

(PCAP and Beef Business magazine)

Easing into Conservation

Conservation agreements: a tool of choice for conservation-minded land managers!

Preamble:

As the country's leading conservation organization, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) has been working with partners since 1962 to protect natural areas and the plants and animals they sustain. Some of the most ecologically rich and species-diverse natural areas in all of Canada are being conserved by NCC in Saskatchewan. By investing in conservation, NCC in Saskatchewan helps ensure natural spaces remain a home for wildlife, a haven for recreation and a vital resource that filters the air we breathe and the water we drink. Guided by the best available conservation science, NCC has helped conserve over 2.6 million acres, including more than 134,000 acres in Saskatchewan.

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Conservation agreements are voluntary legal arrangements between a landowner and a conservation agency such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), an organization that helps conserve the natural attributes of lands. NCC's Saskatchewan Region works directly with landowners in our province as they consider and further engage in conservation efforts, or consider a commitment to legally partner with NCC Saskatchewan through a conservation agreement.

Conservation agreements with NCC Saskatchewan generally involve lands with diverse wildlife species and significant ecological presence or value. Properties may include species at risk, natural prairie cover, or perhaps a wildlife corridor or migratory path. Both the landowner and NCC Saskatchewan staff carefully consider the details before entering into this type of agreement, as through this effort, the landowner agrees to conserve the area's integrity while using the land for agricultural purposes. This generally means the landowner will not cultivate native grasslands but may hay or graze livestock in the area.

This legally-binding conservation agreement remains associated with the property forever, even when sold or the transferred in the family, but the land remains titled in the name of the landowner. Stewardship activities associated with conservation agreements help ensure the property's natural significance remains intact, as the agreement helps sustain adequate habitat for mammals and grassland birds. NCC Saskatchewan staff monitor the property under agreement, visiting the landowner and viewing the area. These regular visits also help NCC Saskatchewan build strong relationships with partner landowners and ensure overall conservation of the land's natural attributes.

This monitoring involves qualified NCC Saskatchewan staff who work with landowners to determine how the land under agreement will be used and managed. Periodic monitoring of these areas helps ensure lands under agreement are maintained. NCC Saskatchewan staff work with the landowner to answer questions or enhance the landowner's efforts to sustain and conserve the ecological integrity. Although violations to the conservation agreement seldom occur, NCC Saskatchewan's staff remain focused on land stewardship and conservation over the long term.

Sustaining these lands over the long term is the goal of NCC Saskatchewan and the land owner's stewardship of the land. And although the conservation techniques may differ, lands affiliated or entrusted to NCC, including those lands through NCC Saskatchewan's conservation agreements, will continue to protect and conserve the natural attributes of the land for future generations to count on—and enjoy.

CAPTION: Conservation agreements with NCC Saskatchewan are a commitment to conserve. By example, the Missouri Coteau area, covering almost six million acres (3M ha) in southwestern Saskatchewan, is a prime area where landowners have paired with NCC's Saskatchewan Region.

OPTIONAL SIDEBAR that may be included:

SIDEBAR: Robert and Penny Cumming of Mortlach, Saskatchewan thought carefully about conservation easements before they joined NCC. "The [conservation] agreement meant we'd manage our lands the way we always have...with conservation and long-term care in mind," says landowner Robert Cumming.

"If a person doesn't take care of the land, you just end up hurting yourself," says Cumming. "It takes years to restore good land when conservation ethic is not applied. And I wouldn't want these 3,000 acres of ours now under agreement disrupted in future, either, so the arrangement works very well for us."