



Three Nations Gather to Celebrate Twinning of Hay-Zama Park with Chinese Nature Reserve

Calgary (May 28, 2008) – Three nations gathered under blue skies in northwestern Alberta today to celebrate the official dedication and twinning of Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park, established in 1999.

A delegation from China arrived this week to join representatives from the Dene Thá First Nation and the Alberta government in order to formalize the twinning of the 468-km² Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Park with the Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia, China. Both sites have been designated by the Ramsar Convention as Wetlands of International Importance, both face potential threats to their ecological integrity, and both are homes for minority peoples.

“This marks the culmination of a challenging collaborative process that will be celebrated for generations to come,” says Alberta Wilderness Association Executive Director Christyann Olson from the community of Chateh. “The untiring efforts of Cliff Wallis, who spearheaded this remarkable achievement, gives us all an enduring wilderness legacy of global significance.”

The seeds for the twinning process were planted when Wallis did some consulting work in Inner Mongolia. “It started with friendship,” he says. “There was a resonance with people who were passionate, innovative, genuine.” Wallis initiated the process in 2004. Today’s momentous celebration ends four years of navigating through the bureaucratic labyrinths of two governments.

Twinning Hay-Zama and Dalai Lake is more than symbolic. “With a global interest, eyes are watching us,” says Wallis, “and the process is less likely to founder.” The process he refers to is that of phasing out oil and gas activity in Hay-Zama. In 1985 the Alberta government acknowledged the cultural, environmental, and economic concerns related to industrial development in Hay-Zama and created the Hay-Zama Committee (HZA) to address them. Since 1994, the HZA has been successfully working toward the accelerated depletion of oil and gas reserves in the park. Its membership includes industry, three levels of government including First Nations, and Alberta Wilderness Association, represented by Wallis.

“The beauty of this exercise,” says HZA co-chair Pat Cabezas, “is that hydrocarbon extraction can be managed in a way in which economic activity, environmental management, and cultural sensitivities can co-exist.”

“I think the twinning of the parks is a great idea,” says James Ahnassay, Chief of the Dene Thá First Nation. “Both countries can work together to promote the importance of these internationally recognized wetlands. China’s recognition of the importance of protecting globally significant wetlands enhances what we are trying to protect here.”

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