**Decision Support Tool – Screening Criteria**

All criteria in Tables 1 and 2 of the Decision Support Tool are intended to help practitioners determine whether an area meets the Pan-Canadian standards and is therefore eligible to be reported as a Protected Area or an “Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure" (OECM) under the pan-Canadian standards. Criteria in Table 1 apply similarly to both Protected Areas and OECMs. Criteria in Table 2 help to both define and distinguish between Protected Areas and OECMs. All criteria in Table 2 must be met at the PA level for an area to be reported as protected, or at the OECM level or combination of OECM and PA levels for an area to be reported as an OECM. **This template is intended to be used in conjunction with the decision support tool and detailed interpretation guide.**

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| **BASIC INFORMATION** | |
| **Name of Site** | OH Ranch |
| **Designation** | Heritage Rangeland |
| **Province/Territory** | Alberta |
| **Year of Establishment / Securement** | 2008 |
| **Area (ha)** | 4,270.52 ha |
| **Management Authority** | Government of Alberta, Department of Environment and Parks, Parks Operations Division |
| **Explanation of Management Authority** *(optional)* |  |
| **Governance Type *(CPCAD type*)** | Government - subnational |
| **Legal Basis / mechanism(s)** | *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act* (*WAERNAHR Act*) |
| **Explanation of legal basis / mechanism(s)** *(optional)* | The governance structure of Heritage Rangelands is unique for protected areas in Alberta, in that the Parks Division maintains management oversight, while management plans, grazing and range improvement plans, and day-to-day operations are completed by rangeland specialists not tied to the protected areas program. As such, the existing management plan plays a crucial role in ensuring that the grazing lease and conditions are managed such that they achieve the conservation objectives, with ongoing monitoring and range health assessments to this end. |
| **Summary of Essential / Relevant natural, social and cultural values** | OH Ranch Heritage Rangeland was established to protect native rough fescue ecosystems that are both rare and representative of the foothills parkland subregion in Alberta, using grazing (via long-term lease agreement) to maintain the native grassland ecology. The ranch consists of two large parcels of native grassland that collectively provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife, both typical species and species at risk, including limber pine which is considered endangered in Alberta.  The Heritage Rangeland includes areas that were part of one of the oldest ranches in Alberta. For 125 years the ranch has stewarded the native grasslands and contributed to the rich cultural history of ranching tied to the land in the province. There is no ranching infrastructure or buildings on this site and recreation access and opportunities are limited to low impact, non-facility based activities that are compatible with conservation objectives and do not impact grazing operations. This site is managed in conjunction with the adjacent large parcel of privately protected ranch lands owned by the grazing leaseholder and held under conservation easement with Nature Conservancy Canada and the Southern Alberta Land Trust. |

| **TABLE 1: STANDARDS COMMON TO PROTECTED AREAS AND OECMS** | | | | |
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| **CRITERIA:** | **INTENDED EFFECT OF THE CRITERION** | **SCREENING CHOICE** | **EVIDENCE-BASED RATIONALE  Rationale/evaluation of how area meets or does not meet the intended effect of the criterion** | **MEETS INTENDED EFFECT?** |
| **GEOGRAPHICAL SPACE** | Demarcates the area to facilitate the in-situ conservation of biodiversity. | A. The geographical space has clearly defined and agreed-upon borders. | The boundary is clearly defined by a legal land description via an Order-in-Council that establishes the site under the Act. Maps and shapefiles of the boundary are publically available and disseminated. | Yes |
| **EFFECTIVE MEANS – 1** | Activities incompatible with the in-situ conservation of biodiversity do not occur and compatible activities are effectively managed. | B. The mechanism(s) provide(s) the ability to prevent, control and/or manage activities within the area such that the in-situ conservation of biodiversity can be achieved. | The legislation governing Heritage Rangelands has the power and breadth to exclude, control and manage most activities within the site that are likely to have an impact on biodiversity with two exceptions. Additional measures are in place to provide protections for these exceptions as outlined here.  The first exception is that the sale of subsurface resource rights under the site is controlled by Alberta Energy, as with all sites in Alberta. However, the *WAERNAHR Act* requires that only pre-existing mineral tenure and related dispositions can be honoured and all new tenure is required to be sold with a “no surface access” addendum in all Heritage Rangelands. The intent of this mechanism is to effectively prevent impacts on biodiversity from any related subsurface activity. Areas within OH Ranch subject to guaranteed access for subsurface resource rights will be excluded from reporting.  Both parcels of the site are underlain by bituminous coal deposits – which have been withdrawn from sale. Metallic and industrial mineral and ammonite shell are also reserved from sale. Although there are varying levels of oil and natural gas that continue to be legally available for sale under OH Ranch, there are no crown oil and gas leases that pre-existed the establishment of the site that would need to be honoured. There are 6 quarter sections (324.89 ha) of privately owned minerals where surface access would have to be allowed if exploration was pursued. However, the park has been managed effectively to exclude these activities and there is no footprint or history of application for subsurface resource development anywhere in the site since its designation.  The second exception relates to cattle grazing in the site, which is not managed under the *WAERNAHR Act*. Cattle grazing is the primary management tool for maintaining the native grassland ecology, which evolved under natural disturbance processes such as fire and grazing by large herbivores like bison. Because both of these key ecological functions no longer exist naturally on the landscape, conservation of these ecosystems requires management intervention to be effective and persist. Management of cattle grazing to this end occurs via a public lands grazing lease that is issued to a leaseholder under the authority of the *Public Lands Act.* Outside of the development of the management plan, Parks legislation has limited influence or success in ensuring day-to-day grazing practices on Heritage Rangelands are in alignment with best practice to meet conservation objectives. Grazing leaseholders on public lands grazing leases are also authorized to remove problem wildlife (only applies to coyote, black bear or timber wolf, all of which have healthy population levels in Alberta) for the purposes of controlling of livestock predation. It is unknown if, or to what extent, this has occurred in OH Ranch. Livestock producers are compensated for the market value of lost livestock.  However, the management plan for OH Ranch identifies a number of management actions that are intended to ensure sustainable site and range management for the purposes of conservation of native grasslands and associated biodiversity. The management plan is also specific in identifying and monitoring objectives to ensure riparian and range health and to ensure biodiversity is maintained. Grasslands in this context are managed on all public lands to a fairly universal “healthy” condition, moving cattle in and out, presuming to emulate grazing by bison. Although there is a concern that current grazing practices may not be ideally suited to emulate the periodicity or intensity of bison grazing or fire processes, there are sufficient monitoring actions and management objectives in place to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the grassland ecosystem and its associated biodiversity overall, or to identify when additional or alternative management interventions may be required.  There is no permanent infrastructure in this site. Recreational use is allowed in OH Ranch, but not promoted, and access (only non-motorized is allowed) is only by permission of the grazing leaseholder. Hunting for licensed species is allowed onsite, and permitting is granted in accordance with the *Wildlife Act* that ensures maintenance of healthy wildlife population levels. The government manages game species populations in Alberta with conservation as their primary priority. | Yes |
| **EFFECTIVE MEANS – 2** | A. The mechanism(s) compel(s) the authority(ies) to prohibit activities that are incompatible with the in-situ conservation of biodiversity. | The *WAERNAHR Act* compels the prohibition of activities incompatible with the conservation objectives for Heritage Rangelands.  Although oil and gas continue to be available for sale under OH Ranch, all new mineral sales are required to be sold with no surface access. The legislation prohibits access to those resources from within the site with the intent to ensure the long term protection of the biotic zone from the impacts of subsurface resource development. Areas within OH Ranch where existing commitments for subsurface mineral leases are being honoured (areas underlain by privately owned mineral rights) do not meet this criterion and are not reported. | Yes |
| **LONG TERM** | The area is permanently protected or conserved and not easily reversed. | A. The mechanism(s) is/are intended to be in effect for the long term and not easily reversed. | The *WAERNAHR Act* explicitly identifies that Heritage Rangelands are intended to be in place in perpetuity, “for the benefit of current and future generations”.  The Heritage Rangeland designation can only be removed with great difficulty by rescinding the Order-in-Council, which requires cabinet approval and a period of public consultation and notification, which is required by legislation. | Yes |
| **TIMING** | Biodiversity is protected or conserved year-round. | A. The mechanism(s) is/are in effect year-round | The Heritage Rangeland designation is in place year round. | Yes |

| **TABLE 2: STANDARDS THAT FURTHER DEFINE AND DISTINGUISH BETWEEN PROTECTED AREAS AND OECMS** | | | | |
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| **CRITERIA:** | **INTENDED EFFECT OF THE CRITERION** | **SCREENING CHOICE** | **EVIDENCE-BASED RATIONALE:**  **Rationale/evaluation of how area meets or does not meet the intended effect of the criterion** | **OUTCOME** |
| **SCOPE OF OBJECTIVES** | Objectives have sufficient scope to result in the in-situ conservation of biodiversity. | A. The objectives are for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity as a whole, or for indigenous values accomplished through the in-situ conservation of biodiversity. | The scope of conservation objectives for OH Ranch are for biodiversity as a whole: to protect the representative grassland ecosystems, rare habitats and sensitive species of this site. These are set out in both the management plan, and also in the governing purpose statement of the Heritage Rangelands class as set out in legislation. | Yes - PA |
| **PRIMACY OF OBJECTIVES** | Objectives are such that they result in the in-situ conservation of biodiversity. | A. Conservation objectives are stated as primary and overriding of other objectives. | Conservation of biodiversity is explicitly stated as the objective of Heritage Rangelands, which are established to ensure protection of Alberta’s native grasslands using grazing to maintain the grassland ecosystems. This is set out in the legislation, and is identified as being the primary objective of this site within the approved management plan. | Yes - PA |
| **GOVERNING AUTHORITIES** | The in-situ conservation of biodiversity is not jeopardized by relevant governing authorities. | A. All relevant governing authorities acknowledge and abide by the conservation objectives of the area. | All relevant governing authorities abide by the Heritage Rangeland designation. Although subsurface resources limited to crown-owned oil and gas tenure continue to be sold under the Heritage Rangeland, they are required by legislation to be sold with no surface access that is binding on all authorities. Any area of the site where pre-existing privately owned mineral rights must be honoured is not included in reporting. | Yes - PA |
| **BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION OUTCOMES** | Biodiversity is conserved in-situ. | B. The area is being managed with the intent of, and is likely achieving, the conservation objectives. | OH Ranch is managed with the explicit intent of maintaining native grasslands and has at least some evidence to support the likelihood that this and related biodiversity outcomes are being achieved, despite management shortcomings. Provincial stewardship objectives for grazing on native rangelands include management to ensure habitat is protected such that it continues to provide wildlife habitat for birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and fish.  The management plan identifies monitoring objectives specifically related to ensuring the maintenance of “healthy range” in the native grassland ecosystem. Range health assessments, baseline inventories and grazing audits have been completed to ensure range and riparian health is maintained on an ongoing basis. Annual stock return forms are required of the grazing leaseholder and also aid in ensuring grazing levels sustainably support range and riparian health objectives. However, there is limited monitoring on other aspects of biodiversity in the site, including predators that may be in conflict with livestock, and on whether current grazing practices effectively emulate natural processes such as bison grazing or fire. Further work on this would provide clearer evidence of effective management. | Yes - PA |

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| **SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT** | |
| **OUTCOME / EVALUATION** | **Screening Outcome:** Protected Area (meets all criteria)  Is this an Interim Target 1 area: no  Is this a candidate Target 1 area: no  **Currently reported to CPCAD/CARTS?** Yes, as Protected Area  **Total Area (ha) to be reported to CPCAD/CARTS:** 4,270.52 ha |
| Identify deficiencies that could be overcome in order to report as PA or OECM |  |
| Lead evaluator / assessor | Originally approved and published as a CCEA case study (Heather Lazaruk, 2017).  Heather Lazaruk, Sr. Systems Planner, Alberta Parks - 2020 |
| Communications / Engagement | *Names of governing authorities and others consulted, including names and positions of contact people and dates*  Travis Sjovold, Area Manager – review and approval 2017 |
| Approvals | *Names of governing authorities (including landowners, right holders and the responsible jurisdiction) that have approved the content and results of this screening as being accurate and complete to the best of their knowledge and agree to reporting of data.*  Tracy Draper, Parks Land Management Director – review and approval 2017, 2020  Brenden Hemens, Alberta Environment and Parks (Pathway Jurisdictional representative) – approval 2020 |

Tags: Alberta, AB, Provincial, Protected Area, PA, IUCN IV, Habitat management area, Species management area, Grassland, Heritage Rangeland, 2020