

6. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRESS TOWARDS SYSTEMS COMPLETION

Although the constitutional responsibility for land and natural resources rests primarily with the provinces, the federal government has a direct interest in pristine areas designation for the following reasons:

a) International Obligations

The federal government represents Canada and national Canadian interests to the world. As well, the federal government undertakes international agreements related to transboundary and global environmental affairs (e.g. 1992 Biodiversity Treaty). In this role the federal government participates in a number of programs related to protected areas such as the World Conservation Union (formerly the IUCN) - which has primary concern in landscapes and biodiversity protection as well as the World Heritage Site Program (under which intact natural areas of global significance receive designation).

b) National Parks

Since the federal government has the responsibility for the nation as a whole, it is able to take a Canada-wide perspective in designing a pristine areas system. The national parks system is the primary means by which this has been done. As well, national wildlife reserves have been established to protect exceptional wildlife populations and habitat. Steps are being initiated now to see how these two systems might be better integrated in order to protect Canada's natural heritage.

The land base of the national parks are federally owned and managed. The prerequisite to the establishment of new sites therefore requires transfer of lands from provincial to federal ownership. This is generally accomplished through agreements between the federal and provincial governments.

The federal government's pristine areas role is proactive. The Canadian Parks System, for example, has a well-developed systems planning process designed to identify new potential pristine areas. To enable the acquisition of such sites from the provinces, the federal government appropriates funds (through CPS budgets and special funds e.g. The Green Plan) for compensating affected third parties and for helping to fund regional development packages.