



## **Suffield in the Balance Panel Confirms the Need to Protect Suffield National Wildlife Area**

**Calgary (January 28, 2009)** – The seven-group Suffield Coalition today applauded the decision to deny EnCana’s three-well application in the Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA). A government-appointed Joint Review Panel, in an announcement released Tuesday, also determined that EnCana’s larger project proposal to expand gas development inside the federally protected area could not be approved at this time without compromising the conservation of wildlife.

However, the Coalition voiced disappointment that the Panel fell short of recommending against any further oil and gas development in the NWA.

The federal cabinet, led by Defence Minister Peter MacKay as Responsible Authority for the NWA, is now expected to respond to the Panel’s recommendations. “The only appropriate decision is to prohibit any further oil and gas development in the Suffield NWA and to close the door to future applications,” says Sandra Foss, past-president of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

Suffield NWA was established in 2003 to protect endangered native prairie and the many species of animals and plants at risk in the area, including at least 15 federally listed species threatened with extinction.

The Panel concluded that EnCana’s proposal to drill 1,275 natural gas wells and construct associated infrastructure in the NWA would result in significant adverse effects on certain species at risk and interfere with the conservation of wildlife. However, the Panel’s recommendations do allow for future proposals to be considered. The report sets out three requirements that would have to be met for the project to go forward:

- that critical habitat be identified for five species at risk: Ord's kangaroo rat, Sprague's pipit and three endangered plant species
- that no project activities take place within this critical habitat unless otherwise permitted under the *Species at Risk Act*
- that the Suffield Environmental Advisory Committee receive a clear mandate and sufficient resources to oversee drilling in the NWA.

“The Panel clearly put a great deal of thought into its recommendation,” says Alberta Wilderness Association’s Cliff Wallis. “The problem, however, is that while the requirements and additional conditions recommended by the Panel might work in a perfect world, in the real world there is no guarantee that those conditions would in fact protect the integrity of the Suffield NWA. Now it’s up to Defence Minister Peter MacKay and Environment Minister Jim Prentice to exercise their precautionary duty to deny approval of EnCana’s expansion in the CFB Suffield NWA,”

The Suffield Coalition is now asking Canadian citizens to express their opinions to the decision-makers in Ottawa about the future of this unique area that belongs to all Canadians.

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*The Suffield Coalition comprises seven groups: Alberta Wilderness Association, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, World Wildlife Fund Canada, Nature Saskatchewan, Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, Grasslands Naturalists, and Nature Canada.*

## Media Backgrounder

### Suffield National Wildlife Area

Tucked away in the southeast corner of Alberta lies one of the last six large native grasslands left in the glaciated northern plains, which sweep across five states and two provinces, including Alberta. This area, referred to as the Middle Sand Hills, includes a number of environmentally significant areas, including the 458 km<sup>2</sup> Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA).

Home to more than 1,100 species of plants, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, the Suffield NWA is a haven for prairie life, including 18 federally listed Species at Risk and almost 100 listed as Species at Risk provincially. Along with the wildlife and native grassland, the NWA contains numerous historical sites, including medicine wheels, bison kill sites, and stone cairns, as well as abundant dinosaur remains and fossilized trees, many of which remain unclassified.

The NWA is managed by CFB Suffield, with the Department of National Defence being the designated Responsible Authority for the area. The Base Commander is responsible for overseeing interests in the area, including grazing and oil and gas development, as well as for maintaining the integrity of this sensitive and rare ecosystem.

### History of the Suffield National Wildlife Area

1850s & 1860s	A British expedition led by Captain John Palliser explores the Middle Sand Hills area.
1877	The Blackfoot First Nation signs lands to Dominion of Canada and moves onto reserves.
1860-80	Bison decline rapidly across the Great Plains and are virtually exterminated.
1883	The coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway leads to the establishment of the nearby town of Suffield and surrounding ranches.
1906-1915	Canadian pronghorn populations are decimated by severe winters. To speed the recovery of pronghorns, refuges are established on federal land in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. An area of 140 km <sup>2</sup> in the Middle Sand Hills area is designated in 1915 as a pronghorn antelope sanctuary, which is officially designated Wawaskesy National Park in 1922.
1938	Recovering pronghorn populations result in the closure of Wawaskesy National Park. The area is declared unfit for agriculture under Alberta's <i>Special Areas Act</i> .
1941	A large portion of the area is expropriated by the Dominion Government to secure it as a chemical warfare testing ground for the British.
1942	Suffield is designated Federal Crown land.
1947	The Middle Sand Hills area is transferred to the Canadian Research Board for chemical and biological weapons testing.
1971	The Canadian Forces Base Suffield is established as a live fire training area, with environmentally sensitive areas, including the Middle Sand Hills, declared off-limits to military activities.
1972	A Resource Evaluation of the Suffield Block is prepared for the Province of Alberta, suggesting the conservation of various tracts of land.
1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Representatives from various national and provincial environmental agencies form the Suffield Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC) to advise the Base Commander on the environmental impact of development. \</li><li>• A Memorandum of Agreement between Canada and Alberta allows development of gas reserves. Before development proceeds, Alberta Energy Corporation (AEC) must identify archaeological sites in the Suffield Block so that protective measures can be taken.</li><li>• Oil development, production, and transmission for the South Saskatchewan River Bank Zone must be limited to wells recommended for approval by the Suffield Environmental</li></ul>

	Advisory Committee (SEAC). No oil development in the Middle Sand Hills Zone is allowed until completion of an Environmental Impact Assessment.
1977	A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Alberta and Canada allows for access to oil in Suffield. Alberta Energy Company Ltd. (AEC) is designated as Alberta's assignee to develop oil and gas in Suffield. As the sole operator, all mineral leases are granted to AEC.
1984	Environment Canada releases "A Proposal to Establish the Suffield Cooperative Wildlife Management Area, Alberta." The document proposes the creation of a 25,000-ha Suffield Cooperative Wildlife Management Area in the northeast corner of the military reserve that would include the Middle Sand Hills and a 47-km stretch of the South Saskatchewan River valley.
1992	The Department of National Defence and Environment Canada sign a Memorandum of Understanding to reserve 458 km <sup>2</sup> of the military base as a National Wildlife Area under regulations of the <i>Canada Wildlife Act</i> .
Late 1990s	Alberta Energy Company (AEC) requests that the Alberta government put the mineral dispositions to deeper formations under CFB Suffield up for auction. In order to do so, some of the surface access rights assigned to AEC under the 1975 and 1977 MOAs have to be transferred back to the provincial government. The amendment, called the Partial Assignment Agreement (PAA) is signed in 1999 by the Province of Alberta, AEC, and a new entity, the Suffield Industry Range Control Ltd. (SIRC).
2002	Alberta Energy Company (AEC) merges with PanCanadian to form EnCana.
<b>2003</b>	<b>The Suffield National Wildlife Area is formally established.</b>
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EnCana proposes to drill 1,275 wells and associated infrastructure in the Suffield National Wildlife Area.</li> <li>• The Department of National Defence, as the Responsible Authority for the NWA, declares its intention to undertake a comprehensive study and provide opportunities for public participation.</li> <li>• The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency announces the commencement of a federal Environmental Assessment (EA) to review EnCana's proposal.</li> </ul>
2005	EnCana constructs a 265-m pipeline within the Suffield NWA without a permit. The company appears in court eight times over the next three years on charges of violating the <i>Canada Wildlife Act</i> . A preliminary hearing is set for April 20-24, 2009.
April 2006	Responding to pressure from several environmental groups, federal Environment Minister Rona Ambrose announces that an independent panel will review the EnCana proposal to drill as many as 1,275 gas wells, with associated infrastructure, in the National Wildlife Area.
February 18, 2008	The Suffield Coalition, comprising six conservation groups, files its submission opposing EnCana's development to the Joint Review Panel.
February/March, 2008	EnCana requests a delay of the Suffield hearings, scheduled to begin on March 10. The Joint Review Panel grants EnCana's request for a delay of the hearings, which are now scheduled to begin on October 6, 2008.
October 6-31, 2008	The Joint Review Panel hearing for EnCana's proposed infill drilling project is held in Calgary and Medicine Hat. The Panel has 90 days from the end of the hearing to publish its report and recommendation to the federal government
December 8, 2008	In the middle of the Joint Review Panel's deliberations and before they make their recommendation regarding EnCana's proposed project, EnCana and the University of Calgary Faculty of Environmental Design announce the creation of the EnCana Chair in Canadian Plains Mitigation and Reclamation, funded by a \$1 million grant from EnCana. Dr. Bill Ross, a member of the Joint Review Panel, is also a member of the faculty receiving the donation. The Panel responds with a public letter containing assurances that they will not be swayed by EnCana's donation.