SOUTHERN ALBERTA NATIVE SEED COLLABORATIVE

STRATEGIC PLAN
2025–2030

MARCH 2025

Cover Photograph:

Wildflowers in Waterton Lakes National Park. © Parks Canada 2014

Background

Temperate grasslands experience one of the highest rates of habitat conversion of any biome worldwide (Hoekstra et al. 2005). In Alberta, 60% of all grassland and 78% of all parkland has been converted by human use (Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute, 2022). As areas of undisturbed grassland continue to shrink it is vital to not only protect what remains, but to restore disturbed areas wherever possible. Many Southern Alberta Native Seed Collaborative (SANSC) members are restoration practitioners who have identified lack of adequate seed as a barrier to restoration. Seed on the broader market may not be locally adapted, may be contaminated with invasive species, or the desired species may be unavailable entirely. Where quality native seed is available, the demand is often greater than the supply. Thus, there is a need for local production of native species commonly utilized in restoration projects. However, the native seed market is challenging for producers due to fluctuations in demand, variable or slow production by native species, challenges with weeds, lack of crop insurance, and unique seed processing requirements.

There are two main methods for supplying seed or other plant propagules. The first is to grow it in an agricultural setting, and the second is wild harvesting. The agricultural production of native seed is a multi-year process. It requires collection of wild material, growth in multiplication plots and then sowing and growing in larger fields, with frequent augmentation from wild populations. Wild harvesting also requires advance planning as the time of year the seed is required is often different from the collection window. Additionally, collectors may need to wait for a mast year, and find large, pure stands of the desired species to collect efficiently. For both seed procurement strategies, the methods and equipment used are often highly specialized and species dependent. Growers and collectors require insight into future demand for species so that they may plan which species to target. Knowledge of which species other producers are targeting can also be beneficial, so that the market is not flooded, leaving the producer with a devalued product. In addition, due to the steep learning curve and specific challenges with harvesting, cleaning seed and growing native plants, the industry stands to benefit significantly from research and knowledge sharing.

Organization History

The Southern Alberta Native Seed Collaborative (SANSC) was assembled informally in 2018 for the purpose of sharing seed and seed collection resources among local organizations. Initially composed of a few governmental organizations, the group quickly expanded to include NGOs, independent consultants, Indigenous land managers, growers, wild seed harvesters, and industry representatives, all with a common interest of improving the availability of local seed. The area covered by the group spans a diverse range of grassland ecosystems, which include the montane, foothills parkland, foothills fescue, mixedgrass, dry mixed grass, northern fescue, and central parkland natural subregions (see Figure 1).

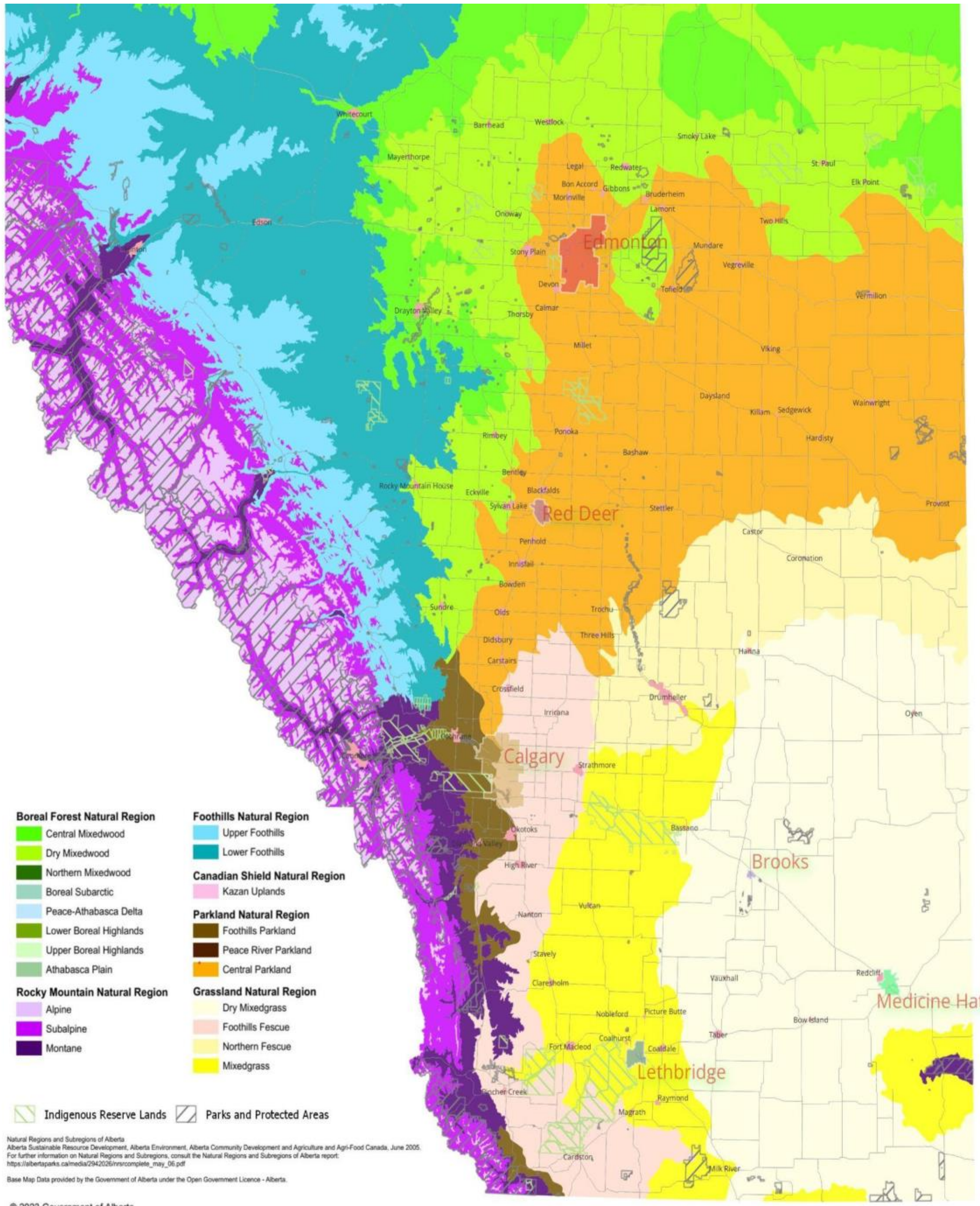
Scope

Thus far, SANSC has served as a space for discussion of methods, ideas, and collaborations. However, with a diverse membership, and the numerous challenges affecting the native seed industry, a strategic plan is necessary to solidify the path forward. This plan will delineate the pathway for the formalization of the collaborative and provide direction on the group’s activities for the next five years.

Our geographic area of consideration will focus on all grassland ecosystems in the south half of Alberta (Figure 1.).

The strategic plan will direct SANSC activities for five years or until all goals have been accomplished. Following this, it will be reviewed and replaced by the SANSC Steering Committee. The SANSC Steering Committee can evaluate and modify the plan at their discretion by majority vote.

Figure 1. Geographic Scope



Vision	Reliable, high-quality, ecologically appropriate, local native seed sources are available for restoration projects in Southern Alberta.
Mission	To advocate for and facilitate the growth of a sustainable, locally sourced native seed industry to supply the needs of restoration projects in Southern Alberta.
Goals & Objectives	Through extensive online discussion and an in-person one-day workshop in November 2023, the following were identified as priority goals to advance the mandate of SANSC: 1. Establish SANSC organizational structure and funding 2. Improve communication, outreach, and education 3. Increase access to genetically appropriate native plant materials

Goal 1:

Establish Organization Structure and Funding

#	Objective	Measure of Success	Expected Benefits
1.	Formalize the short-term relationship with the Southern Alberta Sustainable Communities Initiative (SASCI) via the Grasslands Restoration Forum (GRF).	A. Agreement is in place.	A. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of each organization.
2.	Establish organization structure.	A. Terms of reference developed (completed). B. Established Steering Committee and their roles. C. Established Advisory Committee and their roles. D. Established any potentially paid positions and their roles. E. Paid role(s) filled by September 2025. F. SANSC is set up as a not-for-profit by 2027.	A. Clearly outlined organization hierarchy and definition of roles. B. SANSC has not-for-profit status.
3.	Support Indigenous communities in exploring the option to develop a complementary program focusing on culturally significant species.	A. Plan is developed as lead by Indigenous communities.	A. Indigenous communities have the support they require for restoration of culturally significant species.
4.	Establish financial management structure within the first year of strategic plan completion.	A. Financial Structure developed and approved by Steering Committee.	A. Clearly outlined funding objectives and how initial finances will be managed through relationships with GRF / SASCI.
5.	Secure grant funding to support management of SANSC and implement priority aspects of the business plan over time.	A. Grants and other funding are received to support SANSC projects and management through the first 3 years. B. Once the SANSC not-for-profit is established, funding objectives beyond 2027 are clearly outlined.	A. Funding is secured to achieve SANSC objectives.
6.	Hold Steering Committee meetings monthly excluding summer months (May – August).	A. Dates held are recorded. B. Agenda is established with appropriate time for discussion of each point.	A. Clear direction and progress of projects and goals that can be tracked.

7.	Hold Advisory Committee meetings a minimum of 2 times per year.	A. Advisory Committee meetings with at least one meeting in person (can co-occur with in person Steering Committee meeting) held biannually.	A. Advisory Committee is kept up to date on SANSC business. B. Advisory Committee provides advice to Steering Committee.
8.	Perform strategic plan review every five years, or sooner as needed.	A. Schedule review of strategic plan starting in mid-2030 with completion by Dec 2030 or sooner as needed.	A. SANSC has clear operational direction that is updated as required.

Goal 2:

Improve Communication Outreach, and Education

#	Objective	Measure of Success	Expected Benefits
1.	Improve education and information availability within the native seed industry.	A. Market analysis shared with interested parties by Spring 2025. B. Education series on how to get started as a grower by 2026. C. Establish a newsletter and blog/Q and A portal for members. Completed by Fall 2026.	A. Better understanding of current challenges and successes within the native seed industry.
2.	Improve networking opportunities to connect growers and buyers.	A. At least one meeting per year for native seed related networking occurs.	A. The public, growers and landowners are connected and understand how they can contribute and benefit.
3.	Maintain information portal via the GRF website until SANSC not-for-profit is well established.	A. Assigned person for this role is in place by Fall 2025. B. Regular meeting agenda point.	A. Current and useful information is publicly available.
4.	Develop seed harvester protocol/best management practices.	A. Seed harvester best management practices developed by Summer 2025.	A. Improved relationship with private landowners due to improved confidence in seed harvesting process. B. A reviewed and approved seed collector protocol exists and is published and available for free.
5.	Develop information package on native seed harvesting for landholders.	A. Completion of "Native Seed Harvesting Information of Landholders" by Summer 2024 (completed). B. Distribution of information package at appropriate events. C. Information package published online.	A. Improved incentive for private landowners to permit harvesting. B. Assurances that harvesting is being done in a safe and sustainable way (positive public perception). C. Increased education for landholders regarding native seed harvesting.

Goal 3:

Increase access to genetically appropriate native plant materials

#	Objective	Measure of Success	Expected Benefits
1.	Conduct market analysis including supply and demand for next five years.	A. Native seed market and needs survey is sent to participants by March 2025. B. Completed Analysis by June 2025. C. Leverage results to help industry identify and fill gaps in the market.	A. Improved understanding of market conditions for native seeds.
2.	Improve economic incentives for growers, especially small growers, and reduce risks due to start-up costs.	A. Explore the creation of an equipment share program. B. Advocate with insurance companies to offer crop insurance for native species. C. Explore options for grants to support growers.	A. Increases the number of local native seed growers and production of local native seed. B. Insurable crop for growers reducing liability.
3.	Land registry for lands available to harvest – species present and access restrictions.	A. Explore the option to have an annually updated list of lands available for harvest. B. Have a designated person who accepts and collects this information.	A. Increased land access options for harvesters. B. Improved access to harvester network for land managers.
4.	Registry of potential growers and harvesters, by geographic region, capacity, and species of interest.	A. Completed list of potential growers and harvesters by Fall 2025. B. List is updated annually. C. Have a designated person who accepts and collects this information.	A. Improved knowledge of native seed market.
5.	Connect buyers with forecasted needs to potential growers and harvesters.	A. Develop a mechanism to connect buyers with forecasted needs to growers or harvesters in a timely manner.	A. Improve forecasting of native seed requirements for producers.

Future Directions

Through workshops and online discussions, SANSC has identified additional ideas and goals that are outside of the current scope of this strategy. They are outlined below:

- Develop a formal certification program for growers and collectors similar in concept to professional designation in other industries (e.g. Professional Agrologist - P Ag).
- Clearly determine SANSC's role in supporting the establishment and implementation of the native seed supply chain such as the potential for SANSC to act as a centralized coordinator for the collection, production, storage, and distribution of native plant materials to improve efficiency and costs.
- Develop a certification process for native seeds origin and species similar in context to a certified organic label.
- Advocate for provincial policy and guidelines to prioritize the use of local genetics in ecological restoration programs.

These ideas will be incorporated into future planning and revisions of this strategy.

References

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