

THE BENEFITS OF PRESERVING NATIVE RANGELAND

Native grasslands on the South West prairies host a variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs species that are well-suited to survive the sometimes harsh conditions of this region as they can adapt to these conditions. Grasslands are a crucial part of the prairies and native species, both flora and fauna, can benefit from the use of managed grazing, as the two have co-existed for many years and dependence for health and diversity is mutual. Since native grasslands require less input and are resilient to grazing pressures, using proper management can benefit the land as well as the producer's economics in the long run. Incorporating a grazing management plan will not only allow these lands to be grazed to their fullest potential, but can also extend grazing seasons, improve nutrition, and allow for rest and carry over into the next season.

Native grasslands are becoming less abundant and with their disappearance biodiversity and economic value also degrades or suffers as a result. In areas where land has been converted to annual cropland the risk of soil erosion and salinity can increase. This creates unfavourable conditions for annual crops and reduces production on that land. To minimize losing land area to salinity and to prevent erosion, seeding the land back to native perennial forage can be a beneficial move for the conservation of soils and also can create an extending grazing rotation once established. This can turn a low productivity site into a thriving grassland with increased biodiversity and economic values for both grazing and wildlife, including species at risk.

The Farm Stewardship Program under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) has funding available for a variety of projects aimed at implementing beneficial management practices to ensure that the quality of water, soils, and biodiversity are improved or maintained. This program falls under the CAP division of Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change and funding includes pre-approval and rebate projects. To preserve native grasslands one funding option available is the permanent native forage seeding beneficial management practice. The purpose is to protect soils from erosion through the conversion of cultivated lands back to native perennial forage cover.

Funding is available for this project at 90% eligible costs up to \$10,000. Application requires pre-approval and eligible applicants must be primary producers who earn a minimum of \$50,000 gross farm income in Saskatchewan, hold a premises identification number (if applicable), project land must have been used for a minimum of two years in annual crop production, the forage blend must be approved by a Ministry of Agriculture Agri-Environmental Specialist, be Common#1 or Certified #1 seed, and/or a germination test and Purity analysis is required on wild harvested seed by a certified lab.

Information, applications, and premises identification numbers can be found at: www.saskatchewan.ca/CAP or by calling the Agricultural Knowledge Centre at **1-866-457-2377**.

Agri-Environmental Services can also be obtained in your regional watershed areas. For **Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards please contact 306-770-4606**.

