

Manitoba Provincial Grass Campaign

mbgrass@yahoo.ca

March 3, 2008

Dear Prairie Professionals, Experts and Enthusiasts,

We are a small committee of prairie enthusiasts that wants to help Manitoba celebrate its natural prairie heritage and we hope to draw on your prairie grassland passion and expertise. We also extend an invitation to you to become involved in this campaign.

It is our goal that, by 2010, in time for the Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference in Manitoba, Manitoba's Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism will declare a "Provincial Grass".

We envision a simple process:

- selecting four to six provincial grass species nominees with the input of prairie experts (by March 31, 2008)
- conducting an online poll where public citizens can vote for their favourite grass (this is how Alberta did it); a media release will make the public aware of the campaign as will an intense email and strategic flyer blitz. Outdoor educators will be made aware of the campaign and will be asked to help raise awareness (e.g. school education programs, outdoor education centres such as Living Prairie Museum).
- ask an MLA to put a bill forward in the legislature and hopefully all members recognize the feel-good opportunity and ensure its speedy passage (it would be an amendment to The Coat of Arms, Emblems and the Manitoba Tartan Act)
- Manitoba's Provincial Grass is announced at the conference (March, 2010)

In order to engage the public in this campaign, we plan to conduct an online poll where the public can vote for their favourite grass. We will also provide a description of key features such as habitat, season, and unique characteristics for identification to help the voters select their favourite species.

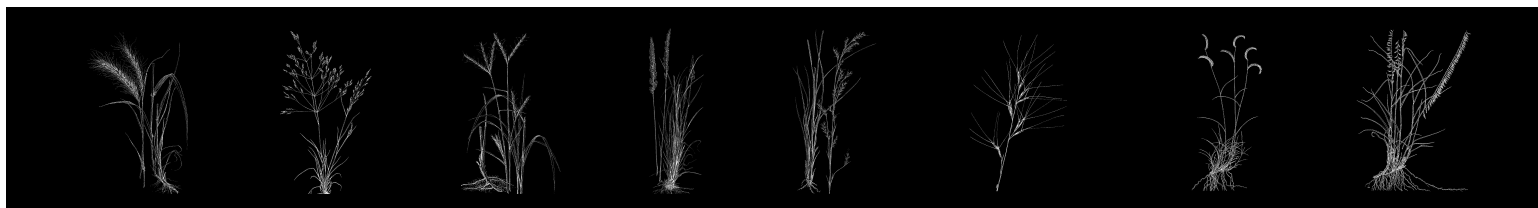
For the online voting process, we think a choice of four to six on the final ballot is a good number so as not to overwhelm those who are just starting out in their love affair with prairie grasses. We need your help in coming up with this short list of candidate species.

We have narrowed the list of Manitoba's prairie grasses down to nine potential nominees. **We are asking you to rank all of them (one to nine) in order of their appropriateness as well as your preference for each to be a provincial grass candidate.** By all means if there is a species you feel strongly should be on the list but is not, feel free to add it. Based on your input, the final list of four to six candidate species will be produced.

Since this will be a celebration of Manitoba's prairie ecosystems, the main criterion is that the species is a native prairie grass (as opposed to a cultivated, woodland, tundra or wetland species). One of the goals of this exercise is to raise awareness of the diversity of prairie habitats in Manitoba, so our selections represent Tall-grass, Mixed-grass, Sandhill and Fescue prairie grasslands. Other factors to consider when selecting a provincial grass may also include recognisability, ease of identification, and beauty.

The other Canadian Prairie Provinces have already declared provincial grasses – Needle-and-thread in Saskatchewan (2001) and Rough fescue in Alberta (2003).

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Now before you go ahead and rank the following species, we would just like to mention that as a small committee we would invite you or your agency to help out in the campaign. An area that we are a little shaky on is the whole website voting aspect so if you or someone you know could help us out, we would appreciate that very much. There are also various other jobs to do like photocopying and communications, or even just be a part of the committee to provide advice and expertise. Please let us know if you would like to become involved.

We are also looking for high resolution images of these species to use in the campaign communications and voting website if you have any you are willing to share.

Please rank the following species in order of preference to be nominees for Manitoba's Provincial Grass Species. Put numbers besides them, or rearrange them, and send the list back to us at mbgrass@yahoo.ca by March 31, 2008.

Big bluestem	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i> Vitman
Sideoats grama	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i> (Michx.) Torr.
Blue grama	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i> (Willd. ex Kunth) Lag. ex Griffiths
Plains rough fescue	<i>Festuca hallii</i> (Vasey) Piper
Green needlegrass	<i>Nassella viridula</i> (Trin.) Barkworth
Western wheatgrass	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i> (Rydb.) A. Löve
Little bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> (Michx.) Nash
Indian grass	<i>Sorghastrum nutans</i> (L.) Nash
Prairie dropseed	<i>porobolus heterolepis</i> (A. Gray) A. Gray

Thank you in advance for your contribution. If you want more information email to mbgrass@yahoo.ca or call (204) 589-1565. Please feel free to forward this message on to other prairie enthusiasts that we may have missed.

Sincerely,

Marilena Kowalchuk
Cary Hamel
Julie Pelc

For information on the grass species candidates, please refer to these websites:

Big bluestem

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=ANGE>
<http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/classes/range/andropogongerarfii.html>

Sideoats grama

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=BOCU>

Blue grama

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=BOGR2>
<http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/classes/range/bouteloua.html>

Plains rough fescue

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=FEHA3>
<http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/classes/range/festucacamp.html>

Green needlegrass

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=NAV14>
<http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/classes/range/stipaviridula.html>

Little bluestem

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=SCSC>
<http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/classes/range/schizachyrium.html>

Indian grass

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=SONU2>

Western wheatgrass

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=PASM>
<http://www.usask.ca/agriculture/plantsci/classes/range/pascopyrum.html>

Prairie dropseed

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=SPHE>

