

Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative

FAQ



Q: What is the Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative?

A: The Initiative is a five-year collaboration to celebrate, steward and protect one of Canada's most ecologically valuable and threatened ecosystems. Nearly \$25M has been committed by the Weston Family Foundation to five organizations to accelerate the adoption of sustainable approaches to protect and restore our grasslands' biodiversity: Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Saskatchewan Stock Growers Foundation, Grasslands National Park (Parks Canada) and Meewasin Valley Authority. Each organization brings additional funding and in-kind donations for a total of \$70M going toward this collaboration over the next five years.

Q: What are the Canadian Prairie Grasslands and why are they so important to Canada's biodiversity?

A: Covering vast amounts of land in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, the Canadian Prairie Grasslands are defined by a variety of mixed grasslands, including shortgrass, mixed or midgrass, tallgrass, as well as aspen parklands. They are a unique and fragile landscape, containing globally significant and productive ecosystems critical for many at-risk species. Grasslands provide ecological services including carbon sequestration and pollination, and support a unique assemblage of wildlife adapted to the wide open spaces and native grasses. With large tracts of native grasslands still intact, there is an opportunity to have a significant impact on a landscape-scale, which is an important principle for effective biodiversity conservation. This area provides critical biodiversity to our country, and with conservation and sustainable stewardship efforts it can be protected for years to come.

Q: Why are prairie grasslands threatened?

A: With less than 25% of Canada's original grassland habitat remaining, the temperate grasslands in Canada represent one of the most endangered terrestrial ecozones on Earth. Canada's Prairie grassland habitat and biodiversity is threatened by a variety of factors including conversion to other uses, invasive non-native species and forest encroachment. Natural disturbance regimes that historically maintained the health of the grasslands have changed over time; in particular, the suppression of fire and near-extinction of free-ranging bison. As grazing is essential to grasslands' health, cattle ranching plays an important role in supporting the effective management of native grasslands by enhancing species diversity.



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The Weston Family Foundation invests in innovation and learning in Health and Landscapes that deliver measurable impacts to the well-being of Canadians

Photo: Jason Bantle

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FAQ



(Left) Grazing enhances species diversity in grassland ecosystems and is essential to its health. Photo: Kimberly Simpson

(Right) The burrowing owl is one of many endangered species inhabiting the Canadian prairie grasslands. Photo: Jason Bantle

Q: What species inhabit the Prairie Grasslands?

A: The Canadian prairie grasslands are home to hundreds of species uniquely adapted to this landscape including mammals, waterfowl, songbirds, amphibians, plants species and many grazing species. Grasslands provide habitat for the pollinators essential to a healthy ecosystem. They also support migratory birds travelling to and from breeding and overwintering grounds.

Q: How many acres of grasslands will be affected by the Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative?

A: Nearly four million acres will be affected by the work supported through this initiative.

Q: How were the five organizations selected for these grants?

A: The Weston Family Foundation invited a number of organizations to submit proposals to celebrate, steward and protect the Canadian prairie grasslands. Each proposal was reviewed by the Directors of the Foundation and a panel of independent advisors. Organizations were asked to include a variety of partners to ensure a holistic and multi-faceted approach for maximum impact.

Q: What activities are being supported through the Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative?

A: Some highlights of the projects include:

- Stewarding nearly four million acres of private and privately-managed (provincial community pasture) grasslands to improve species-at-risk habitat (e.g. Sprague's pipit and Greater sage-grouse), improve wildlife movement, manage invasive species, with the goal of achieving landscape-level impact on the biodiversity of this region.
- Protecting and improving approximately 75,000 acres of priority prairie grasslands habitat with permanent conservation easements and restoring 2,000 acres of native grassland habitat to support long-term ecological and economic sustainability.
- Researching the potential for a Canadian carbon sequestration market and best practices for restoration of native grasslands.



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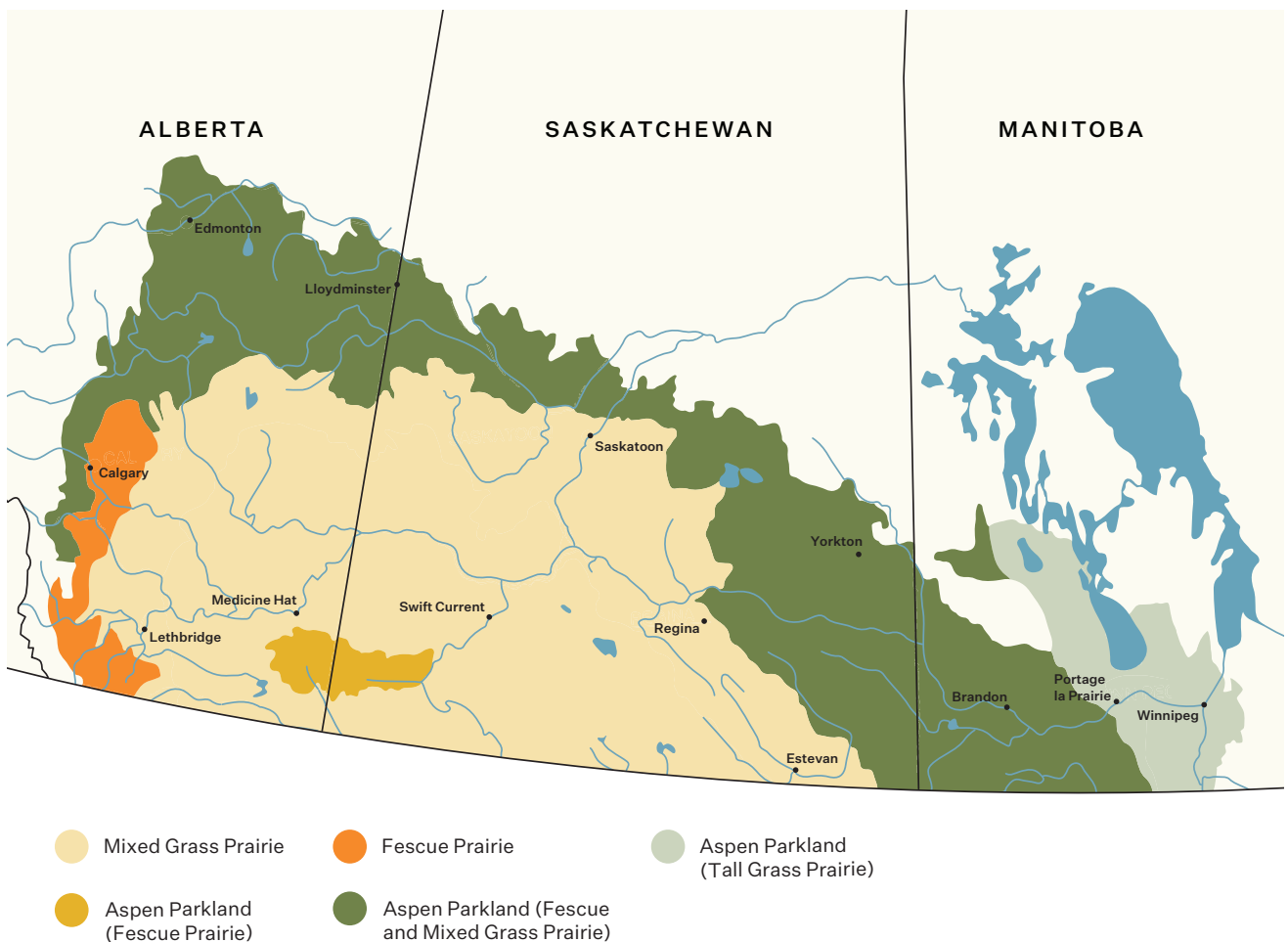
FAQ

- Building capacity and sharing knowledge on the use of prescribed fire grassland restoration with a collaborative that manages millions of acres of grasslands.
- Education and knowledge mobilization, addressing the economic concerns amongst agricultural groups and ranchers to build demand for a major increase in the number and coverage of conservation easements, thereby increasing the amount of basic land protection in prairie Canada.

Q: Will there be any more grants given through the Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative?

A: Nearly \$25M is already committed from the Foundation for this initiative and there are no plans to invite additional proposals at this time. However, because collaboration and partnerships are a key part of the initiative strategy, there may be opportunities for further grants in the coming years. We hope that support from other funders for the many organizations working in the prairie grasslands will help create further momentum toward the health of this unique and valuable Canadian landscape.

The Canadian Prairie Grasslands of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba



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