

### Article 3: Grassland Prescribed Burns

Peter Holub, P.Ag.

Grasslands are an important ecosystem in British Columbia. Native grasslands cover less than one per cent of B.C.'s land base. Even so, they are home to more than 30 per cent of its species at risk. Grasslands support more threatened and endangered plants and animals than any other habitat type in the province.

Fire is an important disturbance in grasslands. Historically grasslands have been home to species that would survive low intensity fires due to their fire adaptations. With fire exclusion these species are being displaced. One of the biggest changes is encroachment by trees onto the grassland. Provincially the area that grasslands occupy have been reduced by over 35 per cent.

The reintroduction of fire is often preceded with a mechanical slashing treatment of the trees that have regenerated on the grassland. **Due to the high fuel loading from decadent grasses, the Westridge grassland will be burned and then a slashing treatment. This will reduce the fuel loading for subsequent burns and let fire prune or eradicate some of the trees.**

The prescribed burn will do a number of things to the plant community. It will burn the accumulated dead grass at low intensity, rather than having a high-intensity wildfire. It will allow native grasses, forbs and shrubs to be rejuvenated with nutrients released from the burn. There will be a flush of regeneration from dormant seeds stored in the soil. There will also be opportunities for new seeds to be established on soil, which would not be the case with matted grass that is present.

Monitoring plots will be established to evaluate the burn and its impacts into the future. This will help us learn about the outcomes and what could be improved on future burns.



*Prescribed burn, Boitanio Park, April 2021*