

Rare Plants and Ranchers Program

Native grassland plants and ranching go hand in hand. The prairie ecosystem, including its native plant species, evolved under grazing pressure by bison and native ungulates. With the disappearance of bison from the landscape, domestic livestock are now the dominant grazers in our prairie ecosystem, and grazing continues to be essential to maintain healthy native grasslands. And, as any rancher will tell you, healthy grasslands are required for a healthy livestock operation.

The Rare Plants and Ranchers program, a joint initiative between the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan (NPSS) and Nature Saskatchewan, offers a practical stewardship solution for ranchers with rare native plants on their lands. This program complements Nature Saskatchewan's Rare Plant Rescue (RPR) program, by working with RPR participants to develop site-specific beneficial management plans for plant species at risk using an ecosystem-based, multi-species approach.

How does the program work?

Step 1: A Professional Agrologist with the NPSS will visit the participating landowner or land manager, to conduct an interview with them to obtain some context about the plant species at risk situation on the land, as well as details about the ranching operation history and current management strategies.

Step 2: The Professional Agrologist will conduct range and riparian (i.e. wetland) health assessments on the quarter sections enrolled in the program, and collect data on the rare plant populations present and any invasive species or other threats that may be present.

Step 3: The data collected in Steps 1 and 2 will be used to prepare a site-specific management plan for the landowner. In addition to the data collected, the management plan also includes specific management recommendations to benefit the plant species at risk on the land. These recommendations use the best available knowledge, follow specific recommendations included in the plant species at risk Recovery Strategies, and are developed in consultation with the landowners and plant species at risk experts to ensure the recommendations are mutually beneficial and practical for both the ranching operation and the rare plant populations. An example of a recommendation might be controlling the spread of Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula*). While this would greatly benefit the plant species at risk by reducing competition from a noxious weed, it also directly benefits the producer by improving range quality for cattle. No recommendations that would be detrimental to the ranching operation are ever suggested, and there is no obligation by the landowners to implement any or all of the recommendations.

Step 4: The NPSS provides the landowner/land manager with dollar-for-dollar cost sharing to assist them in implementing the recommendations outlined in the beneficial management plan.

Step 5: After the recommendations have been implemented, the NPSS and Nature Saskatchewan provide ongoing monitoring of the plant species at risk, in order to assess the effects of the recommendations on the plant populations and habitat, and landowners are given the opportunity to adjust management practices accordingly (adaptive management).

What are the benefits?

There are many benefits associated with the Rare Plants and Ranchers program, including:

- Species at risk and their habitat will benefit from the reduction or elimination of threats, increased beneficial influences, and more informed land stewards.
- Landowners benefit by receiving a comprehensive management plan for the species at risk on their land. This management plan is customized to suit their specific ranching operation needs, goals, and management strategies.
- Landowners also benefit by gaining access to match funding and ongoing logistical support to help improve their operations to benefit species at risk.
- Participating stewards receive a free membership to the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan, which includes a quarterly newsletter.
- Data collected will update known plant species at risk occurrence data, could contribute new occurrences, and may address knowledge gaps such as identifying trends or factors that help explain the presence or absence of plant species at risk in particular areas.
- In the long run, this project may help secure additional species at risk habitat. Participants receive information on conservation easements along with their management plans, and will be given logistical support from either NPSS or Rare Plant Rescue to help them establish an easement if they choose to do so.

How can I participate?

If you are currently a participant in the Rare Plant Rescue program, all you have to do is call Kristen Martin at the Nature Saskatchewan office at (306) 780-9417 or Chet Neufeld at the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan Office at (306) 668-3940. **The program is FREE and we do all the work!** If you are not involved in the Rare Plant Rescue program, you can still participate in Rare Plants and Ranchers if you have one (or more!) of the following plant species at risk on your land:

- Buffalograss (*Bouteloua dactyloides*)
- Dwarf Woollyheads (*Psilocarphus brevissimus* var. *brevissimus*)
- Hairy Prairie-clover (*Dalea villosa* var. *villosa*)
- Slender Mouse-ear-cress (*Halimolobos virgata*)
- Small-flowered Sand-verbena (*Tripterocalyx micranthus*)
- Smooth Goosefoot (*Chenopodium subglabrum*)
- Tiny Cryptanthe (*Cryptantha minima*)
- Western Spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*)

Photos and information about each of these plant species can be found in the *Pocket Guide to the Rare Plants of Southern Saskatchewan* on our Resources for Stewards page. If you are unsure if you have any of the above species or not, please contact us and we can help you out!

If you would like to participate, or if you have questions about the program or plant species at risk, please call Kristen Martin at the Nature Saskatchewan office at (306) 780-9417 or Chet Neufeld at the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan Office at (306) 668-3940.