

# Southwest Manitoba Priority Place Community Workshops Report



West Souris Mixed Grass Prairie. Photo by Ian Gibb



# 1.0 Acknowledgements

ECCC and NCC recognize and appreciate the time given, and efforts made by participants to attend the workshops despite competing priorities. We thank everyone who participated for providing their input, ideas, and sharing perspectives shared by participants at each workshop.

## Land Acknowledgement

The Southwest Manitoba Priority Place covers landscapes within Treaty 1 and 2 territories, the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Ininiwak, Anishiniwak, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. As part of the conservation community, we acknowledge our duty to establish and enhance meaningful and mutually respectful connections with Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, we commit to increasing our own knowledge and awareness of the history, traditions, and cultures of local Indigenous Peoples.

# 2.0 Purpose

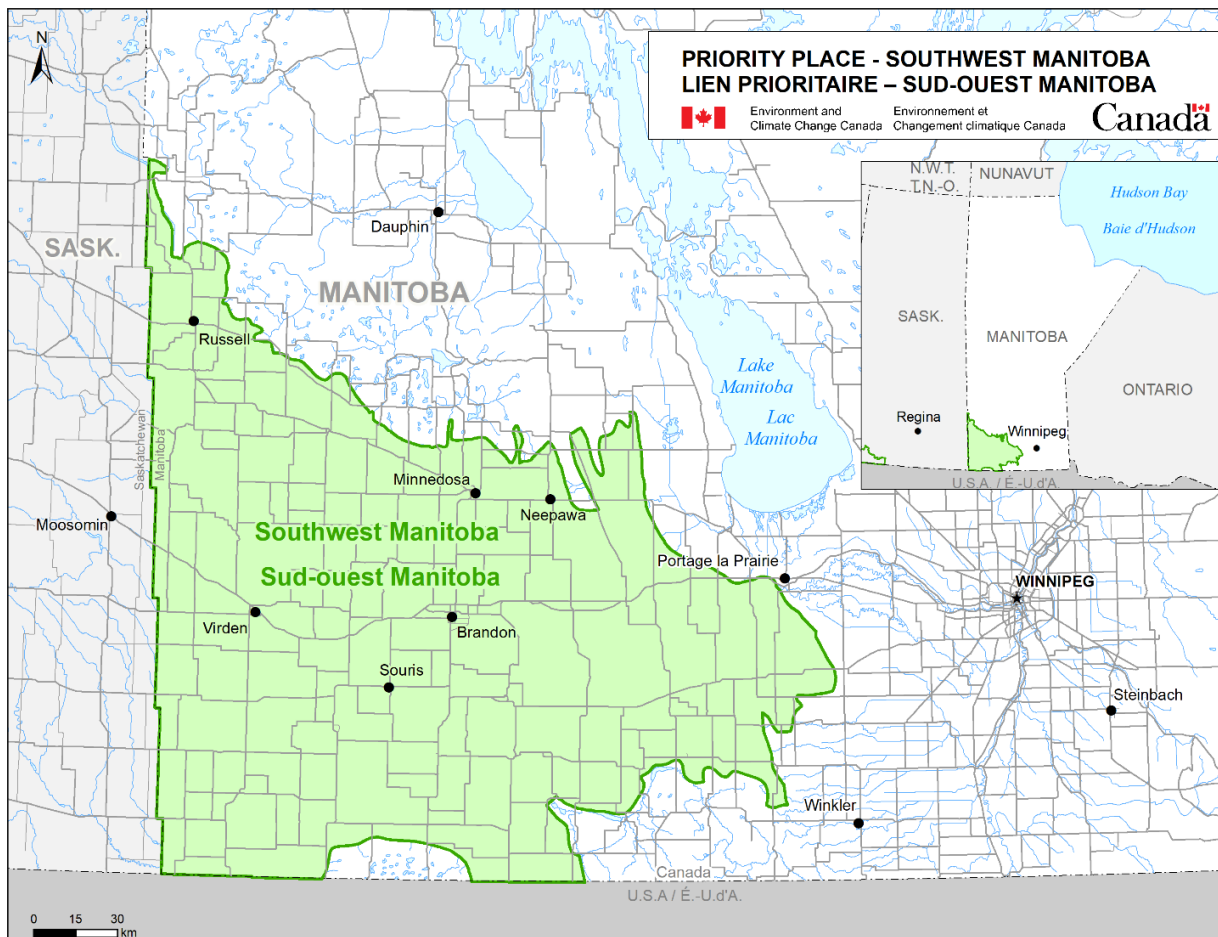
The Southwest Manitoba Priority Place (SWMPP) Initiative is a collaborative, multi-partner project with the goal of improving species-at-risk conservation in southwestern Manitoba.

The objectives of the Southwest Manitoba Priority Place Initiative are to strengthen the relationships between existing conservation partners, explore common ground with new partners and communities, and recognize a common vision that represents the shared interests in the area. The boundaries of this priority place cover over three million hectares in southwest Manitoba (Fig. 1). Together with a broad group of partners, we will deliver a community driven, multi-partner, adaptive management-grounded approach to multi-Species at Risk (SAR) recovery in the Priority Place based 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.

The SWMPP Initiative is co-led by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) with support of a planning team, with members drawn from local conservation partners, the Government of Manitoba as well as the Government of Canada. In addition, a Joint Community Relations Team has been established to develop and implement a Joint Community Relations Strategy for the area, which will be a crucial tool for cultivating partnerships and communicating information. The Joint Community Relations Strategy will aim to increase conservation awareness, link common interests, and strengthen trust and relationships in the SWMPP area (Figure 1).

A collaborative Integrated Conservation Implementation Plan (ICIP) will be produced by this initiative, with the objective of honoring and incorporating the diversity of socio-economic and cultural perspectives in southwestern Manitoba in the spirit of collaboration and reconciliation. These perspectives will inform a shared vision for the landscape, identify barriers and opportunities for conservation, and generate collaborative and effective conservation strategies to be implemented on the landscape.



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



## 3.0 Planning Team

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Colleen Wilson - Agri-Ecosystem and Land Management, Government of Manitoba

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### **Project Leads**

Environment and Climate Change Canada

Ron Bazin

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Steven Anderson

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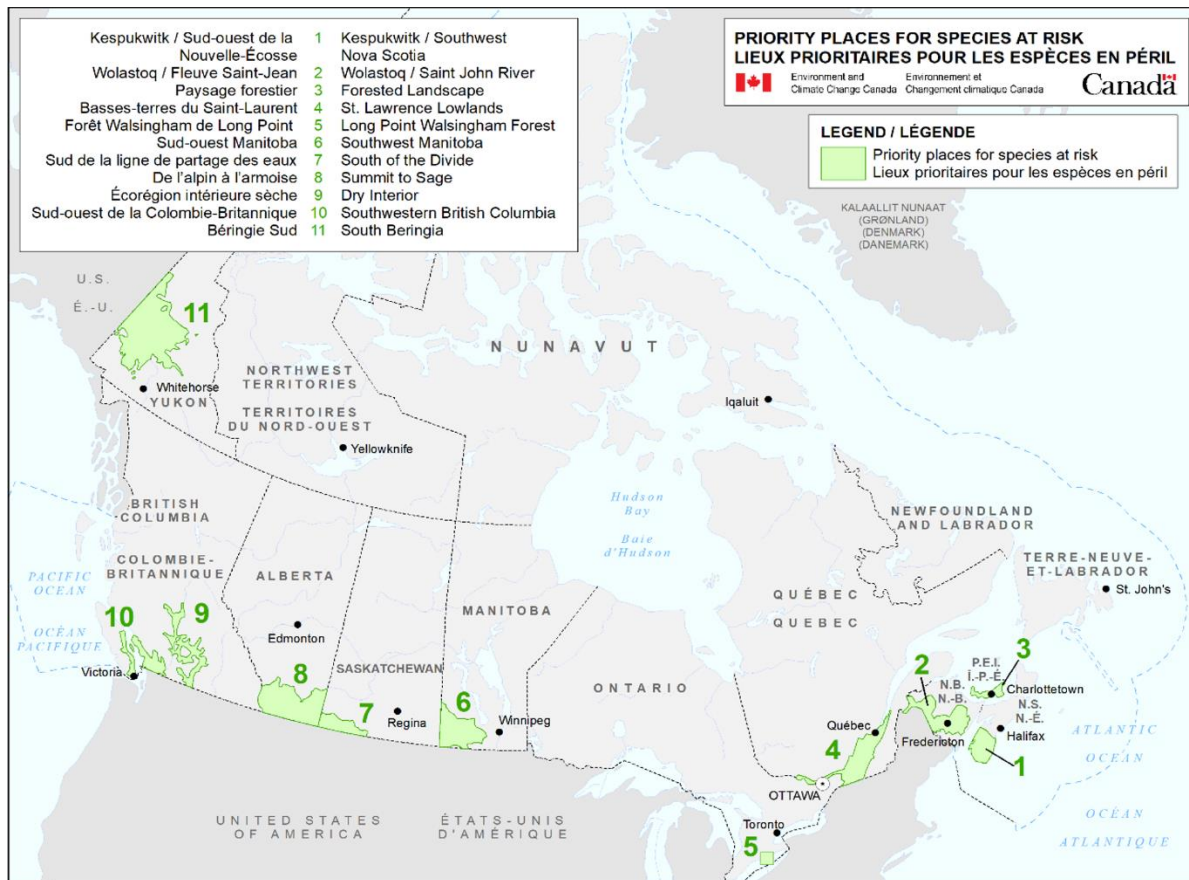
Michael Iyaji

## 4.0 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 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. For more information visit: [URL](#)



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

Compared to other regions in the province, southwest Manitoba has the largest number of federal and provincial species at risk with 47 federally listed and 33 provincially listed species, including several that reside only in the SWMPP. The area also includes five Important Bird Areas containing 104 priority bird species. Many species at risk 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 of lands supporting species at risk;
2. Unsustainable and/or inappropriate prairie management techniques;
3. Shrub/tree encroachment; and,
4. Exotic invasive species.

## 5.0 Objectives of the SWMPP Community Workshops

The municipalities, communities, and community-based conservation organizations whose activities and interest occur within the SWMPP area were invited to a series of workshops held through the spring and summer of 2023, to share perspectives and provide input into the SWMPP Initiative. The objective was to develop an adaptive, community-driven, multi-partner approach to multi-species at risk recovery in the SWMPP. Most day sessions lasted about five hours while some (at Neepawa and Killarney) had extra evening sessions to accommodate community members with different schedules. The workshops were facilitated by Steven Anderson, Ron Bazin, and Rebekah Neufeld with an overarching PowerPoint presentation on the SWMPP presented by Ron Bazin of Environment and Climate Change Canada. The intended outcomes of the community engagement workshops included:

1. Incorporate community values into the vision for the SWMPP;
2. Share knowledge to enhance our understanding of factors affecting nature in the Priority Place, ensuring the resulting plan reflects all perspectives;
3. Identify key areas of common ground and potential collaboration on conservation efforts within the landscape;
4. Enhance collaboration and partnership-building with community-level conservation;
5. Facilitate community-led nature-based conservation efforts;
6. Help advance the understanding of the importance of the Priority Place, its relationship with the communities that call it home, and the natural heritage that benefits all residents; and,
7. Enhance pride and awareness of the Priority Place natural landscapes and wildlife heritage.

These themes were used to appropriately design the agenda for the workshops.

### 5.1 Schedule of Community Workshops

The SWMPP community engagement kicked off with a virtual Indigenous engagement session on February 16, 2023, followed by an in-person workshop on April 4, 2023. Both were facilitated by the Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER), and the report is available [here](#). Thereafter, more community engagement workshops were held as follows:

**Table 1:** Schedule of community workshops

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Catchment municipalities</b>	<b>Date</b>
1.	St Claude	North Norfolk, Portage La Prairie, Grey, North Treherne, Dufferin, Lorne, Thompson, Pembina.	June 6, 2023
2.	Neepawa	Harrison Park, Clanwilliam Erickson, Minnedosa Minto Odanah, Glenella-Lansdowne.	June 7, 2023
3.	Melita	Two Borders, Deloraine, Brenda - Waskada, Winchester and Grassland.	June 20, 2023



4.	Killarney	Killarney - Turtle Mountain, Cartwright - Roblin, Boissevain, Prairie Lakes.	July 25, 2023
5.	Glenboro	Glenboro - South Cypress, North Cypress-Langford, Victoria, Argyle.	July 26, 2023
6.	Birtle	Ellice-Archie, Prairie View, Hamiota, Oakview, Yellowhead.	August 29, 2023
7.	Virden	Wallace-Woodworth, Virden, Pipestone, Sifton.	August 30, 2023

**5.2 Workshop Participants**

Participants at the workshops represented a broad array of interests including community, conservation and industry groups and organizations including:

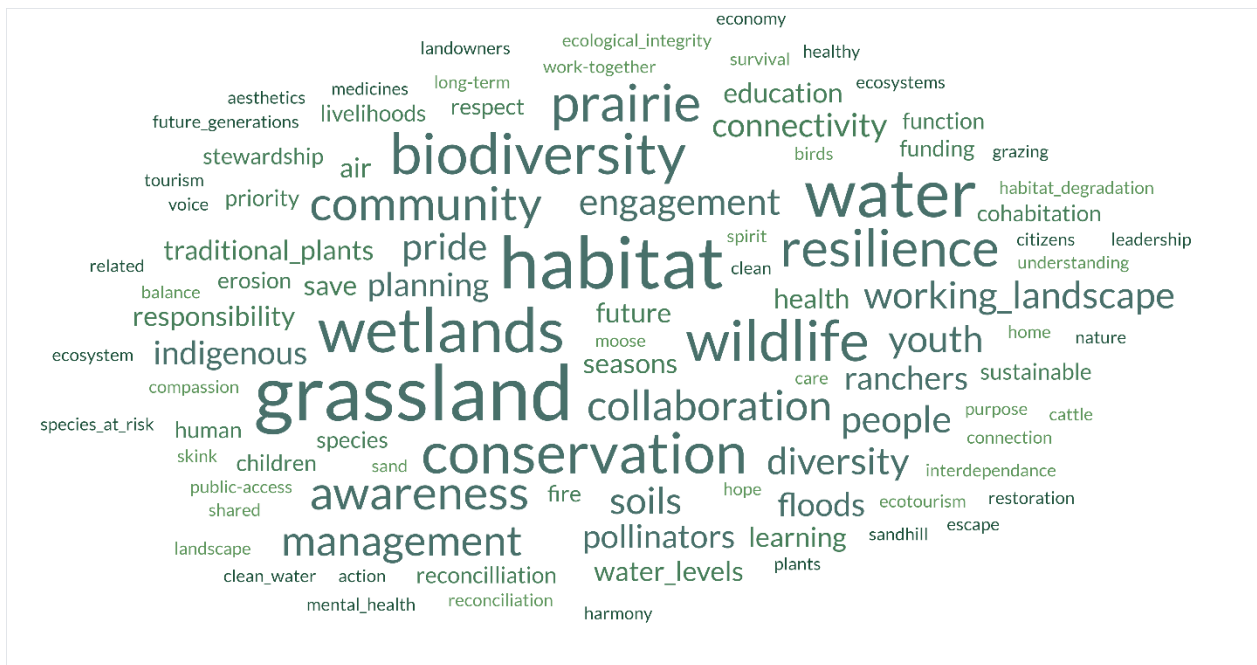
- Association of Manitoba Community Pastures
- Birds Canada
- Ducks Unlimited
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)
- Government of Manitoba – Department of Agriculture
- Government of Manitoba Wildlife Branch
- Keystone Agricultural Producers
- Manitoba Beef Producers
- Manitoba Habitat Conservancy (MHC)
- The Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Pembina Valley Watershed District
- Rural Municipality of Sifton
- Rural Municipality of Yellowhead
- Souris River Watershed District
- Town of Virden
- Town of Neepawa
- Whitemud Watershed District
- Young Agrarians

## 6.0 What We Heard - Highlights

The information gathered at the community workshops through the summer of 2023 will aid in the development of an adaptive, community-driven, multi-partner approach to multi-SAR recovery in the SWMPP. The perspectives shared across the communities were invaluable and will support the Joint Community Relations and Planning Teams 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 events.

Overall, discussion topics addressed the co-benefits for biodiversity, ecosystem health, as well as human health and well-being of communities which overlap the SWMPP. The ability to engage and share perspectives and concerns contributed to a compendium of valuable knowledge for future conservation efforts.

The key word highlighted in a word cloud icebreaker (Figure 3) when participants at every workshop were asked “What word comes to mind when you think of Nature in your community or the Southwest Manitoba Priority Place?” was ‘Grassland’. The word cloud icebreaker also saw participants acknowledge that ‘Habitat’ ‘Biodiversity’ ‘Water,’ ‘Wetlands,’ ‘Prairie,’ ‘Collaboration,’ and ‘Community’ as key themes that come to mind when they think about nature in this area.



**Figure 3.** A word cloud representation of what workshop participants across all community workshops listed when asked “What words come to mind when you think of nature or conservation in your community or Southwestern Manitoba.”

Many common themes arose during the workshops, and break-out sessions provided participants a chance to share thoughts on those themes. Based on specific communities' and/or participants' interests, some workshop deliberations were adapted to align with those priorities. Below is a summary of the key responses and themes heard throughout the workshops.

For a detailed breakdown of the notes and minutes of each workshop see Appendix XX

### **St. Claude Workshop**

Our workshops began in the community of St. Claude, Manitoba with representatives from the Pembina Valley Watershed District, Manitoba Beef Producers, Manitoba Habitat Conservancy and Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We began by discussing what success in conservation looked like in the area. We agreed that increased awareness of the value and uniqueness of the area could increase local support for conservation, particularly for sand and sandhill prairie species. Next, we discussed what the priorities of the community were and how natural landscapes may contribute. The area provides a lot of opportunities for recreation, food subsistence, as well as a host of ecosystem services including pollination and water security.

The afternoon began with presentations from our partners from DFO, where they presented on some aquatic species at risk in the area - Mapleleaf Mussel and Bigmouth Buffalo. Both of these species are impacted by barriers to water flow, as well as threats decreasing water quality. We concluded the afternoon by examining the drivers of land conversion in the area. These include increasing demands and profit margins for crop production. These factors in combination with insurance flexibility are driving many farmers to shift from livestock operations to crop production, thus increasing the amount of pastureland converted to crop. There was also discussion around the role incentive programs could play in retaining livestock operations on the landscape. Current incentive programs help, but don't offset costs enough to make livestock production financially competitive with crop agriculture. Incentive programs also don't often reward those who are early adopters of beneficial practices, making it even more financially difficult for those who have been managing their lands for biodiversity for many years. A conceptual diagram of the factors influencing land conversion in the area is given in Figure 5.

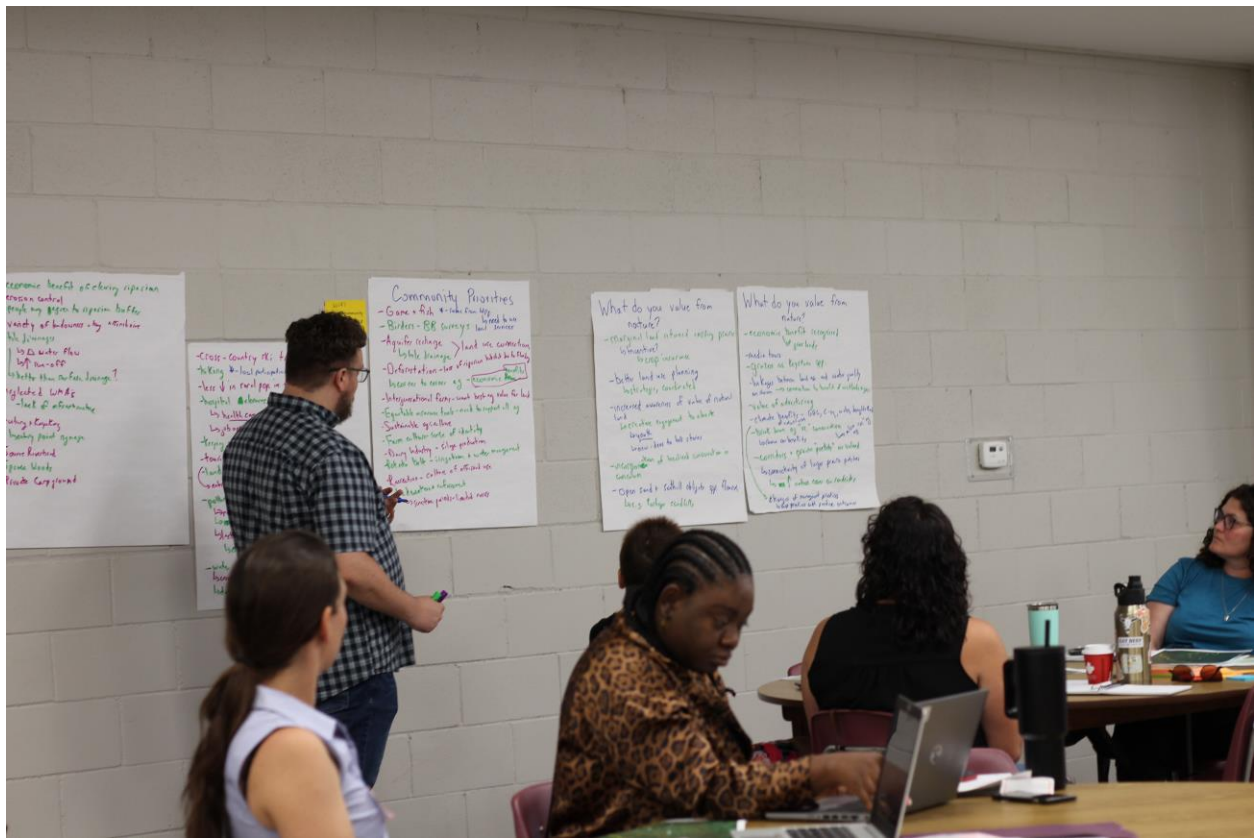
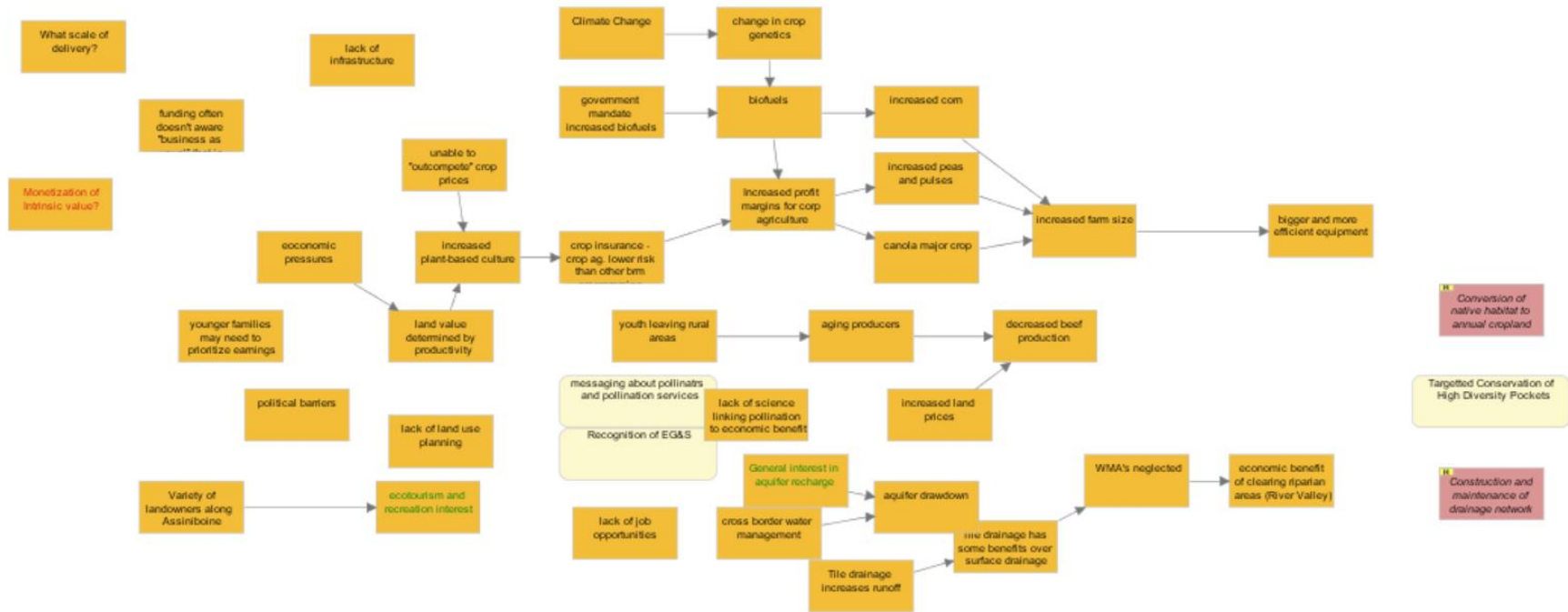


Figure 4. Participants and facilitator at the St Claude workshop.



**Figure 5.** Conceptual Model developed in the workshop, showing factors contributing to the conversion of natural habitat to annual cropland. Red boxes indicate direct threats to biodiversity and orange boxes represent factors contributing to those threats. Yellow boxes indicate potential conservation value strategies and activities.

## Neepawa Workshop

Our workshop in Neepawa was attended by Manitoba Beef Producers, the Association of Manitoba Community Pastures, Birds Canada, Manitoba Habitat Conservancy and representatives and community members from the Town of Neepawa. We began our workshop in Neepawa with a discussion on what nature provides to people. Participants listed some physical and ecological values such as food and environmental goods and service, as well as spiritual, cultural, and emotional benefits of nature. We discussed how nature should fit into the future of the town, and concerns about the tree canopy and flood resilience were raised. A thriving economy in both urban and rural areas, as well as water availability and health were also areas participants felt were important to the future of the area. Barriers to conservation in the area included economic pressures increasing the demands for crop production and land conversion. Risk management is higher for crop production, and there are a number of disincentives to leave land in a natural state. Another barrier was increasing modification of water levels through drainage and cross border water control. Societal factors also were mentioned, such as a sense of apathy or hopelessness to tackle climate issues, avoiding responsibility, or a lack of trust between producers and conservation organizations. A lack of awareness of the value and role of ecological goods and services was also noted as contributing to apathy.

The afternoon centered around a discussion of conservation programming in the area – a number of local groups and initiatives were identified from grazing clubs, wildlife groups, to invasive species to local food/gardening groups. Challenges to programming were mainly related to incentive programs, noting that program overlap, insufficient offsets, and challenging measures of success present barriers to program success. Identified gaps in programming included youth-focused programs, promotion of EGS and by agricultural groups, as well as marketing/information sharing concerns to bring in new participants.



Figure 6. Participants at the Neepawa workshop.



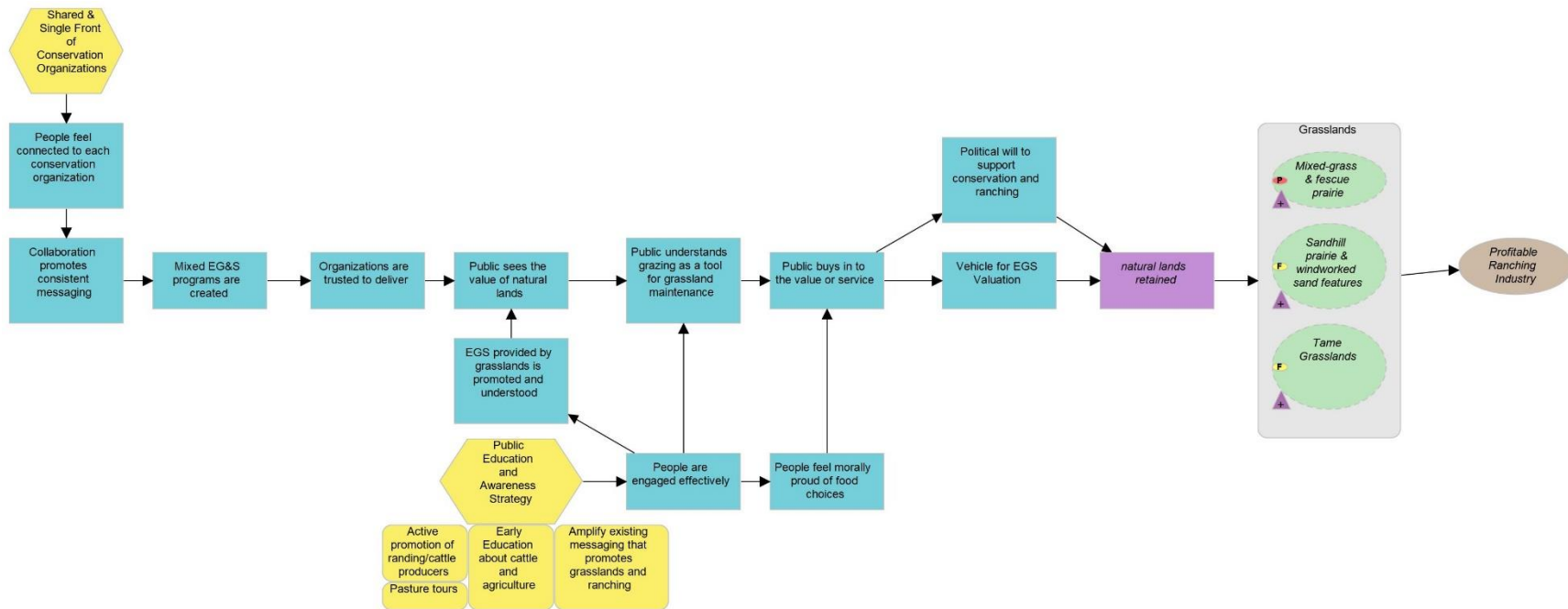
Figure 7. Participants and facilitators at the Neepawa workshop

## Melita Workshop

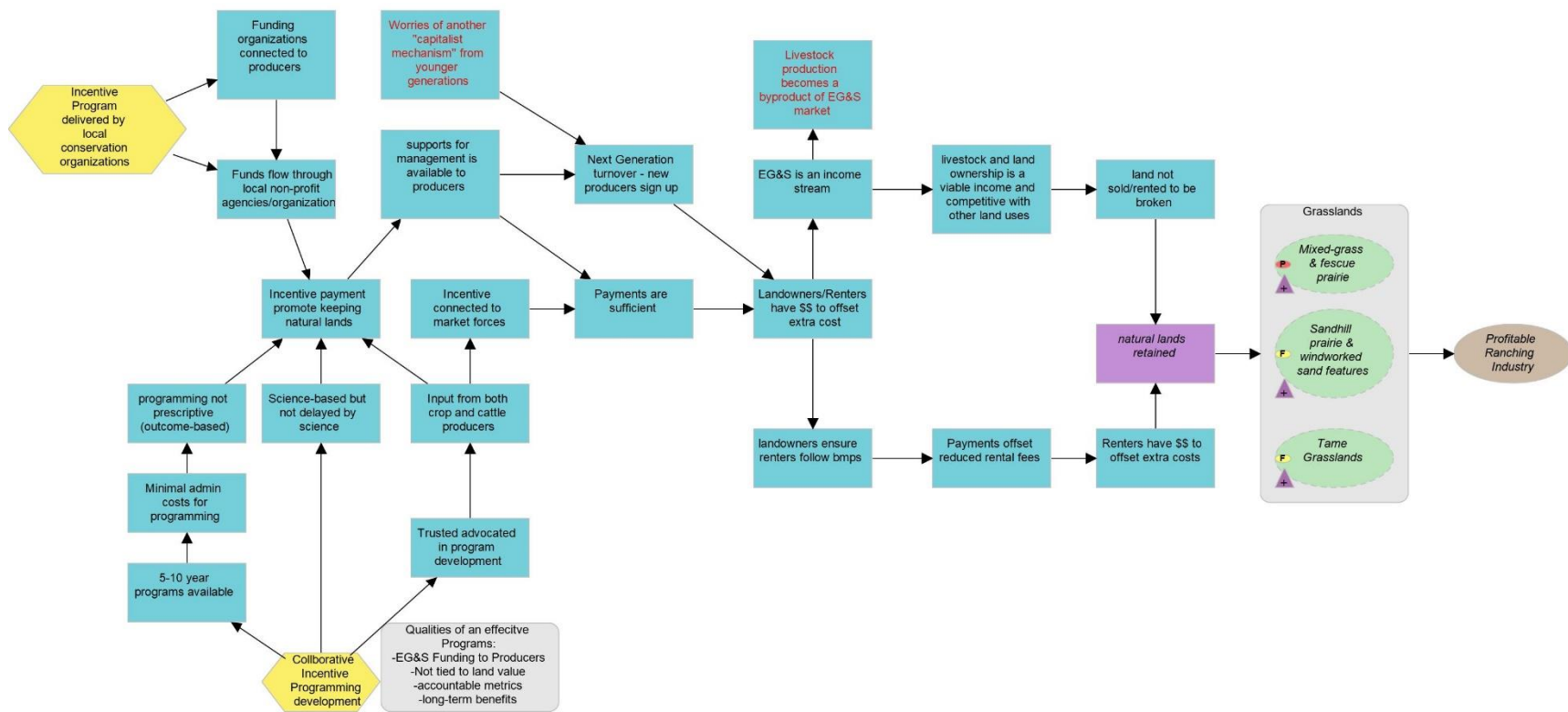
Our workshop in Melita discussed incentive programming across the Priority Place in more detail. Gaps in programming that were identified included compensation for early adopters, the financial adequacy of offset, what made for a good measure of success, as well as how programming could bring in reluctant or late adopters. Knowledge gaps included a survey into motivations for adopting best practices. Some suggested strategies included programming for novel/early adoption of new ideas; as well as conducting producer workshops and making sure producers are included on the planning team for programs.

In the afternoon, participants undertook a results chain exercise, identifying key results and considerations for the conservation strategies of Conservation Marketing and Communication (Fig. 8) and Incentive Programming (Fig. 9). Diagrams of these results chains are presented on the following pages.





**Figure 8.** Results chain diagram of the impact of Media and Marketing Strategies. Yellow shapes indicate conservation strategies (hexagons) and associated activities (boxes). Intermediate results are shown in blue and threat reduction results are shown in purple. Conservation targets are shown in green circles and human well-being targets are shown in brown circles.



**Figure 9.** Results chain diagram of the impact of Incentive Programming Strategies. Yellow hexagons indicate conservation strategies. Intermediate results are shown in blue and threat reduction results are shown in purple. Boxes with red text indicate potential unintended consequences. Conservation targets are shown in green circles and human well-being targets are shown in brown circles.

## Killarney Workshop

Our Killarney workshops were attended by representatives of Manitoba Habitat Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Manitoba Provincial Parks, and Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association. Killarney presented an interesting workshop location, as this area of the Priority Place has a lower proportion of natural lands remaining than other areas. Some of the natural features that were identified as valuable included temporary wetlands and perennial cover for their role in water retention and snow capture. In addition, Killarney Lake is a core part of the lake culture of the area, and many residents have concerns about lake health and water levels in an increasingly variable climate.

Barriers to conservation in this area included factors affecting water levels (drainage and upstream water control), a lack of funding to support riparian habitat, and similar shortcomings of incentive programming that had been discussed in previous workshops. The workshop concluded with a discussion of conservation programming in the area and opportunities/challenges seen with these programs. Results of this discussion are summarized in Table. 2.

**Table 2.** A summary table capturing the discussion of conservation programming in the Killarney area. For each program, its focus and/or conservation targets were identified, and barriers and opportunities for the program were discussed.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Program Focus/targets</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
GROW	Wetlands, marginal riparian, water		Forest Retention
SCAP/RALP	On-farm practices that address climate changes (EG&S payments and BMP' implementation)	Red tape, program audience overlap/narrowness	interest levels high, future years well positioned
PWCP	Regenerative Agricultural Practices (Nitrogen Management, rotational grazing, cover crops.)	Eligibility details, funding availability, timeline	(not discussed)
MHHC GSA	grassland	program overlap, stacking funding	short-term programs appealing to producers
DU Forage	forage production (waterfowl)	Money lost from crops	(not discussed)
DU Marginal lands	saline areas, wetlands	(not discussed)	pollinator services

DU Rangelands	grasslands	overlap with other programming	(not discussed)
DU Wetland Restoration	Wetland creation (10 year or perpetual agreements)	landowner interest	(not discussed)
Conservation Easements	prairie, wetland, treed areas	program funding (\$\$ vs crop profit); long-term value; short-term programming more appealing	(not discussed)
Weston SIP	native prairie	lack of native prairie	
MMF Funding programs (maybe included in PWCP?)	(not discussed)	(not discussed)	(not discussed)
IBA Bird-Friendly Beef Program	Bird habitat	(not discussed)	(not discussed)
Riverwatch	water levels and quality	(not discussed)	potential to expand?



**Figure 10.** Participants at the Killarney workshop

## Glenboro Workshop

The Glenboro workshop had representatives from the Government of Manitoba, Whitemud Watershed District, Ducks Unlimited, CFB Shiloh, as well as a local resident. The workshop opened with a discussion of the value of nature. The aesthetic and cultural value of nature was discussed, as well as the economic value of tourism, EG&S, etc. Other ways we are beginning to value nature through initiatives such as carbon credits were also brought up.

Challenges to conservation were consistent with other workshops: market pressures creating perverse incentives on land use, such as pushing for the conversion of areas with agriculturally poor soils, or the practice of taxing natural lands that provide habitat for wildlife. An increased presence of renters on the landscape may also lead to habitat degradation if renters don't share the same values as landowners or are forced to maximize land use to turn a profit. Societal disconnect from nature and information was also identified, with a declining conservation ethic noted in many areas. These factors have led to mismanagement of lands, a lack of grassland disturbance, etc. Finally, the role of climate change on the landscape was also noted, and a feeling that we are seeing a lack of balance in weather patterns in more recent years.

A discussion on conservation programming in the area was conducted. The results of this discussion are presented in Table 3. Identified gaps in programming included connecting people to nature, Eastern Deciduous Management (in light of the threat of Emerald Ash Borer), sandhill management, aquifer allocation and water use, as well as the shortcoming of current incentive programs.

**Table 3.** A summary table capturing the discussion of conservation programming in the Glenboro area. For each program, its focus and/or conservation targets were identified, and barriers and opportunities for the program were discussed.

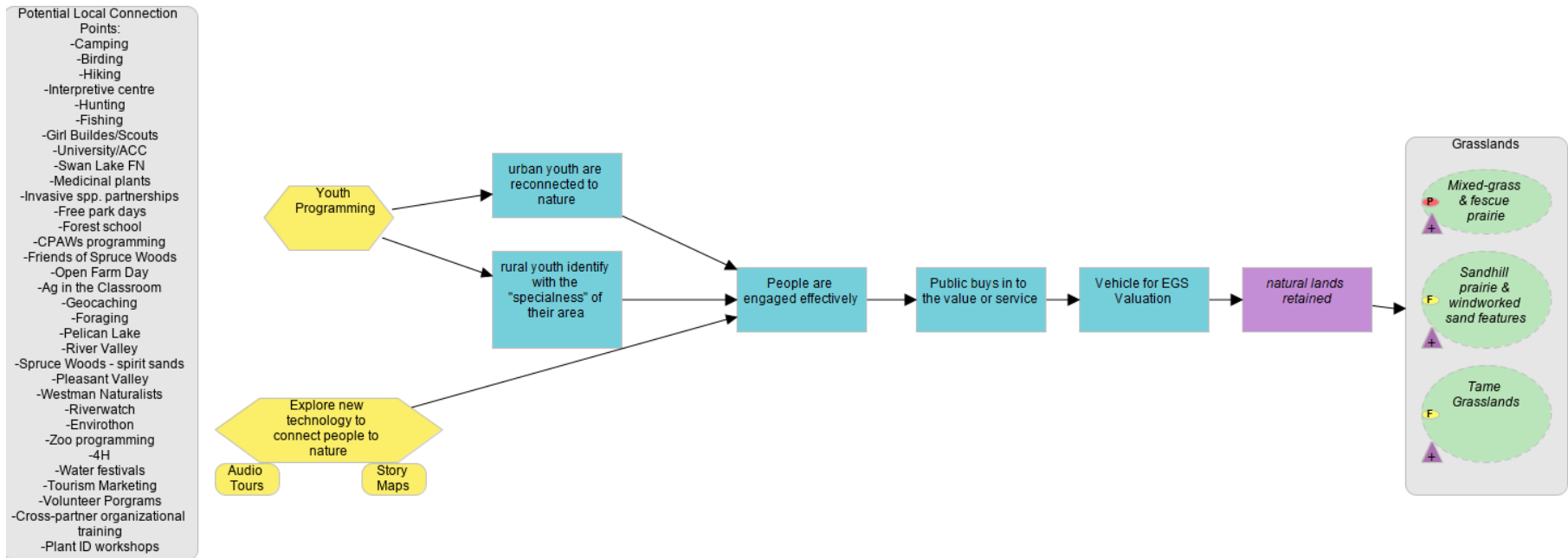
<b>Program</b>	<b>Program Focus/Target</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>
SCAP -RALP - Watershed Districts -RALP- Grasslands and Trees	On-farm practices that address climate changes (EG&S payments and BMP' implementation)	General Environmental Farm Plan Registration, Watershed District variability and capacity	Quantifiable Outcomes - online portal New awareness tool from MFGA (Sept. 2023 launch?)
GROW	Upland habitat, temporary wetlands, pasture management, EG&S	Funding, insufficient incentive to avoid lost profit	

PWCP (MAW)	Regenerative agricultural practices (Nitrogen, rotational grazing, cover crops)	confusion among funding sources, high demand	
DU Forage	Tame grassland (waterfowl)	cropland profit	
Prescribed Fire (CFB and NCC)	Grassland	capacity, hard to partner	
Conservation Trust	Working Landscape		
Other programs listed: Conservation agreements, DU Marginal Areas, DU Wetland Restoration, Burrowing Owl Program, Save the Skinks, Provincial Parks, ALUS, Weston SIP, land securement, OECM's, MB Beef Producers (SARPAL), Living Labs, Grassland Stewardship Program, Predation Pilot (non-lethal predator control), MASC (compensation for losses/crop damage), Parks Interpretive Program, Squeal on Pigs, Weed Districts (variable across area), Lake Winnipeg Basin Program, Birds Canada			

We conducted a results chain exercise to discuss potential actions and results of a communications strategy to connect people to nature, which was highlighted as a potential key strategy to address many of the challenges linked to how nature is valued. See below for a diagram of the final results chain (Fig. 12). Potential connection points to connect people to nature included recreation groups, youth programming, as well as using popular scenic locations as a site for educational materials. We also discussed a variety of conservation strategies and built corresponding results chains focusing on strategies to retain or restore native habitat within the priority place (Fig. 13)

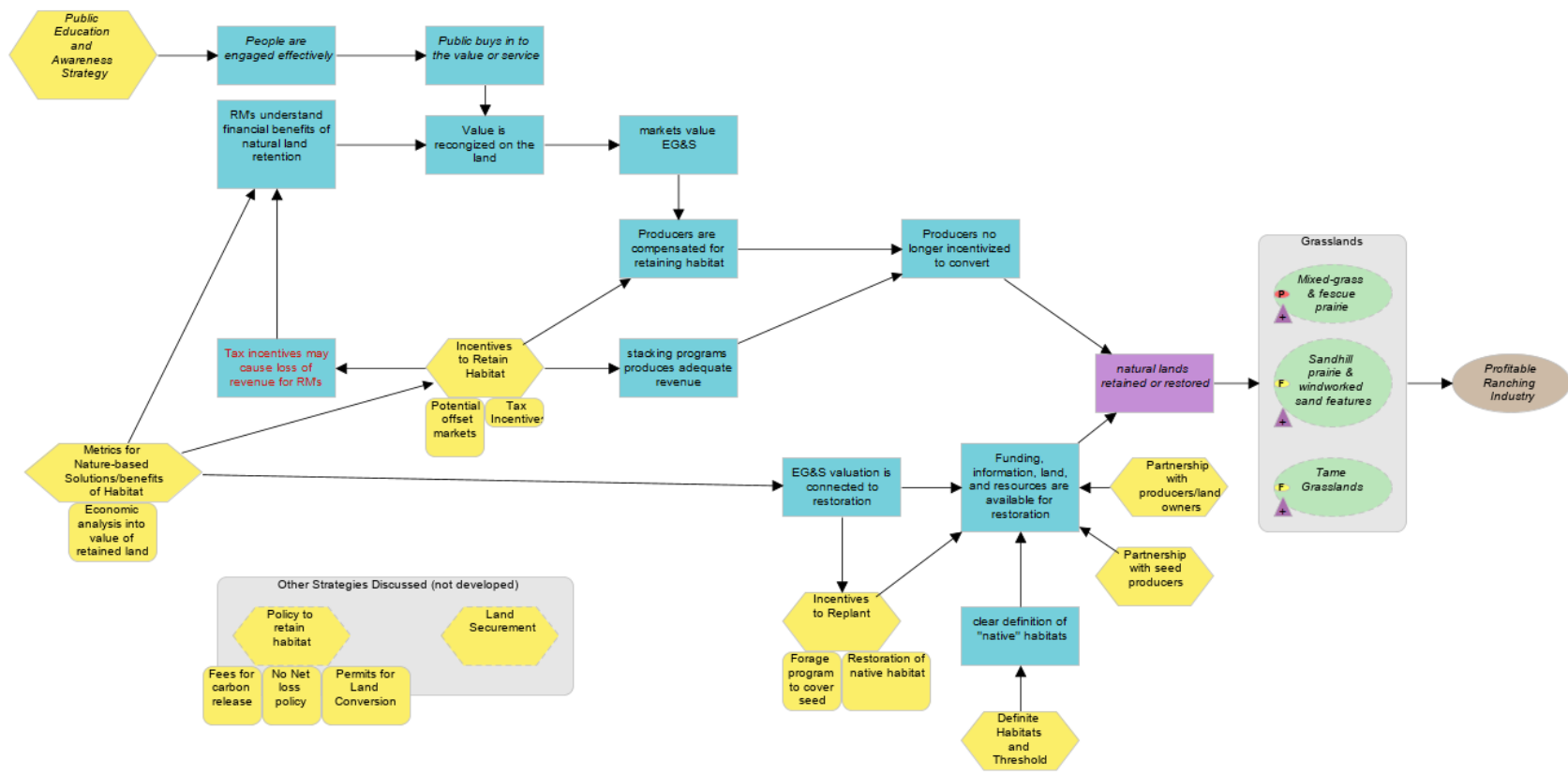


**Figure 11.** Participants at the Glenboro workshop



**Figure 12.** Results chain diagram of a communications strategy to connect people to nature. Yellow shapes indicate conservation strategies (hexagons) and associated activities (boxes). Intermediate results are shown in blue and threat reduction results are shown in purple. Conservation targets are shown in green circles.





**Figure 13.** Results chain diagram of the impact of Incentive Programming Strategies. Yellow shapes indicate conservation strategies (hexagons) and associated activities (boxes). Intermediate results are shown in blue and threat reduction results are shown in purple. Boxes with red text indicate potential unintended consequences. Conservation targets are shown in green circles and human well-being targets are shown in brown circles.

## Birtle Workshop

Participants at the Birtle workshop included representatives from the Town of Birtle, The Young Agrarians society, Ducks Unlimited, the Government of Manitoba, as well as a local resident. The Birtle workshop started with a discussion on the value of nature and what nature provides to society. In general, recreation was a common point of connection to nature for locals in the area. Species at risk were not thought of as a source of pride, but some concerns exist around declining birds and other wild species.

Barriers to conservation were similar in other areas of the Priority Place with livestock production declining. Many farming families are taking off farm jobs, and livestock production presents more work than crop production. Many livestock producers are in the industry for the lifestyle, community, continuing their family's legacy. A general disconnect with the land was discussed, with many landowners in the area renting out their land. A local concern over extreme weather was noted but there was a perception that there is nothing to do about it and that they just have to "ride it out".

Effective Information sharing was a large portion of the discussion at this workshop. A few key themes included:

- Organizations need to do better at communicating what they do and the programming that they offer, and this should be done in a coordinated and collaborative fashion, to avoid potential competition, address gaps, and reduce or eliminate overlap between funding programs.
- Some of these challenges are linked to communicating impact. For example, many programs provide some measures of success, they are often linked to implementation and do not always necessarily accurately measure and communicate the actual effects on the land or the long-term impacts. Just because all the funding was utilized doesn't mean the intended impact was produced.
- When sharing information, care should be taken to use information sharing strategies that resonate with producers.
- People often feel embarrassed to share information about unsuccessful ideas, but those can be very informative.
- Development of on-the-ground local networks and support structures for peer-to-peer learning, and leadership programs to build community leaders/experts and trusted advocates can have a larger impact.

A central theme of the discussions at the Birtle workshop was the need to build trust with producers. Many programs have come and gone in the past, and some abandoned projects are in need of upkeep but no longer have financial support. If new programming is going to be introduced, it must involve producers at all stages of development and have clear and open communication in delivery. It should also not have unintended consequences such as increasing the cost of local materials.

A specific opportunity that was discussed was the protection or commitment to maintain the natural state of road allowances as a potential strategy to preserve natural corridors on the landscape. This has been incorporated into the R.M.'s of Yellowhead and Harrison Park's municipal bylaws.

## **Virден Workshop**

The Virден workshop participants included representatives from the Town of Virден, the RM of Sifton, and Ducks Unlimited.

Several natural features were noted as important to local culture, such as the Scallion Creek which runs through Virден and Oak Lake. In recent years variable water levels have been a concern for both waterbodies and have affected recharge of local wells. Scallion Creek provides recreation and educational opportunities, while Oak Lake is a major driver of tourism in the area. Of concern to some residents of the Oak Lake area is an increasing interest in tile drainage, and access to unbiased expertise and advice was not as a limitation, and information need.

Economic drivers of the region include a higher presence of livestock production, due to soils inappropriate for most crops. Some land conversion has been seen but not as highly reported as other areas of the Priority Place. Oil and gas development as well as transportation are high contributors to the local economy. In general, urban centres are increasing in population as farms consolidate, becoming fewer and larger. Fewer local residents own these large farms, but rather are farm workers commute from urban centres to the farm rather than live on site, resulting in depopulation of rural areas.

Conservation initiatives that communicate with and engage the local community were generally thought of as lacking – most participants fondly remembered the wildlife series *Hinterland Who's Who* as their introduction to wildlife and ecology as youth, but there isn't a modern program that has the same audience. Programming to engage both youth and elders in the community was noted as a need; with educational packages for school and youth groups a suggested way to connect. Conservation organizations could also spend more time in local communities and implement more projects that engage locals to raise awareness of their work across the landscape. There is interest among local governments (e.g. Town of Virден) and organizations for more programming to engage citizens in conserving natural areas, but staff have limited to no time to apply for funding, often needing to prioritize their time and efforts on civil services.

## 7.0 Key Findings

The following recommendations are summarized into key themes based on the main points of discussion across workshops and are designed to support the interests of the Joint Community Relations and Planning Teams. They are framed to be used as foundational elements for future discussion and conservation project implementation in communities in the SWMPP area.

### **1. Partnership and collaboration:**

As evidenced by the Word Cloud and group discussions, increased collaboration amongst all people working on the landscape is necessary to achieve effective species at risk conservation. There were similar priorities shared by community members who attended each workshop – with respect considered to be a foundational element. Planning needs to consider the specific interests of each community when identifying community actions. Understanding the diversity of perspectives on the land will ensure that all types of knowledge support effective change on the landscape. This may also lead to greater levels of engagement between all parties, and more effective partnership achieving larger conservation impacts on the landscape.

### **2. Continued Loss of Natural and Marginal Lands:**

Economic pressures are driving producers to continue to convert agriculturally marginal lands to increase crop profits. With the advent of larger and more efficient technology, areas that used to be impossible or overly difficult to convert to cropland are being turned over, and current market prices mean that the immediate benefits outweigh the costs of converting less productive lands. The potential negative impacts of converting these lands (or benefits they provide if left) are not well understood or are outweighed by short term pressures.

### **3. Support for Cattle Production:**

A common thread across all workshops was a general decrease in cattle producers across the Priority Place. Crop profit margins and insurance support have made cattle production non-competitive in many areas. In these areas, it was noted that many of the cattle producers that remain are in the industry because of their desire to maintain family traditions, the rural lifestyle, and to “do right” by the land they live on.

### **4. Water security:**

The control and availability of water into the future was a concern in many parts of the Priority Place. Much of the water in southwestern Manitoba is extracted from large aquifers, many of which are fully allocated. Lower well levels were noted in several areas, threatening the availability of water in the long term.

### **5. Youth retention and engagement:**

Overall, supporting community-led projects through local monitoring, guided by local goals and local people was widely acclaimed. Many communities also suggested building capacity through youth involvement as a key objective in the process. Youth engagement was commonly suggested as an important step toward fostering conservation efforts and ethics, instilling value and pride in local conservation efforts.

**6. Incentive Programming:**

The need to consider long-term funding to support implementation of conservation activities by producers in the SWMPP Initiative was highlighted across workshop centres. In many areas current incentives are not sufficient to offset the profit difference between crop-based and livestock agriculture. Collaboration between conservation organizations was also viewed as an important factor for the efficient delivery and long-term viability of programs. Also, there is a need for increased clarity and efficiency in funding programs, mostly in application and reporting procedures and in avoiding overlap and competition.

**7. Effective Communication and Knowledge Sharing**

A common need identified within communities was a trusted source for information and knowledge on best practices. Conflicting information is often available to communities and a trustworthy, unbiased source of information would aid decision making. Many producers referenced their local grazing club as a space where they learned about new practices and ideas. Knowledge sharing initiatives should provide a safe space to not only share successes, but also failures; as unsuccessful projects can be just as important and information for community members.

**8. Need for local connections and delivery:**

Local knowledge and experience in rural communities was identified as an important quality to ensure trust and buy-in for conservation activities. A perceived disconnect between rural and urban community values may lead to reduced trust of representatives of organizations coming from larger urban centres to rural communities. If a local employee or champion can be identified, the message may be more trusted. Local networks and support structures for peer-to-peer learning would greatly support and advance knowledge transfer. Watershed districts and rural municipalities in the SWMPP area are often trusted partners and delivery agents and should have a participatory role in conservation activities moving forward.

## 8.0 Next Steps

In the coming months, a Joint Community Relations (JCR) Team will advance efforts at developing a shared communications and engagement strategy. The JCR team's engagement strategy will serve as a useful tool for continuous, efficient, and effective community engagement.

1. In partnership with Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, a conservation gathering was held in the community to receive input to improve our understanding of the unique conservation issues experienced by SVDN and other Indigenous communities as well as prioritize actions to address such issues. A pre-workshop survey was conducted to gauge community interest and priorities on specific conservation in the area. Other communities at the workshop included: Birdtail Sioux First Nation, Canupawakpa Dakota Nation, Dakota Plains Wahpeton First Nation, Dakota Tipi First Nation, Keeseekoowenin First Nation, Rolling River First Nation, Swan Lake First Nation, Waywayseecappo First Nation. A report from this gathering can be found [here](#).
2. Advisory groups will be established to provide guidance and expertise on relevant and specific conservation theme(s) of interest, such as priority threats, species, habitats, or strategies.
3. Creation and sharing of reports and communication materials on the outcomes of engagement, workshops, as well as the overall ICIP development, will be deployed through various channels.
4. Integrated Conservation Implementation Plan development - draft plan completed by March 2024.

## 8.0 Appendices

### 8.1 Appendix 1 - Abbreviations and meanings

ACC	Assiniboine Community College
AFSAR	Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk
ALUS	Alternative Land Use Services
AMM	Association of Manitoba Municipalities
BFI	Bird Friendliness Index
BMPs	Beneficial Management Plans
CA	Conservation Agreement
CFB	Canadian Forces Base
CPAWS	Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
DU	Ducks Unlimited
EAB	Emerald Ash Borer
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
EFP	Environmental Farm Plan
EG&S	Ecological Goods and Services
FCC	Farm Credit Canada
HSP	Habitat Stewardship Program
IBA	Important Bird Areas
ICIP	Integrated Conservation Implementation Plan
JCR	Joint Community Relations
MASC	Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation
MAW	Manitoba Association of Watersheds
MB	Manitoba
MFGA	Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association

MHC	Manitoba Habitat Conservancy
MMA	Manitoba Municipal Administrators
NCC	Nature Conservancy of Canada
OECM	Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures
PWCP	Prairie Watersheds Climate Program
RALP	Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program
RM	Rural Municipality
SAM	Sustainable Agriculture Manitoba
SAR	Species at Risk
SARPAL	Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Lands
SCAP	Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership
SIP	Stewardship Incentive Program
SWMPP	Southwest Manitoba Priority Place
WMAs	Wildlife Management Areas



## 8.2 Appendix 2 - Transcriptions of community workshops

### St Claude

#### **Defining a Vision: What do you value from nature?**

*What part of the natural environment is important to you? What gives you pride?*

- Economic benefits of land,
- media tours,
- grazers as keystone species,
- linkages between land use and water quality (connection to benefit of wetlands and grasslands),
- value of advertising,
- climate benefits (greenhouse gas, carbon sequestration, water, drought, flood of natural areas),
- breakdown versus conservation (also benefits of agriculture versus agriculture)
- corridors and prairie pockets are valued (connectivity to larger prairie patches,
- increased native cover on the roadsides),
- changes of management practices (keep practices with positive outcomes).

#### **What are your communities' priorities? How does nature contribute?**

*What does nature provide your community that would be expensive to replace?*

*50-100 years from now, what kind of natural world do you want for youth in our communities?*

- Marginal land retained existing prairie – incentives, crop insurance,
- better land use planning – strategies, coordinated,
- increased awareness of value of natural land (creative engagement to educate, youth, new ideas to tell stories),
- incorporation of localized conservation in curriculum,
- open sand and sandhill obligate specie flourishing example Portage sandhills.
- Game and fish,
- birders – surveys,
- aquifer recharge and drainage – and the connection to land use,
- deforestation – loss of riparian habitat due to flooding (corner to corner agricultural and economic benefits),
- intergenerational farms – best agricultural value for land,
- equitable insurance tools – need to support all of agriculture,
- sustainable agriculture,
- farm culture sense of identity,
- dairy industry – silage production,
- potato belt – irrigation and water management,
- recreation – culture of off-road use {(sandhills),
- education and enforcement,
- sensitive periods – limited access},
- cross-country ski trails,
- hiking,
- reduction in rural population in the area,
- healthcare and job opportunities to keep youth in rural Manitoba,
- tourism,
- land access and crown land,
- entrepreneurial opportunity – ecotourism,
- pollinator and pollinator services – natural cover, loss of economic benefits hard to offset – lack of clear science,
- eco benefits of neighboring land – marginal land (cross-border water management, damming the Assiniboine river).

#### **What factors, motivations, or perceptions in your community are barriers to protecting nature and achieving your communities' priorities?**

*(e.g. economic drivers, government policies, societal beliefs, knowledge gaps)*

#### **Partner Organizations – Current Initiatives in the Region**

- DFO highlighted work on the Bigmouth Buffalo and Mapleleaf

### Neepawa

#### **What does nature provide?**

- An escape (aesthetics),

- resiliency in an agricultural landscape,
- tourist economy,
- food (foraging, hunting, fishing),
- employment,
- diversity (changes with seasons),
- wildlife habitat,
- Oxygen,
- ecological services (water filtration, flood and drought resilience),
- nutrient cycling,
- pollination,
- spiritual/cultural connections,
- carbon sequestration,
- education.

**What resources would help enable your community/organization to participate in the Priority Place initiative?**

- Funding,
- access to information,
- peer to peer,
- better way to see connection to own programs and priorities,
- local connection stories,
- information on climate adaptation.
- Grazing clubs,
- Westman Naturalists,
- Field to table club,
- Resilient Canopy Program,
- Seton Centre (Carberry Wildflower Garden),
- Bird Friendliness Index,
- Game and Fish Association,
- Neepawa Wildlife Association,
- MBF/research farms – research Ferruginous hawk,
- Wild pigs – squeal on pigs campaign,
- Living Labs Eastern Prairie,
- Carbon co-benefits,
- Water.

**What does your ideal future community look like?**

- Cultural background;
- Climate adaptation, adapting design to protect property and resources,
- Public buy-in,
- Community support,
- Education (climate change, flood/drought).
- Resilient tree canopy (less invasive species),
- flood resiliency (green buffering,
- agricultural drainage,
- urban planning to return wetlands,
- increased park spaces beyond town boundary,
- active transportation (walking, cycling and running etc.),
- increase in population size -for a little bit (youth and thriving rural area),
- local amenities sufficiency (local employment and retainment, health care),
- youth retention (professional services).
- Protecting the aquifer (water availability, long-term sustainability),
- tourism (major stop along routes, regional public transportation),
- cross country biking (mixed concern around land conversion, drainage push in recent years),
- awareness of sand prairie habitat,
- employment,
- new community members (faith, outdoor recreation – basketball, Big Valley, family activities, diverse interests),
- youth activities (4H).
- Filipino Heritage Day – major town festival,
- Crown lands - changes in valuation for improvements (opportunities for long-term leases with bmp implementation),
- Water quality – Minnedosa Lake (land use - Little Saskatchewan River : lake level management and aquatic vegetation management,
- Bison tourism – interpretive opportunities.
- Beer producers vs annual crop (aging producer demographic),
- Livestock production – increase operation size (cultural value of livestock),

- producers/land managers – biggest SAR contribution (financially viable grass-based production,
- compensation for recognition of intrinsic value,
- EGS valuation (lack of education opportunities, awareness of EGS).
- *Recognition of encroachment vs other woody species,*
- *Local municipalities - reduced infrastructure costs of EGS*
- *(disincentives to leave land natural),*
- *Business risk management is higher for annual crops (rebates on leading for BMP's),*
- *Integration with other funding programs to maximize ecological benefits.*

#### **Threats/barriers to conservation**

- Economic pressures,
- Water level modifications,
- Leafy spurge,
- EAB,
- Ticks (anaplasmosis),
- Zebra mussels,
- Wild pigs,
- Recreational damage (also threatens livestock),
- Lack of disturbance,
- Impacts to pollinators (chemicals),
- Hobbyists and biosecurity.

#### **Contributing factors**

- Complacency/apathy (lack of awareness),
- competing priorities (housing, food, recreation),
- lack of ability (financial constraints and technical expertise),
- knowledge gap (what priorities do we not know),
- misinformation (15-minute city),
- targeted denial (vocal minority).
- Upstream water control (cross-border),
- Blame-passing – individual accountability avoided (lack of enforcement of drainage onto neighboring lands),
- pressures beyond ag-sector e.g recreation,
- cultural norms,
- apathy towards weed control (varying levels of control),
- perpetual 'bad blood' towards land securement,
- complicated applications (recruitment first should be priority),
- recreation commonly could be conservation supporters,
- lack of capacity for management,
- recognition of role of grazers on landscape.

#### **What activities does your community or organization currently undertake in the Priority Place?**

- SARPAL, RALP, SCAP, PWCP (offsite watering, shelterbelt – depends on watershed)
- Manitoba Weed Supervision Association, (moving toward EFP being necessary for program),
- Grazing services {(AMCP) rural producers know its importance},
- Grazing Mentorship Network,
- Rodeo's,
- Burrowing Owl Recovery Program,
- Environmental Farm Plan (verified Beef production program),
- Conservation Agreement Programs,
- Conservation Trust,
- Watershed District Programs,
- Weston Stewardship Investment Program on pasture and CA as well as Patron support,
- Agriculture in the classroom (Amazing Agriculture adventure),
- Orienteering (e.g Langford)/Geo-caching,
- 4H,
- CCA – C Youth leadership (good program).

#### **Are programs effective?**

- Livestock-related incentive-type programs not sufficient to offset crop value proposition
- Multiple programs overlap (extra admin using funds, duplication)
- EFP not much rigour – are impacts being achieved?
- Third party audit of program can ensure impacts are real (e.g. CRSB)(accountability)

- Lack of feasible ways to measure impacts (e.g. EG&S) but increasingly required
- Cost-benefit tools not being used enough to attract people to sign up
- Match requirements is a barrier to implementation
- Funding cycles can be challenging. May not be able to implement
- Focus on change – on degraded not retroactive (early adopters omitted)
- Program requires activity to be eligible. Activity is not necessary so it creates extra cost, producers don't sign (funding spent on less important activity)
- Programs that are too broad. Creates inequity for those with different activities available
- Prescriptive limits option vs. outcome-based (more equitable)
- Difficult to measure impact of extension (or rely on existing science)(need efficient ways to measure)

#### **Gaps**

- Post-secondary outreach (implementation opportunities and programs)
- Leafy spurge
- Information available in way to get people unaware
- How to get in front those “middle group” (many interested but unaware or can't access)
- Urban/newcomers not aware of importance/special
- Youth engagement/schools

## **Melita**

### **Potential Conservation Targets**

- Improving/maintaining Prairie (No net loss of prairie, profitable ranching industry, grazing maintained on the landscape).

### **Opportunities**

- Multi-SAR holistic land management planning,
- investigate different types of incentives,
- amend conservation easements,
- evaluate if OECM flexible alternative to easements,
- EG&S value proposition,
- collaborative program development,
- public awareness strategy,
- pasture tours,
- Canadian beef marketed as Carbon positive (EG&S),
- more active promotion of ranching/cattle producers from conservation groups,
- early education (agriculture in classroom) about cattle,
- connect producers with funders,
- partner on messaging with trusted agencies,
- amplify existing messaging,
- shared coalition of organizations,
- create trust through the personal connection with each organization (peer-to-peer trust-building),
- collaboration keeps messaging consistent,
- get private sector on board,
- use the vehicle to bring financial/economic valuation,
- public buy-ins to the value of service,
- start with convincing grasslands is good then bring in the 'grazing',
- adaptable programs allows for change,
- connect market forces, market prices are sustainable for producers,
- payments are sufficient,
- connect more organizations,
- payment programs are localized (watershed districts, collaboration with other organizations),
- funding organizations connected to the on- ground people,
- organizations not competing,
- reduce barriers and limitations of unknown metrics, not delayed waiting on science,
- tax-payers see the value and advantage.

### **Challenges**

- Worries of another ‘capitalist’ mechanism from younger generation,
- effective program developed,
- ranchers subscribe to program,
- peoples’ choice to ‘do right by land’ is compensated,
- ranchers are supported for BMPs,
- monitoring and measurements,
- trusted advocate in program development (bridge),
- crop and cattle producers both have input,
- producer buy-in program objective,
- people are engaged effectively,
- people feel morally proud of food choices,
- people understand EG&S benefits to them,
- people supported conservation policy,
- political will to support conservation and ranching,
- objectives of organisations. short-term programs.

**Activities to consider**

- Farm tours to show success (need to be relatable and comparable),
- stack programs (e.g verified beef),
- survey to figure out motivations or barriers to adoption,
- Incentivize those who have adopted to share (peer-to-peer),
- producer-focused workshop and producers or group on planning team (involve in strategy development),
- extend SARPAL to other groups,
- payment for early adopters,
- conservation organizations advocate for public awareness (address harmful messaging),
- mentorship programming (peer-led tours, grazing clubs, local),

**What are the gaps in conservation programming in the area?**

- Ecosystem services payment,
- early adopters (new projects have greater change in land use, would benefit from \$/acre payment or EG&S payment),
- late adopters (infrastructure needs, application support),
- support for beef marketing (adequate financial offsets),
- appropriate metrics – accurate but not onerous (interim measures, over time connect to other outcomes),
- understand individual barriers (if there is a different approach),
- peer to peer.
- Scale of implementation – importance of farming traditions (recipe for implementation, help for later adopters transition),
- Mentorship (people-to-people learning).

**Current programs**

- HSP, AFSAR, SARPAL, SWPP,
- ALUS EG&S payments for grazing per account payments,
- Trying to create rapid assessments (ECCC and BC),
- BFI,
- Living Labs 2.0(carbon co-benefits metrics for habitat, BMDS),
- Verified Beef Program (combine with other payments?, stack/use same indicators),
- Audited programs more robust,
- FCC give a break on fee,
- Environmental Farm Plan (lack of follow-up, barrier to some, no checking so less effective – but some prefer the lack of constant check-up),
- GROW,
- Shallow Wetland Incentive Program (WD),
- Temp wetland (WD Grow committee).
  
- Ducks Unlimited – Rangeland Programs (10 years agreement),
- Burrowing Owl Program,
- RALP,
- SCAP (prev. Ag) SAM?,
- Stewardship Investment Program (NCC, DU, MHHC),
- Conservation Agreements (NCC, MHHC, DU),

- Navius woody control and mowing (Watershed District),
- Weed District (spurge control),
- Conservation Trust programs.

Killarney	Program	Targets	Barriers to conservation	Opportunities	Value
	GROW	Wetlands, marginal riparian water.	Red tape, Program overlap/audience narrowness, Eligibility details, Funding availability timeline, Funding overlap and stacking organizations, Revenue lost from crops, Overlap with other program, Landowner interest (program funding vs crop), Lack of prairie, long-term	Forest retention, Interest, Future years well positioned, Farmers (lots of class 1 and 2 wetlands in this area), Healthy lake (recreational activities), Riparian areas (local pride, family history, ecosystem service – erosion control), Wetland maintenance a challenge X cash (less native prairie in this area, less conservation programming), Flooding concerns (reduced riparian tree cover), Wetland drainage, Conversion of whatever is left (reduced pasture lands), Increased drought to east, Increased climatic extremes.	Lake culture (tourism economics), Water retention and snow capture (aquifer recharge and groundwater availability).
	SCAP/RALP	Outside watershed district, crown lands.			
	PWCP	Nitrogen Management, rotational grazing, cover crops.			
	MHHC GSA	Grasslands.	Limited grassland cover (increased conversion, increased value of land), Water quality – especially Killarney Lake and Pelican {(heat -shallow lake) as well as residue and run-off}, Water levels and control, Invasive species {(carp – no decontamination station nearby/feasibility study to control, zebra mussels (potential), spurge (issue in some pastures), wild boar to the north (Glenboro area and Oak Lake), Lack of riparian program funding (more trust in municipal programs and watershed districts), Prairie Watershed Climate Program (lag time to receive funding), SCAP (no grazing funding unless outside watershed district, Sustainable Canadian Ag Partnership).		
	DU Forage	Forage production, water fowl.			
	Du Marginal Lands	Saline areas, wetlands.			
	DU Rangelands	Grasslands			
	DU Wetland Restoration	10-year or perpetual			
	Conservation Easements	Prairie, wetland, breed areas.			
	Weston SIP	Native prairie			
	MMF (maybe through PWCP)		More interest in grazing BMPs than funding (western watershed district less vast list), More programs available but complicated with red tape and paperwork (including PWCP), Program overlap stacking (MBP summary document on grazing programming),	<b>Are programs effective?</b> Livestock-related incentive type programs not sufficient to offset crop value proposition.  Multiple programs overlap (extra admin using funds, duplication).  EFP not much rigor.	
	IBA				
	Riverwatch	Water levels and quality			

			Variation in program length/intake (variation in local pride in SAR), Lack of infrastructure to connect to nature (natural areas not promoted for tourism, not seen as an opportunity), Native plant availability, Drainage and run-off (reduced water availability), Previous sustainable slope application (lack of funding, little interest in some areas).	Third-party audit of audit program can ensure impacts are real e.g CRSB.  Accountability. Lack of feasible ways to measure impacts e.g EQTS but increasingly required.  Cost-benefit tools not being used enough to attract people to sign up.	
<b>Glenboro</b>	<b>Program</b>  Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Program (SCAP)  RALP-Watershed Districts  RALP – grasslands and trees  GROW – upland, Temporary  PWCP  DU Forage  Conservation Agreements  DU Marginal Areas  DU Wetland Restoration  Prescribed fire (CFB and NCC)  Burrowing Owls Program  Save the Skinks  Conservation Trust    Provincial parks	<b>Targets</b>  EG&S, BMPs.    Upland temporary wetlands, pasture management, EG&S  No rotational grazing cover crops    Grassland	<b>Challenges</b>  General EFP registration WD variability and capacity    Funding, insufficient incentive to avoid lost funds  Confusion among funding sources, high demands  Cropland profits    Capacity, hard to partner.	<b>Opportunities</b>  Quantifiable outcomes, Online portal.  New awareness from MB FGA (September launch).  <b>Gaps in programming</b>  Connecting people to nature, Compensating early adopters/change not required, Support for invasive control (spurge), {aquatics – zebra mussels, phragmites) EAB}, Planning for Eastern deciduous forest management, Sandhill management disturbance regime, Grassland conservation (policy need?), ADA allocation – increased?, Surface irrigation potential along Assiniboine, Some rivers (Boyn) fully allocated.	<b>Value of Nature</b>  Carbon credits, Health of humankind (how we treat the earth, mental health ‘fresh air’, recreation).  EG&S, Carbon, water, biodiversity, filtration + water holding  Big Grass Marsh, intact marshes, oak trees, remnant oak bluffs.  Deer, elk, wildlife.  Spirituality (well-being: physical, emotional, psychological).  Biodiversity, tourism, hunting, agricultural co-benefits, foraging, food, priceless.  River valley – paradise  Sandhills – species, escarpment, Assiniboine Delta Aquifer.    <b>Connection points</b>

	<p>ALUS</p> <p>Weston SIP Prairie</p> <p>Land securement</p> <p>OECM</p> <p>MB Beef Producers (SARPAL)</p> <p>Living Labs</p> <p>Predation Pilot</p> <p>MASC</p> <p>Parks Interpretive Program</p> <p>Squeal on pigs</p> <p>Weed district</p> <p>Other conservation programs</p> <p>Lake Winnipeg Basin Program</p> <p>Birds Canada</p>	<p>Grassland stewardship program</p> <p>Non-lethal predator control e.g guardian dogs.</p> <p>Compensation for losses/crop damage</p>	<p>Variable effectiveness/funding</p>	<p>Camping, birding, hiking, interpretive centre, hunting, fishing, Girl Guides/Scouts? University/ACC, Swan Lake First Nation, Medical plants, Invasive species partnerships, Free park days, Forest school, CPAWS programming, Friends of Spruce Wood, Open Farm Day, Agriculture in the classroom, Geo-caching, Foraging, Pelican Lake, River Valley, Spruce Wood, Pleasant Valley, Western Naturalists</p>
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**Challenges to Biodiversity Conservation**

- Forest clearing (expansion of technology),
- Market signals,
- Increased land prices,
- Perverse incentives – axing habitat,
- Lack of profit for beef producers – increased crop production,
- Invasive species (leafy spurge, wild boar),
- Shrub encroachment,



- Challenges with tourism – sandhill trails,
- not much respect for nature (lack of environmental conservation ethics, youth connection to the land),
- weather -wet/dry cycles (extreme weather – less water in some areas, flooding elsewhere, lack of balance),
- fire suppression – general concern of wildfires,
- lack of awareness of role of fire (CFB fire training – education opportunity, sharing expertise).
  
- Urban sprawl,
- Increased conversion of ‘poor’ soil types (irrigation crops, new technology).
  
- Surface irrigation impacts on water quality (less natural vegetation for filtration and recharge).
  
- Impact of urban sprawl on agricultural land (may increase natural land conversion).
  
- Cottage country, First Nations acreages subdivided.
- Variation in producers’ perspectives on conservation,
- Renters on farmland may not share priorities.

**Targets**

Tame grasslands, Prairie,

**Strategies**

- Potential offset markets,
- incentives to retain grasslands,
- tax incentives,
- economic analysis into value of retained lands,
- metrics for NBS benefits of habitats,
- incentive to re-plant,
- land securement,
- forage program to cover seed,
- restoration of native seed and incentive,
- fee simple,
- partnership with seed producers,
- conservation easements,
- fees for soil carbon release,
- no net-loss policy,
- permits for land conversion,
- define habitats and thresholds (native prairie classification),
- value of EG&S communicated,
- markets that value EG&S,
- peer-to-peer sharing of success,
- youth programming,
- volunteer programs,
- tourism marketing,
- Riverwatch, Envirothon,
- Zoo programming,
- audio tours,
- story maps,
- water festivals,
- 4-H Programming, Nature/Ag curriculum,
- forest school expansion,
- plant ID workshops,
- cross-partner organization training,
- communicate land value to private landowners.

**Birtle**

**What does nature provide? Local Pride.**

- Sprague’s pipit, chestnut – collared longspur (not a huge source of pride, species have always been here),
- New water system – pumping water from Wattsview plains (burrowing owl concerns, water table/aquifer),

- Farmers proud they keep trees and wetlands/have species (but often quiet about it)
- Lakes, swimming, recreation – (Assessippi),
- Arts and recreation (hockey and skating – Shoal Lake has a new rink),
- Local nucleus of mining families,
- Services for seniors,
- Garden tours – communities in bloom,
- Housing prices – newcomers from other provinces,
- a bit of concern over loss of wild species,
- hard for small scale operations,
- cheaper for new farmers – increased land clearing,
- not as much incentive to retain trees,
- too easy to push bush.

### **Conservation Programming**

- Many programs available - hard to choose,
- Community pastures,
- Watershed programming (information hard to access, bottleneck effect, further impacted by capacity, marketing engagement and inconsistent messaging from the province),
- Conservation organizations need to work together.
  
- Other issues include:
- Holistic management (farmer training on practices),
- Environmental farm plan – difficult to navigate,
- Knowledge transfer-share data on benefits and improvements,
- General mills project – farmer to farmer learning (pollinator association, Carbon projects),
- Grazing clubs (ideas from producers – ex Woodworth Grazing School (trusted advocates, local knowledge, support and empower local leaders),
- Biosphere,
- St Lazare used to have high school program,
- Some programming with Alan Wilson at his school,
- Water festivals,
- Watershed school programming – tree planting,
- Some 4-H programming,
- Game and fish club,
- Lots of hunters from Winnipeg area (male deer call increased interest).
- a little parks tourism,
- camping, swimming, golfing,
- trans-Canada trail/snow man’s trail,
- cross-country ski trails grow shoes.

### **What factors are barriers to protecting nature and achieving your community’s priorities?**

- Economic drivers – underlying all mentioned barriers: young families – both working off farm, livestock are extra work, passion for cattle production only thing keeping them on.
  - Farmed full time, worked 30 years off the farm – renting pasture an easier option
  - passion – passion for lifestyle,
  - living rurally,
  - ranching industry,
  - family ties and time spent investing into cattle breeds, getting out of cattle prevents getting back in.
  
- Weather disturbances – can’t do anything differently during climate conditions, e.g. planting trees, cutting hay.
  - Stigma around certain land uses, crop field aesthetically valued (golden wheat fields during the fall).
  
  - Often, conservation is party of an entire family mindset- training kids that nature is important.
  - news article – “60 harvests left before systems collapse”
  - feeling like can’t change – role

- Communication gap – disinformation readily available, lack of knowledge of how ecosystems work, role of grazers, relationship to the land – some producers don’t have the same relationship with their lands – also consumer disconnect with increasing urban centers
  - legacy of century farms- proper management at the forefront, mindset that I am managing this for future generations
  - land is an investment, many producers goals a maximizing profits, less connection to land used to “make ends meet”
  
- Conservation organizations have a history of distrust in Manitoba, past actions:
  - project that had negative impacts on community or producers
  - conservation organizations have driven up land prices in some areas, local interests often outbid
  - increasing uptake of DU programs in this area
  - don’t hear stories of impact, EG&S retained, lessons learned from mistakes
  - lack of funding for project follow-up and monitoring
  - very narrow thinking on carbon – not the only thing worth measuring
  - hypothetical carbon credits have been promised for quite some time
  - hard to know what is valued in a carbon market – focus on soil health and diversity could be easier to digest
  - use metrics and measures that are understandable to the participants
  - time and logistics to implement environmental projects – not always practical for the producers
  - driving up market prices –grant funding driving up fencing and watering systems prices – watering systems going from \$7k to \$10k
  
- Limited supply of producers/contractors
  - communication amongst granting organizations – potential to identify funding consequences
  - program don’t favour early-adopters
  - we’re supporting practices but not principles
  - innovative ideas and lessons learned maybe have the biggest impact in a time of crisis
  
- Culture of information sharing amongst peers (for innovative ideas and challenges), most of the time we just don’t hear if a practice was successful or not,
  - DU picks easements at random to research for bird populations
  - MB Holistic Management does annual leading indicators, 5 year lagging indicators- funding for 5 year limited
  - monitoring at scale difficult, programming often serves the same producers annually, limited uptake by new producers, not a lot of experts that can advise famers – lack of trusted adviser e.g. Michael Teely in Birtle
  - Brain from WD often gets speaker from first hand knowledge- sharing success stories- often from other states and provinces
  - lots of stigma around being in programming

**Pressure on biodiversity/SAR**

- Increased equipment size,
- No clear generational trend in practices,
- Some farmers report an increase in Beaver impact-pushing bush prevents beaver damage,
- Road allowances infringed upon,
- Enforcement of drainage protection,
- No public ATV trail (a few local ATV derbies),
- Invasive species (bar dock, some spurge – getting closer, tansy, chamomile, creeping thistle, zebra mussel, wild boar, grasshoppers to the south),
- Cattle operations reduced (high cattle prices keeps some producers, grazing capacity and pasture reduced),
- drift flow – oil spraying,
- policy around ditches – different rural municipalities have different data on biodiversity,
- young cattle producers very interested in doing good for the land,
- increased land access.

**Activities and programming you would like to see in our area**

- Convincing municipalities to save road allowances – lot of potential there.
- R.M. of Yellowhead has a bylaw preventing development of road allowances.
- R.M. of Shoal Lake had it (amalgamated with R.M. of Strathclair who did not have bylaw).
- Driven by complaints – friction between neighbours.
- Showcase benefits of marginal lands – wildlife, SAR, pollinators.
- Width of bush is decreasing, trees dying off (falling on fence line)
- similar value to ditches.
- Delta waterfowl used to trap skunks and racoons to protect waterfowl nests.
- Ducks often defend their nests.
- Positive message for conservation, increasing social license of more gatherings of people and discussing effective conservation (gap in current programming space).
- Might be a good space for government/NCC – equal voice amongst participants (not overwhelmed by Watershed District).
- Hard to get producers out – grazing school had 12 participants, Hamiota open house had 2.
- Maybe the marketing discussions need to happen amongst conservation orgs.
- AMM and MAW may be potential venues (CAO conferences?)
- bring back Allen Wilson’s program on outdoor education
- often a lot of pressure on one teacher –
- information trailer – tour fairs, communities, parades, schools.
- going to people

**Recommended Actions/Approaches**

- Speak to communities,
- Rebuild trust,
- Look at different ways of measuring (not just carbon/soil metrics limit to one piece),
- Use metrics/measures meaningful to producers/decision-makers/public,
- Need a focus on innovation not just BMP,
- Need to support new ideas to find solutions,
- Need to foster a culture of sharing that includes creating an opportunity to learn and find a solution,
- Need peer to peer sharing of experience.

**Do we think conservation programming is being effective? What the gaps/opportunities in current programming?**

**What’s the outcome? Did we measure it?**

- A lot of uptake of programming in this area, usually exhausts funding.
- perceived as effective and people are doing activities.
- for community pasture there is some perception that it is becoming degraded – a lot of oxidation of plants.
- increasing amounts of acres being secured every year
- risk of losing species if pastures only goal is to feed livestock
- AMCP does have other goals but some organizational capacity issues to achieve
- could potentially dig into what is actually being measured on the landscape by various groups and if there are any conclusions that can be drawn.

**Virden**

**Do people know how special their area is?**

- Generally not in MB
- people do not advertise it

- Tourism often degrades special areas
- discussion on pros and cons
- trails give a property a “use”
- we need to celebrate what we have but we need to keep it as well
- nature and hunting not at odds, lots of things common interest

**Programming - What is missing? What could work?**

- Need awareness,
- Regulation/enforcement – not neighbour vs neighbour,
- Staffing to monitor,
- Conservation promotion,
- What replaces Hinterland who’s who? – how can we engage youth/general public on biology again?
- Information overload – how to break through the noise,
- Website/education program link,
- In-print materials for youth,
- Municipal mailouts to increase pride/awareness,
- Web content specific to town/RM,
- Funds/assistance with trails etc.,
- Keep it local,
- Small project that raises profile in community,
- Accessible community /citizen science,
- Interactive activities,
- Capacity for active transportation and new initiatives,
- Work with rail company,
- Crime- don’t always want to draw attention (sunflower farms have seen increasing trespassing/crop damage [Instagram to blame?]),
- Road allowance roles/awareness,
- Consider infrastructure – road ways.

**How do people feel about conservation?**

- Some concerns with amount of conservation lands,
- there is trust and agreement to a point,
- 99-year leases unpopular and holds future generations back,
- Water is important – both in quantity and quality – and there is good understanding of how it works,
- Feeding the world – livelihood is important.
- Stigma is related to the amount of conservation land,
- In the RM of Sifton, conservation agreement falls under conditional use and must go through the RM and more likely to agree to a short-term CA,
- Concern with land use restrictions based on presence of species at risk (SAR),
- Wild fire, wood concern due to less land management.

**Needs**

- School package,
- Recreation group,
- School tours of conservation/native lands,
- Day camp in a box,
- Ways to connect with older demographic (less likely to use technology, could be good fit for recording dates),

**Who is delivering programming?**

- Attend conferences (MAWD, AMM, MMA),
- Planning districts,
- Need to increase awareness/appreciation of MB ecosystems/species,
- Need to celebrate ourselves and keep it,
- Awareness of ‘who’s who’ on the landscape – different conservation agencies with different objectives,
- Trade school projects (ACC).

**Economic Drivers in the Area**

- Oil & Gas
  - Enbridge pipeline runs through Sifton, lots of pipelines in the general area (Pipestone owns a lot of mineral rights, increases tax benefits in the area).

- Agriculture – livestock – crop
  - (Hog barns, Land recognized as suitable to livestock production, not a huge push to convert to cropland,
  - some Hutterite colonies converting pasture, transition of land between generations – it all depends where that land ends up,
  - current stewards of land recognize it is best suited for pasture,
  - desire to become a farmer – but financial barriers to new farmers,
  - expansion of farm size likely to lead to one owner with many people managing the lands - bigger land holdings,
  - seeing more ads seeking farmhands, transition from family farms to corporations,
  - large holdings likely to result in more conglomeration or out of province buyers, financial benefits to municipalities – sponsorships,
  - “we rely on the land to survive”.
- Erco – saltwater mine – lot of raw water usage - lots of electricity, chlorine dioxide mine.
- Tourism
  - Oak Lake Beach and Resort - Rodea,
  - Recreation – Oak Lake,
- Transportation – railway; highway; things coming out of the ground needs to be moved somewhere.
- Decent amount of gravel pits.
- RM of Sifton and Virden are pretty steady for population; some interest of city dwellers to escape city life; influx of immigration may also increase rural populations.
- Comment on increase in some birds from participants – hummingbirds, geese, pine siskins, mourning doves, ducks on creek.
- Sources of taxes – commercial assessment in Virden is quite large, homeowner assessment is minimal, higher tax collection compared to smaller communities; pipeline in Sifton, residential around Oak Lake, followed by farmland.

**Other Programming Needs:**

- awareness, regulation/enforcement
- current system relies on snitching on neighbours
- needs a decent level of staffing
- getting out there and promoting ourselves
- hard to promote in the age of internet
- web content specific to town/rural municipalities
- recommendation for us to think about each rm in SWPP and come up with a small engagement project to implement to raise awareness
- Rural crime thing
- rural people don't want to draw attention to themselves
- will also draw in a new set of people (people trespassing to get photos of sunflowers)
- infrastructure needs change if interpretive sites draw in more traffic
- R.M. of Sifton feels like it is being taken over by (not everyone), a lot of people are appreciative of the unique land type
- long term easements are not seen popular- holds next landowner hostage
- conscientious of water

**Current Conservation Initiatives**

- DU, NCC, Upper Assiniboine, Watershed districts,
- General knowledge of conservation organizations,
- lack of awareness of programming,
- Eternal Springs (used for archery contest),
- Assiniboine River Basin Initiative,
- Wildlife Management Areas, tourism, website with locations and
- 4H

- Birding Group
- Education programming – one high school teacher into environmental educations, Calvin Smith, Julie Matheson
- educational package for how to deliver environmental programming
- recreation may be a good touch point
- conservation group took out school groups to learn about water conservation
- some watershed programming – planting trees
- eternal springs do a bit of environmental festival – high schoolers teaching younger students about what they know about nature
- Envirothon
- most municipalities have a recreation person, they might be able to be a point of contact
- town of Virden does summer kids camps (5-12)
- “week of day camp in a box”
- Engaging older demographic – post and verbal contact
- might be a good option for citizen science
- Manitoba Beef and Forage Initiative- one pager on conservation organizations
- Municipal services offices are often the directors of people to services – good to keep them informed
- attending municipal conferences, weed district education sessions
- watershed district conferences
- planning district
- MMA conferences

**Barriers/Concerns**

- Creek flow decreased – smell, decreased aesthetics (siltation – needs to be cleaned out)
- Lots of organizations – who to talk to (barrier to application)
- Capacity, funding windows, information availability often scattered
- Water fluctuations – often ideal conditions missed due to hold-ups
- Competing priorities with airport, health etc.
- Lack of planning for SW
- Older dams in need of upkeep
- Oak Lake water quality (considered increasing dam height – not proceeding)
- Decreased upstream riparian areas
- Tile drainage requests (effect on aquifer, increased irrigation)
- Access to expertise (unbiased)
- Farming low quality ag lands
- Lower well levels
- Enforcement of water policy limited (reparations for violations, cooperation between government agencies, need help from upper level government, decentralization reduces available help)
- Local expertise not captured in government/agencies (opportunity post-COVID for remote offices)
- Partner with conservation on projects/applications
- Loss of natural lands – water quality
- Out-of-province land ownership
- People understand value of natural lands – concerns around government limitations

**What are your community’s priorities? How does nature fit?**

- Scallion Creek (tree canopy, water (irrigation), trail, water for fire, education for youth, greenspace/access to nature, cross country, snowshoe, skating, health and wellness, kayaking, biking, ecotourism)
- Oak Lake resort – issues with water levels, duck mortality, fish stocking

- Aquifer – water security
- Local knowledge – some pride in prairie/prairie species
- Oil and gas development – economics
- Youth engagement – instill values