

Vern Harms Important Plant Areas Program of Saskatchewan

Background

Important Plant Areas (IPAs) are the most important places in the world for wild plant and fungal diversity that ought to have priority for the protection and management of plant diversity and can be managed as specific sites. Plant diversity in this case may include vascular and non-vascular plants, as well as fungi and lichen. The Important Plant Areas program began via PlantLife Internationalⁱ and was originally developed for use in Europe. It has since been implemented around the world.ⁱⁱ Although the program is intended to be employed at the national level, it has been adopted for use by subnational jurisdictions (e.g. Montana Native Plant Society Important Plant Areasⁱⁱⁱ). Because there is no organization in Canada that is currently overseeing national IPA designations, the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan, facilitated by the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre and the Botanical Assessment Working Group^{iv} has decided to begin a program in Saskatchewan. The goal of the program is to identify the most significant sites for the conservation of Saskatchewan's plant diversity.

Nominated IPAs are evaluated using defined criteria and selected for inclusion, or not, by an expert committee. Anyone can nominate an IPA by filling out a nomination form and submitting it to the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan. The Botanical Assessment Working Group will serve as the selection committee for Saskatchewan and will review nominations twice per year. The selection process will be as transparent as possible (see IPA Scoring and Selection form).

Please note that nominated sites must meet at least one of a set list of criteria in order to be considered for inclusion in the IPA system. In order to ensure that the importance of the sites selected is not diluted, not all nominated sites are necessarily approved to be a part of the program even if they meet one or more criteria. Generally, the "best" sites will be sought for the IPA designation, e.g. those that have ecological and geographical integrity, and minimal disturbance or invasion from non-native species.

Sites may be nominated regardless of current ownership or other designations. Provincial parks, federal parks, protected areas, private land, etc., or portions of them, may be nominated. The intent of an IPA designation is not to duplicate areas that are already protected. Since protection of land can change over time, however, the IPA designation will be considered regardless of current legal site protection.

IPAs are not legally protected by being designated as such. The Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan and partners hope, however, that by designating such sites:

1. They will be afforded extra avoidance/mitigation consideration if they are ever subject to a development proposal.
 2. They will be candidates for funding for management activities.
 3. They will be candidates for funding for data collection and monitoring.
 4. They will spur land managers to make decisions with outcomes that will benefit plant species of concern, plant diversity, and sensitive habitats.
 5. They will raise the profile of IPAs for the general public.
-

An IPA designation on private land is a compliment to the landholders for their management, which has enabled a significant site to maintain its integrity and diversity. Landholders who have land that is designated as an IPA are encouraged (but not required) to contact the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan to learn what they can do to maintain or enhance the integrity of the IPA in a way that complements their management and operation strategy.

If you would like to nominate an Important Plant Area in Saskatchewan, please fill out the nomination form and submit it to the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan via e-mail at info@npss.sk.ca or by mail to Box 21099, Saskatoon, SK, S7H 5N9. Digital submissions are preferred.

ⁱ PlantLife: Important Plant Areas. <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/international/important-plant-areas-international> Accessed November 2018. Plantlife International.

ⁱⁱ Darbyshire, I., S. Anderson, A. Asatryan, A. Byfield, M. Cheek, C. Clubbe, Z. Ghrabi, T. Harris, C.D. Heatubun, J. Kalema, S. Magassouba, B. McCarthy, W. Milliken, B. de Montmollin, E. Nic Lughadha, J. Onana, D. Saidou, A. Sarbu, K. Shrestha, E.A. Radford. 2017. Important Plant Areas: revised selection criteria for a global approach to plant conservation. *Biodiversity Conservation* 26: 1767-1800.

ⁱⁱⁱ Important Plant Areas. <http://www.mtnativeplants.org/important-plant-areas/>. Accessed November 2018. Montana Native Plant Society.

^{iv} Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre. <http://www.biodiversity.sk.ca/partners.htm>. Accessed November 2018.