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The Alberta ECOLOGICAL *Gifts* PROGRAM

A Fee Simple Donation to Conserve **PARKLAND HABITAT** *The Natural Riches of East Central Alberta*

A fee simple donation is the transfer of absolute ownership of a property, unencumbered by any other interests or estate, from a donor to a recipient.

One thousand acres of gently rolling parkland were conserved in 2006 through an outright gift of land to the Nature Conservancy of Canada, by an anonymous estate, with the support of Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program.

Motivated by the decedent's interest in the natural landscape and lifelong attachment to "all things Albertan," this quiet donation has made a substantial contribution to the conservation of a unique parkland habitat and highly significant area.

Located about 300 kilometres southeast of Edmonton near Provost and the Saskatchewan border, this ecologically valuable property lies within the Sounding–Sunken Lakes area of Alberta.

The area is a rich mosaic of grass and shrubland communities with scattered stands of aspen, marshes, shallow saline lakes, mud flats and sand dunes formed on sand plains left by ancient glaciers. Situated within the Central Parkland natural subregion of Alberta, the ecosystem in this area is a transition between colder forest

areas to the north and warmer, drier grasslands to the south.


These conditions, taken together, ultimately give the Sounding–Sunken Lakes area a unique collection of plants that incorporates both plant species found in the boreal forest and southern grasslands along with those found in aspen parklands.¹

With the donation of this land, its ecological attributes have been successfully preserved for the future, at many levels.

This property creates a locally protected habitat of open grass and shrubland. Two small saline lakes provide seasonal wetland habitat for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds on this site.² Five species listed as "sensitive" are also found in the immediate area: the northern harrier (which hunts in open terrain), sora, barn swallow, Sprague's pipit and the Baltimore oriole.¹

At a provincial level, this site now preserves some of Alberta's imperiled Central Parkland. This natural subregion of the Parkland Natural Region is one of the most heavily populated areas in

Canada 



This donation was made through a corporation that was part of the donor's Estate.

Corporations and individuals are both eligible for tax benefits under the Ecological Gifts Program of Environment Canada.

Alberta and has been heavily impacted by human activities.

Finally, on an international scale, this donation has also made a significant contribution to the conservation of three Important Bird Areas (Gooseberry Lake, Metiskow and Sunken Lakes, and Sounding Lake). Located in close proximity to this donated property, these three wetlands are used by continentally significant numbers of shorebirds for breeding, wintering and migratory habitat.³

This gift of ecologically sensitive property (an “ecogift”) was set up as a **fee simple donation**, and was arranged under the Ecological Gifts Program of Environment Canada.

Through the Ecological Gifts Program, donations of ecologically sensitive land can be eligible for tax benefits that can exceed those typically associated with charitable donations under the Canadian *Income Tax Act*.

Environment Canada certifies the fair market value of the ecogift. In addition to the recipient issuing a tax receipt for the value of the property donated, the donation can be applied against 100% of the taxable income of the donor.

Going forward, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is developing a comprehensive management plan for this property. NCC will manage this site for wildlife habitat with a focus on maintaining and improving riparian habitat and dealing with invasive species.¹

Ultimately, it is the development of close partnerships between many

parties, and a cooperative network of private landowners, other individuals, corporations, financial programs and conservation organizations that will make land conservation successful.


The donor had a history of making similar contributions for conservation purposes. The gift of this property to NCC—one of many such land trusts in Canada—will ensure that this valuable parkland property will be conserved and managed for the long term.

The conservation of this land has enabled the donor's estate to find a way to “do something for the province.” Something that, it has been related, would have had considerable meaning to this individual.

- 1 T. Worobitz, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Interview January 2010
- 2 *Cairns* by H. M. Sanders. *Legacy* Summer 2008: www.natureconservancy.ca
- 3 Alberta IBA Network: www.bsc-eoc.org/iba/regional.jsp?region=AB



The property is located near the former site of the historic hamlet of Cairns. Established in 1908, Cairns sat on the original Canadian Pacific Railway Winnipeg-to-Edmonton rail line. The Cairns store closed in 1959 and the hamlet's buildings have long since disappeared. Interestingly, the wagon tracks cut by pre-railway settlers following the “early Hardisty Trail” remain just to the west of this former hamlet.²



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For more information on the Ecological Gifts Program, see www.ec.gc.ca/egp-pde