



Alberta Wilderness Association
"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

January 11, 2021

Honourable Jason Kenney
Premier, Government of Alberta
premier@gov.ab.ca

Honourable Sonya Savage
Minister, Alberta Energy
minister.energy@gov.ab.ca

Honourable Jason Nixon
Minister, Alberta Environment and Parks
aep.minister@gov.ab.ca

RE: [URGENT] Petroleum and Natural Gas Leases Offered in the Milk River Natural Area

Dear Premier Kenney, Minister Savage and Minister Nixon,

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is writing to object to the proposed sale of petroleum-natural gas (PNG) rights within the Milk River Natural Area and other parcels containing native grasslands, scheduled for auction on January 13, 2021.

AWA has a longstanding interest in the conservation of Alberta's native grasslands and has advocated for their protection since our founding in 1965. In 2021, less than 50 percent of native cover remains within Alberta's Grasslands Natural Region; moreover, that cover is highly fragmented. The significant contributions of oil and gas development to native prairie habitat loss are well-documented. In order to protect what precious native prairie habitat remains we ask you to remove these PNG lease rights from the January 13, 2021 Public Offering of Crown Petroleum and Natural Gas Rights.

Firstly, we are concerned about PNG development within the Milk River Natural Area (Lease #A0001) as it contains native grasslands and habitat for threatened populations of swift fox and Greater short-horned lizard. While the proposed lease is subject to additional restrictions, we do not believe these are sufficient to protect native prairie and species at risk habitat. For instance, directional/horizontal drilling may not be sufficiently restrictive. Even if a well is placed outside of the natural area boundaries, those adjacent areas may also contain highly intact native prairie and range for species at risk.

Secondly, we are seriously concerned that a number of proposed leases (A0002, A0003, A0004 and A0007) that contain native grasslands do not require any additional access restrictions. Given that native prairie cover within these leases is highly intact, we do not believe that merely minimizing or offsetting disturbance will compensate for the ecological loss of native prairie, especially within parcels containing endangered Northern Fescue Grasslands. Further to this, AWA does not believe the sale of these leases aligns with the management intent of the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. That plan intended to avoid and maintain intact native grasslands for their high biodiversity and watershed protection values.

Thank you for considering this request and we look forward to your thoughtful response as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Grace Wark, Conservation Specialist

Cc: MLA Marlin Schmidt, Critic for Environment, edmonton.goldbar@assembly.ab.ca

Alberta Energy Postings, postings.energy@gov.ab.ca

Alberta Energy Bidding, bidding.energy@gov.ab.ca

Deborah Johnstone, Land Management Specialist, Parks Land Use and Dispositions, Deborah.johnstone@gov.ab.ca

Glenn Mack, Provincial Wildlife Habitat Specialist, Fish and Wildlife Habitat Policy, Glenn.mack@gov.ab.ca