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national farmers union
In Union Is Strength

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PROPOSED CHANGES TO *WILDLIFE HABITAT PROTECTION ACT* RISK THE LOSS OF MILLIONS OF PROTECTED ACRES AND RISKS THE FUTURE OF YOUNG FARMERS AND RANCHERS.

SASKATOON, Sask. – “The National Farmers Union is concerned with the Government’s haste, lack of consultation, and inadequate concern for the future of both wildlife habitat and generations of farmers and ranchers,” said NFU President Terry Boehm.

Wildlife habitat must be protected. The Government’s use of computer modeling is unacceptable, especially when the criteria and results are not subject to an environmental assessment and public review that includes interested parties, wildlife and environmental organizations. The Minister of Environment, Hon. Nancy Heppner has apologized for the lack of public consultation. A few follow-up meetings is woefully inadequate when the future habitat of 3.5 million acres is at stake. The Government’s proposed solution of conservation easements that can be removed at the whim of the Minister of Environment, introduces the potential for abuse.

For ranchers, land is being offered for sale during the worst cattle crisis in history. Projected farm income is down 55% from last year. The lease of Crown land is the lowest-cost option for farmers and ranchers. The Government already has offered 1.5 million acres of Crown land for sale at a discount of 10%. This is an area roughly equivalent to Prince Edward Island. Only 7% has been sold in the first year. “Why does the Minister need to add potentially millions of acres of protected wildlife land to the sale? Who will benefit?” asked NFU President Terry Boehm. “Large tracts of Saskatchewan farmland are being bought up by local and outside speculative investment companies, while our rural communities are being depopulated. Citizens of Saskatchewan need to know who wants to buy, at what price, and for what purpose, before any Crown land sales are allowed,” he added. Crown land sales must stipulate that when the land is resold, it must remain in the sole hands of Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers, or be repurchased by the Crown.

“Access to land is seen as one of the largest barriers for young farmers and ranchers today. With farm debt over a staggering \$60 billion, Crown land leases offer one of the only affordable options for new farmers. Changes to this *Act* could represent yet another obstacle for future farmers,” said NFU Youth President, Kalissa Regier.

“For the sake of our wildlife habitat, the environment, rural communities, and future young farmers and ranchers, the Minister of the Environment must withdraw this hastily conceived legislation,” concluded Boehm.

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