

New Key Biodiversity Areas Highlight Critical Prairie Habitat for Species at Risk

Press release

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The recognition of six new Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in southeast Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan is a critical step for the conservation of species at risk in rapidly vanishing native prairie grasslands.

Species that benefit from these habitats include the Threatened Swift Fox, Canada's smallest wild canid, the Weidemeyer's Admiral Butterfly which inhabits only 13 locations across Canada, and the Greater Sage-Grouse, of which only around 200 individuals remain in Canada. For grassland birds, whose populations have declined by 67% since 1970, conserving the habitat in these KBAs will be essential for slowing drastic population declines.

The new KBAs include:

- [Onefour-Lost River-Sage Creek KBA](#): This area of extensive native mixed-grass prairie is home to almost a third of Canada's Greater Sage-Grouse population, up to 10% of Canada's Swift Fox population, and supports important populations of several other grassland birds and plants.
- [Prairie Pastures KBA](#): Overlapping the Prairie Pastures Conservation Area, this arid prairie grassland is a critical site for reintroduced Swift Fox in Canada, as well as a nationally significant habitat for grassland birds such as Chestnut-collared Longspur and Lark Bunting.
- [Writing-on-Stone KBA](#): A UNESCO World Heritage site of deep cultural significance to the Blackfoot people, the striking landscape formations at this site are home to over 50% of all Weidemeyer's Admiral butterflies in Canada.
- [Cypress Hills KBA](#): Standing as the highest point of elevation in Canada between the Rocky Mountains and Labrador, the Cypress Hills host an incredible diversity of rare and threatened species. There are 13 different species of hawthorns recorded at this site, with at least four found nowhere else.
- [Pakowki Lake and Sandhills KBA](#): This intermittent lake and surrounding grasslands sand dunes provide important habitat for threatened grassland birds year-round, and for breeding shorebirds like the American Avocet. The site also holds over a third of Canada's Western Spiderwort, and several other rare dune and prairie specialists.

- [Milk River-Pinhorn KBA](#): The spectacular Milk River and surrounding canyon contains almost half of Canada's Western Silvery Minnow and Weidemeyer's Admiral butterfly. The surrounding mixed-grassland area is a critical site for several prairie species, including Chestnut-collared Longspur and Upland Evening-primrose.

In addition to the diversity of species that these KBAs support, these regions have thousands of years of recorded human history of use by Indigenous Peoples, and remain an important cultural region for Indigenous Peoples including the Blackfoot, the Sioux, the Stoney, the Cree, the Nakota and the Métis.

While KBAs do not offer legal protection, they highlight critical areas for conservation, guiding strategies to help secure the future of species and the fragile ecosystems they depend on. Across Canada, KBAs are informing land use planning and helping attract more funds and attention towards the stewardship of important places and species.

These newly identified KBAs join a growing list of ecologically important sites across Canada, recognized through the KBA Canada program.

Quotes

Peter Soroye (WCS Canada): "The charismatic Swift Fox embodies both the charm and challenges of Canada's prairies. After being extirpated from Canada in the 1930s, Swift Fox are re-establishing themselves thanks to concerted reintroduction efforts over the last few decades but remain very threatened. These new KBAs highlight core habitat for Swift Fox and dozens of other iconic species of the Canadian prairie. It's our hope that this recognition will support conservation efforts for all species that call these areas home."

Amanda Bichel (Birds Canada): "Grassland birds are in serious trouble, and the message in reports like the [State of Canada's Birds](#) is clear. We need immediate conservation actions that work to make sure these birds don't disappear from Canada. Designating these sites as KBAs will ideally prioritize and encourage existing and new work, to safeguard this habitat for the birds and many other species that depend on it."

Ruiping Luo (Alberta Wilderness Association): "Canada's prairies are highly endangered and under intense pressure from agricultural, industrial and urban development. They are also one of the least protected ecosystems in the country. These new KBAs recognize some of the most extensive and unique prairie ecosystems remaining. They help identify areas of focus for conservation and protection."

Jordan Rustad (Nature Saskatchewan): “Prairie species have been facing sharp declines across their range and within Saskatchewan. The designation of multiple prairie KBAs marks a significant step towards conservation of prairie species and of prairies themselves. Nature Saskatchewan staff and volunteers were privileged to be part of the review process and are excited to see the collaborative effort pay off.”

Wildlife Conservation Society Canada (WCS Canada), Birds Canada, and Alberta Wilderness Association, in collaboration with other experts from Environment and Climate Change Canada - Canadian Wildlife Service, and Nature Saskatchewan, played a role in identifying and mapping these KBAs. The recognition of these sites affirms the critical need to protect biodiversity, particularly in grassland ecosystems that continue to face pressures from habitat loss and climate change.

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About KBAs

- KBAs are sites that contribute to the persistence of biodiversity nationally and globally.
- KBAs support rare and threatened species and ecosystems, as well as key natural processes. They range in size from small patches of habitat to large tracts of land or water.
- KBAs are identified based on specific, measurable criteria.
- The KBA designation does not give sites a particular management prescription or legal status.
- KBAs may encompass private or public land, sometimes overlapping, partially or entirely, with legally protected sites.
- In Canada, KBAs are identified in consultation with local communities and experts
- Visit: [KBA Canada \(kba.canada.org\)](http://kba.canada.org)

About KBA Canada

- Canada has one of the world's first comprehensive national programs to identify KBAs and was the first country to adapt the Global KBA Standard to a national context.
- The KBA Canada initiative was launched in 2019 to help Canada meet protected area targets and other targets agreed to in the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- This work is led by the KBA Canada Coalition, a collaborative initiative involving non-governmental organizations, governments, Indigenous partners, academic institutions, experts and knowledge-holders that are engaged in the work of identifying, delineating and reviewing KBAs.
- The KBA Canada initiative is jointly coordinated by Birds Canada, NatureServe Canada, and WCS Canada.

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<https://show.pics.io/se-alberta-and-sw-saskatchewan-kbas>

Map

