



Special Places:

Candidate Sites Selected for Local Committee Review in 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 and 20 subregions.

Special Places provides the policy, science and process to fill under-represented areas or gaps in Alberta's protected areas network, including the Grassland Natural Region in the south-east corner of the province.

The Grassland Natural Region is a flat to gently rolling plain with a few major hill systems. The Region contains four subregions -- Dry Mixedgrass, Mixedgrass, Northern Fescue, and Foothills Fescue. Each subregion is separated by geographic location and vegetation differences.

The selection of three Grassland candidate sites for review by Local Committees is an important milestone in Special Places. It marks significant progress towards completing a network of protected areas by 1998 and reflects the importance of local input into the selection of sites.

All sites sent to Local Committees are selected to contribute to the Level 1 Themes identified throughout Alberta. Level 1 Themes are broad

landform types which can be easily measured from existing sources of information like maps and aerial photos.

The Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) has forwarded three Grassland candidate sites to Local Committees for review. A map and description of these sites -- Bodo, Grassy Island Lake and Hand Hills -- can be found on the next page.

While this is an important step for the Special Places program, it is only the first in a series of site selections being prepared for the Grassland Region. More candidate sites will soon be announced for other Grassland subregions in south-eastern Alberta to close gaps in the region's protected areas network.



Special Places:

Overview of Candidate Sites

Currently, all the candidate sites are located in the Northern Fescue subregion. Sites will be added in the other subregions as soon as they are considered by the Provincial Coordinating Committee and approved for review by local committees. The three candidate sites in the Northern Fescue subregion are:

Bodo

This site is located east of Consort, near the Saskatchewan border in an area of transition between the Northern Fescue subregion and the Central Parkland subregion. The site covers about 189 sq. km. Level I Themes captured within the site include mostly hummocky moraine, with some wet meadow, shallow marsh, alkali wetlands and springs. Bodo also contains dancing grounds for sharp-tailed grouse, nesting habitat for the upland sandpiper, Baird's sparrow and Cooper's hawk, as well as more than 50 other recorded bird species.

Grassy Island Lake

Located southeast of Consort, this site includes parcels of provincial crown land surrounding the Grassy Island, Misty, Currant, Percy and Berry lakes. This site covers about 72 sq. km.

The shore of the large lake basin is the main feature that makes the candidate site valuable to the Special Places program. This site also contains significant mule and white-tailed deer habitat and has the highest concentration of sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds in the region.

Hand Hills

This candidate site is located north of the Red Deer River and southwest of Hanna. The site covers about 109 sq. km and contains steep-walled coulees with diverse features such as badlands, alkali springs, aspen woodlands as well as tall and low shrub communities. The site also contains plant species uncommon in Alberta like the crowfoot violet and the small evening primrose, as well as endangered wildlife species like the piping plover and peregrine falcon.



* Indicates Candidate Site Location

Special Places:

Questions and Answers About the Next Steps in the Process

How were the Grassland candidate sites selected?

Over the past two years, Albertans nominated 50 sites for consideration as Special Places in the Grassland Natural Region. These sites were reviewed and prioritized by the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) -- a multi-stakeholder group -- and government. Based on this prioritization, the Minister of Environmental Protection has forwarded three candidate sites to Local Committees for review. Other candidate sites in the Grassland Natural Region are expected to be announced in the near future.

What do Local Committees do?

Local Committee review is an important step in the Special Places process. These volunteer committees develop site-specific management principles and recommend boundary options and appropriate land-use activities for each candidate site. Members can include local elected officials, tenure holders, industry representatives and various local interest groups. In the event that the Local Committee cannot support the candidate site, it will not continue through the designation process.

How does the Special Places process handle the rights of disposition holders, such as grazing or oil and gas leases, within candidate sites?

From the beginning, the Alberta government stated it would honour existing commitments to leaseholders. Grazing leaseholders, for example, have demonstrated good stewardship of the land in the

past, and the government will continue to support leases, renewals and assignments through normal approval processes. Local Committees will ensure the Special Places review process represents leaseholders' rights and interests if part, or all, of a lease boundary falls within a candidate site.

How will the historic stewardship role of ranching communities be incorporated into Special Places?

It is because of careful grazing practices by leaseholders that many of the candidate sites still retain their unique grassland features. Alberta Environmental Protection is currently developing a "Heritage Rangelands" protected areas designation. This designation would reflect the ranching and grazing community's responsible stewardship in the past and recognize their continued role in maintaining these Grassland sites in the future. Input from a variety of stakeholders will be sought as this designation is prepared.

What gaps still remain 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 contain examples of many Level 1 Themes, there are significant gaps. The Northern Fescue subregion contains significant representation in the Hand Hills Ecological Reserve. However, this subregion still contains minimal representation of many Level 1 Themes. Both the Foothills Fescue and Mixedgrass subregions contain few protected areas.

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) 382-4306. If you are calling long distance, call the government Rite operator toll free at 310-0000 and ask for 382-4306.

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.



Alberta
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Library

**ALBERTA
SPECIAL
PLACES** 
Preserving our heritage. Protecting our future.

A LEGACY IN THE MAKING

Alberta
GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA