

THE SAGEBRUSH CHRONICLE



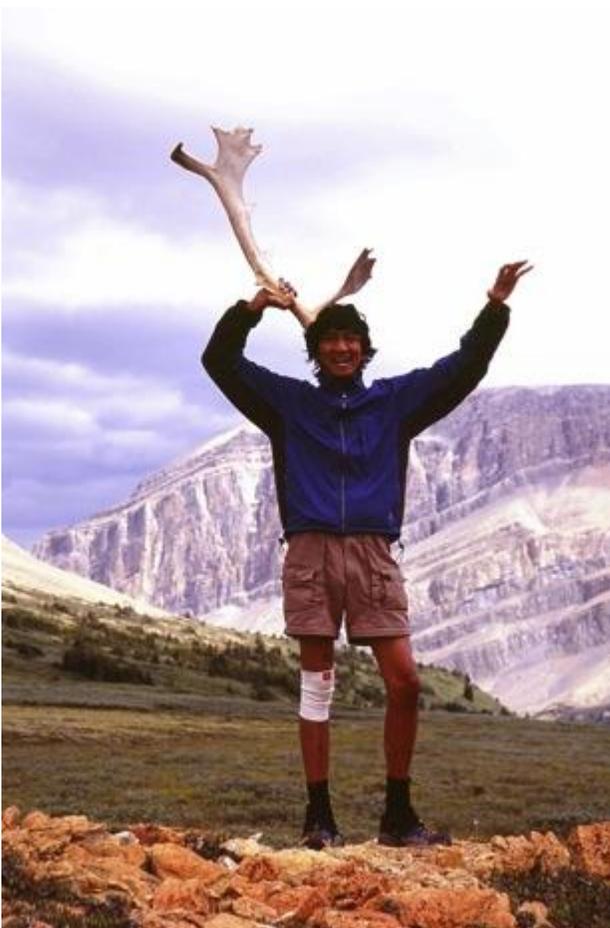
Hiking the Appalachian Trail

Presentation by: Kris Samraj

Kris Samraj hiked the entirety of the Appalachian Trail (AT) in 2002 giving him the title, "Thru Hiker", a badge of honour for backpackers.

The AT is a 2,100 mile (3,360 kms) wilderness trail that runs from Springer Mountain, Georgia to Mt. Katahdin, Maine. The first of the world's ultra long distance backpacking trails, the AT has a long and storied history. The trail follows the ridge of the Appalachian Mountains, one of the most ancient mountain ranges. The trail goes through national parks and state forests including the Great Smoky Mountains (greatest biodiversity in the USA) and the White Mountains (some of the highest recorded wind speeds on land at 231 mph).

But more than anything the AT travels through the backyard of America, sometimes literally. As much as wilderness is a part of the trail experience, the people who live along the way is what makes it special.



Tuesday, November 22 at the Nature Centre

- 7:00 to 7:45 PM: Business Meeting
- 7:45 to 8:00 PM: Socializing
- 8:00 to 9:00 PM: Feature Presentation "Hiking the Appalachian Trail"
Presentation by Kris Samraj

Executive

President	Hugh Armstrong Armstr55@telus.net	526-1003
Vice-President	Anne Bernhardt	527-2792
Secretary	Betty Rainville brainville@shaw.ca	528-2925
Treasurer and Memberships	Eileen Cowtan ecowtan@hotmail.com	526-1264
Past-President	Dave McKenzie naturist@telus.net	527-1701
Directors at Large	Gary Martin gammag4211@gmail.com Ian & Angela Turner ianang@telus.net	878-3483 526-1350

MH Interpretive Program

(Managed by Grassland Naturalists)

Based in Police Point Park Nature Centre

Open Year Round

Tuesday to Sunday: 9:00AM to 5:00PM

Washrooms are on a timer and are open from
7:00AM to 8:00PM daily!

To get up to date information on what is
happening at the Nature Centre call the:

Nature Line at (403) 529-6225

Also find us on Facebook and Twitter
([policepointpark](#))

Present to Dec. 30: Photographers of a Feather: This exhibit, by local photographers, many of them GN members, continues as does the exhibit at the Esplanade.

Nov. 2 to 30: Jan Brett's "The Mitten" Story-Walk: On a trail in Police Point Park.

Sunday, Dec. 4 from 1 to 4 PM: "Lion's Club Christmas Hayride": At the Nature Centre.

Sunday, Dec. 18: "The Night before Christmas" Story Walk featuring illustrations by Canada's own Barbara Reid: Opening at 3:00PM.

Sunday, Dec. 18: Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count: Contact Marty Drut (403-529-6225) or at marty.drut@natureline.info.

The Sagebrush Chronicle is published ten times a year by Grasslands Naturalists. **Submissions of writing and artwork are welcomed but must be edited for publication. Deadline: the 10th of each month.** If you would like to advertise in the Chronicle, more information is available from the editor. Submissions are to be sent to: milton.spitzer@gmail.com (403-528-3120). Do not imbed photos in articles but **do send** them separately.

The Society of Grasslands Naturalists encourages the study, conservation and protection of all components of the natural world. The Society provides educational opportunities, assists in the collection and provision of species data, acts as stewards of the environment, discusses environmental topics and organizes member activities. The Society also manages the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program.

General Meetings: 4th Tuesday, Sept. - May **Board Meetings:** 1st Tuesday Sept. - June

To join Grasslands Naturalists and/or send a tax-deductible donation, write:

**Grasslands Naturalists
Box 2491
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 8G8**

Contact info: Nature Centre 529-6225

Annual Membership Dues: Eileen Cowtan

Individuals	\$20
Families	\$25
Organizations	\$25

Donations to Grassland Naturalists and Interpretive Program are another great way to support local nature and nature education. Tax receipts are issued for all donations over \$10. Your generosity is greatly appreciated!

EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed by the authors in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the editor and the Grasslands Naturalists. The editor reserves the right to edit, reject or withdraw articles submitted. While due care will be taken of all manuscripts, photos or artwork submitted, GN cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage to such articles.

GN Website:

<http://www.natureline.info/gn>

GN Facebook:

<http://facebook.com/#/pages/Grasslands-Naturalists/187598394609744>

You must be a Facebook member to view most of it.

Volunteers Needed!

For the Hayride, the Methanex Christmas Party, the Christmas Story Walk opening, for the Christmas Bird Count and for weekend Feeder Counts. **(403-529-6225)**

Member's Corner

Phil Horch is Grasslands Naturalists newest and most deserving lifetime member. Details of Phil's contributions to the Society are detailed later in this issue.

It's great to hear that **Dwayne Myers** is up and around and is back into taking photographs around the city. At the right is his photograph of a Great Horned Owl taken in Muir Park.

We have a very exciting speaker and topic at this month's meeting (Tuesday, November 22). Details are on the front page but if you wish to familiarize yourself with the Appalachian Trail before the talk, read **Bill Bryson's** entertaining and informative " **A Walk In the Woods**". Of course your interest is likely to be piqued by the presentation and one could read this book at a later date.



President's Message

This past month I have watched as various GN members have been active in getting some of our projects close to fruition and others giving presentations to the public and other organizations. We are indeed fortunate to have various levels of interest and areas of expertise in the club.

I have lived in Medicine Hat for six years and only been a member of the GN for five. During this time, my observation is that the Hat is very lucky to have so many service clubs and volunteer organizations to support various projects and non-profits, which helps to keep the fabric of the city together.

The GN has, over the years, been very fortunate to have strong members and volunteers who put in a lot of hours to keep things running and projects going. Many of our past active members are now at the stage where, although they support the club, they cannot any longer be active volunteers.

And that is what is happening to many service clubs and organizations in this city and, I am sure, many others. Some service clubs are having a very hard time finding enough people to keep their projects going.

The strength of a club is its members and the ability to attract new members. We have a relatively stable membership and have added some new members over the past two or three years. But, we are all getting a little long in the tooth and need to think about the future and what it holds for the club.

Last spring we did a very useful exercise of reviewing how we could raise the profile of the club. The participation was gratifying to see and I believe we have done well in getting our profile raised.

Perhaps the time has come to put our thinking caps on and discuss the issue of new membership. Please think about this and give the board feedback over the next few months.

Hugh

Reminders again:

- 1. All committee Chairs please get your Budgets to Paul by the Nov15th. deadline and if you have outstanding bills get them to Eileen before the end of the year.**
- 2. Volunteers are always needed at the Nature Centre. Don't forget to sign up for the annual Hay Ride and Christmas Bird count.**

Phil Horch: GN's Latest Lifetime Member

At the October 25th GN meeting Phil Horch was presented with a most deserved lifetime membership in Grasslands Naturalists. He received this award for his many years of active participation and leadership in the Society.

Following is a summary of Phil's many contributions to Grasslands Naturalists:

- Upon Phil's arrival in Medicine Hat he discovered that there was no organization such as GN. Since he had been a very active member in the Manitoba Naturalist Society he missed such an organization and had discussions with Rob Gardner and others regarding this need. Subsequently a number of people got together to form GN and Phil immediately joined (1982 or 1983).
- He was Vice-President of GN in 1999 and 2000.
- He was President in 2001, 2002 and 2003.
- He was the Chair of the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program from 2002 to 2013. During this time he represented GN in negotiations with the City of Medicine Hat for annual grants to support the MHIP.
- Presently Phil is the Chair of the Birding Trails Committee (2013 to date). GN members enjoy meeting at Phil's home as Annalora inevitably produces delicious goodies.
- He was a member of the SE Alberta Bird Checklist Committee that produced the 2003 checklist and he chaired the committee that prepared the revised checklist (2013).
- He chaired the Meridian Dam Forum at Medicine Hat College.
- He has participated in numerous Christmas and May Species Bird Counts and has conducted an annual Canadian Wildlife Breeding Survey (1982 to date in Alberta; and 1979 to 1981 in Manitoba).
- He is very generous in passing on his knowledge of bird identification in conducting numerous field trips in and around Medicine Hat. When asked to lead a trip he readily agrees to do so.
- He was the recipient of the Medicine Hat Civic Environmental Award for 2006.

Prior to Phil's arrival in Medicine Hat he was a very active member of the Manitoba Naturalists Society including serving as president, vice-president and board member and was the editor of their monthly news magazine for many years. He was also a member of several action committees of this society and was a founding member of the Manitoba Rare Bird Alert.

Phil not only gave unstintingly of his talents to GN but was very active in many civic capacities as well including but not limited to:

- Chairman and founder of the Medicine Hat Condominium Association (2002 to 2012).
- Member of the Medicine Hat Senior Citizens Advisory Committee (2010 to 2012).
- Chairman of the Christian Businessmen's Committee for many years.
- Board chair and financial chair for the Hillcrest Evangelical Missionary Church for 3 years.
- Member of the Medicine Hat Chamber of Commerce (1982 to 2012).
- Chairman and founder of the Medicine Hat Citizens Coalition for 10 years (a social action committee instigated by former MLA Lorne Taylor).
- Phil was the founding President and CEO of Chinook Village (1992 to 2012).

Unfortunately (for us) since Phil's retirement, he and Annalora spend their winters in Arizona depriving us of his expertise and skills. Our loss is Arizona's gain. He has joined the Tucson Audubon Society and participates in their Christmas Bird Counts as well as in a number of their field trips. We can still count on his active participation in GN activities during the summer.

Upcoming Events and Announcements

Present to Dec. 30: Photographers of a Feather: This exhibit, by local photographers, many of them GN members, continues as does the exhibit at the Esplanade (through January 8, 2017).

Nov. 2 to 30: Jan Brett's "The Mitten" Story-Walk: On a trail in Police Point Park.

Sunday, Dec. 4 from 1 to 4 PM: "Lion's Club Christmas Hayride": At the Nature Centre.

Sunday, Dec. 18: "The Night before Christmas" Story Walk featuring illustrations by Canada's own Barbara Reid: Opening at 3:00PM.

Sunday, Dec. 18: Medicine Hat Christmas Bird Count: Contact Marty Drut (403-529-6225) or at marty.drut@natureline.info . Plan on attending the annual Christmas Potluck Dinner in the evening (5:30PM) for great food and fellowship.

Note: The above events, as well as the Methanex Christmas Party (Sunday, December 11) require volunteers for a variety of tasks. These are detailed in the November issue of the "Volunteer Newsletter" produced by the MHIP.

Christmas Shopping? Think Nature! Think Birds!

Check out the wonderful books and other gift ideas, and support our Interpretive Program while you shop.

The Nature Shop is placing just one more order of bird seed this winter. Phone NOW to place your order for Christmas gifts or for late winter bird feeding supplies.

Southeastern Alberta Birding Trails

The Southeastern Alberta Birding Trails Committee has completed the first phase of its projects and has uploaded the write-ups and maps of the trails onto the Grasslands Naturalists website. To access this go to: www.natureline.info/gn/ . Go to the top gray border and click on "Birding". The overall map is instantly displayed. Each detailed area is interactive and, if clicked on, will open that specific map and write-up. One can also go to the specific trail names below the overall map and access its map and write-up. To get an overview of the trails go to "Overview and Overall Map".

It's not too early to renew your GN Membership and perhaps if you know of someone who is interested in Nature you might consider giving a gift membership for Christmas. Membership rates are detailed on page 2.

Also all donations to GN over \$10 are issued a Tax Receipt.

Exciting Sightings prepared by Robert Frew

November can be a slow month for birding, as local avian activity changes with the onset of colder weather. As the month progresses birders can look forward to the arrival of the winter finches including Grosbeaks, Crossbills, and Redpolls from their boreal and arctic habitats. Male **Pine Grosbeak** sightings were reported at Police Point Park on October 24th and 26th, and a flock of **Bohemian Waxwings** on October 28th and November 1st. representing the first sightings this fall for both species. Late fall can also be a good time to encounter lingering migrants including rarities, and several exciting sightings have been reported.

An unusual sighting of a **White-winged Scoter**, at the confluence of The South Saskatchewan River and Ross Creek was reported by Milt and Elaine Spitzer on October 21st. This the largest of the three scoter species is considered rare in the prairie region, however small numbers have been reported during the breeding season on Elkwater Lake in the Cypress Hills. Several groups of **Tundra Swans** have been observed over Police Point Park, including seven swans on October 28th, and two additional groups of eight, and twenty five swans respectively on October 31st.

Phil Horch was able to pick out several **Rusty Blackbirds** among a huge flock of **European Starlings** and **Red-winged Blackbirds** at Murray Lake on October 22nd, and Dan Schiebelbein reported twelve Rustys at Schuler Lake on October 23rd. This species is often confused

with **Brewer's Blackbird**, but in the fall can be distinguished from the Brewer's by the rusty-brown edging to feathers. Numbers of this boreal species have declined significantly in the last decade.



Photo by: R. Frew



Photo by: R. Frew

An estimated 200 migrating **Western Grebes** congregated on Sauder's Reservoir on October 18th. This species usually leaves the province by mid-November.

Milt Spitzer reported several interesting sightings including; six **Snow Buntings** on the dam at Sauder's Reservoir on October 20th, a **Northern Shrike** at Murray Lake on October 27th, and a **Golden-crowned Kinglet** on October 28th at Police Point Park.

On October 12th Bob Frew observed a late **Blackpoll Warbler** foraging for insects on the remaining leaves of a Schubert Cherry tree in his garden in Southridge. This wood warbler species is renowned for accomplishing remarkable migratory feats.

There have been numerous **Blue Jay** sightings reported in the city during the past month. The calls of this corvid are unmistakable. Recently, Hugh and Dee Armstrong have had a leucistic Blue Jay as a regular visitor to a peanut feeder at their city residence. Leucism is an abnormal plumage condition caused by a genetic mutation that prevents pigment from being properly deposited on the feathers.



Photos by: Hugh Armstrong

A Northern Goshawk, the largest of our accipiter species was observed at Police Point Park on November 7th.

**Send your exciting sightings to Bob Frew at 486 Sissons Cr SE Medicine Hat AB T1B 2J9
Phone 403-526-4573 or e-mail Robert.frew@shaw.ca**

Field Trips for 2017

To help the Executive in planning next year's programs we are asking for suggestions for 2017 field trips. Last year the number of field trips to areas surrounding Medicine Hat was less than normal but this was partially off set by weekly neighbourhood walks to various areas in the City. Unfortunately these weekly trips were mostly spur of the moment and thus often members were unable to participate. We would like to plan the 2017 trips as much as possible.

Potential trips could include journeys to a number of the Southeastern Alberta Birding Trails, trips to view the spring and fall migrations, trips to view the flora and fauna of the prairies and Cypress Hills, butterfly and insect viewing trips to a variety of locales, etc.

Please send your field trip suggestions to our Field Trip Coordinator, Gary Martin, at 403-878-3483 or email him at gamma4211@gmail.com . **The success of our 2017 Field Program depends on YOU!**

Hyland Armstrong's Presentation on "Livestock Grazing Effects on Biodiversity"
Presentation to the GN in October
Summarized by B. Rainville

Hyland Armstrong gave a very detailed, in-depth presentation on "Livestock Grazing Effects on Biodiversity" at the General Meeting October 25. He brings both the academic background of a MSc. in Range management as well as practical hands-on experience gained from years of ranching in the Cypress Hills.

Hyland organized his presentation into five sections described as follows:

Section 1 briefly discussed biodiversity and range health. Along with many other facts presented, Hyland said that by manipulating grazing intensity it is possible to use livestock as a tool to manipulate the biodiversity associated with Western Canadian grassland ecosystems. He told us biodiversity may be measured by the number of species, and the number of individuals of each species, in relation to other species in a given population.

Section 2 included slides showing aerial photographs of the landscapes he managed on his Cypress Hill ranch land, and the wildlife associated with these landscapes. We saw rough knob and kettle terrain in some areas, terminal moraine (as at Reesor Lake), mixed grasses in transition zones, and more. Hyland's wildlife photographs were captivating, and included Elk herds, Yearling Moose, Western Meadowlark, Marbled Godwit, Sharp-tailed Grouse and others. He said the area sustains over 150 species of birds and 6 or 7 species of ungulates as well as the Plains Garter Snake and three important Amphibian species; the Northern Leopard Frog, the Tiger Salamander, and the Northern Boreal Frog.

Section 3 discussed the interaction between wildlife and livestock. The diet of Elk, for example, will change throughout the year, while cattle eat primarily grass all year long. This would not likely cause a problem in the summer, but may cause problems in the winter if elk and cattle use the same area and consume the same grasses. Cattle may overuse the elk winter range.

Another example of interaction occurs between livestock that come to drink and graze at riparian areas, and the waterfowl that thrive on the safety of cover provided for nesting. Livestock will trample nests, and their grazing can change the amount and the condition of plants growing along the edges of the water. The presence of cattle manure will also spark the growth of algae in a slough or marsh and water quality will deteriorate.

Section 4 described the impact of grazing on energy flow in a plant community, individual plants, plant succession and biodiversity. Hyland showed charts and models to illustrate the topics in section 4. One particular slide showed a range site divided by a fence. The appearance of the field on the left varied greatly from the area on the right even though both sides included the same plant species. The field on the right side was larger than the left field and was grazed in the fall, while the left field was smaller and was grazed over the spring and summer. The more appealing spring and summer growth on the left side, coupled with the smaller range area, resulted in a more selective use of the site by livestock. Therefore changing the grazing patterns of livestock, i.e. reducing their selective grazing, gives plants enough time to recover even in the fall and winter when plants are less sensitive to grazing.

Section 5 discussed managing livestock behavior. Hyland spoke about conditions that attract cattle to an area such as water, shade, shelter and other factors. Calves tend to drink along the edges of a slough or marsh and can develop Scours from the blue-green algae present on the surface water. When ranchers changed the behavior of the cowherd by locating clean drinking water in a trough away from the body of water, it was found that the cows preferred the clean trough water. Salt licks were also moved periodically to distribute the cattle more evenly. No fences were needed to restrict the riparian areas when these two previous conditions were in place.

In closing, Hyland briefly mentioned projects carried out by NCC/DU, Nature Conservancy Canada and Ducks Unlimited, to improve the health of rangeland and riparian areas. He also brought up a health assessment report written in part by Barry W. Adams P.Ag. concerning range stewardship practices to improve Sage Grouse habitat. Hyland concluded on a positive note saying, by using innovative and flexible range management strategies it is possible to use livestock grazing as a tool to manipulate biodiversity and endangered species habitat. He stressed the cooperative efforts of the ranching industry are needed to maintain the biodiversity associated with Western Canadian Grasslands ecosystem.

Please go to Hyland's website at www.shockware.com/elkcattle to view stunning wildlife and landscape photos of Cypress hills that show how thoughtful livestock management can help maintain natural wildlife environment.

Webcam at Nature Centre

GN is experimenting with the use of a webcam for nature sites of interest to its members and the general public. As a first step, we have installed a webcam at the Nature Center to monitor the bird feeders. It is typically operating between 9:30 AM and 4:30 PM. It can be accessed as follows:

1. Go to the USTREAM website at www.ustream.tv
2. Select "Watch" from the top menu
3. Select "Search"
4. Type "GN Bird Feeder" in the search box
5. Press return

Alternatively, it can be accessed directly at <http://www.ustream.tv/search?q=GN+Bird+Feeder>

The streaming video can be expanded to a larger size including full screen. Since we are using the free version of USTREAM, advertisements appear at the beginning and periodically during the streaming.

At the present time, we are mainly seeing Black-capped Chickadees, House Finches, Downy Woodpeckers with the occasional Northern Flicker and Hairy Woodpecker. Common Redpolls are expected soon. Occasionally, we direct the camera to the ground to observe ground feeders such as Dark-eyed Juncos, Ring-necked Pheasants with the occasional rabbit and deer. If you see an interesting bird that you need to be identified or confirmed, note down the day and time and report it to the Nature Centre. We are recording all sessions and keep the videos stored on the computer for approximately a week. For those with limited data packages with their internet provider, it should be noted that the webcam transfers approximately 0.7 GB/hour.

Once again, we are in an experimental testing phase and hope to eventually apply what we learn to other sites including, potentially, the Great Blue Heron rookery depending on a feasibility study and external funding.

Additional Announcements

Presentations from the Urban Sustainability Forum on November 4th at the Medicine Hat College are now available on the SEAWA website. They are available under the "Resources" page or at the following link: <http://seawa.ca/2016-urban-sustainability-fourm/>.

Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan hosts a monthly Native Prairie Speaker Series. Our next presentation will be a FREE Webinar about Tiger Beetles in the Elbow Sand Hills. "Chasing Tigers: Population assessment of the imperiled Gibson's Big Sand Tiger Beetle in the Elbow Sand Hills". **Tuesday, Nov. 29th at 12:00PM**. Presentation by Aaron Bell, Troutreach Saskatchewan. To register for this webinar go to : <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7674733377033695745>.



GRASSLANDS NATURALISTS

Box 2491, Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 8G8

Membership Form for 2017

YES! I would like to be part of the Society of Grasslands Naturalists.

Name: _____ Name of 2nd Family Member: _____

Address: _____

Membership:
Individual: \$20/year _____

City / Prov: _____

Family: \$25/year _____

Postal Code: _____

Organization: \$25/year _____

Telephone: _____

Donation: _____ Tax Receipt Available

Email: _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

Prefer to receive GN Chronicle by: Post _____ Email _____

Signature(s): _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

Informed Consent and Waiver Form for 2017

I may wish to participate in field trips and events organized by Grasslands Naturalists.

I affirm that as a participant I am prepared to stay with the group and follow the directions of the coordinator. If I choose to bring my child(ren)/ward(s), I will ensure they also stay with the group and follow the directions of the coordinator and activity leader.

I affirm that, knowing my personal state of health, I feel that I am mentally and physically capable of participating in the trips and events that I choose to attend.

I acknowledge that I am aware of the inherent risks, hazards and dangers associated with activities arising from my participation in trips and events which may result in injury to me or result in my death.

Therefore in consideration of my participation in these trips and events, for myself, my heirs, my executors, my administrators and my successors, I voluntarily assume all risks and hereby waive all my rights against Grasslands Naturalists and unconditionally release and discharge the Grasslands Naturalists, its members, directors, officers, its affairs and its coordinators from all manner of activities, causes of action, suits, claims and demands for damages due to personal injury, death, loss or damage to property, expenses or otherwise which may or shall arise in any way as a result of my participation in the above trips and events.

Photograph Release

The Grasslands Naturalists have my expressed permission to use photographs of me in their publications.

Email Consent

The Grasslands Naturalists have my expressed consent to email me with information regarding my membership. Should I choose to revoke this consent, I may do so at any time by contacting Grasslands Naturalists to that effect.

Signature of Member

Signature of 2nd Family Member

Date: _____

Date: _____