

## BC Grasslands Habitats Backgrounder

Generally found east of the forested Coast and Cascade Mountains, the grasslands in BC occur most often in valley or plateau landscapes. Summer temperatures are **hot, with low precipitation**, while winters are typically cool to **cold and relatively dry**. These areas can be found from Vernon to Penticton and Osoyoos (the Okanagan Valley) and along the Trans Canada Highway around Kamloops and up toward Williams Lake (the Thompson-Nicola and Chilcotin Valleys). For exact locations of BC's grasslands, visit the *Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia* for a look at their excellent interactive maps (See links below).

Grasslands are open areas where grasses feature as the dominant vegetation and trees are sparse. In BC, the mountainous landscape offers more variety in our grasslands than those in the large plateau landscapes found south of the border. For this reason, some grasslands species are found nowhere else in Canada.

Grasses and other low-lying shrubs are adapted to survive in dry and hot conditions. For example, grasses have many long, fine roots that are good for searching out water just below the soils surface. You might also notice that a blade of grass is curved inward. That's so it can capture the rain water and guide it to the roots of the plant. In some areas shrubs dominant the landscape, and they, on the other hand, have long taproots that go deep below the surface looking for water.



Not surprisingly, many of the animals that live in these habitats are grazers - feed on grass. Grassland animals are also adapted to live in these areas. Many seek protection underground to avoid the cold winter or hot summer, like the badger, gopher, or marmot. Others migrate like elk and bighorn sheep. Scorpions, Robber Flies and Pallid Bats are but some of the many special species found only in our hottest southern grasslands, while arrow-leaved balsamroot (a plant), Veerys (a bird), garter snakes, and California Bighorn Sheep are more widespread.



Plants and animals aren't the only species that have adapted to the hot, dry climate of the BC grasslands. Ranchers use the flat, expansive grasslands to raise livestock, while farmers prefer the rich valleys that support a multitude of crops. Wetlands and other precious water sources are being re-routed to grow these crops and feed the cattle. We all can use the convenient transportation corridors provided by these valleys, while sprawling urban development is also made easy in this landscape.

It's not surprising to learn that the grasslands in BC have become one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems. We all must find a way to share and protect this land from over-use and habitat fragmentation. Contact your nearest grassland society for information on what you can do to help. The March-April 2007 issue of Green Star! also has great information to help you on your way!

*The Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia website was accessed for information found in this backgrounder. For more information please visit: [www.bcgrasslands.org/](http://www.bcgrasslands.org/). View their maps at: [www.bcgrasslands.org/maps/bc-map.htm](http://www.bcgrasslands.org/maps/bc-map.htm).*