

Environment/Industry and Resources #04-367 - SASKATCHEWAN RESPONDS TO GREAT SAND HILLS REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT - Government News Release

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SASKATCHEWAN RESPONDS TO GREAT SAND HILLS REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

The Province of Saskatchewan has accepted all the recommendations of the Great Sand Hills Land Use Strategy Review Committee in principle, and is also adding more protected land to the area and commissioning a major independent environmental study of the entire area.

"This approach will expand the protected area, provide clarity for industry with existing mineral rights and use an independent scientific expert to conduct a Regional Environmental Study," Environment Minister David Forbes said. "This will improve our understanding of the area's ecology, which will help establish guidelines for future land use in the area."

Some of the steps being taken include:

Significantly increasing the size of the prime protected area from 36.5 square miles to more than 140 square miles. This is beyond what the review committee had recommended. Government will move quickly to place these areas under a Crown Mineral Reserve which will keep them under provincial control;

- New legislation that would provide additional protection for the Great Sand Hills is being considered;

- Existing environmental approvals and mineral dispositions will be honoured subject to review by local jurisdictions and the provincial environmental approval processes;

- Areas outside the protected area and for which mineral rights have not been sold, approximately 110 square miles, will be placed under a two-year moratorium during which the government will hire an independent expert in prairie ecology to conduct a Regional Environmental Study and to make recommendations on future land use in the area; and

- Options to create a new advisory or administrative board from the RMs and The Great Sand Hills Land Use Commission will be explored to ensure local and provincial involvement in future land use plans and to ensure access to technical support in local land use decisions.

"These actions establish a template for managing this unique area that balances the need for conservation with the need to use the resources there in a reasonable and sustainable manner that supports our plan for a green and prosperous economy," Industry and Resources Minister Eric Cline said. "The review committee must be commended for its commitment to helping us find this balance."

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