

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20



Nature
SASKATCHEWAN

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Submitted by Ed Rodger, President

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it's my pleasure to introduce the Nature Saskatchewan Annual Report for 2019-20.

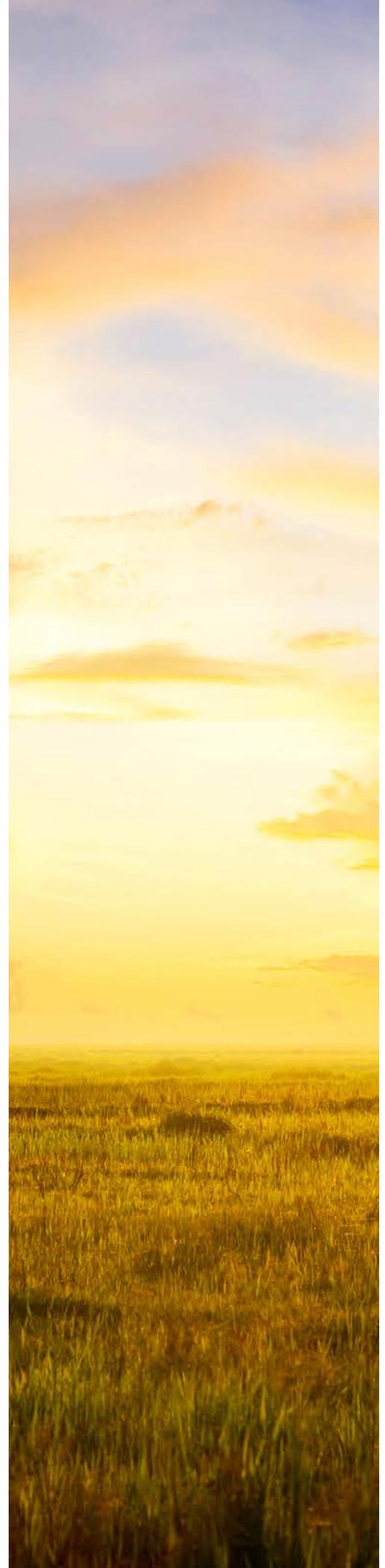
The report looks a little different this year, as we move to a primarily electronic format and distribution. It's also a little shorter, but with the development over the last years of other electronic channels, Nature Saskatchewan is sharing its message and news widely, and we encourage those who would like more details to check those alternate sources.

In any case, the Annual Report still describes an impressive variety of achievements in wildlife conservation and research, habitat protection, citizen science, education and publishing. Nature Saskatchewan collaborated widely with other organizations, from the national to the local, and its success has been acknowledged this past year with awards and award nominations.

The accomplishments you will read about here would be impossible without the dedication and talent of the Nature Saskatchewan staff. The Board would like to thank them very much for their commitment, especially among the disruptions that came with the pandemic towards the end of the year - their ability to maintain continuity of focus and results was very impressive.

I'd also like to add a personal note of thanks to my fellow Board members for their contribution. They have given freely of their time to provide much valuable advice and guidance. There were several changes in Board membership that I don't have the space to recount fully, but I would like to mention and thank Branimir Gvetvaj, who will be leaving after filling many significant roles, including a term as President.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I invite you to read and enjoy our work as described in the Annual Report, and I invite you to join us in that work as a member, volunteer or supporter.



REPORT FROM THE CONSERVATION DIRECTOR

Submitted by Lorne Scott, Conservation Director

In August 2019, Jordan Ignatiuk (ED), Ed Rodger (president), Branimir Gjetvaj (past president) and I (conservation director) attended the America's Grasslands Conference in Bismarck, North Dakota. Branimir and I gave presentations on grasslands and Jordan presented on the SOS program. We made valuable contacts.

We continue to work with and monitor the transfer of three southwest pastures to the federal government. The Govenlock, Battle Creek and Nashlyn former PFRA pastures consisting of some 200,000 acres have been transferred from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to Environment and Climate Change Canada with the ultimate goal to be designated as a National Wildlife Area. A swap of provincial crown lands within these 3 pastures will be made with federal lands within any of the other 59 former PFRA pastures in Saskatchewan. This is expected to be completed in 2020-21.

For the most part both the formal federal and provincial pastures are operating fairly well under the management of producer groups and managers. All pastures are leased on 15 year agreements. Some of the leases have been in place for 7 years already.

The province has sold some one million acres of Crown land in southern Saskatchewan over the past 10 years. Much of the land dumped at below market value is prime native habitat. In fact 48,000 acres of Wildlife Habitat Protection Act (WHPA) lands were sold with no conditions to preserve the natural attributes. Another 107,000 acres of higher value WHPA lands were sold with Crown Conservation Easements. Unfortunately, due to lack of monitoring some of these parcels have been developed with habitat being destroyed. We will continue to monitor this serious issue.

Until recently we have been using the figure that some 80% of our natural landscape south of the forest fringe has been lost to development. More recently Katie Doke Sawatzky's extensive research has determined that only 13.7% of our natural landscape remains. Another study by Sask. Polytechnic reports that as little as 8.75% of our grasslands remains. Consequently some 30 Species at Risk are found on our imperiled grasslands.

Wetland drainage is a major concern. Nature Saskatchewan worked with a committee lead by the Citizens Environmental Alliance to deliver a one day workshop on 'Agricultural Drainage and the Environment' in Regina attended by over 100 individuals. We also met with the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency regarding a new wetland mitigation policy within the Agricultural Water Management Strategy. I wrote a letter to the Editor in the Western Producer refuting outlandish statements supporting drainage and member Trevor Herriot wrote a Letter to the Editor in the Western Producer countering an article minimizing the effects of neonicotinoids.

Jamie Sparrow represents Nature Saskatchewan on the Woodland Caribou recovery plan. Branimir has participated in a number of conferences in Saskatoon. Other board members help out on a number of conservation issues. Our staff do a great job with the Stewards of Saskatchewan programs and other outreach programs with land owners. Nature Saskatchewan enjoys a collaborative working relationship with groups like; Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, agriculture organizations, Government officials and Ministries.

Personally, on behalf of Nature Saskatchewan, I chair SaskTip (Turn in Poachers), serve as co-chair of South of the Divide Conservation Action Programs (SODCAP), serve as a rep on the governments Habitat Management Plan. Jordan also represents NS on several committees: Fish and Wildlife Development Fund, Chronic Wasting Disease Working Group,

and the Breeding Bird Atlas Steering Committee. Nature Saskatchewan continues to be an effective and credible voice for nature. The media relies on our expertise. The public looks to us for leadership. A special thanks to our board of directors, staff and members for their dedication and support.

Jordan once again took part in Nature Day on the Hill in February. Over 40 organizations met with 60 MP's from across the country to encourage continued support for the Nature Fund and Canada's commitment to the Aichi Biodiversity targets.

NATURE SANCTUARIES

In November the Nature Saskatchewan office was notified of a bequest of land by Daisy Meyers. Executive Director, Jordan Ignatiuk, and Conservation Director, Lorne Scott, visited the property, north of Leader, along the north side of the South Saskatchewan River to ensure it met the criteria for conservation lands by Nature Saskatchewan. It is unbroken native prairie with some invasion of tame forages. A yard site with a relatively new house is located in the center. The house can be sold and the site will be cleaned up. A search for a local member to act as Sanctuary Steward will be sought to monitor the property. We are pleased to be adding this property to the 7 other properties Nature Saskatchewan currently owns or holds lease on.



NATURE QUEST

Nature Quest involved the general public with forest ecology/oriented programming on the Ness Creek Site through public presentations and trail walks at both the Ness Creek Music Festival and the Northern Lights Bluegrass and Old Time Music Festivals. About 300 people participated in these activities. We also offered 7 guided trail walks in the forest with about 150 people participating. Two of these walks were designed for children.

INNER NATURE

Métis director Jeanne Corrigan secured a partnership with Gabriel Dumont Institute, to have the Inner Nature programming made available online. The resources are in the filming stage. We are excited to see this important program be made available to all schools in perpetuity.

NATURE WATCH

NatureWatch programs were promoted throughout the year, with school groups and the public. NatureWatch is now going back to its original home at Environment and Climate Change Canada and we look forward to working with them to continue this important citizen science work.

Congratulations to the 2020 winner of the Margaret Skel Graduate Student Scholarship: Ajaypal Singh Kahlon. Ajaypal's Project is "Interactions among climate, stress, and avian influenza, and their impact on survival in migratory waterfowl"

LAST MOUNTAIN BIRD OBSERVATORY

Staff and 23 volunteers observed about 100 species and captured and/or banded 55 species (817 new birds in the spring), and around 137 species were observed and 75 species (2427 new birds) were captured and/or banded in the fall.

There were 652 visitors to LMBO in 2019 that toured the bird banding station and the 13 mist nets, and observed the process from capture to processing and releasing songbirds.

The annual Black-and-white Warbler newsletter and the annual Last Mountain Bird Observatory Report were completed and are available at www.naturesask.ca.



NATUREHOOD

Nature Saskatchewan took 15 school and community groups, including 588 youth, to Wascana lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary or nearby green spaces in Regina. In addition, 10 groups, including 186 students, visited the Last Mountain Bird Observatory. Nature Saskatchewan partnered with Regina Open Door Society, Cosmopolitan Learning Centre and SaskAbilities to bring 65 participants to Wascana Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Last Mountain Bird Observatory. We celebrated World Migratory Bird Day with a free BBQ and activities at Last Mountain Bird Observatory, and we held the Christmas Bird Count for Kids around Wascana Lake. Both events attracted over 100 participants.



IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

The Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) caretaker program received monitoring forms for 15 IBAs. Jordan Rustad, the IBA caretaker program assistant, updated all the site summaries, and held a birding event with Old Wives Watershed Stewards to tour and monitor Old Wives Lake. The annual IBA report was completed and is available at www.naturesask.ca.

STEWARDS OF SASKATCHEWAN

Our voluntary Stewards of Saskatchewan (SOS) suite of programs is designed to conserve habitat for prairie species at risk. The SOS staff work in cooperation with over 900 rural landowners and managers, as well as other organizations, volunteers, and professionals. The main program activities include encouraging and facilitating stewardship, education and awareness (e.g., to prevent the inadvertent destruction of habitat), and population surveys and monitoring (e.g., through census reports). The SOS staff also work with the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Center (SK CDC) and Environment and Climate Change Canada's SAR (Species at Risk) Recovery Teams to document and verify SAR sightings, and to monitor populations. SAR locational data are shared with the SK CDC through the annual census that is conducted with program participants. In 2019-20, SOS staff conducted 216 visits with current and potential program participants to discuss the stewardship programs, species at risk, management options, and conservation.

Site-specific SAR Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) plans are created to encourage land stewardship practices that are beneficial to the SAR and other wildlife in the area while allowing for the specific operations at that location to run efficiently. SOS staff have distributed 45 plans to interested participants.

Operation Burrowing Owl (OBO) is currently working with 348 participants to conserve just over **160,000 acres** of prairie habitat for Burrowing Owls.

Launched in 2003, there are currently 267 Shrubs for Shrikes participants conserving over **81,000 acres** of grassland and shrub habitat for the threatened Prairie Loggerhead Shrike.

Plovers on Shore focuses on conserving and enhancing shoreline habitat for the endangered Piping Plover. Since 2009, there are 64 participants conserving over **223 km (139 miles)** of shoreline habitat.

The Stewards of Saskatchewan banner program, initiated in 2010, works with 162 participants conserving over **83,000 acres** of habitat supporting a number of nationally and/or provincially listed species at risk. SOS staff monitor species' trends with the help of participating landowners through the annual program census. The census is intended to collect population data on target species at risk. The 2019 census results have been compiled and program participants have reported 38 Burrowing Owls (14 pairs, 8 singles, and 2 young), 184 Loggerhead Shrikes (51 pairs, 57 singles, 25 young), 52 Piping Plovers (6 pairs, 10 singles, 6 young, and 24 of unknown age), 519 Barn Swallows, 25 Ferruginous Hawks, at least 25 Sprague's

at least 12 Bobolinks, at least 27 Common Nighthawks, 18 American Badgers, at least 44 Northern Leopard Frogs, at least 21 Tiger Salamanders, and 33 Monarchs.

Initiated in 2002, Rare Plant Rescue (RPR) focuses on nine nationally listed plant species at risk in Saskatchewan and seven species that are provincially rare. RPR currently has 81 participants conserving over **144,000 acres** of habitat.

SOS staff held three Conservation Awareness/Appreciation Day events bringing just over 100 local participants, their families and members of the public together to enjoy a locally catered supper, discuss conservation, and share SOS and a number of partner program/project updates.

Additionally, SOS is excited to be partnering and working with Prairie Sentinel Bottleworks. Prairie Sentinel Bottleworks is a brewery based out of Rosthern, SK. This year, they launched new species at risk labels for their various flavors of cider. Each label features a different Saskatchewan species at risk, such as the Burrowing Owl, Piping Plover, and Western Spiderwort. One dollar from every litre of cider sold is donated to the SOS programs. It has been a mutually-beneficial relationship as Prairie Sentinel Bottleworks has doubled their sales since launching the species at risk labels!



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS IN 2019-20



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Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation



THE SCHAD FOUNDATION

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