

## **Plenary 2: Sand Dune Habitat Restoration and Ord's Kangaroo Rat Recovery**

**February 22, 2023, 1:20-2:20 pm**

Abstract: The Ord's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys ordii*) is an Endangered species. Recent population monitoring indicated significant population decline in Alberta. The sand dunes that kangaroo rats require are contracting because of vegetation encroachment. Several once productive habitats have low populations of kangaroo rats or have become extirpated. The need to restore sand dune habitat was presented to the Department of National Defence at CFB Suffield (DND), and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). A collaborative plan among Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (AEPA), ECCC and DND was developed. The plan included using prescribed fires and manual methods to remove stabilizing vegetation and thatch. Prescribed fires were planned and implemented by ECCC staff with collaboration and support from AEPA and DND. Habitat restoration has occurred at three sites. Prescribed fires significantly increased the amount of available habitat for kangaroo rats. Two restored sites were extirpated and were re-populated with kangaroo rats through translocation. Habitat restoration and translocations were successful at returning populations of kangaroo rats to restored sand dune habitat.

### **Presenter**

**Sandi Robertson, Wildlife Biologist, Alberta Fish and Wildlife**

Sandi Robertson (M.Sc.): has worked for Alberta Fish and Wildlife as a Wildlife Biologist for 15 years. She started in Grande Prairie working in the caribou conservation program. In 2014 she transferred to the Medicine Hat office. In her current role her work focuses on Species at Risk, and she is the recovery lead for several 'at risk' species, including Ord's kangaroo rat. Her experience with the Ord's kangaroo rat started in 2001, when she was contracted to work on distribution studies and evaluating the potential effects of pipeline construction in their habitat. During this time she recognized the knowledge gaps and continued to study this species for her masters thesis at the University of Calgary. She values the fact that she is able to spend a significant amount of time in the prairies monitoring the Alberta species she cherishes.