



Tour Highlights Importance Of Ranching For Conservation

Approximately 25 people including the provincial environment minister, the Honorable Herb Cox and Executive Director of the Canadian Wildlife Service, Bob McLean from Ottawa, toured a number of ranching operations in the South of the Divide area of southwest Saskatchewan from August 25 – 27, 2015. The tour showcased operations that own and manage critical habitat for species at risk including the Greater Sage-Grouse, Sprague's Pipit and Swift Fox. Miles Anderson, a rancher from Fir Mountain, explained how grazing strategies are benefiting Greater Sage-Grouse habitat on both his land and land owned by the Grasslands National Park. Anderson said, *"If we can help a Sage chicken raise two extra chicks every year – that can make a huge impact on the population."*

Orin Balas from Ponteix, demonstrated habitat attributes for Sprague's Pipit and how he uses herding, water development and season of use to reach those habitat targets. At the Lone Tree Pasture, the group heard from Clint Christianson and Steven Grant, executive members of the Lone Tree Pasture Patrons. The Lone Tree pasture is the first pasture in the South of the Divide to transition from federal management to private management. The group heard first hand the process of forming a company to take over management of the pasture which includes critical habitat for Sprague's Pipit and Swift Fox as well as a disproportionate amount of old crested wheatgrass stands. The group also stopped at the old Butala Ranch, Old Man on His Back (OMB), which is now operated by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. While the focus of the ranch is for conservation purposes, OMB is managed as a working ranch for both cattle and bison.

Kelly Williamson, who organized the tour on behalf of the South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc., said, "It is important to recognize the importance of ranching for conservation of critical habitat and native grasslands. The rancher's decision making process involves much more than just cattle management." That message was received by the group on the tour. *"I want to thank all the producers involved in the South of the Divide Conservation Action Program and those who organized the tour,"* said Environment Minister Herb Cox. *"Ranchers are excellent, dedicated stewards of the land and we thank them for their on-going work protecting species at risk."*



Suggested caption:

Fir Mountain rancher, Miles Anderson, talks to the group on a tour on ranching and species at risk conservation.

For further media interviews, contact Tom Harrison, Executive Director, South of the Divide Conservation Action Program Inc. at prairiecloudscape@sasktel.net or (306)530-1385.