

December 20, 2000  
Edmonton, Alberta

**Record number of parks and protected areas added through Special Places program**

Alberta Environment announced the designation of 13 new sites and the expansion of 3 others - the greatest number of protected areas to be established at one time since the Special Places program was announced in March 1995.

These sites are located across the province, from Onefour Heritage Rangeland adjacent to the United States border, to a group of seven sites around Hinton, to the Marguerite River Wildland Park north of Ft. McMurray.

"Together, these sites add more than 470,000 hectares to the parks and protected areas network and legislatively protect some of Alberta's most treasured and environmentally important ecosystems," said Halvar Jonson, Minister of Alberta Environment. "Over 11 percent of Alberta is now legislatively protected - an area roughly the size of New Brunswick."

Under the Special Places program, 75 sites have been designated and 14 sites expanded, adding more than 1.2 million hectares to the parks and protected areas network. The creation of these new protected areas is a direct result of participation from local governments, public members, environmental groups, industry, recreation and conservation organisations, aboriginal communities and other local stakeholders.

"There are many reasons why protected areas are important for Albertans," said David Coutts, Chairman of the Special Places Committee and MLA for Livingstone-Macleod. "They provide places where we can go to appreciate nature and enjoy recreational activities. They provide places where natural processes dominate and biodiversity is preserved. An additional benefit of establishing these protected areas is the certainty for industry and security for future generations of knowing what lands are set aside for preservation and what lands remain open for development."

Several protected area recommendations are still under review by government. If approved, these sites may also be established in the new year. Once sites are designated, management plans will be created providing additional opportunities for public input.

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Attachments: Site backgrounder and [map](#)

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**Site Backgrounder**

Marguerite River Wildland Park

The Marguerite River Wildland Park encompasses nearly 2,000 square kilometres (196,300 hectares) of land along the Alberta/Saskatchewan border, just 25 kilometres northeast of Fort McMurray. This site incorporates the Marguerite Crag and Tail Wildland Park and is made up of extremely rugged landscapes in the north, some of the most pristine organic wetlands throughout the site, and a spectacular esker in the south.

### **Birch Mountains Wildland Park**

The Birch Mountains Wildland Park contains one of the most diverse intact hill systems in the Boreal Forest and is characterized by high landform diversity, vegetation diversity and wildlife diversity. This 1,445 square kilometre (144,500 hectare) site is located approximately 90 kilometres northwest of Fort McMurray, south of Wood Buffalo National Park.

### **Gipsy Lake Wildland Park**

The 358 square kilometre (35,766 hectare) Gipsy Lake Wildland Park is located approximately 50 kilometres southwest of Fort McMurray and incorporates a number of lakes including, Gipsy, Gordon, Birch and Shortt lakes. Birch Lake contains diverse wetland habitat and both Birch Lake and Gipsy Lake are important American White Pelican nesting sites. Gordon Lake is one of the most important waterfowl breeding, moulting and staging areas in this region.

### **Grand Rapids Wildland Park**

The Grand Rapids Wildland Park encompasses over 250 square kilometres (25,667 hectares) along the Athabasca River, stretching from House River to approximately ten kilometres southwest of Fort McMurray. Recognized as a National Environmentally Significant Area, the Athabasca River valley is an important biological corridor for a variety of fish and wildlife species.

### **Dunvegan West Wildland**

Located on the south side of the Peace River from the British Columbia border to Dunvegan, the new wildland overlaps an environmentally significant area of national importance. The Peace River Valley is one of the most ecologically productive and diverse river valleys in Canada. The 210 square kilometre (20,968 hectares) site is found in the Dry Mixedwood subregion of the Boreal Forest Natural Region. Notable features of the wildland include hoodoo landscapes, fossil beds, and habitat for geese, moose, elk and deer and birds of prey.

### **Stony Mountain Wildland Park**

Approximately 45 kilometres directly south of Fort McMurray, the Stony Mountain Wildland Park encompasses approximately 140 square kilometres (13,974 hectares) of land, much of which is notable caribou and moose habitat. This site is also characterized by relatively high landform and vegetation

diversity and is valued for the large number of quality wetlands and peatlands.

### **Sulphur Gates Provincial Recreation Area expansion**

The Sulphur Gates Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) expands upon the existing provincial recreation area by approximately 11 square kilometres (1,088 hectares). The PRA supports all four goals of the Special Places program and is an important wildlife movement corridor in and out of the Willmore Wilderness Park. This site is bordered by the Smoky River and the Town of Grande Cache to the east, the Willmore Wilderness Park to the south, and Highway 40 to the north.

### **Yellowhead Protected Areas**

The Yellowhead Protected Areas total over 500 square kilometres in area, and are located at the foot of the Rockies. The sites include Pinto Creek Canyon Natural Area, Brazeau Canyon Wildland Park, Fickle Lake Provincial Recreation Area expansion, Obed Lake Provincial Park, William A. Switzer Provincial Park expansion, Rock Lake-Soloman Creek Wildland Park, and Wildhay Glacial Cascades Natural Area. All sites are located nearby Hinton, in the rocky mountain-foothills. The seven sites represent numerous achievements for the Special Places program, including contributions to the outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation and tourism/economic development goals of the program.

#### **• Pinto Creek Canyon Natural Area**

The Pinto Creek Canyon Natural Area adds approximately 12 square kilometres (1,233 hectares) to the parks and protected areas network. The canyon supports the only known canyon-dwelling mountain goat herd in Alberta and is located north of William A. Switzer Provincial Park in the Upper Foothills subregion.

#### **• Brazeau Canyon Wildland Park**

Brazeau Canyon Wildland Park adds approximately 50 square kilometres (5,039 hectares) to the parks and protected areas network. Brazeau Canyon straddles the Brazeau River Canyon and contains unique tufa springs and complexes of eskers with kettle lakes. Located southeast of Hinton, the new wildland is a diverse example of landscape representation in the Upper Foothills subregion.

#### **• Fickle Lake Provincial Recreation Area expansion**

The Fickle Lake Provincial Recreation Area, located southwest of Edson, is being expanded by over 10 square kilometres (1,044 hectares). Now about 11.5 square kilometres in size, the site supports bald eagle and osprey nesting sites in mixedwood forests of aspen and white spruce.

#### **• Obed Lake Provincial Park**

The Obed Lake Provincial Park includes the former provincial recreation area and new lands, totalling 34 square kilometres (3,402 hectares). It is located west of Edson, on the north side of the Yellowhead Highway. The wetland complex is important for wildlife, especially elk, and provides over-wintering habitat for moose.

#### **• William A. Switzer Provincial Park expansion**

William A. Switzer Provincial Park, located northwest of Hinton, is being expanded by over 36 square kilometres (3,582 hectares). The expanded areas include the Wanyandi Meadows and the north half of Gregg Lake and its associated wetlands. The new additions almost double the total area of William A. Switzer Provincial Park, now 63 square kilometres.

#### **• Rock Lake-Solomon Creek Wildland Park**

At 347 square kilometres (34,683 hectares), the new Rock Lake-Solomon Creek Wildland Park represents a site of considerable size and ecological importance. Environments typical of the foothills and rocky mountains are found in this wildland, which links up with both the Willmore Wilderness and the northern boundary of Jasper National Park.

### • **Wildhay Glacial Cascades Natural Area**

Wildhay Glacial Cascades Natural Area adds approximately 25 square kilometres (2,492 hectares) of land to the parks and protected areas network. Located northeast of William A. Switzer Provincial Park, along the Wildhay River, this wildland offers an excellent representative of a river valley in the Upper Foothills subregion.

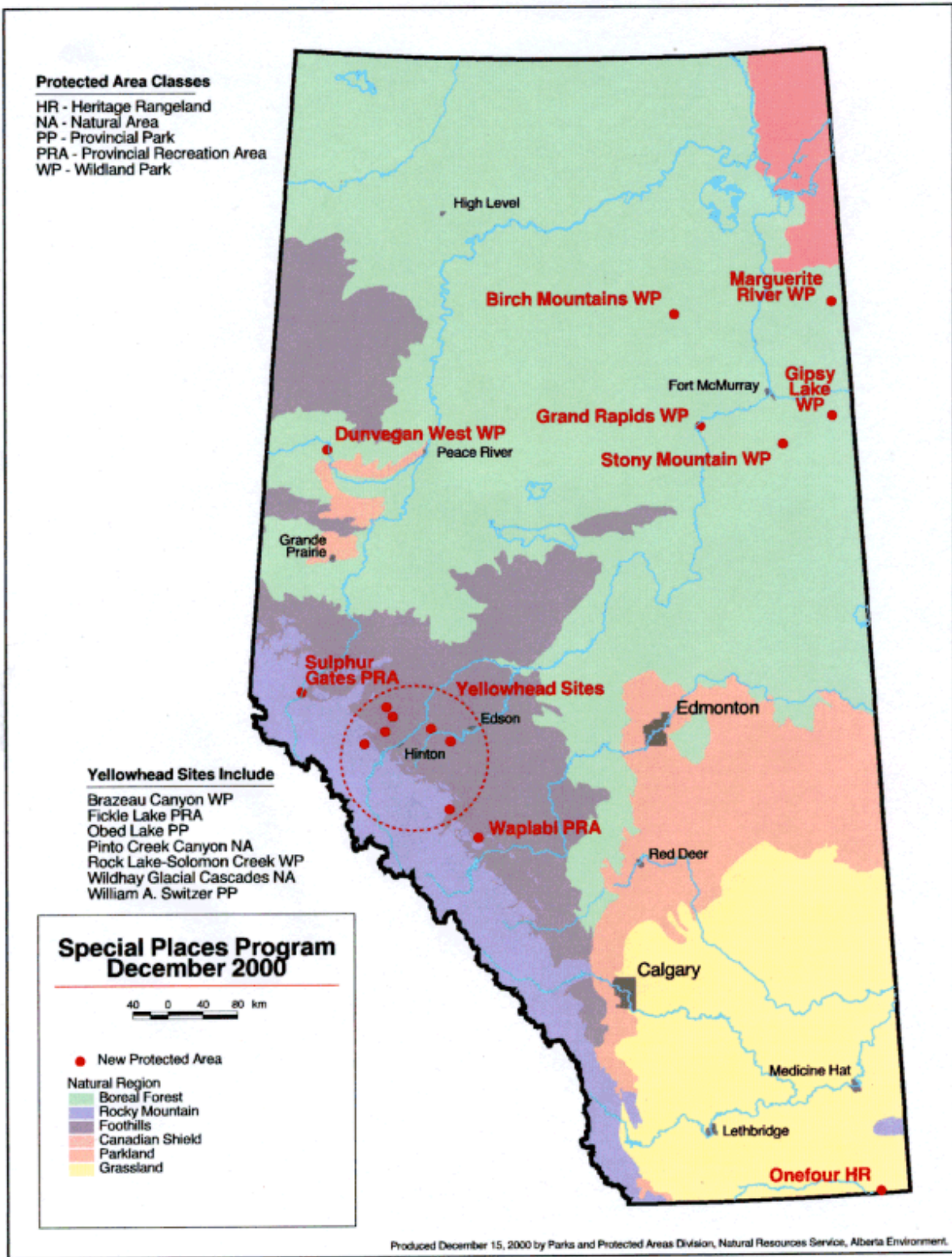
### **Wapiabi Provincial Recreation Area**

The 40 square kilometre (4,033 hectares) Wapiabi Provincial Recreation Area extends from the Blackstone River south along the valley surrounding Sturrock Creek and Wapiabi Creek to the Wapiabi gap. This site is a key wildlife movement corridor and includes critical moose, elk, wolf and grizzly bear habitat as well as key bull trout habitat.

The designation of the PRA is based on the recommendations of the local committee to protect the valley for its recreational and natural landscape values. Recreational activity will be permitted on designated trails and industrial activity will be restricted to permit protection of natural features.

### **Onefour Heritage Rangeland Natural Area**

The Onefour Heritage Rangeland adds approximately 112 square kilometres (11,165 hectares) of new lands to Alberta's parks and protected areas network in the Dry Mixedgrass subregion of the Grassland Natural Region. The heritage rangeland natural area includes three separate sites near the Milk River and the Alberta-Montana border. The first parcel is west of the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve and within the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve. The second parcel is within the southern part of the Onefour Research Station and overlaps the Lost River Valley and the third parcel is in the eastern part of the Sage Creek Grazing Reserve, adjacent to Highway 41. The heritage rangeland is found within the Sage Creek and Milk River Canyon Environmentally Significant Areas, which are of national importance. The site includes alkaline springs, extensive bedrock exposures along coulees, and remote wilderness settings surrounding the spectacular valley of the Lost River



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