

**ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEY OF GRASSLAND
SPECIES-AT-RISK CONSERVATION GROUPS**

by
Don Gayton, M.Sc, P.Ag
Ecologist, FORREX
June, 2009



Introduction

The grasslands of British Columbia, although small in extent, are very rich in overall biodiversity and in the concentration of species at risk. Various agencies and groups have recognized this, and have created regional multi-agency, partnership-style organizations to employ a multi-species, habitat-oriented approach to the recovery of grassland (and, in the case of the Garry Oak team, meadowland) species at risk.

There are important grassland regions of the Province which do not have such organizations, specifically, the Merritt, Kamloops and Williams Lake regions. In a series of meetings conducted in early 2009 by FORREX, the BC Grasslands Conservation Council and the Ministry of Environment, individuals from these areas expressed interest in knowing how the existing organizations function. Don Gayton of FORREX agreed to undertake an informal organizational survey of the five existing grassland species at risk organizations. The purpose of this survey was to assist the unrepresented regions in deciding whether the creation of a regional, multi-species at risk organization is the right course of action. If it is determined that such an organization would be feasible and useful, then the survey should provide local organizers with some useful background on the goals, history and organizational structure of the existing organizations.

The Organizations

The five organizations that were surveyed are listed below, along with their goal statements (taken from their respective websites). The url to each website's organization is also listed, and contact information can be found on the websites.

South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP—based in Penticton)

“Program aims to maintain the rich biodiversity of the area, including species at risk, and a viable ecological corridor between the deserts to the south and the grasslands to the north. The Program will expand community involvement, promote ecologically sustainable land use, enhance stewardship on private and Crown land, and negotiate acquisition of key habitats. The Program will also seek strong community support and involvement to help find a balance between wildlife requirements and human needs and aspirations.”

www.soscp.org

East Kootenay Conservation Program (EKCP—based in Invermere)

“The EKCP is a partnership of 47 conservation, industry and government organizations dedicated to conserving natural areas for Kootenay communities. The EKCP vision is to have landscapes in the Kootenays that sustain naturally functioning ecosystems that can in turn support economic and social well being. We envision vibrant communities that demonstrate the principles of environmental stewardship for future generations. Networking helps us to find win-win approaches to ecosystem conservation and stewardship on private and adjacent Crown lands.”

www.ekcp.ca

Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT—based in Victoria)

“The GOERT is a non-profit organization dedicated to the recovery of Garry oak and associated ecosystems in Canada and the species at risk that inhabit them. The team was formed in 1999 as a comprehensive partnership of experts affiliated with all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, First Nations, volunteers and consultants, and was incorporated in B.C. as a non-profit society in August 2007.”

www.goert.ca

Alberta Multiple Species at Risk Project (MULTISAR—based in Lethbridge, Alberta)

“Vision: Multiple species of wildlife, including Species at Risk, are effectively conserved at the landscape level, through a process that integrates land use management with fish and wildlife management principles, and in a manner that may contribute to the species and habitat recovery and to the sustainability of the rural economy. Mission: To develop and implement the MULTISAR process which directs conservation of multiple species (including species at risk) and their habitat within the Grassland Natural Region of Alberta. Three program areas: Habitat Conservation Program; Education, Outreach and Awareness, and Research.”

www.MULTISAR.ca

Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program (OCCP—based in Vernon)

“To ensure that the Okanagan landscape sustains biological diversity and ecological processes while supporting a **sustainable community** for many generations; and to coordinate and facilitate conservation and stewardship efforts on public and private lands, set conservation and stewardship goals and objectives, and generate the support and resources needed to maintain this effort. Goals: integrate knowledge and decision-making for ecological planning; achieve conservation through communication; provide quality and successful service.”

www.bcgrasslands.org/occp.htm

The Survey Questions, and Responses

1. When and why was your organization initiated?

Organization	Response
GOERT	We started in 1998-99, at a colloquium on Garry Oak Ecosystems at UVic. At that meeting we realized the need for an ecosystem-based organization.
MULTISAR	We started in 2002, following a Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) meeting. HSP suggested the multiple species approach because of the many endangered grassland species, and the large tracts of land held by ranchers. MULTISAR itself started in 2003.
OCCP	We began formally in 2009, following two years of discussions. We got started because the participants recognized the need for cooperation.
EKCP	We started officially in 2002, based on a meeting in 2001. EKCP evolved organically, based on the realization that a lot of conservation entities were operating in the area, and positive synergies would come from a coordinated approach.
SOSCP	Created in 2000; originally 19 partners. A long history of conservation work and conservation organizations here, plus the concentration of rare species and ecosystems here, and the risks. Genetic resilience for the future. Organizations literally tripping over each other; coordination and collaboration essential, plus leverage and combining of resources. Plus a more strategic approach

2. Your objectives were taken from your website. Have they changed significantly since your organization was created?

Organization	Response
GOERT	Our Objectives have stayed more or less the same. We created an initial five year plan, and are currently writing a new five-year plan.
MULTISAR	We are working on a new 5-year business plan, but there are no significant changes to our Objectives. We will be increasing the monitoring component; early on it was mostly baseline data collection and core program work.
OCCP	Some changes.
EKCP	No significant changes, just a bit of wordsmithing.
SOSCP	Objectives remained the same, but focus has changed, from synergy to the need to actually deliver on real projects. Moved beyond mere communication and coordination into project delivery.

3. Who were the main partners or supporters when the organization was created? Has that changed over time?

Organization	Response
GOERT	We started as an unincorporated group, sponsored by the Nature Conservancy. We have now established our own non-profit society and are in the process of applying for federal charitable society status.
MULTISAR	Our lead partners are Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (Lands Division and Fish and Wildlife Division), Alberta Conservation Association (ACA), and Prairie Conservation Forum (PCF is a consortium of govt, NGOs, corporations etc interested in conservation in the prairies).
OCCP	BC Grasslands Conservation Council. Yes; we are more involved with local governments now.
EKCP	The partners have not changed substantially over time. They include municipal, provincial and federal governments, K'tunaxa Nation, Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Nature Trust, The Land Conservancy, Columbia Basin Trust, Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program and Wildsight, plus representatives from livestock producers, rod and gun clubs and naturalist clubs.
SOSCP	Environment Canada, MOE, The Nature Trust, Nature Conservancy, OSCA, CPAWS were some of the main founding partners. Local governments are now more strongly represented. Lots of difficulties engaging First Nations partners.

4. What is the geographical scope of your organization? Are its boundaries geographic, or by ecosystem? Does it address Provincial, Federal, private, and/or Indian Reserve land?

Organization	Response
GOERT	GOERT's geographical extent covers the Garry oak ecosystem boundaries; we program to all types of land tenure.
MULTISAR	Our core work area is the Pakowki Lake Basin, St Marys River basin and the Milk River Basin. Our extension program covers whole grassland natural region of Alberta. We work on both Provincial Crown and private land.
OCCP	Our boundaries are Regional District of Central Okanagan plus the Regional District of North Okanagan, but we are mainly focused in the valley bottoms in the southern part of the area. We work mainly on private land, working through the various local governments.
EKCP	The Rocky Mountain Trench (Golden to the US Border), plus the Elk Valley. However, our securement team services entire Columbia Basin. We focus on private land conservation issues, but do integrate with other tenures.
SOSCP	Boundaries are roughly the same as that of the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen. Intention is to work on the whole landscape, but most of the work has been focused on private lands on valley bottom habitats, and a bit on low elevation Crown lands. Not much work on Reserves.

5. Describe the type of organization; ie, is it a non-profit, an informal partnership, a branch of government, etc? Do you have individual memberships, or strictly organizational memberships?

Organization	Response
GOERT	In 2007 GOERT registered as nonprofit, and applied for charitable status, which is currently pending. GOERT Society currently has 50-60 individual members. Approximately 80 organizations and individual stakeholders are represented on the Recovery Team.
MULTISAR	MULTISAR is a project-based collaborative. ACA and PCF do fundraising. Our budgets are held by a senior partner agency. Alberta Fish and Wildlife handles staffing issues. We have a Management Advisory Committee (MAC) with members from all three stakeholder organizations.
OCCP	We have a set of governing documents that link us to a registered charity. We have a Statement of Cooperation signed by members. Decisions are made by a steering committee. We only have corporate memberships.
EKCP	We are an umbrella organization. Any funding applications we make have to go through one of our registered partners. Our Steering Committee provides governance. We only have corporate memberships.
SOSCP	SOSCP is an umbrella initiative. No individual members; all corporate. Partners did not want SOSCP to become another competing entity. Decisions made by Committee of the Whole (Steering Committee), which has an Executive Committee, with one rep from each Committee, past vice and current chair, and two members at large. Meets every two months

6. Does your organization have internal committees? If so, what are their tasks?

Organization	Response
GOERT	Committee structure: the Recovery Team is the professional/scientific group; the Board of Directors oversees the Society and handles funding, administrative and staff issues. Seven RIGS (recovery implementation groups) report to the Team; they are Plants, Vertebrates, Invertebrates, Conservation Planning, Restoration and Management, Research, Inventory and Mapping.
MULTISAR	The Management Advisory Committee directs the activities of the staff which do the project work.
OCCP	We have a steering committee that deals with finances and contracts, and we have action teams, which act as committees but are project-based.
EKCP	We have a Steering Committee, a Land Securement Team and a Stewardship Team.
SOSCP	Traditional Ecological Team, Science Team, Land Use Planning Team, Securement and Acquisitions Team, Stewardship Team, and Outreach Team.

7. How do you communicate with your members/partners?

Organization	Response
GOERT	Through the website, annual reports etc.
MULTISAR	We communicate through an education and awareness program, targetting landowners, youth and general public. And we keep our website up to date.
OCCP	We communicate through periodic meetings and an Annual Meeting. We are in the process of developing formal meeting routines for the steering committee and action committees. Our communication with members is via telephone and email.
EKCP	We have an Annual Meeting, with a focal topic, and we send email updates to members about once a month. We also communicate regularly through our website, emails and telephone conversations.
SOSCP	Listserv newsletter goes out roughly once a month 46 reps plus their alternates.

8. Do you have paid staff? If so, how many?

Organization	Response
GOERT	We have a paid staff of five to seven people.
MULTISAR	We have 7-8 paid staff
OCCP	We have one paid coordinator, and occasionally engage people on short-term contract.
EKCP	We have one paid Program Manager. We don't generally handle contracts. Our GIS work is done by the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program.
SOSCP	One paid staff, plus occasional communications work on contract. Fall AGM plus spring meeting.

9. In general terms, how is your organization funded?

Organization	Response
GOERT	Our funding is a mix of federal and provincial and foundation funding, plus some small private donations.
MULTISAR	Most of our operational funding comes from three ENGOs.
OCCP	We work on grants from provincial and federal governments, and private foundation money (about 50:50 government: foundation). We are hoping to get local govt. funding in the future.
EKCP	A combination of federal government funding and grant money.
SOSCP	Supposed to be funded by the Partners, but currently more than 50% comes from the Real Estate Foundation, some from Federal Govt, and a small amount from partner organizations.

10. What are the most significant achievements of your organization?

Organization	Response
GOERT	The species at risk recovery planning, our ecosystem-based strategy, and the development and implementation of our landowner contact program. Also, the collaborative and coordinated efforts toward Garry oak ecosystem and species at risk recovery in our area.
MULTISAR	Our achievements: a very collaborative, integrated approach. Integrated in terms of various disciplines involved in project, as well as integrated into fish and wildlife and range, oil and gas, other land use and ecosystem issues. We have created conservation strategies for nine individual ranches, some up to 40,000 acres in size.
OCCP	The Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory that we initiated. We are working with local governments to incorporate the SEI information into their planning processes. We were also able to make a positive contribution to the recently completed Vernon Official Community Plan.
EKCP	Our newly created Local Conservation Fund; our community and stewardship work; and our land securement work. Our Partners have secured 86,000 hectares of private lands for conservation.
SOSCP	Science-based direction of priorities. Leveraging resources to acquire private conservation lands. Close to 50,000 acres. Reducing overlap and competition for resources, eliminating multiple private landowner contacts. Legitimized the approach to conservation in this region.

11. Looking back on your organization's development, are there things you would do differently?

Organization	Response
GOERT	Don't see anything we would change; the recovery team has been quite successful. In hindsight, the transition from a partnership to a society would have been smoother if more time and resources were allocated to planning and facilitating the transition. In our experience, having a collaborative, consensus-based grassroots approach has been really critical, as was spending the time to develop a thorough ecosystem-based guiding strategy with a coarse filter/fine filter approach.
MULTISAR	Involve outside organizations earlier on in the process of establishing MULTISAR.
OCCP	Define the organizational and governance structures relative to financing formally early on, so that contract work goes smoothly.
EKCP	No changes.
SOSCP	Every organization has a life cycle; would have been good to have a plan for those changes over time. Multiple Team format has created silos and segregation.

12. Do you have any advice for a new organization?

Organization	Response
GOERT	Make sure to bring in all stakeholders and partners early on; it is time consuming but very important. Develop a guiding strategy and stick to it; review and adapt it when needed.
MULTISAR	Communicate, and establish a trust relationship with landowners and people with interest in the land.
OCCP	Focus on what is strategically necessary to promote conservation; avoid creating too many semi-permanent committees; formalize financial administration processes early on.
EKCP	Studiously avoid creating plans for and directing the actions of your partners. Focus on the coordination/facilitation role.
SOSCP	Don't ask the partners to fund the program. Let the organization become more than a simple coordinating body; let it seek its own funding and deliver its own programs.