

OUR LEGACY — OUR FUTURE

GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION COUNCIL | Strong support helps protect what makes Kamloops special

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Last year was a difficult year for everybody. Like the for-profit sector, non-profit organizations suffered tremendous funding setbacks that resulted in many having to close their doors. The Grasslands Conservation Council of B.C. (GCC) was not immune; government funding was cut, foundations were not granting and people were not donating. Luckily, the GCC has a strong support base — much of it here in Kamloops — and through the hard work and dedication of its former executive director, Bruno Delesalle, it was able to forge ahead with support from partners.

Although the GCC is a provincially based organization, it is located in Kamloops. Seven of the eight staff members live here, as do four of 17 board members.

Kamloops was chosen as the location for the GCC because it is surrounded by one of the rarest ecosystems in the world, one with a disproportionate number of species at risk, and one that we're trying to conserve.

The ecosystem in which Kamloops is situated in is a large part of what makes Kamloops an amazing place to live. The landscape is incredible; silty bluffs rise high, the grassland flowers are brilliant in spring, and the dormant grasses in late summer create a sea of gold that waves in the wind.

A drive along Ord Road can bring sightings of bighorn sheep and deer on the hillside, a rare glimpse of an endangered rattlesnake near the road and, for those with keen eyes, a tremendous variety of songbirds and raptors.

The arid climate gives four beautiful, perfect seasons: warm summers, long, dry autumns, winters mild and dry enough to allow people to enjoy the outdoors, and spring that sees the entire area awash in a vibrant green hue.

The landscape provides us with world-renowned mountain biking opportunities, incredible hiking and allows us to have bighorn sheep quite literally in our backyards.

Who wouldn't want to live here? Trouble is, not everyone appreciates our grasslands.

Exploring this landscape is exciting, whether it be on foot, bicy-

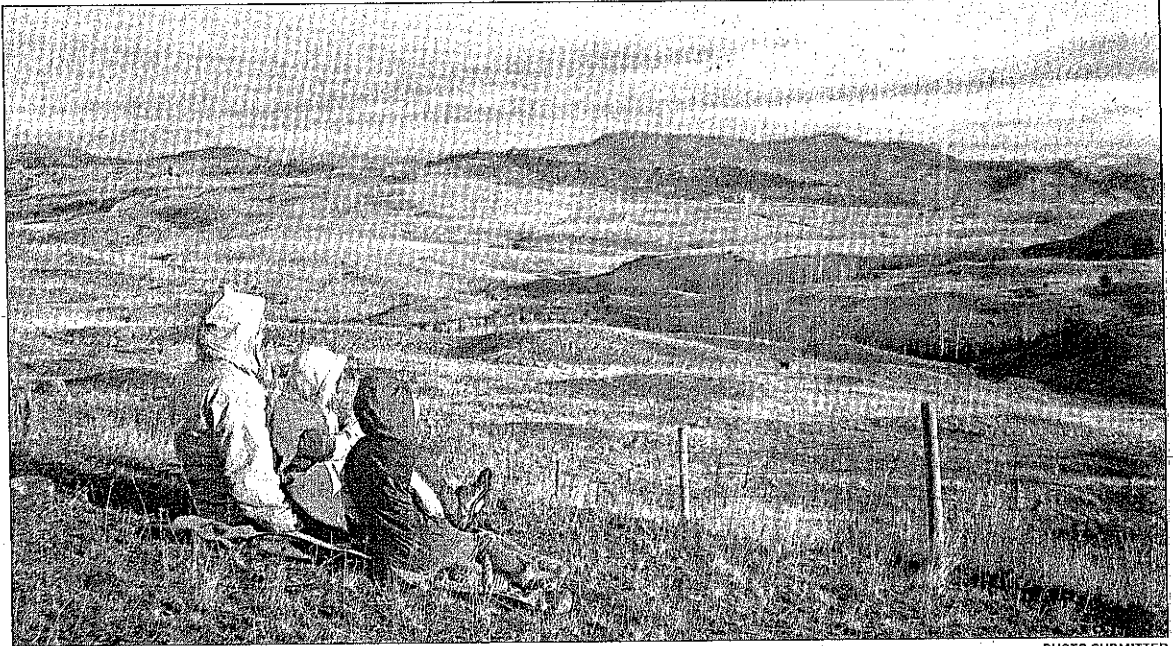


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THE GRASSLANDS surrounding Kamloops are home to a number of endangered species and are under threat due to recreation and development.

cle, ATV or dirtbike. Hundreds of people recreate these ways in our grasslands every day, however not everyone is responsible.

ATVs, dirt bikes and mountain bikes tear up the delicate soils and sensitive plants when they leave established trails or enter areas where they are prohibited. Despite there being designated and open areas for these activities, people still trespass into areas they are not allowed and do significant damage to private land, parkland and rangeland.

Many people simply do not understand the fragile nature of these ecosystems — one pass with an ATV can erode the soils, establish invasive plants and scar the landscape for years.

Another big issue is that of dumping and vandalism.

You only have to take a drive along the Lac du Bois road to see dumped mattresses, ovens, car batteries and burned cars. Several years ago, the GCC fundraised and put up several beautiful information signs at the entrance to Lac du Bois, only to be forced to remove them in 2008 due to extreme vandalism.

One of the biggest issues is that of loss to urban and rural sprawl.

Developers see grasslands as prime real estate: silty soils are

easy to dig up, access is generally easy and the vistas provided are a great selling feature.

Low-elevation grasslands have flat benches with few or no trees on them to get in the way. Often, little thought is given to the many endangered species that are disrupted or destroyed by the loss of the habitat they require to survive.

But winds are changing and, thanks to support from the people of Kamloops, we are making great strides.

Last year, more than 30 community groups, companies and government agencies, including the GCC, planned the Friends of Lac du Bois Trash Bash. Much to our surprise and delight, over 300 volunteers showed up and removed over eight tons of illegally dumped trash in six dump truck loads with 1-800-GOT-JUNK.

Prior to that, Argo Road Maintenance and Twin Valley Contracting collectively removed more than 200 tons of trash from the grasslands.

The GCC has also been working with local groups, such as ATV/BC, the Greater Kamloops Motorcycle Association and several members of the mountain bike community over the years to ad-

dress the issues of abusive recreation in grasslands. Strong partnerships have been formed, and these groups have been excellent stewards, encouraging fellow riders to be respectful when on our grasslands; stay on established trails, don't disturb wildlife, leave fences and gates as you find them and respect private land.

But if you have flown into Kamloops over the grasslands, you will see that message still has a lot of people to reach. New off-road vehicle legislation, announced by Kamloops MLA Kevin Krueger, will hopefully enable tougher rules for these people.

The GCC has been working proactively with the City of Kamloops over the last three years to identify critical areas for conservation and areas of trade-off for development that will impact grasslands the least.

The City has been receptive and is creating Development Permit Areas for environmentally sensitive regions, requiring developers to take extra precautions to ensure their development has as little impact on the ecosystem as possible.

Most recently, the GCC has been working with a group of concerned partners on creating a region-wide partnership to col-

laborate on land management and stewardship issues for this unique and special place we call home.

The GCC, along with FORREX, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District and the Ministry of Environment, have been looking to the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program, the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program and the East Kootenay Conservation Program for a template to create a collaborative group of partners that can undertake some strategic actions to conserve the ecosystems within our region through stewardship and outreach.

The GCC encourages the people of Kamloops and surrounding area to get to know your grasslands, understand what makes them so special and unique, appreciate how lucky you are to live in one of the rarest ecosystems in the world, and understand how to treat it so it can be enjoyed by your kids, grandkids and their kids and grandkids.

As a registered charity, the GCC relies on donations to finance its activities and has begun an endowment fund to support current and future conservation efforts.

For more information, please visit www.bcgrasslands.org.