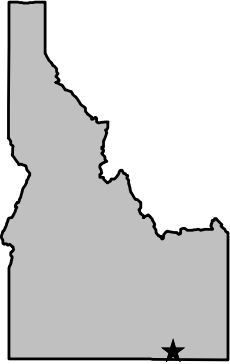


## CHAPTER 8—CURLEW NATIONAL GRASSLAND

## A Prairie Biome



**Curlew National Grassland**, 16 miles west of Malad, Idaho, was established in 1960 to improve soil, vegetation, and the promotion of sound agricultural practices. The grasslands are dotted with the remains of homesteads built by early settlers, many who were forced out by the Great Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Today, the Curlew National Grassland is the site at which research is conducted into highbred grasses that are better suited to wild grazing land, which cattle rangers prefer. Grasslands are also rich in mineral, oil, and gas resources as well as providing diverse recreational uses such as hiking, hunting, fishing, photography, birding, and sightseeing. The grassland is home to many important animal and wildflower species.



**Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*)** Protected from the extreme cold by a thick brown coat, this creature has large padded feet that allow it to move easily across soft snow. The wolverine has five sharp claws on each foot and is an extremely aggressive predator. It eats small mammals such as mice, rats, and squirrels and birds and eggs. A wolverine will watch while another predator hunts and then move in to steal the kill, bearing its teeth and growling until the other predator is intimidated and flees. Related to the skunk, this creature produces a strong smelling musk to mark its territory and warn its enemies to stay away.



**Columbian Sharp-Tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*)** This bird is the smallest of the sharp-tailed grouse. It displays a white belly, brown and black markings, and a long, white triangular tail. The bird inhabits grasslands and arid sagebrush in Washington, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. It nests in the ground choosing a close cover of grass to hide its home. These birds eat wild fruit and berries, some grains, flowers, and leaves.



**Columbia Spotted Frog (*Rana luteiventris*)** A brown frog with black irregular spots on its back, this amphibian inhabits permanent bodies of water including lakes, marshes, streams, and ponds throughout British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The call of this frog is a weak series of clucking noises, which are usually heard during breeding season. The frog lays its eggs in shallow water in clusters with up to 1,300 eggs in each. When hatched, the tadpoles feed on algae and organic matter.



**Payson's Bladderpod (*Lesquerella paysonii*)** This rare plant inhabits slopes with sparse vegetation in eastern Idaho and western Montana. Its leaves are elliptical or triangular with tiny silvery hairs and flowers that are yellow and a half inch long. The plant has been recently domesticated and is now a favorite of rock garden enthusiasts throughout the west, although it prefers to grow at altitudes higher than 2,000 feet. The plant bears an flat fruit along S-curved stalks.

**Ecosystem Cycle Activity:** Have your students design a project that displays how creatures typically found in grasslands are interrelated and how each ultimately depends on the health of the grassland. Have them choose one of the three major types of grasslands (i.e., tall grass prairie, mixed grass prairie, and short grass prairie) for their study, focusing on species that are unique to that particular grassland.

**<http://mbgnet.mobot.org/sets/grasslnd/index.htm>**

**<http://www.nearctica.com/ecology/habitats/prairie.htm>**