



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

October 8, 2014

The Hon. Jim Prentice
Premier of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Email: Premier@gov.ab.ca

Honourable Kyle Fawcett
Minister of ESRD
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Email: ESRD.Minister@gov.ab.ca

Honourable Frank Oberle
Minister of Energy
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Email: minister.energy@gov.ab.ca

Dear Premier Prentice, Minister Fawcett and Minister Oberle:

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is a longstanding conservation organization that has more than 7000 members through the province and is the oldest group seeking a network of protected, representative landscapes throughout Alberta.

Given the recent very clear and strongly worded statement you made Premier Prentice:

"Under my leadership, we will establish Alberta as a world leader in the advancement of conservation and the protection of the environment." (September 20, 2014)

AWA believes we have a win-win opportunity that urgently needs your attention and that of your ministers. We would like to work with you to make this opportunity a reality. We have discussed with and written to Geri Protti and Jim Ellis of the Alberta Energy Regulator on this matter as well and we have been encouraged that, if we work together, we can head off potential and unnecessary conflict and gain protection for our grasslands.

When we met with Gerri Protti and Jim Ellis, we spoke about the importance of AWA helping drive outcomes. We also discussed the unacceptable continuation of lease sales in areas that are under consideration for some level of conservation and protection. We presented a case where an area proposed for Milk River Ridge as a Heritage Rangeland; adjacent to the existing Twin River Heritage Rangeland in the South Saskatchewan regional plan (SSRP) is **currently under immediate threat** of new

petroleum exploration and development by DeeThree . I've attached a map showing the area at the end of this letter. Regrettably, the SSRP is allowing new development while planning continues for protection. It is our view that subsurface rights for this area (and any in the Onefour addition also identified on that map) need to be surrendered to the Crown and appropriate compensation paid.

Unlike the Lower Athabasca plan, not a single acre of land with existing energy leases was moved forward as a conservation area in the SSRP. The Milk River Ridge local lease-holding rancher is supportive and her neighbours are also supportive of the protection and designation as Heritage Rangeland; collectively, they don't want new oil development on this piece of land as they recognize the priceless value of intact native prairie and a vital ecosystem. You may know that Alberta has not met its Special Places 2000 targets for protected areas in the grassland natural region and both the Twin River and Onefour additions would help towards those goals. Your statement defining Alberta "***as a world leader in the advancement of conservation and the protection of the environment***" is refreshing and encouraging and taking time and resources to establish this Heritage Rangeland on the Milk River Ridge would help give reality to those words.

The second map at the end of this letter shows a more general focal area for conservation planning for grassland protection. These priority subregional planning areas must be organized under some directed process to reduce footprint from new leasing and development while planning is ongoing. We believe that a model like the Hay-Zama process (*we would be happy to provide details on this successful process*) could assist with implementing grassland conservation planning and protection and some limited energy development in these areas. This would fit within AER's play based regulation concept, but where the focus is on protection not development.

Given significant timing pressures, we would like to see the Milk River area/DeeThree matter settled before any other applications for development are made on these lands. This would avoid unnecessary conflict in the face of clear direction about where government intends to head; which means this Milk River Ridge area will be added to the Twin River Heritage Rangeland protected area. In the case of the Milk River Area, compensation to DeeThree for mineral rights payments would provide a significant amount of good faith as we all work towards improving Alberta's progress towards its grasslands protection targets.

We look forward to your thoughts on this matter and would appreciate a meeting at your earliest convenience.

With sincere best regards,

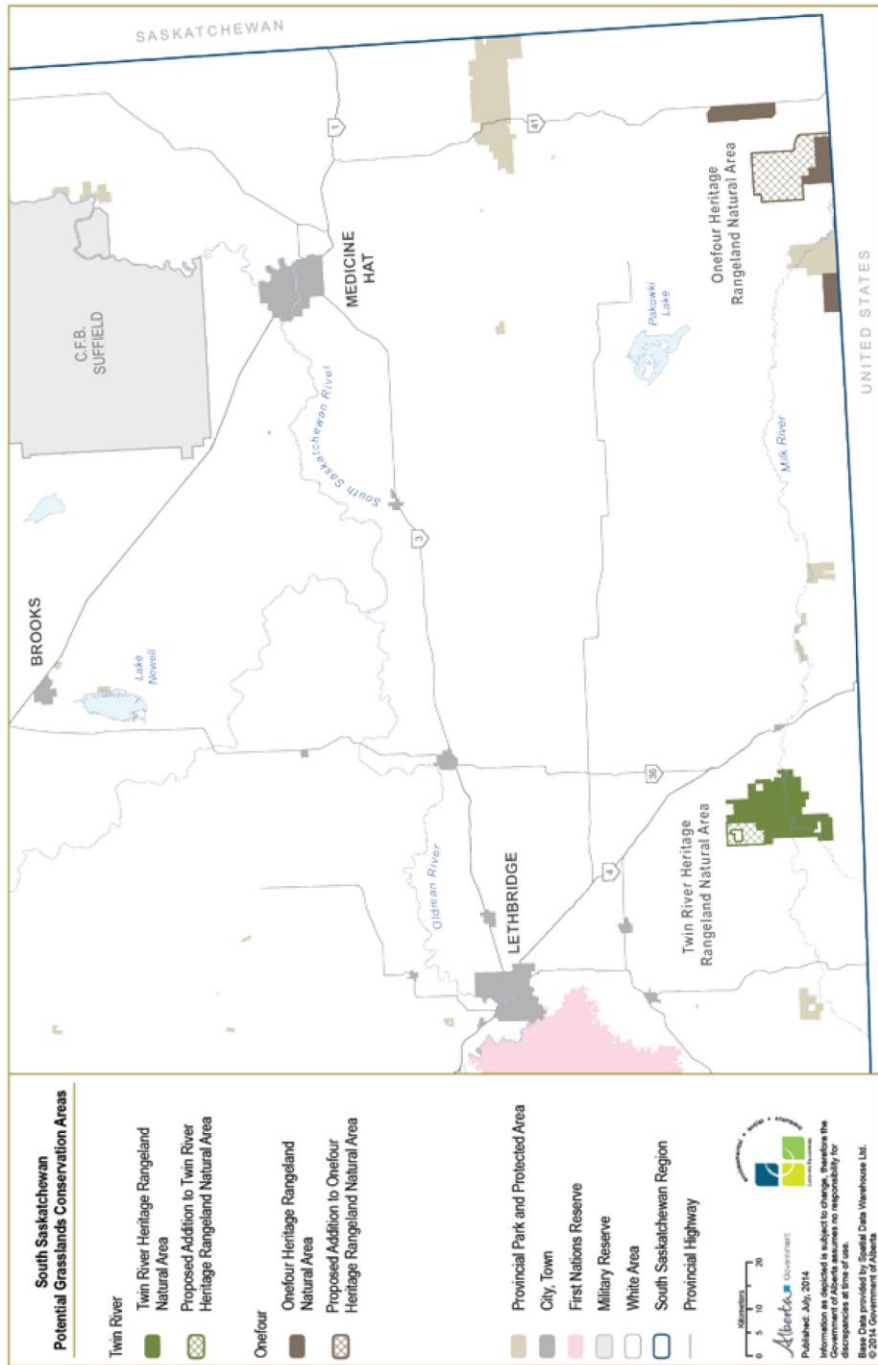


Christyann Olson
Executive Director

Map 1—South Saskatchewan Regional Plan map showing proposed additions to protected areas

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan 2014-2024

Map 6: Potential Grasslands Conservation Areas



Map 2—South Saskatchewan Regional Plan map showing priority subregional planning areas for grasslands

