



**CIER**  
Centre for Indigenous  
Environmental Resources

# Southwest Manitoba Priority Place

## Integrated Conservation Implementation Plan

### Update & Workshop Report

July 2023



**NATURE  
CONSERVANCY  
CANADA**



Environment and  
Climate Change Canada

**Canada**



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CIER, the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources, is a national First Nation directed environmental non-profit organization. We offer research, advisory, and education and training services to Indigenous communities, governments, and private companies through our two program areas: Building Sustainable Communities and Protecting Lands and Waters.

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# Executive Summary

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) in collaboration with the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) held a preliminary 2-hour virtual Zoom session on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and a subsequent one day in-person conference in Brandon, Manitoba on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023, on the Southwest Manitoba Priority Place (SWMPP) Planning Initiative. The Initiative is a prelude to the development of an Integrated Conservation Implementation Plan (ICIP) that incorporates strategic public engagement and innovative land management initiatives for southwestern Manitoba. A key part of this process involves engaging with the Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations and communities situated in the SWMPP to develop a community driven, multi-partner, adaptive management-grounded approach to multi-Species at Risk (SAR) recovery in the SWMPP. CIER's focus is to help enhance the environmental capacity within Indigenous communities through educating, conducting research, and building relationships in the spirit of collaboration and reconciliation.

The goal of the Priority Place Planning Initiative is to deliver an ICIP for southwestern Manitoba that honours and incorporates socio-economic and cultural perspectives founded on a shared vision for the landscape. Throughout the virtual Zoom session and in-person conference, members of the management teams from NCC, ECCC and CIER engaged with 16 Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants from 9 distinct Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations whose territories overlap the SWMPP. Topics for discussion included SAR, Science, Research, and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) in the SWMPP area. Key outcomes of the virtual Zoom session and in-person conferences included:

- Establishing dedicated Indigenous partner and stakeholder engagement in future ICIP planning;
- Integrating all specific Indigenous and non-Indigenous concerns through collective discussion; and,
- Enhancing data and information management sharing to strengthen stakeholder collaboration.

# 1.0 Purpose

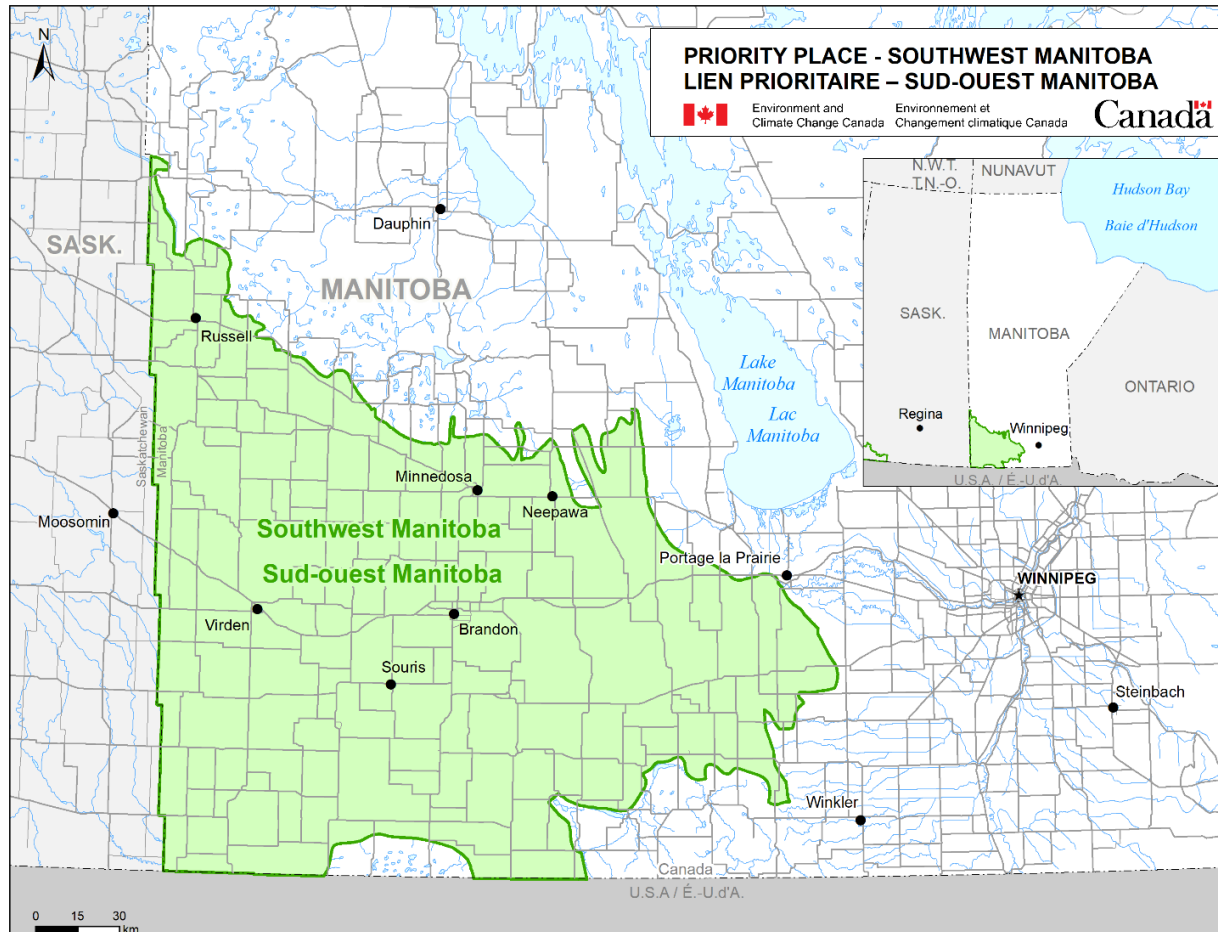
A cohesive and collaborative Integrated Conservation Implementation Plan (ICIP) is the objective of the Southwest Manitoba Priority Place (SWMPP) conservation project that honours and incorporates Indigenous and non-Indigenous socio-economic and cultural perspectives which are formed on a shared vision for the landscape and in the spirit of collaboration and reconciliation.

Throughout the process of developing and implementing the Priority Place Conservation Project, the relationship between existing conservation partners will be strengthened, common ground with new partners and communities explored, and a common vision with similar interests adapted. Together with a broad group of partners, we will develop a community driven, multi-partner, adaptive management-grounded approach to multi-Species at Risk (SAR) recovery in the SWMPP. The project is formed on the following principles:

1. Multi-species and ecosystem-based approach;
2. Shared leadership and priorities;
3. Community-driven;
4. Reconciliation-minded;
5. Built to strengthen partnerships;
6. Evidence and knowledge-based decision making;
7. Improved monitoring and reporting;
8. Improved conservation outcomes for species at risk;
9. Increased co-benefits for biodiversity, ecosystems, and communities; and,
10. Delivery of strategic community relations and communication actions to inspire conservation action.

A Joint Community Relations Team (JCRT) will be established to develop and implement a Joint Community Relations Strategy (JCRS) throughout the SWMPP and will be a crucial tool for cultivating partnerships and communicating information. This Priority Place Conservation project is co-led by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) with support from the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER). The JCRT will aim to increase conservation awareness, link common interests, and strengthen trust and relationships in the SWMPP area (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Southwest Manitoba Priority Place (SWMPP)**



## 1.1 Framework

The project is a broad, multi-partner initiative co-led by ECC and NCC, with the objective of using a conservation management framework (the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (Conservation Standards)) to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, industry, and existing and future partners in the framing, development, and finalization of a shared conservation plan for SAR in the Priority Place project area. Planning will be people oriented with an emphasis on socio-ecological systems, perspective sharing, and exploration of alternative approaches.



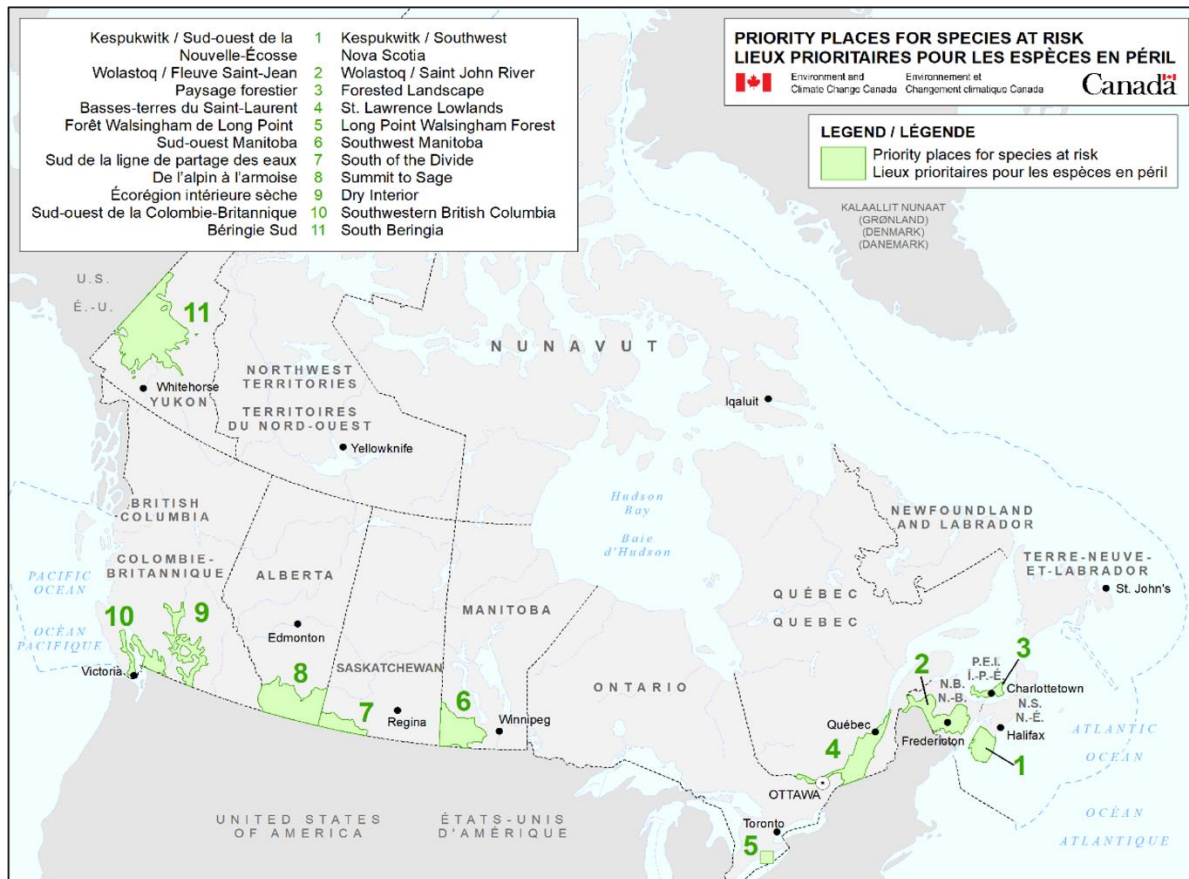
## 2.0 Priority Place

A Priority Place is an area of high biodiversity and conservation value both regionally and nationally that is regarded as a distinct area with a common ecological theme by its Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants. Criteria and considerations agreed upon by provinces (via the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee, (CWDC)) for identifying a Priority Place for SAR include:

1. Biodiversity values;
2. Conservation status (risks exist);
3. Achieving conservation outcomes;
4. Leadership and partnership opportunities; and
5. Appropriate spatial size.

Across Canada, there are currently 12 Priority Places (Figure 2; Newfoundland and Labrador recently identified a Priority Place). Each Priority Place is unique with varying terrestrial and non-terrestrial animal and plant species and opportunities for new and/or expanded collaboration and partnerships, particularly with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, industry, agricultural organizations, Watershed Districts, and rural municipalities. Priority Places have been identified across the country as part of the pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation in Canada.

**Figure 2. Pan-Canadian Priority Places.**



Of all Priority Places across Canada, SWMPP has the largest number of federal and provincial SAR with 47 federally listed and 33 provincially listed SAR, including several that reside only in the SWMPP. The area also includes five Important Bird Areas containing 104 priority bird species. Many SAR in the SWMPP are dependent on mixed-grass and sand prairie habitats. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people equally rely on the mixed-grass prairie as a primary place for their livelihoods and for conserving the rural fabric. Approximately 75% of Manitoba’s mixed-grass prairie has been lost due to conversion. Protecting the remaining remnants of mixed-grass prairie and native grasslands left in Manitoba and the species living in these ecosystems remains critical. Major threats present in the SWMPP include:

1. Conversion;
2. Unsustainable and/or inappropriate prairie management techniques;
3. Shrub/tree encroachment; and,
4. Exotic invasive species.



## 3.0 Overview of Presentations

### 3.1 Virtual Zoom Workshop – February 16th, 2023

The Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and organizations whose traditional territories overlap the SWMPP area were invited to a virtual Zoom session held on February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, to share perspectives and input into the SWMPP Initiative. The objective was to develop an adaptive, community-driven, multi-partner approach to multi-SAR recovery in the SWMPP. The 2-hour virtual workshop was facilitated by Kate Hewitt of CIER. A PowerPoint on the SWMPP was presented by Ron Bazin of ECCC, and a graphic recording of the session was created by Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles (Figure 3). In attendance were nine participants from nine Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations:

#### Communities:

Rural Municipality of Sifton  
Rural Municipality of Victoria

#### Indigenous Organizations:

Government of Treaty 2 Territory  
Long Plains First Nation  
Rolling River First Nation  
Sioux Valley Dakota Nation  
Southern Chiefs Organization  
Swan Lake First Nation  
Treaty One Development Corporation

Intended outcomes of the February 16<sup>th</sup> community engagement included:

1. Enhancing collaboration, two-way knowledge sharing and welcoming new partnerships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous proponents;
2. Increasing knowledge base and discussing best-practice conservation;
3. Increasing community-led nature-based conservation efforts;
4. Helping advance the understanding of the importance of the area, its relationship with the communities that call it home, and the natural heritage that benefits all residents; and,
5. Enhancing pride and awareness of the area's natural landscapes and wildlife heritage.

These themes were used to appropriately design the content of the second workshop.

Figure 3. Graphic recording created by Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023.



## 3.2 In-Person Conference/Virtual Zoom Session – April 4th, 2023

The Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and organizations who were invited to the February 16<sup>th</sup> virtual workshop were re-invited to an in-person conference on April 4th, 2023, at the Victoria Inn in Brandon, MB to share perspectives and input into the SWMPP Initiative. A virtual Zoom platform was incorporated into the one-day meeting to allow participants who were otherwise unable to attend due to inclement weather scenarios in their area. The objective for the in-person meeting was similar to the Virtual Zoom Workshop - to develop an adaptive, community-driven, multi-partner approach to multi-SAR recovery in the SWMPP. The one-day hybrid in-person/virtual conference was facilitated by Kate Hewitt, Thomas McKay, and Shianne McKay of CIER. The Indigenous engagement from the Zoom platform was transcribed by Steven Anderson of NCC into MURAL. The session opened with a prayer by Dakota Elder Eugene Ross of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. A PowerPoint on the SWMPP was presented by Ron Bazin of ECCC, and a Graphic Recording of the session was created live and in-person by Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles (Figure 4). In attendance were 14 participants from 7 Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations both in-person and virtually. The yellow points in Figure 5 represent the community band office locations whose territories both overlap the SWMPP area and who attended the workshop. Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and organizations in attendance to the conference including:

### Communities:

Rural Municipality of Sifton (Zoom)

### Indigenous Organizations:

Government of Treaty 2 Territory (Zoom)  
Long Plains First Nation (In-Person)  
Rolling River First Nation (In-Person)  
Sioux Valley Dakota Nation (In-Person/Zoom)  
Southern Chiefs Organization (Zoom)  
Swan Lake First Nation (Zoom)

### Other Organizations

Agriculture and Agri Food Canada (AAFC)  
Ducks Unlimited Canada (DU)  
Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)  
Government of Manitoba – Department of Agriculture and Resource Development  
Government of Manitoba – Department of Natural Resources and Northern Development  
Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC)  
Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)

Enhancing collaboration and welcoming new partnerships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous proponents was the key focal point of the April 4<sup>th</sup> hybrid conference. Notable discussion topics included co-benefits for biodiversity, ecosystem health, and human health and well-being of communities which overlap the SWMPP. The ability to engage in-person and share opinions and concerns contributed to a compendium of valuable knowledge from both a scientific and cultural lens. Understanding local and Indigenous perspectives around conservation helps advance the understanding of the importance of the area and gain community input to ensure:

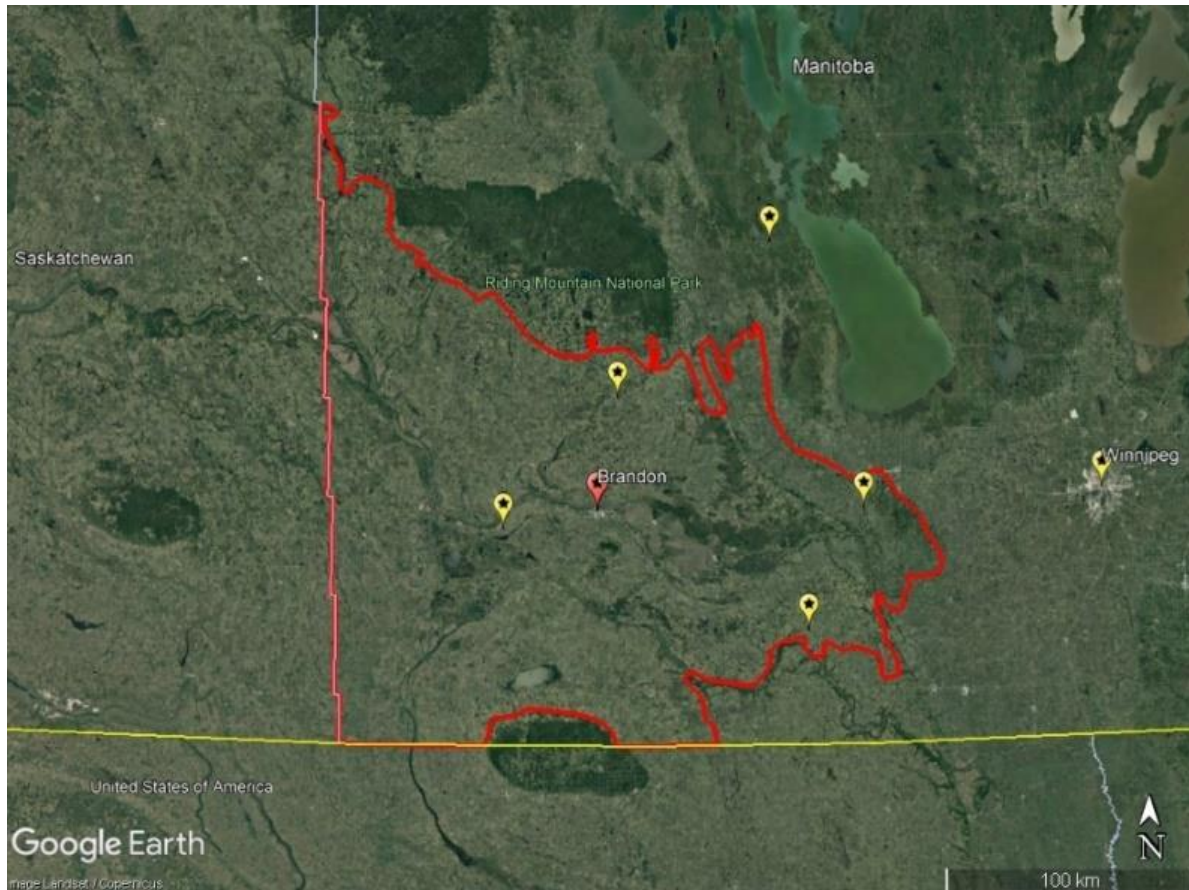
1. Community and cultural values are incorporated into the vision for the SWMPP;
2. Knowledge sharing ensures understanding of factors affecting nature in the Priority Place and reflects all perspectives; and,
3. Identify key areas of common ground and potential collaboration on conservation efforts in Southwest Manitoba.



Figure 4. In-Person conference Graphic Recording created by Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023.



**Figure 5:** First Nations band office locations. In-Person/Zoom are marked in yellow with SWMPP area outlined in Red. Yellow points outside the SWMPP area were from regional Indigenous offices located in Dauphin, Ebb and Flow, Manitoba, and Winnipeg, Manitoba.



## 4.0 What We Heard

The information gathered at the virtual Zoom workshop on February 16<sup>th</sup> and the hybrid one-day conference in Brandon, MB on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023, will aid in the development of an adaptive, community-driven, multi-partner approach to multi-SAR recovery in the SWMPP. The perspectives shared at both the virtual Zoom workshop and the hybrid one-day conference were invaluable. Joint Community Relations and Planning Teams will be established to guide the development and implementation of the Conservation Plan. The ICIP will be a crucial tool for cultivating partnerships and sharing information about the area and enhancing and supplementing the final collective and comprehensive summary of all that was heard during these two events



## 4.1 Virtual Zoom Workshop – February 16th, 2023

The key point highlighted in the Word Cloud icebreaker (Figure 6) when participants were asked “What word comes to mind when you think of Species at Risk?” was *Collaboration*. The Word Cloud icebreaker also saw participants convey that ‘Save,’ ‘Conservation,’ ‘Biodiversity,’ ‘Responsibility,’ ‘Awareness’ and ‘Co-habitation’ were important elements to incorporate in the SWMPP Initiative.

### What We Heard Phase 1

Virtual Zoom workshop: *Working Together: What does future engagement of Indigenous communities look like? The following participant responses were recorded:*

- Working more closely together with experts on the ground.
  - Collaboration with other Indigenous communities just beyond the project boundary was highlighted as an opportunity to deepen the effectiveness of the initiative;
  - Collaborating with the watershed districts; and,
  - Engagement with the signatories to the First Nations’ Land Management Agreement (FNLMA) framework regarding competing land-use interests.
- Allow time for proper engagement and collaboration.
  - Ensure groundwork is complete;
  - Ensure participation from various representatives within each Indigenous community;
    - Multi-generational participation from youth to Elders;
  - Important for engagement to be community-led;
    - Use a community lens when planning engagement; and
    - Involve community members directly in workshop planning and delivery.
- Include youth in aspects of engagement.
  - Bring engagement to their level and prioritize conservation engagement that is reconciliation-focused; and,
  - Make sure community workshops are fun and engaging.
- Two-eyed seeing
  - Importance of considering both traditional knowledge and western science;
  - Need to teach/inform non-Indigenous participants about Indigenous ways of conservation “Onankonehkawin” – the written and unwritten constitution of the Anishinabek; and,
  - Youth programs led by Elders who teach traditional knowledge with western science also being brought into the mix. Encourage the conservation community

to spend time out on the land with Elders to understand environmental issues from an Indigenous perspective.

**Figure 6.** Species at Risk Word Cloud, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023.



## 4.2 In-Person Conference – April 4th, 2023

Many common themes arose during the workshop, and at the end of the day a sharing circle was held to give participants a chance to share thoughts on the day. 7 repeated phrases or themes stood out that very much reflected the discussion heard throughout the workshop: *Collaborative; Perspectives; Diverse people; Optimism; Connections; New partnerships; Bringing people together*. Additionally, a Word Cloud that reflects the priorities of participants was developed based on respondents' answers to the in-person breakout sessions and can be found in Figure 7.

Below is a summary of the key responses and themes heard throughout the workshop.

### What We Heard Phase 2

In-Person Conference: *Breakout session #1 - Defining a Vision: What do you value from nature? The following top responses to key questions were captured:*

1. Clean water/Water levels (12 respondents)
2. Personal Connections (12 respondents)
3. Wetlands (12 respondents)
4. Floods (12 respondents)
5. Wildlife/Wildlife Habitat (11 respondents)
6. Future/Planning (11 respondents)
7. Education/Awareness (9 respondents)

During the breakouts & share-back discussion among the in-person and Zoom groups (see below for summary of Zoom sessions) the following key themes emerged:

Connections are key:

- An ecosystem as a whole approach is needed – everything is interconnected;
- Personal connections & immersion in large expanses of land are valued;
- Traditional use of lands (food/medicine/culture) – and the connection that language brings;
- Stories and the knowledge of elders create the connection;
- Land, season, and climate are connected and the knowledge of them connect people to use of the land; and,
- Without water we can't live – nature should be the first consideration of decision-making.

Awareness of place and its importance is a challenge:

- Lack of understanding and awareness of the place, and education gaps;
- Lack of understanding of the connection and importance of nature to people;
- What we have in this place is unknown and under-appreciated by many; and

- This group recognized the intrinsic values of nature– that needs to be raised elsewhere.

#### Looking Forward:

- Vision for the future that people are connected to nature again & people are aware of the value of nature;
- A fear that these spaces will not exist in the future;
  - Need to leave places better than now;
  - Resilience is needed so nature and values are here for the next generation;
- Climate Change and the changes on the land impact knowledge;
- The plan needs to actually be turned into on the ground action; and
- Short-term funding & resources are a barrier – by the time a program is figured out, the resources change.

In-Person Conference: *Breakout session #2 - Defining a Vision: What factors, motivations, or perceptions in your community are barriers to protecting nature and achieving this vision? (e.g., economic drivers, government policies, societal beliefs, knowledge gaps).* Top 7 responses:

1. Control Over Land (11 respondents)
2. Incentive/Insurance money (7 respondents)
3. Relationship-building with Indigenous Communities (4 respondents)
4. Education/Knowledge Gaps (3 respondents)
5. Urbanization (3 respondents)
6. Disconnection from the Land (2 respondents)
7. Connection to Nature (1 respondent)

During the breakouts & share-back discussion among in-person and Zoom participants, key factors influencing these barriers, and possible approaches to address them were discussed – many of which built on challenges noted in the first breakout.

One theme was that current approaches to decision-making do not meet the needs of communities or are not effective and the correct people are not engaged:

- Consultation is not occurring at the right scope;
- Goals and metrics need to be at a local level;
- Policy and decision-making is urban-influenced – driven by certain groups, then imposed on rural and Indigenous communities;
- Partnerships need to be diverse – limiting to the Priority area limits ability to collaborate and share resource or information more broadly; and,

- Lack of local land use planning resulting from external regulatory limitations and barrier to self-governance.

Additional thoughts on the supports needed to advance key programs and address barriers were discussed, including the need for support for current projects in communities and need for flexibility in funding timelines. Another area of discussion was the dichotomy within the possible solutions presented between the need for more enforcement in some areas, vs the burden that additional regulations create when added on top of self-governance.

In-Person Conference: *Breakout session #3 – Defining a vision: What is the greatest impact this initiative can have on nature and your community?* Top 7 responses:

1. Working Together (14 respondents)
2. Education (7 respondents)
3. Economic Barriers (6 respondents)
4. Acknowledge Loss of Culture, Land, Species, Habitat (3 respondents)
5. Adaptive Management (2 respondents)
6. Provincial and Federal Parks (2 respondents)
7. Interconnection (2 respondents)

Discussion during the breakouts further highlighted the continued strong theme of collaboration and working together as a key opportunity of this initiative. Key points and ideas that came out during discussion included:

- Reciprocal learning through Truth and Reconciliation;
- Bridging communications gaps;
  - Considering how we use language;
  - Ensuring words are meaningful (e.g., biodiversity vs wildlife);
- Connecting nature to other priorities;
- Including diverse partners;
  - Including outside the core Priority Area – extend collaboration and sharing;
  - Industry partners that have been untapped in conservation or SAR initiatives – may have more in common than expected;
  - Recruiting Indigenous students – creating a hub;
  - Expand school curriculum to be more experiential of conservation opportunities and outcomes; and,
- Sharing information on SAR so there is an understanding of how it overlaps.

*Hunting* was considered to be an important activity that communities and Indigenous organizations at the SWMPP conference currently undertake in the Priority Places area.

Throughout the workshop additional thoughts, ideas, and community priorities were shared:

The need for more access to previously disturbed land for expansion of residential development in communities so that natural habitat can be left alone.

Some notable concerns within the Priority Place area that were communicated by Indigenous organizations included:

Swan Lake First Nation:

- Slow return of wildlife to lands;
- Needs water protection;
- Removal of trees in community;
  - No more deforestation; and,
- Above are requests from Elders.

Long Plain First Nation:

- Protection of water;
- Assiniboine River tree removal – a lot of clear-cutting in neighbouring communities; and,
- Buildup of deadfall following tornado – impacting wildlife – lack of programs to address.

Swan Lake First Nation:

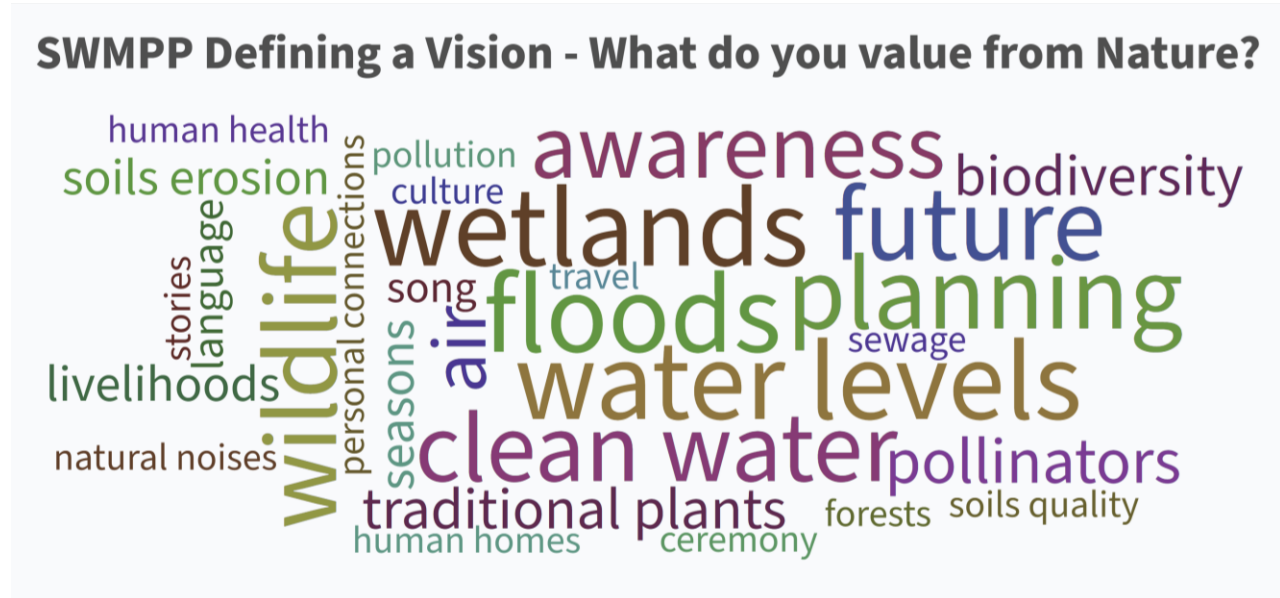
*“Our community needs to be educated on how their habits and consumerism attributes to the environment... right now, it’s slowly being taught.”*

Swan Lake First Nation:

*“Including the five Important Bird Areas, the one thing that we struggle a lot with the species at risk is that the information sometimes is not easily accessible because we have to keep up with multiple websites or it is so broad. Not sure if this is part of the vision plan, but for SWMPP would be nice to have all info related to biodiversity located in one place. This will help conservation efforts.”*



**Figure 7.** Word Cloud visual from In-Person breakout questions.



### 4.3 Virtual Zoom Session – April 4th, 2023

During breakout sessions, thoughts, priorities, and ideas of participants participating through Zoom were captured using MURAL, - an intuitive digital whiteboard. A transcription of the virtual Indigenous engagement from the Zoom platform can be seen in Figure 8. Below are key discussion points captured during those sessions

#### What We Heard Phase 2

Virtual Zoom session: *Breakout session #1 - Defining a Vision: What part of the natural environment is important to you? What gives you pride?*

Swan Lake First Nation:

*“Overall, the natural environment is important. It is very difficult to just select just one part of it. But if I have to choose, water plays an important part in having a healthy biodiversity. The state-of-condition of water in view of heavy agricultural activities and practices are of concern.”*

Sioux Valley Dakota Nation:

*“You asked about SAR or ecosystems - for my community, Sioux Valley, there's a lot of bird species at risk, grassland species and lots of diversity with plants and grasses so I always think of the sounds around us.”*

Swan Lake First Nation:

*“Regarding the pride, at Swan Lake First Nation we are trying to bridge the gap between Western Environmental processes and Traditional Environmental Indigenous Knowledge. There is still a long road ahead but it’s a good start.”*

Sioux Valley Dakota Nation:

*“Community Pride - abundance of plant medicines and foods, rich biodiversity.”*

Virtual Zoom session topics of natural environment importance included:

1. Abundance of plant medicines and foods, rich biodiversity;
2. Restoring wetlands - minimize climate change impacts and sustain flora and fauna;
3. Sweet grass;
4. Working with Agriculture & Agri Food Canada (AAFC) - recommendations based on enhancing productivity, biodiversity;
5. Bison management - ensuring land can sustain them long term (healthy pasturelands, herd cap, and rotational grazing);
6. Swan Lake First Nation- bison and horses, land is worn out- exploring different paddock systems;
7. Protecting the bison and operating sustainably- protects grassland species.
8. Insect populations;
9. Water is the blood of the earth, clean water;
10. Bats- seeing fewer and fewer (Decreasing insect populations?);
11. Ability to implement/plan;
12. Food security;
13. Winter camping and other activities;
14. Clean water;
15. Healthy ecosystems for youth; and,
16. Youth take consideration of practices of natural environments and lands - needs to be an education priority.

Virtual Zoom session: *Breakout session #2 - Defining a Vision: What factors, motivations, or perceptions in your community are barriers to protecting nature and achieving this vision? (e.g., economic drivers, government policies, societal beliefs, knowledge gaps).*

Sioux Valley Dakota Nation:

*“Concerns - climate change is a major concern. Everything from how we feed ourselves/ food security - are we going to have healthy soil to feed ourselves, wildlife diseases are a concern too. Having clean water. Also, safety concerns due to extreme weather especially tornadoes which are increasing and flooding – can we adapt our infrastructure?”*

Virtual Zoom session natural environmental barriers included:

Legislative barriers around land availability and planning

1. Land constraints;
2. Land disparities;
3. Political prioritizing;
  - a. Changing funding priorities doesn't match existing/built up capacity;
  - b. Riparian areas used to be funding priority, then wetlands, now grasslands
  - c. “Carbon credits” new buzzword
4. Jurisdictional issues;
  - a. Breaking a natural system by political boundaries - will end up operating in an ad hoc nature;
5. In MB, level of interest in conservation- 85 conservation officers reflects relative disregard for conservation;
6. Too many gray areas in legislation;
  - a. Navigable waters;
  - b. Open pit mining;
  - c. Forestry;
7. Consideration of "commercial fishing and trapping" not as treaty rights in Environmental Impact Assessments;
8. Registered trapline boundaries are used when determining which communities to consult, when other communities may be impacted;
9. Riparian rights never clearly identified;
10. Gaps in regulation for water- no regulatory regime for water - changes in government result in changing priorities

11. Natural Resource Transfer Act - rights to manage resources passed from crown to provinces has led to resource mismanagement; and,
12. Disconnect on the interpretation of treaty rights and Indigenous rights - Indigenous voices not included meaningfully in environmental discussions.

#### Economic Drivers

1. Agricultural practices hinder conservation and natural environment;
2. Economic drivers - balancing community needs vs protecting biodiversity;
  - a. Sprawl of development reduces biodiversity, but communities are growing- hard to find a balance;
3. Competing priorities between the productivity of pastures lands, and biodiversity on the landscape, economics of the grazing systems;
  - a. Bison graze unevenly - reduces productivity but increases biodiversity;
4. Western ideology of greed; and,
5. Cross-border issues reflect political climate of the U.S.

#### Invasive Species

1. Leafy spurge;
2. Wild boars;
3. Invasive species - Aquatic Invasive Species (zebra mussels); and,
4. Current control isn't sufficient.

#### Technical, financial, and capacity limitations for conservation

1. Staffing capacity as well as financial capacity; technical capacity;
2. Financial barriers;
3. Lack of spatial data for FN lands - vitally important for watershed planning;
  - a. Cost of spatial data is ridiculously high;
4. Lidar data collection - drones may close the gap;
5. Data availability and software is so expensive;
6. Environmental science curriculum is tailor-made on western ideologies. Limited number of instructors that bring traditional Indigenous Environmental Knowledge (IEK); and,
7. Extreme weather - especially tornadoes (can we adapt infrastructure?).

#### Control of water and declining water quality

1. Lower lake levels (Swan Lake);
  - a. Algae issues in Swan Lake;

- b. Flooding of Pelican Lake area - no water release limits downstream water
- 2. Drainage in the landscape and upstream water control limit communities' ability to manage water levels
- 3. Technical capacity to manage surface water was eliminated in favour of bureaucracy;
- 4. Watershed licensing allows agriculture to completely drain landscape;
- 5. Bureaucracy makes it hard to take a whole watershed approach;
- 6. Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) - well meaning, but slow;
  - a. Resources not well utilized or distributed;
  - b. No cross-communications;
  - c. A lot of talk but no action; and
- 7. Flooding is increasing, avoiding flood plains may increase tornado risk.

Some impacts of these barriers on biodiversity in the area were also discussed:

#### Biodiversity Loss

- 1. Sweet grass - disappeared with agricultural practices and building infrastructure;
- 2. Badgers - following gopher populations;
- 3. Mule deer and disease (Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)).
- 4. Working with nesting birds;
  - a. Loss of wintering grounds- may outweigh what we do "up North."; and,
  - b. Loss of habitat impacts migration.

It was also noted that there has been an increase in wildlife/human interactions with bears and cougars in the area. Some bison predation has been noted, but in general these interactions create concern within communities.

It was noted in the Virtual Zoom session: Breakout 2 that current initiatives that need support include:

- 1. Bison management;
- 2. Priority Place funding;
- 3. Partnerships with Birds Canada, Agriculture and Agri Food Canada (AAFC);
- 4. Species at Risk work; and,
- 5. Invasive species control.

Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) added that surface water quality monitoring (i.e., monitoring surface waters and source drinking water) is a current initiative in need of support.

This included monitoring for environmental contaminants - testing water, sediment, and fish tissue. SCO would also like support to complete occupancy surveys for SAR.

Virtual Zoom session: *Breakout session #3 – Defining a vision: What is the greatest impact this initiative can have on nature and your community?:*

#### Supporting Community Priorities

1. Supporting community-based monitoring, build local capacity to do assessments, restore habitat and monitoring; establish goals or metrics at the local level;
2. Some activities need to be monitored and implemented at the local scale; guided by local goals and perspectives;
3. Indigenous student field work recruitment- information hub for finding suitable candidates; and,
4. Updating environmental sciences curriculum to incorporate Traditional Indigenous Environmental Knowledge - support Indigenous student participation in environmental science.

#### Knowledge Sharing and Data Availability

1. Need for local data - if this is a priority for Canada, then we need to preserve what we have - not be forced to build in pristine habitat - land needs to be available in other settings;
  - a. Could be a way to get community buy-in;
2. Spatial data - mapping has not been done since 2000- Canvec database;
3. Public data is usually biased towards developmental interests;
4. Water management and topography - can't do flood mitigation without data;
5. LiDAR availability- process to share is also difficult in 1m resolution- not fine enough for wetland restoration;
6. Funding limitations - holistic spatial data availability could be incredibly helpful;
7. Potential partnership with others working in the area;
8. Hands-on learning, building capacity for habitat restoration and local monitoring;
9. Bison management, better understanding what SAR habitat currently supports;
10. Access to information; and,
11. Species at Risk information - including geographical spread.

#### Community Priorities that could align with Biodiversity Conservation

1. Food security under a changing climate;
2. Pandemics, gas prices;

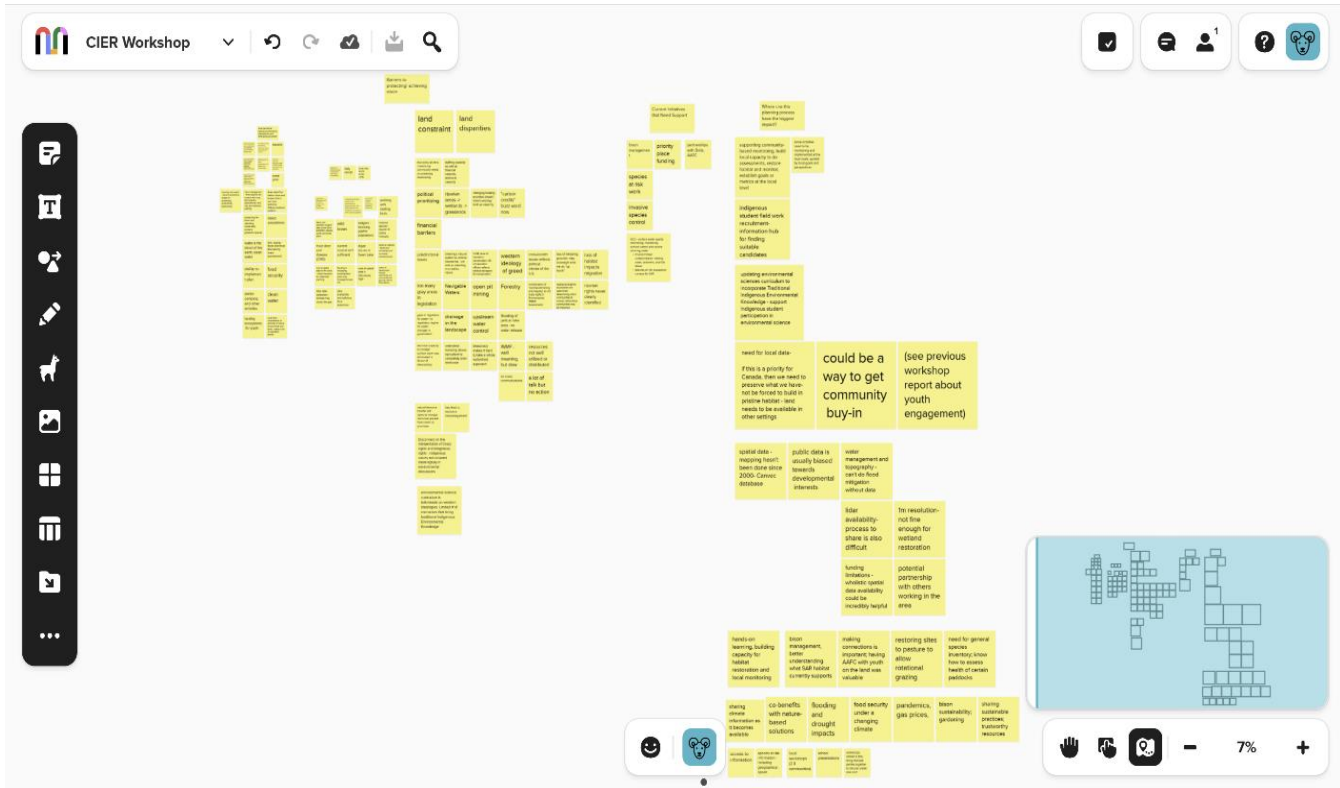


3. Bison sustainability; gardening; and,
4. Sharing sustainable practices; trustworthy resources.

#### Potential Engagement Activities with Indigenous Communities

1. Local workshops (2-3 communities);
2. School presentations; and,
3. Workshops similar to this, bring multiple parties together to discuss under one roof.

**Figure 8.** Intuitive digital whiteboard by MURAL to demonstrate notetaking separated for the various questions. The original view can be found [here](#).



## 5.0 Next Steps

1. In the coming months, a Joint Community Relations (JCR) Team will be established with the objective of decentralizing the initiative’s communication access points. The JCR team’s engagement strategy will serve as a useful tool for continuous, efficient, and effective community engagement.
2. Further community engagement through local workshops and surveys within the Priority Place – ten community engagement workshops will be held across the region to receive input from the public to improve our understanding of the unique conservation issues experienced in communities as well as prioritize actions address such issues. Surveys will be conducted to gauge community interest and priorities on specific conservation in the area.
3. Advisory groups will also be established to provide guidance and expertise on relevant and specific conservation theme(s) of interest.

4. Creation and sharing of reports and communications materials on the outcomes of engagement, workshops, as well as the overall ICIP development, will be deployed through various channels.
5. Drafting of strategies through targeted working groups focused on priority threats, species, habitats, or strategies.
6. Integrated Conservation Implementation Plan development - draft plan completed by March 2024.

## 6.0 Recommendations

CIER, ECC, and NCC were very appreciative of all of the comments and perspectives shared by meeting participants both in-person and virtually at each workshop. There was excellent discussion about the importance of the SWMPP in terms of existing priorities and challenges, and the safe space that was offered allowed for free-flowing information-sharing by all participants. The following recommendations are summarized into key themes based on the main points that were shared in each workshop and are designed to support the interests of the Joint Community Relations and Planning Teams. They are in no particular order, but are framed to be used as building blocks for future discussion, and interested parties should continue respectful and meaningful dialogue with the Indigenous communities in the SWMPP area to ensure engagement continues as the project progresses.

### 1. *Working Together, Education, and Two-Eyed Seeing:*

As evidenced by the Word Cloud and group discussions, the word ‘collaboration’ was shared numerous times regarding steps for moving forward. Working with experts from both Western Science and Indigenous Knowledge backgrounds in the field, or on the land, can greatly contribute to understanding different perspectives and the shared knowledges can coalesce to make effective change happen. This may also lead to greater levels of engagement between all parties and the inclusion of youth in these conversations was highly suggested to ensure there is greater transfer of generational knowledge.

### 2. *Consideration of Community Priorities:*

Much of the information shared when asked about community priorities were similar among the various participants who attended each workshop, but there were some differences. It will be important for future planning to consider the specific interests of each community with consideration of priorities. Wetlands (12) and the maintenance of Wildlife/Wildlife Habitat (11) were listed as key community priorities overall for the next 50-100 years, and the greatest expected impact of the SWMPP project on communities was similar through all group discussions. Overall, supporting community-led projects through local monitoring guided by local goals and local people was alluded to, but some communities noted building capacity through youth and student recruitment should be key in the process.

### 3. *Capacity Funding and Incentives:*

Funding to support participation in the SWMPP Initiative and the Joint Community Relations and Planning Teams will need to be considered to support the resources the communities may need in order to participate. Many communities do not currently have the employee capacity, training, and time needed to support an additional endeavour. Funding would help ensure community priorities are still met throughout the project timeline.

### 4. *Water and Biodiversity:*

Water, in its relation to wetlands, how water flows, and water's role in survivability for traditional plants and wildlife was mentioned at least once in each group in all of the breakout questions. This tells us that the watershed districts and rural municipalities in the SWMPP area should have a clear participatory role moving forward. Wildlife biodiversity related specifically to pollinators, grassland species such as bison, the impacts of deforestation, and the role of invasive species in the area were noted in connection with food security, cultural practices, and livelihoods. In the ongoing collaboration in project design with Indigenous communities, ECCC and NCC should make note of the many levels of connection with wildlife for numerous participants.

### 5. *Land Governance:*

Confusion regarding land ownership and land constraints has led to land disparities. Control over the land in the SWMPP area was listed by 11 participants as the main barrier to protecting the land and achieving the vision of natural value protection. It is believed that the joint efforts of all participants and the inclusion of both Indigenous Knowledge and the principles of Western Science in an environment that is amenable to shared decision-making is the best way forward.

## 7.0 Appendix

### 7.1 List of species at risk as determined by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) currently located within the Priority Places region.

Species	Scientific Name	Taxon	COSEWIC Status	SARA Status, Schedule 1	Provincial Status
American Badger <i>taxus</i> subspecies	<i>Taxidea taxus taxus</i>	Mammals	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Baird's Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus bairdii</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	Endangered
Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Birds	Threatened	Threatened	-
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Threatened	-
Bobolink	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Threatened	-
Buffalograss	<i>Bouteloua dactyloides</i>	Vascular Plants	Special Concern	Special Concern	Threatened
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	<i>Tryngites subruficollis</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	Birds	Endangered	Endangered	Endangered
Chestnut-collared Longspur	<i>Calcarius ornatus</i>	Birds	Endangered	Threatened	Endangered
Chimney Swift	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>	Birds	Threatened	Threatened	Threatened
Common Nighthawk	<i>Chordeiles minor</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	Threatened
Dakota Skipper	<i>Hesperia dactotae</i>	Arthropods	Endangered	Endangered	Threatened
Dusky Dune Moth	<i>Copablepharon longipenne</i>	Arthropods	Threatened	Endangered	Endangered
Eastern Wood-Pewee	<i>Contopus virens</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Threatened	Endangered
Gold-edged Gem	<i>Schinia avemensis</i>	Arthropods	Endangered	Endangered	Endangered
Great Plains Toad	<i>Anaxyrus cognatus</i>	Amphibians	Special Concern	Special Concern	Threatened
Greenish-white Grasshopper	<i>Hypochlora alba</i>	Arthropods	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Hackberry	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	Vascular Plants	-	-	Threatened

Hairy Prairie-clover	<i>Dalea villosa</i>	Vascular Plants	Special Concern	Special Concern	Threatened
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Lark Bunting	<i>Calamospiza melanocorys</i>	Birds	Threatened	Threatened	-
Least Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>	Birds	Threatened	Threatened	Endangered
Loggerhead Shrike Prairie subspecies	<i>Lanius ludovicianus excubitorides</i>	Birds	Threatened	Threatened	Endangered
Mapleleaf Mussel	<i>Quadrula quadrula</i>	Molluscs	Threatened	Threatened	Endangered
Monarch	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	Arthropods	Endangered	Special Concern	-
Mule Deer	<i>Odocoileus hemionus</i>	Mammals	-	-	Threatened
Nine-spotted Lady Beetle	<i>Coccinella novemnotata</i>	Arthropods	Endangered	Endangered	-
Northern Leopard Frog	<i>Lithobates pipiens</i>	Amphibians	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Ottoo Skipper	<i>Hesperia ottoe</i>	Arthropods	Endangered	Endangered	Threatened
Pale Yellow Dune Moth	<i>Copablepharon grandis</i>	Arthropods	Special Concern	Special Concern	Endangered
Piping Plover circumcinctus subspecies	<i>Charadrius melodus circumcinctus</i>	Birds	Endangered	Endangered	Endangered
Prairie Skink	<i>Plestiodon septentrionalis</i>	Reptiles	Special Concern	Special Concern	Endangered
Red Knot <i>rufa</i> subspecies	<i>Calidris canutus rufa</i>	Birds	Endangered	Endangered	Endangered
Red-headed Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	Birds	Endangered	Endangered	Threatened
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Rough Agalinis	<i>Agalinis aspera</i>	Vascular Plants	Endangered	Endangered	Endangered
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Birds	Threatened	Special Concern	Threatened
Small White Lady's-slipper	<i>Cypripedium candidum</i>	Vascular Plants	Threatened	Threatened	Endangered
Smooth Goosefoot	<i>Chenopodium subglabrum</i>	Vascular Plants	Threatened	Threatened	Endangered
Snapping Turtle	<i>Chelydra serpentina</i>	Reptiles	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Sprague's Pipit	<i>Anthus spragueii</i>	Birds	Threatened	Threatened	Threatened
Uncas skipper	<i>Hesperia uncas</i>	Arthropods	-	-	Endangered

Verna's Flower Moth	<i>Schinia verna</i>	Arthropods	Threatened	Threatened	Endangered
Western Grebe	<i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Western Hognose Snake	<i>Heterodon nasicus</i>	Reptiles	-	-	Threatened
Western Spiderwort	<i>Tradescantia occidentalis</i>	Vascular Plants	Threatened	Threatened	Threatened
Western Tiger Salamander	<i>Ambystoma mavortium</i>	Amphibians	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
White Flower Moth	<i>Schinia bimatrix</i>	Arthropods	Endangered	Endangered	Endangered
Yellow Rail	<i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i>	Birds	Special Concern	Special Concern	-
Yellow-banded Bumble Bee	<i>Bombus terricola</i>	Arthropods	Special Concern	Special Concern	-

## 7.2 Photographs from the In-Person Conference

**Figure 9.** Aaron Russell of Conference Doodles designing the graphic while listening to the presentations.





Figure 10. The freshly completed design.



Figure 11. Participants discussing break-out questions.





**Figure 12.** Participants discussing break-out questions and sharing notes for report creation.

**Figure 13.** CIER and NCC work with individuals who Zoomed in due to inclement weather.







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