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For Immediate Release

Manitoba's First Range and Pasture Health Assessment Workbook and Plant Community Guides
MFGA project to help support land management decisions

June 14, 2018 (Winnipeg, MB) – The future of Manitoba's range and pasture health took a solid step forward this week as a top team of range and pasture experts, academia and conservation interests working on behalf of Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association (MFGA), delivered a set of exciting new land management tools.

The Manitoba Range and Pasture Health Assessment Workbook was officially launched on the MFGA website this week, along with supporting rangeland ecosite maps and a guide to Manitoba's Rangeland Plant Communities of the Aspen Parkland and Assiniboine Delta Rangeland Ecoregions.

Mae Elsinger, rangeland biologist for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) – Brandon, co-led the project along with AAFC colleague Kerry LaForge, range and forage specialist in Swift Current. Much of the analysis and product development were completed by Jeff Thorpe, Rachel Whidden, and Lysandra Pyle, with contributions from a wide number of range and pasture stakeholders in Manitoba.

"Many government and non-government organizations from agriculture and conservation sectors have expressed interest in gaining better access to ecological site and plant community information, and a method for assessing the health of range and pasture under various land uses," said Elsinger. "Now we can have better answers for commonly asked questions related to Manitoba pastures and rangelands, like 'How many cows can I put on this land?'; 'Are current land management practices sustaining wildlife habitat, productivity, and other ecological services on this land?'; and 'How do we acquire evidence to support land management decisions and policies?'"

Elsinger says the development of a range and pasture health assessment method for Manitoba has been a work in progress since 2010. The first concrete steps occurred in 2013/2014 when the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council enabled MFGA and the Steering Committee to produce the Rangeland Classification for Agri-Manitoba Report (2014). This report identifies 9 rangeland ecoregions and 21 ecosites for the agricultural extent of Manitoba. The most recent phase of funding from 2016-2018 by Growing Forward 2 – A Federal-Provincial-Territorial Initiative and NCC included two stakeholder workshops on Range and Pasture Health Assessment methods used elsewhere in North America, adaptation of Alberta's health assessment method for Manitoba, completion of rangeland ecosite maps, and the development of a reference guide describing almost 100 possible rangeland plant community types in southwestern Manitoba.



According to LaForge, Manitoba's Range and Pasture Health Assessment method is a science-based procedure, modelled on the Alberta method, with some modifications for Manitoba conditions. An assessment is based on five sets of indicators that produce a health score.

"A health score gives an idea of how much improvement in range and pasture health and function may be possible with modifications to land management practices," said LaForge. "It has significant implications for a site's ability to provide ecological services, such as forage production, biodiversity, habitat, nutrient cycling, water holding capacity, and resiliency to climate change."

"There is a particular need of science-based tools to inform and evaluate land management activities to support biodiversity conservation," says Rebekah Neufeld, Conservation Operations Program Coordinator with NCC. "The tools and guides developed through this project address key knowledge gaps related to range management in Manitoba, and will support the delivery and adaptation of effective landscape and property-scale conservation efforts across the province."

Further work on this project is expected to include the development of Rangeland Plant Communities guides for the other ecoregions within Manitoba, and adapting the Range and Pasture Health Assessment Workbook for seeded pasture and forested rangelands.

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