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Government Continues to Prop Up Game Farming Industry it Admits is Non-Viable

By Shirley Bray

Once again the Alberta government is pumping money into the failed game farming industry. The Alberta Industry Transition Program for Other Ruminants will allow producers to access \$8 million in short- and long-term provincial support to help maintain herds and flocks and develop new markets, says a December 2004 government news release. "Other ruminants" include domestic animals such as sheep and goats, but also game-farmed animals such as deer and elk. The government is trying to blur the lines between domestic and wild farmed animals – but the distinction is critical to wildlife conservation.

In a meeting with frustrated game farmers about two years ago, then Agriculture Minister Shirley McLellan said that if she had been around when game farming was brought up in the first place, she would have voted against it because it will never be economically viable. Why then is the government continuing to pour money into this industry?

The Alliance for Public Wildlife and AWA both agree that the industry needs to be shut down and that game farmers need to be properly compensated once the industry is gone. We object to the government pouring more taxpayer money into the game-farming industry and trying to revive it. The government is essentially promoting the greatest known enemy of wildlife – markets. Wildlife is a public resource and should not be sold. Wildlife in North America was almost wiped out in the 1800s because it could be sold. During the 1900s, a century of increasing fragmentation, wildlife was restored because selling it was made illegal. Now fragmentation and markets present a dual threat to wildlife.

The class action lawsuit brought by game farmers against the federal government in Saskatchewan continues to go forward. It is now in case management and proceeding to certification, which means that the government can no longer delay.

Ontario has joined seven other provinces in banning penned hunting. Ontario had previously banned penned hunts for native and endangered species but permitted hunts for exotics such as wild boar and fallow and sika deer at approximately five penned hunt operations. Four of these recently had charges laid against them for violations of various Ontario wildlife and land-use regulations (International Fund for Animal Welfare, Dec. 2004 news release). The number of penned hunt operations has decreased in Canada from ninety in 1998 to about twenty in Quebec and Saskatchewan, the only provinces that still permit these hunts. Alberta pledged to continue its ban on penned hunting in 2002 in the face of large-scale public opposition.

