



## National Wildlife Areas in Canada

### Backgrounder

#### What is a National Wildlife Area?

National Wildlife Areas (NWAs) are established and protected under the Canada Wildlife Act. To be considered for designation as a NWA, a site must contain “nationally significant” habitat for migratory birds, support wildlife or ecosystems at risk, or represent rare or unusual wildlife habitat or a biogeographic region.

Some of Canada's best wildlife habitat has been set aside in a network of 51 NWAs that span all provinces and territories. This protected areas network is managed by Environment Canada and is critical to Canada's efforts to conserve biodiversity.

National Wildlife Areas do many things:

- Filter and store fresh water, manage floods, clean our air, and provide other irreplaceable services that humans and all other living things depend on.
- Limit the effects of climate change by protecting carbon stores, allowing plant and animal species time to adapt to a changing climate.
- Provide a refuge for species at risk. More than half of these areas provide a home for species at risk of extinction, such as polar bears, monarch butterflies, and burrowing owls. Ontario's Long Point NWA alone is home to 31 species at risk.

#### NWAs Face a Crisis

National Wildlife Areas are part of a federal protected areas network that conserves some of Canada's most important wild spaces for our wildlife, but the health of these areas is at risk from neglect. NWAs are left largely unmanaged. Enforcement of environmental laws is sporadic. Wildlife research is only conducted regularly in a handful of locations. Worst of all, Canada is missing out on important opportunities to grow the network.

At the heart of this crisis is a lack of funding. Environment Canada, the federal manager of the NWA network, lacks even the basic level of funding to properly manage existing protected areas.

In addition to lack of funding, these natural areas are open to other major threats, including deforestation, oil and gas development, urbanization, invasive species, pollution, harmful public uses and climate change.

### **What Needs to be Done**

Nature Canada has called on the Government of Canada to:

- Announce a funded plan to grow and manage Canada's network of National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, including updating its legal and policy framework, by 2009.
- Immediately announce that Canada will protect its boreal and arctic ecosystems by establishing interconnected networks of protected areas and implementing regional land-use plans in the Northwest Territories before approving any large-scale industrial projects, including the Mackenzie Gas Project. Canada should set a goal of protecting a minimum of 50 percent of its intact wild areas as part of comprehensive land-use planning initiatives for intact areas.
- Invest \$175 million over the next five years and \$35 million annually thereafter to establish 21 new NWAs and provide the effective capacity to manage this protected areas network.

### **About Nature Canada**

Nature Canada is a member-based non-profit nature conservation organization dedicated to protecting nature, its diversity, and the processes that sustain it. With strategies based on sound science and passion for nature, Nature Canada effects change on issues of national significance, including bird conservation, wilderness protection, species at risk and national parks. Through public outreach and education we are building a nature ethic among Canadians.