



Saskatchewan  
Prairie Conservation  
Action Plan

Public Awareness of  
Saskatchewan's Native Prairie  
and Ecological Goods and  
Services

**Acknowledgement:**

*Funding for this project has been provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP). In Saskatchewan, this program is delivered by the Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan.*



Agriculture and  
Agri-Food Canada

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Agroalimentaire Canada

### The Background:

In 2014, SK PCAP and its partners will create a new five-year planning framework, revisiting and renewing its priorities for native prairie conservation in Saskatchewan. At an initial planning meeting in fall of 2013, many partners voiced concerns about the awareness of prairie conservation among Saskatchewan’s general public, and specifically expressed concern regarding the lack of awareness of ecosystem services provided by native prairie and the ranchers that steward this important natural resource.

### The Problem:

Within Saskatchewan’s agricultural and conservation communities, a lot of attention has been given to the concept of ecological goods and services (EGS) programming, yet the concept had not been examined at the consumer or public level. There was a lack of benchmark information on public perception of native prairie and the ecosystem services it provides within Saskatchewan. Without a baseline, it would be challenging for SK PCAP and partners to establish meaningful prairie conservation targets, and effectively support its partners’ and stakeholders’ efforts, including ecological goods and services programming.

### The Opportunity:

An opportunity arose for SK PCAP to develop and execute a public awareness survey with Inshgtrix Research Inc. A survey was developed and distributed randomly to Saskatchewan panelists to help quantify an average Saskatchewan person’s understanding of native prairie conservation and ecosystem services, as well as additional questions identifying their familiarity with known native prairie locations, perceived threats and risks to native prairie, and others. The results may serve as a benchmark, and as the survey was designed to be repeatable, SK PCAP or its partners may choose to carry out similar surveys in the future, tracking changes.

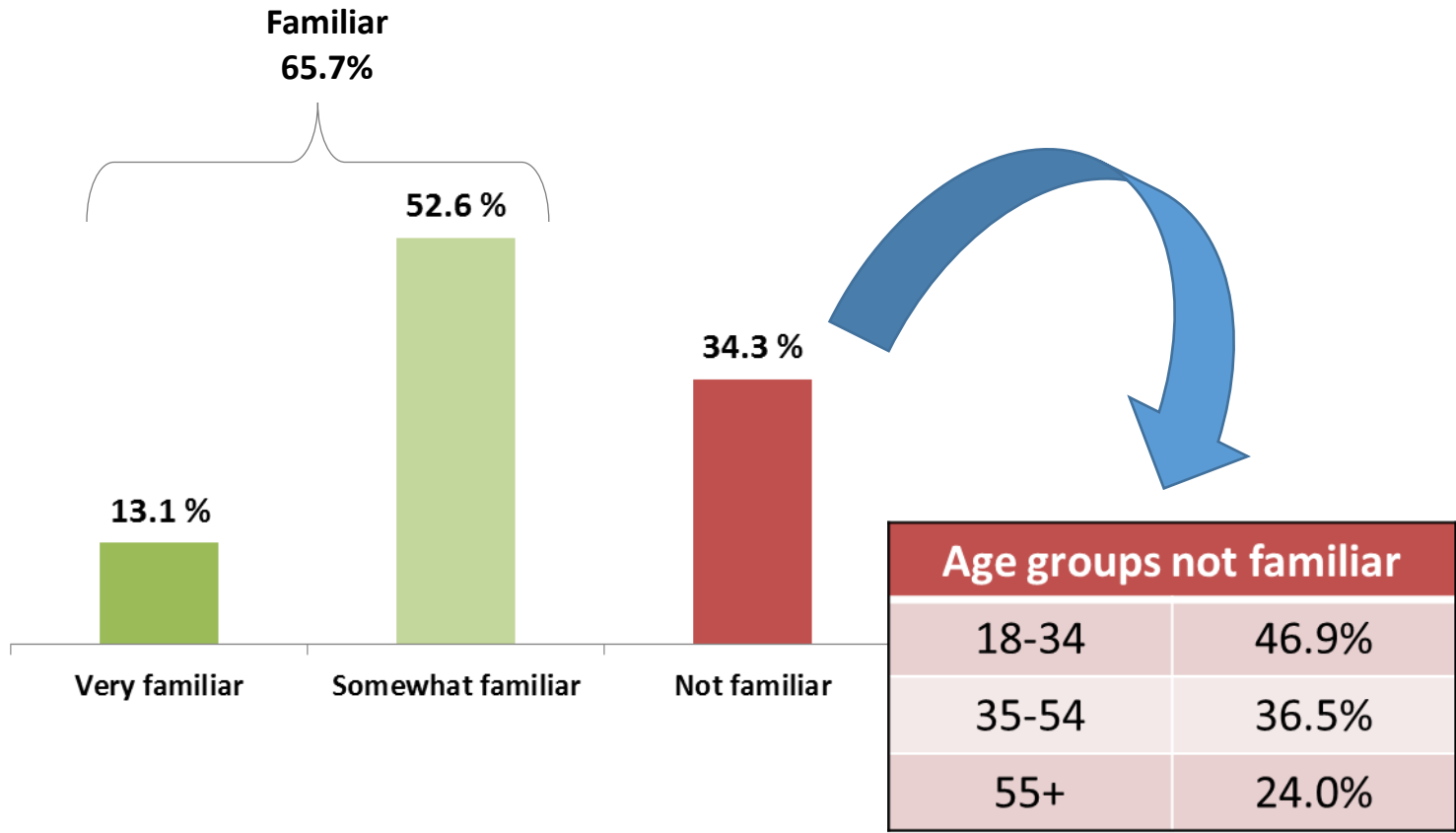
### The Method:

A total of 801 randomly selected Inshgtrix Research Saskatchewan panel members participated in a nine-question online research study that took place between December 10-13, 2013. Age, gender and region quotas were set to match the general provincial population demographics.

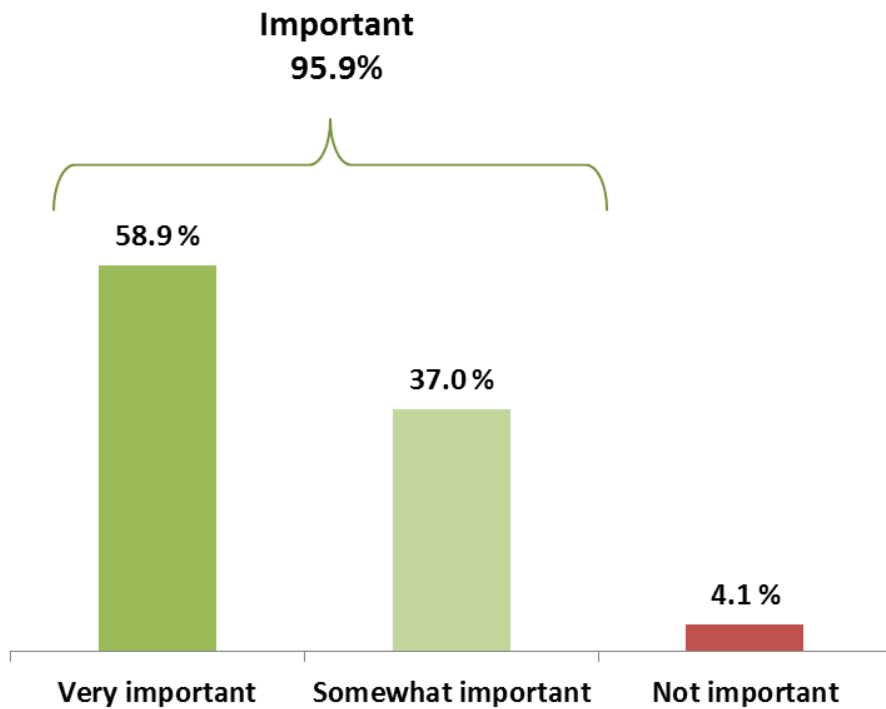
Demographics		Count	Percent
Gender	Male	379	47%
	Female	422	53%
Age	18 to 34	196	24%
	35 to 54	301	38%
	55 or older	304	38%
Region	North	156	19%
	Regina	157	20%
	Saskatoon	176	22%
	South	312	39%
Total		801	100%

**The Results:**

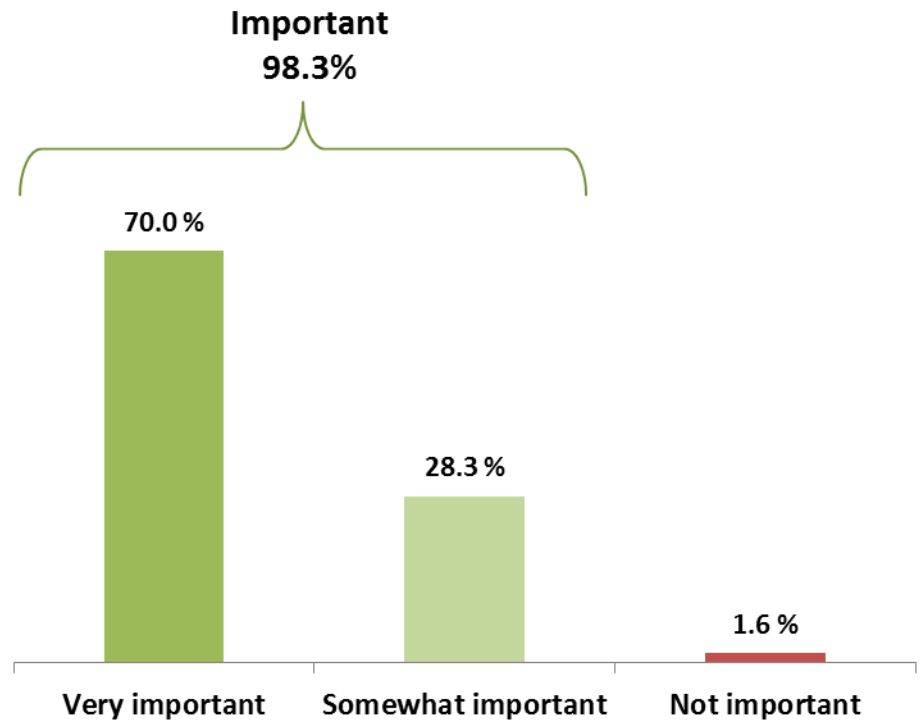
More than one half of respondents (65.7%) are at least SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR with native prairie.



Almost all respondents (95.9%) consider native prairie to be at least **SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT**.

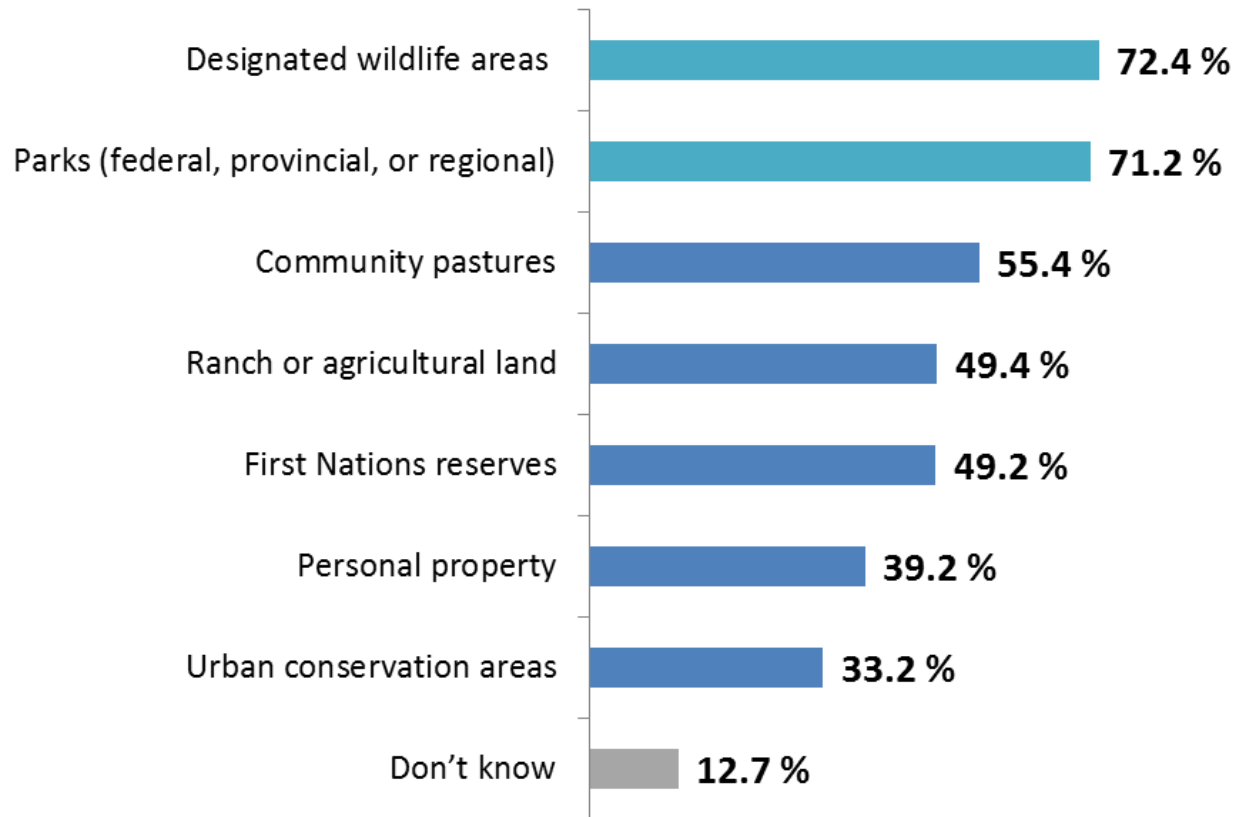


Almost all respondents (98.3%) feel that **SUPPORTING THE CONSERVATION** of Saskatchewan's native prairie is at least **SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT**.



**Respondents indicated awareness of locations featuring native prairie in Saskatchewan:**

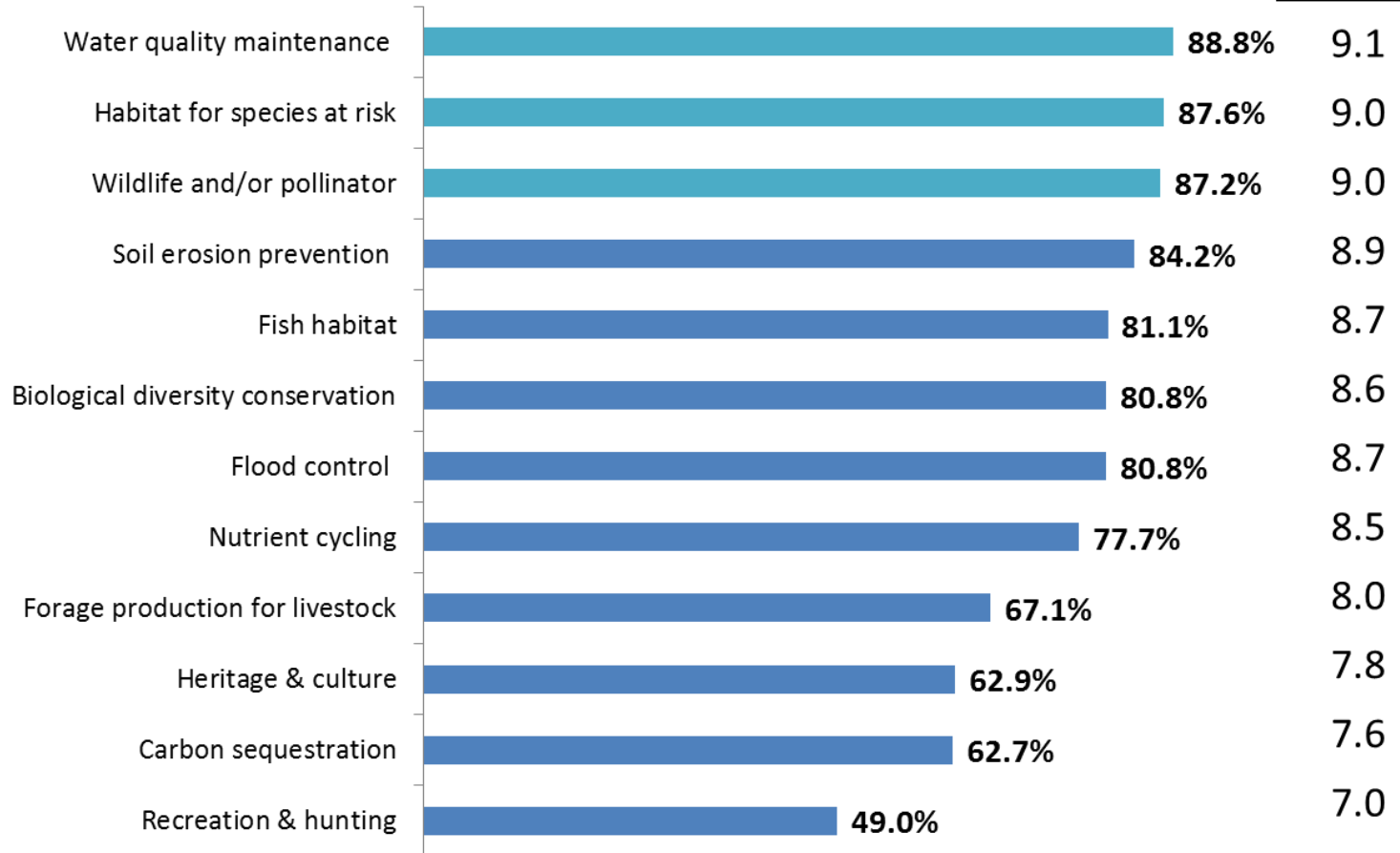
### Awareness of Locations Featuring Native Prairie



## Respondents indicate the Importance of Ecological Services of Native Prairie Grasslands

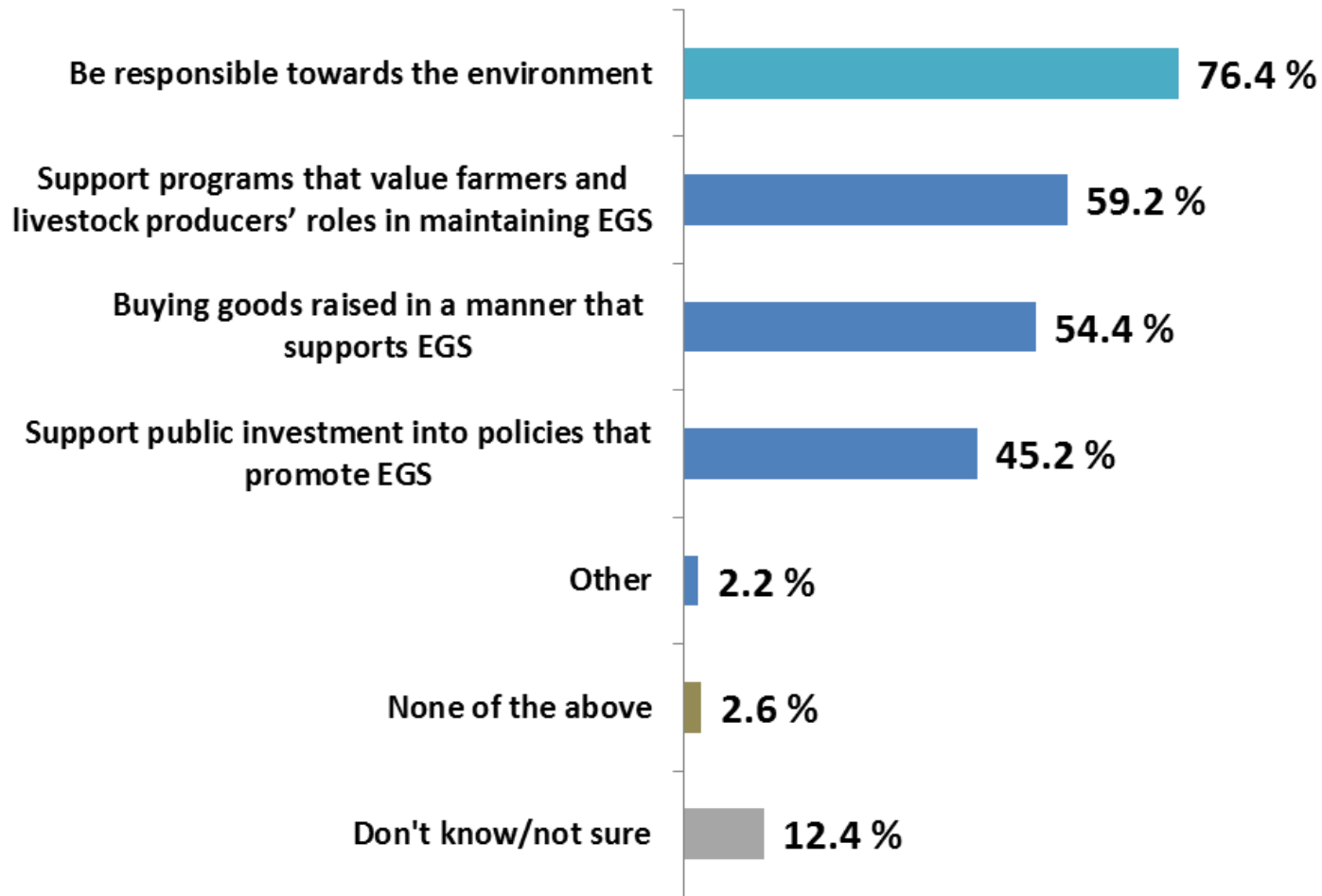
### Importance of Benefits of Native Prairie Grasslands (Importance Ratings 8-10)

AVG  
"IMPORTANCE"  
RATING ON  
SCALE OF 1-10



**Respondents indicate their willingness to support Ecosystem Goods and Services, choosing BEING RESPONSIBLE TOWARDS THE ENVIRONMENT (76.4%) as their preferred support method.**

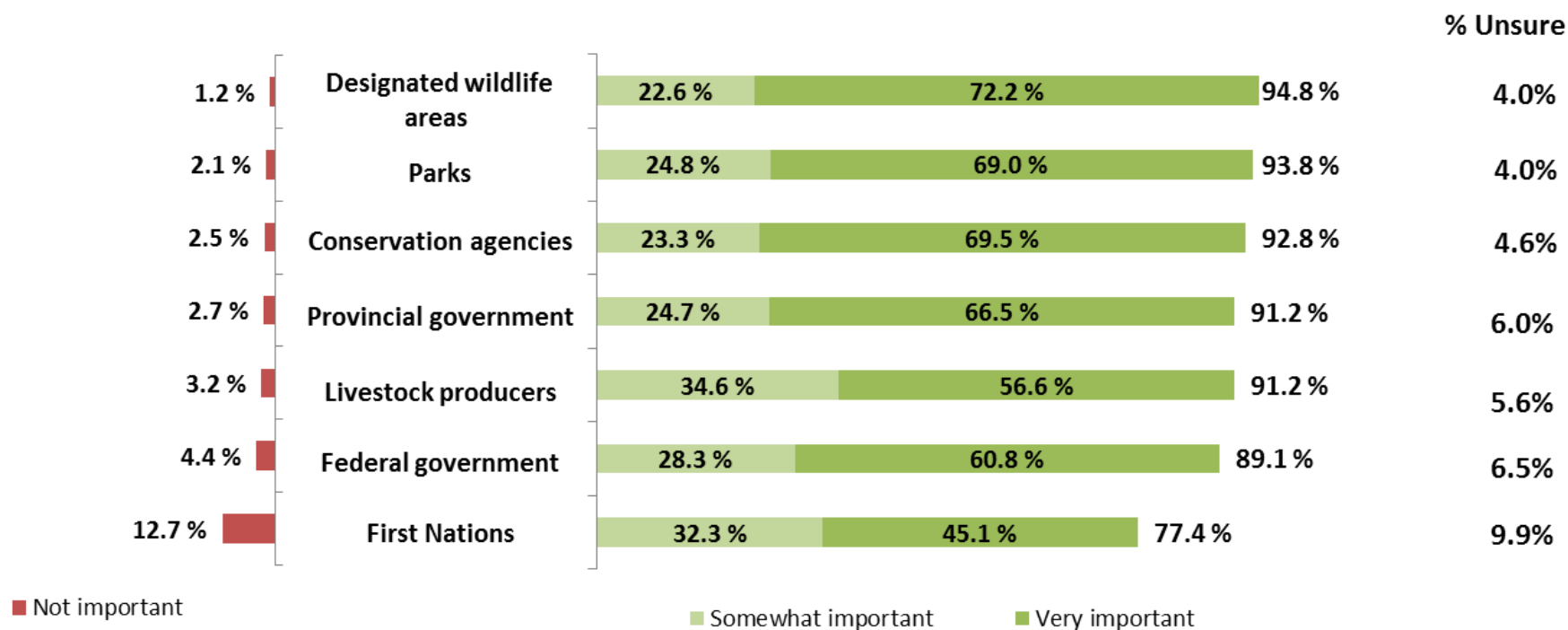
### Willingness to Support Native Prairie Ecosystem Goods and Services





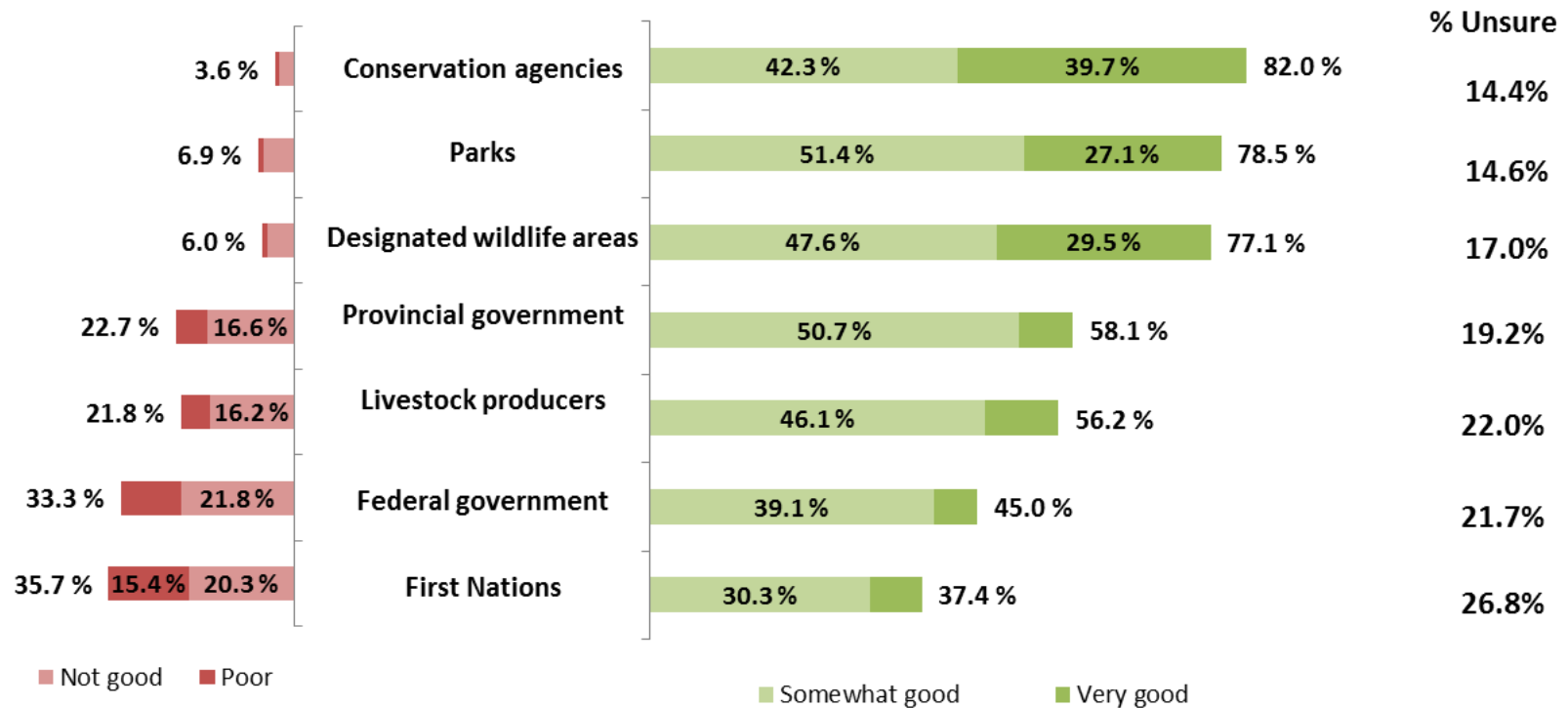
**Respondents view the roles of DESIGNATED WILDLIFE AREAS (94.8%), PARKS (93.8%), CONSERVATION AGENCIES (92.8%), LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS (91.2%) & PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT (91.2%) as the top land managers important for native prairie conservation, followed by the FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (89.1%) and FIRST NATIONS (77.4%)**

### Importance to the Conservation of Native Prairies of Potential Land Managers



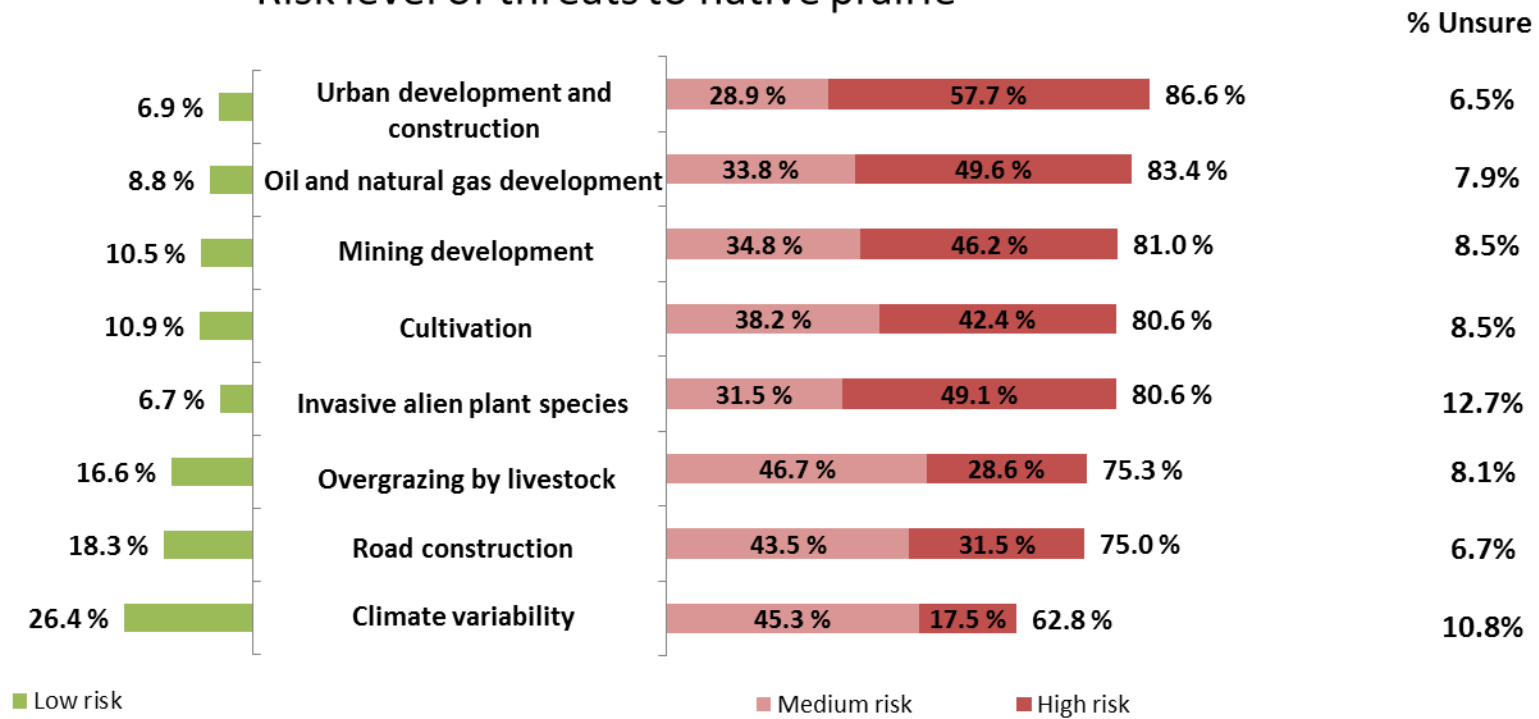
Respondents felt that CONSERVATION AGENCIES (82.0%), PARKS (78.5%) and DESIGNATED WILDLIFE AREAS (77.1%) were doing a 'somewhat good' or 'good' job in prairie conservation.

### How land managers are doing regarding the conservation of native prairie



**Respondents identified perceived threats that may contribute to the loss of native prairie.**

### Risk level of threats to native prairie



## Potential Implications of Survey Results:

### Awareness of Native Prairie:

The applications of this study are numerous to SK PCAP and its partners and creates new opportunities for programming and priorities. Information, such as the general public familiarity (65.7%) and age group (18-34) least familiar with native prairie may help guide prairie awareness initiatives for SK PCAP and partner organizations (Question 1). Also reassuring is the indication that 98.3% of public feel supporting prairie conservation is important (Question 9).

Information regarding public awareness of native prairie across Saskatchewan (Question 3) will enable SK PCAP and its partners to target public information initiatives. For example, in the 2011 Census of Agriculture, Saskatchewan farm operators indicated having 11.9 million acres of natural land used for pasture (which may not all be native prairie). Yet survey results indicate that less than 50% of respondents think of ranch land when asked to select potential areas known to them that feature native prairie. In order to develop effective native prairie Ecological Goods and Services (EGS) programming for the agricultural sector, more awareness needs to be created around the important role that ranching plays in prairie conservation.

### Awareness & Support of Prairie Ecosystem Services:

Information obtained surrounding people's awareness of ecosystem services (Question 4) provide a lot of insight to SK PCAP, its partners, as well as existing or potential EGS program developers. The public views water quality maintenance, habitat for pollinators, and habitat for species at risk as the most important ecosystem services provided by native prairie. Forage production for livestock is not viewed as a top-rated prairie good or service by the public, which may point to public support for ecosystem services independent of a producers' ability to profit from them (ie. meat, milk or fibre).

Public willingness to support native prairie EGS (Question 5) was highest for the practice of "being responsible to the environment" which is ambiguous and non-concrete. Response showed that 59.2% of the public would support programs that value farmers' roles in EGS, and 54.4% of the public supports goods raised in a manner that supports EGS. Survey results indicate 45.2% of the public supports public investment into policies promoting EGS. While work needs to be done to promote the values that farmers, livestock producers and other land managers are doing to provide EGS to the public, a baseline has now been established of current public opinion, which will be useful for partners or sectors developing or evaluating EGS programs.

### Prairie Land Managers:

Information was obtained regarding public opinion of the roles of various land managers (Question 6) and the job they are doing (Question 7) which is important for the development of EGS programming by partners. Wildlife areas, parks and conservation agencies all rated highest in terms of being important to native prairie conservation, as well as doing a somewhat to very good job of conserving prairie. Livestock producers were rated as being important or somewhat important to 91.2% of the respondents. Livestock producers are generally viewed by the public as

being important to prairie conservation, yet rated lower on the scale of doing a good job of conserving prairie, with only 56.2% of respondents feeling producers are doing a somewhat good or good job at conserving prairie. SK PCAP and partners may use this information to promote positive stewardship practices to both producers and public, emphasizing the important ecological role that grazing plays in prairie ecosystem management.

### **Risks to Native Prairie:**

Additional information was obtained relative to public perception of risks that may contribute to the loss of native prairie (Question 9). Urban development and construction, oil and natural gas development, and mining development were rated as top threats to the loss of native prairie, according to respondents. Agricultural practices, including cultivation (80.6%) and overgrazing by livestock (75.3%) were perceived to be medium or high risk activities that may cause loss of native prairie, although 16.6% of respondents also identified overgrazing by livestock as one of the lowest perceived risks to prairie. This may encourage partners to provide clear information to the public regarding the role that livestock grazing plays for prairie conservation in Saskatchewan. Climate variability was viewed as the least likely to threaten native prairie at 26.4%, therefore if partners have projects relating climate change to prairie loss, this information may enable them to better tailor effective communication efforts. Many SK PCAP partners have specific ecosystem management and public awareness initiatives regarding invasive alien plant species (IAPS), so it is interesting to note that 80.6% of respondents viewed IAPS as a medium or high risk to the loss of native prairie which is encouraging for SK PCAP and partners pursuing prairie ecosystem management from an IASP context.

### **The Future:**

Survey results may be used by SK PCAP, partners and relevant stakeholder groups to develop prairie conservation awareness programs and initiatives. These results may serve as a benchmark, and a similar survey may be carried out in the future, noting changes and trends among consumers and the public.