



ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

"Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action"

The Honourable Anita Anand, MP
Minister of National Defence
House of Commons, Ottawa, ON
By Email: Anita.Anand@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, MP
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
House of Commons, Ottawa, ON
By Email: Steven.Guilbeault@parl.gc.ca

March 8, 2022

RE: CFB Suffield Conservation and Reconciliation Opportunity

Dear Minister Anand and Minister Guilbeault,

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is writing to you regarding the future of Canadian Forces Base Suffield. AWA is an Alberta-based group dedicated to the conservation of wilderness with 7,500 members and supporters in Alberta and around the world. Since 1965, AWA has worked to develop a protected areas network and advocates for the good stewardship of Alberta's public lands and waters to ensure future generations may enjoy the abundant benefits they provide. We have also successfully worked with First Nations on wildlife and wildland protection.

In November, several media outlets reported that the British Army would be reducing its use of CFB Suffield¹. AWA hopes the Departments of National Defence and Environment and Climate Change Canada will see any downsizing of the British military presence at Suffield as an opportunity to build on the important conservation roles DND and ECCC have played there for decades.

Biodiversity loss is an important concern facing Canada. The Defence Energy and Environment Strategy recognizes "Defence bases and wings often have conditions that promote high biodiversity" and indicated the commitment of DND to protect species habitat through "species-at-risk work plans for each Defence establishment" and "OECM [other effective area-based conservation measure] recognition where compatible". CFB Suffield, half the size of Prince Edward Island, is arguably Canada's largest intact block of native, uncultivated grasslands and provides habitat and refuge for a variety of wildlife species. The importance of Suffield for grassland biodiversity is difficult to overstate.

The Suffield National Wildlife Area, established on the east portion of the base, already shows the Department of National Defence's diligence to protecting wildlife habitat. Established in 2003, the Suffield NWA plays a vital role in protecting native grasslands, which the Canadian government points out "are continuing to disappear at an alarming rate". With Canada committed to protecting 30% of land and water by 2030, the reduction of British military presence at CFB Suffield provides a wonderful opportunity for the Department of National Defence to strengthen its contribution to conservation by expanding the Suffield NWA.

Another issue of equal or greater importance is reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The Defence Energy and Environment Strategy mentions the Department of National Defence will “engage, collaborate or partner with Indigenous groups on a range of operational and policy matters, including environmental remediation, land access, consultation, procurement, and major construction projects”. The Suffield area has clear connections to Indigenous peoples in tipi rings, medicine wheels and other examples of Niitsitapi culture found on the land.

Lands managed by Indigenous peoples are often healthier and support greater biodiversity, and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas are acknowledged as one method for promoting reconciliation. Establishing an IPCA on CFB Suffield would support both reconciliation and conservation goals.

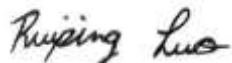
Finally, the Defence Energy and Environment Strategy committed to “clean up contaminated sites”, and set a target to “Reduce DND’s contaminated sites liability by an average of 10% per year by 2023”. With a reduction in military activity at CFB Suffield, there is the opportunity to increase restoration of areas contaminated by military or industrial use. Restoration and remediation of sites could provide an economic opportunity for the nearby City of Medicine Hat, where the loss of military personnel is expected to have an impact economically², as well as for Indigenous groups. Collaboration with Indigenous groups would further Department of National Defence’s target for managing contaminated sites while advancing reconciliation goals.

Further cooperation with Environment and Climate Change Canada would mean not only DND’s aspirations could be achieved but also ECCC’s.

The reduction in British military activity at CFB Suffield could provide an excellent opportunity for conservation, reconciliation, and reclamation efforts in line with the mandate letters of several federal agencies and the clear direction of the Government of Canada. AWA believes this could be a chance to enhance DND’s and ECCC’s roles in conservation and reconciliation without compromising the defence of Canada and our allies.

We will be in discussion with Niitsitapi representatives to gauge their interest and identify potential paths forward. It is essential to have their commitment before any further steps are taken. We believe that we must take seriously our duties and obligations under the Treaties and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Alberta Wilderness Association wants to facilitate further discussions about the future of CFB Suffield. We are excited about the great potential to do something at a meaningful scale both for grassland conservation and reconciliation with plains Indigenous Peoples. Thanks for listening to our ideas— we will keep you updated on our progress.

Sincerely,
ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION



Ruiping Luo, Conservation Specialist

Attachment: Briefing Note **CFB Suffield Conservation and Reconciliation Opportunity**

¹ *The Telegraph, Calgary Herald*. (Nov. 24, 2021). British army to pull training bases out of CFB Suffield and Wainwright. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/british-army-abandoning-alberta-training-bases-for-oman>;

Postmedia News, Calgary Herald. (Nov. 24, 2021). Britain's military clarifies reports about possible closure of Alberta training base. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/britains-military-clarifies-reports-about-possible-closure-of-alberta-training-base>; Rathwell, D. *CHAT News Today.* (Nov. 24, 2021). BATUS to stay for at least near future: CFB Suffield Commander. <https://chatnewstoday.ca/2021/11/24/batus-to-stay-for-at-least-near-future-cfb-suffield-commander/>

² Kaufmann, B. *Calgary Herald.* (November 24, 2021). Spectre of partial British military retreat from CFB Suffield sparks concern in Medicine Hat. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/spectre-of-partial-british-military-retreat-from-cfb-suffield-sparks-concern-in-medicine-hat>
