



Institutional Adaptation to Drought and the Special Areas of Alberta

Hanna Workshop, Feb. 26, 2007

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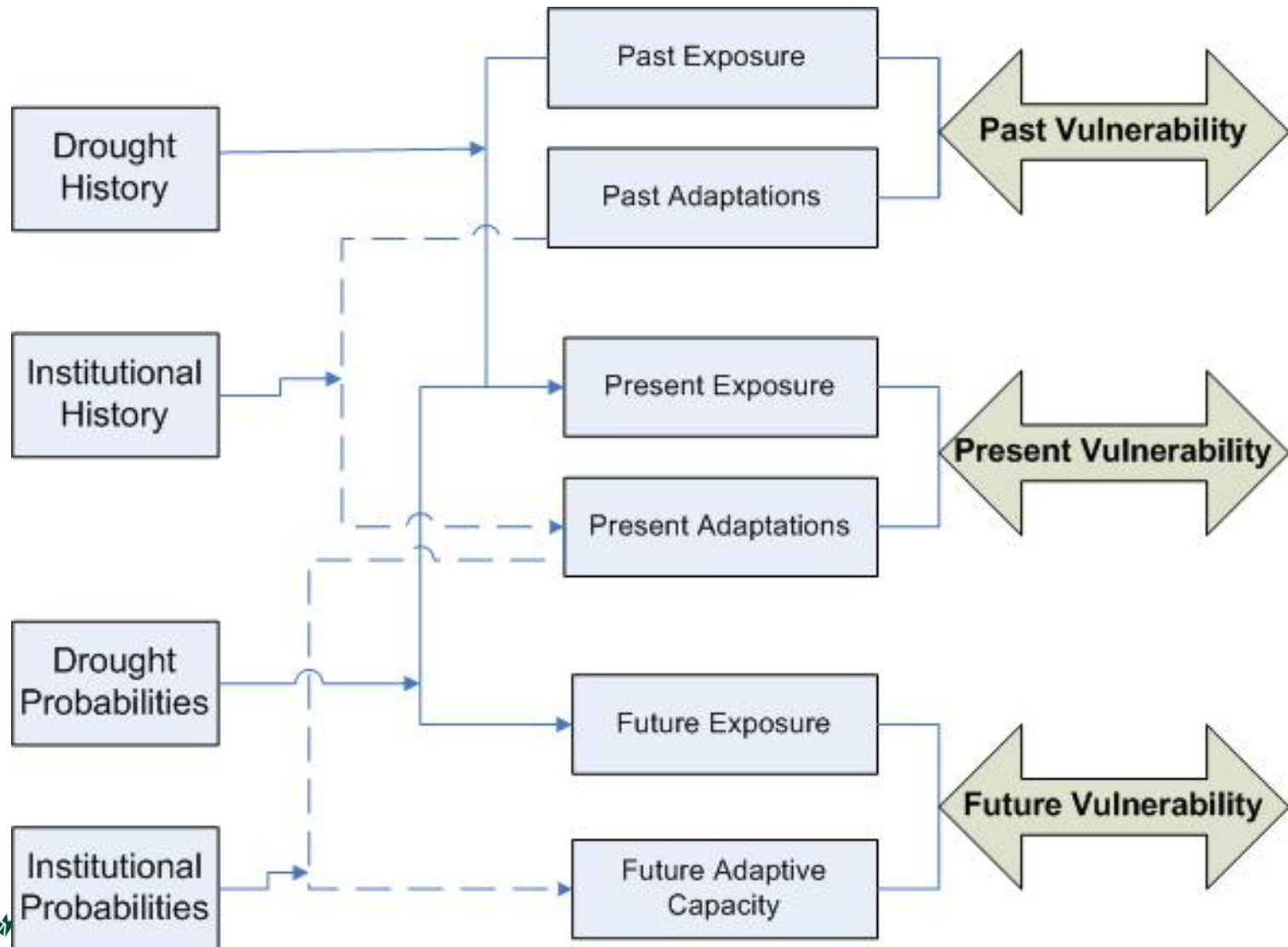
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Roadmap for Presentation

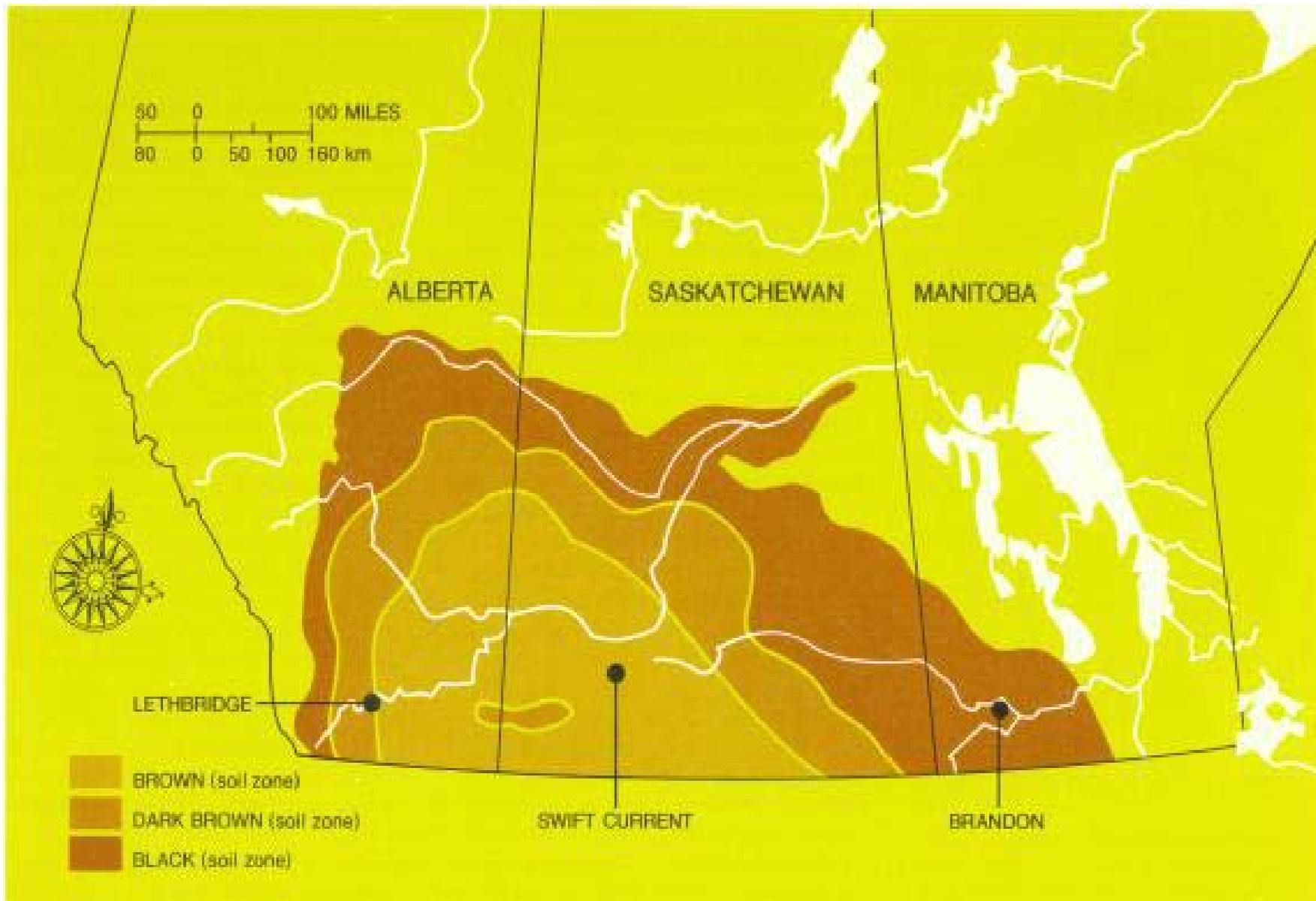
- Explain drought in context of adaptation
- What is meant by the Dry Belt
- History of the establishment of the Special Areas
- Reappraisals after 1945
- Concluding observations

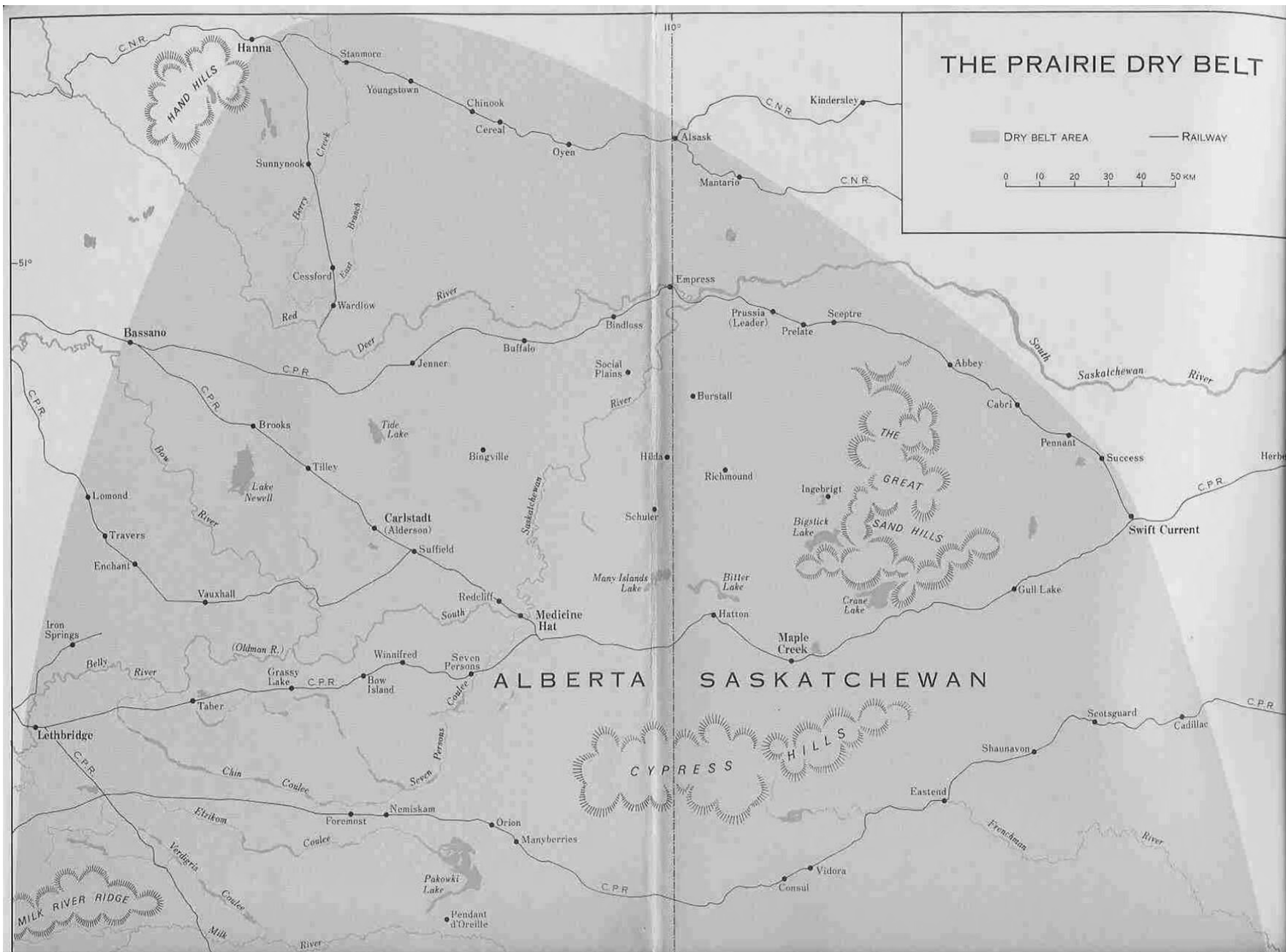
Institutional Adaptation to Drought



Climate Change and Drought

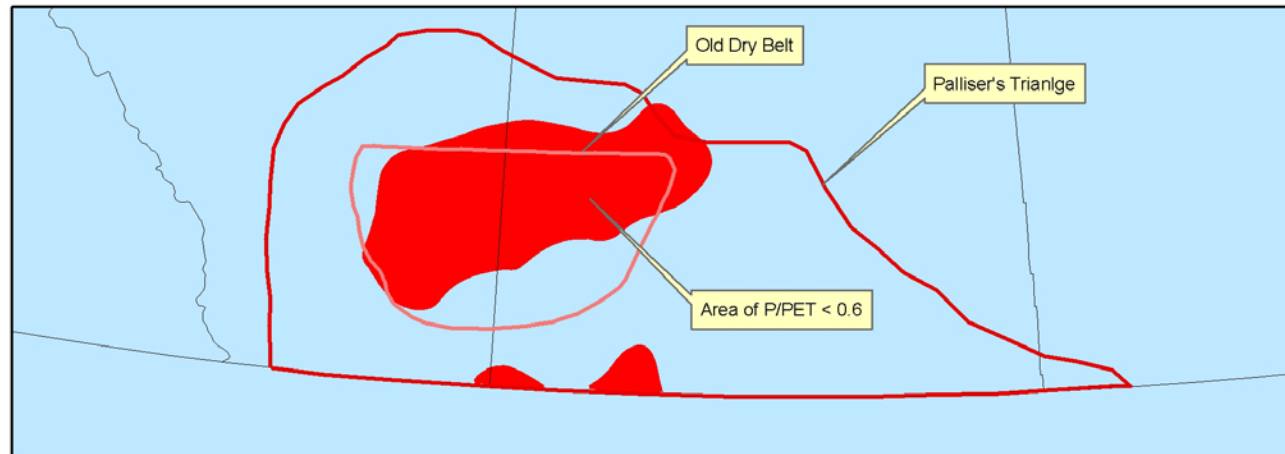
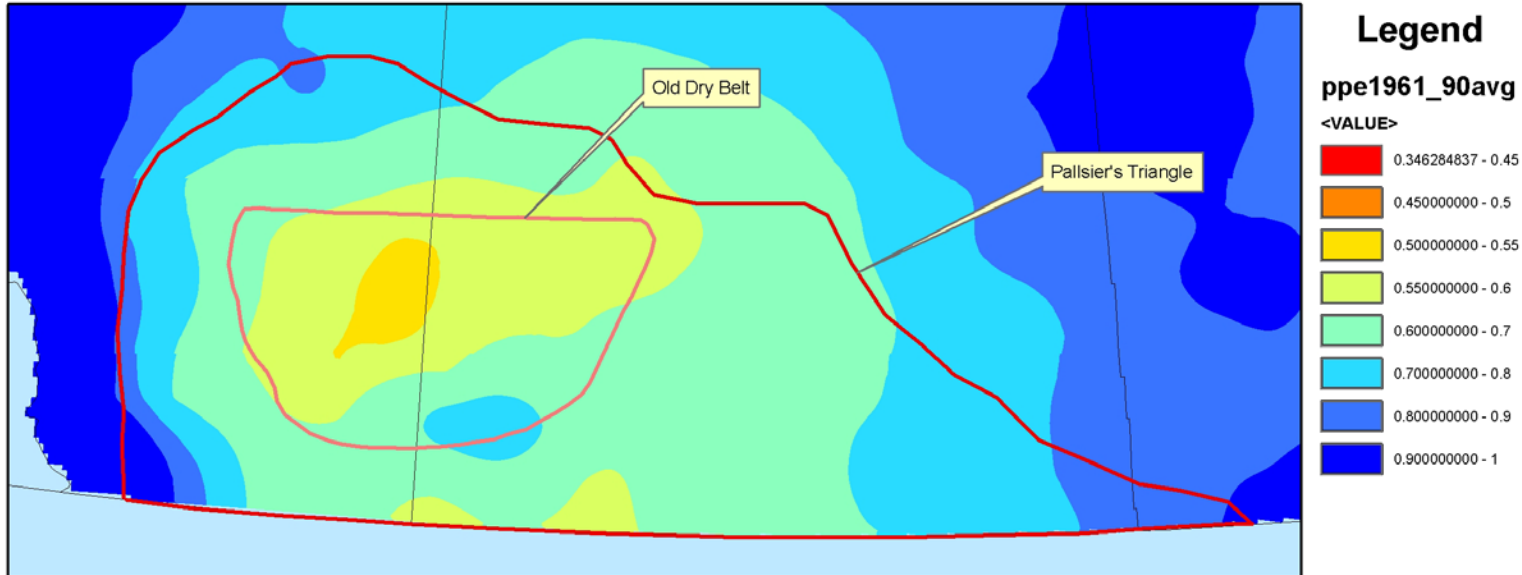
- Forecasts of long-term precipitation variability (i.e. drought forecasting)
- Current climate change models
- Drought forecasts requires high-quality data on past droughts
- Palliser Triangle susceptible
- In particular, the Dry Belt of SE Alberta and SW Saskatchewan

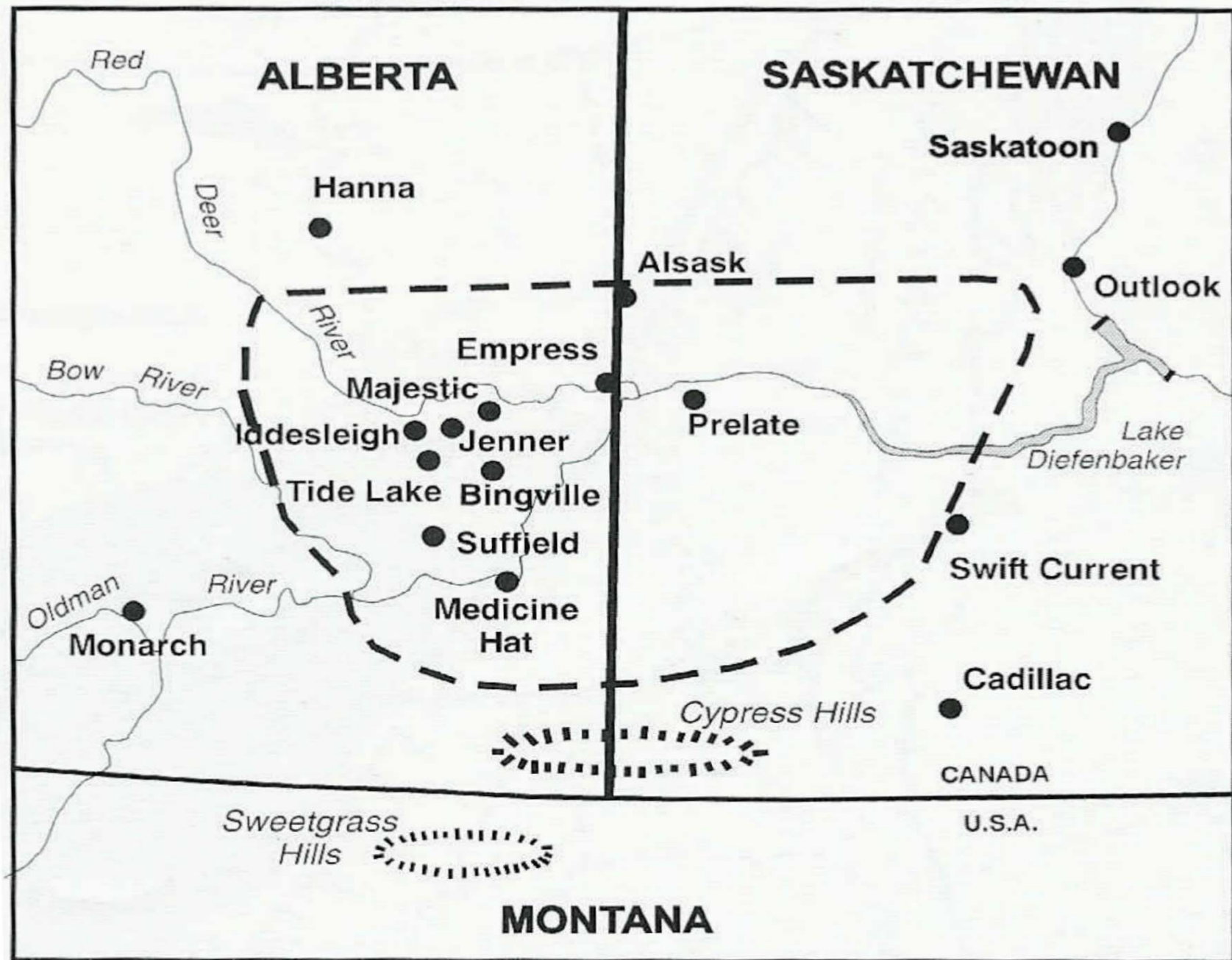




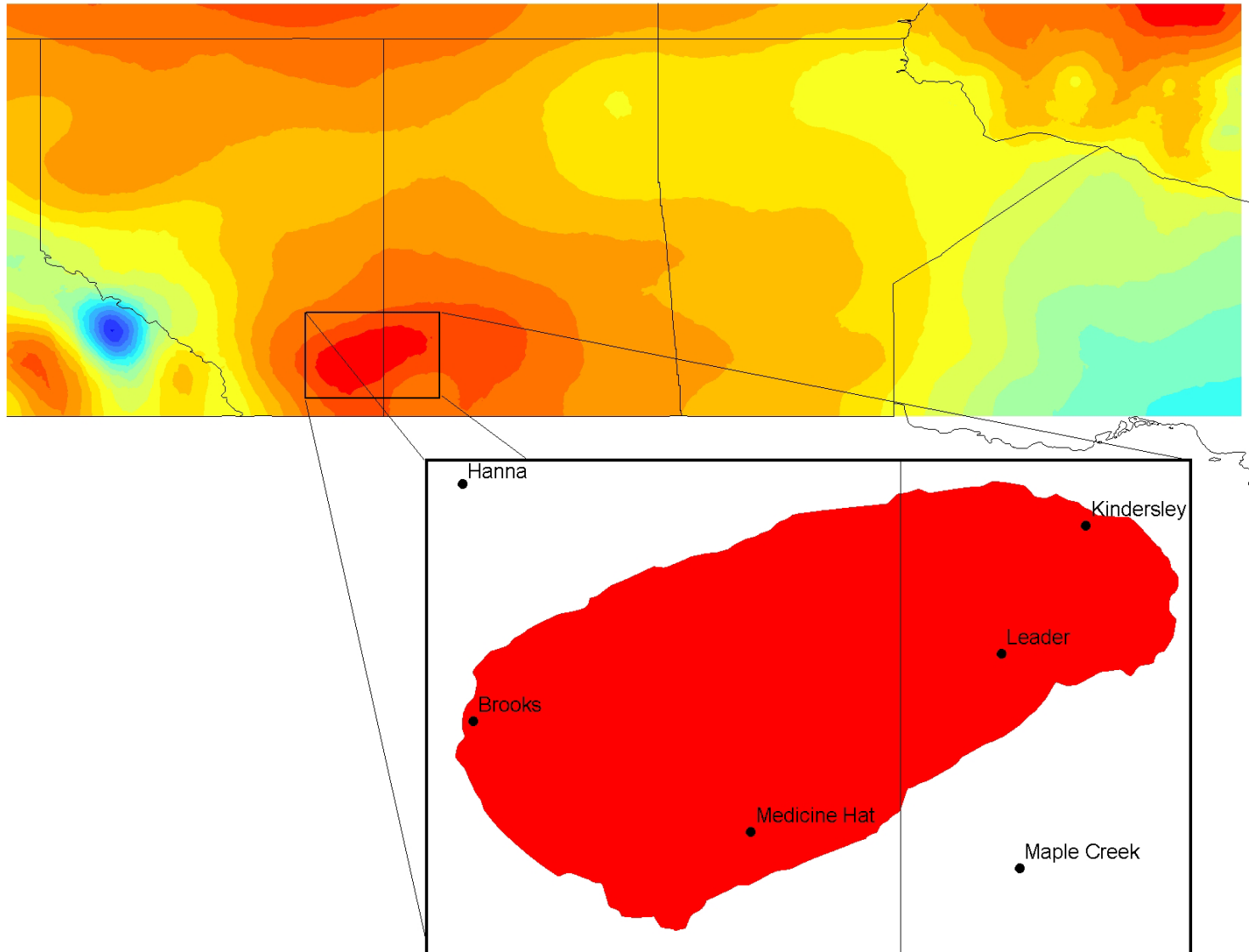
Old View of Dry Belt

P/PET for Period of 1961 to 1990





New View of the Dry Belt



Early Settlement of Special Areas

- Palliser's survey: larger region viewed as extension of the Great American Desert
- Ranching in Special Areas by 1900
- 1906-07: the Killer Winter
- 1909: opened to homesteading
- 1911: school districts
- 1914: municipalities & local improvement districts
- Wheat farming and relative dense population

Impact on Special Areas

- 1914 crop complete disaster: federal government forced to provide relief
- Periodic drought and continual crop failures after 1917 (exception 1927)
- Collapse of local grain economy
- Abandonment of farms and communities
- “No rain: No crop: No taxes: No school.”

Wheat Yields per Acre (Bushels) by SE Alberta District, 1915-1921

District	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921
Enchant	42	30	14	6	0	7	2
Hanna	29	23	8	2	4	10	5
Jenner	44	34	9	6	4	12	6
Lethbridge	33	31	13	5	0	5	6
Macleod	31	24	13	4	0	4	2
Medicine Hat	41	33	7	1	0	5	3
Youngstown	26	23	11	5	2	10	8

Source: Survey Board for Southern Alberta, reproduced in David C. Jones, *Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt* (University of Calgary Press, 2002), 263.

Institutional Response #1: Government of Alberta

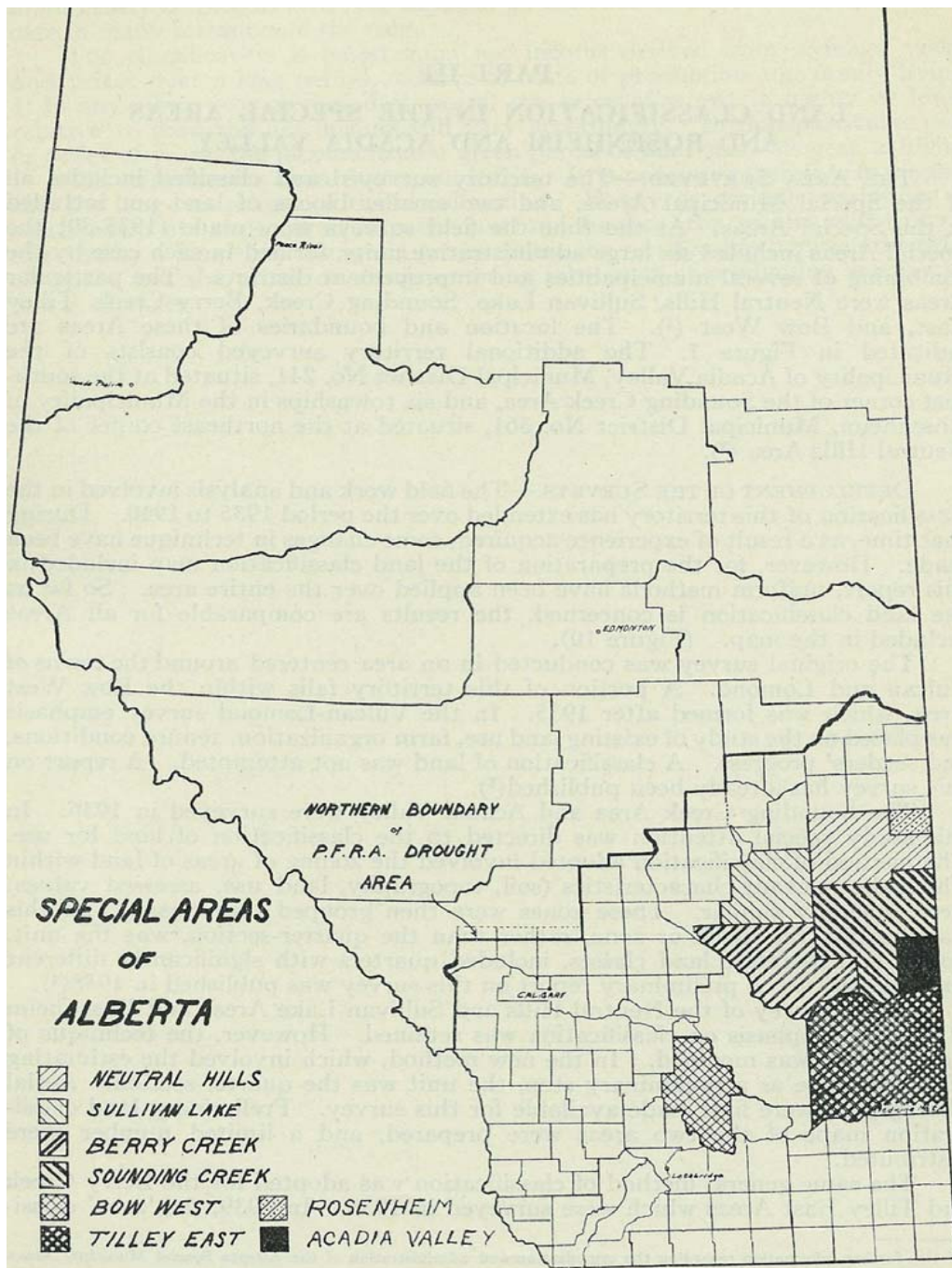
- Organized relocation and depopulation
 - Federal-provincial-railway company agreements on free freight to move to other regions on application to government
 - First agreement in 1922, reinstated in 1924-27, and short intervals for 1931-35
- Debt relief and settlement
 - Ted Fream, commissioner who travelled throughout region

Institutional Response #2: Government of Alberta

- Municipal districts dissolved
- Special Areas administrative boards appointed by provincial government
- Secured control, resettled farmers and promoted transfer to large-scale, self-sufficient ranching operations:
 - Community pastures with water access
 - Education, hospitals and road construction put under control of Board

Establishment of Special Areas

- Tilley East – 1927
- Berry Creek – 1932
- Neutral Hills, Sounding Creek and Sullivan Lake – 1935
- Bow West – 1937
- Special Areas Board – 1938
 - 3 individuals appointed by provincial government
 - Headquartered in Hanna



THE ALBERTA SPECIAL AREAS

Source: A. Stewart and W.D Porter, Land-Use Classification in the Special Areas of Alberta (Dominion of Canada: Department of Agriculture, 1942), 26.

Population Decline: Special Areas

(in thousands)

Year	Rural	Urban	Total
1916	21.7	2.5	24.2
1921	26.0	3.7	29.7
1926	19.3	3.5	22.8
1931	20.3	3.8	24.1
1936	15.0	3.0	18.0
1941	11.8	3.3	15.1
1946	9.5	3.5	13.0
1951	8.4	4.0	12.5

Average Farm Size in Special Areas

(in acres, compared to provincial average)

Year	Farm #	Size	Prov avg	Ratio
1936	4,319	697	404	1.7
1941	3,847	908	434	2.1
1946	3,449	1,188	464	2.6
1951	2,895	1,459	527	2.8
1956	2,384	2,074	579	3.6
1961	2,126	2,322	645	3.6

Special Areas after 1945

- Prolonged drought less of a feature
- Periodic questioning of structure
- O.S. Longman and reappraisal of 1953
 - Hazardous nature of region and possible return of drought justifies extraordinary administration
- Hanson Commission of 1960
 - Well-conceived and well-carried out
 - Still, difficult to justify lack of self-government forever
 - Manning government did not accept recommendation

Concluding Observations on Establishment of Special Areas Board

- Economic + political collapse
- Innovative institutional response to crisis
- Size and expertise facilitated adaptation to drought
 - Converting land tenure (tax sales, pastures, etc.)
 - Rehabilitation of land (grass, water, dams)
 - Consolidating and managing road infrastructure
 - Closing and managing remaining schools
 - Natural experiment re: SW Saskatchewan

Questions

Discussion