

The Wildlife Society
2002 Annual Meeting (September 24-28, 2002)

Full Day Symposium
September 27, 2002
North American Grasslands: Building a Trinational Conservation Strategy
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Organizing Committee

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Purpose

Grasslands are one of the most threatened ecosystems in North America. Many conservation initiatives have been carried out to protect them at national, regional and local scales, but these efforts have been independent and less effective than they might be if they were implemented under a single coalescing strategy. This symposium will address the importance of having a shared trinational strategy for the conservation of North American grassland. Moreover, progress made in this direction will be presented.

The presentations will reflect accumulated experience throughout North America's grasslands and assessments of current common needs, and will highlight opportunities for effective cooperation for conservation at a trinational scale.

Description of the Symposium

North American grasslands span the nations of Canada, United States and Mexico. This symposium will emphasize tall-grass, mid-grass, shortgrass and Chihuahuan Desert grasslands of these nations. Since 2000, the three Federal Wildlife Services have agreed to work together to protect 17 native species of birds and mammals considered Species of Common Conservation Concern, the majority of which are associated with grasslands. Independent of this effort, non-governmental organizations in the three countries have developed additional regional and national approaches to grassland protection. Many Native American tribes, which support proportionately more native grasslands than others, are seeking economically viable ways to maintain their biodiversity. At more local levels, ranchers with common social and economic concerns, such as an inadequate economic base and subdivision of the family ranch, have formed non-profit associations to find economically viable conservation approaches.

The symposium will first present the rationale for building a North American strategy for the conservation of grassland species and habitats. To set up the context, the ecological processes and biodiversity that maintain North American grassland ecosystems will be presented together with the changes over the past century that have stressed them and threaten their future viability. It will then proceed to identify the experiences taken place at a national scale to address these stresses, which are largely socioeconomic, differ among countries, and span local, regional and national scales. Furthermore, the value of a trinational grassland cooperation framework will be highlighted through the presentation of several cases involving grassland species of trinational interest. Finally, this symposium will draw on existing successful initiatives operating at various scales. Several opportunities will be provided throughout the symposium to engage the audience in the integration and discussion of the information presented.

Symposium Structure

1. Setting the context: North American Grasslands, a besieged ecosystem

This opening segment will provide an overview on the different activities related to the grasslands conservation initiative developed by the three North American countries under the auspices of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC).

Moreover, a brief introduction and background to North American grassland ecosystems will be offered, from a species and ecosystem perspective. Furthermore, in this segment the rural and agriculture related factors will also be addressed, identifying largely socioeconomic stresses throughout North America. Among the topics to be approached are:

- Changes in grasslands over the past century: then and now
- Fire and grazing: disturbance processes that historically maintained grasslands
- Fragmentation and conversion to cropland and shrublands
- Decline of biodiversity endemic to the grasslands
- Fencing and restraint of ungulate movement

2. Cooperation for grassland conservation: needs and achievements at a national scale.

This segment will briefly document the stresses that threaten grassland ecology and biodiversity and what has been so far the experience—and need—in developing frameworks for effective conservation at a national scale.

3. Shared Species, making a difference on a common concern.

This section will benefit from cases that exemplify actual challenges and opportunities met when working with grassland species occurring in two, or all three North American countries. The examples presented will aim to illustrate how conservation-related efforts, taking place at a species level, can benefit from multistakeholder bi-/tri-national cooperation, as embodied through a trinational conservation strategy. Topics addressed for each species include:

- Population trends and distribution changes of the species
- Approach (process undertaken to achieve local/regional/national/international cooperation)
- Main results and limitations
- Benefits and needs for enhanced cooperation
- Main lessons and perspectives
- Potential benefits from trinational cooperation

4. Overview discussion on cooperation and strategies

This session is aimed at engaging the audience in a first integration of the information provided during the morning.

5. Toward a trinational grassland strategy

This segment will present progress made on building a trinational grassland conservation strategy, as developed by the three North American Countries under the auspices of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. This grassland strategy draws on successful initiatives, on a review of the status and needs of grassland conservation at a national level, and identifies opportunities for cooperation at a North American scale. Different implementation scenarios will be presented and discussed through a question and answers session.

6. Working cross-boundary grassland strategies

This segment of the symposium will be more lengthy and present approaches that are planned or currently working successfully in the three nations and with Native Americans. These include, but are not limited to:

- The role of landowners and First Nations/Native Americans in the grassland, the lessons drawn from their involvement and the potential for establishing partnerships related to improving conditions for wildlife and habitat conservation on their lands.

- NABCI is currently one of the most promising and ambitious trinational conservation initiatives in North America. The presentation will focus on the lessons and opportunities this process offers to emerging trinational conservation initiatives.
- The Nature Conservancy's Prairie Wings and Ecoregional Planning initiatives that draw on technology and the expertise of scientists to identify focus areas and biodiversity targets within the grasslands of the three nations.
- The importance of protected areas will be highlighted through the work undertaken by Pronatura Noreste, a Mexican NGO that has been working in the Chihuahuan Desert of Mexico to identify focus areas, biodiversity targets and stresses within the region (E.g. El Tokyo and Janos).
- The role that policy changes can have on the allocation of resources for grassland conservation will be illustrated by the NWF, particularly when aiming to meet short and mid-term production and environmental objectives through increasing support for agriculture conservation programs

Speakers at this symposium:

Rosario Álvarez, Pronatura Noreste
 Humberto Berlanga, NABCI.Mexico
 Bennett A. Brown, The Animas Foundation
 Gerardo Ceballos, UNAM.Instituto de Ecología
 Mike Foxx, Native American Fish and Wildlife Association
 David Gauthier, University of Regina
 Juan Guzmán-Aranda, Virginia Tech
 Stephanie Harmon, US Fish and Wildlife Service
 Ken Higgins, South Dakota State University
 Jürgen Hoth, North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation
 Pat Kehoe, Ducks Unlimited, Saskatchewan
 Alberto Lafón, Universidad de Chihuahua
 Bob McCready, The Nature Conservancy
 Greg Riemer, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management
 Jim Ringleman, Ducks Unlimited, North Dakota
 Fred Samson, USDA Forest Service
 Andrew H. Schollett, US Fish and Wildlife Service
 Ted Toombs, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory
 Stephen Torbit, National Wildlife Federation
 John Wiens, The Nature Conservancy
 Ed Wiken, Wildlife Habitat Canada

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Time	Theme/Topic	Speaker
1. North American Grasslands, a besieged ecosystem (Moderator: Rosario Alvarez)		
8:00	Priming a North American approach to grassland conservation.	Jürgen Hoth
8:20		
8:40	Understanding biodiversity patterns and losses in North American grasslands	Fred Samson
9:00	Changing Farm Demographics and Land Use Practices: Greater Risks to Native Prairie Patch	Ken Higgins
9:20	Understanding the landscape for conserving North America's Grasslands	Ed Wiken
2. Cooperation for grassland conservation: needs and achievements at national and regional scales (Moderator: Pat Mehlhop)		
9:40	Canada: lessons on grasslands conservation through a multistakeholder approach	Greg Riemer
10:00 Break		
10:30	USA: The High Plains Partnership - Restoring Habitat and Trust on Private Lands.	Stephanie Harmon
10:50	Mexico: growing recognition to a shared North American ecosystem	Alberto Lafón
3. Examples from Shared Species (Moderator: Bob McCready)		
11:10	Ecology and conservation of the prairie dog ecosystem in Chihuahua, Mexico.	Gerardo Ceballos
11:30	Getting the scale right in grassland conservation.	John A. Wiens
4. Discussion (Moderator: Dave Gauthier)		
11:50	Overview discussion on cooperation and strategies	Dave Gauthier
12:10 Lunch		
5. Toward a trinational grassland strategy (Moderator: Jürgen Hoth)		
13:20	Framework for developing a trinational grassland strategy	A.Lafón, T Toombs, D. Gauthier
13:40		
14:00	Conservation planning, opportunities and limitations for successful conservation in Mexico: Insights gained from combining field and printed data.	Juan Guzmán-Aranda
14:20	Role of land owners in shifting the balance towards effective grassland habitat conservation	Francis Gardner
6. Working grassland strategies (Moderator: Rick Baydack)		
14:40	Native American perspective on grassland conservation	Mike Foxx
15:00	The North American Bird Conservation Initiative, a cooperation model and conservation vehicle for the grasslands	H. Berlanga/ Art Martel/ D Pahley
15:20 Break		
15:50	The Nature Conservancy's Prairie Wings: building a framework for the conservation of shared grassland	Bob McCready
16:10	Joint Ventures in grasslands	Andy Schlott
16:30	Ducks Unlimited Grasslands in Saskatchewan and North Dakota	Pat Kehoe and Jim Ringleman
16:50	El Tokyo Pronatura NE: The role of protected areas	Rosario Alvarez
17:10	NWF, Policy changes to secure grassland conservation	Stephen Torbit
17:30	2nd Integration: Questions, discussion and next steps	D. Gauthier