

Endangered



Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

## Western prairie fringed orchid

*Platanthera praeclara*

The Western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*) is a provincially and nationally endangered wildflower, occurring in Manitoba and seven American states. It is a perennial that can grow to a height of 40 to 88 cm (16 to 35 inches).

Flowers are arranged in a spike of four to 33 (most often less than 20) white to creamy white flowers. Flowers are fragrant at night to attract the moths that are its pollinators. To distinguish a Western prairie fringed orchid from other orchids look for its large, white flowers with deeply fringed margins and its large size, relative to other Manitoba orchids.

### Habitat

In Manitoba, the Western prairie fringed orchid can be found in calcareous (calcium-rich, or alkaline) prairies and wet meadows, typically growing with tall prairie grasses, sedges and some shrubs. It most often grows in relatively undisturbed grassland, however the orchid can also be seen in disturbed sites such as roadside ditches.

### Life History

The Western prairie fringed orchid is a perennial, surviving from one year to another as an underground stem. The lower flowers on the flowering spike open by the third week of June, and by the second week of July, most flowers have opened. Flowers last for several days.

To produce seed, a flower must be pollinated. Sphinx moths pollinate flowers by removing the pollen-bearing structures from one flower and transporting them to another. Sphinx moths are nocturnal and are attracted to the flowers at night, when the flowers produce a scent.

Seed capsules mature by late August or early September. Seeds are very small, and may be dispersed by either wind or water. Successful germination requires the assistance of mycorrhizae, soil fungi that help the plant take up soil nutrients. New plants may grow for many years before producing flowers.

### Distribution

The orchid occurs from Manitoba, south to Oklahoma, east to Iowa and west to central Nebraska. Manitoba's orchid population, located in and around the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve near Vita, is the largest single population of this species anywhere in its range, and the only Canadian site for this species.

### Status

The Western prairie fringed orchid is considered provincially very rare by the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre, and globally rare by the Association for Biodiversity Information. Threats to the species include conversion of native prairie habitat, draining, spraying of herbicides, overgrazing and annual haying before plants have produced seed.



# Manitoba's Species At Risk

## Cool Facts

The Manitoba population of Western prairie fringed orchids is the largest in the world. Approximately 50 percent of all known plants occur in Manitoba, in a 48 km<sup>2</sup> (19 square mile) area west of Vita.

The number of flowering plants fluctuates from year to year. In Manitoba, the highest number of flowering plants ever observed was approximately 21,000. One year earlier only 2,000 flowering plants were observed.

The Tall Grass Prairie Preserve contains about 50 percent of all Western prairie fringed orchids found in Manitoba.

The Western prairie fringed orchid is specially adapted to be pollinated by sphinx moths which can reach down its long nectar spur with their tongues, and can transfer pollen from flower to flower in the process.

The Western prairie fringed orchid grows under very specific soil conditions, and with the assistance of mycorrhizae, soil fungi that assist the plant in taking up soil nutrients.



The Western prairie fringed orchid is listed as Endangered by regulation 25/98 under the Manitoba *Endangered Species Act*.

The orchid has also been assigned a status of Endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). It is listed as Threatened in the United States by the *Endangered Species Act*, and is also listed under several state endangered species acts.

### Stewardship and Recovery

In 1995 the Canadian Nature Federation produced a recovery plan for Western prairie fringed orchid. A key component is the protection of critical habitat for the species. The Manitoba Tall Grass Prairie Preserve protects over 2,100 hectares (5,200 acres) of habitat for native prairie species, including the Western prairie fringed orchid.

Staff of the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve have been performing surveys of the Western prairie fringed orchid since 1992, observing

changes in the population and finding new sites for the plant. Several research projects have also been done in an attempt to better understand the biology of this species.

### Get involved in recovery

If you have a Western prairie fringed on your property, congratulations. Your land management skills have helped to maintain the population of one of the rarest plants in Canada. Contact the Wildlife Branch, or your nearest Manitoba Conservation office, if you would like more information on what you can do to further enhance your land for this and other native Manitoba plant and animal species.

If you see a Western prairie fringed orchid, contact Manitoba Conservation at one of the numbers listed below.

#### Manitoba Conservation Wildlife Branch

Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3J 3W3  
(204) 945-7764

[www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.html)

#### Manitoba Conservation Eastern Regional Office

Lac du Bonnet  
(204) 345-1427

Partners in production of this fact sheet:  
Manitoba Conservation, Wildlife Branch  
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service,  
Manitoba Cattle Producers Association

#### Extirpated Species

Any species once native to Manitoba that has disappeared through all of its Manitoba range. Extirpated species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

#### Endangered Species

Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

#### Threatened Species

Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

#### Vulnerable Species

Species not regulated under the *Endangered Species Act* but which could eventually be considered Endangered or Threatened if the factors affecting them do not improve.