

AWA & CPAWS Concerns with the Additional Sale of Public Lands to Mackenzie County

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On October 25th 2021, the Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks reaffirmed the Government of Alberta's intent to sell 15,000 acres of publicly owned land to Mackenzie County in northern Alberta. AWA does not support the sale of public lands, especially when it will destroy native boreal habitat by converting this land into new agricultural space. "The public lands within Mackenzie County serve important ecological services by providing habitat and movement corridors for wildlife in the area," said Phillip Meintzer, AWA Conservation Specialist. "The sale and conversion of these public lands could have severe impacts on species at risk within the region."

"We have to approach any proposals recommending the permanent conversion of forested lands to agricultural production very cautiously," said Chris Smith, Conservation Analyst with CPAWS Northern Alberta. "The boreal forest plays a crucial role in retaining some of the largest carbon stocks in the world, and the permanent removal of large tracts of forests will be detrimental to Alberta's work on addressing climate change."

As stated in the Legislature this proposed sale violates the principle of reconciliation and would further fragment the boreal forest. Without assurances from Alberta Environment and Parks that First Nations' and ecological concerns have been sufficiently addressed, AWA and CPAWS strongly oppose this sale.

Background:

In 2010, former Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach promised to sell a total of 136,200 acres of public lands to Mackenzie County to offset the transfer of public lands from White Area to Green Area which occurred back in 1997. This land was to be transferred across three stages, for the purposes of converting the area into agricultural land and grazing reserves. As of 2015, nearly 120,700 acres had been sold to the county, and as part of their 2019 election campaign, the United Conservative Party stated that they intended to complete the sale of the remaining 15,300 acres if elected. According to comments recorded in the Alberta Hansard dated October 25th 2021, the Government of Alberta are intending to complete the sale of the remaining portion of this land in early 2022.

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