



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada

Canada



Grasslands

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

2022



2021

Grasslands

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, represented
by the President & Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada, 2021.

GRASSLANDS NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2021.

R64-583/2021E-PDF
978-0-660-39374-2

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

Note to readers:

The health and safety of visitors, employees and all Canadians are of the utmost importance. Parks Canada is following the advice and guidance of public health experts to limit the spread of COVID-19 while allowing Canadians to experience Canada's natural and cultural heritage.

Parks Canada acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic may have unforeseeable impacts on Grasslands National Park of Canada Management Plan. Parks Canada will inform Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the public of any such impacts through its annual implementation update on the implementation of this plan.

For more information about the management plan or about
GRASSLANDS NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA:

GRASSLANDS NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA
South Saskatchewan Field Unit
P.O. Box 150
Val Marie, Saskatchewan
Canada S0N 2T0

Tel: Grasslands National Park Visitor Centre 1-877-345-2257
Email: pc.infopnprairies-grasslandsnpinfo.pc@canada.ca
<https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/sk/grasslands>

Front cover image credits

*top from left to right: J. Page / ©Parks Canada; P. Kuelker / ©Parks Canada; A. Nevert / ©Parks Canada
bottom: K. Hogarth / ©Parks Canada*

Foreword



From coast to coast to coast, national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas are a source of shared pride for Canadians. They reflect Canada's natural and cultural heritage and tell stories of who we are, including the historic and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples.

These cherished places are a priority for the Government of Canada. We are committed to protecting natural and cultural heritage, expanding the system of protected places, and contributing to the recovery of species at risk.

At the same time, we continue to offer new and innovative visitor and outreach programs and activities to ensure that more Canadians can experience these iconic destinations and learn about history, culture and the environment.

In collaboration with Indigenous communities and key partners, Parks Canada conserves and protects national historic sites and national parks; enables people to discover and connect with history and nature; and helps sustain the economic value of these places for local and regional communities.

This new management plan for Grasslands National Park of Canada supports this vision.

Management plans are developed by a dedicated team at Parks Canada through extensive consultation and input from Indigenous partners, other partners and stakeholders, local communities, as well as visitors past and present. I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this plan for their commitment and spirit of cooperation.

As the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, I applaud this collaborative effort and I am pleased to approve the *Grasslands National Park of Canada Management Plan*.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steven Guilbeault', written in a cursive style.

Steven Guilbeault

Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada

Recommendations

Recommended by:



Ron Hallman
President & Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada



Andrew Campbell
Senior Vice-President
Operations Directorate



Adriana Bacheschi
Superintendent
Saskatchewan South Field Unit

Executive Summary

Grasslands National Park is Canada's first and only national park established to represent the mixed-grass prairie – one of the most endangered ecosystems in Canada – and to protect a representative example of the Prairie Grasslands Natural Region. The park is located in southwestern Saskatchewan adjacent to the state of Montana at the Canada-United States border. Grasslands National Park consists of two blocks, the West Block and the East Block, with remaining land to be acquired within the park's proposed boundary.

The park was established in 1981 under the terms of a Federal-Provincial Agreement, to protect and present a representative example of the Prairie Grasslands Natural Region. The park currently consists of 730 km² and could eventually cover 906 km² when land acquisition is complete. Under the terms of the Federal-Provincial Agreement (renewed in 1988 and 2019), land acquisition occurs on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis.

Erosion, glaciation, and a semi-arid climate have formed many of the park's characteristic features. The park has incredible marine and dinosaur fossils dating to 60-80 million years ago. The human history of Grasslands National Park dates back more than 10 000 years, as evidenced by the thousands of archaeological sites that dot the landscape. The park encompasses one of the largest concentrations of undisturbed, pre-contact sites in southern Canada. Many different Northern Plains Indigenous groups used the landscape that formed the park. More recently, ranching families have contributed to the continued stewardship of the landscape. In these semi-arid plains, lightly vegetated badlands, and winding river valleys, the park and the broader region are home to many species at risk such as the Greater Sage-Grouse, Burrowing Owl and Black-tailed Prairie Dog. In 2005, Parks Canada re-introduced Plains Bison after a 120-year absence from the landscape. In 2009, Grasslands National Park became recognized as a Dark-sky Preserve, and is under consideration for designation as the first international Quiet Park in Canada.

The park is open year-round, with some facilities such as visitor centres and campgrounds open from May to mid-October. Visitor experiences include self-guided hiking trails, interpreter-led hikes and programs, campfire programs, scenic driving tours, remote backcountry adventures, and a range of hiking routes to explore.

This management plan replaces the 2010 management plan for Grasslands National Park. Since 2010, the park has focused significant conservation effort on species at risk, monitoring and habitat management, implementing a bison conservation strategy, as well as on connecting Canadians with the park through sharing stories, engaging volunteers, developing a basic visitor offer, new trails, and a new 10-kilometre paved scenic drive.

The four key strategies for the ten-year management plan are:

Key Strategy 1: Growing Land Base and Sustainable Park Infrastructure

This strategy focuses on working towards park completion by continuing to acquire remaining properties within the park's proposed boundary. Baseline inventories, asset prioritization exercises, and service level reviews are all key components of this strategy.

Key Strategy 2: Species at Risk and Resource Management

This strategy aims at ensuring the protection of the park's treasured landscape with all its natural and cultural resource values. Increasing partnerships and improving knowledge will also be key elements of this strategy.

Key Strategy 3: Completing a Basic Visitor Experience

This strategy focuses on offering visitors a powerful, meaningful, and quality experience. The natural and cultural wonders of the park combined with a welcoming visitor service offer will create a unique sense of place.

Key Strategy 4: Building Support and Connection with Indigenous Peoples and Stakeholders

Relationship building and partnerships are at the heart of this strategy. Advancing relationships to better engage with Indigenous peoples, partners, local communities, visitors, licensees, park neighbours, and other stakeholders are vital to the success of Grasslands National Park.

Table of Contents

Foreword	iii
Recommendations	v
Executive Summary	vii
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Significance of Grasslands National Park	1
3.0 Planning Context.....	4
4.0 Development of the Management Plan	6
5.0 Vision.....	7
6.0 Key Strategies	8
7.0 Zoning	13
8.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment	21

Maps

Map 1: Grasslands National Park Regional Setting	3
Map 2: East Block Zoning Overview	16
Map 3: Rock Creek and Parkway Badlands Zoning.....	17
Map 4: West Block Zoning Overview	18
Map 5: Frenchman Valley Zoning.....	19
Map 6: Two Trees and Eagle Butte Zoning.....	20

1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada administers one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national historic site, national park, national marine conservation area and heritage canal administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

The *Canada National Parks Act* and the *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for each national park. The *Grasslands National Park of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how park management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate for the next ten years.

Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, partners and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national park. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Grasslands National Park by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement and, where appropriate, consultation on the management of Grasslands National Park in years to come.

2.0 Significance of Grasslands National Park

Grasslands National Park is Canada's first and only national park established to represent the mixed-grass prairie, and to protect a representative example of the Prairie Grasslands Natural Region.

Mixed-prairie and short grass prairies have been reduced to 20-30 percent of their former extent, jointly exceeding losses reported for any other major ecological community in North America¹. Despite being a highly endangered ecosystem, native grasslands are underrepresented in protected areas in North America. As well, species that make their home in this landscape are increasingly rare. Therefore, the park plays an important role in species at risk conservation.

The park was established in 1981, under the terms of a Federal-Provincial Agreement, to protect and present a portion of the Prairie Grasslands Natural Region. The 906 km² of land that lies within the current and proposed park boundary represents one of Canada's finest examples of North American mixed-grass prairie habitat.

Erosion, glaciation, and a semi-arid climate have formed many of the park's characteristic features. The park has incredible marine and dinosaur fossils dating to 60-80 million years ago. *Triceratops* and *Tyrannosaurus rex* fossils have been discovered here as part of the earliest paleontological research done in Canada. The Rock Creek Badlands within the park is one of the best places in the world to view the Cretaceous-Paleogene (K-Pg) boundary – the layer in the soil that separates the age of dinosaurs from later eras, and signals the point of their mass extinction.

The rich human history of Grasslands National Park is evidenced by the thousands of archaeological sites that dot the landscape. The park encompasses one of the largest concentrations of undisturbed, pre-

¹ Gauthier, D. A. and E. B. Wiken. 1998. The Great Plains of North America. *PARKS* 8(3): 9-20.

contact sites in southern Canada. Many different Indigenous groups used the landscape that formed the park, following the migrations of the bison, and using the resources available. Over the last century and a half, ranching and some forms of farming have become the dominant land uses. These land uses have contributed to maintaining the prairie ecosystem.

Grasslands National Park is a land of rolling hills, rugged coulees, and striking badlands. Minimal precipitation in the region influences many of the park's ecological conditions, including the uniquely adapted vegetation and animal communities. Waterways such as the Frenchman River in the West Block and Rock Creek in the East Block add to the biodiversity, and serve as important habitats for wildlife and plants.

In these semi-arid plains, lightly vegetated badlands, and winding river valleys, the park and its broader region are home to many species at risk, such as the Greater Sage-Grouse, Burrowing Owl, Eastern Yellow-bellied Racer Snake, Greater Short-horned Lizard and Black-tailed Prairie Dog. Cool and warm season grasses dominate the landscape while sagebrush, greasewood, prickly pear cactus, and numerous flowering plants add richness to the plant community. The largely treeless, windswept plains evolved with grazing, drought, periodic fire, and a variable continental climate. The park and region are a haven for endemic prairie species that have had their habitat destroyed elsewhere. In 2005, Parks Canada re-introduced Plains Bison after a 120-year absence. Prior to European settlement, the prairies were home to tens of millions of free-roaming bison (among other large ungulates such as elk and pronghorn antelope). As well as playing an essential role in shaping the park's ecology, this conservation bison herd contributes to the species' continental restoration.

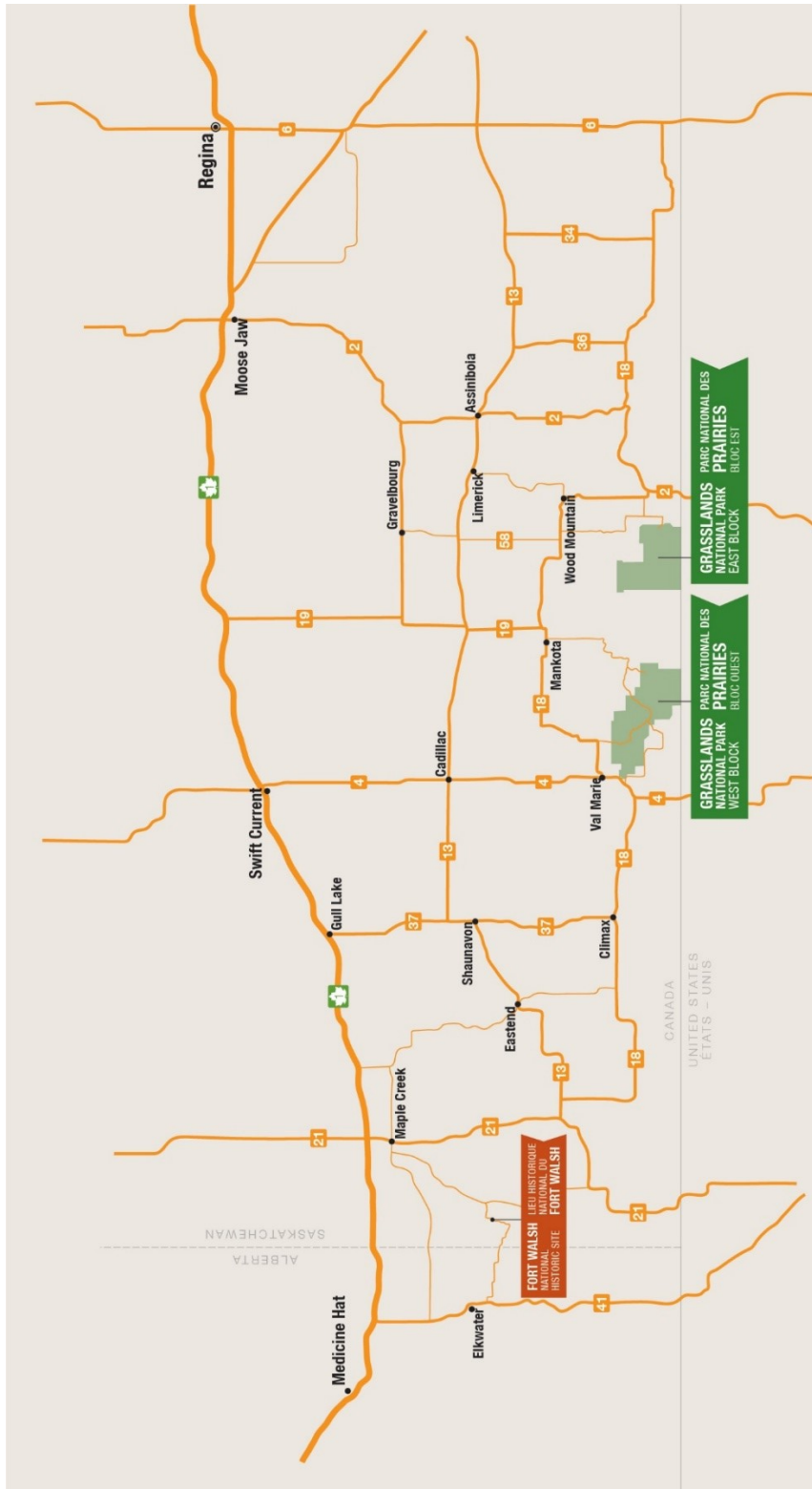
In 2009, Grasslands National Park met the requirement of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada Dark-sky Preserve Program and was certified to be recognized as the Grasslands National Park Dark-sky Preserve. Dark sky preservation contributes to ongoing protection of the natural day-night cycle for the flora and fauna of the park, supporting natural hunting, foraging, and reproductive behaviors. It also allows the opportunity for a spectacular view of the night sky to visitors.

Species at Risk in Grasslands National Park

Thirty-one species at risk are present in Grasslands National Park, with 96 percent of the park considered "critical habitat" for these species. In particular, the park protects the only two known leks (mating grounds) of the Greater Sage-Grouse in Saskatchewan. The Emergency Protection Order for the protection of their habitat includes approximately two-thirds of the park. As well, the only remaining population of Black-tailed Prairie Dogs existing in its natural habitat in Canada is found within Grasslands National Park and its immediate surroundings

Protecting species at risk is a shared responsibility of federal, provincial and territorial governments. Although Parks Canada is the lead for species that occur within the park, the Agency has limitations in their management. The direction for species protection and recovery measures is set by the *Species at Risk Act*, emergency orders under the *Act*, and respective recovery strategies.

Map 1: Grasslands National Park Regional Setting



3.0 Planning Context

Grasslands National Park is located in southwestern Saskatchewan at the Canada-United States border adjacent to the state of Montana. The park consists of two discrete parcels or “blocks” (West and East). The Val Marie visitor centre near the West Block is approximately 160 kilometres from the seasonal Information Centre in the East Block. The West Block centres on the Frenchman River Valley, and the East Block features the Badlands of Rock Creek and the Wood Mountain Uplands. The West Block access point is near the village of Val Marie (at Highway 4 and Highway 18), while the East Block access is near the town of Wood Mountain (at Highway 18) (Map 1).

The 1981 Federal-Provincial Agreement was renewed in 1988, and again on January 10, 2019. The first major land purchase occurred in 1984, and by 2001 there was a sufficient land base to formalize establishment of Grasslands National Park through scheduling under the *Canada National Parks Act*. Under the terms of the Agreement, land acquisition occurs on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis. The park currently consists of 730 km² and could eventually cover 906 km² when land acquisition is complete.

The park is open year-round, although facilities such as visitor centres and campgrounds are open seasonally from May to mid-October. Visitor experiences include family-friendly interpretive programs, scenic driving tours, special events, remote backcountry adventures, guided wagon rides, fireside chats, and a range of trails to explore.

Since 2010, Grasslands National Park has focused significant conservation effort on species at risk management, including the development and approval of the 2016 Multi-species Action Plan. Advances have been made on monitoring and habitat management, implementing a bison conservation strategy, connecting with Canadians through sharing conservation stories, and engaging volunteers through conservation programs.

Also since 2010, there has been significant investment in developing a basic visitor offer in the park, primarily through strategic infrastructure investments, including two new campgrounds (one in each block), a few new trails, and a new 10-kilometre, paved scenic drive in the East Block.

A 2017 State of the Park Assessment identified four themes as key priorities to be addressed by this management plan:

1. Growing land assembly and sustainable park infrastructure
2. Species at risk and resource management
3. Building the basic visitor experience program
4. Building support and connection with Indigenous peoples and stakeholders.

Growing Land Assembly and Sustainable Park Infrastructure

Grasslands National Park is still in the assembly phase (land rights acquired as of 2021 include 98.6 percent of the proposed West Block and 66.7 percent of the proposed East Block, or a total of 84.8 percent overall). The continually growing land base has resulted in a patchwork of park-owned and privately-owned lands within the proposed boundaries. This presents a challenge for long-term planning because with each land acquisition park responsibilities also increase, including the amount of infrastructure, management of species at risk and their habitat, cultural resources, visitor facilities, ranch buildings, and contaminated sites. Also, under the Federal-Provincial Agreement, the transfer of management of roads and bridges from rural municipal authorities to Parks Canada will be negotiated once sufficient lands are under Parks Canada management, and the parties negotiate their transfer.

Recent investments have supported the development of two frontcountry campgrounds, an additional scenic road with parking, hiking trails, and orientation signage, which filled critical gaps in visitor needs. The park has built specialized assets to manage the park’s ecosystem, such as a bison handling facility, and new fire and emergency facilities. Fences are a significant component of the park’s bison and grazing programs, requiring ongoing capital investment, maintenance and thoughtful planning to promote other animal movement.

Visitation growth and changing visitor trends have also increased pressure on existing assets, as well as creating the need for upgraded assets (e.g. roads) and new assets (e.g. signage, buildings).

Species at Risk and Resource Management

Grasslands National Park has a significant number of species at risk, with 31 species listed as of August 2021. For some of them (e.g. Greater Sage-Grouse, Black-tailed Prairie Dogs), the park protects one of the last remaining populations in Canada, and is leading their recovery. Critical habitat—legally defined as the habitat required for species survival or recovery—has been identified for 13 species, and covers approximately 96 percent of the park. The area of critical habitat for species at risk continues to expand as more species are listed and recovery strategies are approved. Additionally, climate change-driven stressors are likely to lead to increased impacts on these species. More information is required about these stressors and their impacts to evaluate and mitigate them.

Additionally, under the *Species at Risk Act*, an *Emergency Order for the Protection of the Greater Sage-Grouse* came into effect in Canada in 2014, encompassing approximately two-thirds of the park as well as other areas in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta. This legal tool was applied because of the species' significant population decline in recent years and includes year-round prohibitions (e.g. no removal of native plants, height limits for built structures, noise restrictions).

Bison were reintroduced in 2005, playing a major ecological role, along with livestock, through their grazing and wallowing behaviour, while providing visitors with an opportunity to view the species in its natural habitat. Prescribed fire was first used at Grasslands National Park in 2000, and the program has continued to grow and support habitat and species at risk targets. Grazing and fire will continue to play important roles to manage the health of the park's native prairie ecosystem.

The park has a rich cultural heritage, ranging from millennia of Indigenous use and occupation, to the more recent stewardship by ranching families. More cultural resources are gained with each new land acquisition. More knowledge, particularly Indigenous knowledge, about cultural resources is needed to support sound decision making when planning projects, and to proactively protect these resources. Large, recent land acquisitions have not yet been surveyed for cultural resources.

Building the Basic Visitor Experience Program

Visitation has grown significantly since 2010, and accordingly the park now provides a broader service offer to visitors than previously available. In 2019, the park welcomed 17 477 visitors showing a steady upward trend, doubling visitation since 2013.

With limited overnight accommodation in the region, camping at one of the two new campgrounds provides an opportunity to immerse oneself in the park and exposes visitors to big sky experiences in one of Canada's Dark-sky preserves. An overnight stay in an oTENTik (Parks Canada's roofed campground accommodation that is a cross between an A-frame cabin and a tent) enables the park to attract a broader range of visitors.

Visitors can drive the new Badlands Parkway – a gateway experience of the park – which provides intimate views of impressive vistas and wildlife. A few trails invite visitors to leave their car, connect with the landscape, and experience the immeasurable beauty and solitude of the park. The recent addition of campgrounds and constructed trails has succeeded in attracting previously unreachable visitor segments, such as families, to intimately explore prairie grasses and flowers, and discover a landscape with stunning and varied topography.

Building Support and Connection with Indigenous Peoples and Stakeholders

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples maintained a close connection with this land and the physical evidence of their presence abounds in Grasslands National Park. Since the late 19th century, most Indigenous communities (First Nations and Métis) have been geographically distant from the park due to their removal from the region as part of the establishment of the Indian Reserve system. Wood Mountain Lakota First Nation is the lone exception of an Indigenous community relatively close to the park. Indigenous communities have been engaged for specific programs in recent years, particularly special events or specific milestones, but more active engagement with Indigenous peoples is necessary for the ongoing operations and management of the Park.

Grasslands National Park has a volunteer program, focussed largely on monitoring, conservation efforts, and special visitor experience events. In the past, the volunteer projects have included fence marking, sagebrush plug planting, Black-tailed Prairie Dog research and bird counts.

Grasslands National Park maintains many key partnerships to maintain and support conservation, and increase opportunities for visitor experience and awareness in the park.

4.0 Development of the Management Plan

This management plan for Grasslands National Park has been prepared in consultation with Indigenous peoples, and with key stakeholders and site partners including the Prairie Wind and Silver Sage Cooperating Association, Wood Mountain Historical Society, the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and other conservation organizations, local communities, agricultural and livestock interests including the South of the Divide Conservation Action Programme, the Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association and the Saskatchewan Stock Growers' Foundation, local and regional economic development organizations and interests, tourism operators and interests and the Province of Saskatchewan.

An initial phase of consultation took the form of a two-day multi-stakeholder workshop held in Swift Current on March 19-20, 2019. The workshop had 24 participants, representing 14 organizations as well as individual interests. During this workshop, discussions about the future of the park occurred under the following themes: land assembly and growing assets; species at risk and natural and cultural resource conservation; building support and connection with stakeholders, partners and Indigenous peoples; and building a basic visitor experience. The workshop was supplemented with in-person meetings with key stakeholders who could not attend, including the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Nature Saskatchewan, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-Saskatchewan and Nekaneet First Nation. A draft management plan was prepared following the first phase of consultation.

A second phase of consultation on the draft management plan was held from March 1 to April 18, 2021; the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 delayed consultation on this draft. During this consultation period, the views of Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the Canadian public on the draft plan were solicited through an online survey, written submissions, and key meetings. Participation was encouraged through social media and through directly contacting key partners and stakeholders. In the end, there were 156 respondents to the online survey, several letters and email submissions, and five virtual meetings. Indigenous peoples were invited to review the draft plan; a meeting was held with Moosomin First Nation, and ongoing engagement will continue to occur with all Indigenous peoples with an interest in park management through the life of the plan. Feedback from this phase of consultation has led to refinement of this final management plan.

Many thanks to all who participated. Your feedback has helped to shape the management plan for Grasslands National Park.

5.0 Vision

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of Grasslands National Park in 15 to 20 years.

This is Grasslands National Park – a vast, protected, and awe-inspiring wilderness prairie landscape, filled with rare and at-risk species and spaces, and human stories flowing through time, all found beneath some of Canada’s darkest skies.

Stand amongst the whispering grasses of the rolling hills, rugged coulees, and striking badlands. Dinosaur fossils reveal ancient connections with life from millions of years ago. Wallow indulgently in life’s seasons, and watch for the thriving bison herd roaming again today.

Carefully wander through thousands of archaeological sites dotting the landscape, and consider the lives of Indigenous peoples over the past 10 000 years. Remember the stewardship of the ranchers and others over the past 150 years who’ve helped conserve this as one of Canada’s finest examples of North American mixed-grass prairie.

Discover, or better yet, be part of conservation efforts, where ecological integrity and cultural values of this treasured place are protected, appreciated, maintained and improved – being at the forefront of management decisions, informed by Western and Indigenous knowledge.

Explore immersive and captivating guided experiences showcasing the park’s one-of-a-kind character, including some of Canada’s rarest wildlife, breathtaking views, diverse Indigenous cultures, rich western heritage, and abundant fossil resources. Weave together unforgettable memories, and appreciate the safe and high quality visitor infrastructure that reflect the essence of place like none other!

Appreciate the heart of Grasslands National Park, as demonstrated through its partners and stakeholders, whom are vital to its successes. The foundations of respect, reconciliation, communication, and common goals, bridge connections between Indigenous peoples and other stakeholders with park lands. Descendants of the people who have lived here know that their stories are authentically presented and that their cultures are both respected and celebrated.

Reflect on the stories and lessons yet to be learned and the actions we will take together to ensure this place remains a living legacy for generations to come.

6.0 Key Strategies

Four key strategies frame the management direction for Grasslands National Park for the next 10 years. These strategies, corresponding objectives, and targets lay out a roadmap for achieving the vision for the park through an integrated approach to park management. Objectives and targets have been prioritized with specific dates where feasible, and will be achieved by then or earlier, depending on opportunities, annual priorities, and operational capacity. Where no date has been referenced, the objective or target will be achieved within the period of the plan.

Key Strategy 1: Growing Land Base and Sustainable Park Infrastructure

Parks Canada will work towards park completion by continuing to acquire remaining properties within the park's proposed boundary, in accordance with the Federal-Provincial Agreement. Where appropriate and possible, newly acquired lands and assets will be incorporated into park programs. This could include restoration of lands, integration of acquired buildings and other site infrastructure with visitor experience opportunities, and establishment of additional park operations. The park will seek unique and innovative solutions to provide meaningful visitor experiences, contribute to ecological integrity, improve current resourcing, while maintaining sustainable operations.

Given that the land base of Grasslands National Park continues to grow, and the complexity and richness of its natural and cultural treasures, there is still much to learn. Therefore, Parks Canada needs to have effective relationships with various partners and stakeholders, and develop unique approaches to support greater understanding of park lands, to support its management. Baseline inventories, asset prioritization exercises, and service level reviews will assist park managers with achieving resource conservation and visitor experience goals, while managing important issues like contaminated sites, greening operations, and sustainability. These cooperative relationships will continue beyond the completion of the land assemblage.

Objective 1.1: Progress is made toward completing the Grasslands National Park land assemblage.

Targets

- Acquired lands increase from the 2021 land base within the life of this plan.
- By 2030, the administrative and legal transfer of lands from Saskatchewan to Canada are completed, and those lands that Parks Canada owns or has leasehold rights to are gazetted.
- Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders, and the public are periodically provided with updates on park assembly.

Objective 1.2: Acquired assets, as part of past and future land acquisition, are strategically evaluated for program usefulness, durability, safety, cultural resource values, species at risk impacts, and climate resilience.

Targets

- Park assets are evaluated for their potential re-use within five years of acquisition.
- By 2025, management of roadways within the park is evaluated in a holistic manner, considering roadways for both operations and visitor experience.
- By 2025, a strategic approach is created to guide infrastructure maintenance and investment to ensure support for programs, maintenance within available resources, Green Government commitments, barrier-free and inclusive principles, while incorporating character of place attributes.

Objective 1.3: Assets meet program requirements, sustainability objectives, and are maintained in satisfactory condition.

Targets

- Land, built assets (e.g. buildings, roads, and other built assets), and natural and cultural resource conservation inventories are improved compared with 2010 information.

- In the next State of the Park Assessment, built assets indicators (buildings, roads, and visitor facilities) identified as in “Poor” condition are either improved to “Fair” or “Good” condition, identified for recapitalization, or directed towards disposal.
- Within the life of the plan, greenhouse gas emissions from park operations are reduced where possible in line with Treasury Board Secretariat’s *Greening Government Strategy*, recognizing that emissions levels vary as the land assemblage continues.

Objective 1.4: A park land use plan directs the integration of resource conservation programs, visitor experience programs, park capital investments, and acquired assets.

Targets

- By 2025, a land use plan for Grasslands National Park is prepared that addresses all currently acquired park lands.
- By 2030, all park functions and capital investments are informed by the land use plan for Grasslands National Park.

Special Considerations: It is important for park management to continue to focus on land acquisition while determining the role of acquired ranch assets, performing liability assessments, and transitioning lands into the full park operation. Additionally, it is important to pursue a range of strategies to appropriately resource park operations within increased land holdings to respond to the pressures noted above.

Key Strategy 2: Species at Risk and Resource Management

Parks Canada has the mandate to ensure the protection of the natural and cultural values of Grasslands National Park. Maintaining and improving the park’s ecological integrity, and supporting species at risk recovery using a landscape-based approach, will govern all park management decisions. Partnerships, including with Indigenous, local, and other knowledge holder communities, are nurtured to maximize opportunities for conservation and cultural gains, and lead to a better understanding of the park’s processes and ecosystems. Initiating the preparation of a cultural resources values statement, which will identify key cultural values of the park and provide for their management, is proposed during this planning cycle.

Environmental stewardship and improved knowledge will position the national park as a key contributor to the conservation of the mixed-grass prairie ecosystem at a regional scale. Intact and connected landscapes, including the park and adjacent lands, will improve species at risk recovery and critical habitat protection. Visitor programs will provide opportunities for appreciating native prairie landscapes and enjoying natural and cultural experiences. Grasslands National Park will continue to be a leader in bison conservation, fire management, grazing programs, and ecological restoration.

Objective 2.1: The ecological integrity of Grasslands National Park is maintained or improved.

Targets

- In the next State of the Park Assessment, the park has maintained or improved the condition and trend ratings for the grassland ecosystem indicator².

Objective 2.2: Grassland ecosystem processes and functions are managed and restored, while maximizing resilience to climate change.

Targets

- By 2030, large, previously disturbed areas, dominated by agricultural grass species with potential for restoration, are identified and prioritized, and restoration work has commenced.
- By 2030, the introduction of new invasive plants is prevented, and current populations are contained or eradicated, through active identification, prioritization, planning, best management practices and strategy implementation.

² In January 2019, Grasslands National Park changed its ecological integrity monitoring to focus on the ‘grasslands’ indicator.

- By 2030, prescribed fires are applied to an average of 100 hectares per year, contributing to the management of species at risk habitat, bison and/or cattle grazing, and non-native plants.
- By 2030, an increased proportion of the park supports grazing programs with a focus on species at risk and other key park ecological integrity measures.
- By 2025, there is increased collaboration between the park and regional land managers related to grazing in the greater park ecosystem.

Objective 2.3: The bison herd is healthy and thriving, with a self-sustaining population size, and managed in accordance with an updated bison management plan.

Targets

- The bison herd remains disease-free and genetically pure throughout the life of this plan.
- By 2030, the feasibility of bison herd expansion is evaluated to inform park management and land use.
- The bison management plan is regularly updated with the input of key partners, including Indigenous communities, and considers factors such as expansion, ecological carrying capacity, species at risk recovery, capital investments, visitor experience programs, and Indigenous involvement.

Objective 2.4: Recovery actions for species at risk and their habitats are implemented, and incorporate strategies to address climate-change driven threats.

Targets

- By 2022, the Multi-species Action Plan is updated in consultation with local stakeholders, Indigenous communities, and various government bodies and considers factors such as capital investments and visitor experience opportunities.
- By 2030, more than 50 percent of recovery actions identified in the revised Multi-species Action Plan are completed or ongoing.
- By 2030, strategies for landscape-scale management of keystone species, are developed and implemented while accounting for multiple landscape uses identified by park management and the park land use plan.

Objective 2.5: Protection of cultural and paleontological resources improves due to increased knowledge and strengthened partnerships.

Targets

- By 2025, a cultural resources value statement for the park is initiated.
- By 2030, an inventory of cultural resources, including built heritage, is advanced, building on 2018 information.
- By 2030, local and Indigenous knowledge, through collaboration with Indigenous peoples and knowledge holders, informs park management.
- By 2030, inventory, protection criteria, and presentation of the paleontological resources are all improved.

Objective 2.6: Public awareness of prairie conservation and its benefits has increased through improved local engagement and broader audience outreach.

Targets

- The number of conservation stories (natural and cultural) shared publicly increases from 2019 baseline.
- Meaningful volunteer opportunities continue to be offered at Grasslands National Park throughout the life of the plan Partnerships in support of conservation programs continue or are increased
- Local engagement and consultation in species at risk and ecological integrity planning significantly increases from 2019 levels through the life of the plan.

Special Considerations: The park's challenge is to inform, plan, and respond to growing commitments arising from the *Species at Risk Act* (e.g. recovery strategies, action plans), while also managing a more robust visitor and conservation operation.

Key Strategy 3: Completing a Basic Visitor Experience

Grasslands National Park, Canada's only prairie national park, will offer visitors a powerful, meaningful, and quality experience. The natural and cultural wonders of the park combined with the visitor offer that communicates about the park's full range of human history creates a unique sense of place. The park will take a phased approach to completing the basic visitor service offer. This incremental approach will enable the park to better include Western and Indigenous knowledge and visitor use management tools in its decision making while considering the potential of its present and future land base. The park will ensure visitor safety, manage impacts to sensitive areas, and highlight both rare and common species, along with the park's human and geological heritage.

Markets identified in an updated visitor experience strategy, whose social values, travel motivations, and preferences align with the park's visitor offer, will be targeted. Visitor opportunities and infrastructure will be developed and managed efficiently, sustainably, and with attention to character of place. These opportunities and developments will complement the protection of natural and cultural resources. The park will work with partners, including adjacent communities and park neighbours, to further enhance and enrich visitor experiences and to foster deeper understanding and lasting connections with the mixed-grass prairie, and the cultures associated with it.

Objective 3.1: Visitors connect with the essence of place through the provision of quality facilities and services, developing them incrementally, and incorporating engineering, ecological and social science in planning, design and construction.

Targets

- By 2030, the park's two campgrounds (Frenchman Valley Campground, Rock Creek Campground) are completed, improving the visitor experience.
- By 2025, plans are completed for current and future visitor nodes and facilities (e.g. backcountry camping opportunities) that respond to the priorities of target audiences, while meeting Green Government commitments, and barrier-free and inclusive principles.
- By 2023, a sustainable trail plan is developed and implemented that includes improvements to existing trails and development of new trails.

Objective 3.2: Visitors enjoy and are satisfied with their visit to Grasslands National Park with its unique and immersive experiences.

Targets

- By 2023, the visitor experience strategy is updated.
- By 2030, interpretive programs are refined, with input from key partners, to reflect underrepresented themes including stories and voices of Indigenous peoples, ranching history, active management stories (e.g. species at risk monitoring and recovery actions), and paleontological history.
- By 2030, existing partnerships with 'friends' groups are maintained, and new ones with Indigenous peoples and regional stakeholders are developed to facilitate sharing of their cultural connections to the park.
- By 2030, the most recent data shows that:
 - At least 90 percent of visitors enjoy their visit.
 - At least 85 percent of visitors consider the park meaningful to them.
 - At least 60 percent report that they have learned something about the natural heritage of the park.
- By 2030, the park receives a level of visitation that is increased from 2019 levels yet is sustainable, and is supported by appropriate facilities and services.

Objective 3.3: Grasslands National Park visitor infrastructure supports safe and accessible visitor experiences.

Targets

- By 2023, the park's visitor safety plan is updated, and implemented.
- By 2030, an increase in visitor awareness of safety risks, and available tools to mitigate risks.
- Throughout the life of the plan, any new infrastructure will incorporate the most recent Government of Canada accessibility standards.

Special Considerations: The park has not yet fully completed plans for new visitor facilities, with important components still missing (e.g. shower facilities, drinking water, sustainably built trails, waste treatment, road improvements, accessibility improvements). The priority over the life of this plan will be incremental completion of the visitor experience offer in a unique environment with species at risk habitat, abundant cultural resources, and a continually growing land base.

Key Strategy 4: Building Support and Connection with Indigenous Peoples and Stakeholders

Relationship building and partnerships are at the heart of this strategy. Building stronger relationships with Indigenous communities based on respect, reconciliation, communication, and common goals is a focus of this strategy, including expanding Indigenous communities' reconnection with the traditionally-used lands of Grasslands National Park. The strategy also focuses on relationships with key partners and stakeholders to achieve common goals, increase their support for the park, and contribute to the enhancement of the park's programs (e.g. conservation, visitor experience). The relationships between Parks Canada and Indigenous peoples, local communities, visitors, licensees, park neighbours, and other key stakeholders are vital to the success of Grasslands National Park.

Objective 4.1: Meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples are established and opportunities identified for increasing their engagement in park management and operations.

Targets

- By 2025, Indigenous communities are approached to initiate discussions about how they would like to participate in park management.
- By 2030, Indigenous communities have indicated their preferred role in park management and work has begun toward achieving co-identified outcomes (e.g. establishment of an Indigenous Advisory Committee).

Objective 4.2: Landscape-based conservation programs benefit from increased stakeholder support, and partner involvement, including Indigenous peoples.

Targets

- By 2030, major conservation initiatives have significant involvement by stakeholders.
- By 2030, partnerships are nurtured to achieve common goals and more successfully promote Grasslands National Park success stories through a wide range of media compared with 2010-2018.
- By 2030, partnership initiatives related to landscape-based planning increase from 2019 baseline.

Objective 4.3: Partner and stakeholder support for enhancing the visitor experience programs and completion of visitor experience infrastructure has increased.

Targets

- By 2030, diversified services and amenities are offered by local business, recreation, and tourism partners in surrounding communities, based upon a renewed visitor experience strategy.
- By 2030, all major visitor infrastructure projects in the park involve partners and stakeholders at an early stage.

Special Considerations: Opportunities for Indigenous peoples to be present on and use park lands may help rebuild connections that were severed through their historic forced relocation, and may support reconciliation efforts. Park managers will continue to build relationships and collaborate with Indigenous groups with traditional connections to Grasslands National Park and the region, on topics such as youth and elder camps and involvement in conservation research.

7.0 Zoning

Parks Canada's national park zoning system is an integrated approach to the classification of land and water areas in a national park and designates where particular activities can occur on land or water based on the ability to support those uses. The zoning system has five categories:

- Zone I – Special Preservation;
- Zone II – Wilderness;
- Zone III – Natural Environment;
- Zone IV – Outdoor Recreation; and
- Zone V – Park Services.

The zoning plan for the park is found in Maps 2 to 6. The zones apply to all areas of the park.

Zoning will help achieve the park vision by ensuring that visitor use occurs in those areas of the park that can best support them, and that rare or sensitive ecological or cultural areas are protected.

All infrastructure projects (e.g. trails, campgrounds, day use areas, fencing, parking lots, park services facilities, bison facilities), regardless of the zone they are in, must comply with applicable legislation (e.g. *Species at Risk Act*, *Emergency Order for the Protection of the Greater Sage-Grouse*), ecological integrity and species at risk recovery objectives, and cultural resource management guidelines.

There have been no significant changes to zoning since the 2010 management plan; the physical area covered by each zone type has not changed substantially. Adjustments to zoning have been made to contribute to improving ecological integrity, reflect contemporary use, acknowledge current land use in transition of ownership, and to adjust the potential land use.

Zone I – Special Preservation (less than 0.1 percent of the Park)

Zone I applies to areas of the park that are among the best examples of the features representative of the natural region, or that support outstanding, or rare, natural or cultural features. This zone offers the highest level of protection. This zone may also be used to protect areas that are too sensitive to accommodate facility development or large numbers of visitors. Within Zone I areas, preservation is the primary management consideration. Motorized access and circulation is not permitted. Natural and cultural features may be interpreted off-site.

For Grasslands National Park, this area includes the large snake hibernaculum in the West Block. Visitor access may be prohibited on a seasonal basis. Because of the sensitivity of this Zone I area, it is not shown on the map.

Zone II – Wilderness (98 percent of the park)

Zone II contains extensive areas that are good representation of the natural mixed-grass prairie that are conserved in a wilderness state. These areas are meant to protect representative natural landscapes where visitors can experience the park's ecosystems with few, if any, human intrusions or facilities. Rustic backcountry camping facilities, and wilderness trails, would be appropriate. No motorized access or circulation is permitted other than for specific, approved park management purposes (e.g. fire response and prescribed fire, grazing management, sylvatic plague mitigation).

Zone II areas total 749 km² and constitute 98 percent of all park lands. These Zone II areas encompass the Prairie Dog colonies, large intact upland grasslands, Greater Sage-Grouse leks, tipi ring concentrations, and badland features.

It is expected that new trails will be developed within the life of this management plan based on the revised trail plan. Trail locations and design will respect the Zone II objectives and conservation goals and requirements.

Zone III – Natural Environment (0.15 percent)

Zone III areas are managed as natural environments that are capable of supporting a range of visitor experiences. These areas enable visitors to enjoy and learn about the park's natural and cultural features through outdoor recreational and educational activities requiring minimal facilities and services. While motorized access may be allowed, it will be controlled. Zone III areas encompass a total area of 1 km² of the park.

For Grasslands National Park, Zone III areas include:

- Viewpoints and associated trails along each scenic drive (West Block and East Block),
- Trails (e.g. Eagle Butte, 70 Mile Butte, Top Dogtown, Two Trees)
- Day use areas
- West Block Backcountry loop (unpaved)

Zone IV – Outdoor Recreation (0.45 percent)

Zone IV areas are capable of supporting more intensive visitor use and major facilities to accommodate a broad range of opportunities for understanding, appreciating, and enjoying the park's heritage values. Visitor opportunities and related essential services and facilities will be provided in ways that minimally impact the ecological integrity of the park. These zones allow for direct access by motorized vehicles. These areas encompass 3 km² of all park lands.

Zone IV areas include:

- Roads used by visitors (frontcountry roads): Scenic Drive (West Block), Two Trees, access in the West Block, and Badlands Parkway (East Block), Rock Creek access in the East Block.
- Parking lots (gravel or paved) along the roads and at the various trail heads.
- Frontcountry camping (e.g. Frenchman Valley Campground [West Block] and Rock Creek Campground [East Block]).
- Day use areas (e.g. Belza, Rock Creek Day Use, Frenchman Valley, Two Trees, former Norah and Don Gillespie homestead).
- Potential areas for future visitor opportunities: Larson yardsite, Dixon yardsite, Walker yardsite, Otter Basin trailhead, Molested backcountry launch, Storey Lowell homestead, Peterson Lookout (north end East Block).

Zone V – Park Services (0.05 percent)

Zone V applies to operation, maintenance and administrative facilities. These areas encompass 0.4 km² of all park lands.

Zone V areas include:

- Bison facilities which include sheds, loading area, pens, corrals, etc.
- Roads used by park staff.
- Depending on the Zone IV decisions regarding the Dixon or Walker yardsite, in future one of these two sites may be rezoned to Zone V for use as an equipment storage and maintenance staging area.

Non-Conforming Uses (1.5 percent)

Any use or activity that is contrary to the spirit and intent of the zone type (either over the short or long term) but that for some reason needs to remain in place is considered a non-conforming use. Within Grasslands National Park, non-conforming uses are found on 12 km² of park lands, and include:

- Roads and trails within the park that are currently required to meet legal access requirements for neighbours, until such time that full land ownership leads to final road network decisions (e.g. East Block). These roads were in existence prior to acquisition by Parks Canada.
- Roads and trails, not open to the public, that are currently required to meet management objectives, until such time that full land ownership leads to final road network decisions (e.g. East Block). These roads were in existence prior to acquisition by Parks Canada.
- Disturbed hayfield lands that are currently used by licensees or park staff for meeting haying requirements.

Non-Conforming Use in Grasslands National Park

Some areas of Grasslands National Park have been zoned as “non-conforming use”. Typically, this zone category is applied where a land use or activity occurs within a particular zone but does not conform with the characteristics of that zone type. In the case of Grasslands National Park, land uses, including hayfields under lease arrangement and roadways that permit landowner legal access while the land assembly continues, have been zoned as “non-conforming”. This accounts for the amount, and this may change in future once the land assembly is more complete and decisions are made how to use these lands.

Emergency Order for the Protection of the Greater Sage-Grouse

The requirements under the [*Emergency Order for the Protection of the Greater Sage-Grouse*](#) need to be respected for all new uses (e.g. facilities, infrastructure) in all zones where the order applies.

Domestic Grazing

As per the *National Parks of Canada Domestic Animals Regulation*, the Superintendent of Grasslands National Park may, to facilitate grazing for ecological purposes in the park, on application, issue a permit authorizing the permit holder to graze any domestic animal that is a herbivore in the park.

Land Agreements

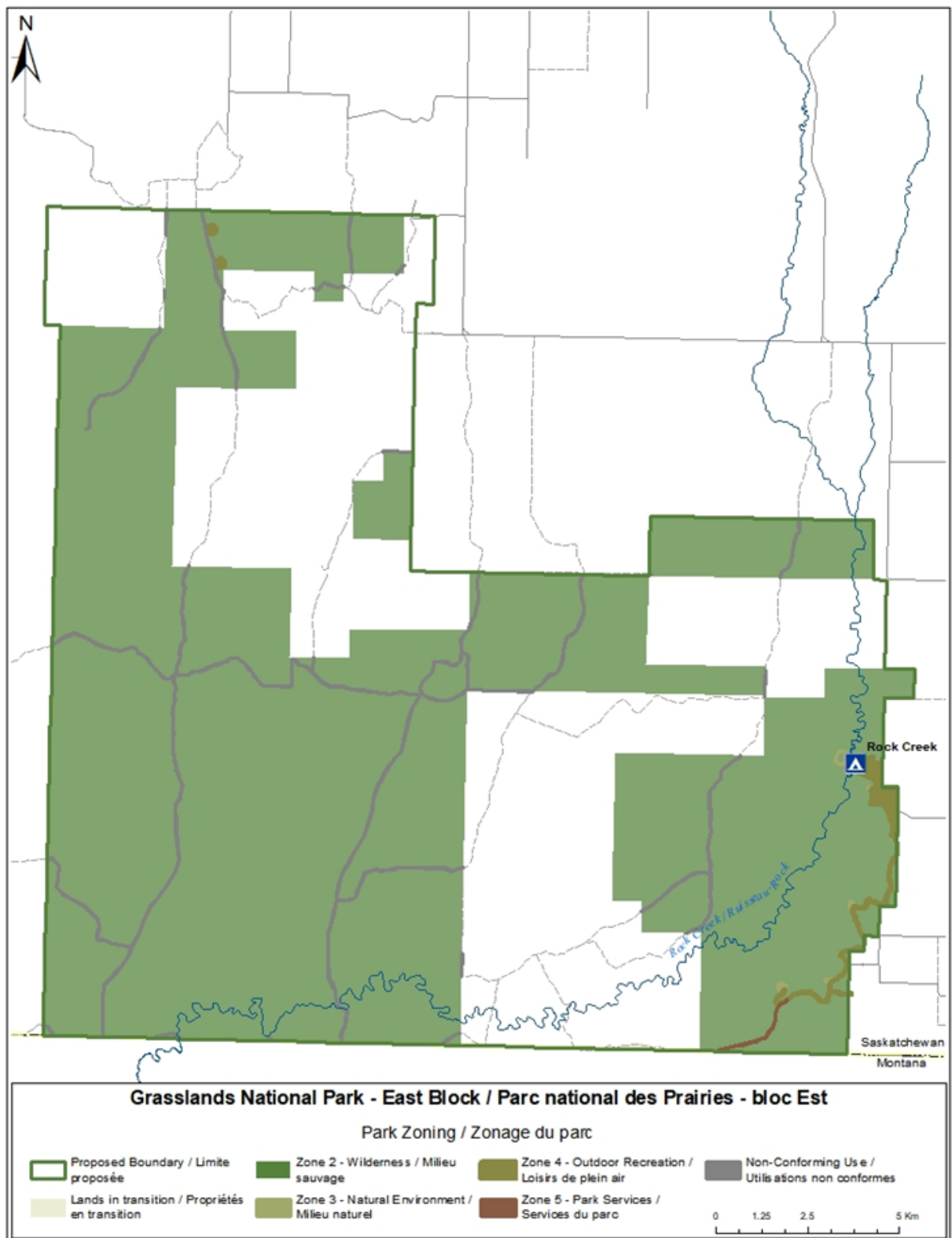
The park uses various land agreement tools to assist the park in active management. Some of these agreements may require a non-conforming use designation.

Environmentally and Culturally Sensitive Sites

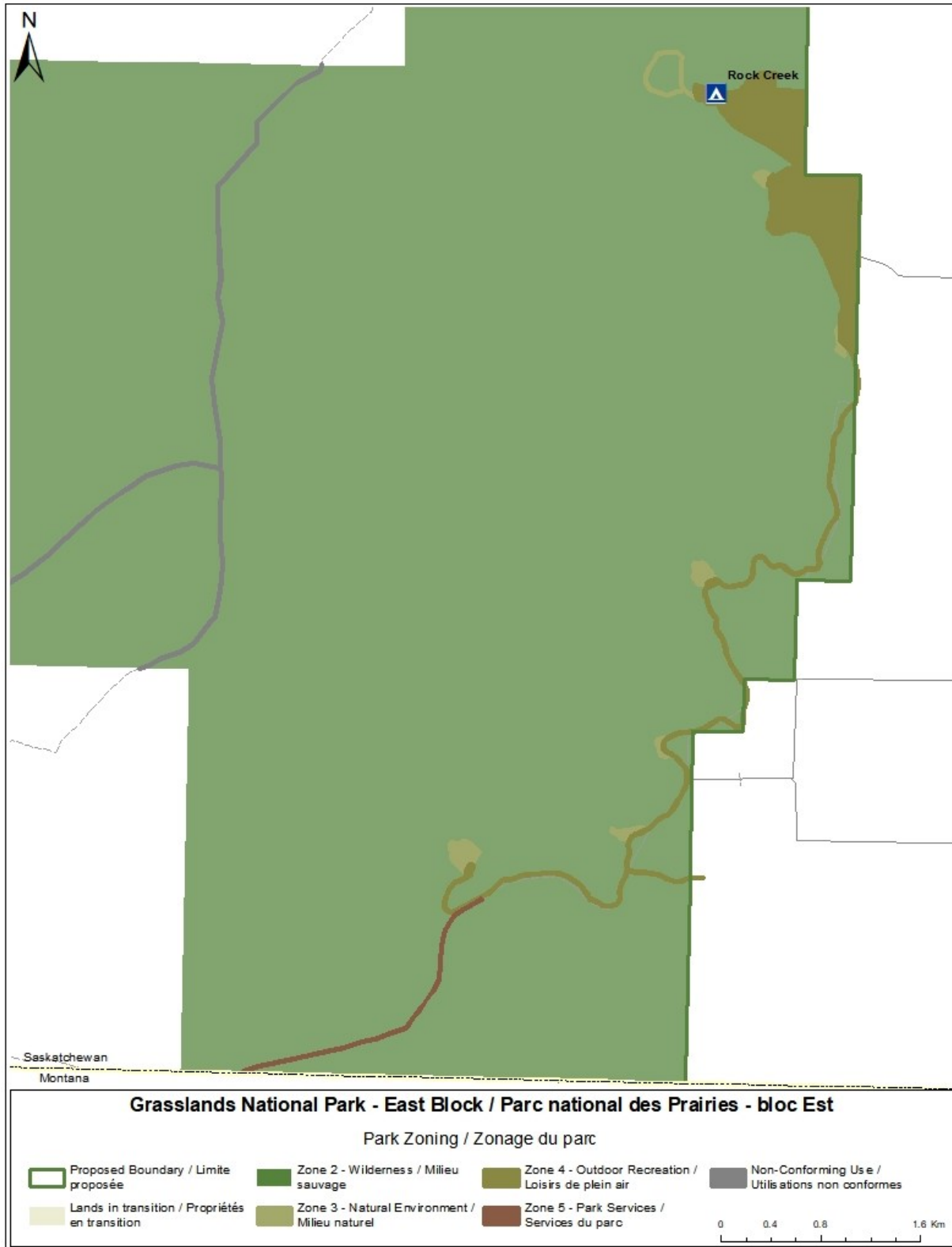
This designation applies to small areas that contain significant and sensitive resources that require special protection or management. This designation can be applied within any of the five zone types. Specific guidelines for each sensitive site will define visitor use and resource management strategies. Because of the sensitivity of these sites, and in some cases their locations may change or new ones may be identified, they are not shown on the maps. As new information on park resources is obtained, the boundaries of sensitive sites will be refined.

The park has environmentally sensitive sites and culturally sensitive sites, which include paleontological sites, as well as sites of significance to Indigenous peoples. These are not shown on zoning maps to ensure the sites' protection.

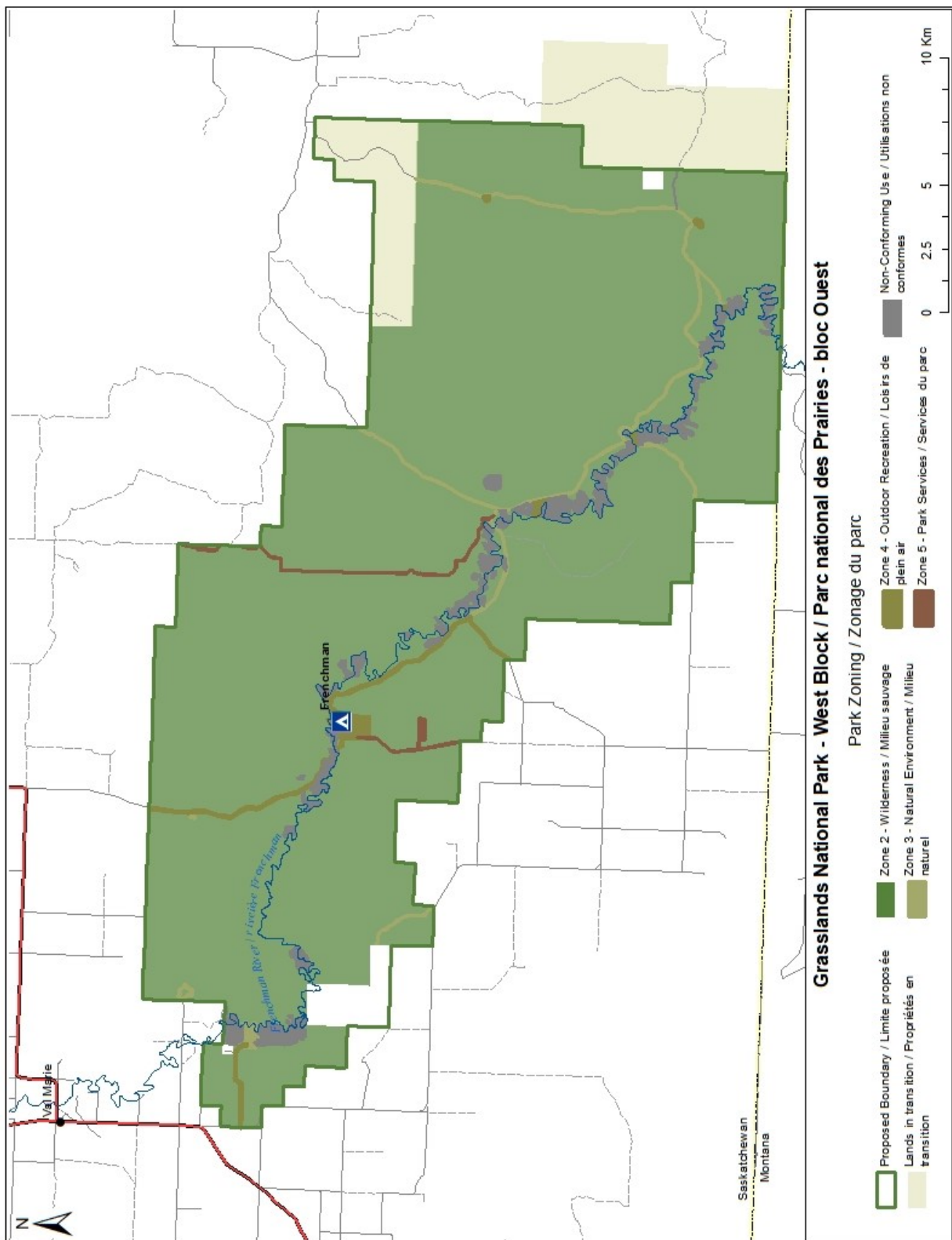
Map 2: East Block Zoning Overview



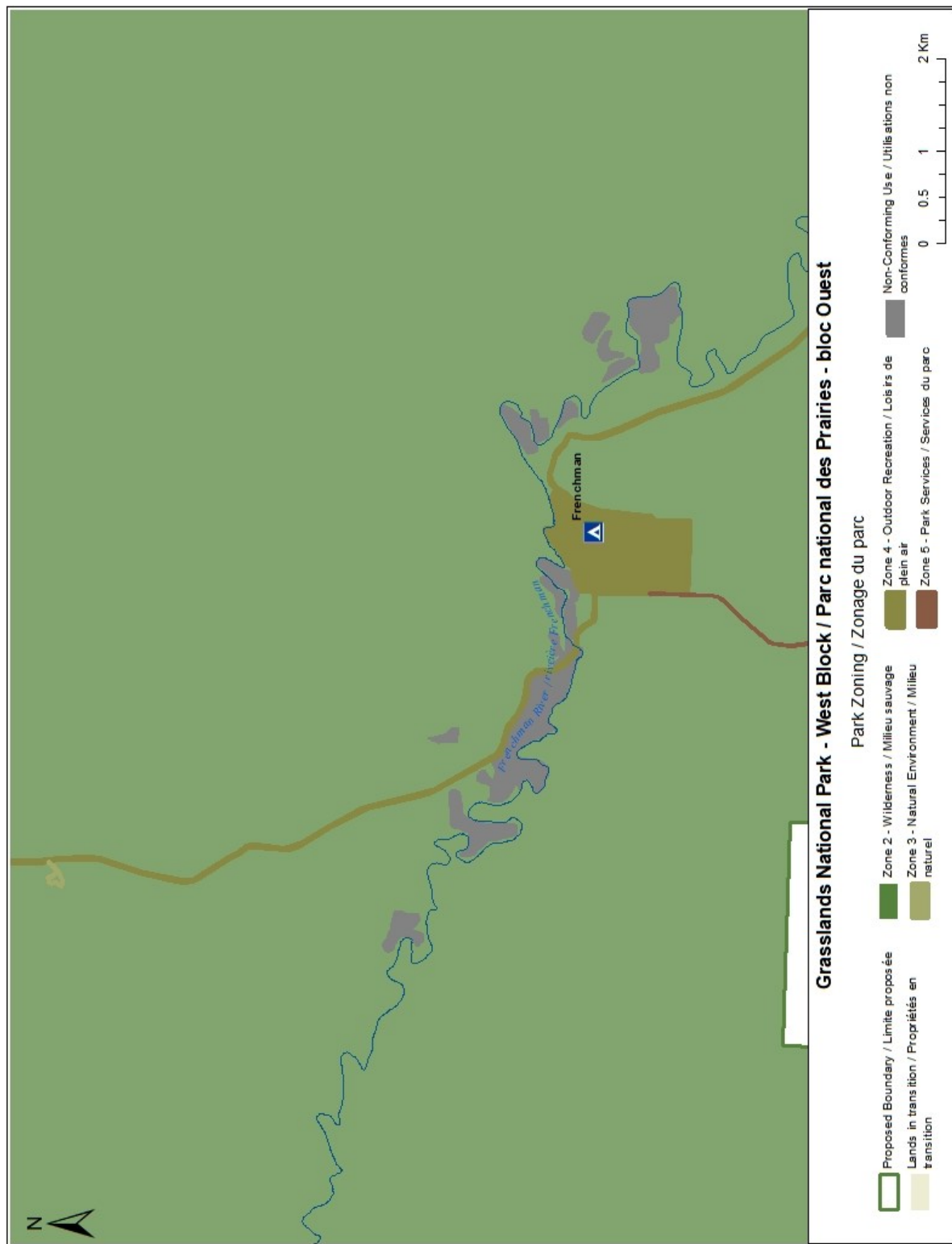
Map 3: Rock Creek and Parkway Badlands Zoning



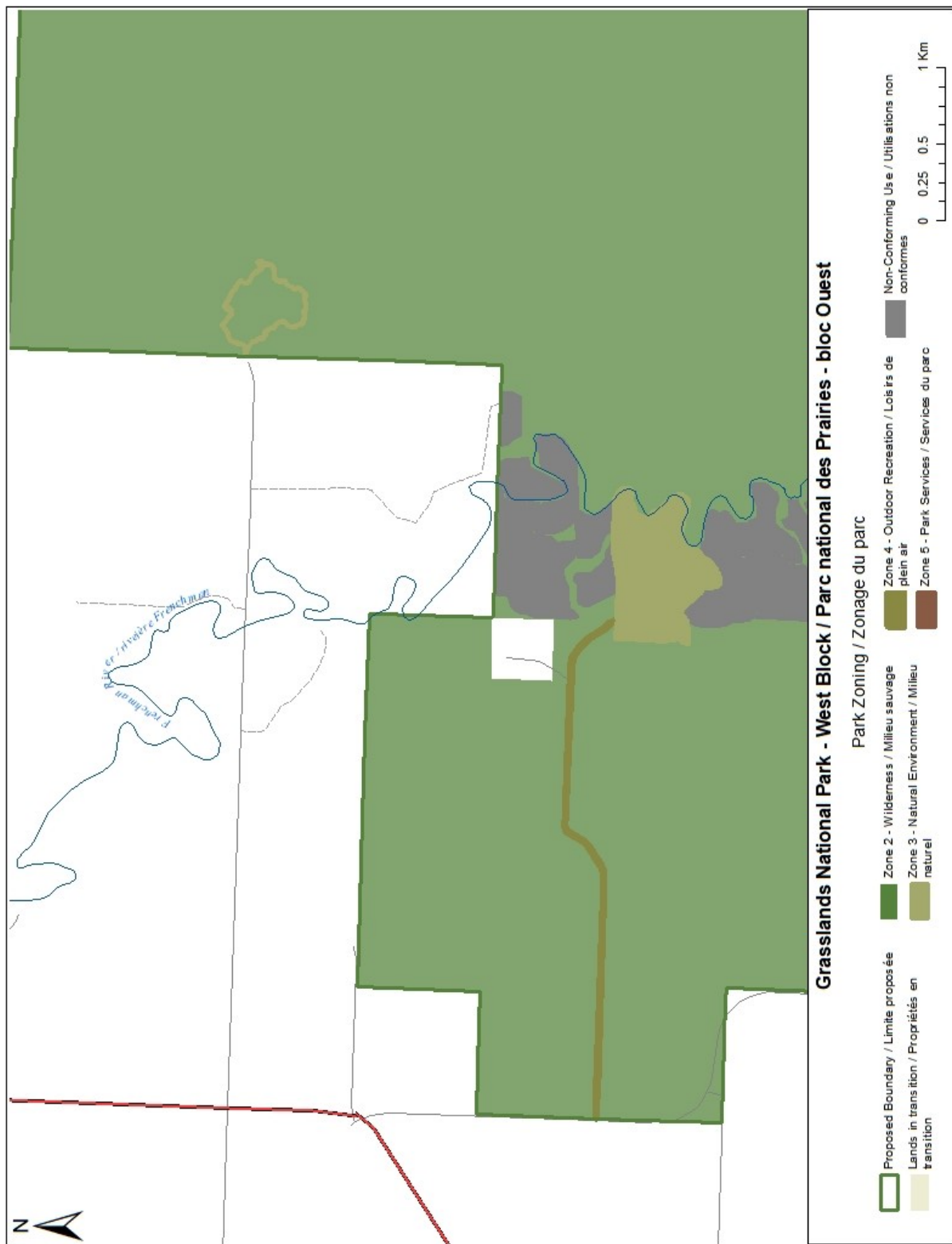
Map 4: West Block Zoning Overview



Map 5: Frenchman Valley Zoning



Map 6: Two Trees and Eagle Butte Zoning



8.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

All national park management plans are assessed through a strategic environmental assessment to understand the potential for cumulative effects. This understanding contributes to evidence-based decision making that supports ecological integrity being maintained or restored over the life of the plan. The strategic environmental assessment for the management plan for Grasslands National Park considered the potential impacts of climate change, local and regional activities around the park, expected increase in visitation and proposals within the management plan. The strategic environmental assessment assessed the potential impacts on different aspects of the ecosystem, including Greater Sage-Grouse, native prairie habitat, riparian areas, and species at risk.

Greater Sage-Grouse are listed as an endangered species and numbers have been declining rapidly. Greater Sage-Grouse habitat is found across much of Grasslands National Park and the park is the location of all remaining leks, or mating grounds, in Saskatchewan. As a result of the importance of the park to Greater Sage-Grouse and the low numbers in Canada, proposed plans for visitor infrastructure and acquired infrastructure were assessed for potential impacts to Greater Sage-Grouse functional habitat.

Greater Sage-Grouse habitat quality can be reduced or destroyed by removing vegetation, creating noise types and volumes that compromise habitat, adding structures that result in habitat avoidance and facilitating predator access. The park seeks to improve overall Greater Sage-Grouse habitat to support recovery of the species. Reducing artificially inflated access by predators to habitat by reducing places where birds can perch and reducing attractants is a priority. Specific goals will be identified in the short term as restoration actions are already underway.

The native prairie in Grasslands National Park is important given the reduced extent of native prairie across North America. Grazing and fire are necessary to maintain habitat for many species and support ecological processes. The management plan identifies ecologically based goals to direct the management of grazing and fire for species at risk and the health of the native prairie. The strategic environmental assessment identifies additional mitigations and strategies to address the impacts on native prairie for infrastructure and invasive species.

The Grasslands National Park Multi-species Action Plan sets out direction for the park's actions to recover species at risk and the plan will be updated in the coming years. The strategic environmental assessment also sets out recommendations for managing increased visitation, creating a trails plan, and managing assets, to avoid contributing to unwanted cumulative effects.

Indigenous peoples, partners, stakeholders and the public were consulted on the draft management plan including a summary of the draft strategic environmental assessment. Feedback has been considered and incorporated into the strategic environmental assessment and management plan as appropriate.

The strategic environmental assessment was conducted in accordance with *The Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* (2010) and facilitated an evaluation of how the management plan contributed to the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy*. Individual projects undertaken to implement management plan objectives at the site will be evaluated to determine if an impact assessment is required under the *Impact Assessment Act*, or successor legislation. The management plan supports the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy* goals of Greening Government, Sustainably Managed Lands and Forests, and Healthy Wildlife Populations.

Many positive environmental effects are expected and there are no significant negative environmental effects anticipated from implementation of the *Grasslands National Park Management Plan*. However, given the importance of cumulative effects to species in the park and the expected changes in visitation and infrastructure, cumulative effects need to be re-evaluated regularly.