



News Release

## **Precious wetlands, old-growth forest and grasslands now protected as part of internationally significant conservation area in the South Okanagan**

**Osoyoos, BC (December 15, 2020)** – An internationally significant conservation area just outside Osoyoos has just gotten bigger. The Nature Conservancy of Canada is announcing the addition of 126 hectares (311 acres) to the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area.

Located fewer than 30 minutes west of Osoyoos along the Canada / U.S. border, Sage and Sparrow now encompasses over 1,500 hectares (3,750 acres) of rare grasslands and interior Douglas-fir forest at the confluence of the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. This area is within the traditional territories of the Syilx (Okanagan) Peoples.

The Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area is nestled within the provincial South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area. The new addition extends the conservation area to the north, filling in a gap in a north-south conservation corridor in one of the country's rarest and most threatened ecosystems.

This unique landscape represents the northernmost tip of the arid, desert-like ecosystem that extends through central Washington State. Sage and Sparrow provides essential habitat for 62 confirmed at risk plants and animals, some of which are found nowhere else in Canada. Several species are listed under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*, including western tiger salamander, southern mountain population (endangered), western rattlesnake (threatened), Great Basin gophersnake (threatened), Great Basin spadefoot (threatened) and Lewis's woodpecker (threatened).

The new conservation lands span a diversity of habitats. In addition to sagebrush steppe and bunchgrass-dominated grasslands, the land includes some of the oldest stands of interior Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine forest in the broader area. Two large wetlands provide precious moisture in this arid landscape.

Woodlands of trembling aspen offer nesting habitat for birds as well as cooling shade during temperature extremes for all wildlife. Snakes, gophers and mice make use of the pockets of rugged terrain scattered throughout the property. And the variety of terrain, micro-climates and structural diversity add immensely to the property's conservation value.

The Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area is open to the public for walk-in access only.

This project has been made possible by the contributions of many funders, including the Government of Canada through the Natural Heritage Conservation Program, part of Canada's Nature Fund, Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sitka Foundation, Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society, Oliver Osoyoos Naturalists Club, South Okanagan Naturalists' Club and many generous donors.

## Quotes

"The work we are doing in this imperilled landscape is critical for the plants, animals and ecosystems here, not only in the face of climate change, but in the face of ongoing development pressure. Thanks to the generous support of our donors and partners, the Nature Conservancy of Canada is able to move efficiently and effectively with willing landowners to conserve their lands. We have made a tangible difference here."

*Barb Pryce, Southern Interior Program Director, Nature Conservancy of Canada*

"Congratulations to the Nature Conservancy of Canada on the expansion of the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area in British Columbia. We are pleased to support this conservation project through the Canada Nature Fund's Natural Heritage Conservation Program to help protect habitat for wildlife, including species at risk such as the western tiger salamander, the western rattlesnake, the Great Basin gophersnake, and Lewis' woodpecker. Thanks to our partners like NCC, we are making progress toward conserving a quarter of Canada's land and a quarter of its oceans by 2025."

*The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change*

"The Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen is proud to be working with the Nature Conservancy of Canada to help protect the region's natural heritage. Expanding Sage and Sparrow will provide greater security to dozens of at-risk species, in one of the province's most unique landscapes."

*Karla Kozakevich, chair, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen*

## Images & Video

Photographs can be downloaded from this link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/us57jnqcrkoeap4/AAD64LOHYkpigm8ZTMedqPjFa?dl=0>

Video is available at: <https://youtu.be/Hn5PmXIqNtg>

## Facts

- Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area shares a significant portion of its border with the South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area. It forms an integral habitat link between protected areas that allows for the movement of species between the Similkameen and Okanagan valleys.
- This grassland ecosystem is one of the four most endangered ecosystems in Canada.
- The Okanagan and Similkameen valleys connect to the Great Basin in Washington State. As the northern limit of a dry grassland ecosystem, this area may contain species that are more adaptable to fluctuations in climate. Protecting these edge ecosystems can play an essential role in climate change adaptation.
- See attached species list for the ranges of rare and at-risk plants, animals and ecological communities found on the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area.



## **About**

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is the nation's leading not-for-profit, private land conservation organization, working to protect our most important natural areas and the species they sustain. Since 1962, NCC and its partners have helped to protect 14 million hectares (35 million acres), coast to coast to coast. To learn more, visit [natureconservancy.ca](http://natureconservancy.ca).

The Government of Canada's Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) is a unique public-private partnership to support new protected and conserved areas by securing private lands and private interests in lands. The program is managed by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). Federal funds invested in the program are matched with contributions raised by NCC and its partners, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the country's land trust community.

## **Learn more**

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