

Working in Grasslands



Antelope-brush grassland



Big Sagebrush grassland

Grasslands are areas of low annual precipitation where trees cannot grow. In the South Okanagan and Similkameen valleys grassland landscapes are characterized by bunchgrasses, sagebrush, rabbitbrush and antelope-brush shrubs.

- Grasslands support an incredible variety of plants and animals including 30 % of the province's species at risk.
- Grassland or "shrub-steppe" habitats can include rugged slopes and rocky cliffs and extend into pine forests, deciduous woodlands, wetlands and stream corridors.
- Healthy grassland soils are covered with a biological crust of small plants, mosses and lichen. This layer absorbs and retains water and is resistant to wind erosion but is very sensitive to disturbance. Degraded grasslands are subject to erosion and weed infestation.

When planning work in grasslands

- ✓ Stockpile topsoil and replace once the work is finished.
- ✓ Control invasive species by immediately replanting or hydro-seeding the area once a project is finished.
- ✓ Develop a weed management plan to control invasive weeds.
- ✓ Consider using native grasses, shrubs and trees for landscaping which are low maintenance and support native wildlife and insects.
- ✓ If possible use permeable surfaces for paths and parking lots to prevent erosion from water runoff.
- ✓ Create clearly defined pathways and discourage off-track bicycle and ATV access into natural grasslands.
- ✓ Where trespassing is a problem, use fencing or concrete barriers to prevent bicycles and motorized vehicles from going on to sensitive grasslands.

Species that depend on grasslands:



Great Basin Spadefoot



Big-horn sheep



Racer



Mormon Metalmark



Lewis's Woodpecker



Mariposa Lily

Amphibians: Tiger salamanders and Great Basin Spadefoots breed in wetlands but spend most of their adult lives foraging and hibernating in grasslands. Retain connecting travel corridors so that amphibians can travel between grasslands and nearby ponds and marshes.

Hoofed mammals: Deer, Bighorn sheep and other ungulates forage in grasslands but also use riparian zones, forests and steep terrain. Preserve wildlife travel corridors where possible.

Snakes: Of seven species of snakes live in this region, five are considered vulnerable. Snakes move in to grasslands and riparian areas in the summer to take advantage of abundant prey. By October snakes have travelled to south-facing rocky areas to hibernate. Preserve travel corridors and rocks and shrubs for hiding habitat so that snakes can avoid crossing roadways and public areas.

Butterflies: The Okanagan is home to hundreds of grassland-specialized insects including several rare butterflies. Retain native flowering plants such as buckwheat, antelope-brush and milkweed to provide important food for butterflies.

Lewis's Woodpecker: With a bright rose-pink chest and face and green wings, this distinctive woodpecker flies out from tall trees to snap up flying insects. It is rare because of loss of grassland habitat as well as large dead ponderosa and cottonwood snags used for nesting. Maintaining a few snags near grassland areas will help this vulnerable species.

Guidelines and Best Management Practices for Grasslands

Invasive Plant Council of BC: Local Government Toolkit for Invasive Plant Management available at www.invasiveplantcouncilbc.ca/resources/technical-reports.

