

Conservation Beyond Borders

2025 Meeting of the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership

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Rock features at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park.
Photo © R. Luo

gathered for presentations, panels, keynote speakers, and a celebratory dinner. But before the workshop officially started, there was a field trip.

For those of us arriving a little earlier, we made a visit to Writing-on-Stone (Áísínai'pi) Provincial Park, near the United States border. We arrived to intermittent flurries of snow and strong winds blowing across the ridge, nearly drowning out the explanations from our guides. Still, as we climbed to the top, we could see the landscape stretched out in the valley beneath, the sharp lines of the river cutting through the brittle grasslands, with layers of storm-grey clouds overhead. We walked down the slope, past towering boulders and enduring forbs growing in the cracks, to see the petroglyphs for which the park is known.

In early November, with the roads clear, if a bit cold, AWA board member Cliff Wallis and I drove southeast towards Lethbridge. From there, we would drive roughly another hour to reach Milk River, where the Transboundary Grasslands Partnership (TGP) meeting was being held this year.

The TGP works mainly across the prairie regions of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana. It is a collaborative and voluntary partnership, recognizing that the environment does not obey arbitrary borders or boundaries. The TGP works to facilitate communication and cooperation, hosting an annual workshop that supports sharing information and making connections across jurisdictions.

This year, the workshop was held in Milk River, Alberta, at the local Civic Centre. There, we

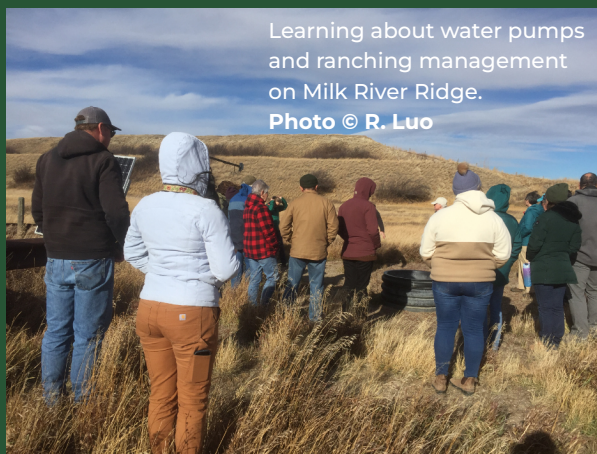


The winding Milk River.
Photo © R. Luo

These petroglyphs, drawings carved into the stone by the people of The Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksikáíitsitapi) are what make Áísinaí'pi a UNESCO World Heritage site. The most famous of these is a battle scene, depicting horses and gunfire as both sides engage. Protected by a metal enclosure — put there by the landowners to discourage cattle rubbing against the stone long before the area became a park — the battle scene is one of the most detailed carvings found in the park, although many others can be seen along the path. Further east is the Visitor Center, boasting displays of tipis, Indigenous culture, and other artifacts, including snakeskins and snake rattles.

In the afternoon, the workshop began. Researchers presented on the impacts of grazing, fire, and herbicides on controlling various species of invasive plants. They also discussed concerns for fire increasing the growth of invasive “cheatgrass” (brome plants, mostly downy brome, which encourage hotter fires). There were presentations on the importance of soil microbes and the potential for microbes to benefit restoration work, and the impacts of bison grazing patterns and management. The keynote speaker, Andrea Morehouse, spoke about bear co-existence and management of bear predation on livestock.

Other presentations covered the new Term Conservation Program that land trusts are testing, work by Cows and Fish and MULTISAR in engaging landowners and collaborating to improve habitat, and an updated State of the Watershed Project published by the Milk River Watershed Council. In between, we heard updates from organizations working in each of the three jurisdictions, and from a panel of cattle producers who shared stories about their work and the work done to learn about the land, the water, and the wildlife.



Learning about water pumps and ranching management on Milk River Ridge.
Photo © R. Luo



Touring Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park.

Photos © R. Luo



The workshop ended with another field trip, this one to the Milk River Ridge. Under a clear blue sky, with a few clouds drifting over the horizon, we heard the history of the area. We visited solar-powered water pumps and discussed ranch management. Our guide, Tim Romanow (Executive Director of the Milk River Watershed Council), also pointed out the Canadian Milk River Canal, more commonly known as the “Spite Ditch,” where a feud between Canada and the United States over water rights resulted in a canal that could divert water from the Milk River.

Conferences like the TGP workshop are important in bringing together people from different sectors and with different backgrounds, but who are all still working on shared goals. While topics and discussions ranged from academic research to more practical on-the-ground projects, everyone at the conference saw the value of native grasslands. Connecting and sharing ideas strengthens our community, and it strengthens innovation. I can't wait to see what new ideas come up next year! 🍀