

Newsletter of the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan



# ROOTS

Vol. 30 No. 1

Spring 2025

*Thorny Buffaloberry*

*Shepherdia argentea*

Photo credit: Chet Neufeld



## President's Message

Watching snow fall in late March made it hard to believe that spring would ever arrive here on the prairies. I remind myself that, much like us, native plants need adequate sleep and water to bloom.

Who, me? My name is Beckett, and I'm your new president. I am originally from Saskatoon, which might be the perfect city in which to fall in love with nature. Exploring the river valley defined my childhood and set me on the path to working in ecology. Like many young people from Saskatchewan, I have moved west and am now based in Edmonton, where I work as an environmental consultant and live with my wife, Jenn, and our dog, Pepper. I assure you, my connection to Saskatchewan remains steadfast. I am back home regularly for NPSS business and for my passion project: restoring the family homestead near Chamberlain, SK, back to mixed-grass prairie.

The NPSS has lots planned for the summer! See what our field crew is up to on social media, volunteer to make a difference with our Flowering Rush removal program, and take a walk with us on one of our field tours!

## Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Legacy Grant

One of the ways that the NPSS chose to celebrate its 30th was by giving back. Earlier this year, the NPSS made up to \$3,000 available to support a project that created or enhanced a public space using native plants. The intent was to support the use and appreciation of native plants, benefit the community where the project was located, and leave a meaningful legacy for NPSS's 30th anniversary. Twenty excellent project proposals were received, making the decision very difficult. In the end, the board awarded the grant to the Bert Fox Food Forest.

Lead by the Bert Fox Community High School in Fort Qu'Appelle, the project aims to provide opportunities for students to engage deeply with concepts such as environmental stewardship, food security, plant identification, and the culinary and medicinal uses of plants. It will serve as a living classroom, promoting sustainability and hands-on learning for the school's curricular offerings.

Over time, the organizers hope that the project will grow into a self-sustaining system that enhances biodiversity, supports

pollinators, improves soil health, and strengthens food security. By integrating traditional Indigenous knowledge, the project fosters cultural awareness and reconciliation, leaving a legacy of environmental stewardship, holistic well-being, and community resilience for future generations. We particularly liked the innovative ideas they included, such as having the students create 3D-printed plant stakes embedded with QR codes linked to a webpage that they design. Each webpage will feature detailed information about the plant, including its ecological function, cultural significance, and uses. This online resource will benefit future students and community members.

The project work will take place from now until October, and the NPSS will offer its expertise in addition to the grant money. Project updates will be sent to us periodically, so we will publish them as they're made available. We wish the Bert Fox Community High School all the best and look forward to the results.

*Roots* is a quarterly publication of the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan (NPSS) and is one of the benefits of membership. Members are invited to submit articles, news, views, photographs and comments. Views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of the NPSS.

### Deadlines: Submission Publication

Winter Issue: November 1 December 15

Spring Issue: February 1 March 15

Summer Issue: May 1 June 15

Fall Issue: August 1 September 15

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### Membership Dues (Year End November 30<sup>th</sup>).

Individual \$30 Family \$45 Student \$15

Non-profit \$100 Corporate \$200

Life \$500 Please contact the NPSS office for info about the lifetime membership instalment payment option.

Get your photo on the cover of... ROOTS! Submit your Saskatchewan native plant photos for future cover consideration to: [info@npss.sk.ca](mailto:info@npss.sk.ca)

# NPSS Celebrates Conservation in Saskatchewan

Chet Neufeld, NPSS Executive Director

On March 8-9, the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan hosted its 30th annual general meeting and conference at Wanuskewin Heritage Park in Saskatoon. The theme this year was “Protecting Our Wild Home Places” and featured a line-up of fantastic speakers and a master naturalist workshop. The event was also punctuated by a changing of the guard, with longtime President Andrew Stewart stepping down and Vice President Beckett Stark filling the position.

Saturday opened with Elder Joseph Naytowhow addressing the crowd through songs, stories, and a smudge. Following the business portion of the annual general meeting, presentations began with Erica Maier from Meewasin Valley Authority and her talk entitled “Conservation in Action: The Ongoing Stewardship of Beaver Creek Conservation Area”. Following Erica, Jeffrey Harder from Environment and Climate Change Canada gave a presentation on National Wildlife Areas in Saskatchewan, including some recent additions to their land base.

Following lunch, Dr. Merle Massie delivered a presentation entitled “Where Am I From? Telling the Saskatchewan Story”, where she talked about growing up in the Paddockwood, SK area and delved into the local history, including the creation of Prince Albert National Park. Dale Gross with the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport was next, and talked about protected areas in Saskatchewan, including their challenges and opportunities.

The final set of speakers began with Ian King and his presentation, “Stewards in the Parkland: Advancing Biodiversity Conservation in The Redberry Lake Biosphere Region”. We learned that, for a relatively small area, there sure is a lot going on at the Redberry Lake Biosphere Region! Rounding out the day was Sarah Rheubottom from Parks Canada, with her talk “Grasslands National Park: More Than Just Grass, But Mostly Grass”.

All the speakers were incredibly engaging, and it was a treat to hear them speak so passionately about the places they work in, live in, and love.

During Saturday’s events, we also ran a silent auction filled with so many amazing items that we nearly ran out of table space (a difficult thing to do in a conference room!). Thanks to our generous donors and bidders we were able to raise nearly \$1,200 for our education programming; an incredible way to end the day.

Sunday featured the Prairie Ecosystems module of the Saskatchewan Master Naturalist Program. NPSS team members Chet Neufeld, Reed Lewko, and Hilary Pinchbeck delivered presentations of various aspects of prairie ecology, while Elder Joseph Naytowhow joined us once again to provide an Indigenous perspective on prairies.

All in all, it was a very successful event, with just over 90 people attending the weekend. Thanks to our presenters, auction donors and bidders, event organizers, participants, and to Saskatchewan Polytechnic for their Platinum Sponsorship.



*Outgoing President Andrew Stewart after receiving a backpack from the NPSS board for his service.*

Photo by Chet Neufeld



Photo by Chet Neufeld



Rural Municipality of Cana Road Allowance.  
Photo by Morley Maier.

## In Defence of Road Allowances

By Paula Maier

There has been some great work done to try and preserve what is left of the prairie landscape and it is hoped that with education there will be more understanding as to why these places need to be cared for and maintained. These are the repositories of our wonderful plants, some rare, some common. But there are other areas, large expanses that are no longer prairie but still harbor the plants we love.

Along with the prairies, the Aspen Parkland, the ecozone and buffer between the Prairies and Boreal Forest, has gone through such changes that there is only fractional natural landscape left. If one wishes to spend time in a prairie environment and search out wildflowers, one must either go to a national or provincial park, Nature Conservancy of Canada property, or know a rancher who owns remaining prairie. There is somewhere else where one can find wildflowers and that is the roadside ditches all over the province. Road

allowances were established with the opening of the province to provide access to encourage immigrants to come and farm. They were established in a grid of one mile (township roads) by two miles (range roads). Most of these road allowances are ninety-nine feet wide. If these were undisturbed there would be 12 acres per mile of land available for plant and animal life. This is crown land, and the municipalities were given the responsibility of maintenance. This means that these are neither the property of the municipality nor the adjoining farmland. These areas were mostly undisturbed for years except for upgrades to the roads.

Here is where the flowers and shrubs returned and flourished in some areas. The road allowances were invaded by invasive species and still the Yellow Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*), Saskatoons (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) and roses persisted. Wetlands contain bulrushes, sedges and



duckweed. Now these areas are often the only places where someone can walk and identify and marvel at the wonder of how these plants want to and do persist. There are also rare plants to be found in these ditches.

Unfortunately, we are losing these wonderful areas at an alarming rate as crop farming practices encroach, wetland drainage continues, and municipalities look for ways to keep within budget. I know that one can never call these places prairie. That ecosystem was lost, yet the grasses, wildflowers, shrubs and trees persist. They make up important corridors for animal, bird and insect life to move through and live in. These can be safe places for people to walk and pick berries and observe the passing seasons. In a one mile stretch of road allowance we have identified 80 bird species and 20 butterfly species. They are there because of the native species that provide habitat for reproduction, nesting, food and protection during the migrations. They are worth preserving.



*Yellowhead Nature Society checking out a roadside ditch in the Rural Municipality of Good Lake.*  
Photo by Morley Maier.



*Rural Municipality of Orkney Road Allowance.*  
Photo by Morley Maier.

I believe that we all must begin advocating for and promoting these road allowances. One way we can do this by communicating with and educating the local municipalities within the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities. The Yellowhead Nature Society has, with full cooperation of the four municipalities in the area, designated road allowances with signage to help preserve areas and create safe spaces for people to walk and for nature to flourish. Each municipality must make its own decisions regarding road upgrades, maintenance or to allow unused roads to return to nature. This is their mandate, and we must trust them to make informed decisions. Allowing destructive land use practices to take over these precious areas is not the right approach.

Our road allowances offer significant ecological and recreational value. We must not lose these places where all can participate and enjoy the wonders of our natural world.



*The provincially rare (S2) Hypoxis hirsuta - Eastern Yellow Stargrass, Township Road 233 in the Rural Municipality of Saltcoats.*  
Photo by Paula Maier.

## Alberta Wilderness Association Cypress Hills Bioblitz

**Objective:** Observe species at Cypress Hills Provincial Park, producing a record of biodiversity at one moment in time.

**Goal 1:** Analyze biodiversity in Cypress Hills Provincial Park across a range of guilds.

**Goal 2:** Compare impacts of activities, including grazing/recreational use, on biodiversity.

**Goal 3:** Produce a publicly accessible report presenting results.

### Event Schedule:

**June 6** – Welcome and set-up. Arrival at accommodations by late afternoon/early evening, introductions, presentations or lectures by experts (voluntary).

**June 7** – Species identification. Experts will travel to sites and record species through iNaturalist, producing as complete a record as possible.

**June 8** – Public outreach. Visitors can learn about the history and ecology of Cypress Hills, grasslands, montane ecosystems. Experts will lead tours to sites of interest.

Upload of all photos to iNaturalist by August 15 – ensure sufficient specialists available to help identify as many species as possible. Identifications should be completed by no later than September

15, 2025, in order to have finalized data for writing the report.

**Location:** Cypress Hills Provincial Park. Exact sites to be determined – anticipating 2 or 3 sites for comparison. Available accommodations will be in cabins/campsites within the park (with an option to stay in nearby towns at own cost).

Cypress Hills Provincial Park is a well-known and unique location. Containing forested uplands and grasslands, Cypress Hills is one of the few unglaciated areas of the great plains. Many rare and endangered species can be found in Cypress Hills and the surrounding grasslands. However, concerns have arisen about the degradation of this land due to overgrazing/unhealthy range management. In addition to producing a record of species in Cypress Hills, this project aims to confirm the state of the ecosystems, and will incorporate rangeland and riparian health assessments.

**Experts' role:** Experts will be responsible for locating and identifying species, recording and uploading photos/audio to iNaturalist, and verifying species on iNaturalist. A project specific to the bioblitz will be set up on iNaturalist. Permits for observations will be applied for by AWA, although sample collection permits and handling will be the responsibility of the experts.

**Cost:** Accommodations inside the park will be covered, and snacks/water will be provided. Participants will be responsible for travel to the site and their own meals.

For more information or to register, contact Ruiping Luo at [rluo@abwild.ca](mailto:rluo@abwild.ca)

## NPSS Celebrates Anniversary with New Swag

As you may know, 2025 is the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan's 30th anniversary, and we kicked off the celebrations with our annual general meeting in March, but the party is just getting started. We've come out with a range of new merchandise to mark the occasion.

At our recent annual general meeting, we released a prairie buff, featuring blue grama, potentilla, and prairie clover on a palette of natural colours. Made of microfibre polyester, it wicks moisture, dries fast, and is breathable. It's also seamless, stretchy and returns to its original shape. It provides UV protection and can be used any number of ways, such as a scarf, headband, mask, bandana, hair tie, and others. They sold really well but we still have some left.

Another item we've come out with are our limited edition 30th anniversary pins; get them while they last! These high-quality enamel on metal pins come in three different custom designs to choose from: Saskatchewan ecoregions, "30 years" design, or Needle-and-thread Grass (our provincial grass emblem). Pick your favourite or get the whole set.

Finally, who doesn't love stickers? We certainly do, which is why we designed a range of them. Because they're vinyl, they can withstand some moisture, so feel free to put them on your



water bottle, bike helmet, or an outside window. Each sticker is about 10 cm and vividly coloured, so they'll be sure to stand out.

All of these items can be bought on our online store here: <https://www.npss.sk.ca/store>

We will also bring these items to our field trips and other events throughout the year. As always, the proceeds will fund our important conservation and education projects across the province.

## This issue's COVER PLANT Thorny Buffaloberry - *Shepherdia argentea*



Thorny Buffaloberry is a native, berry-producing perennial common to the northern Great Plains. Its range extends from British Columbia to Manitoba, and south to California, New Mexico, and Arizona, with small populations in Minnesota and Iowa. Ideal habitats for this shrub include ravines, slough edges, hillsides, open woods, and prairies. Its growth varies depending on the environment in which it is growing; it can reach the height of a small tree in ideal conditions, while in less favourable conditions, it forms a stunted, thorny shrub. Thorny Buffaloberry belongs to the Oleaster family (Elaeagnaceae), whose members feature root nodules containing nitrogen-fixing bacteria.

Thorny Buffaloberry looks similar to Canada Buffaloberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*) but can be distinguished by its thorns and silvery scales on the leaves. This shrub can grow up to 6 metres tall and has rhizomes. Young bark is often covered with a silvery scurf that ages into shallow furrows with flat-topped ridges, which may peel slightly. The leaves are a grey-green colour, oppositely arranged, silvery underneath, especially when young, and elliptically shaped. It flowers before its leaves emerge, from April to May with yellow-green to white blooms, producing berries by late summer. The fruit is drupe-like, with red to orange berries containing a single seed. The berries are edible but quite bitter due to the saponins found in them and are said to be much tastier after the first frost. The saponins in buffaloberries also lead them to be called soapberries. This is a dioecious plant, with male and female organs on separate plants.

Thorny Buffaloberry is valuable to both wildlife and humans. It serves as a crucial food source for many animals, including mule deer, pronghorn, and grizzly bears, although livestock tend to avoid it due to its thorns. The loggerhead shrike, a bird of prey about the size of a robin and lacking strong talons, often uses Thorny Buffaloberry to impale its prey. These shrubs also provide essential nesting cover for sharp-tailed grouse, whose populations thrive around dense Thorny Buffaloberry sites. Thickets also offer insulation and concealment for mule deer. The berries' juices foam up due to their saponin content, a property utilised by some First Nations to make a foamy dessert similar to a mousse. This dessert was made by beating a mixture of berries and water (in a 4:1 ratio) until a foam formed, sometimes with the addition of sweeter berries like strawberries. Although Canada Buffaloberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*) is often cited in the creation of this dessert, Thorny Buffaloberry works just as well.

In horticulture, Thorny Buffaloberry proves valuable for its adaptability to infertile, dry, and slightly alkaline soils, owing to its hardiness and capacity for nitrogen fixation. While it is tolerant in cold and drought conditions, it particularly favours semi-moist soils. Notably, it serves as a significant attractant and food source for native bees. It's important to note that both male and female plants are necessary for berry production. For propagation from seed, pre-treatment by stratification at 5°C for 2-3 months and acid scarification for 20-30 minutes is recommended. Alternatively, starting from greenwood cuttings in early summer presents another viable option.

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