

Alberta Conservation Association 2007/08 Project Summary Report

Project name: Petro-Canada Sustainable Grasslands Program

Project leader: Paul Jones

Primary ACA staff on this project: Maria Didkowsky, Lance Engley, Paul Jones, and Doug Manzer

Partnerships:

Petro-Canada
University of Calgary

Key findings

- Completed Terms of Reference for this initiative to formalize partnership with Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) and Petro-Canada.
- Initiated four projects that seek applied answers for grassland conservation including:
 1. Conservation design for energy development and sage grouse recovery in southeastern Alberta (University of Calgary).
 2. Silver sagebrush reclamation and best management practices for southeastern Alberta (University of Calgary).
 3. Pronghorn antelope as an indicator for conservation design in the Northern Great Plains (University of Calgary).
 4. Tree encroachment on grasslands in southwestern Alberta (ACA).

Introduction

As Alberta's economy and human population continue to grow, grassland landscapes are experiencing substantial surface disturbance from a variety of land-use pressures, particularly from the development of hydrocarbon reserves, expansion of transportation infrastructure, cultivation, rural residential development, and urban sprawl. Balancing demands for such a wide variety of land uses is an enormous challenge. Current land management systems are under stress from unprecedented levels of activity, yet the knowledge and tools necessary for effectively dealing with such a complex issue are poorly understood and implemented. There is a recognized need for increasing the multidisciplinary knowledge base, and developing the interdisciplinary skills, tools, and practices required to resolve current competition for land, while conserving biodiversity and natural capital. Grassland conservation and sustaining the ecosystems and economies that depend on them is of common interest to wildlife and land management organizations. In common with the ACA and University of Calgary, Petro-Canada has indicated an interest in supporting the development of a conservation program focusing on

innovations in sustainable land use management in Alberta's Grassland Natural Region. This program is based on the concepts of ecosystem restoration and management, including biodiversity conservation, social, and economic missions, and associated innovations in mitigation and post-operational reclamation practices.

Methods

Through a consultative approach between representatives of the ACA, Petro-Canada and the University of Calgary, we developed a Terms of Reference to guide the scope, direction and accountability for the Petro-Canada Sustainable Grasslands Program. Together we identified two ecoregions to focus our efforts: 1) foothills fescue and 2) dry mixed grass. Project concepts are vetted by ACA, Petro Canada and University of Calgary (where it is the lead delivery agent).

Results

We developed Terms of Reference and assigned specific principle investigators for four initial projects to be delivered under the Petro-Canada Sustainable Grasslands Program. The initial four projects under this initiative include:

1. Conservation design for energy development and sage grouse recovery in southeastern Alberta – University of Calgary.
2. Silver sagebrush reclamation and best management practices for southeastern Alberta – University of Calgary.
3. Pronghorn antelope as an indicator for conservation design in the Northern Great Plains – University of Calgary.
4. Tree encroachment on grasslands in southwestern Alberta (preliminary) – Alberta Conservation Association.

Proposals, including budgets, were developed by graduate students at the University of Calgary under the supervision of Dr. Cormack Gates for the first two projects listed above. Detailed project proposals and funding agreements are now complete for these two projects between the ACA and the University of Calgary. For the pronghorn antelope project, an advertisement has been posted to recruit a Ph.D. student to deliver this project. We anticipate that the recruitment process will be finalized by the summer of 2008. The ACA is initiating the project concept for the tree encroachment proposal and will submit this proposal to the steering committee in May 2008.

Conclusion

Petro-Canada has taken a proactive approach to the conservation of grasslands and initiated a program with the ACA and University of Calgary. Petro-Canada has committed to a three year program to initiate projects under the Petro-Canada Sustainable Grasslands Program. Four projects will be delivered under this initial three year agreement, with the potential to develop a long-term partnership based on the results of this pilot program.

Communications

- A overview of the purpose of this new program and its general direction was provided in the Petro-Canada Medicine Hat Area Shallow Gas Development Plan Newsletter
- A overview of the purpose of this new program and its general direction was provided in the Petro-Canada Sullivan Area Sour Gas Development Plan Newsletter – February 2008