



## ENDANGERED:

### GREAT SAND HILLS, SASKATCHEWAN

In the sights of Saskatchewan's great oil and gas bonanza is a 2,000 sq-km patch of prairie that's home to the largest active dune field in Canada. Just north of the Trans-Canada Highway in western Saskatchewan an ecological reserve protects the semi-desert, but resource extraction is allowed. cpaws-sask.org

**LOCATION:** From its birth at the confluence of the Oldman and Bow rivers in Alberta to the forks where it joins its northern branch and on to the delta at Lake Winnipeg, the South Saskatchewan is *the river* of the Canadian Prairies and the lifeblood of Saskatchewan.

**WHY IT MATTERS:** Withdrawals from the river feed farmlands across southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, are consumed by hundreds of thousands of residents and power most of Saskatchewan and southern Alberta. This is also historic country: fur traders, including David Thompson, used the river as a highway to the Rockies and it is where Louis Riel resisted the Canadian militia in 1885. Downstream, the river's delta welcomes millions of migratory birds twice a year and is

important habitat for rare species including woodland caribou.

**THE THREAT:** A study of river flows found the South Saskatchewan the most at-risk river in Canada. Climate change, agriculture, urban water use and hydroelectricity production reduce the flow of the river by up to 70 per cent. Fertilizer and pesticide run off and cattle activity affect water quality. Hydroelectric dams reduce flooding, especially in the delta, drying out the wetland habitat. A 25-year water security plan will try and deal with it all, building on a five-year grant program that encouraged farmers to plant native grass riparian habitat in buffer strips along the river and fence-in their cattle.

**THE ADVENTURE:** A quiet and culturally rich section of the South Saskatchewan River begins at Hague Ferry, downstream of Saskatoon, and ends at the Metis town of St. Louis. With plenty of side trips along the 80 km section, allow two or three days to travel via canoe. Below Hague, the river cuts through a wild-feeling valley bordered by pastureland and

forest. Besides a few cattle there is little sign of development, but plenty of history. At Fish Creek, a short hike leads to a battlefield of the North-West Resistance of 1885. Spend a night at Petite Ville, a Metis bison-hunting winter camp turned archeological site on the north bank of the river. A few hours downstream is Batoche National Historic Site, another famous 1885 battle site — today home to an interpretive centre. Further on are two competing South Branch Houses, where the Hudson Bay Company and North-West Company fur trading forts once stood. Got more time? From St. Louis, the conflict and fur trade story wanes but the river gets more interesting with a quicker pace and a narrower valley complete with hoodoos.

**GET OUT THERE:** CanoeSki Discovery Company runs two and three day history-rich trips on the along the South Saskatchewan. (canoeski.com). A DIY canoe guide <http://bit.ly/TsZN2B>.

**GET INVOLVED:** cpaws-sask.com; southsaskriverstewards.ca

# SASKATCHEWAN

## SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER



The South Saskatchewan River offers serene, multi-day canoe trips.

