



NATURE
CONSERVANCY
CANADA

Oak Lake Sandhills and Wetlands
Natural Area Conservation Plan Summary
2017-2027

Oak Lake Sandhills and Wetlands Natural Area Conservation Plan Summary

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Cover Photo: Routledge Sandhills in the Oak Lake Sandhills and Wetlands Natural Area. Photo Credit: Lee Fehler

The Nature Conservancy of Canada

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is Canada's leading national land conservation organization. A private, non-profit organization, we partner with individuals, corporations, 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. We secure properties (through donation, purchase, conservation agreement and the relinquishment of other legal interests in land) and manage them for the long term.

Since 1962, NCC and our partners have helped to conserve more than 2.8 million acres (1.1 million hectares) of ecologically significant land from coast to coast. In Manitoba, we have conserved and protected over 65,000 acres (26,305 hectares) across nine natural areas critical to biodiversity across the province.

Our Mission Statement:

The Nature Conservancy of Canada leads and inspires others to join us in creating a legacy for future generations by conserving important natural areas and biological diversity across all regions of Canada.

Our Vision:

We envision a world in which Canadians conserve nature in all its diversity, and safeguard the lands and waters that sustain life.

Natural Area Conservation Planning

Guided by the best-available conservation science, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) seeks to protect areas of natural diversity for their intrinsic value and for the benefit of our children and those after them. We focus our work on specific landscapes throughout Canada that have been identified as important to biodiversity conservation, often through ecoregional-scale Conservation Blueprints and Ecoregional Assessments. Specific focal landscapes are referred to as Natural Areas (NA), and a Natural Area Conservation Plan (NACP) is developed for each. The purpose of these plans is to act as strategic plans for conservation implementation and support decision making at inception and throughout the implementation period, so that limited conservation resources are used most efficiently. Through these plans, we seek to identify desired conservation results, develop, prioritize, and implement activities that will lead to these results, track their progress, and adapt based on what we have learned. The scope of each plan encompasses the long-term conservation of all biodiversity in each NA. Conservation planning requires recognition of the shifting nature of landscapes and our knowledge of them. This planning process is viewed as iterative and ongoing, rather than a once-a-decade exercise and this document should be viewed in that context.

Natural Area Vision Statement

The Oak Lake Sandhills and Wetlands Natural Area encompasses extensive tracts of mixed-grass and sandhill prairie that support viable populations of rare sandhill-endemic species and grassland birds. Healthy and resilient wetlands and riparian areas support high concentrations of migratory waterbirds and contribute to maintaining the hydrological integrity of rivers and streams. Local communities champion the conservation of natural areas. Compatible management practices, and strong livestock, ecotourism, and recreational industries contribute to the maintenance and recovery of ecosystems and species at risk.

Implementation Period

Start date: 05/01/2017

End date: 04/30/2027

Location

The Oak Lake Sandhills & Wetlands Natural Area (OLSW) is a 733,522 acre (296,846 ha) landscape in southwest Manitoba. The OLSW occurs in the southeastern portion of the Aspen Parkland Ecoregion (Marshall & Schut 1999; TNC 2001).

Oak Lake lies near the centre of the NA and the watersheds of streams contributing to it were used as the initial NA boundary. The watersheds that formed this original boundary all exist within the larger Souris River Watershed. The OLSW boundary was expanded to include portions of adjacent subwatersheds in both the Souris River and Assiniboine River Watersheds that supported Biodiversity Targets and/or were identified in Riley et al.'s (2007) Conservation Blueprint. The subwatersheds added were characterized, in general, by eolian sandhill complexes or pothole wetland concentrations.

The northern boundary and northeastern lobe were expanded to encompass the extent of the eolian and pothole complexes. The southeastern boundary incorporates the Souris River and was delineated using the contour lines and natural vegetation cover along the eastern valley ridge, with one expansion at the southern end to incorporate an eolian sandhill complex and the adjacent blocks of mixed-grass prairie that are large enough to support area-sensitive grassland birds.

On its southwestern edge, the OLSW Natural Area boundary is contiguous with that of NCC's West Souris Mixed-grass Prairie (WSMGP) and Souris River Valley Grassland (SRVG) Natural Area. The conservation targets and threats (and thus the conservation strategies required to address them) differ substantially among these three Natural Areas; as such, separate conservation planning efforts were determined to be necessary.

Conservation Context

The OLSW is a hotspot for biodiversity. The rolling sandhills represent the only place in Manitoba where one can see the threatened Prairie Spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*). Sprawling wetlands support globally-significant waterbird concentrations and the grassy plains support numerous at-risk grassland-endemic species such as Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) and Small White Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*).



Routledge Sandhills. Photo by Lee Fehler

The increasing stabilization of eolian (wind-worked) sandhill complexes threaten the persistence of early-successional sandhill-obligate species. The endangered Prairie Skink (*Plestiodon septentrionalis*), Manitoba's only lizard, lives on the sandhill slopes alongside a suite of rare plants such as Smooth Goosefoot (*Chenopodium subglabrum*) and Silky Prairie-clover (*Dalea villosa*).

Grassland birds are one of the most threatened groups of birds in North America. Species that were once seen across most of southern Manitoba are now primarily limited to the southwest corner of the province (e.g. Chestnut-collared Longspur (*Calcarius ornatus*), Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*), and Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*)).



Chestnut-collared Longspur. Photo by Alan MacKeigan

The OLSW supports 24 COSEWIC-listed species and 18 species that are listed provincially as endangered or threatened. The diversity of habitats and concentration of intact prairie represents habitat for 6 globally rare or uncommon species, 31 nationally rare or uncommon species, and 85 provincially rare or uncommon species.

Elk (*Cervus canadensis*), Moose (*Alces americanus*), and Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) continue to roam the vast landscape. The large shallow wetland complexes of the central plain provide important staging and breeding sites for high concentrations of migratory waterfowl, shorebirds and other waterbirds. Two pothole wetland concentrations identified as *North American Waterfowl Management Plan* priority landscapes dominate the eastern and western extents of the OLSW. The Natural Area's hardwood riparian forests along the Souris River, streams, and lakes add the high diversity of the area, providing nesting

and foraging sites for migratory songbirds and important habitat for wildlife. Large portions of the Natural Area were highlighted in the *Prairies & Parklands Conservation Blueprint*, with portions of the OLSW's woodlands, grasslands and wetlands ranked as being amongst the "top 15" in the Canadian portion of the blueprint.



Pothole Wetlands. Photo by NCC

The rural human population of the NA is increasing in some areas. Livestock production and small grain farming are the main land uses, but recreational uses, and petroleum development are becoming increasingly important to the local economy.

Invasive species, continued conversion of prairies, wetlands and riparian areas, hydrological alterations, and several other factors combine to place the area's biodiversity under an immediate and high degree of threat. The need for landscape-scale, private land-centred conservation and stewardship is urgent. Over 85% of the Prairie Spiderwort population, and the vast majority of prairie, wetland and sandhill sites are privately owned.



Upland Sandpiper. Photo by Tim Poole

NCC secured a 1,616 acre (654 ha) project at Jiggen's Bluff in 1979, and subsequently transferred this land to Ducks Unlimited Canada. Since then, NCC has conserved an additional 1,332 hectares (3,290 acres) through fee-simple acquisition and perpetual conservation agreements. An additional 23,440 hectares (57,918 acres) are under other land ownership pertinent to conservation (e.g. Wildlife Management Areas, lands eased or owned by various conservation organizations). Though not

necessarily protected from development or resource extraction, these lands are managed to mitigate negative impacts arising from those activities. Less than 0.1% of the NA is considered protected by the *Manitoba Protected Areas Initiative* (IUCN categories I-IV) and all of these are owned by Ducks Unlimited Canada.

NCC is well positioned to become a conservation leader in this threatened landscape, and by working with partners, has the capacity to undertake conservation action at a scale large enough to produce measurable, landscape-scale results. Through direct securement projects in the OLSW, NCC will:

- increase the acreage of conserved land by over 7%;
- increase the proportion of the NA conserved from 8.3% to 10.2%
- increase the acreage of secured sandhill prairie by 11.1% , resulting in the proportion of sandhill conserved rising from 23.9% to 26.9%
- increase the acreage of secured mixed-grass prairie by 20%, resulting in the proportion of mixed-grass prairie conserved rising from 30.1% to 39.1%
- increase protected lands from 0.1% to 0.5% of the NA



Plum Lake. Photo by NCC

By working together with local landowners, other conservation organizations and the Sustainable Development Department of the Government of Manitoba, NCC will influence stewardship actions on an additional 20,200 hectares (50,000 acres) of sandhill habitat and 9,700 hectares (24,000 acres) of mixed-grass prairie.

It is recognized that the long-term conservation of biodiversity of the NA will rely on working closely with local producers, governments and communities, not just conservation organizations. An understanding and appreciation of the importance and rarity of mixed-grass prairie and grassland birds will be necessary to affect broader changes on the landscape. As such, the strategies and objectives include a focus on the importance of active management to restore the ecological processes needed to maintain the ecological integrity of these communities.

This NACP builds upon the successes and lessons learned of the previous plan – if successfully implemented this plan is expected to:







- Maintain and recover populations of grassland-obligate birds;
- Increase compatible land use through collaboration and resource-sharing with partners and private landowners;
- Improve the viability of prairie by measurably reducing invasive species and woody encroachment;
- Improve the viability of riparian areas and mitigate the impacts of hydrological alteration;
- Increase awareness of the significance of the NA by implementing well-planned, coordinated and measurably-effective communications and marketing;
- Achieve biodiversity goals by creating linkages between the local economy and healthy natural areas that support agriculture, ecotourism and research; and
- Abate key threats through the strategic securement and maintenance of existing connections and corridors.



Spiny Star. Photo by NCC

Biodiversity Targets

Target:	Grassland-obligate Birds	Current status:	POOR	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2047, the distribution¹ of grassland-obligate bird Species at Risk² has expanded for at least three species <p><i>Milestone: By 2027, the distribution¹ of grassland-obligate bird Species at Risk² is maintained</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2047, increase hectares of grasslands in contiguous³ blocks >1110 hectares that support at least one parcel of mixed-grass prairie to 48,000 hectares <p><i>Milestone: By 2027, increase hectares of grasslands in contiguous³ blocks >1110 hectares that support at least one parcel of mixed-grass prairie to 40,000 hectares</i></p>					
Target:	Large Mammals	Current status:	GOOD	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2027, Elk are observed annually in the NA By 2027, the Moose population is maintained at 2016 numbers⁴ or higher 					
Target:	Migratory Shorebirds	Current status:	FAIR	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2027, migratory birds in the Oak Lake/Plum Lakes complexes occur at peak concentrations⁵ at least twice 					
Target:	Mixed-grass Prairie	Current status:	POOR	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2067, the extent of mixed-grass prairie increased to 20,000 hectares, with at least 75% perpetually conserved⁶ <p><i>Milestone: By 2027, the 2017 extent of mixed-grass Prairie is maintained, with at least 45% perpetually conserved⁶</i></p>					
Target:	Rivers, Streams & Associated Riparian Areas	Current status:	FAIR	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					

<p> By 2047, >75% of river and stream riparian zones have permanent vegetation cover within a 40 metre buffer from the banks</p> <p><i>Milestone: By 2027, >56% of river and stream riparian zones have permanent vegetation cover within a 40 metre buffer from the banks</i></p>					
Target:	Sandhill Prairie & Blowouts	Current status:	FAIR	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					
<p> By 2067, 2000 hectares of sandhill prairie burns at least once within 60 years (twice the historic fire-return interval)⁷</p> <p><i>Milestone: By 2027, 364 hectares of sandhill prairie burns at least once</i></p> <p> By 2047, the extent of sandhill prairie has increased to 8,000 hectares</p> <p><i>Milestone: By 2027, the area of sandhill prairie is >3900 hectares</i></p> <p> By 2027 the extent of open sand blowouts supporting early-successional sandhill-obligate species⁸ has increased to 80 hectares</p>					
Target:	Sandhill Woodland	Current status:	GOOD	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					
<p> By 2067 at least 25% of the sandhill forest burns at least once within 60 years (twice the historic fire-return interval)⁹</p> <p><i>Milestone: By 2027 at least 60 hectares of sandhill forest burns at least once</i></p>					
Target:	Wetlands Lakes & Associated Riparian Areas	Current status:	FAIR	Desired future status:	GOOD
Goals					
<p> By 2027, the extent of wetlands is maintained¹⁰ at 76,000 hectares or greater</p>					
Overall target viability for the Natural Area:		Current status:	FAIR	Desired future status:	GOOD

¹ as delineated by the 10X10 grid square distribution maps developed by the Manitoba Breeding Bird Atlas surveys between 2010 and 2015

² species include: Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared longspur, Loggerheaded Shrike and Sprague's Pipit

³ contiguous refers to adjacent parcels, disregarding the presence of gravel roads and road allowances or small streams

⁴ based on comparison of population counts in areas surveyed by Manitoba Sustainable Development

⁵ To be determined by population counts by the Manitoba Important Bird Area program

⁶ private lands under ownership of, or with legal interest on title by a conservation organization, or crown-owned lands under explicit management for biodiversity conservation

⁷ estimated at 15-30 years

⁸ species includes Prairie Spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*), Smooth Goosefoot (*Chenopodium subglabrum*), and Silky Prairie Clover (*Dalea villosa*)

⁹ estimated at 15-30 years

¹⁰ within the range of natural fluctuation for palustrine and lacustrine wetlands as mapped by Ducks Unlimited in the Canadian Wetland Inventory

Threats

The table below includes only those threats assessed as medium or higher. This assessment is based the threat and their expected impact of the viability of the target over the course of the NACP. See the Appendix for more information on how threats are identified and assessed.

IUCN Classification*	Threat	Overall magnitude
2.1 Annual & Perennial Non-Timber Crops	Conversion of native habitat to annual & perennial cropland	High
7.2 Dams & water Management/Use	Incompatible construction & maintenance of drainage network	High
8.1 Invasive Non-Native/Alien Species	Invasive alien species	High
1.3 Tourism & Recreation Areas	Recreational/residential development	Medium
2.3 Livestock Farming & Ranching	Incompatible grazing practices	Medium
3.1 Oil & Gas Drilling	Incompatible oil & gas development	Medium
3.2 Mining & Quarrying	Sand & gravel extraction	Medium
4.1 Roads & Railroads	Mortality/reduced fitness of migratory birds during migration and on wintering grounds	Medium
4.1 Roads & Railroads	Roads, railroads, pipelines & other linear anthropogenic features	Medium
7.1 Fire & Fire Suppression	Incompatible fire management	Medium
7.2 Dams & water Management/Use	Construction & maintenance of impoundments	Medium
8.2 Problematic Native Species	Woody vegetation encroachment	Medium
Overall Threat Status for the Natural Area		High

*See Appendix for information on IUCN Classifications

Strategic Plan

1.1 Site/Area Protection

Permanent protection of key land parcels

Importance: Critical

- Secure Priority 1 or 2 lands supporting mixed-grass prairie or grassland birds by April 2027, includes the securement of subsurface mineral rights where possible.

- Secure Priority 1 or 2 lands supporting sandhill prairie by April 2027, includes the securement of subsurface mineral rights where possible
- Secure Priority 1 or 2 lands that support watercourses and wetlands with native riparian cover by April 2027. Prioritize building on existing conservation areas in large wetland complexes that support shorebird targets
- Consider the opportunistic securement through donation or purchase of easements or land of ecologically significant Priority 1 or 2 lands, and Priority 1-3 lands that will provide connections between large grassland blocks or Priority 1 shorebird habitat
- Annually submit list of newly-acquired NCC lands to the Government of Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative (PAI) for inclusion in Manitoba's Protected Areas Network. Encourage PAI and Lands Branch to consider protecting ecologically significant Crown lands in the Natural Area

Objectives:

- 🌿 By 2027 increase the proportion of conserved acres of sandhill prairie by 3%
- 🌿 By 2027 increase the proportion of lands supporting mixed-grass prairie that are conserved by 6%
- 🌿 By 2027 the proportion of NA that is protected (IUCN Categories IV or higher) has increased from 0.07% to 0.5%

1.3 Conservation Science and Planning

Conservation planning

Importance: Necessary

- Complete progress reports for the NACP annually
- By December 2017, produce a public version of this NACP that is suitable for sharing with partners and the general public
- By December 2019, undertake climate change adaptation of NACP. Revise NACP actions, if necessary
- Review and update the Oak Lake Sandhills and Wetlands NACP by August 2024

Address key knowledge gaps

Importance: Necessary

- Conduct roadside survey of grassland blocks in the Belleview Plain, Lauder and North Oak Lake areas to confirm the extent of native prairie, and summarize grazing regimes by October 2017
- Conduct surveys for Dakota Skipper (*Hesperia dacotae*) by December 2018
- Summarize management regimes in the sandhills by December 2018
- Map and describe freshwater springs in the natural area by December 2020
- Opportunistically address other knowledge gaps related to targets, threats and action effectiveness, as they arise within the NACP implementation period

2.1 Site/Area Management

Status and effectiveness monitoring to inform action implementation and planning

Importance: Critical

- Determine an appropriate and feasible shorebird monitoring approach to increase the understanding of distribution and habitat use of shorebirds in the NA
- Implement status and effectiveness monitoring protocols as scheduled in the NACP monitoring plan

Property-level stewardship

Importance: Critical

- Conduct stewardship actions on acquired properties as required. Annually satisfy taxation and other legal obligations for all fee-simple properties
- Prepare Interim Stewardship Statements (ISS) within one year of closing, and Baseline Inventories for fee-simple properties of closing and Property Management Plans (PMPs) following NCC's approved Policies, Procedures, Standards and Guidelines
- Monitor all Conservation Agreement properties annually following NCC's approved Procedures, Policies, Standards and Guidelines

Work with the province regarding coding and management of ecologically significant crown land

Importance: Necessary

- Provide ongoing support to Manitoba Sustainable Development and Manitoba Crown Lands Branch, regarding ecological significance of crown parcels in the natural area and recommendations for coding adjustments

Objective:

- 🌱 By 2027, coding for at least one parcel of ecologically significant crown land is changed to remove cultivation or extraction as a permitted use.

2.2 Invasive/Problematic Species Control

Establish invasive species monitoring and control

Importance: Critical

- Establish working group to determine Leafy Spurge control program scope, boundary and goals by December 2018
- Support working group partner efforts to monitor and control Leafy Spurge in core conservation areas through 2027
- Support partner efforts to monitor and control aquatic invasive species in the Natural Area through 2027
- Support partner efforts to monitor and control other terrestrial invasive species in the Natural Area through 2027
- Annually report on status of invasive species and implementation of control activities. Evaluate the effectiveness of treatments every 5 years.

Objectives:

- 🌿 By 2022 there is a 25% reduction in patch size and/or density of Leafy Spurge in managed areas and no new patches in control area
- 🌿 By 2027 no new terrestrial invasive species have established in the NA
- 🌿 By 2027, no net gain in the extent of reaches impacted by aquatic invasives species

2.3 Habitat & Natural Process Restoration

Implement and/or support prescribed fire program

Importance: Critical

- Develop & maintain fire-oriented coordination and communications with Office of Manitoba Fire Commissioner, Rural Municipal Fire Departments and Manitoba Sustainable Development and other fire practitioners
- Develop prescribed fire strategy with partners that encompasses site selection, resourcing and funding considerations by January 2019
- Implement and/or support the implementation of prescribed fire on grasslands within the NA by October 2019

Objectives:

- 🌿 By 2018, all NCC prescribed fire operations are coordinated with local fire departments
- 🌿 By 2027, 1050 acres of sandhills communities burn at least once within 30 years (within twice the fire return interval)*
- 🌿 By 2027, 500 acres of mixed-grass prairie burn at least once within 10 years (within twice the fire return interval)*
- 🌿 By April 2018, prescribed fire sites have been selected, NCC fire crew is trained and available, and day rate is funded

*Fire return interval estimated to be 5-10 years for mixed-grass prairie and 15-30 years for sandhills

Sandhill conservation & recovery plan

Importance: Critical

- Establish a formal sandhill conservation partnership and determine project scope, boundary, and goals by December 2018
- Implement project to investigate the effectiveness of different disturbance regimes in increasing the extent and condition of sandhill prairie and sand blowouts by May 2018
- Investigate the effectiveness of implementing chemical or mechanical control of forested sandhills to reclaim prairie by August 2018
- Implement chemical or mechanical control of forested sandhills on at least five acres to reclaim sandhill prairie and savanna by April 2019. Monitor for effectiveness of treatment and use results to inform and implement future management activities by 2027.
- Implement landscape-scale sandhill management strategies in conjunction with partners by 2020
- Influence private land management by increasing awareness of sandhill status, management and research through to May 2027

Objectives:


- 🌿 By 2027 the area of sandhill prairie patches supporting sand blowouts has increased by 900 acres
- 🌿 By 2027 there has been no net loss of sandhill prairie

Establish capacity for mixed-grass prairie restoration projects

Importance: Necessary

- By 2019 effectively engage with potential partners and interested landowners to discuss restoration programming
- By 2020 develop plan for establishing a local native mixed-grass prairie seed source
- By January 2021, identify potential donors and apply for funding to support capacity-building for the establishment of a local seed source
- By spring 2022 implement plan for establishing local native seed source

Objectives:

-  By 2027, at least one mixed-grass prairie site has been identified as a source of seed for restoration or seed production plots



3.2 Species Recovery

Multi-species and ecosystem at risk recovery, management and research

(Importance: Necessary)

- By March 2018 develop a multi-partner mixed-grass prairie/grassland bird recovery plan for the Natural Area and update NACP activities
- Annually submit rare species & Species At Risk monitoring findings to the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre
- Support ongoing surveys and development of recovery strategies for Species at Risk through to 2027
- Engage with partners and other organizations to ensure strategies related to shorebird recovery in the natural area are complementary with international recovery efforts by 2019

Objectives:

-  By September 2018 Multi-SAR workbooks are utilized by NCC land managers
-  By spring 2018 the mixed-grass prairie/grassland birds recovery plan strategies have been incorporated into NCC's and at least one partner's conservation planning and land management

4.3 Awareness & Communications

Communications

Importance: Critical

- Develop a communications plan by June 2017
- Implement communications plan. Review and update as needed every two years as part of NACP progress report
- Partner with MHHHC, Conservation Districts, MFGA and other partners to hold an open house/promotional tour in local communities for landowners/stakeholders in 2020 with a focus on sharing information about conservation, management programs and research.
- Engage with conservation easement holders annually by providing materials on land management practices and opportunities
- Hold community appreciation event by 2024

Objectives:

- 🌿 By 2020, 50% of survey respondents indicate that they had previously heard of NCC and 75% of respondents indicate that they are aware of the significance of the area for grassland birds
- 🌿 By 2020, open houses are held in at least 2 communities with at least 2 other conservation organizations participating
- 🌿 By 2021, at least 3 landowners have indicated that they consider/implement land management information/practices shared by NCC and partners through public forums or communication materials
- 🌿 By 2027, 75% of survey respondents indicate that they were previously aware of NCC and are familiar with NCC's work, 75% of respondents indicate that they are aware of the significance of the area for grassland birds and Mixed-grass Prairie
- 🌿 By 2027, at least 1 easement holder has adopted compatible land management practices
- 🌿 By October 2017, all NA communications by NCC staff are consistent with the communications plan

Engagement

Importance: Necessary

- Develop an engagement strategy by December 2017
- Develop and implement a fundraising strategy for engagement programming by April 2018
- Implement engagement programming by September 2018
- By April 2019, at least one property will be identified and promoted as a Nature Destination

Objectives:

- 🌿 By 2022, engagement opportunities are available in at least 1 community within the Natural Area
- 🌿 By 2027, at least 4 school or interest group are involved in education and engagement opportunities
- 🌿 By 2027, at least 75% of survey respondents indicate an increased awareness or understanding of the significance of sandhill prairie in the Natural Area

5.2 Policies & Regulations

Participation in water management related committees

Importance: Necessary

- Participate as a stakeholder on committees related to provincial/inter-provincial/international water management and regulation

Objectives:

- 🌿 By 2027 <1.5% of wetland acres have been lost

5.3 Private Sector Standards & Codes

Implementation of internal oil and gas development procedures and guidelines

Importance: Necessary

- Ensure oil and gas development on NCC lands/Conservation Agreements follow NCC MB's oil and gas development procedures manual through 2027
- Share best practices and NACP biodiversity information with the Manitoba Petroleum Branch and the locally operating oil and gas companies by 2019

Objectives:

-  All Oil and gas developments on NCC-owned lands and easements comply with NCC MB's oil & gas development procedures

5.4 Compliance & Enforcement

Conservation Agreement enforcement

Importance: Necessary

- In the event of a breach of a Conservation Agreement, follow NCC's Policies, Procedures, Standards, and Guidelines and obtain legal counsel where appropriate




6.1 Linked Enterprises & Livelihood Alternatives

Expand compatible tourism/ecotourism initiatives

Importance: Beneficial

- Work with local communities and tourism groups annually to identify opportunities for co-ordinating tourism related initiatives
- Partner with the Manitoba Important Bird Areas Program (IBA) and other partners on complementary tourism/interpretive initiatives through 2027

Objectives:

-  By 2021 there is at least one interpretive activity or opportunity related to sandhill prairie in the Natural Area
-  By 2027 NCC has contributed to at least one eco-tourism related initiative related to Oak Lake that provides opportunity to engage visitors in the area
-  By November 2027, NCC and the IBA partner on at least 4 outreach/tourism initiatives that raise awareness related to bird targets


6.4 Conservation Payments


Establish performance-based ecological goods and services program for Pipestone Creek in co-operation with West Souris River Conservation District

Importance: Necessary

- Conduct feasibility study and identify funding sources by 2020 to determine EG&S program requirements, establish pilot project details
- Implement EG&S Pilot Program in 2021
- Report and evaluate on progress/findings of EG&S pilot project by April 2022
- Implement permanent EG&S program in spring 2022

Objectives:

-  By 2027 160 acres of permanent cover has been re-established within 40m buffer of Pipestone Creek

-  By 2027, at least 30 landowners apply to the EG&S program with 10 projects qualifying for payment per year

7.2 Alliance & Partnership Development

Work with partners on complementary IWMP programming

Importance: Necessary

- Partner with Manitoba Important Bird Areas Program and Bird Studies Canada on complementary activities related to shorebird monitoring and conservation initiatives.
- Partner with the Conservation District on complementary planning actions identified in the West Souris Integrated Watershed Management Plan
- Partner with the Conservation District on developing a Pipestone Creek streambank restoration or rehabilitation project

Objective:

-  By 2027, Partner with the Conservation District on at least two initiatives

*Strategies are ranked on their relative importance to achieving the biodiversity goals of the plan. These rankings are defined as follows.

Critical: Conservation strategies that, without implementation, would clearly result in the reduction of viability of a biodiversity target or the increase in magnitude of a critical threat within the next 5-10 years. Also includes information that requires research before important decisions can be made on the management of biodiversity targets.

Necessary: Conservation strategies that are needed to maintain or enhance the viability of biodiversity targets or reduce critical threats. Also includes research that will inform decisions regarding management of biodiversity targets.

Beneficial: Conservation strategies that will assist in maintaining or enhancing viability of biodiversity targets and reducing threats.

Priority Areas for Biodiversity Conservation

In order to focus conservation efforts and ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources, NCC conducts an analysis to identify priority areas within the Natural Area landscape. This analysis considers the presence, distribution, and relative abundance of biodiversity targets, Species at Risk, and existing conservation lands within the Natural Area. By using this prioritization to guide the delivery of activities and programming, NCC strives to obtain the best possible impact on defined biodiversity targets while minimizing threats to those targets.

Acknowledgements

Plan development benefited from a workshop held April 12, 2015 in Oak Lake Manitoba. In addition to NCC Manitoba staff, 15 participants representing conservation organizations, partners, landowners, species experts and government representatives discussed the environmental, social and economic factors influencing wetlands and riparian areas in the Natural Area. Attendees (in no particular order) included: Leah Lees (Local landowner), Wayne Less (Oak Lake Community Development Board Chair), Linda Boyes (IBA volunteer), Glennis Lewis (IBA volunteer), Tim Poole (Manitoba Important Bird Areas program), Louanne Reid (former Brandon Naturalist), Dean Brooker (West Souris Conservation District), Scott Hainsworth (West Souris River Conservation District), Bobby Bennet (Manitoba Sustainable Development), Liz Punter (NCC Science Advisory Committee), Carleigh Babiak (R.M of Sifton), Lorrie Roulette (Oak Lake Community development Board), Bob Jones (NCC Science Advisory Committee), Allison Krause-Danielson (Manitoba Sustainable Development), and Graham Phipps (Manitoba Sustainable Development)

Tim Poole of the Manitoba Important Bird Areas Program provided information on shorebird status. Dean Brooker of the West Souris River Conservation District provided information on issues and threats related to wetlands and streams. Ken Rebisante with Manitoba Sustainable Development provided an update on large mammal activities in the area. Cassie McLean with Manitoba Sustainable Development provided information on surface water quality. Candace Parks of the Invasive Species Council of Manitoba and Bob Tingey of the Pipestone Weed District provided information on the status of invasive species and monitoring and control activities in the Natural area.

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Appendix

Conservation Planning Approach

NCC has committed to examining the effectiveness of conservation activities using an adaptive management approach. To do so, NCC adopted the Conservation Measure's Partnership (CMP)'s *Open Standards for the Practices of Conservation* as an adaptive and results based planning method. For more information on this approach and the methods used in the development of this NACP visit:

<http://cmp-openstandards.org/>

Threat and Conservation Actions Classifications

Threat and Conservation Action Class and Nomenclature are based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Classification Schemes:

Conservation Actions:

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes/conservation-actions-classification-scheme-ver2>

Threats:

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes/threats-classification-scheme>