

Sixteen Years after Being “Protected” Rumsey Natural Area Sees a Halt to New Oil and Gas Access

Sixteen years after it was officially “protected,” Rumsey Natural Area may finally be able to look forward to a future free of industrial development. AWA learned recently that Alberta Energy has made changes so that, as of February 29, 2012, all new petroleum and natural gas agreements within the Rumsey Natural Area will now come with the condition: “Surface Access is Not Permitted.” Any new energy resource extraction will have to be carried out from outside the protected area, using directional drilling techniques.

Previously, leases were sold with “Surface Access Subject to Restrictions” but this seemed to do little to slow down escalating development. Despite the fact that Rumsey was declared a Natural Area in 1996, it has continued to see more and more oil and gas development. Less than a year after it was designated, 44 new oil and gas leases were sold by the Alberta government in the Natural Area. Since then new oil and gas leases continued to be sold; new wells have been drilled and new pipelines constructed. The incomparable values of the area have suffered as a result.

Located about 40 kilometres north of Drumheller, the 241-km² Rumsey area constitutes the largest remaining intact tract of aspen parkland in the world. Rumsey is a mosaic of trembling aspen woodland, grassland, and wetland habitats. This mosaic on the rolling terrain at Rumsey is important for many typical parkland plants and animals. Its biological significance lies mainly in the variety, quality, and extent of

representative natural habitats.

AWA has been fighting for meaningful protection in Rumsey for several decades. We regard the new changes as an encouraging first step in the long-term phasing out of oil and gas activity in the Natural Area. It has been a long, long time coming but we are pleased that Rumsey may be started along the road to true protection.

- Nigel Douglas



Caption: Rumsey is one of the only large protected areas in Alberta’s Parkland Natural Region. Less than one percent of the region is protected.

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