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ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: CANADA URGES FULL PROTECTION FOR SHARED WILDLIFE RESOURCES

The Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable William McKnight, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Honourable Tom McMillan, Minister of the Environment, and the Honourable Marcel Masse, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources announced that Canada has forwarded to the Government of the United States comments concerning the Report and Recommendation to Congress by the United States Department of the Interior to open the Alaskan coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil development. Canada continues to urge the United States to protect critical habitats of the Alaskan coastal plain upon which shared wildlife resources depend.

The Canadian Comments Paper notes that the best way to ensure the future of the many shared wildlife populations of the coastal plain is for the United States to follow the example already set in both the adjacent ANWR lands and on the Canadian side of the border by designating the coastal plain of ANWR as wilderness. The Paper outlines those areas of the U.S. Report with which Canada does not agree and expresses concerns for those parts of the Alaskan coastal plain of greatest importance to transboundary wildlife populations.

In February, 1987, in response to the U.S. Department of the Interior's draft Legislative Environment Impact Statement, Canada expressed the view that a decision to open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development had the potential to cause irreparable harm to the wildlife resources critical to the lifestyle of northern Canadians. After having studied the Final Report by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Canada continues to have deep reservations about the proposed development. This position reflects the fact that native communities in northern Canada have harvested caribou from the Porcupine Herd for many generations; in some communities the animals account for up to 80 percent of the protein consumed. Equally, the potential effects on migratory snow geese and polar bears are of concern to Canadians.

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The Right Honourable Joe Clark noted that "The quality of the environment, particularly the fragile northern environment, is a high priority for all Canadians. Canada is not against development in the North or elsewhere, but firmly believes that northern development must be sensitive to the environment." The Honourable Marcel Masse further emphasized this point by stating that "the United States should ensure, in whatever decision it takes about development of the 1002 lands, that the critical habitats of shared wildlife resources are maintained."

On July 17 of this year Canada and the United States signed the Agreement on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd to manage and protect this transboundary herd. The Honourable Tom McMillan has noted that "The agreement we signed in July sent a strong message to the U.S. Congress that both countries value the Porcupine Caribou Herd. We attach an enormous amount of importance to its continued preservation and survival. Full development of the area would have significant effects on the caribou, snow geese and polar bears of the region."

"These shared resources are important to the sustainable economy of the native people of the northern Yukon and Mackenzie Delta area of the Northwest Territories. Their long-term protection is essential to the development of a balanced northern economy," commented the Honourable Bill McKnight.

In the Comments Paper Canada reiterates an invitation to the United States to recognize the international significance of the region by twinning protected areas on both sides of the border.

The Canadian Embassy in Washington has been directed to make available the Canadian Comments Paper to interested members of the United States Congress which is currently considering the matter.

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