

Grassland Awareness Survey

Key Results

In 2023, the Canadian Wildlife Federation partnered with Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Weston Family Foundation to conduct a Canada-wide poll to measure awareness of grasslands and grassland conservation issues. We learned that we have work to do — about 75 per cent of Canadians don't know what a grassland is, and among those who do know, most don't fully comprehend the threats that grasslands face. Here we highlight some key results from the survey with the hope that you will join us to discuss the results and see how they could benefit your work.

Survey Objectives

1

To determine whether Canadians could identify a native grassland



2

To obtain insights into what motivates Canadians' conservation concerns



3

Once informed, to discover if the public would show particular interest in grassland conservation



4

To determine what kinds of conservation measures and actions they would support



Key Findings

80 %

1

The vast majority of Canadians (80 per cent) prioritize conservation of the environment, and most agree we need to do more.



2

While most Canadians broadly believe grasslands might be at some risk, few assign urgency to grasslands conservation specifically.



3

Only one in four Canadians believe they know exactly what the term "grasslands" means. Fewer understand terms like "native" or "natural" grasslands. Those in the know assume it's meant to convey something that is naturally occurring or untouched.



4

Only one in five Canadians think grasslands are critically threatened, though the majority are open to the possibility.



5

Most of the Canadian public believes politicians and policymakers, as well as Canadians more generally, should prioritize conservation of Canada's grasslands.

Methods

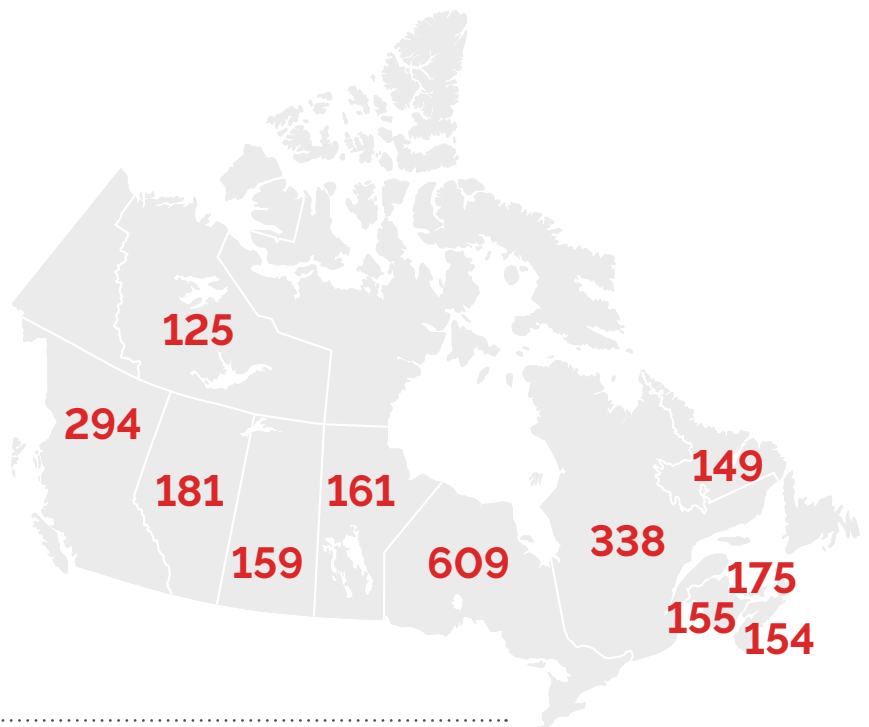
1. Poll conducted by Abacus Data

- Online survey from 7 April to 1 May 2023
- Reached 2,500 Canadians (all provinces and territories)

2. A cooperative project with CWF, ECCC and the Weston Family Foundation

3. We asked 42 questions on five themes

- 1 Demographics
- 2 Political profile
- 3 Grassland deep-dive
- 4 Consumer choice
- 5 Government role



Results

1. Although Canadians overwhelmingly support conservation (79 per cent) they rank grasslands relatively low among well-known biomes (ranked 6th of 7, well behind tropical rainforests – ranked 2nd – a biome that doesn't occur in Canada).

2. Only 24 per cent are confident that they know what a grassland is.

- They get this knowledge mostly from experience (53 per cent) or visiting a nature centre (34 per cent) or conservation area (33 per cent). Nature documentaries were also important (43 per cent).
- Ten per cent visit grasslands regularly while an additional 49 per cent have visited a grassland in the past.
- Forty-four per cent say they live near some grassland, and ten per cent live near a lot.

3. Species at Risk (SAR) are consistently cited as the most important reason for habitat conservation

- Sixty-nine per cent are extremely or very concerned with SAR conservation generally
 - » Followed by climate change
- Seventy-two per cent think that a lot or somewhat more action is needed to protect SAR
- Forty-three per cent chose SAR among the top three reasons for grassland conservation
 - » Human health and climate change are the two next most cited reasons to conserve grasslands

4. Only 22 per cent of Canadians know that grasslands are threatened.

- Although an additional 45 per cent think that they might be threatened – are open to the possibility.
- The top five threats (as selected from a list of possibilities):

1 Urban expansion

(78 per cent respond primary or big threat)

2 Oil and gas development

(67 per cent respond primary or big threat)

3 Road construction

(67 per cent respond primary or big threat)

4 Conversion to annual crops

(65 per cent respond primary or big threat)

5 Climate change

(64 per cent respond primary or big threat)

5. Few individuals are aware of organizations that are currently protecting grasslands in Canada.

- Among those aware, governments and Ducks Unlimited were mentioned significantly more than other individuals/organizations.
- Farmers, Indigenous Peoples and ranchers are seen as doing the most for conserving/protecting grasslands.
 - » These three groups are likewise the most trusted to do the job, while the private sector and government are the least trusted.



Results



6. While many agree with most of the statements tested, those who identify as Indigenous are far more likely to agree that:

- Humans are integral to, rather than separate from, the natural world
- They feel a spiritual connection to nature
- Grasslands provide important recreational space for my communication

7. Part of improving relationships with Indigenous Peoples is recognizing their cultural and spiritual connection to the land and its biodiversity. On a scale of one to 10, on average, respondents rank prioritizing grassland conservation for politicians and policymakers as eight.

- The same priority (eight) was assigned to Canadians generally
- Few know, and most prioritize, the conservation of SAR. This is among the more powerful levers driving support for grassland conservation, along with carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services essential for human health.
- When we give them more information on threats to grasslands, they will increase the priority score by an additional 0.5 (to 8.5) on average.

8. Our questions regarding consumer choice were to determine if Canadians link biodiversity on native grasslands to cattle ranching and thus beef as a choice that supports conservation. The results show a very even split of views.

- Ten per cent say that cattle ranching has a very positive effect on the environment
- Thirty-one per cent say it has a positive effect
- Twenty-nine per cent say it has a negative effect
- Ten per cent say a very negative effect
- Twenty per cent don't know or are not sure

9. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents strongly or somewhat support government action to prevent conversion of natural grasslands to annual crops, with most of the rest neutral rather than opposed.

- Fifty-three per cent strongly or somewhat support tax incentives to prevent natural grasslands from being converted to crops
- Fifty-five per cent strongly or somewhat support direct payments to Indigenous or settler natural grassland managers
- Fifty-seven per cent of Canadians would support a government that took effective action to protect and conserve grasslands



Key Take Aways

1. Most Canadians prioritize the environment generally, and conservation efforts specifically.
2. Few understand that grasslands are threatened and are ignorant of many of their benefits and challenges. Many don't even know what the term means.
3. Canadians, however, are open to the idea that they are critically threatened, and when asked if government should be taking action, most agree and are prepared to support policy measures and the politicians who forward them. This research establishes the potential for a clear call to action.
4. A lot of education must take place to establish the widespread urgency of action. But once facts are socialized, very little convincing needs to be done. The public doesn't need to be convinced of the virtues of conservation, they just need to be told the reality about how grasslands have been and will continue to be threatened.
5. At this time, endangered species seem to inspire the highest proportion of Canadians to care about grasslands conservation. Other ecosystem services (and particularly their role in carbon storage) are also critical for notably sized groupings of Canadians.



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The survey is a rich source of information. What we have presented here are just the highlights. We are interested in sharing its full scope and working together with you as we strive to better understand how to reach Canadians and advance grassland conservation across the country.