

(Disponible sólo en inglés)
(disponible en anglais seulement)

Adopt a Rancher Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan

Project Summary

Part I. Description

Participating organizations

- Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan

The Saskatchewan PCAP partnership is a subsidiary of the Saskatchewan Stock Grower's Association. The partnership consists of 30 partners, including Current PCAP partners include: Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada; Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society; Ducks Unlimited Canada; Environment Canada; Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan; Nature Conservancy of Canada; Nature Saskatchewan; Parks Canada; Prairie Learning Centre; Prairie Wind & Silver Sage; Redberry Lake Biosphere Reserve; Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre; Saskatchewan Environmental Society; Saskatchewan Forage Council; Saskatchewan Ministries of Agriculture; Environment; Economy; Parks, Culture and Sport – RSM; SaskOutdoors; Saskatchewan Research Council; Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association; Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation; SaskPower; Society for Range Management; University of Regina; University of Saskatchewan; Wanuskewin Heritage Park; Western Development Museum; and the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency.

Participating schools were located in Regina, Saskatoon, Kelvington, Frontier, Eastend, and Lampman, Saskatchewan. Participating ranchers were located near Eastend, Preeceville, Regina Beach, Disley, Kisbey, Dinsmore, and Biggar, Saskatchewan. The schools and ranchers were found in the southeast, southwest, south central, east central, and west central parts of the province, which covered a broad section of the prairie grasslands in Saskatchewan.

Background or problem statement (why was the project carried out?)

Young Saskatchewan students from a variety of backgrounds are often raised and grow up removed from natural grassland ecosystems. When introduced to the unit of Climate and Ecosystems in Science 10, they lack a connection to their local native prairie environment. Participating in the Adopt a Rancher program will enable students to connect concepts and theories explored in the classroom to a real-life, practical working ranch ecosystem. Students will be able to learn how ranching can protect Saskatchewan's native grasslands while providing economic benefits for Saskatchewan's people.

General description of the project (what was done?)

Teachers and students were provided guidebooks which included a complete unit of study that covered the new Climate and Ecosystems Dynamics unit in Grade 10 Science. The unit also fit the Environmental Science program in Grade 11. By following the Adopt a Rancher program, students completed a case study of a particular ranch in Saskatchewan.

Each classroom that participated in Adopt a Rancher was paired with a rancher, ideally within an hour's drive of their school. In the completion of the case study, students communicated with their rancher, examined the site characteristics, and learned of the natural resources specific to the working ranch ecosystem. Students then created a case study examining local biodiversity and species at risk on the ranch; threats, challenges and risks to the rancher; the history of management practices; and ecological goods and services provided by the ranch. An important part of the program was a field day in which students and their teachers visited the working ranch and conducted their own projects investigating the natural prairie grasslands.

Description of outcomes and follow-up (what did the project achieve?)

All students completed pre- and post-unit tests related to Adopt a Rancher. Submitted tests indicated increased knowledge about native prairie grasslands and improved opinions about the value and function of native prairie grassland sites. All teachers completed evaluations related to the Adopt a Rancher program. Evaluations submitted indicated an enthusiasm about the program and its value to the students. Some teachers indicated a desire to participate in Adopt a Rancher in the upcoming school year. Aspects of the program that were found to be of particular value were the field day, the Saskatchewan-based resources the program provided, and the fact that it was a locally developed program. The negative remarks pertained to the lack of time available to cover everything in the program manual. All ranchers completed evaluations related to Adopt a Rancher. Evaluations showed an appreciation for being able to interact with students about ranching and how the ranchers manage their rangeland. Negative remarks surrounded working with students who weren't really interested in being on the ranch and the need for more structure around the field day. Based on the results of the students' tests as well as the teacher and rancher evaluations, the Adopt a Rancher program was a success in its first year of implementation. The fact that several of the teachers and some of the ranchers expressed a desire to participate in the upcoming school year shows the genuineness of their remarks.

Project Summary

Part II. Analysis

Successes

The Adopt a Rancher program was successfully implemented in several high schools throughout southern Saskatchewan. Nine high school science teachers signed up to teach the program and were paired up with eight ranchers – two teachers with small class sizes in proximity of one of the volunteer ranchers “shared” their rancher. One teacher subsequently withdrew participation this school year because she found her class was running behind in her planned units and she felt she would not be able to complete the Adopt a Rancher program. She did, however, express a desire to teach the unit this autumn, if it was possible.

All eight of the remaining teachers expressed positive opinions about the Adopt a Rancher program. They were pleased with the quality of the materials and believed that the field day on the ranch was a valuable experience for their students. Several of the teachers who participated this year have expressed a desire to participate again next school year.

The ranchers also were positive about their experiences with the program. They were happy to be able to introduce the students to their operations and to their pastures. They appreciated the opportunity to talk with students about their industry and to expose the students to how a ranching operation functions.

Challenges

Although there was great success with Adopt a Rancher this year and several teachers expressed interest in participating during the next school year, a challenge will be to continue to promote the program and attract new teachers. The fact that we have a base of teachers who successfully implemented the program will help Adopt a Rancher gain traction among teachers in the province.

Contacting interested ranchers will be somewhat of a challenge as the names of ranchers who might be interested is not kept in an easily assessable database. Many different sources had to be contacted in order to finalize interested ranchers. More such sources need to be located to help identify interested ranchers. Ideally, ranches should be located within an hour's bus ride of the participating schools to both reduce bussing costs and to ensure that the students spend more time on the ranch than travelling to and from the ranch. This makes pairing classrooms and ranchers a little more difficult.

Lessons Learned

A key lesson learned was that it is difficult to attract teachers to participate in a new program during the first year using an updated curriculum. Teachers may have felt a desire to learn and teach the new curriculum before they felt comfortable implementing a program that they had not heard of before and that had no reputation. As Adopt a Rancher experiences success and builds a reputation among teachers and ranchers, it will become easier to attract participants.

What Next? (What will you do and what should others do?)

The 2014-2015 school year was the first year of implementation of the Adopt a Rancher program. Teachers and ranchers who wish to participate in 2015-2016 must be solicited and identified. Contacts within the Ministry of Education must be cultivated. Agencies that can assist with the identification of suitable ranchers must be identified and contacted. These include but are not restricted to the Ministry of Agriculture and the various Watershed Associations. Additionally, all guidebooks must be modified and adapted based on the ideas generated by the teachers and the ranchers in their evaluations.

For more information about the project please contact:

Ms. Natasha Wilkie
Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action
Phone: 306-352-0472
pcap@sasktel.net