

PLANNING FOR CHANGE INITIATIVE

ANNUAL REPORT
APRIL 2008



Kamloops Subdivision – Photo by Cameron Carlyle



**Grasslands Conservation Council
of British Columbia**

954A Laval Crescent
Kamloops, British Columbia
V2C 5P5
www.bcgrasslands.org

FUNDING PARTNER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Grasslands Conservation Council of BC would like to recognize and thank the following organizations for their generous financial support of the *Planning for Change* initiative in 2007-2008:

VANCOUVER FOUNDATION



THE REAL ESTATE
FOUNDATION
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Tula
FOUNDATION



Ministry of
Agriculture & Lands



Ministry of
Forests & Range



Ministry of
Environment

Thank you for your support.

1. PROJECT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prioritized objectives from our recently completed *Mitigating the Fragmentation and Development of BC's Grasslands: Problem Analysis and Strategic Plan* identified collaborative efforts between government, key stakeholders and the GCC as the next step towards grasslands conservation. As a result, the GCC has begun the *Planning for Change* Initiative, which builds upon the recently completed provincial grassland GIS data in conjunction with the current *Priority Grasslands* Initiative to deliver a more comprehensive and targeted extension program to all levels of governments.

The *Planning for Change Initiative* will provide municipal, regional, provincial and First Nations' governments with the appropriate tools and information for planning in areas within, or adjacent to, grasslands, including mapping data and conservation strategies from the Priority Grasslands Initiative and tools such as the *Green Infrastructure and Sensitive Ecosystems Bylaws Toolkit*. Grassland portfolios with site specific descriptions are being developed and include priority grassland maps and documents that fully describe characteristics of each site (e.g. ecological importance and risks of development). Regional strategy documents will be developed that include targets and recommendations. The GCC firmly believes that the use of these tools will mitigate the loss of priority grasslands within and adjacent to grassland communities; as growth and development seem inevitable, the GCC will ensure that decision makers have as much information as possible when planning within and around grassland communities. The GCC also recognizes that it is important to develop relationships and feedback loops between the staff, politicians and the GCC to continually affect change. This will be accomplished through workshops held regionally in grassland areas and relationship building between government and the GCC.

2. ISSUE

British Columbia's grassland communities currently lack the information and appropriate tools to stop the fragmentation and development of grasslands and to achieve effective conservation of these endangered ecosystems. Grasslands are a small but significant component of BC's natural landscape; in fact, BC's grasslands are considered one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems. Although they represent less than 0.8 percent of the province's land base, they provide habitat for over 30 percent of BC's species at risk, and provide critical wintering habitat for ungulate species. As well, the grasslands are a significant forage base for BC's ranching industry.

A variety of factors, such as urban expansion, development, habitat fragmentation, agricultural conversion, abusive recreation, inappropriate land management practices, invasive plants and forest encroachment, are threatening grasslands. The loss and degradation of wildlife habitat is proceeding at an unprecedented rate in the grasslands of the East Kootenay Trench, the Okanagan Valley, the Thompson Basin, and the Cariboo. The once extensive meadow-steppe grasslands of the North Okanagan – considered by some to be the only valley bottom occurrence of this community in Canada – have been reduced to a fraction of their historic range.

Throughout the province, agricultural conversion and urban expansion alone have eliminated over 50 percent of this rare and unique grassland community, and thousands more hectares are being lost to development and encroachment every year. Without appropriate information, effective tools, collaborative action and partnerships between government (provincial, regional, local), First Nations, industry and conservation organizations, this irrevocable trend will continue.

3. PROJECT GOALS & OBJECTIVE

The goals of this project are to:

1. Prevent further loss of priority grassland areas to urban encroachment and development;
2. Provide municipal, regional, provincial and First Nations' governments with the appropriate tools and information for planning in areas within, or adjacent to, grasslands; and
3. Build a working relationship with local and First Nations' governments.

The objectives of this project are to:

1. Establish a three-year extension plan to work on the ground with planners and decision-makers at the provincial, regional, local and First Nations level for all four regions (including the whole central and South Okanagan, Cariboo and East Kootenay Trench). The plan will include a priority list of agency departments, personnel, regional districts and cities to target over a three year period;
2. Plan and coordinate a series of workshops and/or meetings within each region to increase awareness about priority grasslands, key regional issues, conservation targets, recommendations, data and land use planning tools available to assist in the conservation of priority grasslands;
3. Extend and present regional strategy documents to key stakeholders in each region, including, but not limited to: Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Agriculture and Lands; Regional Districts; Ministry of Forests and Range; Municipal planning departments and councils; First Nations planning departments and councils; Agriculture Land Commission; and non-government organizations; and
4. Work with the Agricultural Land Commission to define grassland conservation issues on a provincial scale, and to forge a partnership and process to establish solutions to mitigate fragmentation and development of grasslands.

4. PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES 2007-2008

1. Maintained and continued building a relationship with the City of Vernon and the Regional District of North Okanagan.
2. Held workshop for Thompson-Nicola. Invited planners, planning staff and elected officials from the Thompson-Nicola Regional District and the municipalities contained within. Participants were given a presentation on the importance of grasslands in BC and their region, as well as on GCC's Priority Grasslands Initiative and how it would benefit their agencies. Participants were also given a presentation on various planning tools, including the Green Bylaws Toolkit, by Deborah Curran. Participants were provided with a Toolkit outlining various tools for planning around sensitive ecosystems as well as sample priority grassland portfolios. After the presentations, participants were divided

into groups to answer questions and provoke discussion on grassland conservation. An “hourglass” approach was used, where participants begin broad, get into finer detail, then come together as a group and discuss the issues. A Workshop Final Report is attached. Participants were very engaged and the feedback was excellent, with commitments from the various governments to include the GCC in future Official Community Plans and Regional Growth Strategy processes. The GCC, through the Priority Grasslands Initiative, is currently working to identify the priority grasslands within the North Okanagan and Thompson Nicola Regional Districts, and is preparing portfolios containing conservation targets and conservation recommendations. This information will be extended to the planning departments once it is complete. The outcome of this workshop was a strengthened relationship with the City of Kamloops and the completion of *An Ecological Assessment for the Aberdeen Area Plan*, a comprehensive ecological assessment including mapping, species lists and land-use recommendations for an area slated for development. This project was a pilot project and has given the GCC the capacity to complete these detailed ecological assessments for any grassland community. These will assist urban planning departments by: identifying priority grasslands and key ecological features by priority ranking, delineating conservation and sustainable development zones, and assisting city planners and developers to make informed trade-offs based on land use recommendations provided by the GCC and its partners. This will enable to GCC to encouraging and facilitate sustainable, healthy communities with a clear vision for grassland conservation and stewardship. Held symposium in June 2007 focusing on the Planning for Change initiative. Presented on the workshops in a concurrent session (see Planning for Change Symposium reporting for more information). Session was well attended and well reviewed.

3. Based on need and support from the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, a workshop was held in Penticton November 28th, 2007. A presentation was made on October 18th, 2007 to the RDOS corporate board that was very well received, with official support from the RDOS board for the workshops and continuing work with the regional district. The workshop was well attended and included members of the Advisory Planning Councils from the regional district.
4. An outcome from workshops is the need to value grasslands for natural capital and ecological goods and services. The GCC will be addressing this over the next three years.
5. The Green Bylaws Toolkit was officially released in November 2007; the GCC is becoming an official partner of the Wetland Stewardship Partnership and will participate and support the roll-out of the Toolkit in grassland communities. Ducks Unlimited Canada will partner with the GCC on the Cariboo and East Kootenay workshops to improve effectiveness of the message and further promote the Toolkit as an important component of sensitive ecosystem conservation.
6. The Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program was officially launched in May 2007, and the GCC has a spot on the steering committee.
7. The Conservation Covenant working group, after much discussion and waiting for decisions from the Agricultural Land Commission, has decided to work with the BC Trust for Public Lands and to have them lead the process in finding methods to conserve lands in perpetuity on Agricultural Land Reserve lands.

5. COMMUNICATION AND EXTENSION OF PROJECT

- Discussion at 2007 GCC Annual General Meeting
- Information-sharing with the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program
- Information-sharing with the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program's Land Use Planning Team
- Presentation to Planning Institute of BC at annual workshop field tour
- Concurrent session speaker at the Canadian Land Trust Alliance Conference in October 2007, speaking on topic of working with local governments to conserve sensitive ecosystems
- Presentation to Kamloops City Council (televised, with media present)
- Presentation to Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen corporate board
- Article in the Kamloops Daily News on workshop
- Article in the Williams Lake Tribune
- Article in Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 BC Grasslands magazine
- Information packages to Cariboo Regional District Board members
- Page on the www.bcgrasslands.org website.

6. FUTURE STEPS (April 2008-March 2009)

Planning for Change Workshops

- 1) Deliver targeted communications to local communities in the East Kootenay and Cariboo regions prior to delivery of workshops, including presentations to municipal councils and regional district boards, on the importance of grasslands to each community/region, and how the workshop will assist their governments to conserve them;
- 2) Plan, coordinate and deliver two Planning for Change workshops with necessary planning meetings for the Cariboo and East Kootenay regions. The workshop will include an overview of the *Green Bylaws Toolkit*, Develop with Care guidelines and other available guides, information on regional growth strategies and official community plans, as well as priority grassland mapping and data, and other tools for conservation and stewardship. Workshops will be delivered in collaboration with partners;
- 3) Deliver targeted communication to the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council and First Nation bands prior to planning of workshop. This may include a presentation to council on the importance of grasslands to First Nations communities, and how the workshop will assist their government to conserve them;
- 4) Plan, coordinate and deliver one Planning for Change workshop with Shuswap Nation Tribal Council and its member communities and all necessary planning groups within this region. This process will yield a revised model for the Planning for Change workshop and extension to First Nations communities. Workshops will be delivered in collaboration with partners.
- 5) Continue building collaborative partnerships with North and South Okanagan municipalities and regional districts, as well as the City of Kamloops and the Thompson-Nicola Regional District by providing planning departments with completed priority grasslands information. A follow-up meeting and extension of additional information is required for a select list of cities and regional districts, and momentum has been gained with the City of Kamloops Aberdeen Grasslands project.

Ecological Assessments

- 1) Complete detailed ecological assessments as necessary for high priority grasslands sites that are at risk to development or conversion (see Kamloops project: *An Ecological Assessment for the Aberdeen Area Plan*);

Green Bylaws Toolkit

- 1) Coordinate with the Wetland Stewardship Partnership to provide planning departments with a copy of the *Green Bylaws Toolkit*;

Natural Capital and Ecological Goods and Services

- 1) Plan strategic meeting(s) and think-tank session in collaboration with The Bullitt Foundation, Smart Growth BC, The Sonoran Institute and other key partners to explore innovative and effective incentive programs for conservation of grasslands and their ecological goods and services (making stewardship a viable and affordable land use option); and
- 2) Work with the provincial and federal government, industry and academic institutions to develop Terms of Reference and retain consultant/researcher to assist with background research and establish recommendations for framework for full cost accounting of natural capital and ecological goods and services provided by grasslands (provincial committee established to over see project).

Communications and Outreach

- 1) Attend community events (trade shows, conferences, exhibitions, etc.) with GCC display and materials for *Planning for Change* and *Priority Grassland Initiative*;
- 2) Publish articles in the GCC magazine, *BC Grasslands*;
- 3) Collaborate with local media to profile the importance of grasslands within each community; and
- 4) Provide information on the GCC website, www.bcgrasslands.org, including documents, presentations and general information pertaining to grasslands and the *Planning for Change* and *Priority Grasslands* Initiatives.

7. PARTNERSHIPS

The following organizations are engaged in this project through participation in the workshop committee, the Green Bylaws Toolkit and the discussions with the Agricultural Land Commission:

- Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program
- South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program
- East Kootenay Conservation Program
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Wetland Stewardship Partnership
- Environment Canada
- Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia
- Ministry of Environment
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- The Land Conservancy of British Columbia
- The Nature Trust of British Columbia

8. FINANCIAL REPORT

Please see attached Financial Report to March 31, 2008.

9. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- Final Report: North Okanagan and Thompson Nicola Planning for Change Workshops
- Planning for Change Workshop Toolkit and Agenda
- Green Bylaws Toolkit (available at www.greenbylaws.ca)
- An Ecological Assessment for the Aberdeen Area Plan (available at www.bcgrasslands.org/)