



DESERT CLARIFICATION

Are we really a desert?

Although we receive slightly more precipitation than the typical desert definition, there are a number of other factors that come into play. High evaporation rates from wind, porous soil that drains quickly, and hot summers contribute to the arid conditions here. Our plants and animals are adapted to life in dry conditions, too, which is also a good indication that this is a desert environment.

Are we part of the Sonoran desert? No. The Sonoran desert – which covers portions of Arizona, California and Mexico – does not extend into Canada. Also, the vegetation there is quite different from what we have here. We do share similarities, though, with the plant communities found in the Great Basin Desert.

Are we part of the Great Basin, then? No. Although we have species in common, we are technically not part of that desert either! The Great Basin Desert only goes as far north as Oregon and Idaho. We are, however, the northernmost extension of the Great Basin's plant communities.

So, what is our desert called? There are several different names for our desert habitat. At the Desert Centre, we typically refer to it as the antelope-brush ecosystem, or a shrub-steppe semi-desert. Regardless of the name, our dry shrub-grassland is one of Canada's rarest and most endangered habitats.

What other "desert" areas are in Canada?

Carcross – Yukon

Not a desert. It is the sand remains of an ancient glacial lake.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carcross_Desert

Athabasca Sand Dunes – NW Saskatchewan

The Athabasca Sand Dunes Provincial Park was created to protect the Athabasca sand dunes, a unique geophysical land feature in the boreal shield ecosystem of the province of Saskatchewan. The Athabasca Sand Dunes are the most northerly active sand dune formation on Earth.

https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/athabasca_sand_dunes.jsp

Spruce Woods Provincial Park/Spirit Sands/Carberry Sandhills – Manitoba

Spruce Woods Provincial Park contains one of very few areas of sand dunes in Canada, called the Carberry sandhills, or Spirit Sands. This region is not a true desert, but the remnant of a sandy delta of the Assiniboine River, from a time when it ran into glacial Lake Agassiz. The sandhills are home to many unique plants and animals; including some cacti and hognose snakes.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spruce_Woods_Provincial_Park

The Great Sandhills – SW Saskatchewan

The Great Sand Hills (GSH) of Saskatchewan represents an important refuge of native mixed grassland habitat in southwestern Saskatchewan with Provincial and National significance (Gauthier and Wiken, 2003). This unique region features sand dunes 15 to 35 m in height and covers several hectares of land. The dunes are fringed by native prairie trees, shrubs and grasses. The area is also rich in various types of wildlife and is well known for having one of the largest mule deer and sharptailed grouse populations in the province.

<http://www.environment.gov.sk.ca/Default.aspx?DN=9b3f4721-b8e1-4cdd-8db3-a32051c00769>

NOTE: Sand dunes do not = desert!