

Finding and Keeping Conservation Common Ground

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This article is the second in a series celebrating 25 years of prairie conservation through the SK PCAP.

In 2023, Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan (SK PCAP) marks 25 years of bringing Saskatchewan's prairie grassland conservation organizations together by creating the PCAP Partnership. It started as a grassroots collection of 16 partner groups assembled under the umbrella of Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association. Today, it has blossomed into a decades-long conservation movement that has sparked numerous resources, high-profile events, education and awareness campaigns, and a current partnership made up of 34 organizations.

The trail wasn't always easy, however, and getting diverse groups to work together in a formal partnership, particularly in the early days, was challenging.

A Shift in Perspective

With ranchers and environmentalists sitting around the table, in some cases for the first time, there were some difficult conversations. The science around prairie grassland management was still evolving, and not every partner was in agreement as to how prairie was or should be managed.

Chris Nykoluk, SK PCAP's first manager, recalls a shift in awareness about the beneficial function of grazing.

"I believe at that time, different groups

were starting to understand the role that livestock played in managing grasslands," said Nykoluk.

"This idea that although there were issues in the livestock industry that bothered some conservationists, the overarching realization was that livestock was a big part of the solution," she explained. "We were learning more about how livestock created a patch diversity that was beneficial for different species."

Miles Anderson was the initial chair of SK PCAP. "The big thing was that folks weren't understanding each other and were trying to do the same thing, and it took some time to get everybody understanding what the other was meaning," explained Anderson, who ranches south of Fir Mountain, SK.

Nykoluk notes that key leaders like Anderson were good at bringing the group together to communicate in order to find common ground. "People kind of pulled together and were able to see the bigger picture," she said. "If PCAP did anything, it got the partners thinking that grazing was not such a bad thing, that it was actually a good thing."

Accomplishments and Milestones

In the beginning, one thing each partner could agree on was the need to increase awareness about the importance of native prairie grasslands in Saskatchewan. In 2000, SK PCAP initiated Native Prairie Appreciation Week (NPAW), which is proclaimed annually by the Government

of Saskatchewan. It is the only week in North America dedicated to recognizing the value of native prairie.

"Having recognition for native prairie, even before we really got talking about carbon sequestration and the climate change part, was important," said Michael Burgess, who was the PCAP chair from 2005 to 2007. "We would have two or three buses of people touring for NPAW and there was quite a bit of collaboration going on."

In-person events continue to be a mainstay for SK PCAP. While NPAW remains an annual highlight, the organization also identified the need for a Native Prairie Restoration and Reclamation Workshop (NPRRW) that could address gaps in restoration capacity. Since 2011, this biennial event has brought thousands of experts together from across North America.

SK PCAP is also a collaborator with the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership (TGP), a prairie conservation initiative amongst Saskatchewan, Alberta and Montana.

"With any of our events, like NPRRW or the TGP Workshop, networking is always a highlight," said Carolyn Gaudet, SK PCAP manager. "What I hear over and over again, is how in-person meetings are so beneficial for networking. Whether it's catching up, swapping ideas, or finding opportunities for collaboration, it's invaluable. I've noticed that you can't really fabricate situations and force people

to talk to each other, if you put them in a room together, they'll do it on their own, they just need the opportunity."

SK PCAP has an active social media and online presence with their "Prairie's Got the Goods" Ecological Goods and Services Week, a YouTube channel ([youtube.com/user/skpcap](https://www.youtube.com/user/skpcap)), Facebook, Twitter and virtual events.

"Our communication strategies, like our social media channels and our Native Prairie Speaker Series webinars, have developed a dedicated following," said Gaudet. "It's an effective way to share information about native prairie that reaches a wider audience."

Working with students has also been a top priority for the past 25 years and SK PCAP has a variety of curriculum-supported resources. They have engaged more than 100,000 Saskatchewan students through in-school visits, workshops, youth NPAW contests and annual displays at Canadian Western Agribition.


The Future

Kelly Williamson has been the SK PCAP chair for the past three years and is optimistic about the organization's future. "It's been an evolution as far as outreach, and developing quality products," he said, adding that SK PCAP continues to have a notable presence sharing information about grassland conservation.

One of his highlights as chair has been adding a First Nations organization to the partnership table.

"We really hadn't had a First Nations group at the table and this past year we got the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Land Technicians (SALT) to join PCAP," Williamson explained. "It's a First Nations-based organization and a step in the right direction for getting more First Nations engagement."

Like the prairie grassland that is its focus, SK PCAP continues to demonstrate a

lasting presence on the conservation landscape. The organization evolves to find new ways to adapt to challenges and continues to do what it does best — bring prairie people together. 

PCAP Managers

Chris Nykoluk 1998-2000
Karyn Scalise 2000-2008
Michelle Clark 2008-2012
Natasha Wilkie 2012-2015 (Tara M. Davidson interim 2014)
Kayla Balderson Burak 2015-2017
Carolyn Gaudet 2017-present (Diego Steinaker interim 2018)

PCAP Chairs

Miles Anderson 1998-2000
Allen Patkau 2000-2005
Michael Burgess 2005-2007
Ray McDougald 2007-2008
Karla Hicks 2008-2011
Roy Rutledge 2012
Orin Balas 2013-2019
Kelly Williamson 2020-present



Participants at the 2022 Native Prairie Appreciation Week Tour learn to identify and appreciate native plants.

SASKATCHEWAN CONSERVATION OFFICERS NEED YOUR HELP TO SOLVE THIS CASE. YOU CAN REMAIN ANONYMOUS AND EARN UP TO \$2000 CASH REWARDS IF THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE LEADS TO A CONVICTION.

On March 4th, 2023 Humboldt Conservation Officers received a TIPP call regarding a found dead Mule Deer in the Resort Village of Manitou Beach. The deer was located close to the back alley of Cumming Avenue near a trail that leads to Wellington Park. This deer had been shot with an arrow and is suspected to have been shot sometime before the end of February 2023.





HOW YOU CAN HELP

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION, CALL THE TOLL-FREE TURN IN POACHERS & POLLUTERS LINE 1-800-667-7561 OR #5555 FROM A SASKTEL CELL (NO TEXT MESSAGES). CALLS ARE TAKEN 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK. YOU CAN ALSO REPORT ONLINE AT www.saskatchewan.ca/tipp.



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