

# Native Seed Harvesting Information for Landholders



*There is an ongoing shortage of native seed for restoration of disturbances in native grasslands. Some of the native grass and forb species required can only be obtained through harvesting the seed from intact native plant communities. Examples include plains rough fescue, mountain rough fescue, western porcupine grass, needle-and-thread grass, and other key native grasses and forb species.*

*Wild harvesting is a process which strips mature seed from the reproductive structure of the plant by hand or by mechanical means, leaving the leaf and root structures intact. In addition, a portion of the stripped seed is dropped to the ground which disperses mature seed and contributes to the native seedbank.*



Grassland  
Restoration  
Forum

**Southern Alberta  
Native Seed Collaborative**



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# Who Harvests Native Seed?

There are native seed harvesting practitioners with the native plant identification skills, harvesting equipment, storage, and processing expertise required to wild harvest native seed. They are aware of specific species that are required for current and future restoration projects and actively look for intact grasslands that might have these species.

## What Happens if You have a Species of Interest?

A harvester will contact the landholder to determine if there is interest or potential for a native seed harvest opportunity. The harvester will:

- ⇒ Ask permission to scout a specific property, discuss best access and travel routes and negotiate the appropriate method of travel. This could include by truck, all terrain vehicle or be limited to foot traffic.
- ⇒ If permission is granted, scout the property and assess harvest potential, identify potential harvest sites and target species available.



## What is Involved in Harvesting?

If scouting results in the desire to pursue harvesting an area, an open discussion will occur with the landholder and the Code of Practice for Native Seed Harvesting will be shared. The Code of Practice has been developed by the Southern Alberta Native Seed Collaborative.

The Information Portal on the Grassland Restoration Forum website ([www.grasslandrestorationforum.ca](http://www.grasslandrestorationforum.ca)) includes a section dedicated to native seed harvesting along with a wealth of resources relevant to landholders. The Southern Alberta Native Seed Collaborative web page resides on the GRF website as well.

# What is Involved in Harvesting?



*Some of the topics for discussion may include but are not limited to:*

- **Harvest method (i.e. mechanical or hand harvest)** — typically, there are two types of low impact mechanical seed harvesters used to harvest seed while leaving the forage intact. These include a brush stripper header mounted on the front end loader of a small tractor, or a pull-type brush stripper header that is generally pulled by an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) or small tractor. A handheld brush stripper (which operates similarly to a weed trimmer) can be used but is best suited for smaller areas of seed collection.



**Pull-type Harvester & Harvested Seed in a Hopper**



- **Potential physical impacts to the land** — primarily tire tracks associated with mechanical harvest equipment. In the dry mixed grasslands tracks typically fade within a year or so depending on moisture availability. Tracks in rough fescue grasslands typically take longer to fade and may be visible for several years. This may be due to increased litter depth and the size of the plant crowns and does not constitute soil disturbance or rutting.
- **Field inspections** — inform the landholder of the estimated number of field inspections required to monitor seed maturation and harvest timing. At a minimum, 3 to 4 inspections will likely be required. This can vary with local weather conditions.

# Topics of Discussion for Landholders

- **Harvest window(s)** – for cool season grasses the window is typically late June to late July. For warm season grasses the window is typically mid August to early October. The Forb seed harvesting window may run from April to November, depending on the species being harvested.
- **Livestock management concerns** – i.e. whether there will be livestock present or absent during the harvest window.
- **Access routes and staging areas** – confirm access routes/trails and staging areas.
- **Landholder compensation** – there are several options available to address each unique project.
- **Safety precautions** – including going over the Emergency Response Plan appropriate for the activity being undertaken and equipment cleaning protocols.
- **Written agreement** – the option of a signed written agreement regarding the harvest activity may benefit both the landholder and the harvester.



**Vacuum Harvesting Native Forb Seed & Forb Seed Drying**

## Following Harvest, Seed Processing Begins...



The seed is dried, any vegetative materials such as chaff and straw are removed, then cleaned of unwanted species prior to storage in dry, cool or frozen conditions.

**Seed Cleaning Equipment, Native Seed Grown into Plugs at a Nursery & Tractor Driven No Till Seeder**



**\*\* Special thanks for photos contributed by EnviroScapes, Gramineae Services, Grumpy's Greenhouse & Gardens, Kestrel Research Inc. and Skinner Native Seeds \*\***