

Grasslands National Park of Canada

Climate

Grasslands National park is at the heart of the continent, far from the moderating effects of any oceans or other large bodies of water. Temperatures in this continental climate are extreme with cold winters and hot summers. The average low in January is -22°C , though this can plunge to -50°C . Average daily July temperatures are 28°C , and extremes exceeding 40°C have been recorded. Precipitation averages 30-40 cm a year, with drought years seeing less than 10 cm. Most of this falls as rain during evening storms in May and June. The air is generally dry, and the additional stresses of strong sunshine and high winds can evaporate almost two times the moisture gained from precipitation.

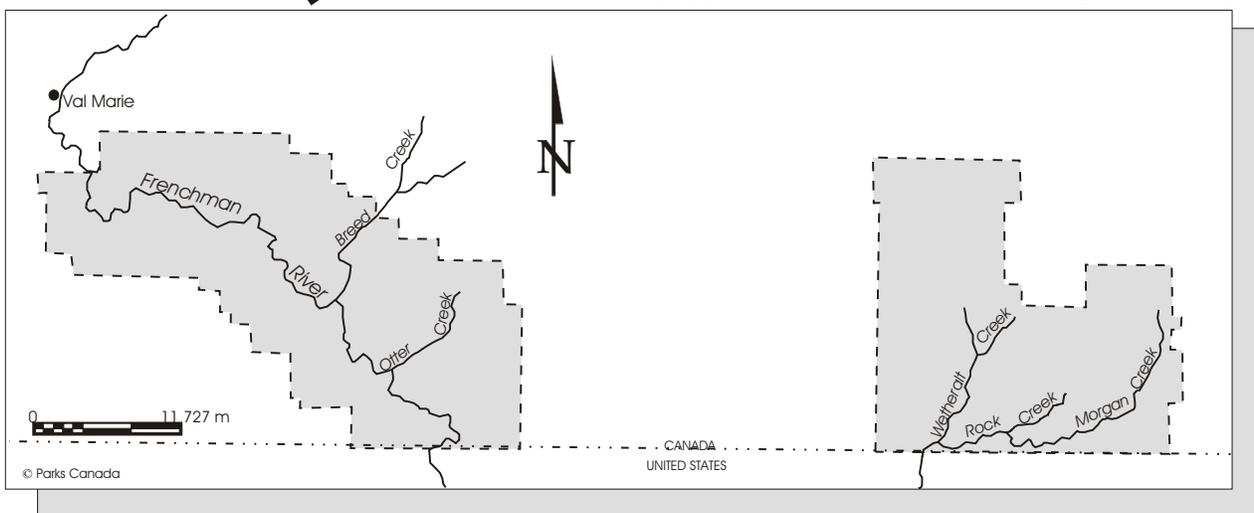


Geology

The park is essentially part of the open expanse of prairie landscape that covers the heart of the continent. The most dominant feature of the west block is the Frenchmen River Valley and the associated river plain. It is a prime example of a glacial meltwater channel. The east block is centered on the Killdeer Badlands and the Wood Mountain Uplands, with Rock and Morgan Creeks winding their way among buttes, hoodoos, and plateaux. The Killdeer Badlands area was the site of the first dinosaur remains discovered in Canada in 1874.

Location

Grasslands National Park is located in the south end of the province of Saskatchewan, bordering on the United States. The two parcels of prairie that fall within the proposed boundary of the park have a combined area of 907 km^2 , and represent Canada's Prairie Grasslands Natural Region - specifically the mixed-grass prairie. Current land holdings amount to over 50% of the proposed lands. The park's establishment was authorized by a provincial and federal agreement in 1988. The two parcels are about 27 km apart, and are about 125 km from Swift Current. The nearest communities are Val Marie, Mankota, Glentworth, Wood Mountain and Killdeer. From Val Marie, the park's boundaries can be reached with a 10 or a 20 minute drive. Grasslands is located in the Prairie Ecozone.



Vegetation

The park protects some of the last remaining original mixed-grass prairie of its kind. It is the only National Park in North America of its kind. The dominant prairie species include needle-and-thread grass, western wheat grass, blue grama grass, wild rose, shrubby cinquefoil, western snowberry, and silver sage. Eroded slopes contain ground juniper, greasewood, bearberry, moss phlox, and sand grass. There are also pockets of specialized communities such as saline (salt) vegetation, flood plain marshes, and some areas featuring tree/shrub/grass communities. As in many ecosystems, fire and grazing play a significant ecological role in both maintaining and renewing the prairie grasslands.

Wildlife

The park's wildlife is plentiful and diverse. The resident colonies of black-tailed prairie dogs along the international Frenchman River Valley are the only ones in Canada that can be observed in their natural habitat. Other major mammal species include mule deer, white-tailed deer, coyote, Richardson's ground squirrel, badgers, skunk, and bobcats. Many of the prairie species that inhabit the park are rare and endangered. Some of these include burrowing owl, swift fox, sage grouse, loggerhead shrike, black-tailed prairie dog, yellow-bellied blue racer, and the ferruginous hawk. Whether it's a prairie rattlesnake (the least venomous of all rattlers), a piping plover (one of the rarest of all prairie birds), a short-horned lizard (as long as your finger), or a prong-horn antelope (the fastest mammal in North America), you are sure to discover an amazing world of life here in the park.



Activities

Grasslands National Park presents a variety of recreational opportunities. Most appreciate the undeveloped nature of the park. Day hiking, horseback riding, overnight backpacking, no-trace camping, nature viewing and photography are the main activities. The best times for wildlife viewing are dawn and dusk. Road access is limited to existing roadways. No off-road vehicles, including snowmobiles and ATVs, are permitted. Please register for camping.

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