

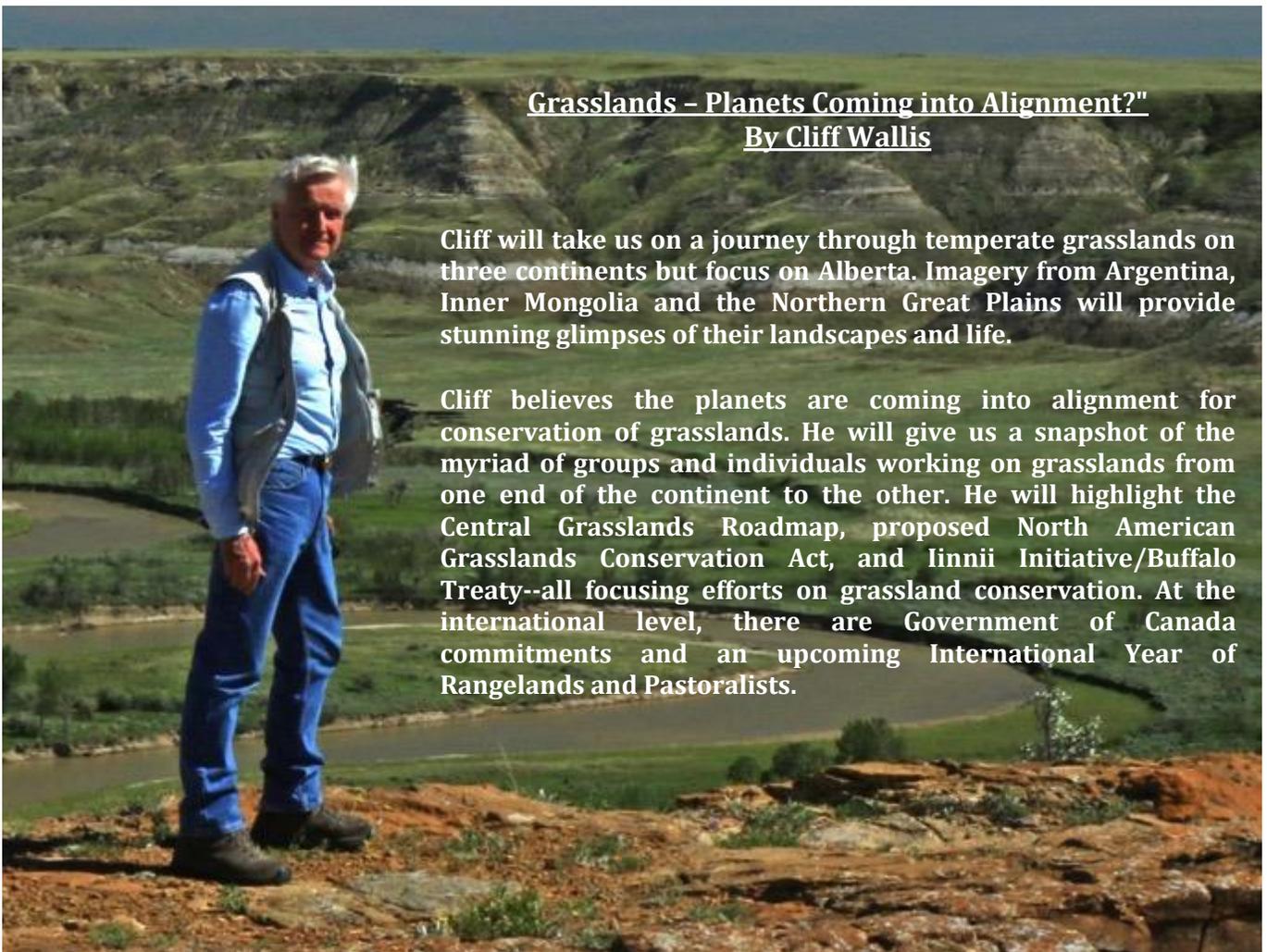
THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



Grasslands – Planets Coming into Alignment?" By Cliff Wallis

Cliff will take us on a journey through temperate grasslands on three continents but focus on Alberta. Imagery from Argentina, Inner Mongolia and the Northern Great Plains will provide stunning glimpses of their landscapes and life.

Cliff believes the planets are coming into alignment for conservation of grasslands. He will give us a snapshot of the myriad of groups and individuals working on grasslands from one end of the continent to the other. He will highlight the Central Grasslands Roadmap, proposed North American Grasslands Conservation Act, and Iinnii Initiative/Buffalo Treaty--all focusing efforts on grassland conservation. At the international level, there are Government of Canada commitments and an upcoming International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.



January 25: Zoom Get Together:

- 7:00 to 7:45 PM: GN Business Meeting
- 8:00 to 8:45 PM: Feature Presentation by Cliff Wallis

Note: Some details regarding the Zoom Meeting are given in the Members Section (page 5 & 6) but specific instructions regarding this particular meeting will be sent, by email, to all members a few days before the 25th.

Executive and Board Members

President Phil Horch 403-529-5918
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Secretary Martha Maudsley
Treasurer Angela Turner
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MH Interpretive Program

(Managed by Grasslands Naturalists)
Based in Police Point Park Nature Centre
To contact the Nature Centre call the:
Nature Line at (403) 529-6225
Also find us on Facebook and Twitter
Policepointpark
The washrooms are open:
Each day from 08:00 AM to 8:30 PM

**The Nature Centre is open (Tuesday through Sunday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM but please observe the COVID restrictions:
Face Masks are Required!**

Contact the Nature Centre

403 529-6225

to find out what nature related programs are being offered and planned in the near future.

The Sagebrush Chronicle is published ten times a year by Grasslands Naturalists. **Submissions of writing and artwork are welcomed but must be edited for publication. Deadline: the 10th of each month.** If you would like to advertise in the Chronicle, more information is available from the editor. Submissions are to be sent to: milton.spitzer@gmail.com (403-528-3120). Do not imbed photos in articles but **do send** them separately.

The Society of Grasslands Naturalists encourages the study, conservation and protection of all components of the natural world. The Society provides educational opportunities, assists in the collection and provision of species data, acts as stewards of the environment, discusses environmental topics and organizes member activities. The Society also manages the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program.

General Meetings: 4th Tuesday (**suspended during COVID**), Sept. - May **Board Meetings:** 1st Tuesday Sept. - June

To join Grasslands Naturalists and/or send a tax-deductible donation, write:

**Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 8G8**

Contact info: Nature Centre 529-6225

Annual Membership Dues: Angela Turner

Individuals	\$20
Families	\$25
Organizations	\$25

Donations to Grassland Naturalists and Interpretive Program are another great way to support local nature and nature education. Tax receipts are issued for all donations over \$10. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed by the authors in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the editor and the Grasslands Naturalists. The editor reserves the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles submitted. While due care will be taken of all manuscripts, photos or artwork submitted, GN cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage to such articles.

GN Website:

www.grasslands-naturalists.org

GN Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/GrasslandsNaturalists/>

You must be a Facebook member to view most of it.

Cross-country ski equipment and Snow Shoes are available to rent from the Nature Centre.

Member's Corner

It is time to renew your GN Membership for 2022. At the back of this Chronicle there is the membership renewal/waiver form. The form and dues (dues are detailed on page 2 of this issue) can be dropped off at the Nature Centre or can be mailed to **Grasslands Naturalists, Box 2491, Medicine Hat, AB, T1A 8G8.**

Life-time and/or Honorary Membership Award: Call for Nomination

The GN Board is seeking nominations for the Society's prestigious Life-time Membership Award. According Section 3.1.2 of the GN Bylaws: "The Society may award:

- a free 'Life-time' Membership to a current or past Member, who has made outstanding contributions to the Society.
- a free time-limited 'Honorary' Membership to a person outside the Society, who has made exceptional contributions to the Society or to its objectives.

'Life-time' and 'Honorary' Memberships shall be awarded by the Board through nominations by Members of the Society. Members shall be informed of such awards through a Society Announcement. Recipients of 'Life-time' and 'Honorary' Memberships shall be considered Society Members with voting rights for the duration of their term."

Life-time Memberships have been awarded to:

- Beth Milne 1995
- Dawn Dickinson 2008
- Donna Maclean 2009
- Veronica Swan 2012
- Ben Velner 2013
- Dennis Baresco 2014
- Eileen Cowtan 2015
- Michael O'Shea 2015
- Martha Munz Gue 2016
- Phil Horch 2016
- Jan Scott 2020

Life-time Membership and Recognition award recipients shall be honoured with their names on the park-bench located in front of the Nature Centre. No GN award shall involve any cash component.

As indicated in the bylaws, the nominations are made by Society Members. The Board will review the nominations at its next meeting, February 1st and announce the award at the next AGM. Nominations may be submitted to any GN Board Member in person, by physical mail or by email. In order to allow Board Members sufficient time to review the nominations, these need to be received on or before February 1.

The nomination document should include:

1. the name of the nominee,
2. the rationale supporting the nomination,
3. the name of the Society Member(s) submitting the nomination.
4. the date of submission.

We are very fortunate to have a dedicated Board with many new members. Since Board members may not be fully aware of the Society's history, nominations should discuss in item 2 above the most important contributions made by the nominee over his or her entire history with the Society.

GN has been blessed with some very active and passionate Members. This is an ideal opportunity for Society Members to honour one of them.

President's Report To GN Members: January 2022

As we launch a new year it is with the hope that 2022 will be a whole lot better than 2021. Unfortunately, my first day of 2022 was marked by a positive test for COVID-19. After, a wonderful family time in the Calgary area between Dec 23-27, I contracted the dreaded virus from a family member who works in the health care system in Calgary.

Upon arriving back in Medicine Hat, I scheduled a test which came back positive. For 3 days I experienced a cough and runny nose but no other symptoms. During that time, Alberta Health Services phoned me twice with many questions and giving me instructions for isolating. At the time of writing this, I have been free of symptoms for eight days and my isolation period has ended. Interestingly, my wife Annalora, who had the same 3 vaccinations as I and had the same exposure as I, had absolutely no symptoms. AHS said that she did not need to be tested and she did not need to isolate. However, she did isolate with me anyway. No doubt thousands of others are having similar experiences.

Normally, on the morning of January 1st of every year, I head outdoors to tally as many species of winter birds as I am able to get my bird tally year off to a good start. This year I was isolating indoors on January 1st. My only species that day were some noisy Black-Billed Magpies outside my condo window who seemed to be mobbing an invisible owl in a spruce tree. All our lives are impacted by covid to one degree or another!

Nonetheless, my COVID experience was so mild, that I was able to carry on with GN duties. Hugh Armstrong and I conducted a meeting of our Symposium sub-committee via Skype and plans for our 2023 Symposium continue. As I write this we are waiting for a date from the Mayor and our new City Council to make a presentation to them on the need for Medicine Hat to launch an Environmental Master Plan. At our January 4th GN Board meeting, it was also decided that we should launch an initiative to have Medicine Hat certified as a "Bird-Friendly City." This is a new initiative started by Nature Canada, our national umbrella organization for all naturalists society. You will hear more about this in the future.

Our Casino Dates Coming Up February 26-27.

A big thank-you to all our members that have registered to volunteer at our casino dates on February 26-27. You will be hearing from our casino manager shortly about the training session just prior to those dates. This is the biggest fund-raising event of the year for our society so your contribution is invaluable.

Time to Renew Your Membership.

A new year means it's time for membership renewal. Please see the forms at the back of this Chronicle. You are encouraged to fill these out and send them in with your renewal once a year so we can keep our files current. Also, note that we have added the opportunity to make payments to the Grasslands Naturalists electronically so there is a new option for payment.

The January Indoor Program Will be Happening Via Zoom – Be sure to Join Us.

Since it looks like we are still dealing with another wave of the pandemic this month, we are going ahead with an indoor zoom virtual meeting. Our indoor program chairperson, Linda Fisher, has lined up one of Canada's foremost naturalist presenters. I know you won't want to miss his presentation. See the details elsewhere in this issue of the Chronicle. I hope to see you there!

Submitted by
Phil Horch,
President

Upcoming Events, Field Trips and Announcements

Cross-Country Skiing

When weather and snow conditions are suitable, cross-country skiing can be enjoyed in the City in Police Point Park, Echo Dale Regional Park and at Elkwater on the Spring Creek Trail (trailhead just west of Hwy 41 South on the road to the Elkwater Golf Course; opposite to the turnoff to Reesor Lake).

Current schedule is to xc ski in PP Park on Tuesdays and Fridays starting 10 AM at the Nature Centre; and in Elkwater on Saturdays 10 AM at the trailhead. For skiing in Elkwater suggest taking lunch/snacks and refreshments. Back in the city around 2 or 2:30 PM.

Rental equipment for xc skiing and snowshoeing is available at the Nature Centre; hourly and daily rates. Suggest calling the Nature Centre 403-529-6225 to check on snow conditions in the Park. If conditions are not suitable for skiing on Tuesday and Fridays, then we can enjoy a walk around the park at 10:00 AM. For more information or to check before going out: contact John Slater jslater@telusplanet.net Cell 403-866-8415. Please note, COVID health protocol is in effect so no carpooling, but you may consider sharing ride with your cohorts (ie. member of your household or person living alone). Keep healthy. Looking forward to seeing you on the trail.

PS. GN member Hazel is looking to buy second-hand XC skiing equipment (any style): Ski length 170 to 190cm; shoe 8 to 8 1/2; and poles. If you have any of these items to sell or give away, please phone her at 403-580-6624.

Work Shops and Webinars

February 2: 5:30 to 6:30 PM: The DIY Seed Series Part One! **Canada's Wild Seeds: Growing our Biological Gold:** Register at:

: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/the-diy-seed-series-canadas-wild-seeds-growing-our-biological-gold-tickets-195097861957>

February 8 to 10: 9th Native Prairie Resoration/Reclamation Workshop: For details go to: <https://www.pcap-sk.org/upcoming-events/nprrw-registration>

March 2: Webinar: An Overview of the Alberta Invasive Species Council and their biocontrol release program in Alberta: For details go to: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/3044324915724580624>

January 25 Zoom Meeting

You will receive an email from Angela Turner regarding this meeting.

1. Open the email and go to the link below "**Join Zoom Meeting**" and click on it. This will take you to your browser. Note: if your email doesn't show a 'clickable' link (in blue) then copy and paste the link into your browser.
2. On the next screen there will be a box "**Open Zoom Meetings**" and you need to click on the 'little' box. Then at the bottom of the screen press "**Open Zoom Meetings**".
3. If #2 above does not appear on your screen then simply press "**Launch Meeting**".
4. Press "**Join With Video**" on the next screen.
5. When the meeting host is notified that you want to join the meeting standby until the host admits you to the meeting.
6. On the next screen press "**Join with Computer Audio**".
7. When you want to leave the meeting move the mouse and the bottom menu options will appear. Press the red "**Leave**" box to exit. Lastly, press the red "**Leave Meeting**".

If Zoom meetings are new to you, below are a few **Zoom Etiquette tips** to help improve your experience and avoid any disruptions or embarrassing situations.

(continued on next page)

Zoom Meeting (continued)

1. Be sure to **mute your microphone**, (lower-left corner of your screen), as soon as you sign on and whenever you are not speaking. This is important and perhaps the most critical tip to avoid background noise, feedback and distractions for others who would otherwise be able to hear things around you. If you speak or there is noise in your background it will interrupt the Speaker, and all of the other meeting participants will also be able to hear you and your surroundings.
2. Consider muting your video (also on the lower left of the screen) if you are eating, talking with someone else in the room, or anything else that might be distracting to others.
3. Close unneeded applications on your computer to keep the video optimally functioning.

Exciting Sightings by Bob Frew

Apart from the 40th Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count on December 19th, local birding was curtailed by weather alerts and extreme cold warnings during the last week of December and the first week of January. Many local birders chose to stay indoors watching their feeders. Despite the adverse weather, some exciting sightings have been reported by GN birders, all eager to get a start on their 2022 species lists.

Snowy Owl- Following his initial report of this iconic arctic owl for this fall/winter west of the city on December 2nd, Dan Schiebelbein reported 3 additional sightings in the same area on December 9th; a Snowy Owl was seen along RGE Rd. 71 between TWP Rds. 122 and 120, a second owl on the south side of TWP114, just west of RGE Rd. 73, and a third along RGE Rd. 73, just north of 120. Owls are attracted to this particular rural area each winter by an abundance of prey.

Harris's Sparrow- George Koopmans reported a Harris's Sparrow at his feeder in Southridge on the 24th and 26th of December, and again on January 3rd. This species is an uncommon migrant, and is more frequently seen in fall/winter. Winter adults can be distinguished from other sparrow species by their large size, black crown and bib, and pink bill.

White-breasted Nuthatch- This Nuthatch species can be detected vocally by its repetitive nasal "yank" call, but it is uncommon, and can be elusive. It forages down, around or along tree trunks. Several GN birders reported recent sightings; Barry Anderson located 2 White-breasted Nuthatches at the Cemetery on December 12th, and another in his Ross Glen Yard on December 15th, while George Koopmans reported a sighting at Police Point Park on January 3rd.

Accipiters- Barry Anderson reported a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, the smallest of our accipiter species, in his Ross Glen Neighbourhood on December 15th. A **Northern Goshawk**, the largest of our accipiter species was reported by Milt Spitzer at Police Point Park on December 31st.

Pine Grosbeak- This colourful winter finch breeds in northern Alberta and its mountain regions. Pine Grosbeaks are irruptive and can be found almost anywhere during migration and in winter, usually showing up at feeders. George Koopmans reported a single bird in Southridge on December 20th.

Gray Partridge- This partridge species is a year round resident of our grasslands and parkland regions. It is usually encountered when flushed from the cover of ditches and fence lines of rural RGE and TWP roads. It is an introduced species. Dan Schiebelbein reported two coveys of 11 and 30 Partridges along RGE Rd. 63, west of the city on December 9th.

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Great Horned Owl- The provincial bird of Alberta is widely distributed, is common in the grassland and parkland regions, and is non-migratory. Nesting territory is chosen in February and early March, the nest is usually an abandoned buteo or corvid nest, and is used without any repair or modification. Dan Schiebelbein reported a Great Horned Owl along a section of RGE Rd. 63, north of the Holsom Road on December 31st. He also reported two Great Horned Owls along TWP Rd. 122 near Sauder Reservoir on January 3rd.

Northern Shrike- This migrant is a rare winter visitor to the southern part of the province. It is recognized by its light-gray upper parts, black wings and tail, and lighter gray under parts, a white wing patch is visible in flight. Its larger size and smaller black mask distinguish it from the similar **Loggerhead Shrike** which is encountered here in summer (It is unlikely that the two shrike species would be found together except during April). An aggressive predator, the Northern Shrike often perches on power lines and tree tops on the lookout for prey. Barry Anderson reported one such sighting on top of a spruce tree in the Ross Glen neighbourhood on December 9th.



Photo by Dan Schiebelbein

Please report your exciting sightings to Bob Frew: phone 403-526-4573, or e-mail: robert.frew@shaw.ca

Manyberries Christmas Bird Count

In spite of the high winds and drifting snow in Medicine Hat this gave way to mainly a gentle wind and mild temperatures in the Manyberries Count Circle. Although only 15 species were observed, there were a number of memorable sightings.

Early in the day, Corlaine spotted and called a Golden Eagle more than 1.5 km away. We were able to approach to within 100 m to confirm the ID. We had excellent views of Common Redpolls in the weedy ditch, and two Great Horned Owls, both sitting in a stereotypical pose in different granary windows. However, the prize was an enormous flock of murmuring snow buntings. A group of perhaps several thousand birds would erupt out of the stubble, then be joined by another flock of thousands. As they wheeled through the pure blue sky, we could hear the wind rustle through 5,000 wings as they landed among another flock of thousands. We watched for perhaps twenty minutes, spellbound.

Several hours later, on our way home, Corlaine and I dropped by the same location to get a better view of the shrike that was seen near the field of buntings. Sure enough, the giant flock of buntings was still circling, then pouring onto the road, then speeding off across the fields. We watched, then slowly passed them to where the shrike no longer was. We returned past the buntings, still cavorting by the thousands. Just after passing them, I realized I could take a video of them with my phone camera, and we turned around. Less than two minutes after last seeing them, they had totally disappeared! Not a one was to be seen. This was almost as spectacular as their coordinated flight.

So, you never know what will be seen on a nature outing, but you can count on being transfixed.

Rob Gardner, Compiler

Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count

The 40th annual Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count was conducted on Sunday, December 19. A total of 42 participants surveyed territories within the circle. In addition 24 feeder watchers supplemented the area counts. Count day temperatures were cool (-17 to -10C) and there was a consistent wind from the NNE of 11 to 26 kph.

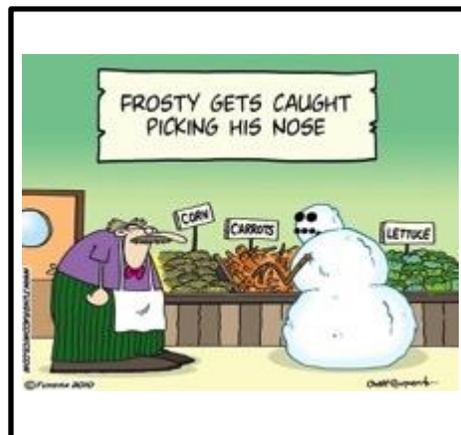
In all 45 species were tallied which is the first time since 2013 that less than 50 species were counted. The average count during the period of record is 53 species. Three regular species were not observed; Prairie Falcon, Gray Partridge and American Tree Sparrow). Gray Partridges were seen in every year except 1982 and 1997 and American Tree Sparrows were seen every year except for 1988. Prairie Falcons have been seen in 30 of the 40 year record. Two unusual species were observed during count week but not on count day; Eastern Screech-owl and Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Birders interested in this count and others can find them at:

<https://web4.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html>

Marty Drut has retired after 14 years of compiling this count and GN extends our heartfelt thanks for his dedication to this program. Ian Langill is the new compiler.

Frosty the Snowman's Adventures Frosty the Snowman's Adventures





Society of Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8



Membership Form for 2022

Name* _____ Name of 2nd Family Member ** _____

Address* _____ Membership: Individual \$20/year _____

City / Province* _____ Family \$25/year _____

Postal Code* _____ Organization \$25/year _____

Telephone+ _____ Donation _____ Tax Receipt Available

Email++ _____ **Total Enclosed** _____

Preference for receiving Chronicle newsletter*:

Post or Email or Neither

Payments can be made by cheque, cash or using e-Transfer at memberships@grasslands-naturalists.org

*Current and recent Chronicles can be viewed and downloaded from the Grasslands Naturalists website www.grasslands-naturalists.org. **Regardless of payment option used, a signed membership form must be filled out and submitted.***

* Required information. ** Required information for family membership.

+ Optional Information. For phone number(s), please note whether it is a residence, cell phone or business number.

++ Information required if you wish to receive the Chronicle and announcements by email.

Informed Consent for Field Trips

I may wish to participate in field trips and events organized by the Society of Grasslands Naturalists.

I affirm that, as a participant, I and my child(ren)/ward(s) are prepared to stay with the group and follow the directions of the coordinator and activity leader. I affirm that, knowing my personal state of health, I feel that I am mentally and physically capable of participating in the trips and events that I choose to attend.

I acknowledge that I am aware of the inherent risks, hazards, and dangers associated with activities arising from my participation in trips, events, litter cleanups, invasive species removal or any other activity that may result in injury, sickness or death to me or my child(ren)/ward(s). Some of these risks may be specific to the area. These include, but are not limited to, animal attacks as well as poisonous snakes, insects and vegetation. Therefore, in consideration of my participation in these trips and events, for myself, my heirs, my executors, my administrators, and my successors, I voluntarily assume all risks and hereby waive all my rights against Grasslands Naturalists and unconditionally release and discharge the Grasslands Naturalists, its members, directors, officers, its affairs and its coordinators from all manner of activities, causes of action, suits, claims and demands for damages due to personal injury, sickness, death, loss or damage to property, expenses or otherwise which may or shall arise in any way as a result of my participation in the above trips and events.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____



Society of Grasslands Naturalists
 Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8



Consent Form

Consent to the Use and Distribution of Personal Information

Grasslands Naturalists (GN) collects personal information subject to the '*Personal Information Protection Act*' (PIPA). GN may, subject to your consent, wish to make some personal information public through, for example, its Chronicle, Website, Facebook page or newspaper article. Please indicate your consent to the following release of information and note any specific exclusion of a consent such as for children.

	Yes	No	Exclusion
Name	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Residence telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Cell phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Business phone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Email address	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Residence address	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Pictures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

Beyond the above consents, GN will not distribute personal information to a third party without your consent unless such information is required, by law, to be released to a federal or provincial government agency in order, for example, to maintain GN's non-profit organization status.

Consent to Receive Emails Related to Commercial Activities

GN may wish to send you emails to promote some of its commercial activities including those provided by its *Club* and *Interpretive Program*. Please indicate your consent to receiving such information. Yes No

Modification of Consents

You may modify any of the above consents, at any time, through a written request to the member of the GN Executive responsible for Memberships.

 Signature of Member

 Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____