

October 8, 2004

Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park designated as a Dark Sky Preserve

Edmonton...Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park is the first provincial park in both Saskatchewan and Alberta to be officially recognized as a Dark Sky Preserve. This designation acknowledges and protects the nocturnal environment, a part of the natural heritage of the provinces.

The declaration was made by the governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan, responsible for managing Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, and by Fort Walsh National Historic Site of Canada, in partnership with the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (Calgary, Regina and Saskatoon Centres) at a Canadian Parks Council meeting held in the park September 26 - 29, 2004.

"Our continuing partnership with Saskatchewan and Fort Walsh will provide opportunities for the public to appreciate a starry sky, which is also an important aspect of our natural heritage, including the First Nations heritage surrounding constellations and related mythology," said Gene Zwozdesky, Minister of Alberta Community Development with responsibility for parks and protected areas.

Establishing Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park as a Dark Sky Preserve will be accomplished by using responsible lighting practices, including the use of fully shielded luminaires, minimum light levels, energy efficient lamps, aiming lights downward, and reducing lighting during night-time hours.

"We are pleased to participate in this designation with the Government of Alberta, Parks Canada and the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, which will help to ensure the protection of night-time darkness, an essential element of the ecosystem," said David Forbes, Minister of Saskatchewan Environment with responsibility for parks and protected areas.

The designation will help to enhance visitors' appreciation of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park with the night sky as part of the natural, historical and cultural experience. It will also provide opportunities for new interpretive and educational programs, attracting more visitors and adding economic benefits to the respective provincial and local tourism industries.

Alberta and Saskatchewan will both work toward expanding the Dark Sky Preserve program within their respective jurisdictions.

The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada is dedicated to the advancement of astronomy and allied sciences. The society has a membership of more than 4,700 professional and amateur astronomers from across Canada.

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Editor's Note: Please see the attached backgrounder.

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Backgrounder

Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park

Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park is one of the most popular tourism attractions in southwest Saskatchewan and southeast Alberta and has a \$50 million combined economic impact on the local economies every year. It is Alberta's third largest provincial park and Canada's first and only interprovincial park, located in both Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Cypress Hills was established as a provincial park in Saskatchewan in 1931, as a provincial park in Alberta in 1951, as an interprovincial park in 1989 and as a Dark Sky Preserve in 2004. The Cypress Hills are the highest point in Canada between the Rocky Mountains and Labrador, with a maximum elevation of 1,466 metres above sea level. The montane environment is an oasis of mixed and lodgepole pine forests in the midst of the Canadian prairies. Combined, the interprovincial park contains 90 kilometres of hiking trails and a wealth of plant and animal life, including 20 species of orchids. And because it preserves night-time darkness, it is a remarkable place to view the natural beauty of the starry sky. In Saskatchewan, the park consists of a Centre Block and West Block and totals about 19,000 hectares. On the Alberta side, the park encompasses about 20,450 hectares of land. Each year close to 500,000 visitors enjoy the interprovincial park's more than 900 individual campsites and many group campsites.

Cypress Hills offers its visitors a unique natural and cultural experience. The park's landscape of mixed and pine forests and fescue grassland surrounded by short grass prairie and ranchland is rich with historical significance and natural wonder. Boating, fishing, swimming, hiking, camping, wildlife watching and stargazing are just some of the ways in which the park can be enjoyed.

For additional information on Alberta's parks and protected areas, visit www.cd.gov.ab.ca/parks.

For additional information on Saskatchewan parks and protected areas, visit www.saskparks.net.

For additional information about light pollution and responsible lighting, visit www.syz.com/rasc/lp and www.darksky.org.

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