



Honourable Jason Kenney
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Honourable Jason Nixon
Minister of Environment and Parks
323 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

March 25, 2020

Dear Premier Kenney and Minister Nixon:

RE: Sale of native grassland.

For over 30 years, The Alberta Chapter of The Wildlife Society (ACTWS) has been working diligently to connect and empower wildlife professionals to engage in science-based management and conservation of wild animals and their habitats. Since our inception, we have participated in various land use planning and management processes ensuring that scientific research is incorporated in decision making. We represent over 450 wildlife professionals in the province and are part of a broader network of leaders in wildlife science, management and conservation across North America. With this letter, we are adding our voice in opposition to the sale of the quarter section of Crown-owned native prairie near Taber, Alberta.

Native grasslands are among the most endangered ecosystems in Canada; less than 5% of the land area in Alberta exists as native prairie grasslands. These lands represent critical habitats for numerous Species at Risk including the Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Sprague's Pipit, Long-Billed Curlew and many others. The greatest risk to these species is habitat loss. Clearly it is not a matter of preserving the 'best' habitat for these species, but rather, preserving any remaining habitats for these species.

In the *Alberta Strong and Free* campaign platform, the UCP committed to consulting with communities, First Nations, and others when dispositions of Crown Land were considered for sale. We are unclear if these consultations took place for a quarter section of grassland near Taber. Within this context and the ecological realities stated above, we were taken aback by the recent announcement of the sale of this quarter section of Crown-owned, native prairie near Taber, Alberta. Scientific research clearly shows that habitats are the key limiting factor for endangered and threatened grassland species. Present use of

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the leased lands in question is for cattle grazing, an activity known to be compatible with native wildlife. However, it is anticipated that conversion to intensive agriculture (e.g., potato production) will undoubtedly result in the loss of habitats native grassland wildlife.

In the spirit of open and transparent government, we ask the following:

- 1) A review of the Public Lands Act to include clear, prescriptive measures that define under what scenarios Crown Land will be considered for sale, requirements for the sale process and future land management, and how potential ecological impacts and habitat loss will be prevented or mitigated.
- 2) The Ministry of Environment and Parks should detail what scenarios will trigger public consultation on their website. The sale or swap of any Crown Land should require public and First Nations consultation as a precursor to sale.
- 3) A copy of the Environmental Impact and Wildlife Assessments for the sale of all Crown Lands should be publicly available. Before the end of the month, we would appreciate the opportunity to review these assessments associated with the quarter-section of Crown land for sale near Taber. You can email these assessments to president@actws.ca.

Our organization, which advocates for management based on scientific evidence, supports previous letters from the Alberta Wilderness Association, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and the Alberta Fish and Game Association calling for an immediate stop to the sale of this critical land, and an opportunity for public discussion on this transaction. We also look forward to working with your government to define a public consultation process and ecological review pertaining to any future public land sales.

We trust that the Minister, and the Government of Alberta, will make a responsible decision which is in the best interest of future generations.

Yours truly,

Andrea Morehouse, Ph.D.
President, Alberta Chapter of the Wildlife Society

cc: Rachel Notley, MLA, Leader New Democrat Party
Sonya Leverkus, President, Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society
Chris Smith, Conservation Affairs Committee, Canadian Section of The Wildlife Society

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