

# Armit Meadows Ecological Reserve

## Backgrounder

### Land Designation

Ecological reserves play a key role in Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative by protecting unique, rare and representative examples of plants, animals, geological features and ecosystems. They are the most protected of the provincially designated sites within Manitoba's network of protected areas.

### Landscape Description

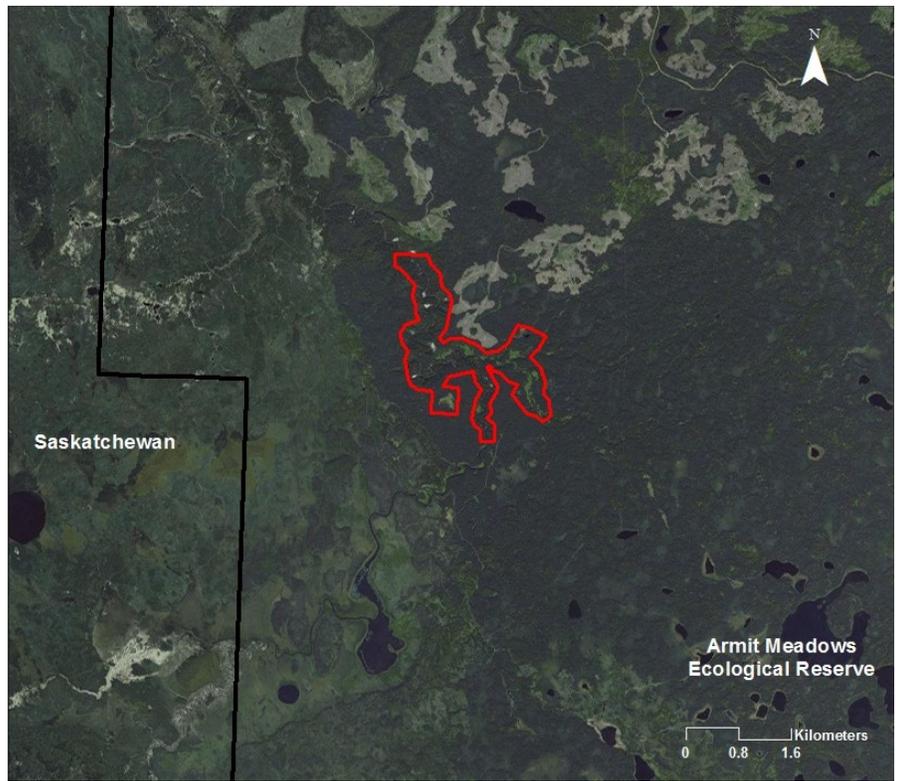
The 263 hectare Armit Meadows Ecological Reserve is located within Porcupine Provincial Forest, situated in the northern portion of Manitoba's Western Upland Natural Region near the Manitoba/Saskatchewan border. This impressive site includes the southeastern portion of the Armit River Canyon and part of the Armit River Valley. Spruce forest dominates the landscape, but a series of small meadows supporting grassland or wetland communities are also dispersed throughout the ecological reserve.



### Outstanding Features

Armit Meadows Ecological Reserve encompasses a pristine riparian zone, undisturbed by human activity. The most striking features of this site are the isolated fescue meadows containing remnants of the endangered fescue prairie ecosystem. These meadows, totaling approximately seven hectares in size, are the most northerly known location of fescue prairie in Manitoba.

Once extending over 255,000 km<sup>2</sup>, only five per cent of the original fescue prairie ecosystem remains on the Canadian prairies. The majority of this land has been utilized for cereal crop production, with only remnants of fescue prairie located along the northern fringe of the prairie region. Though not as scarce as tall grass prairie, fescue prairie is rare in Manitoba, the most notable meadows occurring in Riding Mountain National Park where it covers an estimated 600 hectares.



Plants of the grass genus *Fescue* dominate the fescue prairie meadows, while other dominant species include awned wheat grass, cow-parsnip, wild strawberry, northern bedstraw and common yarrow. Other species found within the ecological reserve include prickly rose, early blue violet, creamy peavine, narrow-leaved meadowsweet, and hairy woodrush, as well as several members of the aster family. The prairie provides significant winter habitat for elk, known to rely on a diet of grasses and grass-like plants during the winter months.

The ecological reserve also supports some dry sphagnum meadows dominated by sphagnum mosses, leatherleaf, sheathed cotton-grass, sedges, swamp birch and small bog cranberry. Large sphagnum dominated openings may not be common in the Porcupine Hills, but they are encountered frequently in other parts of Manitoba.

The small fescue meadows support species unlikely to be encountered elsewhere in this region of Manitoba, hence acting as an important reservoir for biodiversity. The Armit River Canyon and meadows thus comprise a visually and ecologically spectacular site, making Armit Meadows Ecological Reserve an esteemed addition to Manitoba's network of protected areas.

As an ecological reserve, the Armit Meadows site will be maintained for the preservation and protection of pristine riparian habitat and the Fescue Prairie ecosystem. Passive non-consumptive visits on foot are permitted. All other activities will require prior ministerial approval.

This area is categorized by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as a protected area under the management category Ia – a protected area managed for strict nature protection available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring. These protected lands are free from logging, mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas development, and any other activities that could harm habitat.