

## SPECIAL EDITION!

Welcome to this special edition of WN on the native plant rescue near Cochrane and the new highway interchange.

**Rescue of Native plants from Ancient Grassland near Cochrane, Alberta** by Judith Golub using material from Blake McNeil, Mathis Natvik and others. Photos by participants.



This photo shows the conditions of the collection area (looking SW towards intersection of Hwy. 1A & Hwy .22). Photo by M. Natvik, April 2022.

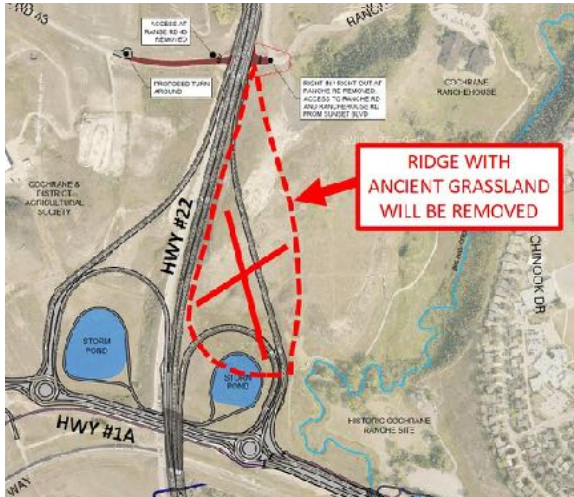
In early April, Mathis Natvik of the University of Calgary discovered that the prairie crocus and other wildflowers in this ancient grassland in Cochrane were soon to be destroyed. The entire hilltop beneath this grassland would be removed to construct a new northbound on-ramp at the intersections of HWY 1A and HWY 22 in Cochrane (just to west of the Historic Cochrane Ranch site). He says, "This small piece of ancient grassland still hosts the incredible diversity of the original vegetation characteristic of the Foothills Parkland. There are very few high-quality grasslands like this left in the Foothills Parklands around Cochrane. Most have been destroyed for housing developments in this area. Outside of Cochrane, most of the ancient grasslands have been sown into European grasses used for hay and pastures. This grassland has never been plowed. It will be sad to see this small piece of irreplaceable grassland go!"

In mid-April, Blake McNeill, a Calgary native plant enthusiast, had a meeting with one of the project engineers to talk about what needed to be done for a salvage project to happen. One would think it is simple, but there was a lot of contact tag and hoop jumping between a lot of people who wanted, and worked on, making this happen. For example the land is owned by the Province of Alberta, Transportation Ministry is running the construction project, but the plants fall under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Ministry. So lots of people were needed to sign off on this.

The other thing that was interesting was the number of people and groups (who contacted McNeill through a native plant Facebook page) as interested in being involved in the salvage; native plants and restoration projects are becoming a hot topic right now which is good news in and of itself.

McNeill said "The area that had been already scraped was previously disturbed land (i.e. a brick factory used to be there) and scraping of the native land that we want to salvage isn't going to happen right away, so they think they can get everything in place to make the rescue happen in time for us to get there before the scrapers. They have

planned the project to minimize the amount of native land to be disturbed. Concerned that we only salvage the land to be disturbed, they will mark out specific areas that we can salvage. It would be nice to standardize this process for future construction projects and native plant salvage in the province.”



On May 8, the well-organised Salvage Group were given permission to go ahead with the rescue in the area marked in red on the map, left. Rescued plants will be used for public naturalization projects and in private gardens.

McNeill credits the Project Management team of ISL Engineering/ Hwy 1A/22 Project Team under the leadership of Managing Director, Chris Delaney, the Town of Cochrane Capital Projects Engineer, Ray Predika, and the Province of Alberta for ultimately signing off before any salvage could begin.

Also integral to the success of the plant rescue were the number of experts who came out and helped people with identifications and how to do transplants etc. Steve Tannas of Tannas Conservation Services for one, and Mathis Natvik, Ass't Professor, Landscape Architecture, University of Calgary, in particular was outstanding as he pointed out

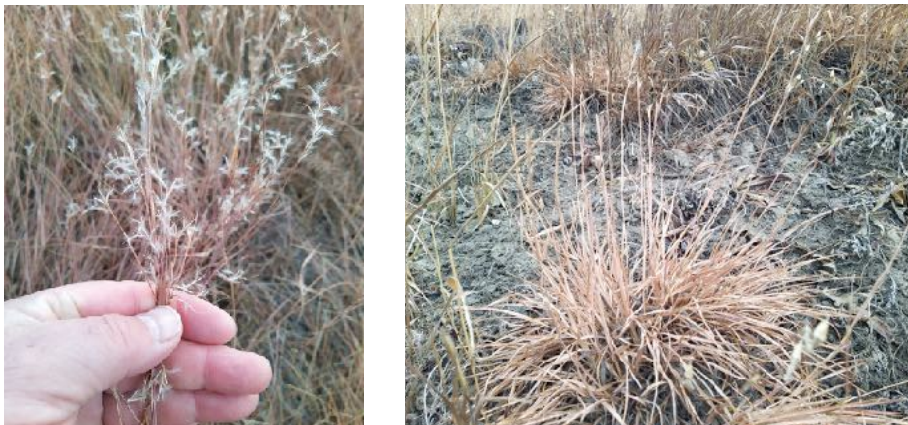
and identified truckloads of plants and answered a million questions. People came away from the event not just with native plants for their own gardens, but also with a lot of knowledge and appreciation about them.

Some of the plants to be rescued include:



Prairie crocus, *Pulsatilla nuttalliana*; buffalobean, goldenbean, *Thermopsis rhombifolia*; moss phlox, *Phlox hoodii*; fleabane sp., *Erigeron sp.*; northern gooseberry, *Ribes oxycanthoides*. Photos B. McNeill. May 2022.

According to Natvik, a total of 52 species were rescued: 32 wildflowers, 12 grasses and sedges, and 8 shrubs. (See species list at end.) Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) was the most significant species collected, as it is an S3 (vulnerable) species in Alberta. The Bow Valley is the most northerly range of this grass in Alberta and the plant rescue site is the most northerly known population of little bluestem in Alberta.

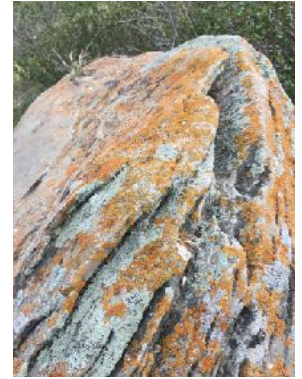


Little bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*  
Photo: M. Natvik

Most of plants that Mathis rescued will be planted in Swann Plaza at the University of Calgary, which includes a two acre grassland planting. The remainder were given to Calgary Parks to be planted in various naturalization projects in the City of Calgary.

An excellent concerted effort by many people working together to save as many plants as possible resulted in a very successful rescue and a great example of citizens in action! McNeill summed it up by saying “letting companies know that these plants are worth saving and letting the public know that these plants are desirable is good and also lets the government know that people do care about native plants and areas.”

Further plans include getting a second shot at that site, or at least part of it, this fall for seed collection and perhaps even another go at another plant rescue next spring before they completely strip it. There also might be a rather different sort of rescue regarding the lichen-covered rocks. These rocks, about to get removed and thrown into a fill pit, are covered in various lichens that have been exposed on the ridge for thousands of years. Also, once the rescue plants are reestablished in their new locations, it's hoped to be able to collect some seeds from them and donate those seeds back to the construction site for restoration purposes.



Ancient lichen-covered rock. Photo B. McNeil

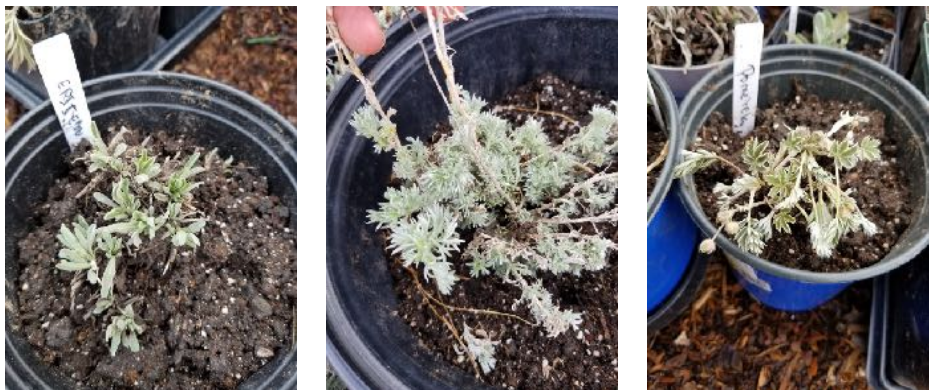
McNeill just recently posted photos of how some of his 'Cochrane Rescue Clump' are adjusting really well. “There are a couple of *Pulsatilla nuttalliana* (prairie crocuses) which seem to be really liking their new home as are the other plants which I'm really happy about. Hopefully they will continue to do well. I can hardly wait for next spring to see if they flower; if they do, I'll be over the moon with them. I won't have to tell my grandchildren what prairie crocuses looked like, I'll be able to show them as nature intended.”



*Pulsatilla nuttalliana*, prairie-crocus, seed head; *Dasiphora fruticosa*, shrubby cinquefoil; *Artemisia campestris*, field sagewort; *Symphyotrichum ericoides*, tufted white prairie aster; *Thalictrum venulosum*, veiny meadow-rue.

More photos from some participants of their rescued native plants:

From Helene: A HUGE THANK YOU to the people who organized the rescue. It was a special experience and so great to see three generations of enthusiastic gardeners. I definitely have new friends now.



From left: Fleabane sp., *Erigeron* sp.; pasture sage, *Artemisia frigida*; and early cinquefoil, *Potentilla concinna*.



From left: another fleabane sp. with yellow umbrella-plant, *Eriogonum flavum* in the foreground; smooth aster, *Symphyotrichum laeve*; and woolly groundsel, *Packera cana*.

From Jen Love: Such an incredible experience of learning and connecting with the land. Such joy to see so many people wanting to give these plants new homes, and deep sadness that this beautiful and important area will be destroyed.



Rescuers and salvagers at work!

...passionate people who care about the conservation/preservation of our native plant heritage.



From left: prairie parsley, *Musineon divaricatum*, an *Artemisia* sp., and a *Thalictrum* sp.; northern gooseberry, *Ribes oxycanthoides* with *Artemisia frigida* in rear; more *Musineon divaricatum*, with prairie onion, *Allium textile*; prairie crocus, *Pulsatilla nuttalliana*.

From Jane Kluk:

The forbs and grasses rescued from the Cochrane Salvage are destined for the University of Alberta's south campus native prairie garden.



Wild beebalm (wild bergamot), *Monarda fistulosa*, and blue grama grass, *Bouteloua gracilis*.



Rough fescue, *Festuca campestris*



L. One bonus of moving the plants is the stress has encouraged them to flower. The seed heads are gorgeous, glossy big florets. C. In their new home. R. This grass is so well adapted to life on the prairies, you can see the persistent sheaths at the base that protect it so well during grass fires...but not so much from land development.

From Tina East:

A selection of rescue plants in the rock garden.



There are still good things worth fighting for and good people ready to step up when needed. Thank you Blake for your work behind the scenes to negotiate a plant rescue! So many of us are grateful that you stepped up and took on the enormous task of organising the salvage. This was also an awesome and heartening commitment by enthusiastic rescuers who gave their time, expertise and muscle to make this happen. Thank you.

Mathis Natvik compiled a species list of plants rescued on May 8, 2022.

**LIST OF PLANT SPECIES COLLECTED (52 SPECIES IN TOTAL):**

**WILDFLOWERS (32 SPECIES):**

BINOMIAL	COMMON NAMES
<i>Allium cernuum</i>	Nodding Wild Onion
<i>Allium textile</i>	Textile Onion
<i>Achillea borealis</i>	Northern Yarrow
<i>Anemone multifida</i>	Cutleaf Anemone
<i>Antennaria parvifolia</i>	Small-leaf Pussytoes
<i>Artemisia campestris</i>	Field Sagewort
<i>Artemisia frigida</i>	Fringed Sagewort
<i>Artemisia ludoviciana</i>	Prairie Sagewort
<i>Campanula alaskana</i>	Alaskan Harebell
<i>Dalea purpurea</i>	Purple Prairie Clover
<i>Erigeron caespitosus</i>	Tufted Fleabane
<i>Eriogonum flavum</i>	Alpine Golden Buckwheat
<i>Fragaria virginiana</i>	Wild Strawberry
<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>	Common Gaillardia
<i>Galium boreale</i>	Northern Bedstraw
<i>Geum triflorum</i>	Prairie Smoke, Three-flower Avens
<i>Helianthus pauciflorus</i>	Stiff Sunflower
<i>Linum lewisii</i>	Wild Blue Flax
<i>Lithospermum ruderale</i>	Western Stoneseed
<i>Maianthemum stellatum</i>	Starry False Solomon's-Seal
<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Wild Bergamot
<i>Oxytropis sericea</i>	White Point-Vetch
<i>Packera cana</i>	Woolly Groundsel
<i>Phlox hoodii</i>	Spiny Phlox
<i>Potentilla concinna</i>	Alpine Cinquefoil
<i>Potentilla hippiana</i>	Woolly Cinquefoil
<i>Pulsatilla nuttalliana</i>	Prairie-crocus
<i>Solidago missurica</i>	Missouri Goldenrod
<i>Solidago simplex</i>	Sticky Goldenrod
<i>Symphotrichum ericoides</i>	Heath Aster
<i>Symphotrichum laeve</i>	Smooth Blue Aster
<i>Thermopsis rhombifolia</i>	Goldenbean (Buffalo Bean)

**GRASSES & SEDGES (12 SPECIES):**

BINOMIAL	COMMON NAMES
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	Blue Grama
<i>Carex filifolia</i>	Threadleaf Sedge
<i>Carex inops</i> ssp. <i>heliophila</i> (formally <i>Carex pensylvanica</i> )	Sun Sedge
<i>Danthonia parryi</i>	Parry's Oatgrass
<i>Elymus lanceolatus</i>	Northern Wheatgrass
<i>Festuca campestris</i>	Foothills Rough Fescue
<i>Festuca saximontana</i>	Mountain Fescue
<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	Prairie Junegrass
<i>Muhlenbergia cuspidata</i>	Plains Muhlenbergia
<i>Nassella viridula</i>	Green Needlegrass
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem
<i>Sporobolus rigidus</i>	Sand Reedgrass

**SHRUBS (8 SPECIES):**

BINOMIAL	COMMON NAMES
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	Saskatoon
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	Kinnickinnick
<i>Dasiphora fruticosa</i>	Shrubby Cinquefoil
<i>Elaeagnus commutata</i>	Wolf-willow, Silverberry
<i>Ribes oxycanthoides</i>	Canadian Gooseberry
<i>Rosa acicularis</i>	Prickly Wild Rose
<i>Rosa arkansana</i>	Prairie Rose
<i>Symphoricarpos occidentalis</i>	Western Snowberry

Aims of the Edmonton Native Plant Society:

- ❖ Promote knowledge of the Edmonton area native plants.
- ❖ Conserve our native plant species and their habitats.
- ❖ Preserve native plant species and habitat for the enjoyment of present and future generations.
- ❖ Educate individuals, business and local governments about native plants.

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Early yellow locoweed, *Oxytropis sericea*; prairie parsley, *Musineon divaricatum*; prairie crocus, *Pulsatilla nuttalliana*; woolly groundsel, *Packera cana*; early cinquefoil, *Potentilla concinna*. Photos by B. McNeill. April 2022.