

Canadian Geography 1202

Unit 1 – Lesson 14 The Prairie Ecozone pgs. 128-137

Define the following:

- Potholes
- Slough
- Drought
- Badlands
- Grasslands
- Shelterbelt
- Windbreak
- Chinook

Landscape

- The Prairie land is very distinct
- From above, the land appears flat. However, a closer view reveals depressions in the soil (potholes) that are left behind by glaciers.
- Many depressions have become wetlands which support a variety of plant life and wildlife
- Other aspects of the Prairie landscape include:
 - River valleys
 - Hills and eroded badlands (an unusual landscape created by the erosion of soft sedimentary rock.)
 - Gently rolling grasslands
 - A mixture of different grasslands
 - Impressions of the Prairie Ecozone (p128)
- The Prairies are a continental climate. This is because:
 - They are located in the centre of the continent.
 - The Rocky Mountains to the west act as barriers against rain bearing winds.
 - Dry arctic masses move in from the north, making the winters long and cold.
 - They are far from the moderating effects of bodies of water.

Vegetation

- Wet and rich nutrient filled areas give way to fertile soil
- Tall grasses grow in wet areas, while shorter grasses grow in drier areas.
- Drought resistant plants such as sagebrush and short grasses grown in drier areas.

- 90% of the Prairie landscape is used for agriculture.

Disappearing Grassland

- Less than half of the prairie's original wetlands, potholes and sloughs remain.
- Many have been drained and cleared for farming and urban development.
- This development has led to the disappearance of many of the wildlife in the area.
- Human activities, such as building dams for irrigation, hydroelectricity and flood control, have forever changed the river systems of the prairies.

Wildlife

- Plain bison were once plentiful in the prairie ecozone.
- Overhunting in the late 1800's drastically decreased their numbers, virtually wiping them out
- Today, plain bison are protected in national parks, where their numbers are growing
- An abnormally large number of animals have disappeared from this ecozone. Many are extinct, extirpated, endangered or threatened because of habitat loss.
- This includes:
 - The grizzly bear (disappeared from area)
 - The swift fox (disappeared from area)
 - The peregrine falcon (endangered in the area)
 - Whooping crane (endangered in the area)

Humans

- The gently rolling land of the prairies is suitable for food production
- The grasslands have fertile soil and a long enough growing season for a variety of crops.
- The rivers can be dammed for irrigation and hydroelectricity
- Oil and gas deposits in sedimentary rock are excellent for the mining industries.

Threats

- Modern farmers have almost wiped out keystone species in the area (swift fox, prairie dogs) much like early settlers almost wiped out the bison population.
- Extensive agriculture uses land and destroys wildlife habitats

- Farming overworks the soil and reduces nutrients
- Wastes from farms and urban areas pollutes the waters.

Complete Handout #7

- Activate Your Learning