



### Suffield's Endangered Species "Insignificant" to EnCana

**Calgary (October 9, 2008)** – EnCana's application to drill 1,275 wells and construct 220 km of pipeline in the federally protected Suffield National Wildlife Area (NWA) will have significant, possibly irreversible impacts on this wildlife refuge, a hot spot for Canada's grassland-dependent Species at Risk, according to a coalition of seven conservation groups opposing the project. EnCana avoided including accurate, comprehensive information about Species at Risk in their seriously flawed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), thus dodging the constraints that would otherwise have been imposed and perhaps avoiding an outright rejection of their application.

"In EnCana's EIS, they consistently arrived at the conclusion that the effects of this development on species at risk would be 'negligible' or 'insignificant,'" says Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) Vice-President Cliff Wallis. "This is in direct conflict with the available science and with federal and provincial reports on these species."

Under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*, a "species at risk" is a species that is extirpated, endangered, threatened, or of special concern. There are at least 18 such species within the 458-km<sup>2</sup> Suffield NWA, and almost 100 species within the refuge are species of concern within Alberta.

One example among many of the EIS's serious deficits is that EnCana failed to recognize in any way how significantly such disturbances as roads and pipelines contribute to habitat loss. Most recovery strategies for Canada's species at risk explicitly mention habitat loss as the main reason for the decline of species.

One of the NWA's endangered species, for example, is the Sprague's pipit. The 2008 federal recovery strategy for this grassland bird blames so-called "linear development" (e.g., roads and pipelines) and resource extraction for reducing this species' habitat. By failing to recognize pipelines and trails in the project as contributors to habitat fragmentation, EnCana concludes that there will be no residual environmental effects on Sprague's pipits.

A better-known endangered species is the burrowing owl, a robin-sized bird that has declined more than 80 percent over the last decade. Recent scientific reports cite habitat change and cumulative effects from land uses, including oil and gas activities, as playing a role in this decline.

“In light of the burrowing owl’s endangered status, EnCana’s assessment of the project’s effects on burrowing owls as ‘insignificant’ and ‘negligible’ is irresponsible and shows a lack of concern for endangered species,” says Sandra Foss, past-president of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists. “This species shows continuing decline in southeastern Alberta and is known to be vulnerable to human disturbance, including oil and gas activities.”

Suffield is one of the few remaining large tracts of unploughed grassland left for the almost 100 species of concern that use the refuge. “If we are serious about the recovery of these species at risk, Suffield should be off limits to additional oil and gas activities,” says Nature Canada’s Carla Sbert. “The results of this hearing will send a clear signal about whether the Governments of Canada and Alberta are truly committed to wildlife protection”.

It is expected that the coalition’s experts will contest EnCana’s submission starting Tuesday afternoon October 14, 2008.

**For more information:**

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*The Suffield Coalition comprises seven groups: Southern Alberta Group for the Environment, Alberta Wilderness Association, Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Nature Canada, Grasslands Naturalists, Nature Saskatchewan, and World Wildlife Fund Canada.*