

PENDING SALE OF PUBLIC LANDS – 100 QUARTERS!!!

The Alberta Fish & Game Association (AFGA) and the Alberta Wilderness Association have learned that the Government of Alberta is in the process of selling a major tract of public land (100 quarters!!) in the Bow Island Grazing Reserve (Townships 12 and 13, Range 11, West of the 4th Meridian) estimated to be valued between \$30-40 million (but sold for \$8 million) to SLM Spud Farms of Taber who apparently will be irrigating and plowing it up to raise potatoes. The majority of the 100 quarters of this native prairie is to be ploughed up for potato farming, to be used in the manufacture of snack food "potato chips". AWA/AFGA are very disturbed to learn that the sale of this huge area of public is going through without public knowledge or opportunity for comment and is already before cabinet. The land is known to have several species listed under the federal Species at Risk Act, including burrowing owl, ferruginous hawk, Sprague's pipit, chestnut-collared longspur, McCown's longspur, short-eared owl, and long-billed curlew. There is less than 5% of native prairie grassland region left and this further destruction will help seal the fate of these species as well as any outdoors enjoyment, recreation opportunities by present and future generations. These islands of nature often stand out as wonderful fish and wildlife habitats which provide all Albertans opportunities for hunting, fishing, berry-picking, wildlife viewing, or other recreational activities. Both groups have a long standing record of not supporting the sale of our public lands.

In a radio interview on "Let's Go Outdoors" with host Michael Short, SRD Minister Knight eludes to the fact that the sale of public lands in this manner has never and will not go for any public consultation. The \$\$ from this sale would go to the Nature Conservancy of Canada (Alberta) and they can take this money and use it to secure "10 times" the amount of similar native grassland land and thus do more good, save more wildlife, protect more area.

"AWA has learned that the Nature Conservancy of Canada is unaware of any such arrangement," said Cliff Wallis, AWA vice-president. "It is AWA's understanding that the Nature Conservancy of Canada could not support such conversion of native grasslands to grow potatoes for snack food, especially when habitat for so many species at risk is involved."

Both groups, as well as us in the ABA, encourage people to contact their MLAs, the minister of SRD Mel Knight and the Premier Ed Stelmach to voice their concerns with the issue and the lack of consultation.

(For MLA contact info ---- http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=mla_home).