



# The Alberta ECOLOGICAL *Gifts* PROGRAM

*Jack and Leila*

## NODWELL

*A Donation on the Bow River East of Calgary (Split Receipt)  
Saving Land While We Can – The Agrium Nodwell Reserve*

*“... You end up in a situation in business where, on the one hand, you see what you’re doing is helping to create jobs and improve the economy and maybe even improving trade relations. But you also see the impacts of what you do on the natural environment so you are torn between the two. — Times are changing and it is important to address that second part, our impacts on the natural environment. How are we going to preserve something for the future?”*

*— Jack Nodwell (businessman and entrepreneur)*

*“We really didn’t have any plans for it. But the birds and plants! It was just remarkable.”*

Through the efforts of landowner and businessman Jack Nodwell, a 59-acre parcel of pristine<sup>1</sup> native prairie habitat has been conserved in perpetuity with the donation of a family property to the Western Sky Land Trust, with support from Environment Canada’s Ecological Gifts Program.

Set on both the escarpment and floodplain of the Bow River Valley near Carseland, Alberta, this protected fragment of prairie is a remarkably rich site for an area its size, and supports over 300 native plant species.<sup>2</sup> Western wheatgrass and prairie crocus grow in the dry upland; wild rose, buckbrush, saskatoon, silverberry and poplar thrive where there is a little more moisture; and willow, sedges, pondweed and cattails line the river’s edge. The land also provides breeding habitat for prairie grassland songbirds, great blue herons and white pelicans, migration and nesting areas for waterfowl, and a protected movement corridor for local wildlife such as deer.

Mr. Nodwell and his wife, Leila, purchased the property in 1995. “We really didn’t have any plans for it,” recalls Mr. Nodwell. “But the birds and plants! It was just remarkable.” Surrounded by an undisturbed landscape and used for overnight camping, picnics and walks, the property became a much-enjoyed place for family and friends.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Nodwell are genuinely connected to the prairies. “Leila grew up on the edge of the Milk River Ridge in southern Alberta seeing across that expanse and west to the Rocky Mountains. It gave her a sense of the land and I think she missed the open spaces. And my family often followed my father’s work as a small contractor, so I got to see almost all of southern Alberta, the natural parts, and its uniqueness,” said Mr. Nodwell. “My parents would say, ‘Look at this beautiful wheat field. This was all just



wasteland before!’ But as a child I got to wander around and get a feeling for how challenging the prairie was—rough, uneven, all the grass and flowers and trees—and I know I found wheat fields much less interesting.”

Leila Nodwell succumbed to cancer in 2000, and Jack Nodwell was faced with the need to consider the future of the Carseland property.

Since 1995 when the Nodwells first acquired this land, new housing, recreational and industrial development in the form of a golf course, gravel pits and feedlots have taken a foothold in the area. Realizing that he no longer wanted to manage or to hold the land, Mr. Nodwell was equally certain that he did not wish to see it sold for development.



In 2008, the Western Sky Land Trust<sup>1</sup> approached Mr. Nodwell about the purchase of the Carseland property as part of a larger initiative to protect the Bow River Watershed in the Calgary area. When Mr. Nodwell agreed, a split-receipt donation (part donation and part sale) was arranged under the Ecological Gifts Program of Environment Canada.

The split receipt approach allowed the Western Sky Land Trust to purchase the Nodwell property for less than the fair market value, while providing both a cash and tax benefit to the donor.

The Western Sky Land Trust now holds full title to the property, monitors the site and protects this sensitive area for both its prairie habitat and Bow River watershed conservation value.

“The main thing for me now,” reflects Mr. Nodwell, “is that the land will now be held by an organization whose primary purpose is to conserve the land, and that it is an organization that will go on and on to accomplish that purpose. It is really very hard to do that, for

The Drumheller area property initially leased by Jack and Leila Nodwell was purchased by Mr. Nodwell and donated to the Nature Conservancy of Canada in 2001.

the long-term future, if you’re just an individual.”

“Western Sky has asked me to talk to people about why I donated the land, but what I talk about more is ‘why’ it is important to donate, and the fact that native land, natural land, is disappearing. You know, where is it going to be found? We have to start saving some.”



1 [www.westernskylandtrust.ca](http://www.westernskylandtrust.ca)

2 Tracy Tarves, Executive Director, Western Sky Land Trust, January 2010