



PRAIRIE BRIEFING

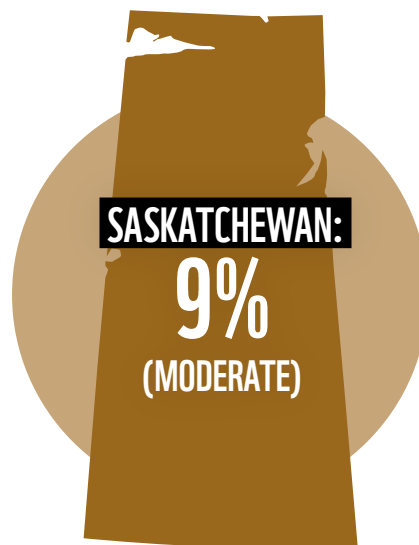
Primary threats: Habitat loss has been the most significant threat to wildlife in the region with 80 per cent of prairie grassland converted mainly for intensive agriculture use.

Protected area downgrading (decrease in legal restrictions), downsizing (decrease in size) and degazettement (loss of legal protection) also poses a threat to protected areas. Recently, the Alberta government announced cutting or privatizing management for over one third of sites from the Alberta Parks system. The divestment of parks puts some of these areas at risk, jeopardizing their value for conservation.

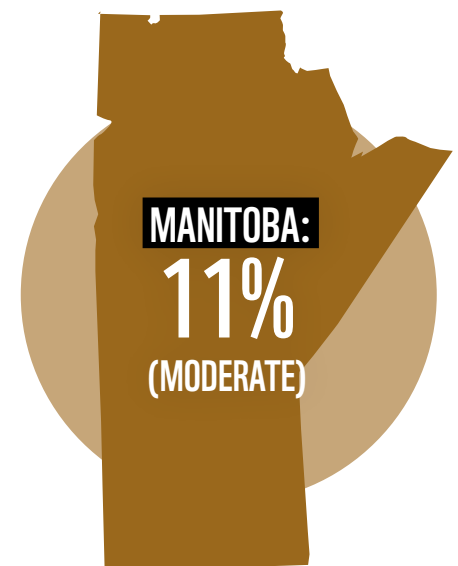
PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS:



Alberta is an excellent example of how a region can achieve area-based protection targets while failing to protect areas that are essential to supporting and recovering wildlife that are at risk of extinction.



While Saskatchewan has many small protected areas scattered throughout the southern portion of the province that enhance its ecological representation, these protected areas lack connectivity and are not sufficiently large to ensure that biodiversity can thrive.



Manitoba lags behind other provinces in the creation of protected areas. Large protected areas in both the boreal and grassland regions of the province would strengthen ecological representation and benefit at-risk wildlife.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT



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BURROWING OWL

IUCN status: Least Concern
COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Burrowing owls — which nest in abandoned burrows of small mammals like prairie dogs, ground squirrels and badgers — have faced habitat loss and degradation of their native grasslands, which has been accompanied by declines in small mammals and suitable burrows. In addition to habitat loss, new and emerging threats may be compounding population declines, such as a decrease in annual summer fallow of Canada's croplands. Storms and flooding caused by climate change, vehicle collisions, predation and reduced prey availability from environmental contaminants are also to blame.



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WHOOPING CRANE

IUCN Status: Endangered
COSEWIC Status: Endangered

At the beginning of the 20th century, the whooping crane population was reduced to just 14 individuals, mostly because of habitat loss. In 1922, the Wood Buffalo National Park was established for the protection of wood bison, but the entire nesting grounds of the whooping crane were coincidentally included within the park's boundary, which spans 4.2 million hectares in the Northwest Territories and Alberta. In 1937, the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge was also established as a refuge for migratory birds. Since breeding and wintering whooping crane habitat were protected, the population has rebounded, particularly since the late 1980s. The population now consists of 500 individuals.

TRUMPETER SWAN

IUCN Status: Least Concern
COSEWIC Status: Not at Risk

In the early 1930s, trumpeter swans were considered locally extinct in Canada as a result of hunting and habitat loss. To reverse the loss, different conservationists and governments undertook swift and substantial conservation efforts to recover the population, including land acquisition, management plans, law enforcement, public education, and captive breeding and reintroductions to the wild. In addition, development and implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan helped to conserve and restore wetlands and other key habitats for waterfowl, including the trumpeter swan.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Help restore habitat. Given that 80 per cent of prairie grassland has been converted, ecosystem restoration is needed to reverse the degradation and loss of these ecosystems. Nature-based climate solutions — like protected areas and restoration — can help to stop this wildlife loss by addressing multiple threats to biodiversity while reducing climate change by sequestering carbon in natural ecosystems.



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