



Position of Alberta's Major Conservation Groups on Alberta's new Special Places 2000 Policy

Background

On March 28, 1995 the Alberta Government released its rewritten Special Places 2000 policy as its new policy for Alberta. This replaces the earlier *Special Places 2000: Alberta's Natural Heritage, Completing Alberta's Endangered Spaces Network*, which was released in November of 1992 as a draft protected areas plan for Alberta.

The new policy will ~ result in a network of protected wildlands, wilderness landscapes and rivers legally set aside from industrial and commercial development -- action requested by the majority of Albertans and set out as the goal of 1992 draft. Instead, the government is embarking on nothing more than a system of glorified multiple-use areas where development such as logging, oil and gas drilling, intensive agriculture, dams and mining can potentially be "integrated with protection" inside the Special Places. In summary, the policy has been described by Alberta's major conservation groups as a public relations exercise aimed at giving the impression that Alberta has a plan for establishing protected areas when it does not.

The undersigned Alberta environmental groups, including major conservation groups such as the Alberta Wilderness Association, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society, and the Sierra Club of Western Canada - Alberta Group are refusing to endorse the new policy as a protected areas policy. Also, the groups will not consider participation in the markedly changed Special Places 2000 program until substantive changes are made.

The conservation groups' boycott of the policy has not stopped their long-standing work for protected areas in Alberta. As it is a multiple-use policy and not a protected areas plan, Special Places 2000 leaves Alberta with the status quo when it comes to completing a network of protected areas. Conservation groups will continue to work for protection -- wilderness area by wilderness area -- as was the case for Wind Valley, the Whaleback Wildland, Dinosaur World Heritage Site, etc. As well, they have now launched a major international campaign, the International Network to Protect Alberta Wilderness (INPAW).

After the release of the rewritten policy, the Honorable Ty Lund stated in the Alberta Legislature that Special Places 2000 is a broad umbrella policy which includes amongst other types of Special Places, protected areas "that will be off limits for development." The Minister made it clear that "one of the pillars of the program is preservation." This has yet to be written into the policy as the focus.

The focus of the conservation community and the national commitment, which the Alberta Government signed onto in November 1992, is preservation. Specifically, it is those categories of Special Places where no industrial activity occurs, including Wilderness Areas and Wildlands where no roads nor any form of development occurs.

As explained in 1987 by the former Alberta Recreation and Parks Department:

Although "preservation" and "conservation" are both forms of heritage resource protection, they have different meanings and distinct aims. Preservation is not simply a less compromising form of conservation, but rather is the retention of the integrity, authenticity and intrinsic value of a resource in perpetuity.





POSITION

The undersigned groups will not endorse the new Special Places 2000 policy as a protected areas plan to meet the national commitment the Alberta Government signed onto in November 1 992, until six basic principles are put back into the policy. These six principles are:

1. Protected areas are wildlands legally set aside from industrial development, cultivation and off-road motorized use. (Protection by policy is tantamount to no protection at all.)
2. Protected areas are explicitly legislated and managed to retain their natural landscapes and ecological integrity.
3. The type of designation used is consistent with the spectrum defined in the Public Advisory Committee Report and available under present legislation (Ecological Reserves, Wilderness Areas, Wildlands or Wilderness Parks, Provincial Parks, Natural Areas).
4. The Special Places policy will be implemented on par with other resource development policies and conservation policy initiatives.
5. A Provincial Advisory Body is charged with completing the protected areas network with a priority placed on the protection goal, even if appropriate candidate areas are not forthcoming in a timely manner from local advisory bodies.
6. Implementation will be based on scientifically sound information and mechanisms will be used to ensure that candidate areas are not degraded by incompatible land uses while being assessed and awaiting a final decision on their future.

Before the undersigned groups will consider any participation in the implementation of the government's Special Places 2000 program, the government needs to accomplish two things:

- 1 legislative certainty in terms of what a preservation area is, and
- 2.the immediate designation of five substantial areas from the backlog of sites awaiting establishment.

To achieve legislative certainty, the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act and the Provincial Parks Act must be amended to preclude any new industrial activity (logging, oil and gas, etc.) in any area designated under these acts, with the exception of Provincial Recreation Areas under the Provincial Parks Act. By these amendments, existing oil and gas activity could be permitted to deplete a field where wells already exist in a protected area and where the ecological integrity of the area would not be degraded. New mine and mineral exploration including for oil and gas, would be forbidden by these amendments. Hand in hand with this, the Willmore Wilderness Park Act must be amended to (a) allow for the designation of other Wilderness Parks or Wildland category preservation areas, and (b) to preclude any roads and any new commercial or industrial development. This legally reflects how Willmore has been managed.





Early in 1993, the Premier promised to act “in the near future” on the immediate designation of a number of sites out of the backlog that has been awaiting designation since the mid 1970’s. Thus, as a show of

good faith that this will be done, and that these areas won’t instead be put through yet another review (Special Areas 2000), the undersigned groups require that the following five areas be designated:

Waterton-Castle Wildland Recreation Area (resort area, recreation area and wildland protection area) under a combination of the amended Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act, the amended Willmore Wilderness Park Act and the amended Provincial Parks Act as required to fit the Natural Resources Conservation Board ruling.

Elbow-Sheep, Wild Kakwa and Bighorn Wildland Recreation Area all brought together under the amended Willmore Wilderness Park Act.

Ross Lake as an Ecological Reserve under the amended Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act.

These are five substantial sites out of the backlog of those that have cleared previous government review processes such as protected area reservations and/or integrated resource planning. Their establishment under the amended legislation requested above will demonstrate that the Alberta Government is indeed serious about implementing the *Statement of Commitment to Complete Canada’s Networks of Protected Areas*, which it jointly signed with all other provinces and territories in November of 1992.

