



Meewasin Valley Authority
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NEWS RELEASE

for immediate release

Meewasin Announced as a Recipient of Weston Family Foundation Grant to Support Grassland Health

March 4, 2021

Meewasin is excited to be part of a new collaboration on one of the largest prairie grasslands conservation efforts in Canadian history. The Weston Family Foundation launched the Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative, with nearly \$25M awarded to five organizations to support conservation and biodiversity of grasslands.

The Canadian prairie grasslands are complex ecosystems that support critical biodiversity in our country. They provide habitat for hundreds of species and migration stops for millions of birds. The prairie grasslands also provide food for Canadians by supporting soil health, offering grazing for livestock, and acting as habitat for pollinators. Native grasslands are resilient and play a key role in mitigating the effects of climate change, but once destroyed are difficult to restore.

The Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative will fund organizations working with local communities to advance ecologically and economically sustainable long-term solutions for this critical landscape. Despite a loss of more than 70% of the country's prairie grasslands, there remains enough continuous grasslands intact to have a substantial effect on biodiversity in Canada if they are well managed.

"The Canadian prairie grasslands are some of the most ecologically-valuable but threatened ecosystems in the world and we have an opportunity now to protect them for future generations," said Eliza Mitchell, Director, Weston Family Foundation. "We're launching this initiative to bring together a diverse group of environmental and agricultural organizations to accelerate the adoption of sustainable approaches to protect and restore biodiversity in this unique landscape"

"This Initiative brings decades of informal partnerships conducting prescribed fire on the Canadian prairies into an era of mutual support, training and standards to increase community understanding and acceptance for prescribed fire as an important tool in restoring grasslands biodiversity. Meewasin has partnered with a number of groups including Indigenous organizations and governments, government agencies, municipalities, producer groups, and non-government organizations. These partners will share the group's efforts to First Nations, remote communities, and many other stakeholders across the Prairie Provinces. Meewasin is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work within such an impactful partnership," says CEO of Meewasin, Andrea Lafond.

Meewasin's partners in the project include: Grasslands National Park and Waterton National Park (Parks Canada), Nature Conservancy of Canada (Saskatchewan and Manitoba Regions), Saskatchewan Parks, Culture and Sport, College of Agriculture - University of Saskatchewan, Canadian Wildlife Service/Environment & Climate Change Canada, City of Saskatoon, First Nations Emergency Management, Prince Albert Grand Council, and the Association of Manitoba Community Pastures.

For more information, contact Andrea Lafond at (306) 665-6887 or meewasin@meewasin.com

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About Meewasin Valley Authority

The Meewasin Valley Authority exists to ensure a healthy and vibrant river valley, with a balance between human use and conservation by:

- *Providing leadership in the management of its resources;*
- *Promoting understanding, conservation and beneficial use of the Valley; and*
- *Undertaking programs and projects in river valley development and conservation,*

for the benefit of present and future generations.

There are 67 square kilometers of land and over 90km of established trail, which has seen up to 1.87 million trail visits per year, in the Meewasin Valley. The area also features sites that help people to connect to nature through experiences such as Beaver Creek Conservation Area, the Northeast Swale, Saskatoon Natural Grasslands, the River Landing Spray Area, and the Cameco Meewasin Skating Rink @Nutrien Plaza. Meewasin is a non-profit organization that relies on donations and volunteers for sustainability. To get involved or learn more visit www.meewasin.com

About the Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative

The Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative is a five-year collaboration to celebrate, steward and protect one of Canada's most ecologically valuable and threatened ecosystems. Nearly \$25M has been committed by the Weston Family Foundation to five organizations to accelerate the implementation of sustainable practices and achieve landscape-level impact: Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Saskatchewan Stock Growers Foundation, Grasslands National Park (Parks Canada), and Meewasin Valley Authority. Each organization brings additional funding and in-kind donations for a total of \$70M going toward this collaboration over the next five years. The Initiative aims to improve species-at-risk habitat, enable wildlife movement, expand the amount of land protection in the prairies, and ultimately increase long-term ecological and economic stability. Dozens of partners will support this work that will affect nearly four million acres of priority native grasslands in one of the largest prairie grasslands conservation efforts in Canadian history.

