

# Towards a Conservation Strategy for the World's Temperate Grasslands

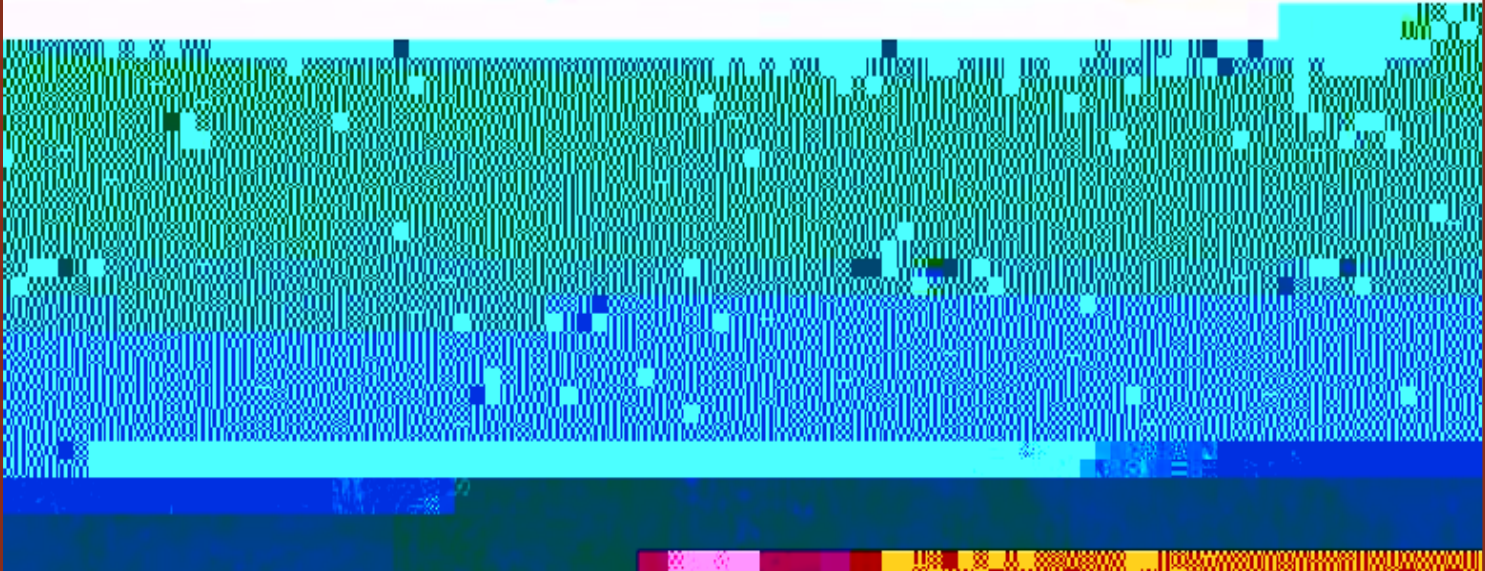


Photo by Chris Harris

## A Sense of Urgency

Temperate grasslands, one of the world's great biomes, occur on every continent except Antarctica. ...

After cradling the needs of humans for centuries, temperate grasslands are now considered the most altered and endangered ecosystem on the planet.

For most of the past century, temperate grasslands have not been visible on the global conservation agenda. The grasslands used to be home to some of the greatest assemblages of wildlife the earth has ever witnessed. Potential for protection still remains, especially in the prairies of North America, the pampas of South America, the lowland grasslands of southeast Australia, the steppes of Eastern Europe, and the Daurian steppes of East Asia.

It was with this knowledge of the high rate of conversion and the low level of protection of indigenous temperate grasslands that in 1996 the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), of the International Union for

and protection of grasslands. Numerous initiatives toward this end are evident throughout the biome, and the recorded level of protection for temperate grasslands has increased from 0.69% in 1996 to ~5% today.

Despite this impressive progress, nowhere in the world does the protection for temperate indigenous grasslands come close to an acceptable level. Protecting the world's temperate grasslands and managing them sustainably is essential to minimize the threats they are facing. The information in this brochure outlines the urgent task that we are undertaking and how we plan to catalyze action over a 'decade of temperate grassland conservation'. We need your financial and volunteer support and urge you to join us in this global conservation effort.

*Bill Henwood*  
Leader, Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force



# A Decade of Action for Temperate Grasslands

The evidence is clear – specific attention needs to be focused on the plight of indigenous temperate grasslands. To this end the Grasslands Protected Areas Task Force, with the generous support of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, launched the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative (TGCI) in Hohhot, China, June 2008. The 35 grassland experts from 14 countries participating in the Hohhot workshop adopted the following mission:

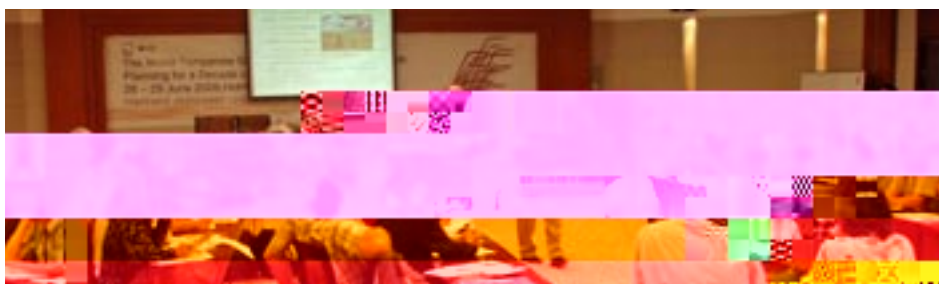
**“To reverse the trend of biodiversity loss and degradation of the temperate grasslands biome by promoting both the designation and special management of representative protected areas, and the widespread use of sustainable management practices beyond protected area boundaries, with the goal of at least doubling the current level of protection by 2014.”**

At this meeting participants signed *The Hohhot Declaration* that outlines the value of the world’s temperate grasslands, why they are endangered and how important it is for citizens of the world to work together to protect them.

Another product of the meeting was a compendium or description of the 17 priority temperate grassland regions from around the world. This compendium is the first global effort to provide an initial inventory and status information for these critical and fragile ecosystems.

At the Hohhot meeting, participants agreed to the following goals and action is now underway to implement them:

“Temperate grasslands are now considered the most altered and endangered ecosystem on the planet.”



## Grassroots Action - Transboundary Conservation

A clear pattern of the common threats has emerged. The overarching threat is climate change, which will lead to ecosystem impacts that are largely unknown and unpredictable. Unsustainable grazing and land conversion for forest plantations, crop production and energy/mining development are fundamental threats in every temperate grassland biome. These threats result in habitat loss, fragmentation, loss of diversity, degradation, and in many cases desertification. Building conductivity on these landscapes through sustainable management and restoration facilitates ecosystem health and services for livelihoods, as well as combating climate change.

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**South America:** In November 2008, 42 people from 8 countries gathered to develop an action plan to protect and conserve the 4 distinct temperate grassland eco-regions of South America: páramos, central Andes, pampas and campos, and the Patagonia steppe. Together, these eco-regions represent approximately 13% of the South American continent.

### **The Daurian Steppe East Asia:**

The development of a transboundary conservation strategy involving three countries (Russia, China and Mongolia) is a rare opportunity to address both biodiversity values and the interests of mobile peoples. Immediately after the Hohhot meeting 26 people from 10 countries met to begin developing a preliminary strategy for the Daurian Steppe.

In addition to these two priority areas, there is interest from North American grassland enthusiasts to revitalize conservation initiatives within Canada, United States and Mexico.





Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative