

MEDIA RELEASE

‘Loss of grasslands’ issue complex, requires wide range of perspectives

Kamloops – The fragmentation and development of B.C.’s grasslands poses a serious threat to this endangered ecosystem. On May 18th and 19th approximately 40 representatives from different organizations, agencies and private businesses gathered to sink their teeth into this complex issue.

The workshop, entitled “Shaping the future: Mitigating the fragmentation and development of B.C.’s grasslands,” brought together select individuals with expertise in grassland issues. The group spent two days grappling with the issues leading to the loss of grasslands to fragmentation and development, identifying roots causes and exploring potential solutions.

The event kicked off with a panel presentation that explored the many factors of development on grasslands. Dan Wallace, a planner with the Thompson Nicola Regional District, gave an overview of grasslands in the region and how planners try to work with developers to achieve an economic and environmental balance. Kevin McNaney, acting executive director of SmartGrowth BC, conveyed the importance of preserving the Agricultural Land Reserve as a tool for urban containment, portraying the ALR as grassland habitat’s best friend. And lastly Grant Huffman, owner of Riske Creek ranch and a commissioner on one of six Agricultural Land Commission regional panels, presented the challenges of maintaining a viable ranching operation in the face of many socio-economic challenges.

On day two, participants rolled up their sleeves to deal with the complexities of the fragmentation and development issue. The working groups was broken down into four different themed groups:

- Viability and sustainability of ranching
- Local and regional planning for sustainability
- Governance
- Sustainable grassland use (non ranching)

The groups fleshed out issues within the scope of their theme, formulated potential solutions and identified any current gaps in knowledge that may be necessary to effectively deal with a particular issue. Afterwards, the groups reported back to the other participants and some priority issues bubbled to the top of the list.

Based on the results of the workshop, the Grasslands Conservation Council and a steering committee will determine priority focus areas for a more in-depth analysis. Marking the second stage of this important initiative, the problem analysis will result in strategic recommendations for government and other non-government organizations to begin to take action on this looming threat to grasslands.



Building on the results of stage two, the GCC will plan a large provincial conference for planners, land managers and policy-makers to gather and resolve ways to implement the strategic recommendations. The conference is tentatively scheduled for Fall 2005.

The fragmentation and development of grasslands is denigrating the social, cultural and ecological aspects associated with grasslands. This is a complex issue that stems from many interrelated factors. In order to gain an understanding of the problem, we must examine how the legislative framework, conservation issues, socio-economic aspects, and land use planning and decision-making processes interrelate. The myriad of issues associated with this problem need to be scrutinized, clarified, and applied to future land use and decision-making processes if we are to make sizable gains towards the conservation and stewardship of BC's grasslands.

The workshop summary document and a full project description is available at:

<http://www.bcgrasslands.org/conservation/fragdev/workshop.htm>

The Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia is a province-wide non-government organization with a mandate to promote and ensure the conservation and stewardship of B.C.'s grasslands. For more information about this important conservation initiative, please contact Taylor Zeeg at (250) 374-5787 or taylor.zeeg@bcgrasslands.org.