



Edmonton July 24, 2001

Special Places concludes with designation of five new sites

A five and a half year initiative to protect the environmental diversity of Alberta concludes with the designation of five new sites, including the largest provincial site ever established by the province, under the Special Places program. The announcement was made today by Community Development Minister Gene Zwozdesky who is responsible for parks and protected areas.

The five new sites which add more than 697,000 hectares to Alberta's provincial parks system are: Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park, the largest protected area designated by the province; Peace River Wildland Provincial Park; and three new designations in Kananaskis Country - Sheep River Provincial Park, the Bluerock Wildland Provincial Park and Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park.

"Albertans should be proud of the accomplishments of the Special Places program. In true Alberta spirit, we have honoured a 1992 commitment to complete Alberta's component of the World Wildlife Fund's Endangered Spaces Program," said Zwozdesky. "From the grandeur of Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park in the Rocky Mountains to the unusual beauty of Richardson River Dunes Wildland Provincial Park in the Boreal Forest, Alberta's parks and protected areas are natural wonders that will be cherished forever."

Formally announced in 1995, Special Places is a 'made in Alberta' strategy to complete a network of landscapes that represents the environmental diversity of the province's six natural regions. Under the program, 81 new and 13 expanded protected areas - wildland provincial parks, ecological reserves, provincial parks, and natural areas - added almost two million hectares to the province's protected areas network, resulting in a more than three-fold increase in the amount of provincial land in Alberta's protected areas network since the start of the program. Approximately 12.5% of the province is now protected in national parks, wildland provincial parks, provincial parks, wilderness areas, ecological reserves, natural areas and Willmore Wilderness Park.

"Today's announcement firmly demonstrates the Alberta government's commitment to protecting our natural landscapes and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism," Zwozdesky said. "The designation part of the program is completed, but our work with our new and existing parks and protected areas will continue, including developing management plans to ensure their values are maintained."

"Albertans from all walks of life helped to make the Special Places program a reality," stated Jon Lord, MLA Calgary Currie and Chair of the Special Places Committee. "Albertans who participated in the nomination and decision-making process to identify and establish new parks and protected areas never lost sight of the ultimate goal. Everyone worked together and, in the end, realized the important and long-term significance of their decisions and agreed that they had done the right thing."

Zwozdesky added, "Since the concept of protecting Special Places began during the Honourable Don Getty's tenure as Alberta's 11th Premier, it is appropriate to dedicate the final site in his honour. This dedication recognizes Mr. Getty's many years of public service to our province, and reflects his deep appreciation for recreation, tourism, the great outdoors, and the importance of family."

For more information on Special Places, visit the Community Development web site at: www.cd.gov.ab.ca

and click on Preserving Alberta.

- 30 -

Editor's Note:

A map and description of the five new sites are attached. Also attached are a backgrounder on Special Places and a map illustrating all the protected areas within Alberta.

[Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park](#)

[Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park](#)

[Peace River Wildland Provincial Park](#)

[Sheep River and Bluerock Wildland Provincial Park](#)

[Protected Areas System in Alberta](#)

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FIVE NEW DESIGNATIONS UNDER SPECIAL PLACES

Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park (5,910 km²) is the largest area protected under the Special Places initiative and represents the diversity of the Subarctic Subregion of the Boreal Forest. A rich bird environment, the Caribou Mountains provide habitat for species found much further north including gray-cheeked thrush, red-necked phalarope, red-throated loon, American tree sparrow, mew gull, pacific loon, and surf scoter. The wildland includes about 80% of the range of an important population of woodland caribou. A population of up to 120 wood bison lives in the Wentzel Lake area in small groups of up to 15 animals. Polar reed grass found in this area is believed to have been introduced by the bison. Wetlands are an integral part of the Caribou Mountains. The Peat Plateau Bog and the Northern Ribbed Fens are unique environments of provincial significance.

Peace River Wildland Provincial Park

(246km²) preserves the south bank of the Peace River from the town of Peace River west towards Dunvegan. Included in the wildland is about 30 km of the Smoky River and valley upstream of its junction with the Peace River. Most of the wildland is forested by aspen and some spruce. The Smoky-Peace Point area includes grassland and shrubland communities typical of the Peace River Parkland. Deer, elk, black bear and wolf frequent the area.

Bluerock Wildland Provincial Park

(127 km²) preserves the valley of the Sheep River between Elbow-Sheep Wildland and the eastern boundary of Kananaskis Country. The wildland park provides a transition zone between the Rocky Mountains and the Foothills natural regions. It protects one of the most extraordinary wildlife corridors in Kananaskis Country, where moose, elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, bighorn sheep, wolves, grizzly bears, black bears and Alberta's most studied population of cougars move freely along the Sheep River valley.

The Bluerock Wildland Provincial Park provides opportunities for fishing, carefully regulated hunting, guide-outfitter operations, hiking, back-country camping and horseback riding but permits no industrial development.

Sheep River Provincial Park

(62 km²) Sheep River Provincial Park includes the former Sheep River Wildlife Sanctuary, which is home year round to a herd of bighorn sheep. The eastern portion of the area extends into the Lower Foothills where open grassy slopes provide critical winter range for elk and deer that spend their summers in the higher alpine areas to the west. The park has been a wildlife sanctuary for many years and has supported much of Alberta's leading wildlife field research from the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. It contains two major campgrounds and a wide range of day use sites and trails. The Sheep River Provincial Park will continue to be closed to hunting, as a wildlife sanctuary, and will permit no industrial development.

Don Getty Wildland Provincial Park

(628 km²) consists of a number of parcels of land that add ecological integrity and contiguity to adjacent protected areas (e.g. Ghost River Wilderness Area, Banff National Park, Bow Valley Wildland Park, Elbow-Sheep Wildland Park). Forget-Me-Not Ridge to the east of Elbow-Sheep Wildland is particularly noteworthy with spectacular panoramic views and one of the deepest known caves in Alberta, as well as exceptional examples of felsenmeer, stone stripes and stone polygons. The Plateau-Cataract area includes Cataract Creek, a premier, blue ribbon, walk-in trout fishing stream. These periglacial features are well preserved with little disturbance from industrial activities and recreation use.

Backgrounder

- On March 11, 1992, Prince Phillip, His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, in his capacity as the International President of the World Wildlife Fund, received a commitment from the provincial government to prepare a "made in Alberta" strategy for completing our component of Canada's Endangered Spaces program. This commitment was made by the late Honourable Don Sparrow, then Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, on behalf of the Honourable Don Getty, Premier. That strategy came to be known as Special Places 2000: Alberta's Natural Heritage.
- In November, 1992, in Aylmer, Quebec, at the Tri-Council meeting of federal and provincial ministers responsible for environment, parks and wildlife, the draft document Special Places 2000: Alberta's Natural Heritage was tabled as a statement of Alberta's commitment to the Endangered Spaces Campaign.
- During the spring and summer of 1993, a series of open houses and group meetings encouraged Albertans to share their views on the draft document.
- February 1994 - The Special Places 2000 Advisory Committee report was released by Brian Evans, then Minister of Alberta Environmental Protection, and Ken Kowalski, then Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.
- March - August, 1994 - Public comments were received on the advisory committee report. A summary of all public comments with recommendations was prepared by an interdepartmental committee comprised of Environmental Protection; Economic Development and Tourism; Energy; Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; and forwarded to the Minister of Environmental

Protection.

- February 1995 - Ty Lund, then Minister of Alberta Environmental Protection, tabled recommendations and policy with Alberta Government Cabinet.
- March 28, 1995 - Ty Lund announced the Special Places 2000 policy and implementation plan.
- July 24, 2001 - Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Community Development, announces the conclusion of the Special Places program and five new designations, including the **Caribou Mountains Wildland Provincial Park**.
- Under Special Places, 12.5% of the province's land base is now protected in national parks, wildland provincial parks, provincial parks, wilderness areas, ecological reserves and natural areas.

Ecological Benefits of Special Places

- Maintain essential ecological processes, and preserve the genetic diversity of species and the genetic variations within them.
- Permit the continued evolution of wild species through natural selection in relatively undisturbed settings.
- Provide protected "environmental services" such as the production of oxygen, the creation and protection of soils, the absorption and breakdown of pollutants, and the amelioration of local and global climates.
- Preserve a full range of ecological options for future generations.

Economic Benefits of Special Places

- Create a positive international image for Alberta businesses that depend on natural resources.
- Create a climate of greater certainty for industry by establishing where they can and cannot operate.
- Balance a healthy and sustainable environment with a vibrant and sustainable economy.
- Preserve genetic stocks that have a vast potential for new foods, medicines and other products (over 50% of modern medicines make use of wild plant or animal species).
- Protect habitat for species that are harvested outside of these areas (e.g. fish stocks, migratory wildlife).
- Diversify local and regional economies with tourism initiatives associated with Special Places.
- Ensure protection of landscapes and view scapes, which attract visitors to the province.

Educational Benefits of Special Places

- Promote a deeper understanding of the relationship between humanity and the ecosphere.
- Serve as outdoor classrooms for schools, colleges, universities and organizations.
- Build public support for habitat protection, waste reduction and pollution abatement outside of protected areas.

Recreation and Health Benefits of Special Places

- Promote recreation for the enjoyment of nature, physical fitness and escape from the pressures of urban living.
- Provide opportunities for a distinctive range of outdoor recreation, including hunting, fishing, equestrian, hiking, camping, boating and other activities.

Scientific Benefits of Special Places

- Provide natural research laboratories in which to gather and assess information on how ecosystems function and how they respond to change.
- Serve as benchmarks against which to measure changes caused by humans or nature.

Spiritual and Cultural Benefits of Special Places

- Strengthen cultural identity and heritage values.
- Inspire artists, poets, musicians, writers and sculptors.
- Ensure the survival of species that symbolize our province, such as bighorn sheep, great horned owl and bull trout.

Alberta Index | Dept Index | Community Development Home Page | News Releases [Top of Page](#)

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Return to [Government Home Page](#)