Integrating a Protected Areas Species-at-Risk Conservation Needs into Regional Conservation Planning: A Case Study.

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Grasslands National Park (GNP) has 14 species listed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). As part of Parks Canada's Species at Risk program, GNP was selected as a focus site for multi-species recovery. The challenge is to develop a conservation plan at a scale that is relevant for the conservation requirements of these species given that several are wide ranging with generalized habitat requirements linked to native prairie. Consequently, conservation planning for species at risk in the park requires working at a broader spatial scale and putting species requirements in the context of native prairie conservation/restoration programming.

The last year has been spent developing a partnership framework for conservation planning within a portion of the northern mixed grass prairie that includes Grasslands National Park, part of Northern Montana, SW Saskatchewan and SE Alberta. Participants in the process will include representatives of conservation organizations, land management agencies, universities, and interested stakeholders. This planning area is a subset of the TNC Northern Great Plains Steppe Ecoregional Plan that identifies sites of high conservation value within the ecoregion. This subset of the ecoregion was chosen because it is considered that the sites within it share enough in common that detailed conservation planning could be better accomplished in a multi-site conservation planning process. The engine for developing the plan will be the TNC Efryomson workshops series. During the next 2 years, integrated plans will be developed that identify the sources of ecological stress, conservation targets, viability of conservation targets, and strategies for securing the viability of the conservation targets. It is postulated that this approach will be an effective way of addressing species at risk conservation requirements within the planning region and will complement conventional species-by-species recovery planning.