August 5, 2026

Municipal District of Taber Council
4900B - 50 Street
Taber, Alberta T1G 1T2
By email: feedback@mdtaber.ab.ca

RE: Protection of native prairie in the MD of Taber

To Municipal District of Taber Council:

We are writing to express our concerns for the breaking of healthy rangelands on tax recovery lands. These native grasslands are essential for rancher livelihoods, and breaking these lands will result in degradation of soil productivity and loss of biodiversity.

These lands are unsuitable for extensive cultivation and should be maintained as grassland for future generations. We are asking for your support in registering legal protections on the remaining tax recovery lands in the Municipal District of Taber, to prevent the breaking and loss of these important grasslands.

In particular, we ask the Municipal Council to:

1. Review existing policies preventing the cultivation and breaking of tax recovery lands, identify gaps in policy, and extend protections to all development interests.

2. Explore the feasibility of registering caveats against the title on tax recovery lands to prevent breaking of these lands.
3. Extend the *Prairie Conservation Bylaw* to include cultivation or breaking of these lands by the MD of Taber and other interests.
4. Consider the application of conservation easements on tax recovery lands managed by the MD of Taber, in partnership with local land trusts.
5. Engage with stakeholders, including local grazing associations, local ranchers, environmental organizations, and residents, to determine other appropriate protection measures.

For the past decades, grazing leaseholders have stewarded and relied on these lands to maintain their herds. Native prairie forages can be particularly valuable as several species retain nutritional value into the fall[1], unlike tame forages which are generally more nutritious during the spring. Thus, use of native forages can reduce costs associated with haying and risks to livestock health and survival.

Native prairie also provides many benefits to the surrounding area. As well as keeping soil anchored, the extensive root system of prairie plants increases soil water retention, buffering the land against flood and drought, helps to filter contaminants from the air and water, stores vast amounts of carbon[2], and provides habitat for pollinators and other beneficial organisms. Breaking these lands would cause extensive degradation of soil productivity and once lost, native prairie is difficult to restore, requiring extensive effort or time.

Many tax recovery lands are in areas not suitable for cultivation, with severe limitations due to soil or climate. Soils are often sandy and unproductive[3], and these lands are situated in a region prone to drought and high wind. Previous attempts were already made to cultivate these lands and were unsuccessful.

Cultivation is likely to remain unsuccessful without the addition of extensive water, a resource that is becoming increasingly limited. In past drought years, irrigators have frequently received more limited allotments, with irrigation districts even ending seasons

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[1] Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. 2018. Field Guide to Select Native Forages. Available at: https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/aac-aafc/A22-603-2018-eng.pdf
[2] Yang, Y., Tilman, D., Furey, G., & Lehman, C. (2019). Soil carbon sequestration accelerated by restoration of grassland biodiversity. Nature communications, 10(1), 718.
[3] Government of Alberta. 2026. Alberta Soil Information Viewer. Retrieved June 23, 2026 from: https://soil.agric.gov.ab.ca/agrasidviewer/

early during drought years[4]. Droughts are expected to become more severe in coming years[5], and water cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, it would be more cost-effective and sustainable to maintain tax recovery lands as native prairie.

Protecting these grasslands would also fulfill promises made by the MD of Taber when the lands were transferred from the province. At the time, the MD demonstrated a commitment to "conserve prairie grassland for grazing for generations to come[6]." The MD of Taber's *Prairie Conservation Bylaw* (Bylaw 1845) was drafted to fulfill this promise and "ensure the proper stewardship of all municipally owned, controlled or managed Grasslands for the purpose of maintaining healthy and functional natural prairie rangeland ecosystems for the benefit of all citizens of the MD[7]." The bylaw mandates grasslands are maintained "in a condition that aids in the preservation of the natural prairie ecology." Further, tax recovery lands sold to the grazing leaseholders had caveats against the title registered which prevented cultivation or breaking of these lands.

As well, municipalities are expected to honour the approved *South Saskatchewan Regional Plan 2014-2024 (Amended 2018)*, which established as a regional outcome "Biodiversity and ecosystem function are sustained through shared stewardship." Regional objectives additionally specify that "Intact grassland habitat is sustained" and "Species at risk are recovered and no new species at risk are designated." The MD of Taber has already taken steps towards these objectives by establishing the *Prairie Conservation Bylaw* and placing caveats to prevent the breaking of native grasslands. This is an opportunity to build on this work by extending existing protections on native grasslands.

We ask that these protections be expanded to prevent breaking, cultivation and conversion of all tax recovery lands by other interests, including the MD of Taber and the Province of Alberta. We additionally ask that other protections, such as caveats against the title and conservation easements, are considered as opportunities to preserve these rangelands in perpetuity. These lands are more valuable for the long term if they are maintained as native prairie. Given the increasing pressures on these lands, it is essential to safeguard these lands from inappropriate development.

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[4] Pederson, K. 2023. CBC: Wet winter needed to feed next years' crops, say Alberta irrigators amid early water shut-off. Retrieved June 23, 2026 from: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-drought-irrigation-crops-climate-change-1.6984720

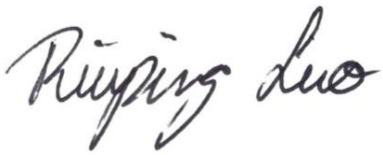
[5] Government of Alberta. 2019. Alberta's Climate Future. Available from: https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/89a69583-a11b-4e31-a857-b311ab6563cc/resource/17ce2d24-ba7b-466c-acd9-33a2cf6beb69/download/aep-alberta-climate-report-arc.pdf

[6] Taber Times. 2014. M.D. set to receive 30,000 acres from province. Retrieved June 23, 2026 from: https://tabertimes.com/news/2014/02/26/md-set-to-receive-30000-acres-from-province/

[7] Municipal District of Taber. 2014. Prairie Conservation Bylaw. Available at: https://portal.laserfiche.ca/Portal/DocView.aspx?id=51027&repo=r-000155ca749f

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and discuss this matter further. Thank you for considering our comments, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ruiping Luo
Conservation Specialist, Alberta Wilderness Association



Sara Jordan-McLachlan
President, Alberta Native Plant Council



Cheryl Bradley
Director, Southern Alberta Group for the Environment



Katie Morrison
Executive Director, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Southern Alberta Chapter



Cheryl Bozarth Soll
President, Nature Alberta