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"This unique addition to the Parkland Natural Region will ensure the protection of a diverse bird population that is recognized internationally."

Gary Mar, Minister of Environment

Beaverhill Lake protected under Special Places

Edmonton-An important bird habitat in the province's Parkland Natural Region has been preserved under the Special Places program. The 18,000-hectare site, 50 kilometres east of Edmonton, is the newest addition to the province's growing protected areas network.

"Beaverhill Lake is internationally recognized for its rich marshes and diverse shorebird population," said Environment Minister Gary Mar. "This thriving bird population is evidence of the ecological importance of the site."

Over 272 species of birds, including waterfowl and other shorebirds flying to and from the Arctic, stop to rest at Beaverhill Lake. One hundred and forty-five of these species are known to breed locally, including the endangered Piping Plover. The shore around the lake is also home to a variety of other wildlife species, including amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

The grassy area surrounding the lake will benefit from the site's Heritage Rangeland designation. With a focus on preservation, this designation uses traditional grazing practices as the primary management tool.

"This unique area will be managed as it always has been, through traditional grazing practices," said Ed Stelmach, MLA for Vegreville-Viking and Minister of Infrastructure. "Beaverhill Lake will be preserved using the same practices that historically shaped its landscape."

Since the Special Places program was announced in March 1995, a total of 53 sites have been designated, adding more than 600,000 hectares (1.5 million acres) to Alberta's network of protected areas. The result is a 79 per cent increase in protected Alberta land since the Special Places program began.

Beaverhill Lake Heritage Rangeland Natural Area

History

- Beaverhill Lake is located approximately 50 kilometres east of Edmonton in the province's Parkland Natural Region.
- A local nominating committee recommended the new site for inclusion in the Special Places program. Further public input will now assist in developing a detailed management plan for the area.
- The Heritage Rangeland designation will sustain traditional ranching practices around the lakeshore while continuing to preserve the area's unique ecological and biological features. Heritage Rangelands use grazing as the management tool to maintain the historic grassland ecology – a role traditionally carried out by bison.

Natural Features

- The lake itself comprises approximately 85 per cent of the site. The remainder is Crown land around the shoreline.
- Beaverhill Lake is internationally recognized for its wetlands and diverse bird populations. More than 272 species of birds have been reported in the area, with 145 known to breed locally, including the endangered Piping Plover. This represents 74 per cent of the 370 species known to occur in Alberta.
- This rich bird and wetland habitat resulted in Beaverhill Lake being named a prestigious Ramsar site in 1987. The Ramsar Convention, signed in 1971, is an international program that promotes the protection of wetlands throughout the world. Alberta has three additional Ramsar sites: Hay-Zama Lakes, the Peace-Athabasca Delta and the Whooping Crane Summer Range, the latter two located in Wood Buffalo National Park.
- The shoreline around Beaverhill Lake consists of extensive marshland, making the area attractive to waterfowl and other migratory birds traveling to and from the Canadian Arctic.