

The forgotten ecosystem: Multinational research team focuses lens on grasslands conservation

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The Grasslands Research Team (GRT), a collaborative group comprised of eight specialists from six different countries, convened in Calgary and Banff, Alberta in October 2017 to release a proposal focusing on “the forgotten ecosystem” of native grasslands in the Americas. This work highlights the critical nature of grasslands and proposes a two-year timeline to unite scientists, government, NGOs and farmers in protecting this vulnerable ecosystem.

Although grasslands are frequently ignored in the conservation dialogue in favor of other ecosystems such as rainforests or the Arctic, the research team argues that grasslands should be at the forefront of environmental conservation agendas. Covering 23 percent of the world’s land surface, only five percent of grasslands around the world are protected. The main economic activity on this ecosystem is grazing livestock, which has been posed as a threat for the environment. But this seems to be only one side of the story. This relation between conservation and production is a topic to be explored. “Addressing the various factors - social and ecological - that impact grasslands conservation and farmers’ livelihoods is critical to the future of the ecosystem and the Earth”, said Pablo Modernel, principal investigator of the project.

The team plans to create a framework that illustrates the interactions of these various factors, identify ways that farmers on grasslands can support sustainable land use and conservation, and then make recommendations for policy in specific countries with significant temperate grasslands in North and South America (Canada, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay). This holistic approach will address the complexity posed by the social and ecological factors informing the framework.

Representing the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI), the GRT is eager to communicate the importance of grasslands conservation beyond just the scientific community, recognizing the need for collaboration to face this global challenge. The team has received a commitment of funding from the IAI to kick off research and looks forward to connect with other stakeholders in the coming months in the hopes of obtaining additional funding for farmer surveys and external engagement in this work. For more information, visit <http://www.iai.int/?p=24364>.



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