

For Immediate Release:

Keremeos Columns Grassland Protected By The Nature Trust of BC

Historic Okanagan landmark and surrounding sensitive ecosystems now protected

Wednesday, June 7th 2022 - Okanagan, BC - Today, [The Nature Trust of British Columbia](#), one of the province's leading non-profit land conservation organizations announces that, with the help of many donors, over 479 acres (194 hectares) of historical and ecologically important land has been purchased for conservation in the Similkameen Valley, including the Keremeos Columns formation.

The Keremeos Columns Grassland conservation area is located in the Similkameen Valley within the traditional territory of the Smelqmix and Syilx People. The conservation area is adjacent to the 20 hectare Keremeos Columns Provincial Park, increasing the size of the protected land by almost ten-fold and connecting seven crucial and sensitive ecosystems.

The ecosystems include grasslands, sagebrush steppe, riparian, open coniferous woodland, mature forest, old forest and sparsely vegetated rocky outcrops. Low elevation grasslands are one of the most rare types of ecosystems in BC and support high concentrations of species at risk; protecting this type of ecosystem is a conservation priority.

The mixture of diverse and sensitive ecosystems on the property requires urgent protection as they provide habitat for a variety of at-risk species. The Western Yellow-bellied Racer (listed as Special Concern under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA)) and the Western Rattlesnake (threatened under SARA), who are sensitive to habitat fragmentation and rely on contiguous low elevation grassland, shrub-steppe, and rocky outcrop ecosystems found in the Similkameen Valley, are known to reside within the conservation area.

Additionally, this conservation area will support the habitat needs of the Lark Sparrow, which was once common in BC, but is now primarily found in undisturbed shrub-steppe grasslands of the South Okanagan and Similkameen. The Watson's cyptantha, an annual white-flowered herb that grows in the sagebrush steppe, blooms on this land, which is one of the few remaining places left in BC where it is known to grow naturally.

The Keremeos Columns Grassland conservation area has a rich history. Surrounded by Douglas-fir trees within this conservation area, vertical hexagonal basalt columns rise above the forest. The Columns are a unique geological formation that was created over 30 million years ago during high volcanic activity. The funds raised through this campaign will ensure this geological landmark is protected and can be appreciated by generations to come.

The Keremeos Columns formation is best observed from viewpoints within the Keremeos Columns Provincial Park.

Access to the conservation area requires movement across several private land holdings. We ask that if you want to view the Columns you do so from the Provincial Park to respect the private property of local land owners, as well as the sensitive species and ecosystems found within the conservation area.

Over the past 50 years, The Nature Trust of BC has acquired and cares for over 178,000 acres (72,000 hectares) of our province's most critical natural habitat for vulnerable wildlife and plants.

This project was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada through Environment and Climate Change Canada. This project has also been made possible by MapleCross, Val and Dick Bradshaw, the Kaatza Foundation, and many individual donors.

QUOTES:

“We were blown away by the community support we received to purchase this property. Preserving connectivity among biologically diverse parts of the Similkameen Valley landscape is an important step in enabling ecosystems to adapt and persevere through climate change. The land is not only rich in sensitive ecosystems and at-risk species, but also rich in history. Protecting this property will make the conservation network in the Okanagan and Similkameen much more resilient.”

— **Jasper Lament, CEO, The Nature Trust of BC**

“MapleCross is proud to be supporting The Nature Trust of BC to protect British Columbia’s rich natural heritage. Keremeos Columns Grassland is a wonderful example of this partnership in action. This acquisition will not only protect numerous endangered species, but will also protect endangered grassland ecosystems and a unique geological formation with the basalt columns. This is our 6th project with this leading non-profit and conservation organization.”

— **MapleCross founders Isobel Ralston and Jan Oudenes**

“Recovering Canada’s species at risk and restoring biodiversity requires local, regional and national action. Conservation efforts at the Keremeos Columns Grassland is a terrific example of how we can work together with partners to protect nature, build ecological corridors and help species at risk. The Government of Canada is committed to conserving 25 percent of Canada’s land and inland waters and 25 percent of oceans by 2025, and is working toward 30 percent of each by 2030. Together, we are conserving nature for a healthier future.”

— **The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change**

ABOUT:

The Nature Trust of BC

The Nature Trust of British Columbia is a leading non-profit land conservation organization with a 50 year history of successfully protecting and caring for B.C.’s most critical habitats. Since 1971, The Nature Trust of BC and its partners have acquired more than 72,000 hectares (178,000 acres) of ecologically significant land to save vulnerable wildlife, fish and plants.

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