

RCEN Biodiversity Best Practice/Case Study Handbook Template  
Project Write-Up (Maximum 600 words)

**Project Title (if needed):**

Hay-Zama Lakes – Involving the Neighbourhood in Environmental Protection and Community Development

**LOGO of Organization**



**Alberta Wilderness Association**

**Name of lead organization:**

ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION (AWA)

**Partnerships: (if applicable):**

Dene-Tha' First Nation, ENGOs, industry, and municipal/provincial/federal governments ("The Neighbourhood")

**Purpose: (specific to your activity):**

Involving the neighbourhood in protection of the Hay-Zama Lakes

**Summary of Hay-Zama Committee (HZC) activities:**

1995–HZC re-established to deal with oil and gas activity

1999–MOU introduces novel concept of *time limitation* where all activity must cease by 2017 and high risk activity is halted immediately. Designated as 486 sq. km. Hay-Zama Wildland Park on HZC advice.

2000–MOU updated with concept of "no new industrial footprint"

2002–Management Plan approved limiting industrial use and recognizing Dene-Tha' traditional land use and need for collaborative management

2003-2008–twinning of Dalai Lake, Inner Mongolia and Hay-Zama Lakes, Alberta

2007–Alberta confirms limits on industrial activity; wells continue to be abandoned and reclaimed

2008–Hay-Zama Wildland Park dedicated and twinning agreement signed during official visit by Inner Mongolia; tourism strategy initiated

2009–Alberta visits Dalai Lake; sponsors community participation workshop

## **Challenges and Accomplishments/Outcomes:**

The Hay-Zama Lakes complex in NW Alberta is designated as a wetland of global significance under the Ramsar Wetlands Convention. It lies within the traditional territory of the Dene Tha'.

In the 1990s, poorly regulated oil and gas activity in an environmentally sensitive area threatened the wetlands, wildlife, water and traditional way of life.

The HZC has been instrumental in obtaining long-term protection through Wildland Park designation in 1999 and winding down pre-existing oil and gas activity in the most sensitive areas through MOUs. It has improved environmental performance by working with regulators and industry to change operational practices and reduce activity levels in the complex.

It developed unprecedented (for Alberta) time limits for extractive activities and the concept of no new industrial footprint, confining the pre-existing extraction to a small, less sensitive area. All activity must be phased out by 2017 but oil and gas wells in the highest environmental risk areas have already been abandoned and reclaimed.

The HZC is unique in being led by stakeholders and has full participation from First Nations, ENGOs, industry, and governments. It has withstood a challenge from industry to re-negotiate the MOUs but the neighbours all demonstrated their original commitment to environmental protection.

Since 1995, industry has funded wildlife monitoring. Hundreds of thousands of waterfowl and shorebirds continue to use the complex for staging and nesting. The Wood Bison herd has expanded from 29 when re-introduced in the 1980s to over 500 today.

The project combines strong support for environmental protection with the need to sustain a local economy. The Dene Tha' practice their traditional harvesting while new approaches to community development are being sought through a tourism strategy.

In 2008, Hay-Zama Wildland Park was twinned with Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia, another Ramsar site and part of the world's most extensive remaining temperate grassland – Daurian Steppe. Both Dene Tha' and Mongolian indigenous peoples have strong conservation interests. The international cooperation focus of the HZC is building capacity in indigenous communities for nature protection and community development.

Wildland protection, economic development and the vision of First Nations happen through meaningful participation. Mutually beneficial agreements developed by “the neighbourhood” protect wildlife, land and water. Successful change requires mutual sharing of information, communication, transparency, and trust.

*“Great things can happen with the simple exchange of experiences and knowledge.”*  
– Leroy Johnson, MLA

## **Link to information related to the project:**

<http://www.albertawilderness.ca/wilderness/areas/hay-zama>



*Dene Tha' Chief James Ahnassay addresses official twinning ceremony in 2008*