

## Sparrows in the Grasslands

Emma Stroud, Ecology Manager



Savannah Sparrow at BVR grasslands

The grasslands are full of life, and native plants are what fuel native species and provide them with the habitat they need to not only survive but thrive in their natural ecosystems.

We're always interested in understanding what native species are making their homes in our restored areas and seeing if changes have happened due to the restoration process itself. As part of this data collection, volunteers joined us in June last year to do a Bio-Blitz in the grassland restoration area in the Bow Valley Ranch. The goal of this project was to use

Visit iNaturalist on your mobile phone or desktop computer:



[www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org)

iNaturalist (a citizen science app) to document biodiversity (plants, birds, insects, mammals, fungi, and more!) between restored and un-restored areas.

In the restored area, we documented at least four

Savannah Sparrow adults and located three nests that had either eggs or a nestling inside. This is exciting because while Savannah Sparrows are known for living in native grasslands, they were occasional visitors to Fish Creek Provincial Park in the past due to the invasive brome and bluegrass making up most of the landscape. They're now very frequently seen on the east end of the park in the grasslands, especially around the Bow Valley Ranch Day Use area. Savannah Sparrows are a small migratory songbird that nest in Alberta's grasslands and then depart between mid-September and early November to the Southern US, Mexico, and Central America.

They return in the spring, usually in late April, and are recognizable by the yellow stripe on their heads.

Their song, which you may have heard if you frequent high-diversity grasslands here in Southern Alberta, has a three-part structure, which can resemble that of a red-winged blackbird—though blackbirds tend to live in different areas. Another similar species you may see in the Bow Valley Ranch are clay-colored sparrows, which

have a buzzy almost grasshopper-like song, lay blue-colored eggs, and usually nest in shrubs rather than the grass.

### Heterogeneous

different in kind; unlike; incongruous. composed of parts of different kinds; having widely dissimilar elements or constituents.

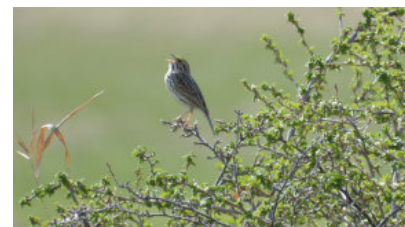
Like all native grassland birds, Savannah Sparrows benefit from **heterogeneous** plant communities, with tall plants they can use for perching, short grasses for nesting, and plenty

of wildflowers to produce seed and attract insects for them to eat. With the diversity of native plants in our grassland restoration sites, it's no surprise we're now finding so many of these sparrows!

Savannah Sparrows have one of our favorite Latin names, *Passerculus sandwichensis*, not because of our favorite lunch food, but because the first specimen to be formally described was collected near Sandwich Sound (now Prince William Sound) in Alaska.



Savannah Sparrow nest at Bow Valley Ranch



Savannah Sparrow in the BVR grasslands: by iNaturalist user klukshu95



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**Thank you for your  
commitment to  
Fish Creek  
Provincial Park!**

**Help preserve the park,  
donate today!**



# A note from the Executive Director

It may be the middle of winter, but preparations for the spring season are kicking into high gear here at the Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society! We have had groups busy all winter with preparing the kilograms of seeds we harvested last fall in preparation for planting this year, including at the Listen Garden site. You'll soon be able to see some of these seedlings growing in the Grow Tent (sponsored by CPKC) at the Bow Valley Ranch Visitor Centre!

Last year our plant salvages brought in over 45,000 new native plants to Fish Creek Provincial Park, and we've already seen more species of butterflies and other pollinators popping up in the restoration sites than in other areas. Not only are these native plants a fabulous way to improve local biodiversity, but they are also extremely beneficial for water conservation – something that is top of mind for many Calgarians now. To inspire more people to take up native gardening, the Friends will be hosting a very exciting speaker series on April 16 on this very topic. You can also read more about water conservation efforts in the article on page 6.

Adding to our regularly scheduled programming of Good Grief, Birding, and park tours, the Friends are excited to announce that summer 2026 will be the first year of the Fish Creek Day Camp (see article on page 4). Registration for this program will begin in March, with members getting early access, so be sure to renew your membership ASAP if you're looking for a great outdoor educational experience for your kids this summer.

The Friends operate through a combination of grants, fundraisers, program revenue, and donations from individuals and organizations alike, not to mention a tremendous amount of volunteer support. Thank you for all your help in making sure the Friends continue to live out our mission of providing stewardship and educational activities in this incredible park!

Sincerely,

Katrina Terrill  
Executive Director



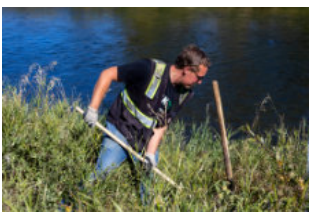
# Celebrating our Volunteers

## 2025 Volunteer Awards

At our volunteer appreciation event in early December, we got to spend time recognizing the incredible group of people that make our work possible. This involved fun group activities, great conversation, delicious food, and an awards ceremony honouring 2025's standout volunteers. Here are all the amazing volunteers presented with awards:



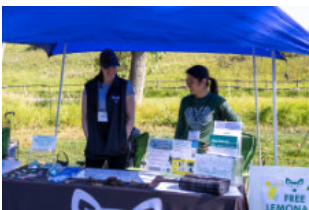
Award Title	Description	Recipient 2025
<b>Kingfisher</b>	For engaging the public in their love of nature by leading the birding program	Bernie D. & Robert W.
<b>Trailblazer</b>	For taking on projects that are outside the box and help expand what is possible for The Friends	Annette N.
<b>Staff Choice</b>	A volunteer recognized by all staff for their exceptional contributions to The Friends	Jennifer H.
<b>Community Champion</b>	For lending their expertise across multiple programs and building resilient communities, furthering the mission and vision of The Friends	Dennis B. & Jennifer S.
<b>Flintknapper</b>	To the volunteer who is the ultimate multi-tasker –jumping into special projects that require leadership and a wide array of skills	Chris B.
<b>Steward in Action</b>	To the volunteer who enthusiastically collaborates on riparian restoration activities and loves reconnecting with the land	Grace B.
<b>New and Noteworthy</b>	To the volunteer who recently joined the community and is keen to contribute to initiatives and strengthen ongoing programs	Jacob & Ronald N.
<b>Grassland Superstar</b>	To the volunteer who collaborates on grassland restoration activities and celebrates native plant communities	Tuyen V.
<b>Unsung Hero</b>	For working diligently behind the scenes and collaborating on projects that keep operations running smoothly	Judy & Ron S.
<b>Bill Hiebert Inspiration Award (Volunteer of the Year)</b>	To the volunteer who exemplifies the heart and spirit of The Friends	Gerhard M.
<b>Spark!</b>	For taking initiative and building partnerships and opportunities for the organization	Tim C.
<b>Board of Directors</b>	For helping keep us fiscally responsible and focused on organizational goals	Neil G.
<b>1,000 hours club</b>	For reaching more than 1,000 volunteer hours dedicated to The Friends	Bob M. & Ruth D.



## Volunteering Opportunities

Field season is just around the corner, and it's powered by all the people who choose to volunteer with us! Whether you're looking for a year-round volunteer role or are a student focused on gaining experience and having fun this summer, we've got a whole bunch of opportunities on the horizon.

**Youth ages 16 and up can volunteer without a parent! Here's what you can expect to see on our volunteering shifts:**



Events and Outreach:	Stewardship activities
- Visitor pop-up centre	- Planting
- Field trips (kids)	- Weed management
- Visitor Centre Ambassadors	- Beaver dam management
- Daycamp volunteers	



Scan or click to learn more about volunteering and to sign up!

**OUR MISSION:**

To engage the community through activities and awareness to conserve a truly unique naturalized urban park.

**OUR VISION:**

A sustainable Fish Creek Provincial Park that improves the quality of life for present and future generations.

**Become a Member Today!**

Purchase an annual membership and support us in preserving the ecological integrity of the Park, sharing education and knowledge with the public, and building awareness of this incredible Park right in our backyards!

**Member Benefits**

- 10% discount at the Wild Bird Store
- 10% discount at Kensington Art Supply
- Free Entry to Fish Creek Speaker Series
- Discounts on Birding, Tours, and Merchandise
- Early registration for Day Camps

**Help preserve the park, donate today!**



# Fish Creek Day Camp

Something new is coming! This July and August, your conservation-minded and nature-loving kiddos aged 6 to 12 will be able to spend their summer days at our new Fish Creek Day Camp.

Campers can expect to get their boots muddy, take part in real stewardship projects and explore the natural environment right here in Fish Creek Provincial Park. Your young explorer will also gain insight into diverse ecosystems and build friendships through games, storytelling, and creative expression at this nature-based day camp. Here’s a sneak peek at the camp’s programming and schedule for every age group:

Camp	Approach	Ages	Dates & Cost
Explorers	Learning to love nature through outdoor play, gentle discovery, and curiosity-led exploration.	6 - 8	July 6 – 10 (\$340) July 27 – 31 (\$340) August 17 – 21 (\$340)
Adventurers	Exploring ecosystems with purpose through hands-on stewardship, teamwork, and growing independence.	9 – 10	July 13 – 17 (\$340) August 4 – 7 (\$272) August 24 – 28 (\$340)
Trailblazers	Taking action for conservation through deeper ecological learning, leadership, and real-world stewardship projects.	11 - 12	July 20 – 24 (\$340) August 10 – 14 (\$340)

*\*Optional extended drop-off and pick-up times will also be available for an additional fee*

**Featuring:**

- Daily nature exploration
- Themed programming
- Hands-on learning
- Creative expression
- Stewardship in action
- A safe, supportive environment



Look for registration opening in March! Friends members will get the opportunity for early registration, so make sure you’ve signed up or renewed your membership to get in on early registration!



**Scan or click to learn more about Fish Creek Day Camp**

# Native Plants and Water Conservation

Oh, beautiful Calgary—our sunny but dry city that seems to experience less predictable summer rainfall with each passing year. That means when we most want to see our beautiful outdoor areas green and thriving, it takes a lot of water to make that happen. With less precipitation, that water is often in short supply, even when you're doing

what you can to capture water with rain barrels or similar methods. So what can we do to help our gardens be green and beautiful even when the clouds above aren't cooperating?

If you guessed "establish native plants", you're 100% correct! These plants have a lot of environmental benefits and are a natural part of our ecological system. They evolved alongside our Calgary climate and are drought-tolerant so they can make it through the long, dry, southern Alberta summers without needing much extra watering at all.

Native plants are also havens for native insects and pollinators, and are well adapted to survive our harsh winters. Some plants even NEED cold temperatures for their seeds to germinate! If you're interested in getting native plants started in your garden this year, look for our Grow with Us program re-opening up this

spring, where we provide community members with native plant seeds at no cost to them. We just ask that growers help us to grow our seed bank by returning native seeds to us once their plants go to seed!

If you're looking for a specific species or color of flower, you can also check out native seed producers like **ALCLA**, **Grumpy's Greenhouse**, or **Eastern Slopes Rangeland Seeds** for plugs and seeds to plan your garden just like you want. We also have an exciting Speaker Series coming up on April 16 where Mathis Natvik of Natvik Design Inc. will present on gardening with Alberta native plants – check the panel right below to learn more!

Native plants require around **50% less water** than their non-native or agricultural counterparts. Their deep roots can access water far below ground and adaptations like the shape and colour of their leaves, hairiness, and sun tracking abilities help reduce their need for water.

*Native grasslands not only support plant diversity, they provide a home for native insect species like bumblebees (upper) and blister beetles (lower)*



## Fish Creek Speaker Series

Tickets: \$10 | Complimentary for Members

- February 19 | The Weaselhead/Glenmore Park Preservation Society
- March 12 | Calgary's Best Walks & the Joy of Walking
- April 16 | Gardening with Alberta Native Plants

Click or scan to get your tickets:



Scan to sign up for our email list

Sign up for our newsletter to get the latest on upcoming events.

Member perk!  
\$90 value

9 free events per year!

# Group Stewardship Volunteering



Did you know that we have so many exciting ways your organization can get involved in conserving Fish Creek Provincial Park? Join us with a group of any size, from small offices to full departments for a fun, engaging team-building activity that makes a real impact.

Learn about native species and be a part of restoring the native grasslands to the park by planting rescued native plants into the grasslands at the Bow Valley Ranch. Or maybe your group wants to make its mark by visibly reducing invasive species in targeted areas

around the park? There's also the option to participate in a self-guided park clean-up, being stewards of the land and helping keep the park clean for everyone who enjoys it, humans and animals alike.

Whatever your group chooses, you'll be working with a Friends staff member who will guide you and pass on knowledge about native species, invasive plants, and conservation in the park and beyond.

*"It was very refreshing"*

*"It felt good to give back to the community"*

— Corporate group feedback

Are you interested in joining one of our programs or meeting new friends? Do you enjoy learning new things or sharing your experiences with others? Become a volunteer!

[Click here to get started](#)



SCAN ME

**Year round:** Park clean-up.

**June through September:** Grassland restoration and invasive species management (weed pulls)

**May-June and September-October:** Weed pulls, riparian restoration, and tree wrapping (in support of beaver coexistence)

## Fee Schedule

<b>Riparian Restoration</b>	<b>Tree Wrapping</b>	<b>Grassland Restoration</b>	<b>Weed Pull</b>
\$2,500	\$1,000	\$800	\$500

### **Park Cleanup**

Pay what you can! Just register with us and collect supplies from the cookhouse Monday-Friday.



Scan or click to learn more about Corporate Stewardship Opportunities

# Coexisting with Fish Creek Beavers

*Ross Anderson, Restoration Team Lead*

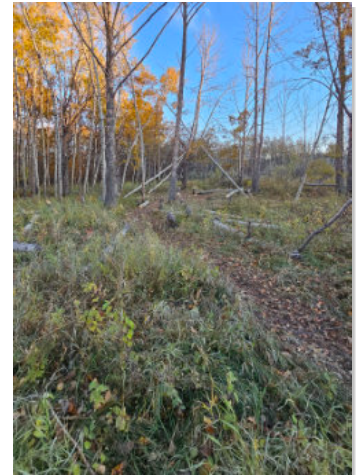
The 2025 beaver coexistence program officially wrapped up last November (with volunteers being able to keep going through the winter if they were super keen) and we've gotten the chance to look at all the data submitted through the season. This program involves independent volunteers monitoring a section of the park regularly to track beaver activity features like dams, lodges, drag trails, tree chewing, and food caches. Monitoring and logging data helps us understand what Fish Creek Provincial Park beavers are up to and informs our tree wrapping activities or infrastructure protecting projects when necessary.

**What kinds of things were the park beavers up to in 2025?** Some neat things we found include two new large dams between bridges five and six (by the Raven Rocks between Votier's Flats and Bebo Grove) and a new lodge in the bank in that same area. We've also observed lots of felled trees and chewed trees around the Votier's Flats day use area – meaning there's been a lot of purposeful activity in building dams and establishing food caches!



*Friends staff Ross & volunteers breaking down storm channel dams by Bebo Grove, 2025*

Beavers in the west end of the park kept us busy in the later part of the summer with their extremely efficient dam building in stormwater draining channels. Combined with the massive amounts of rain seen in July, these dams led to significant pathway flooding in one area around Bebo Grove. Thanks to some dedicated volunteers and a lot of effort over multiple dam management sessions, we were able to break the dams down. It was no easy feat though! One day alone we dealt with 13 or 14 dams—it seemed like they were popping back up as fast as we could clear them sometimes!



*Beaver drag trail in the park*

We also wrapped trees in the area to encourage the beavers to move to a different spot, and are looking into other options to prevent pathway flooding in 2026.

This year, we also had the chance to collaborate with the city on stormwater pond management where resident beavers had the potential to be impacted. This involved draining and dredging accumulated silt out of two storm ponds with beaver lodges in them. The work began with slowly draining the storm ponds, reducing the water level with the goal of encouraging any current residents to relocate. In this case, it turns out that the lodges were unoccupied, but it was a positive step for protecting wildlife who make their homes in and around city infrastructure like storm ponds.



*Before (left) and after (right) photos of the beaver dam between Bridges 5 and 6*

# What's coming up: Winter & Spring

- ★ **February 19** .....  Speaker Series: Weaselhead/Glenmore Preservation Society | **Tickets \$10**
- ★ **March 12** .....  Speaker Series: Calgary's Best Walks & the Joy of Walking with Lori Beattie | **Tickets \$10**
- Free Event!** **March 15** .....  Open House at the Bow Valley Ranch Visitor Centre
- Free Event!** **March 29** .....  Open House at the Shannon Terrace Environmental Learning Centre
- Free Event!** **April 11** .....  Star Night at the Shannon Terrace Environmental Learning Centre
- ★ **April 16** .....  Speaker Series: Alberta Native Plant Gardening with Mathis Natvik | **Tickets \$10**



Scan or click me to visit our events page online

★ **FREE for Friends members**

[www.friendsoffishcreek.org](http://www.friendsoffishcreek.org)

## Become a member today!

### Membership gives you:

- Complimentary Speaker Series admission
- Discounted Birding
- Complimentary tour admission
- Discounts at local partners
- Early Day Camp registration
- Discounts on Friends merch

**SCAN ME FOR  
MORE INFO**

