



# GRASSLANDS

NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA

*VISITOR GUIDE*



Parks  
Canada

Parcs  
Canada

Canada 



Parks Canada administers over 150 national sites, 42 national parks and 3 national marine conservation areas. Grasslands National Park is the only park in Canada to represent the Prairie Grasslands Natural Region.





# WELCOME

Grasslands National Park of Canada celebrates the native prairie: bison raising dust in a wallow, swift fox pups playing in a coulee, a creek finding its way along an ancient glacial valley, and you discovering a timeworn ring of stones on a windy ridge... and... much more.

Parks Canada welcomes you to this open wilderness – a diverse, resilient and evolving prairie ecosystem. The West Block encourages you to explore the Frenchman River valley and marvel at unexpected encounters with rare animals and plants. Astonishing geological formations and rich fossil beds are yours to discover in the East Block. Here the uninterrupted vistas will hold you breathless.

Glowing sunsets, striking badlands, ancient tipi rings, expansive river valleys and rare plants and animals are just a few of the unique attractions waiting to be discovered!

Grasslands National Park is located in southwestern Saskatchewan near the Saskatchewan/Montana border. The West Block has access points off Highways #4 and #18 near Val Marie. The East Block has access points off Highway #18 – one south of Wood Mountain and the other located east of Glentworth. Watch for signage.

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# GRASSLANDS NATIONAL PARK IS A REPRESENTATIVE PART OF THE PRAIRIE GRASSLANDS NATURAL REGION



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## DIVERSE

The grasslands that surrounds you is situated at the northern tip of North America's mixed-grass prairie. It is unique in Canada bringing with it many uncommon plants and animals. Find a yellow-bellied blue racer coiled under the lavender blue blossoms of slender beardtongue. Watch a threatened ferruginous hawk swoop down to catch a rare black-tailed prairie dog.



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## RESILIENT

Once the grassland is broken by the plough, it takes many years and a nearby seed source for the native plants to return. If the protective grass, moss and lichen ground cover is removed, the fertile soil is soon blown away by the strong prairie wind. With care and a gentle hand, it will survive and thrive.



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## EVOLVING

Less than one quarter of Canada's original mixed-grass prairie remains in its natural state. Grasslands National Park and area is one of the largest and least disturbed of these remaining pockets of native prairie in North America. Grasslands continues to evolve by reintroducing prairie species and restoring native prairie vegetation.



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## VISITOR CENTRE

The Visitor Centre will make your trip most memorable, as friendly knowledgeable staff provides up-to-date information on park programs, camping opportunities, maps, road conditions, weather, safety and more!

The centre exhibits significant prairie stories: grassland ecosystems, endangered species, human history, palaeontology and geology.

It is located in Val Marie, Saskatchewan at the junction of Hwy # 4 and Centre Street.

## HOURS OF OPERATION

### VISITOR SEASON:

May long weekend to

Labour Day weekend, daily ..... 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

### SHOULDER SEASON:

(closed noon hours, weekends and statutory holidays)

Fall: After Labour Day weekend to

Oct. 31st ..... 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Spring: April 1st to

May long weekend.....8:00 am – 4:30 pm

### OFF SEASON:

Nov. 1st – March. 31st ..... limited hours

(The Administration Office adjacent to the Visitor Centre is open during business hours. Visitor Services are limited - call ahead.)

## FEES

Fees apply for overnight camping and interpretive programs, which support the development of visitor services and facilities. Currently, there are no entry fees.

## Contact Information

Grasslands National Park  
P.O. Box 150  
Val Marie, Sask. S0N 2T0

### Telephone:

West Block – Visitor Centre  
(306) 298-2257

East Block

Poverty Ridge Station  
(306) 476-2716

### Fax:

(306) 298-2042

### Email:

[grasslands.info@pc.gc.ca](mailto:grasslands.info@pc.gc.ca)

### Website:

[www.parkscanada.gc.ca/  
grasslands](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/grasslands)

### Operations Compound

Phone: (306) 298-2166

## Emergency Phone Numbers

Emergency: 911

Park Emergency:

West Block

(306) 298-2257 or

(306) 298-2166 press 2

East Block

(306) 476-2716 or

(306) 298-2166 press 2

RCMP – West Block

(306) 625-6400

Ponteix 24 hours

RCMP - East Block

(306) 642-7110

Assiniboia 24 hours



# HELP US PROTECT YOUR NATIONAL PARK

Please report any concerns or unlawful activities to a Parks Canada warden or the RCMP. We salute over 100 years of dedicated service of the exceptional men and women who contribute to outstanding visitor experiences, education and conservation in Canada's treasured natural and historic places.

## PLEASE OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING

- Open fires are not permitted
- Vehicles must remain on designated roads and pull-offs at all times
- Collection and/or removal of any natural or cultural objects from the park is strictly prohibited
- Visitors must camp a minimum of 1km off a primary access road
- It is illegal to harass, hunt or attempt to handle wildlife
- All terrain vehicles (ATVs) and snowmobiles are prohibited
- All pets must be leashed
- Researchers must obtain a permit
- Grazing is conducted for ecological purposes, using bison as the preferred species and livestock in other areas. Livestock grazing is done under a superintendent's permit – contact staff for further information

## RESPECT OUR NEIGHBOURS

- Closed or open? Always leave gates as you find them!
- Stay on park property. Visitors must have landowner permission prior to accessing private land.



# THE PRAIRIE PEOPLE

## FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS

One after the other, they came – the Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, Cree and Blackfoot. They hunted bison, elk and mule deer and left behind their bison drive lanes and tipi rings for you to see. Sitting Bull camped here briefly as he fled the USA after the Battle of the Little Bighorn. The Métis came searching for the last of the bison.



## RANCHERS

By the early 1890's small cattle ranches prospered into big operations such as the Turkey Track and 76 Ranch. Ranching and the cowboy way of life survived blizzards and droughts.

## HOMESTEADERS

Between 1908 and the First World War, traditional farming practices were applied to these hot, dry, windy prairies. They were not productive and homesteaders had to adapt to the demanding grassland environment or leave. The ranchers and homesteaders who stayed combined ranching and farming with hospitality and friendliness to create our regional prairie communities.



# WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

The Wood Mountain Rodeo & Ranch Museum in the Wood Mountain Regional Park near the East Block of Grasslands National Park offers day-use and camping permit visitor services. Visitors can experience a wide range of historical activities as they explore the Rodeo & Ranch Museum, the Métis Adobe or the Heritage House featuring homesteaders from eastern Europe. In addition to museum activities and group tours, the local Historical Society offers an archive including an extensive photograph collection, and a bookstore featuring books by local authors.

The Visitor Centre and the Museums are open daily from the May long weekend until the September long weekend from 9:30 AM to 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM to 5:30 PM. Tel. 306-266-4953 or email [woodmountainhistoricalsoc@sasktel.net](mailto:woodmountainhistoricalsoc@sasktel.net)



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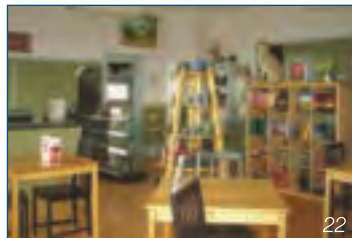
Prairie Wind & Silver Sage – Friends of Grasslands is a volunteer, non-profit organization based in Val Marie, Saskatchewan on the edge of Grasslands National Park. The organization provides additional visitor services (on a seasonal basis) at the historic Little Brick Schoolhouse.



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## SERVICES INCLUDE:

- publication and sale of Grasslands National Park Field Guide
- museum featuring the natural history of the grasslands
- art gallery exhibiting work by Saskatchewan visual artists
- gift shop emphasizing books, pottery and other gift items with a connection to the landscape
- coffee bar offering delicious things to eat and drink, including the best lattes in southwest Saskatchewan
- wireless internet access
- special programmes in support of both park and community activities



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To see more, volunteer or donate, email [info@pwss.ca](mailto:info@pwss.ca), visit [www.pwss.ca](http://www.pwss.ca).





# SPECIES AT RISK CONSERVATION

## GRASSLANDS NATIONAL PARK IS A LEADER AND CONTRIBUTOR TO THE RECOVERY OF CANADIAN SPECIES AT RISK

### HOME ON THE RANGE

Visitors from around the world come to Grasslands National Park in southern Saskatchewan to see a who's who of prairie species at risk: burrowing owls, sage grouse and the crowd pleasing colonies of prairie dogs, just to name a few.

### PRAIRIE BANDITS

Another rare species has been added to the mix – the legendary black-footed ferret. The cat-sized carnivore is one of the most endangered mammals in North America. It was 1937 when the last wild black-footed ferret was spotted in Canada. These small prairie hunters are captive-bred ferrets from the Toronto Zoo.

### RETURN OF THE BISON

In December 2005, after a 120 -year absence, plains bison were re-introduced back to the park. They came from Elk Island National Park's well-established herd. Now, a herd of over 150 animals is once again at home on the wild open prairie.



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Second only to the park, Brad Dixon's ranch is home to Canada's largest population of prairie dogs. He is the only private citizen on the federal government's black-footed ferret recovery team.



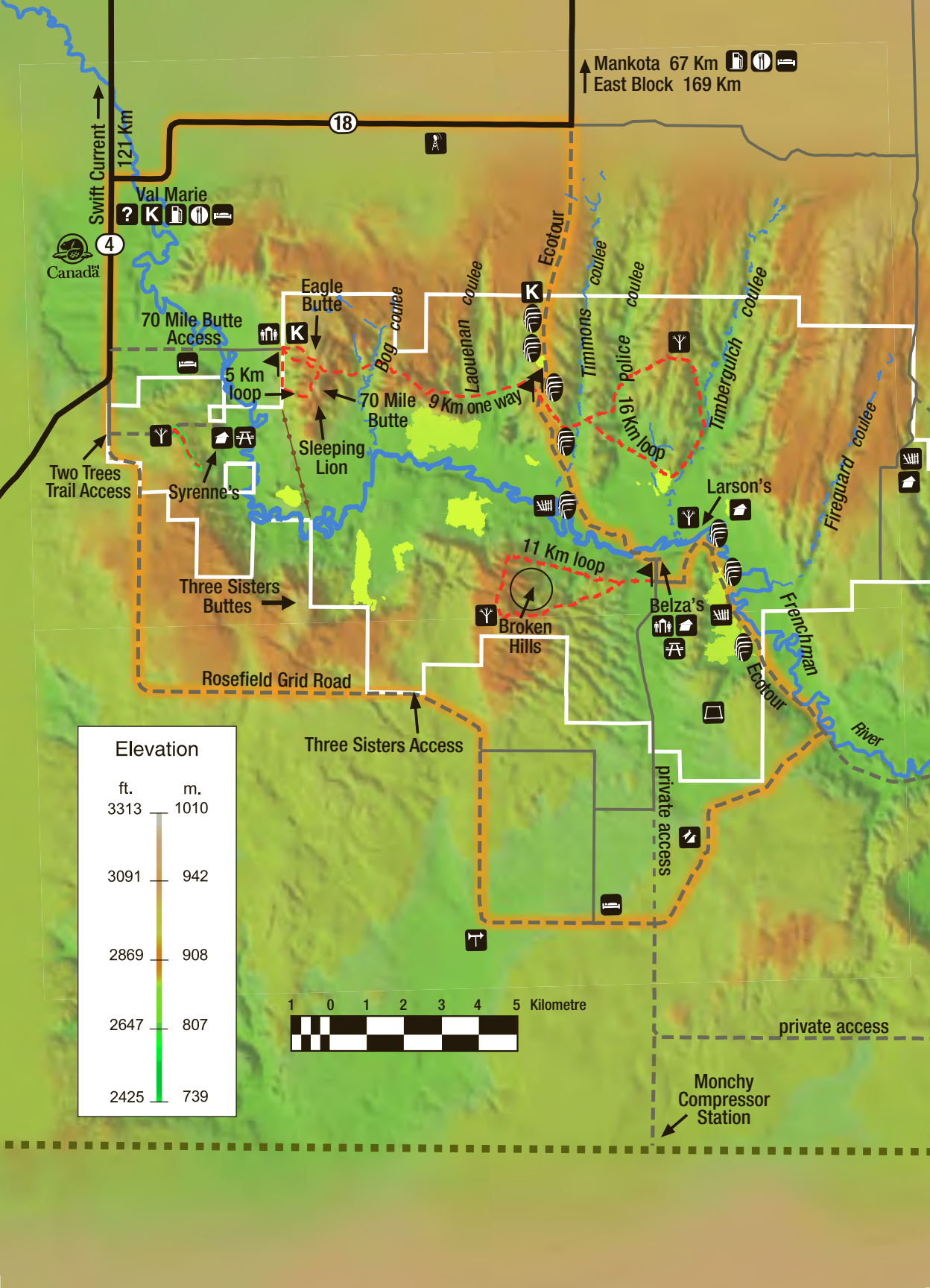
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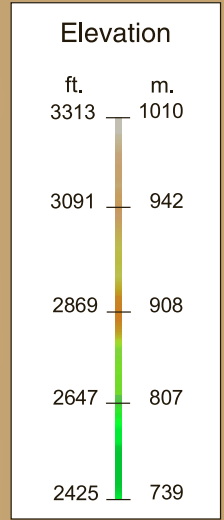
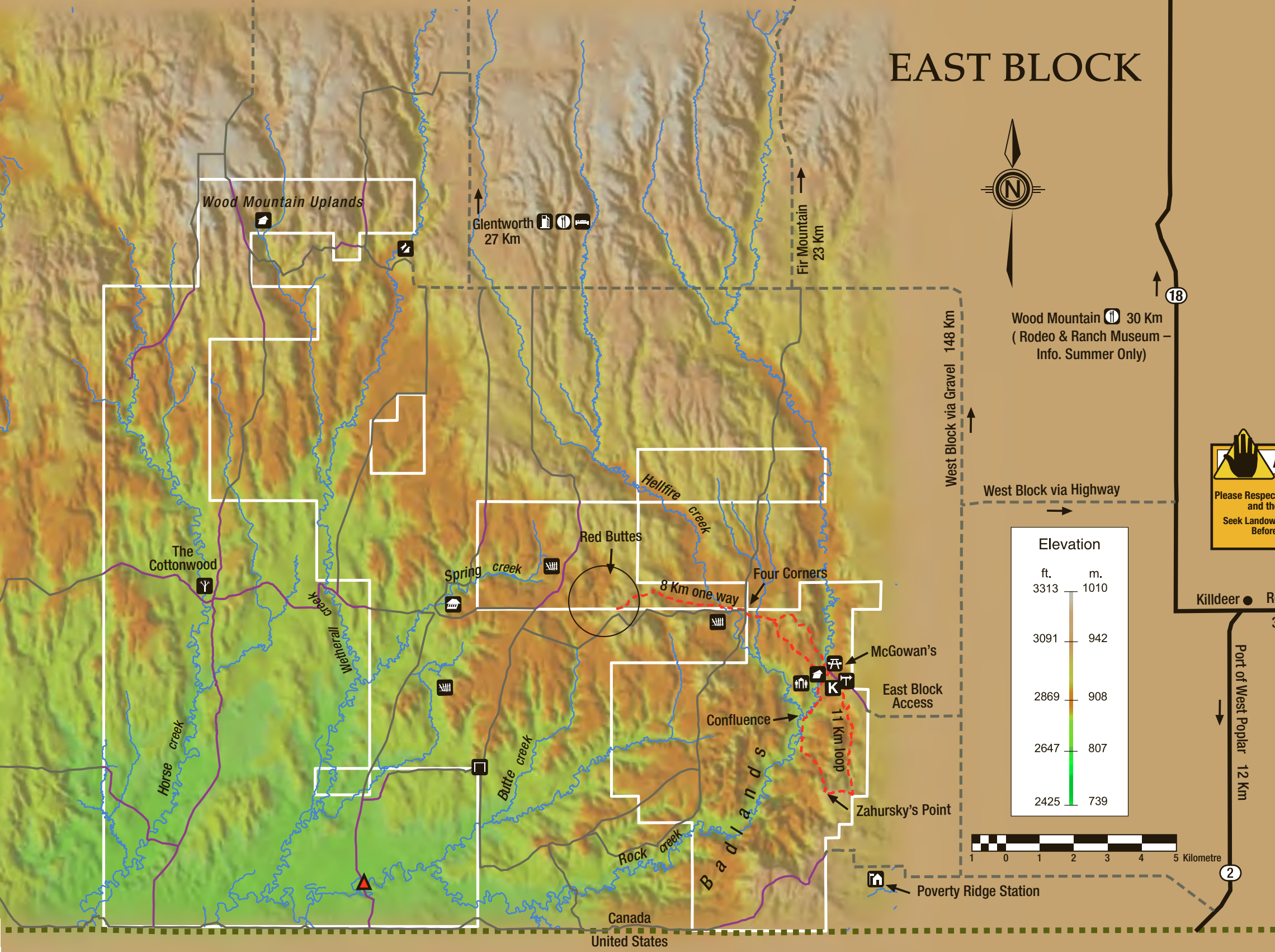
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# EAST BLOCK



## Legend

- Former ranch
- Old corrals
- Old school
- Overhead gate
- Tree
- Picnic table
- Outhouse
- Private residence
- Gas
- Food services
- Accommodation
- Weather station
- Warden station
- Information kiosk
- River/creek
- River crossing - impassable by vehicle
- Present holdings
- Black top road
- Gravel road
- Bladed trail - Private access
- Bladed trail - suggested mountain biking routes
- Suggested Field Guide hiking route

- TRAVEL:** *Be prepared for rural travelling.*
- Gas and Services – locations are few and far. Travel with well-maintained vehicle!
  - Regional Roads – old highways and gravel roads are challenging. Always leave gates as you find them.
  - Park Roads – impassable when wet. No off road travel, nor vehicle travel on bladed trails within park.
  - Bison – they can be found in the largest portion of the West Block.

- SAFETY:** *You are in a wilderness setting!*
- Whereabouts – carry compass and map and know how to use. **Fences may not follow boundaries!**
  - Wildlife – beware of rattlesnakes and bison. Keep children close and enjoy from safe distances.
  - Weather – be prepared for extreme temperatures, strong winds and dangerous lightning.
  - Watch Out – avoid abandoned buildings and quicksand.
  - Walking – travel with sturdy footwear, a hat and a first aid kit.
  - Water – bring 2 - 3 litres per person daily. No potable water available.

- CAMPING AND HIKING**
- Rustic, car accessible camping and random hiking are encouraged. Serviced camping is available in outlying communities.
- Wildfire – **no open fires.** Camp stoves only please! Report all wildfires!
  - Park camping – register with the park (year round), or the Rodeo and Ranch Museum (summer only).
  - Hiking - visit the PWSS bookstore for GNP hiking guide.
  - Pets - keep them leashed when hiking or camping.
  - Regional camping – use the map to find communities that provide camping services.

Contact the park for further details! (306) 298-2257

- EMERGENCY CONTACTS**
- 911 request assistance of park warden/ambulance
  - (306) 298-2166 Operations Compound
  - (306) 298-2257 Visitor Centre
  - (306) 625-6400 RCMP (for West Block) Ponteix 24 hours
  - (306) 642-7110 RCMP (for East Block) Assiniboia 24 hours

**ATTENTION**

Please Respect Our Neighbours and their Lands

Seek Landowner Permission Before You Go

Killdeer ● Rockglen →

37 Km

Port of West Poplar 12 Km

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West Block via Gravel 148 Km

West Block via Highway

Wood Mountain 30 Km  
(Rodeo & Ranch Museum – Info. Summer Only)

Glentworth 27 Km

Fir Mountain 23 Km

Wood Mountain Uplands

The Cottonwood

Spring creek

Red Buttes

8 Km one way

Four Corners

McGowan's

East Block Access

Confluence

11 Km loop

Zahursky's Point

Poverty Ridge Station

Canada  
United States



## WELCOME CAMPERS

Grasslands National Park offers two types of camping experiences. Register at the Visitor Centre (Val Marie) and at the Rodeo & Ranch Museum (Wood Mountain Regional Park – summer only). A permit is required and fees apply. Inquire about our camper check-out service and self-registration.

Full service campgrounds exist in Val Marie and the Wood Mountain Regional Park. Private campgrounds are located near the park. Check our Services and Amenities section for more information.

### FRONT COUNTRY CAMPING

A rustic experience, accessible by vehicle at two former ranch yards – the “Belza Place” (West Block) and the “McGowan Place” (East Block). These locations serve tents, trailers or self-contained RV’s. A dry toilet and a ‘mowed’ site are provided in both locations.

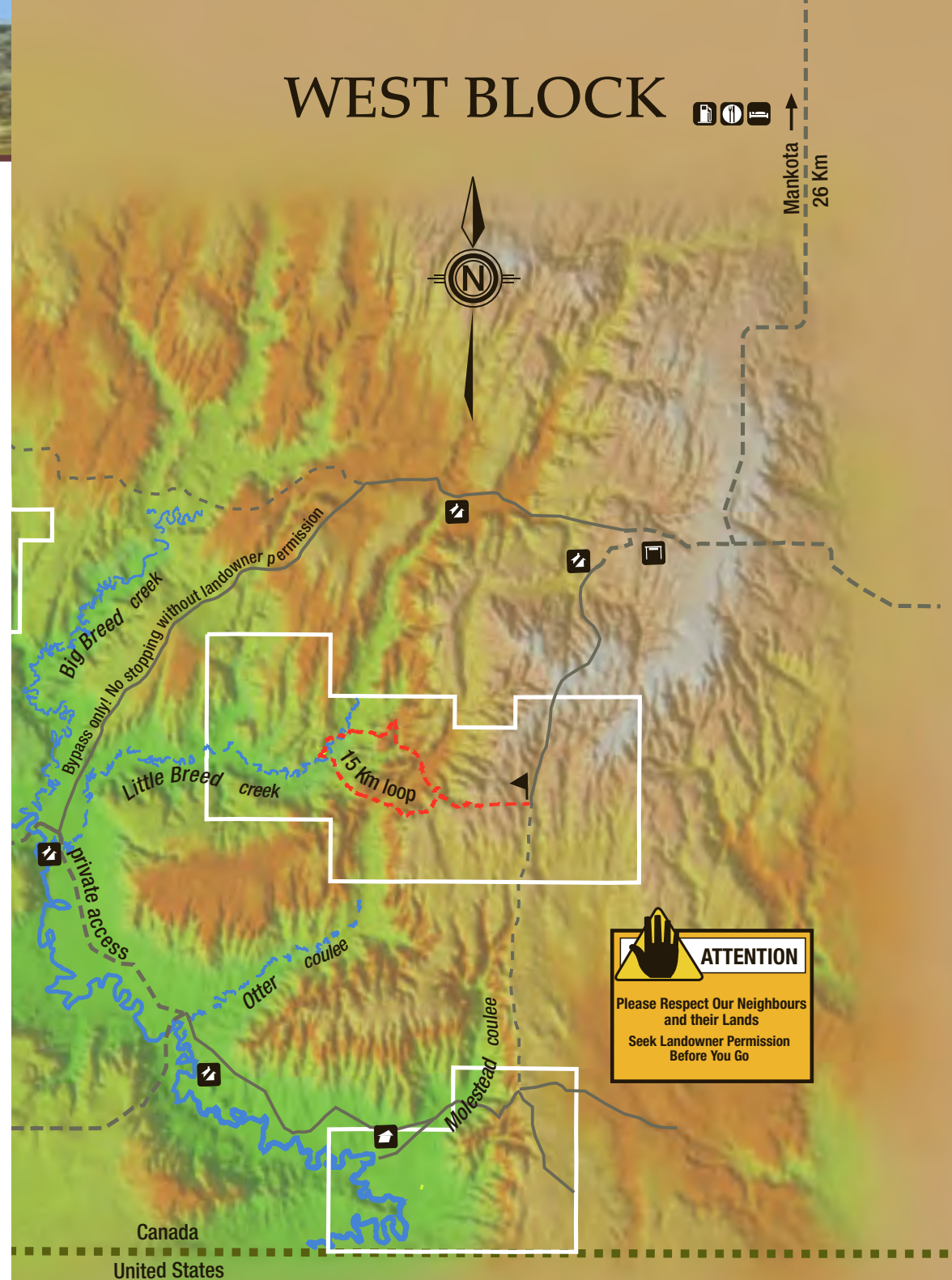
### BACK COUNTRY CAMPING

A wilderness camping experience, where campers randomly tent and enjoy the native prairie landscape without services. Park your vehicle on a gravel pull-off and set-up camp out of view – a minimum of 1km off-road.

- Respect our ranch neighbours and stay on park property
- Pack out everything that was packed in
- Open fires are not allowed. Use of portable cook stoves are permitted, unless restricted during high fire season (fire bans)
- No potable water is available in the park. Bring your own. We recommend 2L/day/person
- Be cautious during wet weather as roads may become impassable! Check with staff for current weather conditions
- Check at the Visitor Centre for fire bans

OUR FEES ARE EVOLVING AS WE DEVELOP OUR CAMPING OPPORTUNITIES.

## WEST BLOCK



## Legend

- Former ranch
- Old corrals
- Ranch sign
- Tree
- Picnic table
- Outhouse
- Private residence
- Gas
- Food services
- Accommodation
- Weather station
- Telecommunications tower
- Bison compound
- Information kiosk
- Visitor Centre
- Prairie dog colony
- Trailhead markers
- Ecotour stop
- River/creek
- Drainage
- Present holdings
- Bison fence
- Black top road
- Gravel road
- Bladed trail
- Prairie trail
- Suggested Field Guide hiking route
- Ecotour route
- Marked interpretive trail

**TRAVEL:** Be prepared for rural travelling.

- Ecotour – The Ecotour adventure is an 80 km self-guided driving trail, round-trip from Val Marie, with a series of learning moments and scenic lookouts. It is the primary access to the West Block.
- Gas and Services – locations are few and far. Travel with well-maintained vehicle!
- Regional Roads – old highways and gravel roads are challenging. Always leave gates as you find them.
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# PARK EXPLORATION

## HIKING

Experience the rare opportunity where visitors are invited to walk a timeless, prairie landscape. Follow a marked interpretive trail, or the suggested routes, (an excellent “Hiking Guide” is available from Prairie Wind & Silver Sage – Friends of Grasslands). Or, chart your own path in the direction of your choice. Discoveries await!

## HORSEBACK RIDING

This is ‘cowboy’ (and cowgirl) country. From pre-contact times to present-day ranching, horses have been a part of this land. It remains a great way to explore the park. Pick up the “Horse Use in Grasslands” brochure.

## CYCLING

A prairie bike ride has its challenges, and its rewards. Travel the gravel Ecotour road or an old prairie trail (West Block). Try a bladed trail (East Block) – they are relatively smooth and cactus free. Park staff can provide information.

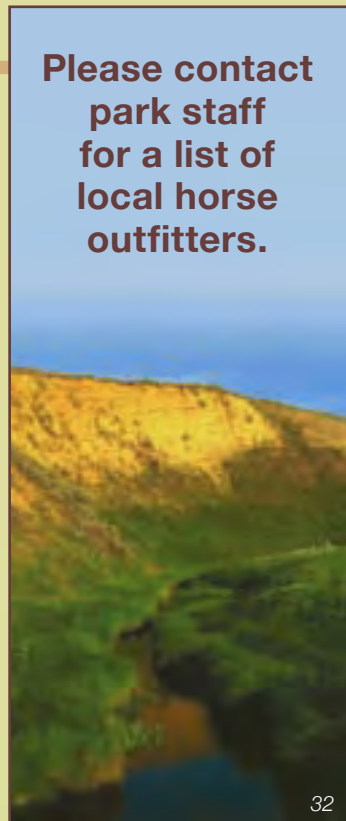
## CANOEING

We admit we’re not a water sport ‘hotspot’. Nonetheless, canoeing the Frenchman River is possible at certain times and provides a perspective like no other. Acquire the “Canoeing Section” (Field Guide from Prairie Wind & Silver Sage).

## SNOWSHOEING

Occasionally, sufficient snowfall entices the snowshoes out. A snowshoe exploration presents different wildlife viewing opportunities and plenty of solitude. Talk with staff about locations and access challenges prior to departure.

**Please contact  
park staff  
for a list of  
local horse  
outfitters.**



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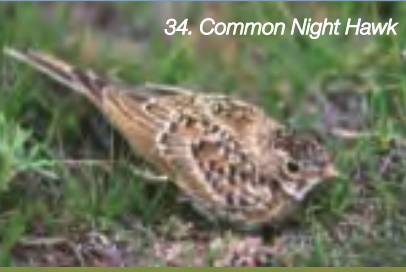


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# ACTIVITIES

34. Common Nighthawk



35. Long-Billed Curlew



36. Loggerhead Shrike



37. Ferruginous Hawk



## WILDLIFE WATCHING:

Grasslands is rich with wildlife viewing opportunities. Be patient and observe rare and common species like black-tailed prairie dogs, American badgers, mule deer, coyotes and bullsnakes. Mornings and evenings provide the best observations.

## PHOTOGRAPHY:

With a 360° horizon, and the tiniest grassland flower below you, it's no surprise that many enjoy the park through a camera lens. Review "Watching Tomorrow's Wildlife Today" for hints and regulations.

## BIRDING:

The grasslands bird community is in steep decline in North America. Here, visitors can 'check the list' (copy available) for the unusual as well as 'iconic'. Hear the Sprague's pipit's swirling trill, the horned lark's twinkle, the grasshopper sparrow's rasp and of course the meadowlark's welcoming gurgle.

## PICNICKING:

Sit yourself at a designated site or find a hilltop to enjoy lunch and great views. Pack out what you pack in.

38. Three Flowered Aven

39. Common Tickseed

40. Dotted Blazing Star

41. Bessey's L





## SUNSETS & STORMS:

Is there anything more beautiful than a prairie sunset? 70 Mile Butte (West Block) or the recently accessible Dawson’s viewpoint (East Block) are great locations. Prairie storms are an impressive display of nature’s power. View from a safe distance, and exit the park if rain is impending – unless you’re prepared to stay for a while!

## PERSONAL HISTORY EXPLORATION:

Know a family member that once homesteaded in the area? Want to see the remnants of old corrals, homes and tipi rings? This is your place.

## SMELL THE FLOWERS:

Spring and early summer can decorate the prairies with plants only found in native habitats. Spring’s prairie crocus and golden bean, early summer’s blue-eyed grass and purple milk-vetch, and late summer’s coneflower and dotted blazing star never fail to delight!

## ASTRONOMY:

Find yourself overwhelmed by the beauty of the night sky in Canada’s Largest Dark Sky Preserve! Talk to park staff for more details!



**There are many ways to relax and enjoy yourself in Grasslands National Park.**

46. Prickly Pear Cactus



42. Blue Grama



43. Harebell

44. Pincushion Cactus

45. Swift Fox





## INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS



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### GUIDED PROGRAMS:

Find venturing into this landscape a little overwhelming? Let us welcome you to this beautiful and complex terrain through an interpreter-led tour.

### FRENCHMAN RIVER VALLEY ECOTOUR:

This self guided driving tour through the Frenchman River Valley in the park's west block usually takes about 2.5 hours. It can be completed as an 80km loop or a 70km "out and back." Information panels along Ecotour Road provide interpretation of the prairie landscape.

### CITIZEN SCIENTIST VOLUNTEER:

Fulfill your desire to contribute by being a citizen scientist volunteer. Gain insight into the struggles and successes of species at risk. Get the inside look as you assist park biologists and collect important data. Pre-registration required.

### SPECIAL EVENTS:

We love to have fun as much as you do! Celebrate Canada's birthday with Val Marie, explore the park with our neighbours at the East Block Party, and discover the park's winter wonders during Prairie Little Christmas.



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## GEOCACHING:

Navigate your way through the West Block with a challenging “multicache.” Please talk to park staff for details or visit [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com).

## GROUP TOURS:

Organizing a conference, workshop or family reunion? Pre-book an interpreter-led hike for more adventurous groups. Guided bus tours work well for groups desiring minimal walking.

## SCHOOL TOURS:

We have fun, hands-on learning experiences that meet your curriculum needs. Programs available for K – 12 students for science, social studies, native studies, geology, geography, and biology objectives.

## OUTREACH PROGRAMS:

Can't come to the park? Let us come to you. Whether a school, post-secondary group or a community organization, we can tailor a program or presentation to suit your needs and schedule.

The geology and palaeontology of Grasslands National Park and surrounding area tell a story of fascinating land formations and fossils. The diverse landforms are windows into geological time. Discoveries of fossilized land and sea creatures stand as testimony to the prehistoric world 60 to 80 million years ago!





## BE SAFETY AWARE!



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Grasslands National Park is a wilderness environment with few services. Be prepared! Your safety depends on your awareness of wild animals such as bison and rattlesnakes, prairie wildfires and storms, and being able to find your way!

Prior to venturing into the park, observe the following to ensure an enjoyable visit:

### GENERAL SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Get current information at the park visitor centre and kiosk
- Bring 2-3 litres water/person/day
- Bring a first aid kit, snacks and cell phone (coverage may be unreliable) and maps
- Wear a hat, sunscreen and mosquito repellent
- Enjoy wildlife for short periods from safe distances (see bison and rattlesnake safety messages)
- Roads become quickly impassable when wet
- Avoid abandoned buildings
- Avoid quicksand, bogs and alkali
- Beware of cactus, black widow spiders and ticks
- Avoid high ground and barbed wire fences during lightning



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### RATTLESNAKES

- Wear protective, over the ankle, footwear and long pants
  - Watch where you walk and keep children close, as you may not hear the rattle
  - If you see or hear a rattlesnake, stay calm and slowly move away
  - Snakes will only strike when threatened or cornered
- If bitten:**

- Stay calm, restrict movement and do not panic
- Call 911 and seek medical attention immediately
- Cleanse the wound and keep limb below heart level



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## BISON

- Remain inside your car, proceed with caution, do not honk or become impatient
- Use extreme caution when cycling, horseback riding or hiking (especially with pets). Maintain 100-metre distance from bison (length of a football field)
- Bison are more aggressive during calving (May) and rutting (mid-July through August)

## PRAIRIE WILDFIRES

- Be prepared for sudden weather changes and electrical storms. Lightning frequently ignites grass fires
- Report sightings of smoke or flames to the park office or call 911
- Grass fires travel quickly! Be prepared to evacuate!
- If the fire traps you, head for the areas of low vegetation (eg. gravel road, prairie dog colonies) or the burned area (ie. the 'black zone')

## SINK HOLES

- Sink holes or quick sand are the main safety concerns for the east block.

## FINDING YOUR WAY

- Tell someone your plans!
- Get oriented at the visitor centre and use navigation tools (eg. maps, compass, GPS)
- Cell phone coverage is not reliable
- Stop frequently to be aware of your surroundings
- If you become lost or disoriented, stay put, stay calm and remain visible
- Find shelter if the weather turns bad or if night falls



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### Watch for these Signs of Bison Aggression:

- shaking their head
- pawing
- short charges or running toward you
- loud snorting
- raising the tail



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# PRAIRIE CLIMATE

## Photo Credits :



### Cover Pages

Main image: Pat Fargey

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6. Parks Canada
7. James R. Page
8. Greg Huszar, Sask Tourism
9. Robert Sissons, Parks Canada
10. USFWS

### Inside Page Headers:

West Block and East Block images:  
Wendy Michael

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60. SBOIC

## DRY

The sun and wind can evaporate more water during an average year in the grasslands than the clouds can bring as rain or snow. On average, 30–33 cm of precipitation falls each year – Pacific Rim National Park gets roughly 100–200 cm annually! Rocky Mountains to the west combined with strong winds create a dry climate.

## HOT AND COLD

The scorching sun can push temperatures over 40°C and during a winter storm they can dip to –40°C. In summer, deer cool themselves by the river. In winter, sage hens bury themselves in the snow. Year round, rattlesnakes can retreat underground.

## WINDY

Antelope, deer and even people climb up onto buttes to enjoy the cooling relief of the wind. But, the wind is the devil in disguise. It dries as it cools, robbing the land and its inhabitants of precious moisture. Much of what happens here happens underground, safe from the drying effect of the sun and wind.



60. Burrowing Owl

# SERVICES & AMENITIES

	GASOLINE	GROCERY	RESTAURANT	ACCOMMODATION	GARAGE	ATM	HEALTH CENTRE (limited services)	EMERGENCY 24 hr. CARE (full services)	CAMPING (full services)	CAMPING (minimal services)	911 SERVICE
Val Marie	●	●	●	●		●			●		●
Mankota	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●
McCord	●	●								●	●
Glentworth	●	●	●	●	●					●	●
Wood Mountain			●	●						●	●
Wood Mountain Regional Park			concession						●		●
Rockglen	●	●	●	●		●	●		●		●
Cadillac	●		●	●	●	●					●
Climax	●	●	●		●	●	●			●	●
Bracken	●	●									●
Assiniboia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Swift Current	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●



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