



# Special Places:

## Alberta's Grassland Natural Region

*Special Places is a made-in-Alberta strategy to complete a network of landscapes representing the province's six natural regions (20 subregions) by the end of 1998.*

*Special Places provides the policy, science and process to fill under-represented areas or gaps in Alberta's natural regions, including the Grassland Natural Region.*

The Grassland Natural Region is a flat to gently rolling plain with a few major hill systems. The Grassland Natural Region contains four subregions, each separated by geographic location and vegetation differences.

The Dry Mixedgrass Subregion, the warmest and driest in Alberta, contains elevations ranging from 600 metres above sea level to more than 1300 metres. The Mixedgrass Subregion is slightly cooler and moister, typically including gently undulating to rolling morainal and glacial lake deposits with some steeper terrain. The Northern Fescue Subregion is characterized by gently rolling ground moraine and hummocky moraine, with some sand plains, dune fields and glacial lake deposits. The

Foothills Fescue Subregion along the flanks of the Rocky Mountain foothills contains the highest elevations in this Natural Region, ranging up to 1400 metres.

### Grassland Subregions

*Dry Mixedgrass*

*Mixedgrass*

*Northern Fescue*

*Foothills Fescue*



QH  
77  
A3  
S743  
v. 3 c. 2

Grassland Natural Region

Alberta Environmental Protection



0 1630 4054 5648

# The Special Places Process:

## How Does it Work?

*Any Albertan can nominate Crown land for consideration, but nominations undergo a review by a multi-stakeholder Provincial Coordinating Committee, local volunteer committees and the provincial government before a site can become one of Alberta's Special Places. The following answers some common questions about how the process works.*

### **How are nominations made?**

Special Places relies on Albertans' participation and direction. Involvement begins with a public nomination process. Any Albertan can nominate a parcel of Crown land for consideration.

Nominations of private land will not be considered unless they are submitted by the landowner and they contribute to filling a gap in the protected areas network.

### **How are nominations prescreened and narrowed down to candidate sites?**

When a Special Places nomination is submitted, it's only the first step – nominated sites are not automatically considered candidate sites.

Candidate sites, those with a high probability of meeting the preservation goal, are identified in a prescreening process. The prescreening is completed by an Interdepartmental Directors Committee and reviewed by the Provincial Coordinating Committee.

Existing commitments on candidate sites, such as leases, will be honoured. However, interim protection measures, which limit new activities or developments, may be applied to candidate sites at this stage to ensure their integrity is not compromised during the review process.

### **What is the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC)?**

The Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) is the multi-stakeholder group that provides overall direction and awareness for Special Places. Representing the broad interests of Albertans, the PCC reviews nominated sites against Special Places policy, principles and science. The Committee then recommends to the Minister of Environmental Protection which sites should become candidates and be reviewed by local committees.

### **After the prescreening, what is the review process for candidate sites?**

After the candidate sites are identified, they proceed to Local Committees for further consideration.

Local Committees (LCs) are established regionally to review candidate sites. Municipal Governments in the Grassland Natural Region will be offered the opportunity to host and chair LCs in the region as well as assist in defining the membership. LCs have about four to six months to make recommendations to the PCC and the Minister. The PCC then reviews and makes recommendations for designation to the Minister of Environmental Protection.

### **What is the role of Local Committees?**

The volunteer Local Committees contribute site-specific management principles and recommend boundary options and appropriate landuse activities. Made up of local stakeholders, these committees will consider broad local input in their recommendations to the PCC. Local Committees' memberships can include local elected officials, tenure holders, industry and various local interest groups.

Local Committees are crucial to the Special Places process. They are in the best position to coordinate local public review and to provide input regarding boundary options, management guidelines and appropriate landuse activities. If the Local Committee cannot support the candidate site, it will not continue through the designation process.

# Special Places:

## Alberta's Grassland Natural Region

### **How does the Special Places process handle the rights of disposition holders, such as grazing leases, on candidate sites?**

The Alberta government stated it will honour commitments to leaseholders. Leaseholders have demonstrated good stewardship of the land, and the government will continue to support leases, renewals and assignments through normal approval processes. Local Committees ensure the Special Places review process represents leaseholders' rights and interests if a nomination is considered as a candidate site.

### **The grazing community has suggested that the current legislative framework and related designations do not "fit" well with protected areas in the Grassland Natural Region. Will there be an opportunity to consider a special class of designation that addresses these concerns?**

Early in the Special Places process, the PCC suggested a comprehensive review of protected areas legislation. Alberta Environmental Protection has begun such a review process. The Department will investigate the possibility of a designation that more accurately reflects the ranching and grazing community's responsible stewardship. Stakeholder input will be essential in the review process.

### **How will oil and gas activities be affected by the Special Places process?**

When the Special Places policy was announced, the government committed to honouring existing rights and dispositions. This means existing subsurface rights, surface dispositions and agreements will be respected within candidate sites. During the review of candidate sites, interim protection measures may be applied to new development and activities to ensure the site's integrity is not compromised.

### **What is the timeframe for Special Places in the Grassland Natural Region?**

The Minister of Environmental Protection asked the PCC to complete the system of protected areas by 1998. The most efficient way to meet this goal is to proceed by natural region.

Time needed to complete each region depends on the number of nominations and how well they meet Special Places objectives.

The nomination deadline in the Grassland Natural Region was September 20, 1996. It is estimated the PCC will review Grassland nominations in mid 1997.

### **How much land needs to be designated to fill these gaps in the Grassland Natural Region?**

Under the Special Places program, 166 significant and highly-visible landforms, called Level 1 Natural History Themes, were identified in Alberta. From this information, it is possible to set preservation targets for each type of landform in each subregion. In the Grassland Natural Region, the gap based on Level 1 Themes is 1615 square km.

### **Where are the gaps in the Grassland Natural Region's protected areas network?**

All four subregions in the Grassland Natural Region are under-represented in the existing system of protected areas.

While existing protected areas in the Dry Mixedgrass Subregion already represent many Level 1 themes, there are significant gaps in Glacial Lake Bed, Shallow Marsh and Deep Marsh. Both the Foothills Fescue and Mixedgrass Subregions contain few protected areas. The Northern Fescue Subregion contains significant representation in the Hand Hills Ecological Reserve. However, this subregion contains minimal representation of the themes of Glacial Lake Bed, Hummocky Moraine, Dune Field, Floor/Stream, Springs, Shallow Marsh, Deep Marsh and Alkali Wetland and Lake.

### **How many nominations have been received in the Grassland Natural Region?**

As of November 1996, 45 nominations for sites in the Grassland Natural Region have been received.

## For More Information ...

This fact sheet is one of several sources of information about Special Places. The Special Places "Policy and Implementation Plan" covers the Special Places process. You can find information about the natural regions and Special Places in the booklet "A Framework for Alberta's Special Places" and the brochure "Preserving Our Heritage, Protecting Our Future." If you need copies of these publications, contact the Alberta Environmental Protection Information Centre at (403) 422-2079. If you're calling from outside Edmonton, dial 310-0000 and ask to be connected to (403) 422-2079.

For general information about Special Places, call (403) 427-0047. If you're calling from outside Edmonton, call the government Rite operator toll free at 310-0000 and ask for 427-0047.

For more information about Special Places in the Grassland Natural Region, contact the regional Alberta Environmental Protection office in Lethbridge at (403) 381-4306. If you are calling long distance, call the government Rite operator toll free at 310-0000 and ask for 381-4306.

You can also get more information by writing to:

**Alberta Environmental Protection  
Corporate Management Service  
11th Floor, South Petroleum Plaza  
9915-108 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2G8.**

To read about Alberta's Special Places on the Internet, visit the Environmental Protection Web site at:

<http://www.gov.ab.ca/~env/>

\*click on the Lands icon and select Special Places from the menu displayed.



A LEGACY IN THE MAKING

