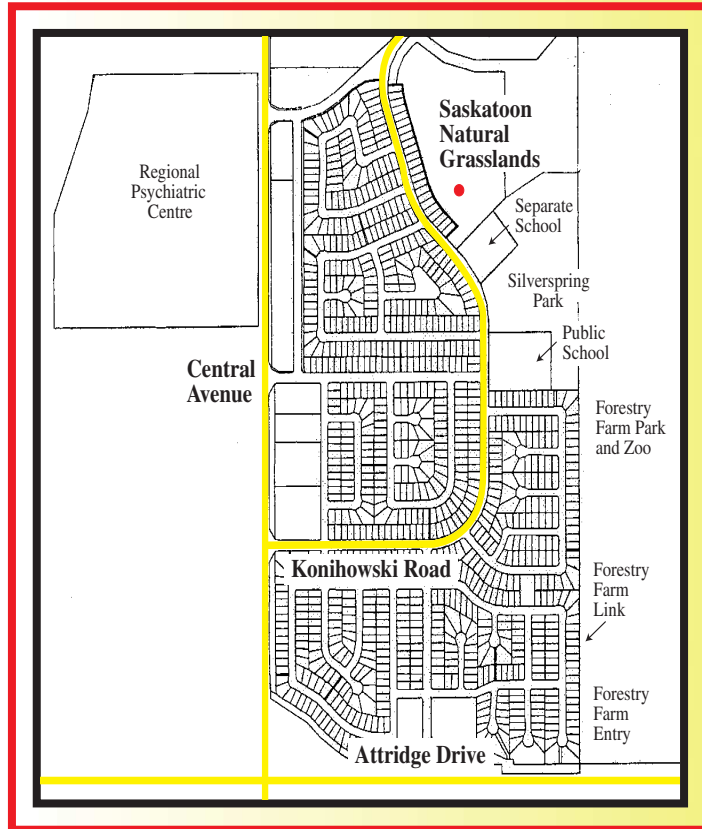


Come tour the grasslands on weekends and holidays from June until August when the Prairie Nature Center is open (1-4pm). The Center is located 1.9 km north of Attridge Dr. on Central Ave., and will move to Mother Teresa School in the spring of 2002.



Saskatoon Natural Grasslands

For more information on the Saskatoon Natural Grasslands please contact:

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WHAT IS IT?

The Saskatoon Natural Grasslands (SNG) is a 34 acre (13.8 hectare) parcel of native Saskatchewan grassland persisting in a surprisingly natural condition. It lies within the area known as Silverspring (located in the northeast sector of Saskatoon, 8kms from the city centre along the South Saskatchewan River). This fescue grassland is not just grass, but an ecosystem – a complex association of grasses, flowering and non-flowering plants, birds, animals and insects representing 10,000 years of natural history since the glaciers receded.

There are at least 117 species of birds that nest in or frequent this area, 25 kinds of butterflies and 222 plant species. Unfortunately, few places of true virgin prairie remain in Saskatchewan – almost the entire fescue prairie has been destroyed, both in the province and across Canada. Saskatchewan loses 200,000 natural acres per year, including grasslands, wetlands and forest acres. According to Ducks Unlimited, the parkland alone loses 13 upland acres per hour.

HISTORY

About 10,000 to 12,000 years ago glaciers covered the grasslands. As the glaciers melted and receded they left glacial debris, ranging in size from large boulders to fine particles. The University of Saskatchewan owned the site and used it for grazing sheep and cattle, botany and the excavation of limestone used for the construction of the greystone buildings on the university campus. In 1982, the City of Saskatoon designed an urban development plan to be built over the natural heritage site.

Spearheaded initially by local ecologists Jim Romo and Ed Driver in the late 1980's, various environmental groups lobbied to save the SNG. In 1989, a group of concerned citizens, Meewasin and environmental groups led by Gordon Silversides joined forces to preserve a section of the endangered fescue grassland. Working with the City of Saskatoon, the U of S and the Province of Saskatchewan (SERM), they were successful in conserving 34 acres. On February 26, 1993 the City of Saskatoon sold the SNG to MVA for \$1 to "conserve the natural grasslands area in a natural state and use the natural grasslands area for the purposes of the general public".



Why is the SNG Important to Conserve?

- Prairie vegetation is vital to the survival of countless wildlife species, many of which have already dropped in number due to loss of habitat.

- The SNG lies in a transitional zone between two ecosystems – prairie and parkland – and thus represents a unique range of biodiversity.

- The great variety of natural and cultural resources provide many opportunities for education and interpretation, especially for the youth attending Mother Teresa and Silverspring Schools.

- The SNG benefits the community by providing habitat, aesthetic and recreational opportunities, soil protection and gene pool availability for future medical and agricultural use.



Gaillardia aristata



Red-tailed Hawk

What is Being Done?

Careful planning and management help us to live in and make use of the prairies in a positive way without degrading its habitat value for other species. Meewasin has a project coordination committee consisting of members from the Silverspring community, Silverspring School, Mother Teresa School and the Saskatchewan environmental community.

In 1993, with the support of the City of Saskatoon, Meewasin developed a management plan for the SNG to preserve the ecological integrity of the prairie as a remnant of a larger prairie ecosystem and gene pool for the future. The conservation area provides a living classroom for environmental education and interpretation.

“What may begin as a concern for endangered species, leads inevitably to understanding the importance of saving spaces or habitats, which leads to maintaining the health of ecological processes underlying the spaces and habitats, which leads to peering into the lifestyles, economic systems and souls of people alive on Earth today.” (WORLD WILDLIFE FEDERATION)

The SNG is a grassland preserve for recreational use and for the enjoyment of individuals wishing to access the Forestry Farm and Petturson’s Ravine along the Meewasin Trail. The SNG will also provide an educational link between the community and the schools that neighbour the grasslands.



Prairie Crocus

For 100 days each year from Mother Teresa School, the Nature Society will deliver free public programs on weekends and summers. The Saskatoon Public School system contracts with the U of S Extension Division to provide the SNG interpretation for grade two students in its system.

Silverspring School and Mother Theresa School will host special locally developed environmental education programs for their school and community.

“Within one lifetime, the prairies have passed from wilderness to become the most altered habitat in this country and one of the most disturbed, ecologically simplified and over exploited regions in the world. The essence of what we risk losing when the grasslands are destroyed is not a species here or a species there, but a quality of life, the largeness and wilderness that made the country remarkable.”

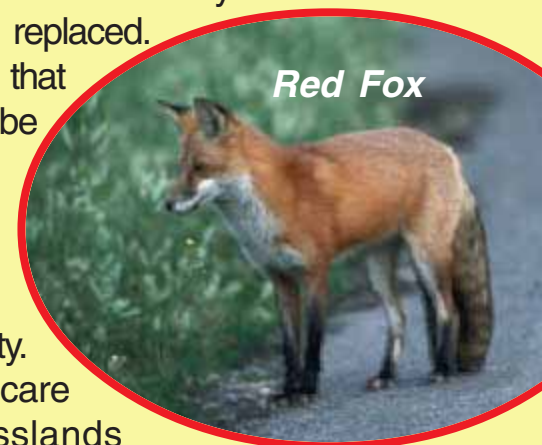
- Adrian Forsyth

How Can You Help?

- Please follow the trails
- Do not bicycle off the trails (mountain bikes especially do damage)
- Please help clean-up (you may leave the trails to do so)
- Dogs should always be on a leash (bylaw no. 7860)
- Dog owners: please clean-up after your dogs

The disappearance of native prairie means the disappearance of thousands of years of natural history. This resource can never be replaced.

The only way that the area can be conserved is with the support and ownership of the community. Please take care of your grasslands and educate others as to their value.



Red Fox