

NEWS RELEASE

October 23, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



**Grasslands Conservation Council
of British Columbia**

World Scientists Declare Grasslands Vital to Our Future

Today, as throughout history, temperate grasslands play an essential role in the survival and livelihoods of millions of people around the world. Grasslands provide agricultural goods, they support significant numbers of wildlife, including many species at risk, and increasingly, they are recognized as ecosystems that provide vital functions to society, such as by sequestering and storing carbon. In the face of global climate change and economic pressures to support local, sustainable agriculture, governments around the world are urged to heed the call of international experts to protect grasslands.

This urgent call to action arose from the July joint International Grassland and Rangeland Congress held in Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, China. A highlight of the Congress was the release of the Hohhot Declaration, in which grassland and rangeland experts appealed to governments at all levels to take action and stop the fragmentation, development and degradation of grasslands worldwide.

Temperate grasslands are under siege. They cover about 8 percent of the world's landmass but are considered one of the most altered and threatened ecosystems on the planet. In North America, only 20 percent of the natural grasslands in the central plains remain. British Columbia has lost over 20 percent of its historic natural grasslands, and those remaining are increasingly threatened by fragmentation and development.

The Hohhot Declaration was the result of a Canadian-led World Temperate Grasslands Conservation workshop organized by the Grasslands Task Force of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, in which participants from 14 countries on five continents began to forge a global conservation strategy for the world's temperate grasslands. "The outcome of this workshop is very powerful," says Bruno Delesalle, one of the participants and the Executive Director of the Grasslands Conservation Council of BC (GCC). "The message agreed to by consensus states that in the face of global climate change, governments and industry must recognize the important role grasslands play in supporting ecological, social and economic sustainability. We just can't afford to see them developed, degraded or lost." The Declaration clearly states that the global community must act quickly to ensure appropriate management and conservation of grassland resources and, in turn, the ecological goods and services they provide. "Grasslands are a vital part of our past, present and future."

The Congress itself had over 1,400 participants from around the world, including five representatives from BC. It enabled experts to share experiences and approaches to rangeland management and restoration, as well as to share results from the best science on grassland ecology, agronomy and resource management.

The grasslands of British Columbia share the same threats and dangers as grasslands around the world. In support of the Hohhot Declaration, the GCC Board of Directors passed a resolution on October 17, 2008, calling on the government of BC to take urgent action to ensure effective conservation and stewardship of the life-sustaining grasslands of the province.

--30--

For further information, please visit www.bcgrasslands.org or contact:

Bruno Delesalle, Executive Director
Grasslands Conservation Council of BC
Ph: 250-374-5787 Cell: 250-319-4058 Fax: 250-374-6287
bruno.delesalle@bcgrasslands.org