

REGIONAL INTRODUCTION

The Columbia Basin region, as described in this treatment, and represented by the *Living Landscapes* program (Figure 1a) is bounded to the west by the ridge line of the Monashee and Columbia Mountains and to the south by the Canada/U.S. border. On the eastern boundary is the British Columbia/Alberta border through the Rocky Mountains and the northern limit is at Valemont. The Columbia Basin region is made up of four mountain ranges, the Monashee/Columbia, Selkirk, Purcell, and the Rocky Mountains. The intervening valleys of these ranges have long lake chains such as the Kinbasket/Columbia/Koocanusa River system, the Kootenay Lake/Duncan Lake system, the Slocan Lake/Kootenay River system, and the Arrow Lakes. The region falls within the Southern Cordilleran and the Interior Cordilleran Ecoclimatic zones. The climate of this region is strongly moderated by the continental influences and this means that humidity and precipitation are reduced from that of the Pacific Coastal region.

Where grasses are commonly located in the Columbia Basin region

When people think of grasses in British Columbia, they usually think of the extensive grasslands of the Southern Interior and the Rocky Mountain Trench. But throughout British Columbia, grasses grow in every terrestrial environment from slightly submerged shoreline to mountaintop. In the Columbia Basin region, grasses inhabit open forests, wetlands, and the alpine zone, especially along the rocky ridges and talus slopes. Grasses often predominate in the dry valley bottoms and slopes, too. (See Table 1 and Appendix 1.)

Grasses of the biogeoclimatic zones According to the biogeoclimatic (BEC) mapping of forested ecosystems (Meidinger and Pojar, 1991) there are seven biogeoclimatic zones (Figure 1b), located in the *Living Landscapes* study area of the Columbia Basin region. These are Alpine Tundra, Engelmann Spruce–Subalpine Fir, Montane Spruce, Sub-Boreal Spruce, Interior Cedar–Hemlock, Interior Douglas-fir, and Ponderosa Pine. All of these zones, though dominated by tree species, have grasses associated with them.

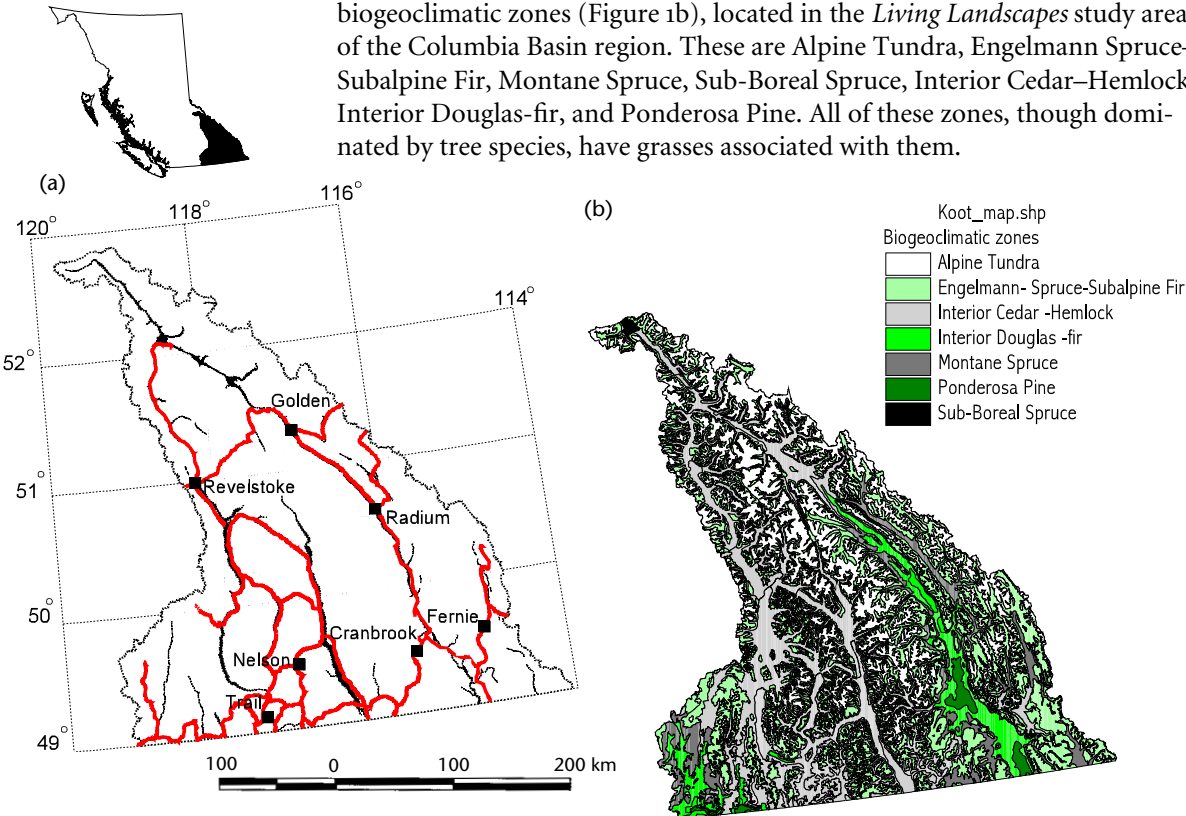


FIGURE 1 Maps of the Columbia Basin region showing (a) human settlement and (b) biogeoclimatic zones.