

**- Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan (SK PCAP) -
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“Networking - the informal sharing of information among individuals linked by a common interest.” Many of us attend meetings of personal interest or on behalf of an organization and upon returning home or to the office, many of us are also greeted with “so, what did you learn?” Truth be known, sometimes it is very little. That is the black and white side of meetings, the formal agenda which everyone can read. Those questioning you are looking for the short term gain: was it worth going?

Networking is the grey side of going to meetings. Sometimes by chance or sometimes as planned, it is making contacts, whether it be through the exchange of a business card or the sharing of a drink over supper, that allows you to get to know individuals who have the same common interest as you. There may be no immediate gain. There may never be a gain. But this contact made may become significant in the future. The grey side of meetings sometimes becomes more significant than the black and white side. Some meetings now schedule networking time, basically a long coffee break.

I am realizing that just as an individual networks, an organization also networks. We had an interesting coincidence occur this July. Krista Connick Todd, with the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, contacted me about bringing some visitors out to see our ranch. The principal visitor was Dr. Gustavo Marino from Aves Argentina who was on a tour of North American grasslands. Also along on the tour were Dan Svingen and Jake Powell from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in North Dakota. The common interest between the three individuals...birds. The main intent of Dr. Marino’s visit to North America was to look at ideas of how to encourage grassland managers in Argentina to manage for birds, as many of our grassland birds here in North America winter in South America. A friendly debate ensued between Gustavo and Dan as to whether they are our North American birds or their South American birds.

Our ranch is not managed for the birds but our grassland management is complimentary to the birds. A bird identification survey done on our ranch in May 2006 found over 80 different species. My brother, Angus, and I hardly know a quarter of them, but as grass managers we are earning our livelihood from the land, all the while the birds seem to flourish. I believe that by having Krista tour Dr. Marino around our ranch, some PFRA pastures, Eric & Ann Lawrence’s ranch and Neil Block’s ranch, it became obvious that bird protection does not have to be regulated but can be accomplished by having sustainable agriculture, providing a complimentary habitat.

The coincidence of this story lies in the fact that unbeknownst to Krista or myself, while we were making a contact with Dr. Marino, Michelle Yaskowich, the PCAP Manager, was in the process of making contact with Dr. Marino’s partner organization, the Alliance for the Grasslands – Initiative for the Conservation of the South American Southern Cone Grasslands, in Argentina to liaison with PCAP as both organizations have a common interest of grassland conservation and management. As an alliance is formed, the grey is becoming black and white.

For more information on PCAP, please visit our website at www.pcap-sk.org or contact the PCAP Office at (306) 352-0472 or pcap@sasktel.net.

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