Evaluating the Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Lands program in southwest Saskatchewan: The perspective of producers

Photo credit: Melanie Toppi

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Frenchman River Valley, Saskatchewan

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1. Executive Summary

In 2015, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) introduced the Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Lands (SARPAL) initiative. SARPAL works with ranchers on voluntary stewardship initiatives to support the recovery of species at risk on agricultural land and will provide $6.2 million dollars in funding nationwide over five years.

In 2016, the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (SSGA) received 2.58 million dollars from SARPAL to work with its members—producers in the Saskatchewan cattle industry—to support rangeland sustainability, wild species conservation and recovery of species at risk in ways that also benefit farmers and ranchers. These funds will be distributed over five years, and the overall goal is to protect species at risk, their habitat, and maintain biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem on the ranch. Most of Saskatchewan’s remaining native grass is on privately managed ranch lands, and these grasslands are integral habitat for many species at risk.

A Multi-Species Action Plan was developed which focused on thirteen at-risk species and the South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc. (SODCAP Inc.) was created as a partnership between stakeholders and government to implement actions relating to the South of the Divide Multi-Species Action Plan. To this end, SODCAP Inc. and the SSGA have developed six different SARPAL programming options for producers who are managing critical or important habitat in southwestern Saskatchewan; specifically in the Milk River Watershed of the South of the Divide region.

In 2019, 36 of the 42 cattle producers who were participating in the SODCAP Inc. SARPAL program were interviewed to document their experiences with the program. The perceptions of producers actively engaged with the SARPAL program may inform the potential next phase of the SARPAL program in 2020. Results of this research may also contribute to program delivery and policy development at all levels of government around species at risk conservation on agricultural lands both nationally and internationally.

Results of the study were positive. One hundred percent of producers were satisfied with the SARPAL program option they were involved in, and 100% felt that being involved in SARPAL was beneficial to them as producers. Despite its success, results of the interviews revealed ways that the program could be improved, including recommendations to improve the national program and inform species at risk and agricultural policy, as well as local program delivery. Nine recommendations were made regarding the program, including to design the program to be synergistic with agricultural operations, target funding to the largest swaths of unbroken grassland, and to fund land in production. Ten recommendations were made to improve local program delivery, including to support successional planning, promote producer conservation management to the Canadian public, and to provide advocacy for producers involved in SARPAL. These recommendations are intended to contribute to more effective and robust program delivery and policy development regarding species at risk conservation on agricultural lands.
2. Introduction

A 2018 report by the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership notes that within Canada, Saskatchewan is second only to Alberta in cattle production, with producers generating about $2.26 billion in livestock farm cash receipts in 2017. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has an objective of expanding agricultural exports to $75 billion by 2025. This increased demand will create pressure on the use of natural resources.

Agricultural producers are tasked to ensure agricultural production can meet the needs of a growing population in an environmentally sustainable manner while also contributing to biodiversity conservation. Recent literature documents a high level of public concern regarding the economic impacts of species at risk conservation and a need for effective programs to encourage voluntary stewardship of endangered species on private land. To address these challenges, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) introduced the Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Lands (SARPAL) initiative in 2015. SARPAL works with ranchers on voluntary stewardship initiatives to support the recovery of species at risk on agricultural land and will provide $6.2 million dollars in funding nationwide over five years.

In 2016 the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (SSGA) received 2.58 million dollars from SARPAL to work with producers in the Saskatchewan cattle industry to support rangeland sustainability and conserve and enhance species at risk habitat in southwest Saskatchewan. These funds were distributed over five years, and the overall goal is to conserve species at risk habitat and maintain biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem on the ranch. Most of Saskatchewan’s remaining native grasslands are on privately managed ranches, and these grasslands are integral habitat for many species at risk.

A Multi-Species Action Plan was developed which focused on thirteen at-risk species and the South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc. (SODCAP Inc.) was created as a partnership between stakeholders and government to implement actions relating to the South of the Divide Multi-Species Action Plan. To this end SODCAP Inc. and the SSGA have developed six different programming options for producers who are managing critical or important habitat in southwestern Saskatchewan; Habitat Management Agreements, Habitat Restoration Agreements, Results-Based Conservation Agreements, Term Conservation Easements, Grass Banking, and Niche Product Branding. Initial program targets included four to six Results-Based Agreements, sixteen Habitat Management Agreements and at least one or two Grass Banks. Further, SODCAP Inc. has directed its main efforts toward conserving the Prairie Loggerhead Shrike, Greater Sage Grouse, Sprague’s Pipit, Northern Leopard Frog, Chestnut Collared Longspur, Swift Fox, and McCown’s Longspur.

To date the SARPAL project has resulted in 16 Results Based Conservation Agreements, 13 Habitat Management Agreements, 6 Habitat Restoration Agreements, 2 Grass Banking initiatives, and 2 Niche Product Branding initiatives. Producers have expressed interest in Term Conservation Easements and the SSGA has initiated the creation of a Foundation that could hold
the easements; however, the Foundation is still waiting to receive official notice from the Canada Revenue Agency before any easements can be signed. Briefly, in Results Based Conservation Agreements, producers would sign agreements that identify specific results or habitat characteristics that need to be achieved to provide optimal habitat; and payments are triggered when results are met. Habitat Management Agreements are tailored to each producer’s operation and the particular critical or important habitat that they are managing. The agreements are based on an evaluation of each ranch, focused planning exercises, the producer’s objectives and resources, habitat conservation goals, and any other relevant circumstances. Producers may be funded up to 100% of the costs for implementing their agreements on lands that qualify. Management activities that are beneficial to both the producer and species at risk are identified and included as part of each agreement. There are no requirements to meet specific habitat targets; however, producers must implement the management activities. For Habitat Restoration Agreements, potential qualifying sites for habitat restoration are identified. These include land that is currently cultivated, or was previously cultivated (i.e. tame grass), and locations near existing candidate critical habitat for species at risk. Producers agree to prepare the seedbed and perform necessary weed control, seed the field with a mix of native grass, rest the reseeded area for up to 2 years and maintain the site in perennial cover for 21 years. Producers work with a SODCAP Inc. agrologist to implement a grazing plan, and 100% of the reseeding costs are covered. The Grass Banking initiatives allow ranchers to graze on Grasslands National Park (GNP) land at a reduced fee in exchange for tangible conservation benefits on the private ranch. Producers work with GNP and SODCAP Inc. staff to implement the program. Niche Product Branding initiatives assist producers in marketing beef raised in environments that support species at risk habitat. Producers that have signed any of the conservation agreements are exploring marketing their beef as being sourced from lands that provide habitat for species at risk under a ‘Prairie Provide’ brand. Finally, in Term Conservation Easements, producers sign easements to protect land for a specific length of time, rather than in perpetuity, as is currently the case.

The SSGA received SARPAL funding in 2016 and the program will end in 2020, with a strong potential for renewal. In 2019, we took the opportunity to talk to the producers engaged in the project, and the program managers who implemented the program, to gain an understanding of the real-world experiences they have had with the program over the course of four years. This research data may inform the development of the potential next phase of SARPAL so that it may best meet the needs of producers. Views shared by producers may contribute to the development of future SARPAL policies and programs which will be most effective and responsive to stakeholders; i.e., producers supporting the recovery of species at risk on agricultural land.

3. Methods

After an extensive review of academic literature and relevant program related documents, and meetings with SSGA and SODCAP Inc. staff, interviews were held over the summer of 2019 with producers participating in the SARPAL initiative. Producers were primarily located in the Milk River Watershed in the South of the Divide (SOD) region of southwestern Saskatchewan (Figure 1). Conservation agreements were also signed with producers in the Missouri Coteau.
Both the Milk River Watershed (South of the Divide) and the Missouri Coteau contain significant tracts of native grassland and provide habitat for a diversity of species at risk in the province.

Figure 1: South of the Divide, Saskatchewan. (Map courtesy of SODCAP Inc.)

The interviews were semi-structured, conducted in person and lasted approximately two hours long. They were held in order to understand what elements of the program were successful, and which elements had proven challenging. The same set of forty-four open-ended interview questions were used in each case, in order to allow for the producer to have ample opportunity to share their experiences with various aspects of the program. Producers were invited to participate in this research project through direct invitation by the management of SODCAP Inc., and asked to contact the researcher directly if they wished to be interviewed. The interviews were confidentially transcribed and subjected to a content analysis that identified the perceptions of the producers involved in the SARPAL program, which were then coded and analysed using Nvivo 12 qualitative data management software.

Sixteen producers had signed Results Based Conservation Agreements and 14 were interviewed. Thirteen producers signed Habitat Management Agreements and 9 were interviewed. Six producers signed Habitat Restoration Agreements and 3 were interviewed; and 7 participants from the Grass Banking initiatives were interviewed, including staff members of Grasslands National Park. Two Niche Product Branding initiatives were signed and both participants were interviewed. All 4 participants who had expressed interest in Term Conservation Easements were interviewed. The interviews did not go into specific details of any of these program options, but
instead asked producers to share their experiences with the program in general. The results of this research may contribute to a renewed SARPAL program informed by considering lessons learned in the initial phase, which may be applied nationwide, and will be of great value to species at risk conservation and agricultural sustainability across Canada.

4. Results

Of the 42 people who were participating in the SODCAP Inc./SSGA SARPAL program, 36 were interviewed. Some of the producers were involved in more than one SARPAL option, but were only interviewed once. There was one producer who wished to be interviewed together with his hired hand, and that interview was recorded as the views of 1 person. There were 4 co-operative grazing entities, such as co-ops, interviewed, and each one was comprised of various numbers of producers. Interviews of these entities varied; two consisted of one board member speaking for the group, another consisted of an interview with 4 people on the board at once and recording them as 1 interview, and for the final entity, 3 board members were interviewed separately. Three people were interviewed separately who worked for the Grasslands National Park and represented the Park's involvement in the SARPAL Grass Banking project. Finally, one person was interviewed who worked for a non-governmental organization, which had done some pilot project research regarding the SARPAL Grass Banking program for SODCAP Inc. This interview was recorded separately and was included in the overall final report but not included in the general data set of producer interviews.

Due to having a few instances where more than one person participated in a single interview, it is not possible to accurately record the results by the percentage of respondents, so this data will be noted as ‘approximately’, as in ‘approximately 80% of respondents were in the age range of 55 to 65 years old’. In presenting the findings, we use quotations from the transcribed interviews as those are the study’s data. Quotations have been slightly edited for grammar and some words have been added if needed, and placed within brackets, to increase clarity. In order to ensure anonymity, the names of SODCAP Inc. program managers have been omitted and replaced with the generic phrase {SODCAP Inc. program manager}.

4.1 Demographics
Questions were asked to gain an understanding of the demographic profile of producers participating in SARPAL. The largest number, 10 people, identified as being in the age range of 55 to 65, 5 identified as being 45 to 55, 5 as being 35-45 and the 4 co-operative ventures listed their age ranges respectively as 35 to 45, 30 to 65, 35 to 45, and 25 to 55.

The majority, 22 people have been ranching their entire lives. One person has ranched for 22 years and another for less than 5 years. Two co-operative ventures responded they have ranched their whole lives, one noted the venture has been operating for 6 years and the other said their organization had been in operation for 4 years. Grasslands National Park has had cattle in the park for 14 years. The vast majority of producers had completed high school and had a few years of college or university, with a few completing a college diploma or university degree.
All of the producers interviewed had children, with the majority having 2 children, and a slightly lesser amount having 3. Almost all producers interviewed were operating a family ranch. The largest number of respondents, nine people, were 3rd generation ranchers, 7 were 4th generation, 3 were second generation, 2 were 5th generation, 1 was 1st generation and another was not operating a family ranch (Figure 2). One person noted his family had owned their ranch for 105 years, and another producer noted that their ranch had been family owned since 1908. The 4 co-operative ventures all noted that most of their members operated 2nd, 3rd and 4th generation family ranches.

The majority of producers run a cow/calf operation, followed by a slightly lesser number that run a cow/calf and backgrounder operation. The amount of cattle each producer had varied greatly and, of course, fluctuates; and some producers were not comfortable in sharing that information. Answers ranged from 100 cows to over 1,000. An average would be 500 cows. The co-operative ventures had over 1,000 cows and Grasslands National Park had between 1,500 and 2,000 of other producers’ cows grazing in the park.

Producers owned and leased varying amounts of land as well. For our purposes there is close to 78,000 acres in Results Based Conservation Agreements, over 127,000 acres in Habitat Management Agreements, just over 700 acres in Habitat Restoration Agreements and 40,000 acres in Grassbank Agreements. As is noted later in the report, many producers stated that they would be willing to put much more of their land into SARPAL agreements, if the SARPAL program had the funds to support this.

The vast majority of producers ranched both native and tame grass, with just under half stating that their land is mostly native grass and 3 people stating their land was all native grass. Three of the 4 co-operative ventures use both native and tame grass, with the majority being native grass,
and 1 uses all native grass. Grasslands National Park uses both, but is predominantly native grass.

The majority of producers have been involved in previous government programs. Twice as many producers have been involved in the Environmental Farm Plan than not, including 3 of the 4 co-operative ventures. Twenty-one producers have been involved with the Farm Stewardship Program, including all 4 of the co-operative ventures, and 7 had not. Almost every producer had been involved in the Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program, including all 4 of the co-operative ventures, only 5 had not.

When asked about their goals for the operation, the majority of producers replied that they wanted to be both profitable and sustainable, and that they would like to be able to pass a healthy ranch along to the next generation. Many mentioned environmental protection as a goal as well.

Photo credit: Melanie Toppi

4.2 Producer’s Perceptions of the SARPAL Program
A series of questions were asked to gather the perspective of the producers who participated in the SARPAL initiative to gain insight into what aspects of the initiative were most successful and which elements they found challenging.

The SARPAL program is different from other government programs

When asked if they thought that the SARPAL program is different from other government and industry programs they had been involved in, approximately 90% of producers said that it was. They stated that this program is conservation based instead of farm income support based, and that the local delivery of the program involved practical solutions, flexibility, was non-prescriptive and results based, and educational with a focus on habitat. The program was designed so that it could offset financial pressures such as paying bills and mortgages instead of overstocking, which would degrade the habitat. They noted this program was not focused on securement in perpetuity and that it rewarded producers for their range stewardship. Further,
when asked this question, a representative of a non-governmental organization that had engaged in preliminary grass bank research with SODCAP Inc. noted that:

Yes, in that it is very producer-centric. More producer-centric than other types of programs. It is meeting the needs of producers, recognizing the economics of ranching, those realities, and how good grass management can also produce good biodiversity outcomes.

Producers are satisfied with SARPAL program options

When asked what program option they were involved in, there were 4 interested in Term Conservation Easements, 2 in Niche Product Branding, 4 producers involved in Grassbanking, (plus 3 staff members from Grasslands National Park interviewed regarding this option), 6 in Habitat Restoration Agreements, 13 in Habitat Management Agreements and 16 in Results Based Conservation Agreements. All producers said they were satisfied with the SARPAL program options offered. Many producers said that they like the option they are in but that they don’t know much about the others, and that they valued that the program was delivered by a local organization. They liked SARPAL better than other government funded programs that invest in securement, such as conservation easements and fee simple purchase, and ECCC taking over federal pastures. They felt that the program was limited, however, by inadequate funding terms—they wanted longer agreements—and a lack of stock water options to assist with drought. They were concerned as well about the interplay between drought and management as they felt drought may negatively affect their ability to meet their program targets. These concerns around water and drought indicate a need for further education from SODCAP Inc., as SODCAP Inc. delivers the FRWIP water supply program, and there is a clause in each SARPAL agreement that deals specifically with this issue of drought. Finally, many producers noted that they were proud of their past management and the condition of their pastures and they appreciated being recognized and rewarded for their management. Comments included:

Yes, what was offered was fine. It's just the security of it that is not good enough to do any long term planning.

Yes, I think they're good programs that they offer. We're always looking for more ways to get funding for the way we manage our grass. You have to go long way to find grass that's been managed as we have over the years and in the state that it's out there right now.

Producers appreciate being recognized and rewarded for good stewardship

When asked why they chose to participate in the program, the main themes that arose were because they could be recognized and rewarded for the way they had already been managing their land, and the need for them to make minimal or no changes to engage with SARPAL; and that the program helped them make adjustments on their land for which they may have lacked the financial capability, or the specific expertise to do. They expressed appreciation for the financial and technical support available to tackle issues such as grazing management rejuvenation and control of leafy spurge. They appreciated that the program is conservation
focused rather than production focused, especially when they faced financial pressure. Producers felt they were more involved in conservation through this program and less skeptical about the value of conserving species at risk habitat on their land. They expressed an increased appreciation of the extension for restoration and grazing management and monitoring, individual project management, and negotiation with outside partners. Producers’ commented:

Well I guess as conservation, we support that and I think we should be recognized for that. But also to learn more about it too you know, what we should be doing as far as habitat. With SARPAL we certainly have been made more aware of it. And, why shouldn't we be recognized and be compensated for that? We should be rewarded for our stewardship, even though we haven't changed a lot, it’s what we have always done, but if it's good for habitat and for species at risk, we should be rewarded for it absolutely.

“I FELT THAT WE WERE MANAGING OUR GRASS IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT WAS A GOOD FIT FOR OUR OPERATION TO BE RECOGNIZED AND REWARDED FOR PROPER GRASS MANAGEMENT. AS WELL AS HAVING THE DATA ALONG WITH EVERYONE ELSE SAYING THAT RANCHERS ARE THE BEST ENVIRONMENTALIST AND STEWARDS OF THE LAND.”

Other organizations and other people get rewarded for doing that kind of work. Why shouldn't we?

When asked what elements of the federal SARPAL program they liked the best, the majority of the producer’s again responded that they appreciated being recognized and rewarded for good stewardship practices. They stressed a desire for the government to continue to support and promote the concept of producers providing a public good and recognizing their good management and conservation. Producers’ comments included:

I don’t really know enough about it all, but I do think it’s time—if the people of Canada want species at risk protected, then the landowners should not be the only ones paying for it, to protect them.

What I like is that the people, us, we're on the land and we're making a living off it and we're getting rewarded for our stewardship. If they're going to be paying money for helping species at risk and their habitat, and, you know, if all these other organizations can get funded, their obviously getting money from somewhere, so why shouldn't we?
Why are we exempt? Like an everyday job, if you do a good job you get rewarded, and recognized as well. So I like that the federal government's finally saying that, you know what, this is a smart place to put our money. I don't think enough people understand what we do for species at risk. Also it’s really flexible and not prescriptive and telling you what to do.

“I am glad they are recognizing that the managers of native prairie are contributing to the survival of species at risk in providing the habitat. It is so often we are legislative in what to do when you are doing it willingly. Most of the participants in this particular SARPAL program must have been doing it already because you don’t change your native prairie from this year to the next to qualify. So we are being recognized for our contributions.”

I think what I like about it a lot is that I've always seen agriculture as one of the biggest opportunities for promoting conservation, and I think the government has finally recognized that there are opportunities there. And by providing that funding, it really can shift the thought process of a producer who's needing to pay the bills and needing to keep the grass managed sustainably through the future, that that financial incentive can be really key, and kind of shifting what they're willing to do on the land…And also recognizing that you don't have to buy the land to protect it or to conserve it or to do good things for species at risk. You can just work with the people who own the land.

Further, when asked this question, a representative of a non-governmental organization that had engaged in preliminary grass bank research with SODCAP Inc. noted that:

I like that it's federal recognition of the linkages between agriculture and biodiversity conservation. I like that it is an opportunity for producers to benefit from the good work that they do, that contributes to the public good, not just to their own private economic interests, and I see that as government's role to support those kinds of efforts.

Producers want the federal SARPAL program to offer more funds and longer terms

When asked what elements of the federal SARPAL program they liked the least, half of the producers responded that they had no complaints really, however, a primary complaint expressed was the lack of long-term security of program funding. They felt that the funding levels do not accurately reflect the true value of conservation measures undertaken by producers, and they have a perception that too much of the funding is spent on administration. Some producers thought that SARPAL was only available to SSGA members, which is not the case. Producers
suggested that the geographical scope of the program should reach beyond the South of the Divide. They also offered a critique of various other government programs and initiatives, such as a distrust of the Emergency Protection Order issued over the Greater Sage Grouse in past, too much funding distributed to Grasslands National Park and the lack of grazing for so many years in the park. Further, they expressed a dislike of land purchases by environmental NGO’s, species at risk release projects, and a lack of enforcement for the breaking of native grass. One rancher noted:

I’m not saying they should give us more, but that money that they're giving us, is not even close to what it's costing us…and it’s too short term, longer term programs give us all more security and probably would have more impact.

A local SARPAL delivery team is very valuable

Producers were next asked what elements they liked the most about the specific SARPAL program they were involved in. Responses here echoed what they had stated in earlier questions; mainly that they liked the flexibility and the cooperative nature of the program. However, in this question they further stated that they really appreciated having a local program delivery team. They expressed appreciation of the SODCAP Inc. staff and the services they provide, such as project management, monitoring, education on species at risk issues, extension, negotiating agreements, leadership, flexibility, adaptability, availability and experience. They noted that they liked the results based approach, and that the funding is good, but they would prefer it to be adequate enough to assist in times of financial pressure, such as a bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) outbreak, and other issues which create market fluctuations; comments included:
Well, I really liked the leadership of {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} and all that they’ve done, like a lot of paperwork and so on, that's what we like the best. It's just been great dealing with them, they’ve helped us a lot. Well, if you compare it to a program where you just fill out an application, you send it in and you may or may not get the funding, this is so much bigger than that. It’s great actually, they are on site and around.

We are able to deal with people with experience in the area and they know what we should do and how we should do it. They worked out the funding options with us and there were no strings attached. There was money up front when we needed the cash flow. People don’t know how much it costs to rejuvenate the land—it’s expensive and it’s uncertain. There are always huge costs.

“That they are flexible and they know the area, not from Calgary or Toronto, and have the same interests, and they leave us alone. They recognize what we have done in the past and that we want the same thing they do.

Producers were asked what elements they liked the least about the specific SARPAL program they were involved in. Many producers said they had no issues, but others voiced concerns such as the term being too short, inadequate funding, a lack of follow up and one producer suggested having a database that records their participation in the program that they might use to counter oil and gas projects on their leased land. One rancher noted:

Well, the term right. So, obviously the term is short and it's tough to do any long term planning...And it's mainly time. You know, you negotiate with the money, and I think the money could actually be more, but the time is actually more important, because anything over what you get normally is ok, but not a lot, so the money, I think that it's going to have to be better than that, at some point. So this government needs to know that it's either that or they will have to accept the fact that everything they have other than their provincial federal pastures and their national parks will not be saved. Recently a guy purchased 100 quarters of land that was native eight weeks ago that has a crop that's six inches high right now. So not only was it broken, but if everything is based on production, and if we don't have a way to either open the markets up in a way that people can maintain these lands in their native state, it's not going to happen.
Incentives worked, but there is room for improvement

When asked of if the incentives offered had any influence on their decision to participate in the program, producers had mixed feelings; some noted that the cash payment was helpful and that it may incentivize others to manage their range more proactively to conserve species at risk habitat. Others noted that grazing in the park was an absolute incentive; they also felt that the funding was recognizing them for good range management. One rancher stated:

Well the incentive was a cash payment per acre and definitely it was the reward for what we had been doing, so we would be foolish to not take it. It’s the greater good…but if they put a dollar value on a pair of Greater Sage Grouse hens then why should we carry all that responsibility if it’s for the public and the greater good? The public should, if they want Greater Sage Grouse in the native prairie, maybe they could help support the managers of the native prairie…They are finding out that ranching wasn’t the evil thing when the park first came in. That is what soured a bunch of people, they were saving it from the ranchers and then they found out that the ranchers were saving it all along.

Suggestions to improve the incentives

Throughout the interviews producers have shared their opinions on how the SARPAL program incentives may be improved; they suggested more funding and longer contracts, that the government should fund producers through programs like SARPAL rather than acquiring land and taking it away from producers, and make more funding available for individual projects. They suggested more project site tours such as to promote the Niche Product Branding option, with a focus on increasing awareness to the consumer on the valuable role that producers play in grasslands conservation, and more promotion to the public in general, on the valuable role of producers in species at risk habitat conservation. They also suggest the general public be made aware that production and profitability could be increased if the land was farmed, or more intensively managed, which would result in habitat loss for species at risk. Producers asked for an increased focus on youth involvement, and succession planning to facilitate intergenerational transfer when grassland conservation is important. They suggested that SODCAP Inc. could advocate and negotiate on their behalf regarding their participation in SARPAL when other industries and groups seek access to their lands. Producers noted it would be beneficial to increase awareness of the FSP (Farm Stewardship Program) and the FRWIP (Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program) and to explore the creation of carbon tax credits and municipal tax credits for grassland conservation. They suggested the scope of the program be broadened beyond the South of the Divide region so that more producers could participate, and to place more emphasis on ecosystem or multi-species approaches and decreasing the fragmentation of grasslands. It was suggested they might explore the application of further technology, such as the use of drones to spray invasive weeds, and an increase in incentives for management in remote areas. Further ways they suggested the SARPAL program incentives may be improved are broadening the scope of the Grass Banking option, increasing advertising and outreach to attract more participants to the program, and advancing the notion of Term Conservation Easements and less environmental NGO land purchases. A sample of comments include:
More funding…we would have joined with a lot more acres, much more land if they could fund it.

Maybe it would be best if you could work with the RM’s on the reduction of taxes because…if I am putting it back to native grass I should see some tax benefit at the rural municipality level. But if I called them up out of the blue there is no way they are even going to listen to me, but if you (SODCAP Inc.) called them up they may listen. What about carbon credits? That is another idea…passing off such credits, if there were to be a cap and rate system to the producer, would be hugely beneficial to him and make sure the producer gets all of that if the producer is to sign up to the program

I would like to see the target payment for no break, no drain, 25 year term agreements increased. I would like to see them be a longer term than then five years. And I would like to see this funded wholly, for them to put more dollars towards it because if they would fund it we would put more land in it. Again, recognizing that these are the best managers for critical habitat that we have and we need to reward them for their work and keep them on the land.

“They need to make the incentives more powerful, they'll have to if they want to change behavior, because, like, I don't want to step on our foot, but they haven't changed anything. The funding offered is not anywhere good enough to get anyone to change their ways to join. They should recognize the public good of us looking after these public lands, not tearing up the land, and sequestering carbon and reward us at a fair rate for that. For other ranchers who may not believe in protecting the species at risk or ecosystem, this funding is not enough to change your mind for sure.”

Producers were asked if they felt the technical assistance offered in SARPAL was adequate. The majority asserted it was, one rancher commented:

Yes, it definitely is beneficial because, like, after they did their assessment last year, I asked him for the results and he did get them to me so that we could actually look at them, and you know, it wasn't just them saying yep, you qualified here's your money. At least they explained to us why we qualified, you know, how much wiggle room we have. They said we had so much litter and we’re allowed this much, and also, you know, I could tell myself then whether I needed to graze a little more or less or change the time where they grazed. So that was really beneficial.

Most producers felt that the overall level of engagement and outreach for SARPAL was adequate. Some examples of outreach that SODCAP Inc. engaged in are a poster presentation and a plenary session at the 2019 Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference, hosting a tour for the Provincial Ministers of Agriculture and Environment, and a tour for the Wyoming Conservation Exchange. They had producer presentations at the Saskatchewan Cattlemen’s Association Zone meeting and the SSGA and SODCAP Annual General Meetings.
There have been articles on the program in the media and in industry newsletters, both online and print format. One producer commented:

Yes, they came to you, they're reaching out to us all the time, and we have {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} on speed dial.

**Suggestions to improve SARPAL**

When asked what changes they would like to see in the SARPAL program, to better assist them in protecting species at risk and conserving wildlife, producers had a range of ideas, such as higher incentives and longer terms, targeting people in charge of large provincial pasture rangelands, excluding oil and gas development on lands under SARPAL and outreach to increase participation in the program. They suggested making expensive, specialized equipment available for loan, adding support for water improvement projects and cross fencing, expanding agreements to cover multispecies and providing a written report for every section in the program to the producer. One producer noted:

Higher incentives and longer terms. We need the funding to be consistent…They could also consider going after one or two or three people at the highest of high levels in a provincial pasture system, they could nail down a million and a half acres without talking to anybody else. The problem with that though, is they're copying what happens everywhere instead of complimenting it, and the rest of the ranchers don’t grow and learn and they will stay the same. But, with the pasture systems you could go after less people and nail down a lot of acres that have been looked after pretty well.

![Sprague's Pipit](image)

*Sprague's Pipit*

*Photo credit: Melanie Toppi*

**Producers greatly value having a local delivery agency**

When asked if having a local SARPAL program management team had any influence on their decision to participate in SARPAL, the majority responded that it did. Many producers remarked that they knew and trusted the SODCAP Inc. team who were ranchers who knew the industry
personally, and that they valued staff continuity as the team is comprised of local ranchers committed to their ranch in the area, comments included:

Absolutely, when they brought the contract for me to sign it, and I mean it was, I don't know how many pages, and I definitely did think twice about signing on the bottom line. And so it probably really did make a difference that it was {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} instead of somebody that I didn’t know. Because when I read it, well, it's all new to me, right? Like the McCown’s Longspur and Pipit and stuff and I was like, what is that? Like, who knows about that? Does every rancher know that stuff? So I think sometimes you do have to have a bit of a leap of faith right and to say, well, if they are ranchers and I trust them, well, this must make sense.

I appreciate that the SODCAP (Inc.) team are very much producers themselves. They understand the reality of my operation…You know you see people that come, like fly in from Toronto or something and tell you how to do it. They don't know the reality right? Like it's not Ontario, you know.

Similarly, when asked if there were any key individuals who influenced their decision to sign up for the program, a couple people mentioned fellow ranchers, and an overwhelming majority of producers listed SODCAP Inc. staff members; producers stated:

{The SODCAP Inc. program manager}, he’s a rancher and I know him and trust him, as do some of my friends.

{The SODCAP Inc. program managers}, I really liked their approach and I would say that I think a lot of the success for this program is due to the staff that they've placed in the program.

Producers’ clearly valued that the SARPAL program was being delivered by SODCAP Inc. in this region. When asked if the fact that they are a local organization with ranchers serving at all levels of the organization, had any influence on their decision to participate in SARPAL, the overwhelming majority of producers said that it had. A sample of comments are:

We are trying to convey to the public that we are fine stewards of the land… and that I have government leased land that is owned by the people of Saskatchewan, that in theory, I am managing for the people. As ranchers we need to participate in order to let the public know that under some difficult circumstances we are trying to manage the land well, and it is not only the grass, it is the water, we are sequestering carbon…and environmentally we are the main environmentalist that are out here. We got boots on the ground, we got flesh in the game and it is to our long-term advantage that things are well taken care of.

We own 1 quarter of land and lease the rest from the government so the government might appreciate having SODCAP (Inc.) act as local stewards of their leased land.
Producers were asked if the fact that SODCAP Inc. was a non-governmental organization (NGO) had any impact on their decision to participate in the program, and the results were mixed; one rancher noted:

Definitely. I’m not sure we would have done it otherwise, we may not have even known about it. With other programs you have to search for them and then e-mail to ask and then fill out an online application and send off and it’s time consuming and can be complicated and time critical to meet deadlines; so yes, this made a huge difference. Also, the SODCAP Inc. team will help you do applications, which is very helpful.

*The SARPAL program was designed to be synergistic with agricultural operations*

We asked producers’ to describe what activities they are doing to protect species at risk or to conserve wildlife on their property and the majority of responses focused on not overgrazing their range; one rancher noted:

…We don't actually graze our native grass lots of times until the winter and so you know the species are gone then. That's been our practice, I've always looked at the native grass as my grass bank. That to me is, when I have a problem, that I can always go to that… Anyway, the cattle actually create that habitat, the best for species at risk and I don't think we've been given enough credit for that, you know, in the past.

When asked why producers’ took those actions, they invariably answered it was simply good range management, what was best for their cows, which also is good for maintaining species at risk habitat. Responses included:

I was not thinking species at risk when I did these things, it was the right management things to do to try and enhance my livestock enterprise. I don’t try and do things to manage our livestock that are purposely detrimental to the rest of the critters in the environment-- long term that’s detrimental to you surviving in the livestock business. This cattle business is a typically a low margin business, there is not a lot of room for error.

Well, I'd like to apologize for the environmentalist, but it wasn't for that arrangement. Yeah, it's in our own best interest, good range management. If we don't look after it we can't run our cows there and we’re out of business.

“*Well, just try to have a healthy, viable ranch. We’re just doing what we’ve always done and if it’s healthy for the cows it’s healthy for everything. Our job is looking after the land that looks after us.”*
Producer’s were asked if their participation in SARPAL had any influence on how they decided to manage species at risk habitat, and the responses were mixed. Comments included:

Well, it was an education probably and I suppose the influences are subtle but they’re still there. We didn't change everything that we were doing but it just helped us to do things a little differently, and with those little tweaks can come big dividends for everybody. It makes you aware of what is out there, now we look for the Loggerhead Shrike and know what it looks like. I guess it's a bit of an awakening, those are things that have interested you, but you don't really take the time to educate yourself. Like I learned how to do transects and the robel pole and it was great. And now I'm passing that love of grass and the diversity of what's in it onto a 15 year old that, you know, hopefully she can learn from it and take it on and into her toolbox for future.

Well, I guess I stepped into the program and I was meeting the criteria. But now I had the incentive to keep on doing it that way. This supports you to make the right decisions. So it's easier to make the right decision because you get a little extra bump financially.

“No, we just have always managed this way for healthy pasture a long time before anyone thought about species at risk. You just think about species in general, like your number one is cows, but you know that if your cows are happy and healthy then everything else is going to be healthy and happy, right, like good habitats. I've honestly, up until five years ago, never thought about the word habitat. You know, you're not saying oh, God, that's nice habitat. You look at your range, your grassland and you want it to look nice, looking good, healthy. So that's what you're thinking about. But habitat wasn't even in our vocabulary. It’s just that if we don’t look after it, we're not here and if we're not here, then yeah, no one's looking after it.”

When asked if participation in SARPAL had any influence on how they decided to manage their land in regard to drought preparedness, the responses were most often that they had been managing for drought for many years, so no; but also yes, in that it helped them by giving them some extra room to manoeuvre for drought. For example, comments included:

Absolutely, using the park to graze saves our grass from getting abused so it withstands drought better, and we’re not hurting the park. If I rest a field one year it gets me two years of drought proofing, so with SARPAL now we can rest a lot more and that helps with drought preparedness.

Again, I'm going to say no because we'd already managed for drought and the last three years showed us we've been doing a really good job, forgive me for being a bit pompous. But yeah, that's sure a good feeling and especially now that we're getting some rain.
We asked producers if they felt that being involved in SARPAL changed the way they managed their land to support rangeland sustainability, and the results were mixed; comments included:

Yes, it helps us to not overgraze and it helps our lease fees; it helps to not have to use the land to the maximum.

Yes, it did, it made me more aware of different ways of keeping the cattle away from the water holes or spreading them out more and watching your patterns of grazing and trying to work with the cattle on where they'd want to be and I'm trying to encourage them to be.

When we asked if they thought that being involved in SARPAL has helped them make decisions to adapt to extreme weather events on their property, many said that it had not; producers stated:

Yes, it’s helped with the drought thing. I mean we do the same management we always did, not overgrazing and resting pasture as best we can, but SARPAL helps us do it now, makes it easier for us.

No, not really. I think the area we live in kind of requires us to have that built in, you know? My family’s ranched here for over 100 years now so we have passed down information on land and range management, it’s our legacy.

When asked if participation in SARPAL had increased their awareness of the relationship between species at risk and climate, the majority of producers answered that it had not; some stated:

I’m not sure, I’ve been ranching this land my whole life, I’m attuned to weather and climate.
No, we were aware of it long before they decided to try and make us aware of it.

When asked if participating in SARPAL influenced how they felt about discussing issues regarding species at risk, the majority of producers said that it did. Responses included:

Yes, it's created more awareness and we have learned more. Like we have Leopard frogs. Who knew? …I'm not scared to say we have species or risk anymore…We are actually proud that we have species at risk because our land is good enough for them to live. It shows again good land management.

Yes, it made me more educated on it and able to discuss it more, I think I can speak more. But when we work with these species at risk people, they educate us and we educate them.

We asked, “SODCAP Inc. have directed their main efforts toward conserving the Prairie Loggerhead Shrike, Greater Sage Grouse, Sprague’s Pipit, Northern Leopard Frog, Chestnut Collared Longspur, Swift Fox, and McCown’s Longspur. Do you have any of these species on your land?” The producers reported that they were unsure sometimes what they had at any given time, that populations change, and they often rely on the experts to tell them what is on their property. In total 23 producer’s said they had the Prairie Loggerhead Shrike, 5 had the Greater Sage Grouse, 26 had the Sprague’s Pipit, 21 had the Northern Leopard Frog, 12 had the Chestnut Collared Longspur, 11 had the Swift Fox, and 11 had the McCown’s Longspur.

We asked producers if they had heard of any success stories, due to SARPAL, regarding the protection and conservation of any of these species, and almost all responded no, with many noting that it would be hard to attribute any results to SARPAL as the species come and go, and SARPAL is such a new program. Comments included:

I don't think so but it's pretty early to ask that question. Hopefully we do hear that.

Hard to say, people get confused in all the different programming, but, yes, there’s definitely been some success stories, although weather changes and species shift habitat as well.

100% of producers felt that being involved in SARPAL was beneficial to them

When asked, 100% of producers felt that being involved in SARPAL was beneficial to them as ranchers, comments included:

Guaranteed. Definitely for leafy spurge management.

Oh yes. It takes some financial pressure of you and it is rewarding good management, it is a win-win.

Absolutely. Not just financially, but we need to protect our right to raise beef, and do it in a in a way that shows environmental sustainability as well as production system sustainability. And the only way that we are going to do that going forward is to prove that we are doing our jobs and the SARPAL agreements provides a vehicle and a tool to do that, when it comes to showing the people in Ottawa.
Grasslands National Park staff agreed as well, stating:

Yes, for the park, we're getting data and we're working collaboratively with grazing partners and it’s building and improving neighbor relations or maybe changing them even.

Wondering if ranchers saw any connection between ranching, species at risk, and climate change, we asked them the following question “the SARPAL program strives to support ranchers’ agricultural production, while also protecting and conserving species at risk. There is also a need for ranchers to prepare to manage weather events like drought and flood—do you see any relationship between these three activities?” All but one responded that they did see a connection, comments included:

Yes, it’s all interconnected, the native grasses and the native species that are on those grasses, they were here first and we're just utilizing the leftovers, call it the abundance, and so we have to manage it properly to support them, and if not they won’t be here and we won’t be here either.

Sure, it’s all connected to range management and caring and protecting the grass to survive drought and be financially viable. If we are successful species at risk will be protected.

Further, when asked this question, a representative of a non-governmental organization that had engaged in preliminary grass bank research with SODCAP Inc. noted that:

Absolutely. Essentially, keeping grass grass side up is one of the best ways to maintain some resilience in the face of climate change and maintain those species there. So really, by maintaining ranching livelihoods, you're combating or adapting to climate change.

When asked if they had any final comments to add on anything we’d discussed, or the SARPAL program in general, many took the opportunity to add some parting thoughts, such as:

Well, I think sometimes when you're living on the tarmac you forget what the guys on the grasslands are doing for you. There’s a need for public education. Ranchers are feeding Canadians safe food and protecting species at risk and we should be supported for this, especially as Canadians want safe food and species at risk conservation.

You already have active managers, right? It’s kind of like you're hiring a manager that's already in place, and actually they’re eating from it and their kids are eating from it. So the investment can't get any deeper; all you have to do is support what they're already doing. And they're not going to care if you want to come and measure, or you know, they're going to be proud of what they got and are managing well. But if you look at them, like managers or stewards or whatever, and reward them for what's already been done, then it'll stay conserved… So same with this program, trying to reward folks that are already doing it rather than run them off and then hire somebody to do exactly what they were doing before…
It’s an awesome program and I like that you are evaluating it and asking the opinion of the ranchers.

“Well, the people in the city need to be educated more about ranching and where their food comes from. We are feeding the world and protecting species at risk at the same time. The public is out of touch and needs to be educated on our industry. They need to understand the pride we take in what we do, this is our passion and it is not about money, there is not enough profit to be made. The public should support us in supporting species at risk so we can ensure that our young people can afford to be here and carry on, succession planning and a sense of security is important.”

Further, when asked this question, a representative of a non-governmental organization that had engaged in preliminary grass bank research with SODCAP Inc. noted that:

I think that recognizing ranchers for the good work that they do is important. That the only way you can achieve conservation at scale is through those kinds of efforts, keeping ranching, those livelihoods. Keeping the ranchers on the land and keeping grass grass side up is really the only way you can achieve that scale, those kinds of outcomes that you're looking for, for species at risk, and in adapting to climate change and addressing those kinds of environmental issues.

5. Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Recommendations
The extensive use of direct quotations applied in this report were used to show the real-world, thoughtful, and widespread opinions of the ranchers who had on the ground experience with the program. Consideration of their views offers an exceptional opportunity to more fully understand the strengths and the weaknesses of the SARPAL initiative, from the opinions of those the program was designed to serve. The perceptions of the producers recorded in this research present a valuable opportunity to inform policy regarding species at risk on agricultural land in general, and, more specifically, may contribute to policy development for a potential second phase of the SARPAL program. The research data presented here clearly illustrates that the producers involved with the SARPAL program support and value this initiative.
5.1.1 Recommendations for SODCAP Inc. and the SSGA

Considering the data from the interviews with producers, we offer the following 10 recommendations for SODCAP Inc. and the SSGA, as local delivery agents, to improve their program administration:

- **Provide more project site tours.** Producers expressed an interest to learn from other ranchers and share their experiences with SARPAL with their neighbors and other producers. They would also like to provide opportunities for the general public to learn about their conservation efforts through tours to promote the Niche Product Branding option with a focus on increasing awareness to the consumer of the value that producers provide for conservation.

- **Promote producer conservation management to the Canadian public.** Producers expressed a strong desire to increase awareness to the general public, nationally, on the value that cattle ranchers provide for conservation.

- **Promote involvement in the Farm Stewardship Program (FSP) and the Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program (FRWIP).** Producers engaged in SARPAL have expressed a desire for services that are offered through these programs, that may enhance their SARPAL program options, and seem to currently lack awareness of options available to them.

- **Increase the focus on youth involvement.** Producers noted that it takes time to educate a successor and that it would be beneficial to start the promotion of species at risk habitat conservation as early as possible for the next generation of ranchers.

- **Provide advocacy for producers involved in SARPAL.** SODCAP Inc. and the SSGA may advocate for producers that are leading in conservation when other industries and groups want access to their lands or when there is the need for broader negotiations. They can further support producers through advocacy related to water issues and carbon and income tax credits.

- **Educate the Canadian public about range management options.** Producers expressed a desire for an increase in awareness to the general public, that production and profitability could be increased--and critical habitat sacrificed--if producers’ land was farmed or more intensively managed.

- **Increase program promotion.** Producers suggest that the SARPAL program would benefit from an increase in advertising and awareness of the programming options to increase participation in the program.

- **Support successional planning.** Producers identified a challenge in successional planning to facilitate intergenerational transfer when grassland conservation is important, and suggested that SODCAP Inc/SSGA could play a role in meeting this challenge.
• **Explore the use of further technology.** It was identified that technology such as drone application to spray invasive weeds would be beneficial to advance conservation, and to consider making expensive equipment available for loan to producers for conservation purposes.

• **Investigate the creation of tax credits.** Producers suggested that there would be value in SODCAP Inc. and the SSGA exploring the creation of municipal tax credits and carbon tax credits for grassland conservation.

### 5.1.2 Recommendations for the national SARPAL program

Nine recommendations to improve the program and inform species at risk and agricultural policy, derived from our interviews with producers involved in every SARPAL program option offered, are as follows:

- **A need for longer term funding.** Producers strive to make a living and to leave their ranches in sound environmental and financial shape to leave to the next generation. As in any business, it is a challenge to make sound decisions without having long-range security through programs such as this. Producers are well aware that short term range management decisions may have long term effects, and they may hesitate to sign up to short term funding programs that may require changes in their range management. As it is widely acknowledged that Canada’s temperate grasslands are in rapid decline, that they are a vital habitat for many species at risk, and that cattle grazing provided by ranchers in these grasslands is beneficial to protecting these habitats, producers feel that there is a strong argument for longer term funding to support them in their careful range management. Five to ten year program funding is recommended.

- **An increase in funding.** The data presented above clearly illustrates that the funding currently offered in the SARPAL program is inadequate. Many producers asserted that they would commit more of their land to the program, if that option had been available; and current funding levels had been described as a ‘token’ by one participant. Further, it was suggested that the current amount of funding available for producers to engage in SARPAL was not nearly enough to incentivize people who may be hesitant to enter into the program. They stated that more funding would be needed to convince a rancher to make substantial changes to their range management to engage in the program. This is a lost opportunity for the program to not simply ‘preach to the converted’ and reward producers for their current range management, which is in alignment with SARPAL; but instead, to strive to educate and encourage behavior change in those producers who currently manage their range in ways that are not as supportive to species at risk conservation as they could be. Funding levels should also recognize and reward for past valuable stewardship and management, including lost opportunities, plus the recognition of investing in correcting problem areas; both need to be invested in.

- **Fund for the conservation of multispecies.** Producers had many comments on the intricacies of species at risk conservation, noting that it is a dynamic enterprise affected by various conditions such as climate, habitat conditions, and the policy decisions made
in other areas where the species migrate—perhaps thousands of miles away. Yet they understood that there is a strong chance that no matter what state their range is in in any year, through flood or drought, the condition of the range may be conducive to the creation of a healthy habitat for one species at risk, while being detrimental to a different species. They suggested that in the grasslands they manage, they will always be providing habitat for some species at risk, no matter the varying conditions each year. They also noted that protecting habitat for one species may endanger another. For example, protecting habitat for the Swift Fox may have a detrimental effect on various bird species at risk in the same grasslands, as the fox will eat the bird’s eggs. For these reasons, the producers recommend that SARPAL does not limit support for individual species and instead, be expanded to support the protection of multispecies.

- **Target funding to specific regions.** Producers’ acknowledge that the South of the Divide is a very unique ecosystem which contains a large amount of un-fragmented grassland providing critical habitat for a large number of species at risk. They suggest that there would be a greater conservation impact if federal government funding was concentrated on species at risk funding to this region, as well as other regions identified as important areas for species at risk conservation, such as the Great Sandhills and Missouri Coteau in Saskatchewan. They feel that targeting funding to specific areas that are proven habitat ‘hotspots’ for species at risk would have a greater impact on conserving those species and their habitat, than dispersing the funding equally across the nation.

- **Target funding to the largest swaths of unbroken grassland.** The fragmentation and breaking up for cultivation of the grasslands is a serious challenge to the habitat of species at risk. Some producers suggest the focus of a large portion of funding for species at risk habitat conservation should be on former community pastures, historically unbroken, which may act as a ‘core base’ for protection of species at risk and their habitat. This ‘base’ could then be expanded out through programs such as SARPAL supporting producers, who manage less acres of grassland, in their conservation efforts.

- **Support a local delivery agency.** Producers’ made it clear that they greatly valued having a local delivery agency for SARPAL. This was noted as a unique, and highly appreciated aspect of the SARPAL program. Species at risk conservation is a relatively new phenomenon in the lifespan of a multi-generational ranch, and historically, there have been government programs and conservation actions that producers’ felt were harmful to their livelihoods, and disrespectful to them personally. As such, producer’s may be hesitant to engage in current species at risk programming. Knowing that the program was being delivered by an organization that is local and comprised of local ranchers at every level of the organization, was reassuring to producers. Many producers knew SODCAP Inc. staff as neighbors and friends, who knew the intricacies and challenges of day to day ranching, especially the subtleties of ranching in the unique ecosystem of the South of the Divide, and this was noted as having a positive effect on their decision to participate in the program. They appreciated knowing that they could have a face to face visit within a week if necessary, that their calls would be answered the day they were made, and that they would not be dealing with a different program manager every few months; as local ranchers employed by SODCAP Inc. had strong ties to the area, and most likely would
not be leaving their family ranch. In programs that may be sensitive to deliver, such as species at risk conservation on agricultural lands, having a local delivery agent may be a valuable resource and may increase both uptake in the program, and longevity of participation in the program.

- **Fund land in production.** Grazing temperate grasslands is proven to be an integral element of conserving species at risk and their habitat. Alloting large amounts of resources to taking land out of production in the grasslands has been proven ineffective. Producers’ assert that federal funding to conserve grasslands and species at risk habitat in that region is much better spent on supporting current, and successive generations of producers who graze the range, provide food for the nation, contribute to the economy, and conserve species at risk and their habitat. Federal funding to support species at risk habitat conservation will have a much greater, and broader impact -- on the economy, food supply, rural development -- and conservation of species at risk and their habitat, if committed to producer focused programs such as SARPAL.

- **Design the program to be synergistic with agricultural operations.** Ranchers appreciated the fact that the SODCAP Inc. team visited their land and discussed the program terms with them, and they noted that the program was not prescriptive, but inclusive. One of the challenges of engaging private land owners and managers in conservation, is incentivizing their participation in stewardship programs. Requiring major changes in the management of their land may be a deterrent to program uptake. Ranchers in our study were able to participate in the program while having to make only subtle changes to their range management. This synergy of management for their operation and for critical habitat conservation, resulted in them feeling rewarded and recognized for their range management, and increased their interest in, and knowledge of species at risk. The high level of satisfaction with SARPAL illustrates that this program design is effective.

And;

- **Align policy among government agencies.** Producers expressed frustration that the nation is signaling that they value species at risk protection and that of their habitat, and yet the funding for these actions is often sporadic, short term, and not aligned throughout various levels of government. They felt that aligning funding sources and policy making across all levels of government, from local municipalities to provincial and federal government agencies and departments, and extending funding into 5 - to 10 - year packages, would signal a serious commitment to species at risk conservation, and would result in a much greater impact. They feel that this alignment would enable programs they see real world, on the ground value in, such as SARPAL, to have real, tangible, meaningful impact on, and progress towards conserving species at risk and their habitat.
5.2 Conclusions

*Beef producers are integral to both conserving species at risk and the Canadian economy*

Cattle producers have a vital role to play in conserving our last remaining grasslands and species at risk habitat, while also making a substantial contribution to our nation’s food safety and supply, and our economy. Small and medium sized enterprises (SME’s) are an integral part of the Canadian economy. A 2016 Toronto Dominion bank reported noted that nearly 99% of private agricultural employment is attributable to SME’s (firms with less than 500 employees). The Canadian agriculture sector plays an important role in the Canadian economy and Canada remains one of the world leading exporters of agriculture products. As reported by the 2016 Census of Agriculture, agricultural operations in Canada employed 280,315 people in 2015, and total farm sales reached $69.4 billion in 2015. Ranches and farms as family-owned SME’s are a leader in job creation and innovation. A 2018 report by the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership notes that within Canada, Saskatchewan is second only to Alberta in cattle production, with Saskatchewan producers generating about $2.26 billion in livestock farm cash receipts in 2017. Further, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has an objective of expanding agricultural exports to $75 billion by 2025. This increased demand will create pressure on the use of natural resources. Even though greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture have decreased since 2008, data from Environment Canada shows that the sector was still responsible for 10% of emissions in 2011. It is important to continue to develop sustainable agricultural practices to reduce the impacts of climate change and conserve biodiversity.

Farmers and ranchers are interested in adopting innovative practices to meet the challenge of climate change. The 2016 Census of Agriculture reported that 5% of farms reported having a renewable energy-producing system on their operation. Of these farms, 85% had solar panels while 16% reported wind turbines. Producers are facing significant environmental, agricultural and conservation challenges. Farmers and ranchers are stepping up to the challenge, and, as true environmental stewards, they should be supported. Further, the Canadian Forage and Grasslands
Association (CFGA) states that there used to be 141.5 million acres of prairie grasslands across western Canada, and that now, only 26 million acres remain. The CFGA note that risks from grassland loss include water quality concerns, a steep decline in grassland birds due to habitat loss, and depleted community resiliency around weather events such as flood and drought. They state that grasslands need more attention and urgency and that there is a need to support a producer-valued system that promotes the retention and enhancement of existing grasslands.

The Action Plan for Multiple Species at Risk in Southwestern Saskatchewan: South of the Divide 2017 report stated:

The conservation of native grassland, which is essential for conserving species at risk in this Action Plan, will provide other ecological goods and services, including forage for livestock, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, pollination and habitat for pollinators, carbon sequestration to slow the rate of climate change, recreation and water storage and filtration...Although difficult to quantify, the value of public goods and services and passive-use values derived from grassland conservation should not be ignored, because they may be significant. For example, the benefit of public goods and services derived from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Community Pasture Program was estimated to be larger than the private benefits that accrued to pasture patrons from grazing. The types of public goods and services provided by the Community Pasture Program were similar to those that would be associated with grassland conservation in general, and were valued at $34 million. Carbon sequestration ($20 million), soil conservation ($2 million), hunting ($4 million) and other recreation ($2.5 million) were significant benefits; while biodiversity was valued much lower ($0.2 million). The land base in this study was about 33% greater than the extent of native grassland in the SoD region. By simple extrapolation, this would translate to an approximate estimate of $25 million in public benefits related to the conservation of native grasslands in the SoD area. Not included in this estimate is the benefit associated with substantially reduced government financial support paid primarily to crop growers. Furthermore, native grasslands in the SoD area provide private benefits to a variety of industries and stakeholders, estimated at approximately $80/ha/yr ($32/ac/yr). Extrapolated across the SoD region, this private benefit amounts to an estimated $60 million per year.

The SARPAL program is valued by producers

The results of this study are clear; producers see significant value in the SARPAL program. One hundred percent of producers interviewed reported being satisfied with the program option they were involved in, and one hundred percent reported feeling that being involved in SARPAL was beneficial to them as ranchers. One of the significant findings of this study was the value of having a local organization delivering the program, which contributed greatly to program uptake and ongoing participation. Producers also greatly valued the sense of recognition for their rangeland stewardship that participation in the SARPAL program offered them. They appreciated being acknowledged and rewarded for their careful management of the temperate grasslands and their contributions to conserving species at risk and their habitat. This sentiment was expressed by a majority of producers. They felt strongly that if Canadians, as a society,
value the conservation of species at risk and their habitat, they should be made aware of the integral role that cattle producers play in this conservation, while also providing a safe and secure food source to the nation, contributing to the national, and often fragile, local economy, and providing a meaningful career opportunity and lifestyle for ongoing generations of Canadians.

Cattle producers are playing a vital role in preserving and promoting Canadian values such as the right to gainful employment and to contribute to our economy, a safe food supply, conservation of our last remaining temperate grasslands, and conservation of species at risk and their habitat. They appreciate the support the SARPAL program offers them in continuing their valuable work, while also offering further education on how to support species at risk on agricultural lands. Producers would like to see the SARPAL program extended, expanded, and funded at a larger scale in order to realize the full potential of its impact.

6. Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the generous support of the MITACS Accelerate program. The researchers are grateful for the open contributions of SODCAP Inc. and SSGA staff. Finally, we are extremely grateful for the generosity of spirit, time, and open sharing of personal opinions of all the producers who agreed to be interviewed.
7. Appendix: A sample of interview questions and responses

What are your goals for your operation?

Responses included:

To be able to have everything clear and be able to just hand it over to the boys without any strings attached and then still have enough to retire. That's a pretty solid goal.

I guess we don’t have written down goals but I guess to be here next year again. Our goal is to be sustainable and to protect the environment.

To pass it down to the next generation and keep it functioning as a profitable ranch.

Well, it's really important to us to sustain our native prairie. That's a goal. We try to grow our cattle as big as we can in an economically efficient way. Our goals aren't really to get a whole lot bigger it's to add on a little bit here and there and just basically to make it a little bit easier to operate. Trying to keep things simple and sustainable.

To carry on as a successful grazing operation for cattle and maintain the ecosystem. It’s important to have a balance between all species and cattle—it’s good for both.

I guess long term is probably to pass it on to my children or grandchildren.

Sustainable living and to keep the environment healthy.

Retirement and to keep our native grass forever. It is nice to have your cattle simply live off the land.

… succession is probably the key you know, that's probably number one…

Do you think the SARPAL program is different from other government and industry programs you have been involved in? If yes, in what ways?

Responses included:

Yes. Instead of approaching our active management about production, it's actually the other way around. It's more about conservation in a sense. So it's actually being funded to create habitat or maintain habitat, instead of about production. So it's actually almost the opposite of most programs. To me the programs that we talked about initially are more farm programs, and habitat is more a ranch program because that's the difference between… like to ranch is to conserve and to farm is to produce.

Oh, yes. I really believe so. Like, you set the program, for the most part. You're being rewarded for doing the right things and you should anyway because if you look after the grass it will look after you. But so many, especially young people, seem to get caught in a jam so they overstock to survive but then it cuts into their survival eventually; and so this program makes it a lot easier to do the right thing.
Well, yes, because number one, we have somebody like {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} coming in, we just deal with them. The other programs, you do the application and then you apply for the –whatever, and you either get it or you don't, right? And this has been different in that we've just totally dealt with {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} whose been here a lot to help us figure things out as we go along, they’ve been wonderful and are a big reason that we got involved in this program.

Yes, this is a grassroots program, the SODCAP (Inc.) team have experience with what we are doing. This is not sending an application off to a far off desk somewhere.

Yes… this one's pretty flexible. So people come out and we design it together. Whereas other programs, it's not really like that. You have to fit the parameters. I feel like these guys were willing to work with us, and negotiate on what would work for us to not be out of reach. Yeah, whereas these other ones, either you fit the criteria or you don't, you know, you gotta fit the box kind of thing. But with this one, it seems that it's more flexible, they talk to you and try to figure out how it's going to work or if it will work. They're willing to work with you. It's more of a partnership than a dictatorship.

Absolutely. What sets SARPAL apart is it’s results based. You know, a lot of the other environmental groups, it's focused on procurement and easements. And SARPAL rewards ranchers for proper management practices. And it is absolutely vital to grass management, absolutely vital, vital to not just the regular species, but especially the species at risk. And if we can reward ranchers for what they're doing, it's a way more effective tool than perpetuity easement.

Yes, for sure, to start with it's not prescriptive. It allows what works for me to be recognized as a habitat that I produce, not telling me how to produce it. It's also not cost shared, so I can manage the ranch as I want and not have to meet specific criteria other than outcomes the program asked for, targets or outcome based. It's not ‘do this and hope it works’.

Yes, well, results based, right, I mean, you set habitat structure goals and then you get paid, or not, by the results. Which is kind of completely different than other programs because the grazing is not created equal, it changes over time, there's various levels. Most times with government programs you got paid to cultivate and for the most part, if you didn't cultivate it, you never got any money, and if you cultivated it, you did. So the incentive in the other programs was always there to actually change it as opposed to keeping it the way it is.

Most definitely. It’s more personal and hands on and much better contact with the people involved, in charge of the program, you can call them anytime and get their opinion. They are very knowledgeable. Also they started by asking my opinion, what I could do about a problem. SODCAP (Inc.) takes ownership of the problems and creates a personal outcome in partnership with the producer. Also that there's ownership for the producer, and when you have your own ownership, you take a first hand lead in it, whereas some of the other programs, there's a real directive on how they want you to manage that. And
with SODCAP (Inc.), I feel that the producer feels that they're still in the driver's seat, there's ownership on their behalf, which then creates a positive outcome for their outfit.

Are you satisfied with the programming options offered?

Responses included:

Yes, but….I guess the question is budgeting right now. The government talks the talk, but they won't walk the walk. They talk about all these great things about stewardship and enhancement and everything. But when it comes down to it, they still put money into buying land and habitat instead of trying to keep the people there that are already managing it, looking after it. Instead they’re actually buying land through the Nature Conservancy, giving them a ton of money, and various other outfits and they don't have anyone to manage them. And that is an issue. So coming out of the same pot of ECCC funding, like, it is so much cheaper to pay these guys that are already doing it, us ranchers, than it is to buy the land and then pay somebody to manage it. When these guys are kind of doing it for nothing now, but it might just take a little bit more to keep them doing what they're doing. I guess the name of the game, or what the SARPAL program is doing, is to try to keep them from turning native land into cultivated, and it's not working. Everything they've done so far hasn't worked. So maybe the fee for service conservation, I think is something that should be examined closer. These options, they're fine for the most part, but an improvement would be more funding.

Yes, but the niche brand marketing could maybe be supported with something like a consumer bus tour to see the ranch and how we manage our range and cattle. Beef advocacy to tie in the consumer to the production stage. Also, they could offer some programming on water options, water reclamation and water systems are always needed. Maybe something on tame hay rejuvenation and management, tame grass management. Also, it would be of value to add some youth programming options to get youth, even as young as 15-16 involved and interested in things like species identification and grass identification.

Why did you choose to participate in the program?

Responses included:

Well, to me when you're raising cows on native grass, you're actually doing it anyway. However, SARPAL allows you to conserve instead of produce. You can bank some grass for security reasons. Which means you can run less animals and then in the wintertime, feed less animals and still be financially viable to allow you to make all your payments and do the things you got to do in order to keep your boat floating.

We were initially reluctant because it is government and there is a fear of dealing with environmentalists as it could be detrimental to us in the long run; but we feel that we were not doing anything that anyone could criticize us for and so we wanted to participate. Also, as I mentioned before, to get another pair of eyes and more experience
to advise us on how we are managing the grass and whether we are regenerative in our grazing management.

The big problem is this (leafy) spurge and it's getting out of hand, and we don't have the resources or the time to conquer it. So {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} is supplying some of the tools and resources and some time and then being able to find the funding to do it, to fund some of these contractors that came in to do a little bit of the spraying for us. All that has definitely helped.

It was a no-brainer. We were invited to participate and it took us awhile to gain access to graze in the park, so for sure, I was in.

We needed to rejuvenate some grass, which is very expensive so we were looking for funding and some added expertise as well, number crunching. SODCAP Inc. provided the funding through SARPAL, which was huge for us. We may not have been able to do it without SARPAL funds.

We were doing it already and we trust the {SODCAP Inc. program manager}. We have always deferred native grass anyway and we are learning as we go. If we overgraze native grass we only hurt ourselves. Good range management for our cattle and conserving species at risk go together.

Well, partially because the cost was free and other than that we wanted to restore some of the ground that was first cultivated in 1914. So I took a lot out of production because we went into cattle and it was kind of a good feeling to do that, for when I turned it over to my son.

…and then we have quite a bit of oil field development here, and the more we can get into these programs and be recognized as a group that is trying to conserve this land and trying to look after nature, trying to, you know, take care of it, gives us a little more clout when we're arguing with oil companies, because, I mean, we don't benefit financially from the oil here as a group.

Comments from Grasslands National Park staff include:

Grass banking as we're doing it in the park, basically, we have a proposed boundary. So the park doesn't own all of the land yet that is encompassed in our proposed boundary. So we have neighbors that own land that the park is hoping to own in the future. SODCAP Inc. partnered with those landowners who own land inside the proposed boundary, to be able to manage both the park and that land that they own kind of as a unit, and that we can influence what's happening on the park land as well as what's happening on neighboring land. So, we can try to improve the habitat for species at risk in kind of a greater area than just what the park is managing. And so what these ranchers do for us is they get access to the park for grazing…and so along with that access, then comes this results based agreement, which is another part of SODCAP (Inc.’s) programming. So their access to our park land is contingent upon their agreement to be involved in this results based program; that program is happening both on the park land and on the private
land that's inside the proposed boundary. So if they meet those targets from the results
based agreements that we've set on the park land, with their grazing management, they
get a discounted grazing fee; and if they meet the targets on their own land, then they get
basically a check in the mail or whatever dollar amount those targets are equal to in the
agreements we've set out…So the park is really pretty happy because we're getting this
grazing management and it's focused on species at risk, which is what we're focused on.
So we want to participate in this program because for Grasslands, one of the primary
goals is to match habitat for species at risk. And by working with these producers, we've
been able to reintroduce grazing to the park, where for a long time, it was completely
excluded. And we can do so in such a way that we know that they've got species at risk
kind of in the back of their minds because they're wanting to reach those targets so they
can get that financial incentive essentially. It's also a good partnership because we take
the data from the field monitoring and we go back to the producer with that data and say
this is where you achieve targets. This is where we think you can do better next year. And
so we can kind of create that grazing plan with them, and in cooperation, rather than just
having like an ultimatum…So it's kind of a unique partnership in that sense.

**What do you like most about SARPAL in general, as a national program?**

Well, they're recognizing stewardship that was already in place. I recognize that Parks
Canada purchased Grasslands with the mentality that their purpose was to save the land
and what they recognized over their first 30 years was when they purchased it in its
native state, somebody else had saved it, whether it be the Indians or cowboys or
whatever it might have been, for them. They already did that. So Parks didn't actually
save it, all they did was fund it. So that's what this program is saying, okay producers,
your conservation side is going to be recognized so that we can keep you there, otherwise
there would be people farming native grassland so fast it would make your eyes bug.

In general, I like the fact that the government's putting money into this, it’s huge. Great,
because without SARPAL and you guys and this this organization, I'm pretty sure we,
well I know we wouldn't be where we're at right now with the leafy spurge. The chemical
control has cut the spurge right back and it’s been a big help for us. It's not a yellow
coolie anymore. So if we didn't have that funding and the resources, yeah, we wouldn't be
where it's at. It’s terrific.

I think it's a good way to keep the sustainability for the land. And, I mean, recognition.
You know, we've been doing this all our lives, we don't overgraze our land. But it costs
us money, absolutely. We can take more cattle there because we are actually under the
stocking rate. But we don’t and it's coming out of our own pockets. So it’s nice when
{the SODCAP Inc. program manager} says well, you guys, you're doing already what we
want, so I mean, it's nice to have the recognition. And a little bit of extra cash.

Well, it looks like the government has recognized that we're stewards of the land, and
committed to helping the environment, and the federal government putting money into it
is sort of a small baby step, saying thank you for helping with the environment...So, I
guess in some small ways the government has acknowledged that ranchers do work for the environment and should be supported financially for that.

The fact that they, the Canadian government, that there's going to be some hard data, showing that we ranchers are the best stewards that they have for protecting very, very fragile ecosystems in this country, and that we've been doing it not just for 10 years, but generationally. And the fact that we won't just say that we're doing our jobs, we will have the data to prove that we are.

Well, I guess the thing I like most about it is that as far as native grasslands go, at least, they're trying to do something, they're trying to put some money into preserving these grasslands or at least helping land owners to do it.

Just for the federal government to take recognition of some of the things that are going on out here. And that's been a complete about face of anything that they've ever done before because, in past, the guys that didn’t plow their land got no reward or recognition.

What do you like least about SARPAL in general, as a national program?

Responses included:

Your species at risk, if you look after your land right, the species at risk do well, but if you're in a jam and start cutting some corners to try to survive, so then you're hurt long term, you're hurting yourself and I guess long term you're hurting species at risk. So by giving this money to the NCC (Nature Conservancy of Canada) that buys land, that land goes out and disappears off the land market. I look at the markets too, if I sell out, my biggest option, especially price wise, is the farmer, they’re all around me, I'm surrounded by them. If I sell to them for the money, they will break that native grass and I know they are not going to look after the species at risk, like a born rancher would, and it's a failure…and it may sound like I'm really against NCC, well, I'm against the principle, that's for sure.

The Missouri Coteau range of hills is also critical habitat, as well as the Great Sand Hills and even further north. So it's limiting if we focus just solely on the southwest.

Well, I think sometimes the government is working at odds against each other. The SARPAL program is great for conservation, but if you don't have policies in place that protect what's existing of native prairie, then you can dump a bunch of money into someone who wants to manage for just, like, our Longspurs, but their neighbor might tear up three sections of native prairie. So how is that? I don't think that that's helping the problem. So I think the government really needs to fix that problem. I don't know if it's federally or provincially but we are still losing native prairie and that's a big problem… SODCAP (Inc.’s) delivery of the program I think is a bit confusing because they're focused on the South of the Divide (SOD) area. And yeah, they've told me in person that they will work outside of the SOD area, but none of their, like, very little of their programming exists outside of the SOD. And I think that even though the concentration of species at risk is probably lower outside of it, I think there's still good opportunities out
there. And it seems weird to me that the funding somehow got funneled to the SOD through Stock Growers because the SSGA is supposed to be all stock growers in Saskatchewan, not just the SOD stock growers. So I think there's a little bit of that that is maybe unfair to other producers. I think that that should either be clarified in their programming or they should expand their programming, because I think that it could be very defendable that they're only working here because of how much native prairie is left here and how many species at risk, but they need to be clear.

I don't have anything that I dislike about them funding this program, exactly. I just, I mean, in general, when it comes to the environment and the government, I think a lot of it is just too little too late. And, like a lot of things, it's going to be 20 years down the road, and they're gonna say, oh my God, look at all this native grassland that we've destroyed, we need to do something about it. Well, maybe they should have done something 20 years ago, you know.

Well, back to educating us, the general Canadian public, on the good we do, and consultation from the government in general. I'm all about transparency, and consultation from the government in general as a rule, and having a, you know, a good conversation… So it's scary and they don't, I don't know if they don't want to share that stuff with us or what, but people are scared because we don't know. And look what they did with the Greater Sage Grouse protection order. So this is when you start to panic and think, you know, are they going to come knock on my door and take my lease away on me and they're going to turn this all into a park so we can't run cattle anymore… and that's what scares people, they think do my grandkids have a future here? Yeah, we want security.

I think the funding window. Like we have a five year funding window. In five years, we have been in some of the wettest times and then all of a sudden, we started into a drought scenario, and it's been broken, but we manage for a lifetime, not for five year intervals. And so the unpredictability of a five year fund is a detriment.

It's just focus. There's a lot of focus just solely on species at risk. And that's great that we're encompassing species at risk, but we need to look at the whole picture. This isn't just looking at a species that's at risk, you've got to take care of the whole environment. …I think SODCAP (Inc.) needs to be able to promote our industry. So if we have negative feedback coming back from other forms of government that say that the cow is the problem for carbon, I think SODCAP (Inc.) really needs to throw back some. You guys have got the numbers, you guys can come back with some pretty good statistics and some advertising that is showing that the cows are actually excellent for the environment. There's so much misinformation out there…You know, there's so many great things that the cow pie is doing. If you knock over a cow pie, there's so many insects that are breaking that down, there's birds that are feeding on the insects that are getting nourishment from that fertilizer. It's just that there's not enough information getting out to the public of what the positives are, even in that, you know, and the basics of what the cow puts into the soil. We keep that all hidden…I mean everything has a buzzword and I find that last year it's been species at risk. You know, we've totally gone away from
focusing on the positiveness of cattle… and we're just totally retelling the common consumer and the people in the city that we're just solely wanting to create positive numbers of species at risk. But in order for them species at risk to be a positive population, they need something to graze that grass. It's that you can't have one without the other.

**What elements do you like the most about the SARPAL program you are involved in?**

Responses included:

The people are phenomenal to work with.

It makes you want to keep your native grass as good as you can and it makes you proud to have good grass.

Well, for example, on habitat results based, is most ranchers with a significant amount of native ground are already doing so already and they're just being recognized for it. Where we really start to see it, is if we have a, for example, BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) outbreak, was one, or if you have a negative flex in the market, and so especially if you're, I'm going to say 50 or younger, you're going to see people having to make moves that they maybe don't want to, but they have to, to survive. And so, if you can do this, this would allow you to, like I said, financially be recognized in a way that, for me, could amount to, like having 200 extra cows. The difference is you're not paying for the cows and you're not paying for the ground you run those cows on. It's better for the cow and it’s better for us.

I like how it's administered. I like that it's very much results based, so that if you don't meet your targets you don't reap the rewards. So there's a definite incentive to hit your targets. And, you know, the staff have been excellent to work with. And it's been interesting to learn how they come to the numbers that they do looking for litter and how you can improve your own grass management.

The fact that they share their results. We can use it as a management tool. And the fact that they actually put people on the ground, {the SODCAP Inc. program manager}, the technical {person}, is excellent. Well, {their} out there walking the pasture, and I mean, {their} report, {they} put what {they} see in {their} report, so if {they} see something that maybe (one of our guys) rode past or a noxious weed or something, we get that and we can go back and say oh yeah. (Our guy) is also great but he has a different job and may not be looking at the grass that closely, so their guys can say, you know you got this kind of grass and that's good. It's very, very helpful. Again though, I like the fact that it's results based. I think that's a good thing. So if they come out and say, you don't qualify, your results aren't good enough for them. It didn't really cost you money. It's just money you're not going to get and it's time to go back and see what's going on.

Probably education. Yeah, being informed would probably be my number one. I mean, the little bit of money we get from the program I just kind of consider it as a token, but it's something, right? It helps pay the taxes on that land, which is something. And also,
I'm probably participating in more, you know, little conferences and stuff like that because I'm more curious now and more educated now.

Grasslands National Park staff commented:

I think it’s pretty much a win-win situation. The most valuable elements of using a results based approach is that at the end of the day, whatever happens, we have monitoring information. So we're aware of what the vegetation looks like out there. That in itself is hard to achieve, simply because it's resource intensive. Additionally, it is an objective way of evaluating success or failure… Here, it's much more objective. So we simply say this is what we're shooting for, we've agreed at this from the start. We looked at the numbers, we’re not achieving it. In terms of future management, there's no pressure on you to change. We're not kind of asking you would it be too much trouble to change your management, we're saying, change your management, this will be the reward. Don't change your management and you won't get the reward. Hopefully the program is strong enough and hopefully the incentives are valued correctly, so that it will incentivize them to do that.

What elements of the SARPAL program you are involved in do you like least?

Responses included:

Well the issue is that the grass in the park has not been grazed for so long it has little nutritional value and so calf weight drops 70 to 80 pounds, so, you know, nothing is free. That’s not the fault of the program of course, it’s simply the condition of the pasture. Another issue for the park, not the program, is that it’s just so big it needs boundary fencing and cross fencing for manageability. Some electric fence would help. With these issues it may not pay for us to meet the targets set in SARPAL, but that’s not a huge issue for us.

The thing I like the least is when the government put all that money in the NCC, Ducks Unlimited and that kind of thing, it creates another bureaucracy where a lot of the money is being spent on things that are not helping the species at risk and are not helping the guys that are trying to deliver it. Also it's making it a lot tougher on young guys to compete. How many millions of dollars did they dump in the NCC a year ago? So if they dumped that into the young ranchers to help them get started, man, they could fly along and do all the things that they're asking for to help with the species at risk.

There was a limited amount of funding so we weren't able to secure as many acres as we would have liked to under SARPAL.

The fact that it is so short. I'd take a five year term with no restrictions.

…whether it be SODCAP (Inc.) or Ducks Unlimited or whoever, but somewhere that should be registered. So that like when we're dealing with an oil company or something we can say, if they want to come into whatever section of land, we can say, wait a minute, guys, we have a contract with SODCAP (Inc.) on this ground, that we're doing all
this, and not that it's maybe going to affect our contract with SODCAP (Inc.), but if they come in and build a road to the middle of it, we lose them acres of our contract, and it's costing us then...it's especially because we're community pasture, we're not private, like we can't just tell him to get out. So if we had that as registered somewhere on a database that that like oil companies and gravel companies and stuff could look at and say, you know, hey, maybe we could move somewhere else, or you want to do something a little different. I don't know if they're allowed to even tell them that...Also, in the long run, this is federal money. So anybody who wanted to know anything about the birds or anything, well, that could look at that database and say, this is where our money is going.

Comments from the Grasslands National Park staff:

I think more work is needed to determine whether the incentives are effective. It’s early in the program, and I'm not, I can't say one way or the other, whether we are influencing managers to manage differently or not, that remains to be seen. And I hope that as the program progresses, we keep good track of examples of situations where the incentive has clearly influenced one manager to manage differently or, for example, you know, the incentive was there, and they did not. It's really hard to choose your dollar value. So we're kind of starting with something that intuitively seems like it's in the ballpark, but I think it's important to keep an eye on that.

There's about 100 different ways to look at it, right? So there's so many different parties that would need to be in line in order to have a program that would be steady. So you can have, like, a government perspective, which can change just in an election, you can have a variety of NGO’s, and then obviously, the private industry is mainly about viability, even if they are stewards. So, that's what's hard about it is trying to get everybody to see it the same way so that there can be some kind of security in whatever programming you come up with.

**SARPAL offers various incentives for participation. Did the incentives have any influence on your decision to participate?**

Responses included:

No, I won't say that played any kind of a role. No, it’s for the good of the land and everything else is the big thing. And so of course, when somebody is waving a little bit of money in front of you, that's never anything but incentive, you know, but no, that's not first and foremost. I think maybe some people that are struggling to get started and get going, to somebody that's 21 instead of somebody that’s 70, that'll probably play a bigger role, and it should to help them get started and do the right thing.

Yes, I did it for the money. I would not have done it otherwise

No, it’s not enough to make a difference, just a little bit of money, you know, not really, it’s just a token really.
My view is that the incentives are a starting point to show that producers are doing the right thing. I don't believe the incentives are nearly adequate, but I think that in this current program anyway, they're necessary to get the word out that people managing the land deserve recognition. And in my experience, if you do something for nothing, it's not really recognized. Also, unless there's a monetary payment, because you know, we're into a legally binding payment regime that is based on science, and the measurements to take are scientifically developed, and so we have committed to that, but there has to be a payment involved to make it all legally binding.

Well, their support, and the money gave me the courage to go ahead with it…So funding programs like this, I would say, as a producer, it gives you the means to be able to you make some bigger decisions. Every bit helps.

Grassland National Park staff commented:

It's not really applicable, but I guess it is because they pay for the monitoring, and yes, that was a big advantage to the park I think we gained something there that we really couldn't have gained any other way. We're gaining a pile of monitoring data, so we ourselves know what's out there.

Yes, I think I think so… The incentives were basically not money given to you, but money off your rent for the results that you created. So then when they hit the targets, and each year, they're hitting more targets, right, as they use it a little bit and their cattle become conditioned to that area and feel more comfortable there. They're hitting your targets every year, which would reduce their grazing rent, which would be incentive. I mean, if you leave it for 25 years, which is what parks do, it's not that the cattle are picky, but it’s old grass, it's like you know, handing you some moldy bread and saying here, eat this and yet you can stay where you're at and eat perfectly fine bread, so we had to force them to go there almost. And so, we recognize that, and that was part of the formula originally, because we could see that it was going to be tough. The first year the cows smashed the fence and went home two or three times, but now they're getting more conditioned. And now it becomes more of a benefit for the ranchers. But, you know, it's been after three, four years of some aggravations, and incentives are getting better every year, like they're getting more take up every year.

Are there any changes to existing incentives, or any other incentives that you would like to see offered?

Responses included:

Higher incentives yes, but longer terms, the time is the bigger one. And I think it needs to be directly related, so that there would be a link between whoever is funding it. So if it's a federally funded, ECCC, for example, type of a program where it's initiated at the highest of levels, the funding would still have problems because most of its provincial land. Let me give you an example. If you have a quarter section that has a wildlife easement on it, or it's in the EPO (Emergency Protection Order) and so you are, in a sense, restricted
from using that land for production. It should be more than a lower appraisal. It needs to be that the appraisal is only when you buy it yourself, it's actually the cost of operating. So that would be your taxes or lease or whatever, that should be direct. So anybody that leaves things in their natural state is allowed to purchase. Second, it should be, well, I'm not saying you have to put an easement on it, but if there's already one there, one should be compensated for it. It has to have a value. And with that being said, and I know somebody in another area might not feel the same, but in my opinion, when you have, let's just say a million acres in a region that is generally not fragmented, it needs to be, from an environmental perspective, classed higher. And so, for example, our area is a good one because we have five community pastures all within 40 miles of each other, not including a national park, and about three quarters of any of this land is native. And so if the government is going to want to do wildlife easements or any kind of industry, there's really nobody doing that strategic planning, that I'm aware of, that would say, yeah, a quarter section in the middle of one of those townships is of value, because it's not fragmented. It's almost the reverse of value, you can't go by the value of dollar value production, you go by value of the habitat, and which, if you were to flip that upside down, becomes the cost of habitat to that rancher. So then that rancher is no longer classed as a producer, he's classed as a conservationist, and he can do his job because he's being paid for it. So longer contracts, more secure contracts. The provincial government is the landlord in this case, and so if the, if the conservation is coming from the federal government or wherever it's coming from, in the end, they're going to have to work with the provincial government to establish programs where incentives are almost attached to the lease, and that's how you're going to get your long term. Or you're going to get your terms to where, if you have a 33 year lease, but your program incentive is only three years long, 11 different times in your career of that lease, you're going to possibly have to change your plans. So a farmer, like in their opinion, if they buy and pay for 160 acres, they could eradicate 160 acres, they could burn it, they could bury it, they could do whatever they want with this 160 whereas when you approach it, when you're renting grass from the province, not only are you only a renter, but you are also not breaking it. A longer term would put some security in, and in the end, the program would be far more solid, it would be attached to what these folks are doing, and you wouldn't need the other programs. You wouldn't need the darn water programs because there'd be security in what people are doing, it would be almost like moving backwards, closer to where the old ranches, how they were run. But isn't that the way it's been? You know, like all these great advancements and nobody seems to think long term, you know, in all these little programs, all these government programs, they chop up the land and say this is the way to go. So even in in planning, or managing something like a ranch, there's no stability the more you fragment, and that's why I'm trying to say that ECCC has to work with the province. If there are areas that they believe can be identified, that they're at a higher level because of less fragmentation and because of the number of species at risk in that region or because of the other programs that just happened to be in place, provincial pastures, national parks, all these things. If those kinds of stars are lining up, then why not use them to your advantage?
And I've always said, you know, like, as a primary producer, as a beef producer and a farmer, rancher… these programs are great, but I don't have the time or the money to do a lot of these other programs. Just don't have it. But I believe that if society has a desire to maintain the habitat, and the species at risk that are there, if society as a whole has that desire, then society as a whole should be helping people, us ranchers who are doing this. It shouldn't be up to us alone, you know; when my people came here and homesteaded 120 years ago, we didn't know that we're in this unique area and the we're going to get bombarded. It's all quite new, right? And people, society, they need to be educated. It would be a win-win because the farmers and ranchers, we're really poor advocates of what we try to do, a lot of people don’t realize that we are stewards of the land…Okay, we've had to get up to speed on a lot of this stuff, but now that we realize and recognize those birds and them species of risk out there, a lot of people are profiting from our stewardship; because we haven't made a mess, it's still there.

Maybe they could offer a tax break. Like, you know, okay, here's $2,000 because you participated in the program, but we're not going to tax you on that land.

Well I haven’t studied the program and maybe the Farm Ranch Water Infrastructure Program covers it but I think, I know, the water belt is a touchy subject because sometimes it concentrates the cattle and destroys the habitat and I understand dugouts, but pipelines or remote watering helps.

For us, it's been working quite well. Obviously, if there can be more incentives, if I could have, let's say a helicopter or drone hired to come in and spray some of this (leafy) spurge and have all the chemical paid for, like, just let's hit it full bore, then it would be brought down to a more manageable state; and we may not have to use that expensive practice every year. Like, it might be you could just wipe it out pretty good and you could have let's say, a five year plan, where okay, we're going to spray the whole thing this year, and then we've got a way of monitoring the next year, the next year, the next year. And then once you get five years down the road, maybe it's at a manageable state where I can keep after it. It is a massive expense, and we as producers aren't able to do it

I don't know what you would want to change about it. Well, maybe something to do with carbon credits. They have a carbon sequestration program in the USA where they can be paid for carbon, they could maybe look at that for here.

You could make it longer and advertise more and explain to those people that somehow got a sour taste in their mouth that there's no repercussions to signing up. And the other thing about SODCAP (Inc.) with SARPAL is they'll come in they'll offer you advice but you don't have to take it. That's the biggest stigma for these programs.

Well, maybe some incentives on intergenerational transfers, I don't know how that would be done…So intergenerational transfers, like there could be some mechanism where there could be, I don't know, a suspension of payments something like that they could work in so that you know that the land was being taken care of when you're gone…And I have more faith in the young people that are looking to get into ranching then I would in
some organization that has another agenda that we don't know what it is exactly…They say if they don't get the land then it's going to be destroyed, well, that isn't the case, it's the next generation that's going to be taking care of, if we can help them get into it. So one of the problems that we see is the value of the property, if it's going to be transferred in a few years, is you cannot give anybody any kind of a break, because you're going to be hit with a tremendous tax bill on top. And the only thing that kind of makes you angry is the policy now in organizations like the World Wildlife Federation or whatever, is at the end of the day, they're going to offer big money, huge money to buy it. You know, it's hard for some producers to not take that money. But you could look at certain types of easements and if you could put a time limit on them. Because there is going to be a demand in future for these lands.

My initial impression is that maybe the incentives aren't big enough…it seems like there's been cases where we said, if you're going to take on this extra management, there might be, you know, $6,000 in incentives for you, and it kind of seemed like the producer thought to themselves well, without the $6,000, you know, it's probably easier just to not worry about achieving that.

Grasslands National Park Staff noted:

So right now a lot of its financial but access to the park for grazing is one of them. That's actually something that I've been thinking about, is to broaden the grass banking program so that people can get access to the park if they're doing some program with SODCAP (Inc.). Like you become eligible to graze in the park only if you're working with SODCAP (Inc.) or SimplyAg or it could even be any other conservation program in the province, it doesn't have to be just those two but that's something I've been thinking about.

**Technical assistance is offered in SARPAL. Do you feel this assistance is adequate?**

Responses included:

Great, {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} is terrific, very thoughtful, knowledgeable and not at all pushy and if you pick up the phone, they'll answer the call or whatever you need or just your basic support. Very helpful. You know, they’ve even offered to assist us if we needed any help, if we had questions to apply for other programs outside of SODCAP (Inc.) even, because they know it's going to improve things in the long run for the whole, and I think they're just really passionate about their job.

Absolutely, and I think it should be mandatory on all provincial leases.

I don't know what more they could have done to be honest. I’m very happy with it. I have no complaints about what they've done. It’s nice to have another opinion sometimes, and they’ve lent me books as well. And I learned some of the techniques that they used in looking at the grasses and looking at the litter. Maybe they could do a couple tours for us on other ranches to keep educating us.
Do you feel the overall level of engagement and outreach for SARPAL was adequate?

Responses included:

Well, the outreach is great for people who believe in it and live this lifestyle, but until the provincial and federal governments work together it won’t be adequate, it needs to be better aligned. We need the funding to be consistent. The agriculture and environment minister need to work together. They also need to realize that our area is really well suited to conserve habitat and they can farm everywhere else. The southwest region happens to have 26 townships on land in one chunk that's not broken. The federal government should agree on this and identify regions and allocate funds to those regions that could have the most effect on conservation outcomes. And longer term funding, right now they reach out but they reach out every three years over and over again. So right now, speaking from someone who's in an area that I think suits species at risk conservation, if they could make the funding more steady, it'll stay that way. And then you can go ahead and farm everywhere else. Say the Minister of Environment says we have like 20 species at risk down there in the southwest and we want to put $20 million towards conservation. You could say, there are six regions throughout the province that are less fragmented, how about we allocate half of that money right off the bat right to that region and you just attach it with a program to those leases in that area. Then you avoid giving that money to administration.

So, depending on funding maybe they could do more now. Like, I'm sure it would increase. I would think when it was first setup, targeting certain people made sense, right? Because you kind of can see where the grass or the people would fit it. But now you want to prove bigger than that, right? So yes, it should have extra funding for everybody if you really want to improve the grass, and change behavior, like, you don't need to preach to those already converted, right? I mean, I got you know, lots I could improve on too but, if that's really the motivation of the program, then yes, increase outreach to make change.

Not really, it felt almost top secret. It needs to be advertised, explained and promoted widely, as I said, lots of these older ranchers distrust these new programs from past experience. Maybe have an open house type thing where I can talk directly to my neighbors and tell them my experiences, they trust me you know.

What changes would you like to see in the SARPAL program, to better assist you in protecting species at risk?

Responses included:

I don’t know if SARPAL excludes any seismic oil and gas. I think it should be an option. The only problem is on this crown land is that the government wants the revenue from the oil and gas more than they care about the (Sprague’s) Pipit.

I'd say the biggest thing would be to bring more people on board, maybe have a town hall meeting where I can tell my neighbors what I am doing with SARPAL…maybe they
don't realize that there is this program and what the program does right? Providing payment so we can take habitat like ours that's been completely overtaken by leafy spurge, and in basically two years we've got it so it's now 100% accessible to these animals and there's grass there and you know, it's lush.

Well, for us grazing in the park, the fencing would help. I’d also like a written report for each section so we can understand what needs to be done to get to the targets. Right now there’s a year lag between reports which could be better. Also they could add some programs to help us access water, like piped water would not damage the ground and does not need to be monitored, if it’s clean and pumping, the cows will use it. And extend the term, like for five years or longer would provide us some security.

Funding. If we had greater access to more funding we could do more land. We would like to protect the land better but it is hard, it can be an overwhelming task. The next step for SARPAL would be to make specialized equipment available to use, that way more land would get done (seeded back to native), especially here in the South of the Divide, this area has so much species at risk, and we need specialized equipment we cannot afford to buy.

At this time I think it’s ok. But what I'd like to see as is that the funding that's going into buying habitat, instead of that, it should be going into stewardship, as it states in section 11 in the Species Act, like, why are we going to buy this land if It didn't fix nothing? Right? So that's thinking high level SARPAL funding, federal. The federal government put $1.6 billion into buying land, but nothing into stewardship. So why is it that they trust the guys in the Nature Conservancy more than they do guys that ranch the land?

Did having a local SARPAL program management team have any influence on your decision to participate in SARPAL?

Responses included:

Yeah that would have been an influence, I would be more inclined to sign an agreement with people I knew instead of somebody coming to the door, and it helped that the Stock Growers Association were involved in it too.

Yes, we would not have participated otherwise. We know these people are producers and we are comfortable with them. Also, their (staff) turn over rate is low, which is good.

Yeah, I think it's important that the management team are locals and therefore have a better understanding of the landscape they are working on and the attitudes of the producers they are working with.

Were there any key individuals that influenced your decision to participate in the program?

Responses included:
The whole SODCAP Inc. team we knew already. We’re cautious people and careful of species at risk, so we appreciate dealing with people we know and trust, who have a continuity of staff and who will come out and see us when we ask them to.

**SODCAP Inc. is a non-governmental organization. Did this fact have any influence on your decision to participate in SARPAL? Please elaborate. If no, do you think you would participate in the program if it was being delivered by a government agency?**

Responses included:

It makes it easier that we are not dealing directly with the bureaucrats, we actually are dealing with people that have skin in the game themselves, they own a cow, they own some land, they know what drought is, they know what flooding is, so yes that is important. I would have reservations on it if it was being delivered by a government agency.

Not really, my biggest thing is, like I said, financial and resources and all the rest of it came with the program. I would still participate in the program if it was being delivered by a government agency, when they show up with money and resources, I take it, right? We have a problem, we’re trying to make it manageable and if it had a government sticker behind it, it didn't really matter to me. The program has to be done right is all.

Well, yes, you’re more comfortable with people you know. I’d probably do it if it was delivered by people in Ottawa but I’d be more wary.

Grasslands National Park staff noted:

Yes. This is funny to say but it is a little bit easier to work with NGO’s at times, simply because of bureaucracy that can be really limiting. For example, SODCAP (Inc.) can go through a hiring process and hire for technicians really quickly, whereas, absolutely, yeah, the government process is very different.

**Can you tell me what activities you are doing to protect species at risk or to conserve wildlife on your property?**

Responses included:

Well, on our breeding pasture we use in the summer we try to be on a two-year rotation so we graze them once every three years. Now it does not always happen, in the drought period we might have to graze one, but we try to maintain that three-year rotation, but when it gets dry it gets to be a struggle. We pump water from our dugouts using solar pumps. We have a few hawk poles in fields, but there is not Burrowing Owl habitat there, and, basically, we just keep our numbers (of cows) at a manageable level…

I think we do our very best with grass management, we try pretty hard. And I think if your grass is managed, you know, as good as you can get it, it just benefits all species and wildlife, it benefits your cattle and then also benefits everything else that lives here.
We do lots of mob grazing, bigger numbers and moving lots so we can then leave a field alone for a year. We move them maybe 30 times a year, staying on tame field to protect the native grass and species at risk. We also use a pipeline to help spread the cattle around to water and we have two portable solar water systems to protect the leopard frog, and we fence around the dugouts.

Well, I rotate grazing, trough water, moving salt in different areas, so they're (cows) not tramping around too much in one area, and we use special fencing. We're always providing some place for species not to be interfered with by the livestock, and that only makes sense for the grass. We do rotational grazing and no hunting and no trespassing.

Did your participation in SARPAL have any influence on how you decided to manage species at risk habitat? Please elaborate/how so?

Responses included:

Yes, sure, we’ve learned a bit and done a few things, like we’re moving say salt blocks or tubs or stuff like that and just moving stock as well around a little more.

I don't know, maybe it gave me some ideas or, well, {the SODCAP Inc. program manager} definitely came up with lots of different ideas, like the goats, of course, even different chemical style controls. But, yes, it definitely gave us a bigger payroll to do what we wanted to do—it would have been impossible for us to do this without SARPAL funding.

Did your participation in SARPAL have any influence on how you decided to manage your land in regard to drought preparedness?

Responses included:

I was going to say no, but….well, I can see the results of what we did. I was a bit hard on one field, that was something that I was doing that I thought I could get away with, but it wasn't. So this helped in terms of prevention of erosion, managed through reclamation, enticing the roots to grab hold, so it won’t wash away. So that will help me in future for drought.

Do you think being involved in SARPAL changed the way you managed your land to support rangeland sustainability?

Responses included:

Well, no, it hasn't changed it because that's what I was doing anyway, but it's supported me to keep doing it that way.

Did participating in SARPAL influence how you feel about discussing issues regarding species at risk? Please elaborate/how so?

Responses included:
Not really, but the discussion, I think, has been better because of SARPAL. You know, you can have a chance to tell your side on how your grazing patterns have enhanced their habitat, and how we need to be rewarded for what we’re doing, letting those animals you know, thrive in in good conditions without having someone come in and tell you how you're going to do it.

Well it made me more aware that there are species at risk where I ranch. Those initial government things they proclaimed they were going to do to help protect species at risk to the detriment of people making a living, that was scary, we talked about that already…I would say yes, I am more comfortable discussing it, it has not turned out to be the boogey man that it was possibly first portrayed to be, saner heads have prevailed, farmers have gotten together and we want to work together.

Grasslands National Park staff commented that:

Yes, I think it was. Working with SARPAL’s been valuable to see how they approach private land managers and how they bring up these topics. So I would say I, as a person, and our staff have learned from the experience and it improved my ability to communicate with private land managers, because we work with private land managers occasionally and they work with them all the time.

**Do you think being involved in SARPAL has helped you make decisions to adapt to extreme weather events on your property? If yes, how so? If no, can you tell me a bit about how you are prepared to adapt to weather events like flood or drought?**

Responses included:

No, we have to manage for that and have done that for generations.

Yes, we have extra native grass now so we can weather it better.

**Have you heard of any success stories, due to SARPAL, regarding the protection and conservation of any of these species? Please describe.**

Responses included:

I don’t think so, but it’s such a new program.

**Do you think being involved in SARPAL is beneficial to you as a rancher?**

Responses included:

Yeah, it probably does, it brings a little more awareness and maybe a voice down the road, some status for being involved in it and maybe SODCAP can go to bat for us if needed, and say, you know what, they've been stewards of this land, and they’ve been managing it well, and we think they know what they're doing.
The SARPAL program strives to support ranchers’ agricultural production, while also protecting and conserving species at risk. There is also a need for ranchers to prepare to manage weather events like drought and flood—do you see any relationship between these three activities?

Responses included:

Yeah, based on the fact that it's mainly all native ground they have to look after to survive, and so the stewardship is already there. But if inflation and margins, the other markets, that are driven by other influences such as operating and overhead, stuff like that, continues to influence them, they have to look for a different way of doing business in agriculture. So the stewardship's already in place, if they could just find a way to include some of that funding in their active management on a daily basis, so that they can afford to continue doing what they're doing, because cattlemen never get wealthy. It's not like farming -- cattle, you got to really like what you're doing. Because it's not, you know, the margins, I guess it's just not the same. They need to figure out a way to allow those people that produce food to produce it in the same state they did up to now and still be able to afford to be there. Otherwise the kids all disappear. And if people get old and retire and have to sell the native range to someone, who, the next day they've ripped up that land, well, that's the end of that, right?

Do you have any final comments you'd like to make about anything we've discussed here today, or the SARPAL program in general?

Responses included:

The country needs to realize that you don't have what we have, and it may be gone because the margins will drive us to sell if someone doesn't recognize that there's a cost to manage land this way, as stewards, for the long term. But you can't have the public saying you need to keep Sage Grouse habitat on your land. It's no different than me saying you need to build a cage and put a polar bear in your backyard in downtown Ottawa. What we're saying is we're already doing it, recognize it, the baseline for species at risk conservation is actually a region, like ours here at the South of the Divide. If you don't secure the core, you're never gonna have expanded out with that. And I know that's high level thinking, but if you fail at the high level, if they don't understand the high level thinking, well, the people down here are wasting their time. Because the margins will just push us all into fragmenting what we have. So if they understood that if they fund ranchers then they can continue doing what they're doing without breaking anything, and that's part of what they're doing, providing safe food, contributing to the economy and then those communities still exist, right? The infrastructure still exists, the schools and highways and the economy. It's still going to exist; but yet, could also expand, that could happen, and could continue down and make a difference. SARPAL has to be funded from everyday program funding, not little pots of funding, because if it's short term it won't last. Provinces have to believe in it at the highest level. And, it's important that we believe in it, right because we're the, I guess you would call us stewards. And it's
important that the federal government believes in it if that's where the funding is coming from. We need long term security for this to work. As it stands there’s a lack of the safety of my land…What keeps the next producer from breaking the land, or not doing what I'd been doing? Whereas if I had a program that's as long as what my lease is for, maybe does not need to be, but it’s say, security in it for 20 years long. That’s long term security and a better chance to make a real difference in conservation of this habitat for species. What I can't believe is that the two governments haven't already figured out how to transfer funding for the purpose of habitat management, or expansion or even make funds available directly to the other government’s programming so that the administration doesn't need it. And so that would include identifying regions that are where their success rate would be so much easier; for example, community pastures, right, because they're already in their native state and there's millions of acres that are already administered by one government. For a region like the southwest where you have two, three federal pastures, two provincial pastures and a national park all within, you know, beer bottles thrown at each other. And so if you recognize that the provincial leases run between, you could actually….well I can't believe that the two governments haven't already come up with a way to financially reward the folks that run those leases in a more long term, secure way.

Nothing really, other than we're just happy with it so far. Yeah. extremely pleased. And we hope that funding carries on.

Well, I like the SARPAL program for the simple reason that it supports us to manage grass, and in the end it helps species at risk, so it’s a win-win situation.

Well, it's nice to have the recognition, but money is always better. You know, just when you break it down and what it is actually you're getting out of it, it's pretty minimal. And more people would be involved if there was more of a greater scale as well and reward, and it's putting the money where it should be I feel because it's protection, we're protecting the land and we are protecting the species at risk because the habitat is there. It's all part of it. Us retaining ownership of that land is better than NCC owning that and having no skin in the game. If you made ranching profitable, you wouldn't have to worry about overgrazing and chewing grass roots down deep because you wouldn't have to. And then you could do away with these programs, and it wouldn't be in the public eye that way. You know the way city people will go on and say, look at the ranchers are getting money, or farmers are getting more money, they're getting a hand out.

Again, I'll say that the, the SARPAL program in Saskatchewan has the potential to be excellent, not only for the ranchers that are involved, but also for the data that's collected for all Canadians. You know, under the Target One goals that are being put out there, this land that is being privately managed, is of significant public benefit that is untapped. And a lot of its leased land, so we are managing the land for the public as well. So the fact that it tells a story of what we've been doing generationally to take care of our own livelihood, as well as provide the benefit of critical habitat for species survival, is an excellent tool and needs to be funded fully. Again, if you can give one environmental group a billion
dollars, you can give us 20 million. And remember, traditionally, government programs would be saying, well, you got to break that land up and then put it back in tame grass. And we always said, well, no, we don't, you know, we're doing the job. So we don't have to disturb anything, and we can show you that we're doing the job. That's why this program works and needs long-term, substantial funding.

…Also, what would be the easiest targets for SODCAP (Inc.), millions of acres, all one owner…the province. Community pastures all in one RM. So if you can imagine one agreement is this size. If you had one agreement this size, you're going to influence a lot more, right? And they're already doing it, and if there was more money, we would do more. The money could come direct, it doesn't have to be administered through 12 different people, if they knew that the region was basically not fragmented and legislated to stay the same, which is basically all your pastures, your national park and your provincial pastures, they're already legislated to stay the same. You could attach money to them for the purpose of stewardship, because it's already there. You're not trying to influence it to happen. It's already happening. You want to keep it there. To me, it's a lot easier to maintain a stable population of range land if it's already there…So species at risk conservation needs to be attached to these lands.

Yes, I have a few thoughts. I think it's important that the public knows that while the ranchers on the prairies in Canada are doing the right thing, the species may be having difficulties in other areas of their life cycle, like wintering habitat, and it is a no fault of the local rancher. So don't assume that the decline of species in this area is solely to blame on us. The government put an Act in and the Act specifically allows for funding to preserve species habitat. It doesn't speak to species it always speaks to habitat and the ranchers providing that habitat should be allowed to participate in that funding stream. Because it's not prairie by definition that provides species, it is how the prairie is managed that provides the habitat that species need. And that brings up the point that it's not who owns it or who protects it, it is who manages that in the best manner to effectively provide the habitat that it's called for, for the individual species…Also, I think this program has been very beneficial by being informative to local producers, and I think its continued existence is in the best interest.