

Government of Alberta News Release

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Milestone Reached in Preserving Alberta's Natural Heritage

Edmonton-- The designation of six new Wildland Parks in the Canadian Shield Natural Region, and a range of preservation measures for the Castle area in the Rocky Mountain Natural Region will add approximately 2,800 sq km to Alberta's protected areas network under Special Places.

"The addition of these six sites in the Canadian Shield is particularly significant because it fills Alberta's protected areas gaps in that Natural Region," said Minister of Environmental Protection Ty Lund.

"Together with the protection of the Castle, these designations mark a major milestone in the preservation of Alberta's natural heritage for future generations."

The Wildland Park designations in the Canadian Shield Natural Region protect areas of natural landscape with minimal facilities and interference with natural processes. Eco-touring, adventure travel, guiding and outfitting are supported. These designations cover two Natural Subregions. The Kazan Upland Subregion will be represented by La Butte Creek, Colin-Cornwall Lakes and Fidler-Greywillow sites on the north shore and several adjacent islands of Lake Athabasca. The Marguerite Crag and Tail, Richardson River Dunes and Maybelle River sites will represent the Athabasca Plains Subregion. Traditional and historical uses of the land will continue under the Wildland designation.

The protection measures for the Castle area reflect the Local Committee's recommendations to provide legislated protection for the area while taking into account the region's importance for recreation, tourism and established development.

Implementation of the Castle recommendations will proceed in two phases.

In the first phase, a Special Management Area will be established as a Forest Land Use Zone to provide immediate legislated protection for the Castle area by regulating the existing Castle Access Management Plan, currently being managed through voluntary compliance.

As part of this first phase, an Ecological Reserve will also be created in the wetland area in the West Castle River valley following the required 60-day notification period.

Secondly, the government will conduct a full review and update of the Castle Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), as recommended by the Local Committee.

"The Local Committees have done an excellent job given the widely differing circumstances of the Shield and the Rocky Mountains," Lund said. "Each committee provided thoughtful recommendations on how to best meet the preservation goal of Special Places while respecting present interests and recognizing the program's other three goals of heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation and tourism/economic development."

Today's announcements demonstrate the continuing progress of the Alberta government's Special Places program. A total of 44 new sites have been added to Alberta's network of protected areas since the program was first announced in 1995, representing a contribution of more than 4,800 sq km.

"I am pleased with the substantial progress that has been made by the Provincial Coordinating Committee in completing the review of four natural regions. I would also like to thank Albertans for their enthusiastic participation in the public nomination process and bring the nomination phase of the program to a close," concluded Lund. "Special Places is now focused on identifying the best candidate sites from the over 380

sites nominated by Albertans for consideration by Local Committees."

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Attachments: backgrounders

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CASTLE SPECIAL PLACES DESIGNATIONS

Special Places is the Government of Alberta's protected areas policy. The vision is to complete a system of protected areas by preserving representative examples of Alberta's six natural regions. Although the Rocky Mountain Natural Region was already well represented, the Castle area, located west of Pincher Creek, was one of four sites in this Natural Region advanced by the government for consideration in response to Albertans' interest. The Castle is an area with a rich variety of plant and animal species.

In July 1997, following extensive public consultation, the Castle Special Places Local Committee submitted its recommendations to the Minister. The Local Committee's 10-point recommendation balanced the importance of preserving valuable habitat, honouring existing commitments and recognizing the many historical and traditional uses of the area. This approach provides regulated protection for the area, while meeting the four goals of preservation, heritage appreciation, recreation and tourism/economic development.

The Castle Special Management Area will be implemented in two phases.

Phase I:

- Provide immediate legislated protection through a Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ) which will regulate the existing access management plan, previously managed on a voluntary basis.
- Create an Ecological Reserve to protect an important wetland area in the West Castle River valley following the required 60-day notification period.

Phase II:

- Review the existing Castle River Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) as the management planning exercise for the Castle

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CANADIAN SHIELD SPECIAL PLACES DESIGNATIONS

Special Places is the Government of Alberta's protected areas policy. The vision is to complete a system of protected areas by preserving representative examples of Alberta's six natural regions. The priority of Special Places in the Canadian Shield is to add sites that fill the gaps in the provincial system of protected areas.

The Canadian Shield is the smallest of Alberta's Natural Regions, in the far northeast corner of the province. The six sites designated under the Special Places program will protect representative landscapes of the Natural Region's two Subregions. For example, Richardson River Dunes, in the Athabasca Plains Subregion, contains part of the largest single uninterrupted sand dune complex in Canada, while the Colin-Cornwall Lakes site is one of the most diverse wetland-stream complexes in the Kazan Upland Subregion in Alberta.

- All sites have been designated as Wildland Parks. The Wildland designation typically encompasses large areas of natural landscape that still allow for ecotourism and adventure travel. Interference with natural processes is minimized. Recreational motorized access will be permitted along designated trails.
- Cooperative management with local representation will continue for all sites.
- Development of small commercial recreation facilities will be considered in order to provide opportunities for recreational hunting, fishing and ecotourism.

The Canadian Shield was the first Natural Region to begin the Special Places process. One Local Committee was formed with three sub-committees in Fort McMurray, Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan that provided opportunities for public input in all three communities. Input from the three groups was consolidated into one Local Committee report containing recommendations to the Minister of Environmental Protection on December 10, 1997.

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