

STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

You've read about some great examples in this newsletter about how Operation Grassland Community works with its membership toward common stewardship goals. We, of course, can't 'do it all', but wanted to share some of the other great organizations and agencies that can be of assistance. Please don't hesitate contact the OGC office if you would like more information!

Government Programs:

Alberta MULTISAR (stands for MULTIPLE Species At Risk).

A program of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and the Alberta Conservation Association, MULTISAR assists landholders in managing land to benefit species at risk. They offer Conservation Strategies and Plans for both large and small operations. MULTISAR staff also provide rangeland or wildlife technical support. **Contact:** Francois Blouin, MULTISAR Coordinator; Phone 403-381-5318; e-mail Francois.Blouin@gov.ab.ca; Website: www.multisar.ca

Alberta Growing Forward Program. Implemented by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, provides expertise and financial support to develop agri-business plans. The Stewardship Plan Initiative (one of 12 initiatives) helps landholders manage natural resources and strengthen competitive position. To qualify, producers must complete an Environmental Farm Plan and risk report. **Contact:** Toll-Free: 310-FARM (3276); e-Mail: GrowingForward@gov.ab.ca; Website: www.GrowingForward.Alberta.ca

PFRA Shelterbelt Program. Provides technical services and tree and shrub seedlings (free!) to establish shelterbelts, and for conservation/reclamation projects. Application forms are available on-line. **Contact:** Contact your local County Office; Phone: 1-866-766-2284; e-mail: agroforestry@agr.gc.ca; Website : www.agr.gc.ca/pfra/shelterbelt.htm

Partners in Habitat Development (PHD). Provides financial and technical assistance for shelterbelt planting, re-seeding to perennial grassland cover, fencing, installing watering systems, and wetland enhancement projects. **Contact:** Margo Jarvis Redelback; Email: margo.redelback@eid.ab.ca; Phone: 403-362-1413; Website: www.eid.ab.ca/Partners_in_Habitat_Development.htm

NonGovernment Organizations

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC)

Forage programs. Encourages planting of native and tame grass through a discount on seed price. OGC partners with DUC to provide a further savings through cost-share (50/50) with land managers on native seeding projects. **Rangeland programs.** Cost-share funding and financial assistance to help landowners secure and improve existing upland native rangeland habitat. **Contact Info:** Website: <http://yourland.ducks.ca/manage/alberta.html>; Scott Henowitch, Conservation Programs Specialist; Phone 403-394-9492; Cell: 403-331-1511; email: s_henowitch@ducks.ca; Nathan Fontaine, Brooks Office Phone: 403-362-4827 e-mail: n_fontaine@ducks.ca; Darwin Chambers, Red Deer Office Phone: 403-342-1314; e-mail: d_chambers@ducks.ca

Cows and Fish. Supports improvements in grazing and other riparian management strategies toward landscape health/productivity, & for benefit of producers and their communities. **Contact:** Norine Ambrose, Program Manager Phone: 403-381-5538; e-mail: nambrose@cowsandfish.org; Website: www.cowsandfish.org

Other Organizations of Interest

Alberta Invasive Plant Council (AIPC) Awareness of invasive plants in Alberta. Website: www.invasiveplants.ab.ca

Milk River Watershed Council Canada works with government, non-government, and residents to manage watershed resources. Website: www.milkriverwatershedcouncil.ca

The Oldman Watershed Council (OWC) works with residents to improve the Oldman River Watershed. Website: www.oldmanbasin.org

The Bow River Basin Council is dedicated to improvement and protection of the waters of the Bow River Basin. Website: www.brbc.ab.ca

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PRAIRIE ACRES

NEWS FOR ALBERTA'S LAND STEWARDS

TELL GOVERNMENT WHAT YOU THINK: PLEASE HELP OGC CONVEY YOUR 'STEWARDSHIP REALITY'

WHAT?

In 2010, OGC will hire the Ipsos Reid polling company to conduct an anonymous telephone survey of willing OGC members. **(NOTE: no names, addresses, or phone numbers will appear in the final analysis/report... the results will simply be 'averaged' across participants).**

WHY?

Your Land Stewardship 'Reality'. Land stewardship is in your hands, and only you appreciate the daily challenges! This is what we mean by 'stewardship reality'.

OGC's Land Stewardship 'Reality'. We are passionate about finding balance between agriculture and wildlife. Like you, economics plays an undeniable role in our work. In recent years, OGC has felt some pressure from our funders to 'push' a particular stewardship agenda (e.g., conservation easements among others).

Does this agenda 'fit' with your stewardship reality? What message would you like to convey?

Let's deliver the message together! What works for you and what doesn't? How can we achieve mutual success?

HOW?

In spring 2010, we will send out a permission form to allow us to share your first name and phone number with Ipsos Reid. Their calling centre will then call you at a convenient time. The survey will take very little of your time. Compiled results (remember, no personal information will be shared with the public, only your name and number will be given to the polling company) will be available by winter of 2010/2011.

A MODEL RANCH FOR THE FUTURE

By Wonnita Andrus, and Brett Ackerman

On the northern fringes of Alberta's grassland region lies the once much larger Northern Fescue Grassland. Once extending over 255,000 km² across the Prairie Provinces, less than five percent remains. Located just north of Hanna, Alberta, in the heart of this nearly lost ecosystem is the 12,000 acre TK Ranch.

Owned and operated by Colleen and Dylan Biggs, TK Ranch is an all natural, organic ranching operation. The Bigg's commitment to sustainable ranching shows: they fence,



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and thus protect their water resources, they don't use pesticides or herbicides, and they have a live and let live approach to predator management. In addition, they sustain their range health through "under stocking" (dividing just 700 head into 2 – 4 smaller herds), rotational grazing, and deferred grazing. The ranch is guided by the principle of "intensive management not intensive livestock". As a result of their commitment to these sustainable practices, their land supports a plethora of species, including Burrowing Owls.

TK Ranch is currently working with Operation Grassland Community a second time by installing another off-site watering system, and through fencing of dugouts. Both projects will protect areas that produce prey for Burrowing Owls.

Their efforts as Land Stewards attracts international attention, and volunteers come from around the world to work and learn what it takes to be considered an Environmentally Sustainable Ranch. In 2009 the ranch won the prestigious Countryside Canada National Stewardship Recognition Reward. Dylan Biggs also practices low stress livestock handling, and is widely respected as a teacher on the subject. If you are interested in more information regarding sustainable ranching, including school and landowner tours, the Biggs encourage you to contact them at TK Ranch, 1-888-TK RANCH.

RANCHING FAMILY LOOKS AFTER THEIR BOTTOM-LINE AND BURROWING OWLS

Brad and Pat Rooke of Pollockville understand ranching and they understand their role as stewards of their land. Brad's grandfather settled the land in 1913 and Brad himself has been ranching for 35 years. The Rookes have had Burrowing Owls on their land as long as they can remember. Because of this love of for the land, and for the owls, the Rookes decided to join Operation Grassland Community.

Win-win for Ranchers and Wildlife: Grassland Habitat Enhancement Projects

Operation Grassland Community (OGC) believes that prairie habitats can be wisely used, ensuring the sustainability of other wildlife habitats and agricultural livelihoods.

Habitat Enhancement Projects are one method OGC uses to preserve & enhance habitats, while at the same time improving native range. Brad and Pat have worked with OGC to do just that on their land: fencing off two dugouts and installing an off-site watering system near

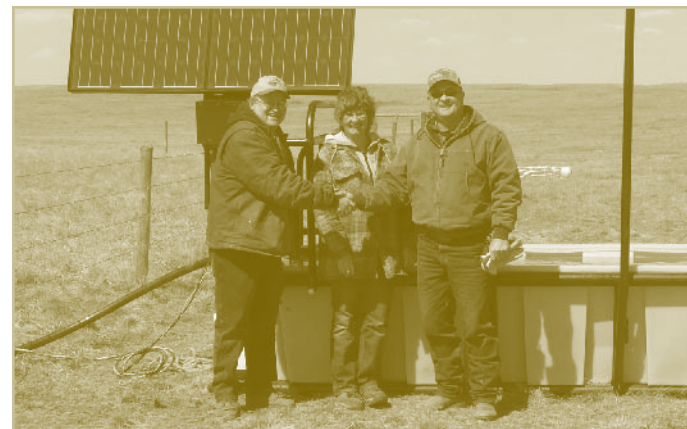
active Burrowing Owl nest sites. These projects kept cattle away from the water's edge, better enabling grasses to thrive and in turn creating habitat for mice and voles (the owl's food sources). These measures also provided benefits to the Rookes through improved range and livestock health!

The Rookes agreed to cost-share the project and haven't regretted it since. They are very impressed with the projects and feel that in addition to helping the owls, these projects were a good financial investment for their operation. Last summer, they noted extensive vegetation growth and variety of wildlife (e.g., hawks, pronghorn, and coyotes) using the grassy areas within the fenced dugouts. They also observed Burrowing Owls within a mile of one of the fenced dugouts in 2008!

This spring, the Rookes partnered with OGC again to cost-share the fencing of a third dug-out and the installation of a second watering system. OGC also contributed in the purchase a cattle oiler station for the Rooke's operation. The latter project contributes to the Burrowing Owl's nesting habitat (Burrowing Owls nest in well-grazed areas as it helps them see predators approaching).

Off-site watering systems 'no sweat' to operate and Cows love them!

The Rookes find the off-site watering systems easy to setup and move. They've noticed marked improvements in bank erosion and water contamination, both of which have improved herd health. The majority of their cattle (about 70%) preferred the off-site watering systems over unfenced water bodies within the same pastures. Through their dedication, the Rookes have created a "patchy" landscape of lightly and more heavily grazed areas – just the type of habitat suitable for a range of grassland wildlife. And, although they do their best for wildlife on their land, they emphasize that conservation groups need to recognize that



making a living is paramount. Working with OGC, the Rookes feel they can do both. If you have Burrowing Owls on your property or wish to find out how you can help, please contact Operation Grassland Community at 780-437-2342 or 722-0944

BURROWING OWL AND LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE CENSUSES 2009

2009 marked the 19th Anniversary of OGC's annual Burrowing Owl census and the 6th year for the annual Loggerhead Shrike census. Thanks to our dedicated membership throughout southern Alberta, we have collected a very special dataset, unique to Alberta, allowing us to monitor change in population numbers of these species at risk.

2009 Burrowing Census. While owl numbers appear to have dropped slightly from 2008 (from approx. 55 down to 45 pairs), they have been relatively stable over the last few years (e.g., 46 pairs were reported in 2007- so not much of a change!)

2009 Loggerhead Shrike Census. These birds show a slight increase in number (73 pairs reported compared to 62 pairs in 2008 and 69 pairs in 2007).

Because owl numbers have declined so dramatically over only the last 20 years (242 pairs of owls were counted in 1990), it is important that we continue monitoring. Shrike numbers are less well recorded, and continued monitoring will hopefully give us a better idea how these shrikes are fairing in southern Alberta.

Again, many many thanks to those OGC members who participated in the census!! Your continued support really does make a meaningful contribution towards avian conservation!

Congratulations to 2009 Census Winners!

Every year, OGC rewards those census participants who provide us promptly with their census information.

This year's winners are:

- 1st Place (\$300): Mr. Donald Versluys of Champion AB
- 2nd Place (\$150): Mr. Walter Regehr of Linden, AB
- 3rd Place (\$75): Mrs. Marguerite Watson of Strathmore, AB

Congratulations and Thank-you!

FERRUGINOUS HAWKS AND ARTIFICIAL NESTING PLATFORMS – How OGC MEMBERS ARE HELPING THIS THREATENED BIRD!

Artificial nesting platforms provide a safe nesting location for Ferruginous Hawks whose current nests are at risk of falling, or have previously fallen. In areas where trees have decreased in number, an increase in the number of artificial nest platforms for Ferruginous Hawks have shown to help increase numbers of this threatened bird. In turn, the presence of Ferruginous Hawks is great for landowners as a single pair of hawks can consume as many as 500 ground squirrels in one season! "With their appetite for ground squirrels, landholders definitely see this opportunity as a win-win!" says Susan Skinner, Co-Manager with AFGA's Operation Grassland Community program.

Operation Grassland Community (OGC) Program recently partnered with AltaLink and ATCO Electric to provide and install nesting platforms for Ferruginous Hawks.

Through the generous donation of materials and staff time by ATCO Electric and AltaLink personnel, three artificial nesting poles have been installed on OGC members' property so far. These nesting structures are made of a recycled transmission pole and an attached, wooden platform. Crews install poles about 10-15 feet above the ground as Ferruginous Hawks typically nest in smaller trees lower to the ground.

Building on these successes, ACTO Electric, AltaLink, and OGC will continue to work together to provide additional alternate nesting sites for Ferruginous Hawks in the coming months. For inquiries please contact Operation Grassland Community at 780-437-2342 or 403-331-0627.

