

Manitoba Provincial Prairie Grass Emblem Campaign

561 St. Anthony Ave, Winnipeg, MB R2V 0S6

January 5, 2009

Honourable Eric Robinson
Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport
118 Legislative Building
450 Broadway Ave
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Robinson,

Re: Provincial Prairie Grass Emblem Campaign Support

We are writing to seek support for a citizen-led campaign that will soon be underway. The goal of this initiative is for Manitobans to declare a provincial prairie grass for Manitoba.

The previous selection of provincial emblems such as the Great Gray Owl and White Spruce represented an opportunity to re-affirm the commitment of all Manitobans to the protection of biodiversity, while at the same time honouring our rich natural heritage and the economic opportunities it has brought us. Manitoba is a 'Prairie Province', and we believe Manitobans will enthusiastically support the recognition of the native prairie that once spanned much of southern Manitoba through the selection of an official prairie grass emblem.

The process of selecting a species provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the amazing variety of prairie ecosystems that exist in Manitoba and their value – to biodiversity, to the economy, and as part of our heritage. Manitoba's native prairies provide valuable grazing and hay land, habitat for dozens of endangered species, support traditional plant and animal harvesting, draw eco-tourists, and sequester large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere.

The Process

Earlier this year, our committee consulted several prairie professionals, experts and enthusiasts in order to narrow the list of dozens of potential species down to a list of four. These represent Manitoba's most charismatic, identifiable and representative native prairie grasses, and will be presented to the public as candidates from which to choose. They are Big Bluestem, Sideoats Grama, Blue Grama and Little Bluestem. We have also created a campaign website that highlights the candidates and provides information on Manitoba's native prairie grasslands. It can be viewed at www.manitobagrass.ca.

We will engage Manitobans by encouraging everyone to select one of these four grasses via an online vote, as well as by providing opportunities to vote in person at selected

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community events. Our communication plan calls for the engagement of school-children, seniors, First Nations, rural and urban residents and new Canadians. We plan to conclude the voting and reveal the winner in time for the ninth Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference being held in Winnipeg in February 2010, an event that is being co-chaired by Manitoba Conservation.

Similar to the processes in Saskatchewan (declared Needle-and-Thread Grass in 2001) and Alberta (declared Rough Fescue in 2003), we are optimistic that the chosen species will eventually be officially adopted as an amendment to The Coat of Arms, Emblems and Manitoba Tartan Act. Numerous prairie enthusiasts and professionals have indicated their intention to support this campaign and it is our hope that you and your department will as well.

Thank you for taking the time to read our letter. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us at info@manitobagrass.ca or by calling Marilena Kowalchuk at (204) 589-1565. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Marilena Kowalchuk
p.p. Cary Hamel
p.p. Julie Pelc

cc: Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives
Minister of Conservation