



September 6, 2018

To: Honourable Shannon Phillips, Minister of Environment and Parks

Cc: Premier Rachel Notley
David Khan, Leader Alberta Liberal Party
Stephen Mandel, Leader Alberta Party
Jason Kenney, Leader UCP

Re: Support for Expansion of Twin River Natural Area

Please accept this letter of support for the expansion of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland on the Milk River Ridge – a protective designation that has been under consideration for well over five years with ample ecological justification.

In its 2011 report to government, the multi-stakeholder Advisory Committee for the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan recommended extension of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland to include this area of native grassland on public land. The Regional Plan, approved by the previous government in 2014 after extensive public consultation, provided for exploring the potential for additional conservation areas with explicit mention and mapping of lands currently being proposed for inclusion in the Twin River Heritage Rangeland (Policy 3.14). The consultation currently underway through Alberta Parks honours the conservation intent of the Regional Plan and is presently providing an opportunity for further comment by interested parties.

Conservation planning by government and others recognize native grasslands on the Milk River Ridge as having high conservation significance. Grasslands are one of the most imperilled ecosystems on the planet. Moist mixedgrass and foothills fescue grasslands that are found in the proposed expansion, are particularly at risk. There are few vehicle trails and abundant wetlands in the proposed expansion that provide for a higher conservation value than other public lands adjacent to the Twin River Heritage Rangeland. Sensitive wildlife species that are known to or may occur in the proposed expansion include Ferruginous Hawk, Sprague's Pipit, Long-billed Curlew, Horned Grebe, Northern Leopard Frog and Grizzly Bear. Native habitats on the Milk River Ridge provide an important connector for movement of Pronghorn, deer and game birds such as Sharp-tailed Grouse between large tracts of dry grasslands in southeastern Alberta and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the west.

It is fortunate that the current holders of grazing leases on these public lands are supportive of designation as a Heritage Rangeland, recognizing that well-managed livestock grazing is beneficial to grassland ecosystems. It is unfortunate, however, that oil and gas leases set to expire in 2017 were inexplicably renewed with the concomitant spectre of fragmentation by roads, wellsites and pipelines. Southern Alberta Group for Environment and Alberta Wilderness Association have and will continue to make their concerns known when these applications are reviewed by the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER).

There has been some resistance to the expansion of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland until a caveat is placed that allows a dam site in the protected area. A dam on the Milk River, an international river under the purview of the International Joint Commission, has been extensively studied, most recently in 2002, and found to not be feasible based on economic cost-benefit analysis and adverse environmental effects. As such, this concern should not become a barrier to the expansion of this rangeland.

In summary, we appreciate the continued support of successive governments of Alberta for the protection of sensitive grasslands, particularly the land being designated in the expansion of the Twin River Heritage Rangeland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Braum Barber', with a stylized, cursive script.

Braum Barber
Southern Alberta Group for the
Environment