

CANADA'S GRASSLANDS

ABOUT CANADA'S GRASSLANDS

Canada is home to temperate grasslands dominated by dark, rich soil and lush, open grassland areas. Found around the world, these ecosystems are a result of a lack of rainfall, which leads to dry soil. Temperate grasslands can endure a wide range of extreme temperatures. Species that live here — such as bison, elk, burrowing owls and badgers — must be able to adapt to the dry, windy and barren landscape.

In Canada, grasslands include the vast prairies that stretch from Manitoba into Alberta. Large areas of grassland also occur in central British Columbia. Smaller pockets of prairie and savannah habitats can be found in Ontario and on western Vancouver Island.

WHY WE PROTECT THIS HABITAT

Globally, grasslands are threatened by continuing habitat loss, fragmentation and desertification. These impact both the variety of species that live here and the people who rely on healthy grasslands for their livelihood. More than 50 per cent of the world's temperate grasslands have been converted to crops and other land uses. Much of what remains is intensively grazed by livestock, which replaced what were once some of the planet's greatest concentrations of wild grazing animals, such as plains bison.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is working to protect grassland habitats across Canada. In Manitoba, we are protecting one of this country's most endangered ecosystems: the tall grass prairie. Today, the largest intact blocks of tall grass prairie in Canada occur in Manitoba's Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. Only 0.1 per cent of this habitat remains worldwide.

CONSERVATION NEEDS

NCC has secured more than 203,000 acres (82,189 hectares) of grasslands across Canada. There are several NCC natural areas that require urgent action now to protect and restore important grassland habitats. These include:

- Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area, BC
- Sandstone Ranch, Alberta
- Old Man on His Back Prairie and Heritage Conservation Area, Saskatchewan
- Tall Grass Prairie Preserve, Manitoba
- Rice Lake Plains, Ontario



Baird's sparrow (Photo by Rick Bohn)

5 FACTS ABOUT GRASSLANDS

- 1.** Over 60 Canadian species at risk depend on grassland prairie habitats in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, including species such as plains bison, swift fox and burrowing owl.
- 2.** More than half of Canada's population of endangered western prairie white-fringed orchid can be found at NCC's Tall Grass Prairie Preserve.
- 3.** Many grassland bird numbers are rapidly declining. Some, such as Baird's sparrow, Sprague's pipit and chestnut-collared longspur, have lost over 70 per cent of their population in the last 40 years.
- 4.** Grasslands are important for soil and water conservation, providing habitat for pollinators, flood control and climate regulation. They also play an important role in protecting the quality and security of drinking water for people living in Canada's prairie provinces.
- 5.** In 2008, the International Union for Conservation of Nature declared temperate grasslands as the world's most endangered ecosystem.




To learn more about this habitat type, visit natureconservancy.ca/grasslands.

NCC-PROTECTED GRASSLAND AREAS ACROSS CANADA

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The map below shows all of NCC's protected grassland areas across Canada, to date.

 NCC-protected grassland and prairie
Milieu de prairie protégé par CNC

