



For Immediate Release

February 13, 2006

Royalty lends its voice to the Andy Russell – I'tai sah kòp Park initiative

CALGARY, AB – The Wildland Park proposed for southwest Alberta in tribute to Andy Russell and his wife Kay has received a boost from His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh (Prince Philip), President Emeritus of World Wildlife Fund International. There have also been positive letters from the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister of Economic Development replying to a letter sent by a group of notable Canadians. Conservation groups have just received a letter from the Premier's office indicating that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development has been asked to follow up with them and to keep the Premier informed of those discussions. The groups had forwarded Prince Philip's letter to Premier Klein, along with their request for a meeting to discuss the progress of the tribute.

In response to a joint letter from the locally based Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition and the Sierra Club of Canada, Prince Philip writes, *"I understand that WWF-Canada has supported work to help protect this magnificent area of wilderness, and I know that it shares your enthusiasm for such a permanent legacy. I can only hope that the appropriate action to bring about this desirable proposal will be taken as soon as possible."*

The park proposal encompasses the Castle wilderness, including lands that were once in Waterton Lakes National Park. It was part of Andy and Kay's wilderness backyard. It is the most biologically diverse area in Alberta, with stunning landscapes from five different natural regions and over half of the plant species in Alberta found there.

Last November 23rd, award winning songwriters Connie Kaldor, James Keelaghan and Ian Tyson; Mike Robinson, President and CEO of the Glenbow Institute; and John Russell on behalf of the Russell family sent a joint letter to each MLA. They received a number of encouraging replies, which have been forwarded onto the conservation groups.

The Honourable Pearl Calahasen replied, *"I commend you for developing this unique partnership in support of this particular park designation and in recognition of the relationship between Andy Russell, the Piikani First Nation and the Castle wilderness."*

The Honourable Clint Dunford, Minister of Economic Development wrote, *"It is clear that you have a strong appreciation for the beauty of Alberta's landscape and the value of preserving its culture. I commend the spirit that motivated you to undertake this project."*

"We're deeply touched and honoured to have such recognition for the park initiative," says John Russell on behalf of the family.

The conservation groups were expecting an announcement of the park before the end of Alberta's Centennial Year and are now hopeful that will occur before June 1st, the anniversary of the passing of Andy Russell; an internationally recognized author and conservationist who was the first to film North American grizzly bears in the wild.

For More Information contact:

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Gordon Petersen 403 627-3732, President, Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition, Beaver Mines.

For interviews in French contact: Brian Pincott, 403 830-2515, SCC-Chinook Group, Calgary.

BACKGROUND

To Feb. 13, 2006 Media Release



Photo by Murray Anderson

The "Gate" on the Carbondale River.



The Idea & the Connection

- The idea for the 1,040 km² combined Wildland Park and Provincial Park in tribute to Andy Russell and his wife Kay, and in recognition of the Piikani First Nation came about at the memorial for Andy in Pincher Creek, Alberta, June 8, 2005.
- A 1987 National Geographic magazine feature on Waterton and Glacier National Parks turned to Andy Russell and son Charlie for views on threats to the Crown of the Continent ecosystem and the importance of the Castle for its long-term health. Waterton and Glacier are the core of that internationally significant ecosystem.
- Kay grew up traveling the wilderness trails of the Rocky Mountains. Her father, Bert Riggall, was the first commercial outfitter in the Waterton-Castle wilderness of southwest Alberta, Akamina-Kishinena of southeast B.C.; all a part of the Crown of the Continent.
- A skilled rancher, outfitter and recon-tour, Andy took their passion for the wilderness to the world through his books, magazine articles, films and story telling.

A Job Unfinished

- The province identified the Castle area as having "*considerable park potential*" in Alberta's 1977 Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes.
- In 1993, the Natural Resources Conservation Board concluded, "*Continuation of existing land use trends are not sustainable ... Protection by policy has proven to be tantamount to no protection at all. The NRCB has stipulated that statutory protection - protection by law - is required.*"

A Watershed of Unsurpassed Importance

- 23 headwater streams feed the Castle, Oldman and Waterton Rivers, and supply the source of water for southern communities.
- Exceptionally high biological diversity, including numerous rare plants and landscapes unique in Canada.