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April 3, 2007

Premier Ed Stelmach
Office of the Premier
Room 307, Legislature Building
10800 - 97th Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

RE: Some common sense for the uncommonly valuable Southern East Slopes

Dear Premier Stelmach,

As residents, groups and organizations, we are very concerned about the current and future state of the Southern East Slopes¹. Hence, we have a set of pressing requests of your government aimed at changing the current, undesirable trajectory to one that will sustain communities, and sustain and protect the irreplaceable renewable assets of the region and its ecological integrity.

The Southern East Slopes represent an iconic landscape of mountains and foothills grading into prairie. It is as close as one can get to the features in Alberta's coat of arms. Unlike our coat of arms, in which the landscape appears untouched, unblemished and unfragmented, the real landscape has seen many changes. In addition, scale and pace of land use change in the area is unprecedented and is projected to continue. This concerns us as residents and as groups, organizations and individuals who understand and value this region. Alberta and Albertans have become wealthy from our natural resources but many of us now are beginning to understand prosperity has a price. We believe you are aware of this and are also concerned about the transferal and deferral of the costs of prosperity onto our environment and to future generations. Do not misunderstand our intent as anti-development. Rather, it is our observation that a planning and policy vacuum in Alberta has given rise to growth without the guiding hand of sobriety – growth without the measures to sustain the region's ecological integrity and the renewable resource assets upon which our future prosperity depends.

The Southern East Slopes hold significant and largely irreplaceable renewable resource assets for Albertans. This landscape currently provides:

- The headwaters that capture and temporarily store Alberta's most vital resource, water, necessary for life and economic opportunity in the southern part of the province and our neighboring provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

¹ from the Bow Valley to the Montana border and from the Continental Divide east to where the prairie begins

- The last large area of undisturbed rough fescue grassland and foothills parkland in the province, key to sustainable ranching and an important carbon sink.
- A treasury in the form of the province's richest variety and diversity of animals and plants.
- Sustainable economic opportunity with ranching, recreation, tourism and communities.
- A place that attracts people because of unfragmented space, biotic integrity, natural beauty and cultural heritage.

We hope you agree these are significant assets, worthy of the attention, concern and protection by your government through planning and the development of policy and legislation. This isn't the first time these assets and the value to Albertans have been articulated in planning exercises, hearings and letters of concern to various government departments. In particular, the recognition of the value of the area as the headwaters for a significant portion of the prairie provinces dates back prior to the formation of Alberta as a province. Despite considerable effort to inform government, we see little substantive change in policy and legislation to safeguard these assets. There are some promising planning initiatives; Water for Life and the Land Use Framework to name two. However, the speed and intensity of resource development in the Southern East Slopes will outpace these measured initiatives in provincial planning and policy development. We are concerned that a significant and in practical terms, irreplaceable loss of what the Southern East Slopes represent will have occurred by the time the planning and policy exercises of your government are completed.

The Southern East Slopes can't exist on the hopes and promises of tomorrow. The possibilities of a desired future will only become realities if we make ourselves responsible for that future, today.

Sacrificing renewable resources, threatening ecological integrity and creating a future economic and ecological debt is not in Albertan's best interest and cannot be justified by any rational business case. Yet, that is the track we are on. The future of our landscape is being determined by the unintended consequences of multiple decisions and land uses operating without a cohesive, regional plan. There is a tyranny of small, seemingly unconnected decisions that are leading us to unmanaged cumulative effects.

We believe Albertans have both the intellectual capital and the will to change course, especially for the Southern East Slopes. Achieving a desired future will require these actions:

- Planning better and quicker, with the test of success being a landscape that maintains ecological integrity, environmentally sustainable land uses and community longevity. Effective planning will define indicators and incorporate limits and thresholds. It will be open, transparent, inclusive and accountable.
- Allocating new resources to rebuild planning capability in the civil service and at the municipal level, as well as to support the efforts of existing community-led planning initiatives.
- Providing tools to fairly deal with existing commitments and allocations so these do not unduly fetter policy and planning exercises.
- Developing provincial policy and legislation that supports planning and protects the assets of the Southern East Slopes.

We think you would agree this is a logical course to set for the Southern East Slopes and hence, we ask that your government lead by undertaking the four actions listed above.

To add impetus to the effort we also ask your government's collaboration with community-led planning initiatives already underway, such as the Southern Foothills Study. The use of these initiatives and the Southern East Slopes as a pilot project would add speed, community buy-in and credibility to the task of regional planning.

Furthermore, time is against us if planning continues to lag behind activities that impact land, water, air, biodiversity and quality of life. To create space for effective planning we strongly

endorse the concept of a pause, or a "time out" for many resource developments occurring now in the Southern East Slopes. If unchecked, the frequency and intensity of these developments will significantly undermine planning efforts and regional ecological integrity. There is precedence for the province undertaking such a time out, as it did so in 1973-4 during its province-wide hearings and policy development on Land Use and Resource Development in the Eastern Slopes

The tools we have and those we can build are only as useful as our will to employ them in making the tough decisions. The Southern East Slopes we want tomorrow requires us to exercise restraint and decisiveness now. We ask you to exercise the will and make the commitment to help us achieve the desired, environmentally sustainable future for the Southern East Slopes. What an incredible legacy that will be for your government and for those that will inherit the Earth from us.

Because this issue is so important to us and to ensure our request is not forgotten we would ask that you provide an initial response within two weeks of the date of this letter. Our contacts are Mr. John Cross (johna7@telusplanet.net ; 403.646.0046) and Mr. Joe Obad (jobad@cpawscalgary.org ; 403.232.6686). We would also request a meeting with yourself and the Ministers of Sustainable Resource Development, Environment, Energy and Municipal Affairs to discuss these matters.

Sincerely,



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cc: Hon. Ted Morton, Hon. Rob Renner, Hon. Mel Knight and Hon. Ray Danyluk