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## **“Potatogate”**

### **Irreplaceable Public Land to be Sold to make Potato Chips**

In a shocking insult to all Albertans, the provincial government is set to sell off a huge swathe of public land – our land – to a private company, to grow potatoes. Despite the fact that the 16,000-acre parcel of land near Bow Island is valuable native prairie, known to be habitat for a number of endangered species, the sale looks set to go ahead this week with no opportunity for public input. The priceless piece of prairie will be ploughed up to grow potatoes.

“Potatogate” is a blatant example of secret backroom, under-the-table dealing,” says Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist. “It seems that our public land is up for sale, and not even to the highest bidder. If you have the right connections, then they will sell you our land and even turn a blind eye to all of the endangered species habitat that will be destroyed.”

The loss to the Alberta public would be enormous. More than 70 percent of Alberta’s native grassland has already been destroyed, and less than 1 percent of the province’s Grassland Natural Region is protected. Though only 5 percent of Alberta consists of native prairie, this land is home to 70 percent of our threatened and endangered wildlife. The 16,000-acre Bow Island parcel is known to be home to endangered species including burrowing owls, ferruginous hawks and Sprague’s pipits.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), unsatisfied with the lack of information and response by our government elected officials in this matter, has initiated a Freedom of Information (FOIP) application, to access documents which it is believed will expose our government’s backroom dealings in the proposed public land sale. But because of the long drawn-out nature of the application process, the land may already have been destroyed before the documents are received.

AWA has also written to the presidents of Fritolay and McCain foods , as well as the Alberta Potato Producers, to ask for assurances that potatoes produced on recently cultivated native Alberta prairie will not be purchased. No reply has yet been received.

“We have been blown away by how many Albertans have been calling and writing to express their outrage that such dealings can go on,” says Douglas. “They’ve been telling us ‘surely this should wait until the Land-Use Framework plan comes out’.”

AWA believes that public land is the land that was put in the public trust so that it would be protected for our wildlife and wilderness legacy. This shabby backroom “Potatogate” deal must be stopped now before irreversible harm is done.

#### **For more information:**

Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist: (403) 283-2025

