

Partnership Examines Native Grasses in the Black Soil Zone

Ducks Unlimited Canada is pleased to be partnering with the Saskatchewan Forage Council on a research project to restore native perennial grasses in the black soil zones of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The project is funded under Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Greencover Canada program as a Regional Technical Assistance Component (TAC).

"There are benefits to livestock producers to seeding native grasses in these areas," says Trevor Plews, Head of Uplands Restoration for DUC in Saskatchewan. "Native plants have enhanced adaptability in the area, if kept vigorous, many have a higher protein content, and their longevity means that producers could extend their grazing season."

The problem, however, is that are so few fields that have been returned to native perennial stands, and the majority of those are in the brown and dark brown soils in Saskatchewan. "We need more information on how these native plants will work in the parkland and in real, live farming operations," Plews explains.

To meet this need, the project is gathering data from several representative fields where native plant stands are being established. Six test sites were chosen, working with producers in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Seed blends for each of the test sites were specifically selected from perennial native plants adapted to the local area. Each test site is 40 acres in size, simulating a paddock or hay field and sufficiently large enough to facilitate grazing management. Once established, these fields will be utilized by producers for hay or grazing.

"It's critical for us to capture some benchmarks," Plews states. "To promote the fullest integration of native grasses into forage cover, we need to see how native grasses can meet the needs of both livestock production and land conservation."

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