasing Frequency of Perennials within Annual Crop Rotations

Increasing the use of perennials will add diversity to annual crop rotations with the goal of protecting and building soil organic matter, reducing erosion, and improving soil structure and water infiltration. Flowering perennials also provide forage for pollinators and increase biodiversity.

Cost share ratio and funding cap

- There is a cost share ratio of 25% government, 75% applicant. This BMP has a funding cap of \$10,000.

Eligible costs

- seed, equipment use, and labour costs for seed-bed preparation and seeding
- equipment modification for seeding perennial legumes with an annual crop
- inoculants and fertilizer if required to establish the perennial crop
- personal labour (\$25 per hour) and personal equipment use (at set program rates outlined in the Farm Machinery Custom and Rental Rate Guide)

Ineligible costs

- annual crop seed (e.g., nurse crop)

Notes

- The objective of this BMP is to target carbon loss, greenhouse gas reduction, soil organic matter loss, erosion, and nutrient loss. Priority will be given to projects that meet these objectives.
- Seed mixtures must not contain potentially invasive species.

BMP: Perennial Cover for Sensitive Lands

Perennial cover on sensitive lands (i.e., land that was converted in the past but is in fact unsuitable for annual cropping) will minimize erosion and salinization, and help to sequester carbon in soil.

Cost share ratio and funding cap

There is a cost share ratio of 50:50 and a funding cap of \$10,000 for this BMP.

Eligible costs

- seed, equipment use, and labour costs for seed-bed preparation and seeding, limited to a maximum of 40 acres per project (typically per quarter section)
- inoculants and fertilizer if required to establish the perennial crop
- personal labour (\$25 per hour) and personal equipment use (at set program rates outlined in the Farm Machinery Custom and Rental Rate Guide)

Ineligible costs

- annual crop seed (ex: nurse crop)



3.1.1 Ag Action Manitoba cont...

Notes

- The objective of this BMP is to protect soil vulnerable to erosion and salinization. By establishing a perennial crop where the growth of annuals is otherwise poor, there should also be an increase in carbon sequestration and soil organic matter. An added benefit of flowering perennial cover is increased biodiversity and pollinator habitat.
- The intention is to maintain permanent perennial cover on sensitive land; therefore, the land should not be converted from perennial forages to annual crops as the environmental benefits would not be upheld.
- Seed mixtures must not contain potentially invasive species.

BMP: Managing Livestock Access to Riparian Areas

Effective management of both surface and ground water sources used for livestock production is essential for ensuring the health and longevity of both the livestock and their pastures.

Cost share ratio and funding cap

- There is a cost share ratio of 50:50 and a funding cap of \$10,000 for this BMP.

Eligible costs

- Water source development – Wells
 - drilling new or deepening existing wells, test hole drilling, screening, casing, well caps, etc.
 - water pumps and required plumbing components
 - professional and contractor fees
- Water source development – Dugouts
 - constructing new or rehabilitating existing dugouts, test hole drilling, etc.
 - professional and contractor fees
- Alternative watering system equipment
 - solar, wind, or grid powered systems
 - associated components and installation costs
- Permanent fencing to restrict livestock access to surface water and dugouts
 - construction materials
 - associated components and installation costs
- Permanent pipeline
 - development pipe, plumbing materials, trenching, earthworks, etc.
 - professional and contractor fees
- Watering system components*
 - watering bowls, troughs, or storage tanks
- Personal labour (\$25 per hour) and personal equipment use (at set program rates outlined in the Farm Machinery Custom and Rental Rate Guide)

** Eligible as a part of a water source development project; items are not eligible as a stand-alone.*

Notes

- Watershed Districts may offer complimentary programs such as abandoned well sealing and alternative watering systems. Please contact your local watershed district for more information. Find contact information in the Watershed District section of this guide.
- Eligible costs must be for permanent solutions only.



3.1.1 Ag Action Manitoba cont...

How to Apply for Funding

Applications are available on the Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development website. Go to www.manitoba.ca/agriculture and click on Ag Action Manitoba.

Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development will publish deadline dates through newsletter, website, and social media channels.

Applications must be submitted to the program administrator no later than the deadline.

Applications and required documentation can be submitted to your local Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development office or emailed to Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development. One application must be submitted for each activity.

Applicants must acknowledge and agree to any terms and conditions contained in the application.

For full details on programs and how to apply please visit:

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/environment/environmental-farm-plan/assurance-bmp.html>
or contact:

Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development

CAP-Ag Action Manitoba

Toll Free telephone: (844) 769-6224

Email: agaction@gov.mb.ca

**A male Chestnut-collared
Longspur perches on a fence.
These birds are area sensitive,
meaning they need big patches of
grassland to mate and nest.**



Photo: Dan Arndt



Bobolinks, like this male, tend to like moist grassland pastures and areas with wetlands. Watch for these unique birds in pastures in southwest and central Manitoba especially!



Photo: Brenda Doherty

3.1.2 Ducks Unlimited Canada – Manitoba

Forage Programs

These programs encourage landowners and producers to seed perennial forages on their annually cropped lands, providing financial assistance to establish stands of mixed grass and legume forages.

Producers and landowners in the areas outlined in the below map are eligible to receive one time payments for establishing forage.

Program Details:

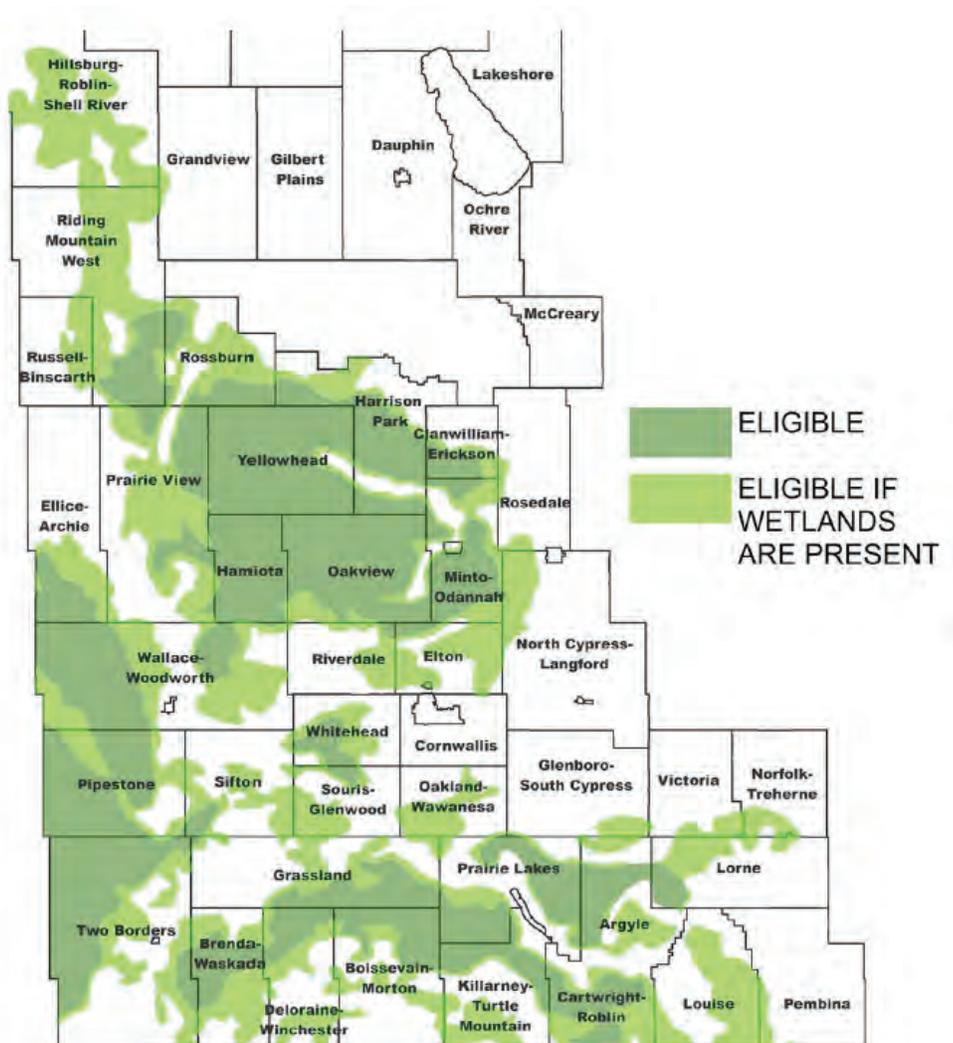
- There are no restrictions to grazing or haying, except for in the year of establishment when grazing is not recommended.
- Seed mix must contain both grasses and legumes
 - 100% Alfalfa is not eligible.
- It is recommended that all participants take advantage of the Forage Establishment Insurance available through Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation.
 - Stands are evaluated in the fall for establishment success so that producers have the option to terminate poor stands and claim insurance.
- A pro-rated buyout is available to program participants at any point in the agreement.

There are two Forage Program agreement length options available:

This map shows the areas of Manitoba eligible for Ducks Unlimited Canada Forage Programs.

10 Year Agreement:
Receive up to \$60/ac
30-acre minimum

15 Year Agreement:
Receive up to \$110/ac
75-acre minimum



3.1.2 Ducks Unlimited Canada - Manitoba cont...

Marginal Areas Program

This program is designed to seed down acres that are unprofitable in annual cropping. “Farm less, make more!” It provides a financial incentive to seed those hard-to-access/poorly producing areas to perennial forages. Forages improve profitability, increase pollinator habitat and biodiversity, reduce herbicide-resistant weeds, act as buffer zones to meet product label guidelines, and manage clubroot.

How does it work?

- Participants are paid a one-time payment of \$125/ac and agree to a 10-year agreement to keep these small areas in perennial forage cover.
- Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) provides establishment advice and provides a seed mix suitable for these challenging conditions and that also provide benefits to wildlife and beneficial insects.
 - Participants can either purchase their own seed and receive the full \$125/ac payment or DUC will provide the seed and the price of seed is deducted from the \$125/ac payment.
- There is a pro-rated buyout option available at any time.

Conservation Agreements

A conservation agreement is a voluntary legal agreement. Under the terms of a conservation agreement, the landowner commits to conserving the natural integrity of the land by limiting the amount and type of development such as breaking, cultivating, or alternative land use. The area of land covered by a DUC conservation agreement is protected in perpetuity.

A conservation agreement allows for compatible agricultural land use such as haying and grazing on a property. Because a conservation agreement protects the land's natural features and supports the growth of native plants, perennial cover is maintained and serves as a sustainable source of forage. Both wetlands and uplands can be included in this program. In fact, Conservation Agreements provide the opportunity to protect intact native grasslands in perpetuity. As many at-risk grassland birds rely heavily on this threatened habitat, Conservation Agreements are a great option to ensure this essential habitat remains available for these birds into the future.

These agreements often provide compensation worth 30% to 40% of the lands value, and more if restoring drained wetlands. So this may be a good way to free up cash flow for your farm while also helping nature.

Wetland Restoration

Under the wetland restoration agreements DUC restores partially- or fully-drained wetlands, while providing the labour and covering the expense.

- DUC covers expenses such as surveying costs, legal fees, labour, and equipment.
- Landowners receive an incentive payment of up to \$1700/ac of wetland restored.
- Participants agree not to drain the wetland on their property for 10 years (when the agreement expires, regulations or legislation that restricts wetland drainage still apply).
- Wetlands and restored wetlands can be hayed and grazed.
- Restored “occasionally cultivated wetlands” may be worked during dry periods.

Wetland restoration can also be part of a conservation agreement or forage program.



3.1.2 Ducks Unlimited Canada - Manitoba cont...

Revolving Land Conservation Program

A Revolving Land Conservation Program provides an opportunity for a great impact on the landscape. Through this program, DUC purchases a piece of land, restores its wetlands and grasslands, and then makes it available to potential land buyers on the real estate market after placing a CE on the title. Proceeds from these land sales go back into DUC programs to fund further conservation work.

For farmers and ranchers, it's a chance to acquire affordable land close to home. While the wetland area is being restored — before it's resold — the cropland is rented to nearby farmers. That keeps the land in agricultural production and weed-free.

The Revolving Land Conservation Program is an alternative to DUC buying and keeping lands. Under this program, habitats can be protected and lands are returned to agriculture.

Shallow Wetland Incentives Program

Ducks Unlimited Canada has partnered with the Central Assiniboine, Assiniboine West, Pembina Valley and Souris River Watershed Districts to provide financial incentives for producers and landowners to keep shallow wetlands intact for ten years.

These shallow wetlands in the spring provide important habitat for ducks and shorebirds. As they dry up in the summer, they provide habitat for other birds and beneficial insects.

Please contact your Watershed District for more information about the Shallow Wetland Incentives Program. Find the contact info for your Watershed District in the Watershed District section of this guide.

* All incentive values subject to change each fiscal year.

To find out more about any of the above DUC Manitoba programs please contact:

Ducks Unlimited Manitoba
(204) 729-3500
du_brandon@ducks.ca



Upland Sandpipers are so reliant on native prairie that scientists use them as indicator species. The absence of Upland Sandpipers indicates that there is likely a problem with the habitat. They make a long journey back and forth from the grasslands of South America, where they spend eight months of the year.



Photo: Nick Saunders

3.1.3 Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) works to conserve fish and wildlife habitat in Manitoba. The Corporation achieves this through voluntary agreements with landowners to conserve, restore, and enhance habitat on their property.

Working primarily in agricultural Manitoba, MHHC uses habitat conservation as a tool to improve Manitoba's wildlife populations and general ecosystem health, including water quality and biodiversity.

Conservation Agreements

A Conservation Agreement is a legal contract, registered on the land's title, designed to provide long-term protection of wildlife habitat. The agreement is between the landowner and MHHC within which the landowner agrees to retain the natural habitat. For this, the landowner receives a tax receipt or cash payment.

MHHC delivers Conservation Agreements to conserve wetland, grassland, and riparian habitats. CAs are tailored to allow the landowner(s) to continue farming their productive lands, while conserving natural habitat.

- A Conservation Agreement is a way to ensure long-term conservation of habitat on private land
- Conservation Agreements are designed to protect habitat and not interfere with the use of productive farmland
- Landowners are compensated for their conservation commitments
- The habitat will continue to be conserved after the land is sold

Land Donations

MHHC also gratefully receives donations for the purpose of maintaining wildlife habitat and for the enjoyment of natural landscapes by Manitobans.

Many of these donations of ecologically sensitive lands can be part of the Ecological Gifts Program (Ecogift). For most land donations the taxable portion is 50% of the capital gain; in the case of an ecological gift it is reduced to 0.

For more information on Conservation Agreements, land donations or MHHC and their work please contact them at:

Phone: (204) 784-4350

Email: mhhc@mhhc.mb.ca

Or visit: <https://mhhc.mb.ca/>



3.1.4 Manitoba Beef Producers: Species at Risk on Agricultural Lands (SARPAL)

The Manitoba Beef Producers received funding for the SARPAL program. Prairie native grassland is typically used by cattle producers to pasture cattle. Once native prairie grassland is lost, it is nearly impossible to replicate.

The intent of the program, over a three-year period, is to deliver information and incentives to cattle producers to enhance pastureland with the goal of improving grass quality and maintaining a healthy habitat for Species at Risk.

The project area includes the:

- Poverty Plains
- Lyleton Grasslands
- Blind Souris River Valley
- Bellevue and Maple Lake Region

How Does It Work?

Cost-shared incentives and management services are available under a 10-year agreement. Funds available to participating producers:

- A maximum of \$13,000 per quarter section,
- A maximum of \$50,000 per land owner.

Some examples of the incentives and/or services for which funds could be used are:

- Fencing that supports improved grazing
- Watering systems designed to improve cattle distribution
- Management of woody, invasive plants encroaching on grasslands (shrubbing)
- Established additional pastures that help to relieve grazing pressure on native rangelands
- Native pasture establishment



Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is delivering the program on behalf of MBP. Funding is provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada.

The projects are also supported by grassland bird surveying and monitoring carried out by Important Bird Areas (Manitoba) Program.

For more information, contact:

Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation at (204) 784-4350 or visit the Manitoba Beef Producers website.



A Western Meadowlark singing its lungs out in Saskatchewan.



Photo: Dawn Hall



3.1.5 Manitoba Watershed Districts

Watersheds often have programs to supply funding for alternative watering systems, grazing management infrastructure, and other projects that improve grassland and riparian health.

Below are the contact details for Manitoba Watershed Districts operating in the prairie and aspen parkland regions of Manitoba:

Assiniboine West Watershed District

111 Sarah Ave, Miniota, MB R0M 1M0
Miniota Office: (204) 567-3554
Oak River Office: (204) 566-2270
Inglis Office: (204) 564-2388
<https://myawwd.ca/>

Central Assiniboine Watershed District

Baldur Office: (877) 535-2139
<https://centralassiniboinewd.ca/>

Intermountain Watershed District

Ethelbert Office: (204) 742-3764
Ste Rose Office: (204) 447-2139
<https://www.manitoba.ca/water/watershed/wd/imwd.html>

Pembina Valley Watershed District

Manitou: (204) 242-3267
<http://www.pvcd.ca/>

Redboine Watershed District

Holland: (204) 526-2578
<https://www.redboine.com/>

Seine Rat Roseau Watershed District

Steinbach: (204) 326-1030
Vita: (204) 425-7877
<http://srrcd.ca/>

Souris River Watershed District

Reston: (204) 877-3020
Deloraine: (204) 747-2530
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/water/watershed/wd/srwd.html>

Swan Lake Watershed District

Swan River: (204) 734-9550
<http://www.swanlakewatershed.ca/>

Westlake Watershed District

Alonsa: (204) 767-2101
<https://westlakewd.com/>

Whitemud Watershed District

Neepawa: (204) 476-5019
<https://whitemudwatershed.ca/>



A LeConte's Sparrow singing near a wetland in Manitoba. These little sparrows rely on the upland areas surrounding prairie potholes. Photo: Walfried Jansen



Photo: Dawn Hall



3.2 Saskatchewan

This beautiful expanse of native prairie pasture in southern Saskatchewan has varied structure and ample vegetation from responsible grazing practices, making this pasture excellent habitat for many grassland birds.

Photo: Diego Steinaker and Melanie Toppi, SODCAP Inc.

3.2.1 Farm Stewardship Program –BMPs

The Farm Stewardship Program (FSP) provides Saskatchewan producers funding through Canadian Agricultural Partnerships (CAP) funding to implement BMPs in three priority areas – water quality, climate change, and biodiversity.

The following Best Management Practices (BMPs) all require pre-approval to obtain funding.

Invasive Plant Biocontrol and Targeted Grazing BMP

This BMP is available for eligible producers and pasture grazing associations to contain and manage large-scale invasive plant infestations through the support of integrated non-herbicide practices. Infestations where herbicide application is not environmentally feasible or practical (infestations are large and costly to treat) are targeted through this BMP.

Native Rangeland Grazing Management BMP

With only 17 per cent of prairie grasslands remaining in Saskatchewan, this BMP seeks to improve or protect the health and productivity of the existing native rangelands by supporting the creation and implementation of native rangeland grazing plans.

Permanent Native Forage BMP

Native plants are well-adapted to variable climatic conditions, require minimal inputs, and are resilient to grazing. The purpose of this BMP is to establish native perennial forage cover to provide wildlife habitat and sequester carbon.

Permanent Tame Forage BMP

Perennial grasses and legumes sequester carbon, hold topsoil in place and use available moisture more efficiently than annual crops. Perennial forages are also recommended as a management tool for fields that are infected with clubroot. The purpose of this BMP is to protect soils from erosion and improve resilience to climate change through the conversion of environmentally sensitive cultivated lands to perennial forage cover. This BMP can also be used in clubroot infected fields for the prevention of further spread associated with annual cropping and reduce pathogen load over a period of time.

Riparian Grazing Management BMP

Riparian areas are the green zones adjacent to lakes and watercourses. They stabilize stream banks and shore lines, filter impurities, trap sediment, and provide habitat for wildlife. The Riparian Grazing Management BMP's intent is to protect water quality through exclusion or properly managed timing, intensity, and duration of livestock grazing along riparian areas.

For more information including eligibility, program and funding details, visit

www.saskatchewan.ca/cap or call the Agriculture Knowledge Centre toll-free at 1-866-457-2377 to be connected with local representatives to assist you.



Horned Larks like this one will congregate in areas that have been recently grazed, as they prefer the short grass. In the extreme southern portions of Saskatchewan and Alberta they sometimes stay all year round!



Photo: Nick Saunders

This beautiful Ferruginous Hawk and its mate will eat up to 500 grounds squirrels in a season.



Photo: Nick Saunders



3.2.2 Ducks Unlimited Canada - Saskatchewan

Forage Incentive Programs

These programs encourage landowners and producers to seed perennial forages on their land, providing financial assistance to establish stands of any forages.

The Forage Incentive program provides cash-back incentives on all forage seed purchases paid at full retail price from Nutrien Ag Solutions when producers convert cultivated land to hay or pastureland. By increasing their forage base, grassland bird and waterfowl productivity is also increased.

How Does It Work?

- Producers receive a rebate of \$100 per 50-lb bag of forage seed purchased from Nutrien Ag Solutions*
- There is also a one-time payment of \$35/ac
- Other seed sources can be utilized but only Proven® Seed is eligible for the rebate. The \$35/ac payment is still paid.
- There are no restrictions to grazing or haying, except for in the year of establishment when grazing is not permitted.
- Seed mix must contain both grasses and legumes*
- It is recommended that participants explore forage establishment insurance offered through the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation on lands with light textured soils or impacted by salinity.
- A pro-rated buyout is available to program participants at any point in the agreement.

Forage in Rotation Program

This program provides compensation for producers to include forage in their annual cropping rotations.

How Does It Work?

- Producers are paid \$35/ac for areas that are put into forage*.
- 10-year agreement.
 - Forage must be on the farm for 10 years but can be part of a shorter rotation.

Marginal Areas Program

This program provides a financial incentive to seed those hard-to-access/poorly producing areas to perennial forages. Forages improve profitability, increase pollinator habitat and biodiversity, reduce herbicide-resistant weeds, act as buffer zones to meet product label guidelines and manage clubroot.

How does it work?

- Participants are paid a one-time payment of \$125/ac and agree to a 10-year agreement to keep these areas in perennial forage cover*. These areas may be hayed or pastured annually.
- Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) provides establishment advice and provides a seed mix suitable for these challenging conditions and may provide an additional seed blend that also provides benefits to wildlife and beneficial insects.
- There is a pro-rated buyout option available at any time.

*For all Forage Programs: some forage plant species such as crested wheatgrass, timothy, and clovers may be ineligible due to their potential for invasiveness. Please consult with DUC staff before purchasing forage seed mix.



3.2.2 Ducks Unlimited Canada - Saskatchewan cont...

Wetland Restoration Lease Program

DUC compensates landowners based on current fair market value for previously drained wetland areas that are restored under a 10-year lease.

How Does It Work?

- DUC restores the wetland and covers expenses such as surveying costs, legal fees, labour and equipment.
- Restored wetland areas stay under the management of the landowner.
- Restored wetlands may be hayed or grazed but they cannot be drained, altered, or tilled during the term of the agreement.
- DUC's lease pays landowners significant compensation for this restriction
- Participants agree not to drain the wetland on their property for 10 years (when the agreement expires, regulations or legislation that restricts wetland drainage still apply).
- Restored "occasionally cultivated wetlands" may be worked during dry periods.

Landowners and cattle producers who have drained wetlands on grazing lands are often a very good fit for this program. Farmers should consider this program as a partial source of financing for new land. Wetland restoration can also be part of a conservation agreement or forage program.

Conservation Easements

A conservation easement allows for compatible agricultural land use such as haying and grazing on a property. Because a conservation easement protects the land's natural features and supports the growth of native plants, perennial cover is maintained and serves as a sustainable source of forage.

How Does It Work?

- A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement.
- Under the terms of a conservation, the landowner identifies and commits to conserving the natural integrity of the land by limiting the amount and type of development such as breaking, cultivating or alternative land use. The lands can be used annually for hay or pasture.
- The area of land covered by a DUC conservation easement is protected in perpetuity.
- These easements often pay over 25-35% of your land's value.

A conservation easement may be an opportunity to generate cash flow while also ensuring there will be a space for nature for generations to come.

Long Term Lease

Long Term Leases by DUC allow landowners to retain ownership of their land while being compensated for the land while DUC restores the grassland and wetland habitat on the land at DUC's expense.

How Does It Work?

- The long-term lease program (minimum 10 years) provides annual compensation to landowners based on the crown land cultivation lease rates.
- DUC pays for all restoration (grassland and wetlands) and manages the land through periodic haying or grazing for the period of the lease.

Rangeland Fencing Program

Have some fencing to do? DUC can help.

How Does It Work?

DUC provides financial assistance to landowners for costs associated with constructing a new perimeter barbed wire fence (up to a maximum of \$5000) in exchange for protecting the wetlands and upland habitat on the parcel as part of a 10-year agreement.



3.2.2 Ducks Unlimited Canada - Saskatchewan cont...

Revolving Land Conservation Program

A Revolving Land Conservation Program provides an opportunity for a greater impact on the landscape.

How Does It Work?

- Through this program, DUC purchases a piece of land, restores its wetlands and grasslands and then places a conservation easement on the title.
- The land is then made available to potential land buyers on the real estate market.
- Proceeds from these land sales go back into DUC programs to fund further conservation work.

For farmers and ranchers, it's a chance to acquire affordable land close to home which can be used annually for either hay or pasture.

The Revolving Land Conservation Program is an alternative to DUC buying and keeping lands. Under this program, habitats can be protected and lands are returned to agriculture.

Purchase of Land

If you are considering selling your land and want to ensure that your land provides a space for grassland birds, waterfowl, and other wildlife – while also providing other environmental benefits such as flood mitigation and improved water quality – consider selling your land to DUC.

How Does It Work?

DUC purchases land for the purpose of restoring and protecting habitat on the parcels. DUC pays fair market value for land and retains ownership of these lands in perpetuity. The lands will be periodically either hayed or grazed and are typically tendered to local farmers.

Hay and Grazing Tenders

Sound management of pastureland helps to keep forage stands healthy and vigorous. It also helps with weed control, while at the same time, maintains productive waterfowl and grassland bird habitat. As a unique opportunity for local producers, DUC makes land available for haying and/or grazing with annual tenders.

How Does It Work?

- Tenders are typically posted in February/March, and advertisements for available properties appear in local newspapers and on ducks.ca/resources/landowners.
- Fill out a tender application found here <https://www.ducks.ca/resources/landowners/hay-tender-saskatchewan/> and submit before the deadline.

For more information about any of the above programs please contact:

Ducks Unlimited Canada – Saskatchewan
(866) 252-3825
du_regina@ducks.ca



A Swainson's Hawk searching for its next meal. They feed their young rodents, rabbits, and reptiles, but while not feeding young, they eat mostly grasshoppers. They are mostly found in the grasslands of southwestern Manitoba, southwestern Saskatchewan, and southeastern Alberta.



Photo: Yousif Attia



3.2.3 Nature Saskatchewan

Habitat Enhancement Program:

Nature Saskatchewan partners with Saskatchewan landowners to deliver a Habitat Enhancement Program that was initiated in 2000. The program involves a 50:50 cost share to enhance habitat for the Endangered Burrowing Owl, the Threatened Sprague's Pipit, and/or the Endangered Piping Plover. Habitat Enhancement projects for the Burrowing Owl and Sprague's Pipit are accomplished through native seeding to enlarge pastures and reduce fragmentation, and strategic wildlife-friendly fencing to improve pasture health. Fencing and alternate water source developments for livestock are also supported in order to preserve newly planted and native prairie areas. Piping Plover projects are accomplished through wildlife-friendly fencing and alternate water developments to keep livestock away from shorelines used by plovers. Preference is given to projects near areas that currently have or recently had nesting owls, nesting pipits, or nesting plovers; shoreline designated as critical Piping Plover habitat; and projects located in the South of the Divide. All projects must be adjacent to or near existing grassland.

For approved projects, Nature Saskatchewan provides funding to landowners on a 50:50 cost share basis, and the landowner formally agrees to maintain the project enhancement activities. A 12-year binding agreement is signed by Nature Saskatchewan and the landowner, requiring the landowner to maintain the enhanced habitat and to participate in the annual census of the target species to evaluate its use of the enhanced work by enrolling in the respective voluntary stewardship program.

The typical level of assistance for native seed cost is half of \$100/acre, for labour; and the rental of proper seeding equipment for native blends is half of \$35/acre; and for glyphosate-based herbicide applications, the typical level of assistance is half of \$22/acre for up to two applications.

The typical level of assistance for the construction (including labour) of 1 mile of two-strand high tensile electric fence is half of \$2400; and for 1 mile of four-wire (double strand barb, bottom and top wire smooth) fence is half of \$3800. All fencing projects are required to be wildlife-friendly, i.e., the bottom and top wires are smooth, with the highest wire 40-42 inches or less off the ground, the lowest wire 18 inches or more off the ground, and the top two wires no less than 12 inches apart. As fences can be barriers to migration as well as inhibit access to food, water, and shelter, wildlife-friendly fencing ensures ungulates are able to jump over or crawl under the fence with ease. Lastly, the typical level of assistance for the development of a livestock watering site is half of \$3500.

For more information, to discuss eligibility, and how to apply, please contact

Nature Saskatchewan toll-free at 1-800-667-4668, directly at 306-780-9833, or by email at obo@naturesask.ca.



3.2.4 Saskatchewan Stock Growers Foundation

Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (SSGA) launched the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Foundation (SSGF) in January, 2020. The SSGF is affiliated with the SSGA, the oldest operating agricultural organization in Saskatchewan and a trusted voice in agriculture in the province.

The goals of the Foundation are to conserve agricultural lands, to advance education, to relieve poverty and to assist victims of disasters. The SSGF will fill a growing need in the ranching community for voluntary, private-sector options for agricultural land conservation.

The SSGF has a specific focus on conserving agricultural lands and it is the first and only provincial agricultural land conservation organization based in Saskatchewan.

Term Conservation Easements

The SSGF offers Term Conservation Easements. Conservation easements currently held in Saskatchewan are ‘in perpetuity’, but Term Conservation Easements through the SSGF provide the option to register the conservation easement for a specified term, not in perpetuity. This allows landowners to generate cash flow and protect habitat on their property, without having to commit to a permanent easement.

For further information about SSGF and Term Conservation Agreements, contact the office at (306) 757-8523.

Photo: Diego Steinaker and Melanie Toppi, SODCAP Inc.



3.2.5 South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc.

The South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc. (SODCAP Inc.) is a partnership between stakeholders and government that believes success lies in developing programs cooperatively with farmers, ranchers, and industry, that make habitat management for Species at Risk both an important priority and economically sustainable.

Native grasslands in southwest Saskatchewan are the last refuge for many Species at Risk. Native grasslands are also an important forage resource for the cow-calf sector. Together, these grasslands are valuable from an ecological and cultural perspective and are also economically important.

Biodiversity is important to the economic well-being of Saskatchewan. Native prairie supplies important habitat for many of our bird Species at Risk, and wildlife as a whole. A healthy ecosystem is a sustainable one, for everyone involved: **wildlife, birds, native plants, Species at Risk, livestock, and humans!**

Funding and Programs

SODCAP Inc., in partnership with a number of organizations including the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, has a variety of conservation agreements available to producers and landowners that can be tailored to your individual situation and goals.

Past programs have provided funding for habitat outcomes, habitat restoration, grass banking, and habitat management.

If you have grasslands and/or riparian areas that you manage in southwest Saskatchewan, you are likely to be eligible for funding through SODCAP Inc.

For more information on funds available to actively participate in preserving, enhancing, and restoring grassland habitats in southwest Saskatchewan please visit:

<https://www.sodcap.com/>

3.2.6 Simply Ag Solutions

Simply Ag is a non-profit that administers programs which provide education, agriculture awareness, and information to its clients in the Saskatchewan agriculture industry. Through partnerships with ag-interest groups, governments, and the private industry, Simply Ag works to promote and advance all sectors of Saskatchewan Agriculture.

The Saskatchewan Species at Risk Farm Program

The goal of this program is to:

- work with agricultural producers across the province to protect and enhance Species at Risk and their critical habitats.
- increase awareness of Saskatchewan Species at Risk and what we can do to ensure these species continue to survive and thrive in their critical habitats
- enable producers to voluntarily and confidentially develop a Species at Risk Farm Action Plan (SARFAP) and then participate in opportunities to access funding through the Species at Risk Stewardship Program to protect and enhance habitat for species at risk.

Simply Ag Solutions will be offering workshops for landowners to assist them in completing the Species at Risk Farm Action Plans (similar to the Environmental Farm Plans). Completion of the plans during the workshops are voluntary and all information remains confidential.

Simply Ag Solutions will work with landowners throughout the application process and to help implement the BMP stewardship projects.

Successful applicants will receive **100% of funds to cover project costs via a Stewardship Program.**

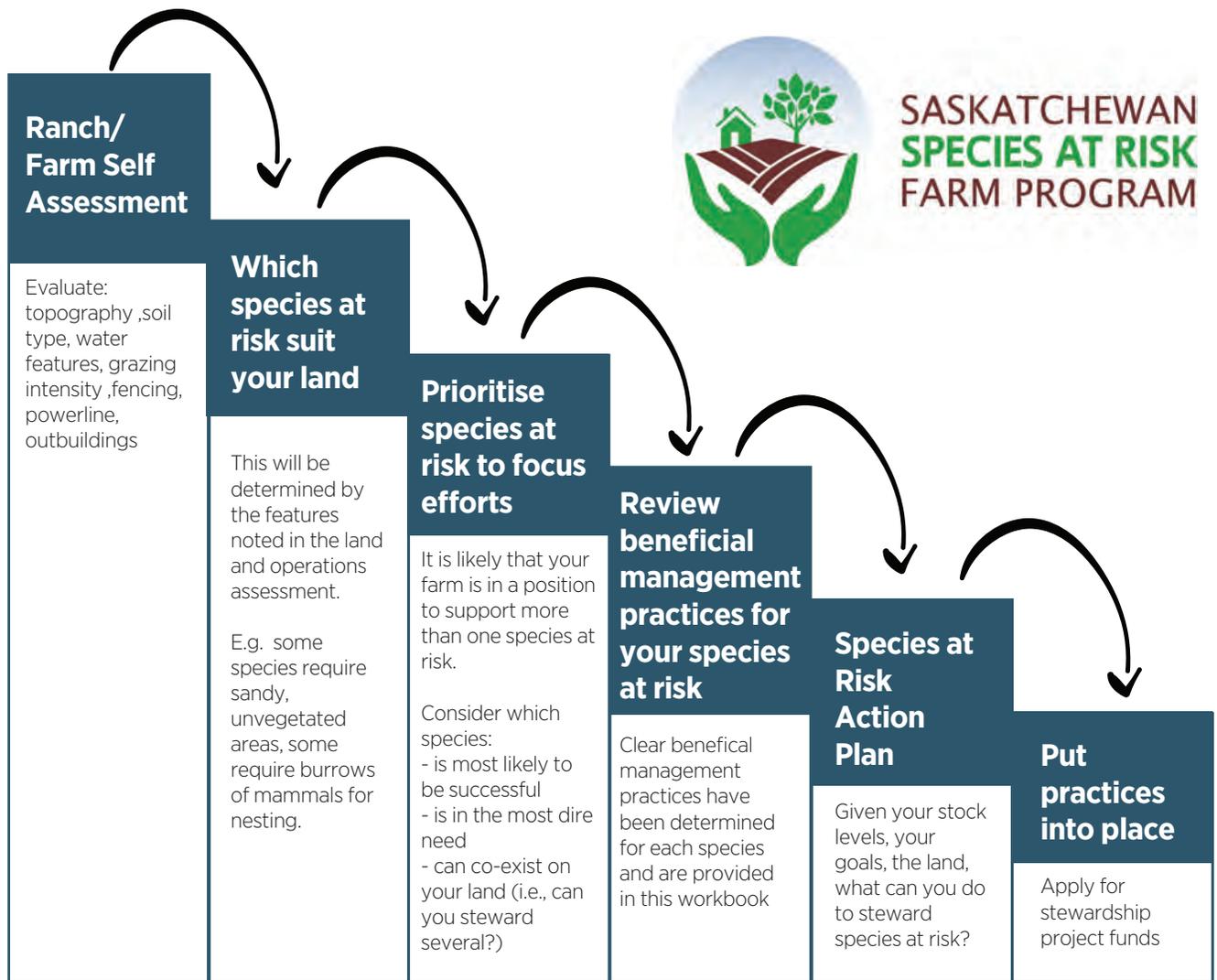


Piping Plovers use prairie lakes and wetlands to nest and raise their young and they will fiercely defend their nest against intruders. One Killdeer in Manitoba learned this the hard way when it entered a Piping Plover's territory. The Killdeer got bitten so hard, that it limped for the rest of the summer!



Photo: Nick Saunders





The Saskatchewan Species at Risk Farm Program Process

How Do I Become Involved?

Attend a free workshop where you will be provided with a Saskatchewan Species at Risk Farm Program workbook, aerial images of your farm/ranch, and an opportunity to complete a farm self-assessment and action plan. Your Action Plan will include Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) implementation. All information will remain confidential.

Once the Action Plan is completed you can apply for stewardship project funds to implement the BMPs. Successful applicants will receive 100% of funds to cover project costs via a Stewardship Program.

For more information on The Saskatchewan Species at Risk Farm Program, for upcoming workshops in your area, or to set-up a workshop in your area please contact:

Travis Quirk
Saskatchewan Species At Risk Farm Program Coordinator
(306) 955-5477 ext 204
travis@simplyag.ca
<http://simplyag.ca/species-at-risk/>



3.2.7 Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation

The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation is a non-profit, non-government, charitable organization with over 33,000 members enhancing fish and wildlife habitat since 1929.

Land Acquisitions

Landowners work together with the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation to ensure that their land will be preserved and managed for the benefit of Saskatchewan's wildlife.

For more information on selling land to the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation please contact them:

Phone: (306) 692-8812

Or visit: <https://swf.sk.ca/contact-us/>

3.2.8 Saskatchewan Watersheds

Watersheds often have programs to supply funding for alternative watering systems, grazing management infrastructure, and other projects that improve grassland and riparian health.

Below is the contact information for all eleven Saskatchewan Watershed Associations:

Assiniboine Water Stewardship Association:

(306) 783-1696

j.nielsen@assiniboinewatershed.com

<http://www.assiniboinewatershed.com/>

Carrot River Valley Watershed Association:

(306) 920-8166

crwatershedaegp@gmail.com

<https://crwatershed.ca/>

Lower Qu'Appelle Water Stewards

(306) 745-9774

<https://www.lqws.ca/>

Lower Souris Watershed

(306) 452-3292

(306) 452-7935

info@lowersouris.com

<https://lowersouris.com/>

Moose Jaw River Watershed Stewards

(306) 691-3399

admin@mjrriver.ca

<https://www.mjrriver.com/>

North Saskatchewan River Basin Council

(306)441-3119

Info@nsrbc.ca

<http://www.nsrbc.ca/home.html>

Old Wives Watershed Association:

(306) 650-7202

admin@oldwiveswatershed.com

<http://www.oldwiveswatershed.com/home>

South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards

(306) 343-9549

info@southsaskriverstewards.ca

<https://southsaskriverstewards.ca/>

Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards

(306) 770-4606

dallas.sccws@gmail.com

<http://www.sccws.com/>

Wascana and Upper Qu'Appelle Watersheds Association Taking Responsibility

(306) 946-6533

info@wuqwatr.ca

<http://wuqwatr.ca/>

Upper Souris Watershed Association

306-634-7074

d.pattyson@sasktel.net

<http://www.uppersouriswatershed.ca/index.php>





This Willet relies on wetlands as a source of aquatic insects to feed on. Willets can sense their prey through their sensitive beak so they can feed at night as well as during the day.

Photo: Pete Davidson



The image shows a vast landscape of rolling green hills under a cloudy sky. The hills are covered in lush green grass and some shrubs. In the foreground, there is a body of water, possibly a reservoir or a lake, with a rocky shoreline. The overall scene is a natural, open landscape.

3.3 Alberta

Landscapes like this provide habitat for a wide variety of bird species including grassland songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors.

Photo: Pete Davidson

3.3.1 Canadian Agricultural Partnership in Alberta

The Canadian Agricultural Partnership is a five-year, \$3 billion federal-provincial-territorial investment in the agriculture sector that began in April 2018, and is the successor of the 2013-18 Growing Forward 2 partnership.

Below are programs relating to enhancing grasslands.

Visit the program pages to learn more about what is eligible for funding and to access application forms.

Project: Riparian Area Fencing and Management

Funding Maximum: \$75,000

Cost Share: 30-50%

Purpose: Fencing helps manage livestock access to environmentally sensitive areas on the farm property resulting in protection of aquatic life, riparian vegetation, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

Eligible Costs:

- Permanent fencing for controlled access or exclusion as part of a riparian area fencing and management project
- Cross fencing only if it is part of a riparian management project
- Included in the above:
 - Permanent barbed or electric fencing systems
 - Construction materials and supplies – all materials must be new materials and not materials on hand
 - Labor and equipment will be reviewed at a 1:1 ratio to materials expenses. If approved, actual labour and equipment hours must be tracked and submitted
- Purchase and planting of native trees and shrubs and/or native or non-invasive introduced species of grass and legumes*
- Cultural weed control systems and mulch
- Seed and seeding operation for revegetation
- Applicant's equipment use and labour (at set program rates) Total In-kind costs (labour and equipment) shall not exceed 50% of eligible expenditures.

*Proposed riparian species must be native to your ecoregion and are subject to approval by program staff. No ornamental species are allowed.



3.3.1 Canadian Agricultural Partnership in Alberta cont...

Project: Year Round/Summer Watering Systems

Funding Maximum: \$50,000

Cost Share: 30-50%

Purpose: Installation and setup of winter watering systems support winterfeeding management, reduce the build-up and off-site transport of manure nutrients and pathogens, and provide greater protection of natural water sources.

Eligible Costs:

- Portable watering systems
- Troughs, stock tanks, plastic tanks, or similar water storage
- Heat tape or heated waterers
- Pumping systems
- Power sources such as solar panels, windmills, etc. and other electrical supplies
- Plumbing materials
- Surface, shallow, or deeply buried pipelines - if used to distribute water within a pasture and protect a water source
- Applicant's equipment use and labour (at set program rates)

Note: Watering systems associated with a well, dugout, or spring; dugout aeration systems; and deeply buried water lines (below the frost level) within a farmyard are not eligible under this project funding. However, they may be eligible for cost share funding under Farm Water Supply Program.

Project: Riparian Management Strategies - Open

Funding Maximum: \$100,000

Cost Share: 30-50%

Purpose: Grazing management solutions that address an environmental risk.

Eligible Costs: Eligible costs include common and proven management practices which are determined to be the best fit in addressing an identified environmental risk. Activities must not be explicitly ineligible and must be shown to meet or exceed the program goals.

Projects of this nature will be assessed on an individual basis by a technical review panel and must have merit. Any items listed in any ineligible column in the Funding List are not eligible under this category. Applications under this category must clearly describe an environmental risk and explain how the suggested project(s) will mitigate the risk. The larger the environmental risk, the larger the granted cost-share.

Potential Eligible Projects*:

- Native prairie management
- Riparian buffer establishment
- Grazing Management Consulting
- Wetland Restoration
- Pond Levelers for beaver management

*Potential eligible projects listed above are not guaranteed for approval. Applicants must demonstrate how these solutions will address an environmental risk on their farm.



3.3.1 Canadian Agricultural Partnership in Alberta cont...

Project: Wetland and Riparian Assessments

Funding Maximum: \$100,000; \$15,000 per Wetland or Riparian Assessment

Cost Share: 50%

Purpose: Assessment of wetlands and riparian areas to collect site information and evaluate potential solutions that will improve surface water management for agricultural operations and address environmental issues.

Eligible Costs:

Engineering and consultant fees to conduct the following:

- Economic analysis of options;
- Riparian and or wetland health assessment
- Land survey

For more information about the above programs please contact:

Phone: 310-FARM (3276)

Email: CAP.ESandCCProgram@gov.ab.ca

Web: www.cap.alberta.ca



This Chestnut-collared Longspur is in the midst of his display. Listen for their song, similar to a meadowlark, in pastures that have been recently grazed.

Photo: Yousif Attia



3.3.2 Cows and Fish

Cows and Fish strives to foster a better understanding of how improvements in grazing and other management of riparian areas can enhance landscape health and productivity, for the benefit of landowners, agricultural producers, communities, and others who use and value riparian areas.

We are available to help landowners:

- Understand riparian area functions and values
- Access technical advice and educational materials
- Examine and monitor the health of their riparian areas
- Evaluate and suggest management strategies

How is the Cows and Fish program valuable to landowners and communities?

- Work with landowners and communities on riparian health and management
- Provide an opportunity to help landowners and communities present a proactive approach as good stewards of the land
- Assist in building community-based and producer driven groups to address local riparian issues
- Provide technical assistance on riparian management and health assessment
- Provide funding or advise participants on how to access funding for stewardship projects
- Provide better information so landowners and communities can make informed decisions

For more information on how Cows and Fish can assist your stewardship plans and for great resources on grazing management and riparian health, please contact them:

Cows and Fish
Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society
2nd Floor, Avail Building
530 – 8th Street South
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada T1J 2J8
(403) 381-5538
(403) 381-5723
riparian@cowsandfish.org
<https://cowsandfish.org/>



3.3.3 Ducks Unlimited Canada - Alberta

Forage Programs

These programs encourage landowners and producers to seed perennial forages on their land, providing financial assistance to establish stands of mixed grass and legume forages.

The DUC/Nutrien forage program provides cash-back incentives on all Proven® Seed forage seed purchases paid at full retail price when producers convert cultivated land to hay or pastureland. By increasing their forage base, grassland bird and waterfowl productivity is also increased.

How Does It Work?

- Producers receive a rebate of \$100 per 50-lb bag of Proven® Seed forage seed
- There is also a one-time payment of \$35/ac
- Other seed sources can be utilized but only Proven® Seed is eligible for the rebate. The \$35/ac payment is still paid.
- There are no restrictions to grazing or haying, except for in the year of establishment when grazing is not permitted.
- Seed mix must contain both grasses and legumes
 - 100% Alfalfa or Alfalfa/Timothy only mixes are not eligible.
- It is recommended that all participants explore forage establishment insurance.
- A pro-rated buyout is available to program participants at any point in the agreement.

The DUC/CPS forage program is best suited for producers in the parkland and prairie regions.

**Please contact DUC for more details and eligibility requirements before purchasing seed.

Wetland Restoration Lease Program

DUC compensates landowners based on current fair market value for previously drained wetland areas that are restored under a 10-year lease.

How Does It Work?

- DUC restores the wetland and covers expenses such as surveying costs, labour and equipment.
- Restored wetland areas stay under the management of the landowner.
- Restored wetlands may be hayed or grazed but they cannot be drained, altered, or tilled during the term of the agreement.
- DUC's lease pays landowners significant compensation for this restriction
- Participants agree not to drain the wetland on their property for 10 years (when the agreement expires, regulations or legislation that restricts wetland drainage still apply).

Landowners and cattle producers who have drained wetlands on grazing lands are often a very good fit for this program. Farmers should consider this program as a revenue source for lands that are currently unproductive. Wetland restoration can also be part of a conservation easement or forage program.



3.3.3 Ducks Unlimited - Alberta cont...

Conservation Easements

A conservation easement allows for compatible agricultural land use such as haying and grazing on a property. Because a conservation easement protects the land's natural features and supports the growth of native plants, perennial cover is maintained and serves as a sustainable source of forage.

How Does It Work?

- A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement.
- Under the terms of a conservation easement, the landowner commits to conserving the natural integrity of the land by limiting the amount and type of development such as breaking, cultivating, or alternative land use.
- The area of land covered by a DUC conservation easement is protected in perpetuity.
- Significant compensation is available to landowners putting a conservation easement on their land.

A conservation easement may be an opportunity to generate cash flow while also ensuring there will be a space for nature for generations to come.

Revolving Land Conservation Program

A Revolving Land Conservation Program provides an opportunity for a greater impact on the landscape.

How Does It Work?

- Through this program, DUC purchases a piece of land, restores its wetlands and grasslands and then places a conservation easement on the title.
- The land is then made available to potential land buyers on the real estate market.
- Proceeds from these land sales go back into DUC programs to fund further conservation work.

For farmers, it's a chance to acquire affordable land close to home which can be used annually for either hay or pasture.

The Revolving Land Conservation Program is an alternative to DUC buying and keeping lands. Under this program, habitats can be protected and lands are returned to agriculture. RLCP is an ideal fit for cattlemen with land within high-capability waterfowl production areas.

Hay/Graze Tender Program

Sound management of pastureland helps to keep forage stands healthy and vigorous. It also helps with weed control, while at the same time maintaining productive waterfowl habitat. As a unique opportunity for local producers, DUC makes land available for haying and/or grazing with annual tenders.

How Does It Work?

- Tenders are typically posted in February/March, and advertisements for available properties appear in local newspapers and on ducks.ca/resources/landowners.
- Fill out a tender application found here <https://www.ducks.ca/resources/landowners/alberta-haygraze-tender-program/> and submit before the deadline.

* All incentive values subject to change each fiscal year.

For more information about any of the above programs please contact:

Ducks Unlimited Canada – Alberta
(866) 479-3825



Northern Pintails require more upland area surrounding wetlands than many other waterfowl. Sowing marginal areas around wetlands down to permanent cover provides nesting habitat for these unique ducks.



Photo: Nick Saunders



3.3.4 MULTISAR

Eligible Area: Calgary south to U.S. Border

The MULTISAR program is a voluntary collaborative stewardship program that focuses on multiple Species at Risk habitat and provides landholders with baseline assessments of their property. Landholders collaborate with the MULTISAR Partners that include Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Environment and Parks, Prairie Conservation Forum, and Cows and Fish Program. The program also has an advisory board consisting of the Alberta Beef Producers, Canadian Cattlemen's Association, and the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef. Funding for this program comes from Environment and Climate Change Canada, the MULTISAR partners listed above, industry, and private donations.

The MULTISAR Program began in 2002 and through this collaborative process has engaged with producers that manage approximately 750,000 acres of land. Key to this program is the long-term relationships that are developed with landholders based on mutual trust and respect via open and honest communications. The project maintains these relationships by going back every five years to reassess portions of the properties to measure and document changes over time in the plant communities, range health, and wildlife populations. Properties that implement habitat enhancements are visited more frequently to measure changes in habitat as a result of these enhancements.

Landholders receive either a detailed Habitat Conservation Strategy or a Habitat Management Plan.

- 1) **Habitat Conservation Strategies:** These include detailed assessments of the range (plant communities, health of those communities, carrying capacities), riparian (plant communities and health of those communities), and wildlife (locations, species list, and associated habitat types) located on a property. Landholders sit down with the MULTISAR team to discuss what was found on the property and generate ideas that can be mutually beneficial to both the landholder's operation and the wildlife habitat that occurs on their land. This information is then provided to the landholder in a report. Landholders then decide what they wish to implement and funding to assist those projects is cost shared between the landholder and MULTISAR.
- 2) **Habitat Management Plans:** These are more rapid assessments of the property that include point count surveys for wildlife and habitat measurements such as Robel pole heights and litter amounts. The landholder receives a smaller report detailing wildlife species found and maps of their property showing the range in litter amounts (lbs/acre) and Robel pole heights (cover). Information is presented and discussed with the landholder and ideas are generated for ways to maintain or enhance habitat on the property. As with the Habitat Conservation Strategies, the landholder then decides what they wish to implement and funding to assist those projects is cost shared between the landholder and MULTISAR.

Types of landholder led enhancements implemented through this process include upland water developments, portable watering units, wildlife friendly fencing, portable electric fencing, hawk poles, and native grass reseeding projects.

If you are interested in how you can improve habitat for Species at Risk, please contact:

Brad Downey (403) 382-4364

Katheryn Taylor (403) 381-5318

www.multisar.ca



3.3.5 Species Habitat Assessments and Ranching Partnerships (SHARP)

Eligible Area: Alberta (two to three-hour radius of Edmonton)

The Species Habitat Assessments and Ranching Partnerships Project (SHARP) is a voluntary collaborative stewardship project that focuses on multiple wildlife species including Ruffed Grouse, ungulates, bats, waterfowl, and grassland birds, to name a few. The project provides landholders with habitat assessments (range and riparian) of their property looking at ways to maintain or further enhance wildlife habitat that also has benefits for the operation. Landholders collaborate with the SHARP Partners, including Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Environment and Parks, and ALUS Canada, all of which all sit on the project's steering committee. The project is funded by the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

The SHARP Program started in 2018 to build on the momentum of the MULTISAR Project down in southern Alberta and to provide opportunities to landholders in central Alberta. Key to this project is the long-term relationships that are developed with landholders based on mutual trust and respect via open and honest communications. The project maintains these relationships by going back every five years to reassess portions of the properties to measure and document changes over time in the plant communities, range health, and wildlife populations. Properties that implement habitat enhancements are visited more frequently to measure changes in habitat as a result of these enhancements.

Landowners receive a detailed Habitat Conservation Strategy:

Habitat Conservation Strategies include detailed assessments of the range (plant communities, health of those communities, carrying capacities) and riparian (plant communities and health of those communities). Wildlife surveys are completed in year two once the habitat assessments are completed and tied to specific areas where enhancements are desired (locations, species list, and associated habitat types) located on a property. Landholders sit down with the SHARP team to discuss what was found on the property and generate ideas that can be mutually beneficial to both the landholder's operation and the wildlife habitat that occurs on their land. This information is then provided to the landholder in a report. Landholder' then decide what they wish to implement and funding to assist those projects is cost shared between the landholder and SHARP.

Types of landholder led enhancements implemented through this process include portable watering units, wildlife friendly fencing, portable electric fencing, etc.

To learn more contact:

Brad Downey
(403) 382-4364

Amanda Rezanoff
(780) 410-1975.

Sprague's Pipits are found in open grasslands with plenty of grass and litter to hide in, so the presence of Sprague's Pipits can be a good indicator of range health. If there are lots of Sprague's Pipits this usually indicates that there is lots of carry-over and likely good forage production for the following season.



Photo: Dan Arndt



3.3.6 Alberta Watersheds

Watersheds often have programs to supply funding for alternative watering systems, grazing management infrastructure, and other projects that improve grassland and riparian health.

Below is the contact information for all 11 Alberta Watersheds:

Athabasca Watershed Council

5101 50 Avenue, PO Box 1058, Athabasca, AB
(780) 213-0343
admin@awc-wpac.ca
<https://awc-wpac.ca/>

Battle River Watershed Alliance

Mirror Lake Centre, Bottom Floor
5415 49 Ave, Box 3, Camrose, AB T4V 0N6
(780) 672-0276
(888) 672-0276
otis@battleriverwatershed.ca
<https://www.battleriverwatershed.ca/>

Bow River Basin Council

Spring Gardens Building D
861 40th Ave NE
Mail Code #64
P.O. Box 2100 Station M
Calgary, AB T2P 2M5
(403) 268-4596
mark.bennett@calgary.ca
<https://www.brbc.ab.ca/>

Lesser Slave Watershed Council

PO Box 2607
4833-52nd Ave.
High Prairie, AB T0G 1E0
(780) 523-9800
info@lswc.ca
<https://www.lswc.ca/>

LICA-Beaver River Watershed

PO Box 8237
5107W-50th Street, Bonnyville, AB
Bonnyville, AB T9N 2J5
(780) 812-2182
(877) 737-2182
lica2@lica.ca
<https://lica.ca/watershed/>

Mighty Peace Watershed Alliance

Box 217
McLennan, AB T0H 2L0
(780) 324-3355
info@mightypeacewatershedalliance.org
<https://www.mightypeacewatershedalliance.org/>

Milk River Watershed Council Canada

Box 313
240 Main Street
Milk River, Alberta. T0K 1M0
(403) 647-4342
tim@mrwcc.ca
<http://www.mrwcc.ca/>

North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

202-9440 49 Street
Edmonton, AB T6B 2M9
(587) 525-6820
water@nswa.ab.ca
<https://www.nswa.ab.ca/>

Oldman Watershed Council

PO Box 1892
Lethbridge, Alberta, T1J 2C7
(403) 330-1346
info@oldmanwatershed.ca
<https://oldmanwatershed.ca/about-the-watershed>

Red Deer River Watershed Alliance

4918 59th St
Red Deer, AB T4N 2N1
403-340-RDRW (7379)
info@rdrwa.ca
<https://www.rdrwa.ca/>

Southeast Alberta Watershed Alliance

Room 41, 419 - 3rd St SE
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 0G9
(403) 580-8980
executive@seawa.ca
<http://seawa.ca/>



4. Additional Resources

Manitoba Important Bird Areas

Landowner's Guide to Grassland Bird Conservation.
Southwest Manitoba Bird Identification Sheets pages one and two.

Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

Species at Risk Booklet
Species at Risk Fact Sheets

Manitoba Forage and Grasslands Association

Range and Pasture Health Workbook
Guide to Integrated Brush Management
Producing Forage Finished Beef in Manitoba
Many more resources on pasture management, grass-fed beef and other topics

Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan

Guides to Managing for Optimal Habitat Attributes for multiple Species at Risk
Species at Risk Factsheets
Rangeland Health Assessment Workbooks and lots of other resources

Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

Land Manager's Guide to Grassland Birds of Saskatchewan

MULTISAR

Meet Grassland Species at Risk
What Landowners Can Do (to Help Species at Risk)

Prairie Conservation Forum

Resources on native prairie reclamation, Species at Risk and lots more

More Resources

Beneficial Grazing Management for Sage Grouse
Management of Canadian Prairie Rangeland
Grasslands Beneficial Management Practices online tool

5. Prairie Birds

In this section you will find more information about the birds that you are helping when you participate in the programs described in this guide.

Birds are arranged generally based on their abundance and probability of observation from east to west.

To find out more about the conservation status and lives of these birds visit [Canada's Wildlife Species pages](#)

If you need some help getting started identifying birds use this handy Merlin [Bird ID app](#)

You can enter the birds you see in the eBird app that is available for [IOS](#) and [Android](#)

There is also lots more information on these birds and thousands of others on [eBird](#)



Bobolink

Dolichonyx orzivorus



Photo: Kaila Ritchie

Description: Male Bobolinks are the only North American bird that have white backs and black underparts, and kind of look like they are wearing a tuxedo backwards. They also have a large yellowish, buffy nape. They are about the size of a robin and you can listen for the males singing their [bubbly song](#) in the spring, often from the tops of tall plants or fences. In the fall after they molt males and females look similar, both resembling large brown sparrows.

Habitat and Distribution: In Canada, you can find Bobolinks right across the prairies, but they tend to be more common on the eastern prairies, where there are taller grasses. Look for them in your moist hayfields and pastures. They will also use wetlands that drawdown during drought periods if the vegetation is allowed to remain.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Bobolinks are polyandrous, meaning that the offspring a female produces in a single clutch could be from multiple different fathers! They also rack up the miles, flying to and from southern South America every year, a round trip of around 12,500 miles. Over a lifetime, a Bobolink might fly the equivalent of 4-5 times around the earth.

Delaying haying or intensive grazing until young have fledged in mid-July helps improve nesting survival. [Using flushing bars or cutting using an inside-out pattern](#) will also allow more Bobolinks to flush out before being run over by haying equipment. Keeping fields in permanent forage and using the mentioned management strategies will also help out the Bobolinks, which are continuing to decline.

Description: Grasshopper Sparrows are smaller than a lot of sparrows, only 10 cm (4 in) tall. They have a large flat head with a bill that seems a little too big for them. Face, flanks and breast are all plain buff-brown. Look for a yellow patch right in front of their eye. They are secretive birds, making it tough to find them, but listen for their [song](#); after a couple of introductory notes, they sound like an insect! They will perch when they are singing, which can make this a good time to spot them if you know that to listen for.

Habitat and Distribution: Mostly found in native pastures and hayfields with a variety of grass heights in the southern parts of the prairie provinces.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: As their name suggests, they eat mostly grasshoppers. Like a parent cutting up their child's steak, Grasshopper Sparrows will remove the legs of grasshoppers before feeding them to their young.

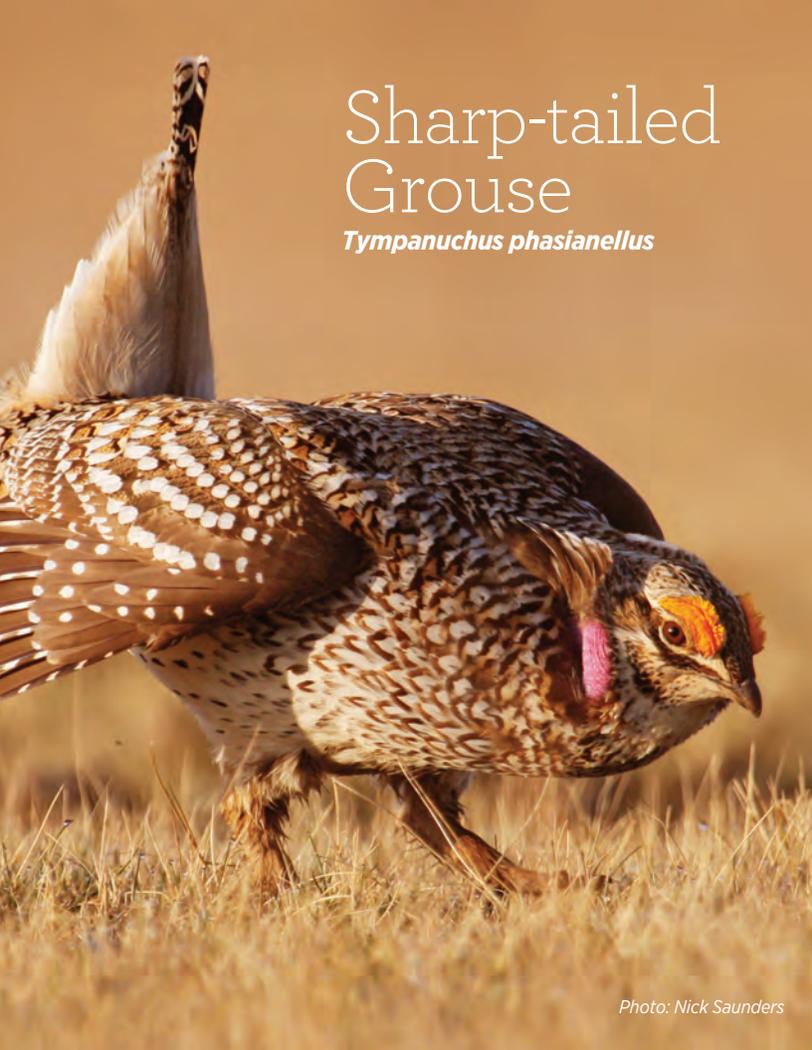
Due to habitat loss, Grasshopper Sparrows have lost over 50% of their populations in Canada in the last 50 years. Seeding down areas of marginal cropland to grass is particularly helpful to grasshopper sparrows. Limit the use of insecticides to only when pests are above economic thresholds or eliminate the use of insecticides altogether. This reduces the movement of insecticide throughout the food chain.

Grasshopper Sparrow

Ammodramus saviannarum



Photo: Nick Saunders



Sharp-tailed Grouse

Tympanuchus phasianellus

Photo: Nick Saunders

Description: ‘Sharpies’, are a close relative to prairie chickens, and these grouse are often called ‘chickens’ by a lot of people on the prairies. They are typically 31– 48 cm (15-19 in) tall and spotted with brown, gold, black and white. As their name suggests, they have a ‘sharp’ tail which is obvious in flight and which separates them from other grouses. When the males are displaying, they will make cooing noises.

Habitat and Distribution: Year-round resident birds on the prairies, Sharp-tailed Grouse can be found where there is open prairie mixed with shrubby areas. They normally nest in shrubby places like shelterbelts and riparian areas, and they rely on these places and frozen wetlands with standing vegetation during winter for shelter.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Early in the spring, Sharp-tailed Grouse gather at leks where males dance for the attention of females by bending low, stamping their feet quickly, and inflating their purple air sacs to make a cooing noise. These year round residents have to find ways to stay warm during the harsh prairie winters. They will sometimes burrow in the snow to roost in at night to stay insulated and hidden from predators! Keeping riparian areas for shelter, wetlands with emergent vegetation (such as cattails) and healthy pastures for their leks will help ensure they stay part of the prairie community.

Description: American Kestrels are North America’s smallest falcon at 22-31cm (8.7-12 in) tall, just slightly bigger than a Robin. Don’t let their cuteness fool you, though, they are fierce hunters, feeding on small mammals and insects. They have a blue-grey head and reddish brown backs. Look for bold markings on their face (the handle-bar moustache and side burns), which distinguish them from Merlins, which are a similar size. They have a distinctive call that you may not expect to be coming from a bird of prey.

Habitat and Distribution: These birds use nest cavities of woodpeckers as their homes, and can therefore be found in open areas interspersed with trees. Most abundant in aspen parkland regions, look for them perched on hydro wires, scanning for prey.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Birds can see ultraviolet light, this allows kestrels to see urine trails of small mammals, which can lead them to their next meal! While populations of many raptors are increasing, the little American Kestrels are declining in Canada. Loss of open habitats mixed with trees and the reduction of insect prey is driving these declines. Limit or eliminate the use of insecticides, protect riparian areas and keep bluffs intact to provide habitat. They also will take readily to nest boxes, which would be a fun project with kids and a good way to get a little mouse control around the yard.

American Kestrel

Falco sparverius



Photo: Nick Saunders



Western Meadowlark

Sturnella neglecta

Photo: Jodi Forster

Description: Meadowlarks have a striking yellow front with a characteristic black 'V' on the chest and a long pointed beak. They resemble something like a small winged football in flight. Their clear and cheery song, ringing across the pastures, is a familiar part of a prairie summer. Meadowlarks can be inconspicuous, and are most easily seen when they are perched and singing.

Habitat and Distribution: Meadowlarks live in open and grassy areas, avoiding areas with many trees or shrubs. They feed on seeds in the spring and fall and in early summer on insects like cutworms, beetles and grasshoppers. Fairly common throughout the prairies.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Meadowlarks have strong bill muscles that allow them to stick their bills into the ground and pry open a hole and eat insects found there that most other birds can't access. Female Meadowlarks do all of the nest building, which are often built in depressions left by cow footprints and sometimes have waterproof roofs or tunnel entrances that are several feet long! Though, still quite common and abundant, Western Meadowlarks are declining on the Canadian Prairies because of the conversion of grasslands to annual crops. However, these birds do quite well in planted grasslands, so seeding down poor land to grass mixes will help make sure they remain a prairie icon.

Description: Stocky, about the size of a Robin, with a huge head compared to the rest of its body (hence the name loggerhead). They are grey, white and black, with a black mask and a heavy slightly hooked bill. Songs are a series of trills and rasps mixed with some descending notes.

Habitat and Distribution: Loggerhead Shrikes prefer large areas of open country with widely spaced shrubs and low trees as well as riparian areas. They need the perches to be able to see and dive onto their prey from above. They're found where these requirements are met in Alberta, Saskatchewan and southwestern Manitoba. Watch for them on fence posts and hydro wires as well.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Loggerhead Shrikes are songbirds that act like raptors. Some of their prey is noxious or large so they will often impale it on barbed wire or thorns to incapacitate it before eating it, earning them the nickname 'The Butcher Bird'. They can carry prey that is the same size as themselves and feed mainly on rodents and insects, particularly grasshoppers. A parent will feed a grasshopper to its young every four minutes on average. We have lost over 50% of their population in Canada since 1970. If restoring riparian areas, consider using native species like hawthorn and buffaloberry. Keeping native prairie intact and limiting or eliminating the use of insecticides will help keep these unique birds from disappearing from the prairies.

Loggerhead Shrike

Lanius ludovicianus



Photo: May Haga

Baird's Sparrow

Ammodramus bairdii



Photo: Nick Saunders

Description: Males are striking birds with a black belly and chestnut on the back of the neck, hence the name. They also have yellow on the face and their tails are white with a prominent black triangle in the centre. They are about 13-16 cm (6in) tall and their song can be heard when males fly high into the air, circling and fluttering, then singing in descent with their tails spread widely.

Habitat and Distribution: Most likely to find these birds in pastures that have been recently grazed, as they like short vegetation. Mostly found in the mixed and short grass prairie regions, they are area-sensitive, which means they need large tracts of native grasslands.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Males put on quite a show in the spring when they are displaying (like the one in the picture). Watch for them about 15 metres off the ground, singing as they descend. They hunt for insects, especially grasshoppers, as they walk along the ground and they often nest beside cow pies, where they feed on the insects attracted to the manure.

Across North America, we have lost a staggering 90% of their population since the 1960's. Habitat loss is driving these declines. Medium intensity grazing, promoting a mix of grass heights on your native prairie pastures and keeping native pastures intact will help out these striking little birds. Nest predation accounts for a large number of failed nests. Large contiguous areas of grasslands reduces nest predation as it provides more room to nest and hide!

Description: Baird's Sparrows are small but chunky sparrows with heavy bills. They are sandy brown and have a necklace of thin black streaks on an otherwise clean white belly. They also have yellow spreading across their faces and heads. Listen for the males' musical song, especially in the spring. They are tough to spot except for when males are perched up to sing during the mating season.

Habitat and Distribution: Baird's Sparrows breed mostly in native grasslands, especially in the tall and mixed grass regions and they prefer the lush areas of pastures. They're found in native prairies in southwest Manitoba and through southern Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: These little sparrows will often scurry away from you on the ground rather than taking flight. They forage on the ground for grasshoppers, leafhoppers, etc.

Baird's Sparrows can occasionally be found in forages and planted grasslands, and they need plenty of room. Once one of the most common birds on the prairies, their population has declined over 50% in Canada since 1970. Declines are primarily caused by habitat loss. To help Baird's Sparrows, delay haying in native grasslands until mid-July and promote a variety of plant heights in pastures.

Chestnut-collared Longspur

Calcarius ornatus



Photo: Yousif Attia



Clay-coloured Sparrow

Spizella palida

Photo: Glenn Dreger

Description: Horned Larks are the size of a large sparrow with a dark mask and breastband and white-yellow face, and small, black horns, making them look devilish. Or maybe they are just trying to fit in with the cows? Their song is a musical assortment of delicate tinkling notes usually lasting a few seconds.

Habitat and Distribution: Open-country birds that prefer very short grass or bare ground. Horned Larks are widely distributed throughout North America. Most common though in the short and mixed grass prairies of the Canadian prairies, and can be year round residents in very southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. You might spot them foraging in flocks on bare ground for seeds in the winter in those areas.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Still relatively common and widespread, this species is sharply declining across the Canadian Prairies. In a Horned Lark, family, females do pretty much all the work! They build the nest, which they line with pebbles and soil clods, but no one really knows why. It may be to keep the nest from blowing away in the prairie winds while it is being built. The females do a dance when they are ready to mate that looks a lot like she's having a dust bath. In fact, sometimes males mistake an actual dust bath for an invitation to mate! To help these unique little birds that have lost over 50% of their population in Canada, keep native prairie pastures intact and practice bird-friendly haying practices, like delayed haying, using flushing bars, cutting in an 'inside-out' pattern, and minimize insecticide use.

Description: These adorable little birds are small, slim sparrows usually under 15 cm (6 in) tall. They have a small bill and a long notched tail. Look for the pale, then tan, then grey facial pattern and the white streak on their crown. Their song is 2-8 toneless buzzes that sound insect-like (although not quite as much as the Grasshopper Sparrow).

Habitat and Distribution: Clay-coloured Sparrows nest in thick shrubs, like snowberry or rosebushes on the wooded edges of fields and pastures. They mainly feed on the seeds of grasses and weeds like lambsquarters, and occasionally they will eat insects as well. Their range is primarily limited to the grasslands of North America and they are especially abundant in the Aspen Parkland area of the prairies.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Clay-coloured Sparrows' young leave the nest before they can fly! They hop down to the ground from their low nests and then move deeper into cover, where their parents will bring them food for another 6-8 days until they finally learn to fly. While they are still very numerous in their range, these birds have seen slow but steady declines over the last several decades. Keeping riparian areas intact or planting and maintaining shelter belts with low shrubs included will give a place for this cute, and declining bird to forage and nest.

Horned Lark

Eremophila alpestris



Photo: Nick Saunders

Sprague's Pipit

Anthus spragueii



Photo: Yousef Attia

Description: Sprague's Pipits' plain buffy plumage helps them blend into the prairie. Their most striking features are their large dark eyes. However, Sprague's Pipits are not often seen. When on the ground they are well-hidden in the grass and when in flight they are often very high up in the air. It's best to listen for their unique flight song that is a series of descending, warbling, flute-like notes.

Habitat and Distribution: Depend on native grasslands with very little shrub. They are area-sensitive as well, meaning the larger the grassland, the more suitable it is. They nest in pastures with good growth and a good litter layer, so the presence of Sprague's Pipit is actually a good indicator of pasture health! Most common in Alberta and Saskatchewan but can be found in suitable habitat in western Manitoba.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Males perform an impressive song flight, hovering high above their territory (sometimes hundreds of feet), making sure they can be heard far and wide. This keeps them airborne for half an hour at a time and sometimes up to three hours! Around 80% of the global breeding population of Sprague's Pipit occurs in Canada, which means ranchers are very important for the conservation of this fascinating, bird which is losing 4.3% of its population each year. Keeping native pastures intact and using grazing practices that keep pastures healthy are the best things that we can do. Consider low to medium stocking rates in pastures with Sprague's Pipit present until young have left the nest to avoid trampling nests.

Description: This 'regal' hawk is the largest in North America, standing 61cm (2 ft) feet tall with a 1.4 m (4.5 ft) wingspan! They have greyish heads with rusty-brown shoulders and legs (hence the ferruginous name). The underside of the tail is a bright white. This can be used to distinguish them from a Red-tailed Hawk. Their call is lower and not as piercing as Red-tailed Hawk's characteristic scream - another way to distinguish them.

Habitat and Distribution: Usually found on wide open prairies, often nesting in isolated trees or on rocky outcrops and sometimes on power poles. They can be located anywhere where there are prairie dogs or ground squirrels to eat. They breed from southwest Manitoba to the core of their range further west in the open grasslands of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: A Ferruginous Hawk pair will eat up to five hundred ground squirrels in a season! So, having them nest in your pasture will provide a natural control of ground squirrels, rather than using poison which would poison these beautiful hawks as well. Ferruginous hawks are sensitive to disturbance by humans while raising young; to prevent them from abandoning the nest, do not approach nests within 1000 metres from March 15 to July 15. Restrict grazing in riparian areas by using alternative watering systems or fencing riparian areas. Leave lone trees and shelterbelts intact. These practices will all help these iconic prairie birds.

Ferruginous Hawk

Buteo regalis



Photo: Nick Saunders

Willet

Tringa semipalmata



Photo: May Haga

Description: Willets are large shorebirds and are similar in colour to many other shorebirds, but in flight, you can see a striking black and white pattern on both sides of the wings. The Willet in the picture here is doing a good job of showing that off. Willets will wade quite a ways into the water to probe for food. Note also the straight bill and its grey legs. You can hear their piercing sounds typically in the mornings and evenings.

Habitat and Distribution: These prairie shorebirds are dependent on potholes and other wetlands throughout the prairies. They nest in upland habitats near ponds in both native and tame grasslands.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Willets are able to feed day or night. They have very sensitive beak tips that help them locate aquatic insects even when it is dark out. Much like a Killdeer, Willets will pretend to have a broken wing to lure predators away from the nests. Keeping wetlands intact, and leaving or seeding down buffer areas in the marginal land surrounding potholes will help provide nesting space for Willets.

Description: Unmistakeable birds, Burrowing Owls are small, sandy colored owls with bright-yellow eyes and long legs. Chances are if you see a small brown owl with long legs on the ground in the middle of a pasture, it is a Burrowing Owl. They vocalize infrequently, but males can occasionally be heard cooing.

Habitat and Distribution: Burrowing Owls nest in the vacant burrows of burrowing mammals such as prairie dogs and ground squirrels. They require grasslands with few trees and low vegetation. Places where prairie dogs have thinned vegetation make excellent sites. They feed mostly on insects and small rodents, including grasshoppers, mice and ground squirrels. There are some Burrowing Owls still in southwest Manitoba but they are more common in the native prairies of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Young owls will sometimes try to mimic the sound of a rattlesnake to ward off predators. Young owls will also practice their hunting skills by jumping on each other, on prey that their parents have brought for them, or - in a pinch - just piles of dung. Burrowing Owl populations crashed some 90% in the 1990's and have not recovered. Some tolerance of prairie dogs and ground squirrels to provide nesting burrows, or installing artificial burrows would attract Burrowing Owls to your fields and pastures. They prefer open grasslands but as long as there is ample prey, they can live in smaller grassed areas, so seeding down marginal areas to native grass mixes can also help. Avoid putting watering stations or salt blocks near burrows to prevent trampling. Do allow grazing near burrows to keep grass height low.

Burrowing Owl

Athene cunicularia



Photo: Nick Saunders

Thick-billed Longspur

Rhynchophanes mccownii



Photo: Nick Saunders

Description: Male Thick-billed Longspurs have black breasts and chestnut patches on their wings. They are bigger and chunkier than sparrows and their beaks are black (sparrows typically have pale beaks). Males sing a tinkling, cheerful song that gets even more elaborate when singing during flight. You can often hear them from dawn until midmorning during early spring.

Habitat and Distribution: These birds live in the dry prairies of Saskatchewan and Alberta. They prefer dry and short grass so they like areas that have been grazed heavier. They have large territories across expanses of prairies where they forage on the ground for seeds and insects like grasshoppers and caterpillars. They nest beside bunchgrasses in suitable habitat.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Formerly known as 'McCown's Longspur'. Males display involves raising one wing to show their white underwing. In their spectacular aerial display they fly up, then drop down on raised wings and spread their tail while singing. Receptive females bow and flutter wings in response. The longspur name refers to a long claw on the hind toe. These birds are in serious trouble. We have lost 98% of the population in Canada since 1970. To help, conserve breeding habitat on dry native prairies, and encourage a mosaic of different grass heights in pastures. Keep insecticide use to a minimum and only spray for grasshoppers, etc. when absolutely necessary. In areas of open prairie, keep shrub encroachment at bay with mowing.

Description: Neither a lark or a bunting, in fact, but a species of sparrow and one of North America's most striking sparrows at that. They have a very large, bluish-grey, conical bill that can be helpful to tell the females apart from the two longspur species. Males are all black with a splash of white on their wings. Their songs have distinct phrases and Lark Buntings are unique in that they have two different flight songs.

Habitat and Distribution: These birds only occur in the North American great plains. They are found in pastures and grasslands containing blue grama grass, needle and thread grass and some element of sagebrush is usually preferred. Because of this, Lark Buntings are found almost exclusively in the dry and mixed-grass prairies of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: The similarity of their song flight to Eurasian Skylarks are why they have 'lark' in their name despite being unrelated. Lark Buntings pairs will live near other pairs and when males outnumber females, the males without mates will help out by bringing food to the young. To help create and conserve habitat for Lark Buntings, avoid overgrazing pastures, keep large areas of intact grasslands and delay your first cut of hay until young have fledged in mid-July. Fall or winter grazing native prairie, if possible, also ensures that birds will not get trampled by cattle. These birds have seen large decreases in the last fifty years in Canada, mostly due to loss of habitat.

Lark Bunting

Calamospiza melanocorys



Photo: Nick Saunders

Greater Sage-grouse

Centrocercus urophasianu



Photo: Tom Reichner/Shutterstock

Description: Greater Sage-grouse are large, chubby grouse that are between a Ring-necked Pheasant and Wild Turkey in size. Outside of the breeding season they look like a big grouse with a black throat, white breast and yellow above their eyes. When displaying, males transform into what you see in the picture here, with large yellow air sacs covered by what looks like a white scarf. They also spread their tail into what looks like fingers. Males make a noise sounding like water drops while displaying. The rest of the year they tend to be quiet.

Habitat and Distribution: The life of Greater Sage-grouse revolves around the sagebrush. They nest under sagebrush and most of their diet is sagebrush, so in Canada, they are restricted to the sagebrush grasslands of southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Males perform dances on breeding grounds known as leks. To begin their display, they puff up their air sacs, gulping down and holding a gallon of air in these specialized pouches in their esophagus. The noise emitted is actually louder off to the side, which is why if you are lucky enough to witness one of these displays on their leks, you may see the females standing to the side, rather than straight in front. These birds have experienced precipitous declines since the 1970's. They need vast spaces of sagebrush prairie throughout the year, so habitat loss is the main driver of these losses. Installing Sage-grouse friendly fencing and keeping native prairie intact and in good shape are among the best things we can do for this species.

Description: These birds are almost unmistakable, with their impossibly long and curved bills. Long-billed Curlews are also North America's largest shorebird, standing nearly 61 cm (2 ft) tall having an almost 91 cm (3 ft) wingspan! They are mottled with cinnamon colour spreading throughout their body. Watch for them probing for earthworms or catching grasshoppers. Their song starts off slow and almost sounding like 'kerlee', then gets faster and louder as it progresses.

Habitat and Distribution: Summers are spent in the dry, mixed-grass prairies of Alberta and Saskatchewan where there is relatively sparse vegetation. Long-billed Curlews are also found in the interior grasslands of British Columbia. They are extirpated (locally extinct) in Manitoba, where they were once common.

Interesting Facts and Conservation: Long-billed Curlews will hunt for grasshoppers together, forming a line, so that as they flush them out, the grasshoppers can't easily escape all of the Curlews' long bills.

Long-billed Curlews are declining because of loss and fragmentation of their habitat. Keeping native pastures intact, controlling invasive species and reducing the use of insecticides will help these unique birds. When haying native grasses, use flush bars or 'inside-out' patterns to reduce the risk of killing these birds as they nest on the ground.

Long-billed Curlew

Numenius americanus



Photo: Arthur Beague

"Nature is not a place to visit.
It is home." Gary Snyder

Photo: Pete Davidson

