



What's the Future of Grasslands and Rangelands in the East Kootenay?

Oct 16-18, 2025

Kimberley Conference Centre, Kimberley BC

Thursday, Oct 16, 2025

8:30 am	Check-in & coffee
9:00 am	Opening welcome Joe Pierre, Ktunaxa citizen, and welcoming remarks from CMI and the event organizing committee
9:15 am	Ktunaxa and Shuswap elders on grassland values and stewardship , video presentation
9:35 am	Grasslands of North America, the East Kootenay, and what we know about their current and future health Barry Irving, University of Alberta
9:55 am	Refreshment and Networking Break · Be sure to check out the posters and displays
10:20 am	Panel: Past provincial manager perspectives on range and grassland health, monitoring and management in the East Kootenay Don Gayton, Rangeland Ecologist and writer (retired) Gail Berg, Rangeland Ecologist (retired) Darrell Smith, Rangeland Stewardship and Programs Manager, Government of Alberta Moderator: Ian Adams, Larix Ecological
11:05 am	Panel: Healthy range and grasslands, and culturally important food and medicine Tiffany Traverse, Indigenous Researcher, Land & Seed Steward, Salish Fire Keepers Jared Cayenne, Ktunaxa Nation Council Others TBD Moderator: Kerri Wall, Interior Health, Healthy Communities Program
11:50 pm	Lunch Break and Networking · Be sure to check out the posters and displays
1:00 pm	Panel: Ranching and agriculture for range and grassland health Mike Malmberg, Agrologist and Agricultural Economist John Zehnder, Zehnder Ranch, and additional ranchers from the region TBD Leanne Colombo, Rancher and Vegetation Specialist Dave Zehnder, Farmland Advantage Tony Pighin, Lost Creek Enterprises Moderator: Darrell Smith, Rangeland Stewardship and Programs, Government of Alberta

1:45 pm	Panel: Elk behaviour and science for range and grassland health Clayton Lamb, Wildlife Science Centre: Biodiversity Pathways, University of British Columbia Colleen Cassady St. Clair, University of Alberta (remote) Ken Walburger, Kootenay Boundary Region Resource Manager, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Moderator: Tara Szkorupa, Director of Resource Stewardship Operations, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
2:30 pm	Refreshment and Networking Break · Be sure to check out the posters and displays
3:10 pm	Panel: Impacts of climate, fire and drought on range and grassland health Greg Utzig, Kootenai Nature Investigations Jen Baron, Centre for Wildfire Coexistence, and University of British Columbia Catriona Leven, Columbia Wetlands Stewardship Partners Moderator: Marcy Mahr, Kootenay Conservation Program
4:00 pm	Closing comments
4:15 pm – 7:00 pm	Free time , on your own for dinner before reconvening for the community keynote. See below for info

Event partners

Columbia Mountains Institute is pleased to work with these agencies in hosting this event: [Backcountry Hunters & Anglers](#); [BC Range Branch](#); [BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship](#); [EcoMosaic Environmental Consulting](#); [Farmland Advantage](#); [Grasslands Conservation Council of BC](#); [Ktunaxa Nation Council](#), [Phyla Consulting](#), [Shuswap Band](#), and [VAST Resource Solutions](#).



Event sponsors

We extend our thanks for financial assistance to the following event sponsors: [Grassland & Rangeland Enhancement Program](#) administered by the [Kootenay Livestock Association](#), [Columbia Basin Trust](#), [Wild Sheep Society BC](#), [Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society](#), [VAST Resource Solutions](#), [Keefer Ecological Services](#), [Kootenay Conservation Program](#), and the Knowledge and Technology Transfer Program funded through the Sustainable Agricultural Partnership.



Community keynote: Oct 16, 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Join us for a talk with ecologist and writer **Don Gayton** who will present *Trees, Grass and Fire – An Ecologist's Perspective*

We'll also screen the Kootenay ʔa·kinq̓uku TREX film presented by ʔaḡam and the BC Wildfire Service followed by a discussion with ʔa·kinq̓uku Fire Manager Ashley O'Neil, Kiah Allen with the BC Wildfire, and others.

All are welcome to attend this free and open-to-the-public event in the main ballroom.

Friday Oct 17, 2025

8:30 am	Check-in & coffee
9:00 am	Welcome back by Master of Ceremonies
9:10 am	Restoration in the Rocky Mountain Trench , Randy Harris, Dba Wandering Ecotone and Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program
9:40 am	Invasive plant species in the East Kootenay: History and current management challenges , David Ensing, Summerland Research and Development Centre, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
10:00 am	Habitat value of native vs. agronomic grasses and the associated impacts on the grassland community health and encompassing ecosystem , Melanie Redman, Nupqu
10:15 am	Refreshment and Networking Break · Be sure to check out the posters and displays
11:00 am	Keep off the grass: An analysis of legislative tools for managing recreational activities on public land , Aden Stewart, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
11:20 am	Range stewardship on Alberta public land grazing leases , Darrell Smith, Range Stewardship Programs Manager, Government of Alberta
11:40 am	Payment for ecosystem services to improve the health of East Kootenay Grasslands , David Zehnder, Farmland Advantage
12:00 pm	Forage and Water Resiliency, and Targeted Grazing , Andrew Pantel, Rangeland Ecologist, Pantel Environmental Consulting Inc
12:15pm	Using virtual collars for improved management of healthy range and grasslands , John Church, Thompson Rivers University
12:30 pm	Lunch and Networking Break · Be sure to check out the posters and displays
1:30 pm	CONVERSATION CAFE Break-out themed discussions, see details below
2:30 pm	Refreshment and Networking Break · Be sure to check out the posters and displays
2:50 pm	CONVERSATION CAFE Continued discussions, new groups

3:50 pm	Closing comments , Don Gayton
4:00 pm	Event Social and Posters
–	Time to revisit the posters, displays, and enjoy some happy hour refreshments.
5:30pm	See poster list below.

Saturday Oct 18, 2025

8:30 am	Check-in
8:30 am to 2:30 pm	Field Tours Field tour descriptions and instructions provided below

Posters & Displays

POSTERS

- **Igniting change: Enhancing at-risk species habitats in the East Kootenay Trench – The Indian Springs case study.** Doris Hausleitner, Seepanee Ecological Consulting and Becky Phillips, Vast Resource Solutions
- **Assessing the effects of herbicide, seeding, fertilization, and ground scarification treatments on different functional plant groups at a range unit in the East Kootenay.** Nicola Herman, Thompson Rivers University; Wendy Gardner (presenter), Thompson Rivers University
- **Have you seen me? Medusahead and North African Grass.** Megan MacPhee, East Kootenay Invasive Species Council
- **Grassland restoration in the face of invasive species: A British Columbia, Canada case study.** Morgan Robinson, BC Ministry of Forests; Krisi Gordon, Thompson Rivers University; and Wendy Gardner (presenter), Thompson Rivers University
- **Increasing education and awareness on grassland ecosystems through the development of curriculum.** Sonya Rokosh, Kamloops-Thompson School District 73; Kristi Gordon, Thompson Rivers University and BC Conservation Foundation; and Wendy Gardner (presenter), Thompson Rivers University
- **Where Learning Meets the Land: A Model for Place-Based Grassland Education in BC's Parks and Protected Areas.** Sonya Rokosh, Kamloops-Thompson School District 73; Kristi Gordon, Thompson Rivers University and BC Conservation Foundation; and Wendy Gardner (presenter), Thompson Rivers University

DISPLAYS

Clear Sky Retreat Grasslands Stewardship. Michelle Heinz and Catherine Pawasarat
East Kootenay Invasive Species Council. Megan MacPhee, Program assistant
Grasslands Conservation Council BC. Mike Dedels, Executive Director
Kootenay Boundary Institute of Agrologists. TBD
Kootenay Livestock Association. Tyler Morrison, President

Conversation Cafe

Friday Oct 17, 2025. 1pm- 4pm. Main hall.

The Conversation Cafe is an opportunity to synthesize the learning from the conference and draw on the wisdom of everyone present. Small groups will discuss the nuggets collected throughout the conference and identify key priorities and recommendations for actions that will influence the future of range and grassland health in the future.

The recommendations document (collated and edited afterwards) is intended to capture our collective knowledge and provide a blueprint for the future. It will be a tangible take-away from the conference that can be used by all participants to help inform their work on improving range and grassland health in the East Kootenays. All participants will receive a copy of the document by email after the event.

Each table will have a host to help guide a structured discussion and a note-taker to ensure the discussion is captured.

Discussion topics within the context of healthy range and grasslands to get us started:

- What is the future of healthy native plant communities in Grasslands & Rangelands?
- What is the future of healthy open forests in Grasslands & Rangelands?
- What is the future of abundant wild food and medicine in Grasslands & Rangelands?
- What is the future of sustainable ranching and agriculture in Grasslands & Rangelands?
- What is the future of healthy ungulate populations in Grasslands & Rangelands?
- What is the future of responsible recreation in Grasslands & Rangelands?
- What is the future of healthy Grasslands & Rangelands in a changing climate?

Field Tours

Saturday Oct 18, 2025. 8:30am – 2:30pm

Departing from the Kimberley Conference Centre main parking lot at 8:30am via carpool. Field tours will involve some light hiking (about 4km return with 130m elevation gain at the first location, light walking at the second location). We'll be outside for the whole time in whatever weather nature gifts us. Please come prepared with sturdy footwear, warm and dry clothing, water and food. (Note on lunches: some participants have ordered bagged lunches, we'll distribute those in the morning.) You may want to bring binoculars.

We will carpool to the field sites. For people in the Kimberley area, meet at the Kimberley Conference centre at 8:30am. For folks from the Cranbrook area, meet at the Tamarack Mall, parking lot in front of Staples.

FIRST STOP

Wycliffe Conservation Complex: Improved grassland health combining restoration, protection, and stewardship through a unique partnership approach

Field trip leaders:

Chris Bosman, Nature Trust BC
Andrew Pantal, Pantel Environmental Consulting Inc
Jeff Volp, Cordillera Technical Services



Field Trip description:

This collaborative tour will take place at several points of interest within the Wycliffe Conservation Complex – a complex of more than 1450 hectares (3500+ acres) of conservation lands managed by a partnership between the Province (MWLRS), The Nature Trust of BC, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. This ecologically diverse area contains native grasslands, mixed forest, wetlands, riparian habitats, and small lakes. The Complex contains Class 1 Ungulate Winter Range, is home to several Species at Risk, and is part of a critical cross-valley wildlife movement corridor connecting the Rocky Mountains to the Purcell Mountains. The field tour will showcase how the partnership is working together to improve grassland health in this important area through securement and stewardship efforts and various ecological restoration and enhancement projects.

SECOND STOP

New and exciting tools combined to improve grassland health and benefits to communities

Field trip leaders:

Jordy Thibeault, Kootenay Livestock Association
John Church, Thompson Rivers University
Dave Zehnder, Farmland Advantage
Andrew Pantal, Pantel Environmental Consulting Inc



Field Trip description:

This collaborative tour will take us to the Thibeault ranch which abuts two other parcels of public and private land. The tour will showcase many tools and possible solutions discussed during the conference involving high-tech tools, novel program approaches, and sustainable funding. Highlights will include targeted grazing with the use of virtual fencing, payment for ecosystem services, and ecosystem restoration and monitoring using drones, and conservation dogs.

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A big thanks to the members of this event planning committee (alpha by last name):

Araleigh Alexander, Ktunaxa Nation Council; Jeremy Ayotte, Phylla Consulting; Jared Cayenne, Ktunaxa Nation Council; Mike Dedels, Grasslands Conservation Council of BC; Enoloa Eugene, Shuswap Band; Cian Kelly, Shuswap Band; Rhiannon Kirton; Shawna Larade, Ministry of Forests Range Branch; Marcy Mahr, EcoMosaic Consulting; Hanna McIntyre, BC Ministry of Forests Range Branch; Randy Moody, Moody Tree Ltd; Allana Oestreich, BC Ministry of Land, Water, Resource Stewardship; Caitlin Phillips, Ktunaxa Nation Council; Aden Stewart, Back Country Hunters & Anglers; David Zehnder, Farmland Advantage.

Thank you to our event volunteers, not listed above (alpha by last name):

Ian Adams, James Albino, Marc-Andre Beaucher, Emily deFreitas, Jessica Lowey, Wendy Gardner, Darrel Smith, Don Gayton, Becky Phillips, Tracy Flynn, and others!

Thank you to the CMI staff and contractors behind the scenes:

Hailey Ross, Jasmin Dorinda, and Kendal Benesh.

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The Columbia Mountains Institute of Applied Ecology (CMI) is a non-profit society based in Revelstoke, British Columbia. CMI hosts science-informed events and specialized courses, workshops, webinars and the like, that benefit managers, researchers, educators, and natural resource practitioners across British Columbia and beyond. Our website offers many resources, including conference summaries, talk recordings, partner links, and more. Ask at the registration desk about joining CMI if you're not already a member!