



Government of Yukon

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FOR RELEASE #11-138
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Stewart River moose calving grounds protected

WHITEHORSE—The Yukon government recently put permanent measures in place to protect two sensitive wildlife areas along the Stewart River, known as Devil's Elbow and Big Island.

"Designating these lowlands as Habitat Protection Areas helps us preserve habitat, practice conservation and safeguard traditional First Nation harvesting practices," acting Environment Minister Elaine Schiman said. "Maintaining the region's high density of moose, a traditional food base for area residents, is our priority."

The 75.1 square kilometre Devil's Elbow area and the 7.6 square kilometre Big Island area are the two main moose calving sites in the lower Stewart River Valley, featuring abundant escape cover from predators and high quality forage.

Habitat Protection Area (HPA) status provides more protection than the lands currently have because the Yukon government has permanently withdrawn the subsurface from staking, exploration and mining activities. This will ensure the HPAs can be managed on the basis of current levels of land use.

"The Yukon government and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun will work together to encourage public awareness and appreciation for these areas," Chief Simon Mervyn Sr. said. "Together we will protect habitat from activities that may reduce the HPAs' ability to support wildlife."

The Devil's Elbow wetlands lie between Stewart Crossing and Mayo, immediately south of the Silver Trail Highway. Almost 40 per cent of the Devil's Elbow HPA is Settlement Land. Big Island lies in the middle of the Stewart River, about five kilometres upstream of Mayo.

Area residents called for extra protection for these areas in the course of developing the *2002-2007 Community-based Fish and Wildlife Management Plan for the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun Traditional Territory*. These areas not only support moose but are important feeding sites for waterfowl and shorebirds, spawning and rearing habitat for freshwater fish, and rearing habitat for salmon. A management plan for both HPAs will be finalized shortly.

Over the past nine years, the Yukon government has approved seven HPAs, five Special Management Areas and completed the Management Plan for Tombstone Territorial Park.

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