

CFGA NATURE FUND PROJECT

About the CFGA

Driven by a passion for grasslands, the Canadian Forage and Grassland Association (CFGA) was created in 2010 to address the need for a national voice on forage-related issues and opportunities. It was selected as the funding recipient for the Nature Fund Project because of its national grassland stewardship and extension mandate, its past and on-going involvement in assessment of Canadian grasslands as carbon sinks with potential for climate change mitigation and its prior role in researching agricultural conservation measures for species at risk in the Prairie Provinces.

"The CFGA Nature Fund Project provides the opportunity to put the best available conservation information into the hands of the land stewards who are working towards the preservation or enhancement of habitat for native species within Canada's agricultural landscape."

- Cedric MacLeod
CFGA Executive Director



Canadian Forage & Grassland Association
Association Canadienne pour les Plantes Fourragères

Project description

In June 2018, the federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for conservation, wildlife and biodiversity agreed to the Pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation in Canada. This shifts Canada's approach to conservation, wildlife and biodiversity from a single species to a focus on multiple species and ecosystems. With this new approach, conservation efforts now focus on priority places, species, sectors and threats across Canada and involve collaboration with the agriculture sector.

With financial support from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) as part of the Canada Nature Fund, the CFGA is leading a two-year project that addresses the agriculture priority sector identified under the Pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation in Canada. Taking place over a number of phases, the CFGA Nature Fund Project will be delivered in as many provincial jurisdictions as technically feasible and will potentially be applicable to all Canadian agricultural lands.

The CFGA is working with national and provincial stakeholder committees, governments, Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) delivery agents and agricultural associations to develop province-specific, online habitat and biodiversity management tools and integrate them with the provincial EFP platforms. The project builds on an existing tool in Alberta that was supported by the ECCC's Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Land (SARPAL) fund with the goal to assist interested landowners who support natural habitats for plants and wildlife on their lands.

The Habitat and Biodiversity Assessment Tool has shown promise as a cost-effective means of helping producers become more aware of practices they can undertake, or may already be doing, to help native species. It achieves this by using information on species and habitat at the farm level to determine the conservation measures that a given producer can undertake to maintain or improve species' habitats.

Once developed, the tool will help producers identify habitats present on their farms worth a closer look for conservation to support enhanced biodiversity on their operations.

The tool will also provide some guidance on best management practices relevant to the habitats they may be stewarding.

The main input required by producers is their land location and some land cover information. The output is a producer-friendly report on what practices are relevant on the farm for conserving habitat and which conservation programs are available to support action. The tool is specifically designed as an extension and awareness approach that is based on the potential for species to occur in the area, and avoids releasing sensitive information about actual species-at-risk observations. If producers are interested in more detail, the tool provides contact information for provincial experts from collaborating conservation organizations.

Contractors in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia are currently collecting and processing data to customize the tool for each province and developing online interfaces that fit with the conventions of the online EFP processes in each jurisdiction. The tools in each province will require beta testing, which will occur by engaging expert review and communicating with stakeholders and end users. Next phases of the project will be to collaborate with agriculture, industry and government agencies to explore opportunities for similar tools across all provinces.

Link to forages and grasslands

Canada's cultivated forages for pasture, feed and seed production account for 33.8 million acres – or 39 per cent – of Canada's agriculture production. Over 36 million acres of land in Canada is devoted to native or unimproved pastures. Indeed, forage and grassland production is the largest land-use type in Canadian agriculture. Considering that grasslands, combined with forested areas and wetlands, create a significant portion of habitat that supports native species, the applicability of the Habitat and Biodiversity Assessment Tool is very significant for forage and grassland producers.

Why is it important

Purchasers of agricultural commodities and, indirectly, consumers, are increasingly demanding sustainably sourced products. To meet this demand, major sustainable sourcing initiatives are including components dealing with native species, habitat and biodiversity protection. The Habitat and Biodiversity Assessment Tool will help keep the EFP program relevant in a sustainable-sourcing ecosystem.

Engaging producers in grassland and biodiversity conservation will help Canada meet international and domestic conservation obligations related to protecting native species and climate change action. Demonstrating what producers are doing to protect grasslands can contribute to proof of sustainable sourcing for Canadian agri-food products and can help producers establish a record of due diligence relative to obligations related to native species under federal and provincial legislation.

The CFGA Nature Fund Project seeks to draw these threads together in an approach that positions agricultural landholders to take a leadership role in conservation with support from the conservation community. It will also enable conservation partners to work together to achieve better outcomes for native species.

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