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Sustainable Resource Development tackled tough natural resource challenges in 2003-04

Edmonton... Drought, the Lost Creek Fire, mountain pine beetles, the West Nile virus and recreational access were some of the many tough challenges tackled by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), in co-operation with its partners in 2003-04.

In its annual report, released today, the ministry outlines its proactive steps to ensure province's public lands, forests, fish and wildlife resources can be managed sustainably.

"As the past year shows, it's more important than ever to look after our renewable resources wisely," said Mike Cardinal, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. "Our stewardship involved careful balancing of complex issues and different views, and constant monitoring."

Some 2003-04 annual report highlights include:

- fighting more than 1,100 wildfires during a difficult fire season that involved the evacuation of more than 3,000 Albertans during the Lost Creek and Fort McKay wildfires;
- partnering with several agencies to successfully counter the spread of a mountain pine beetle outbreak in the Bow Valley Corridor;
- responding to the West Nile virus threat through the wild bird surveillance program;
- increasing co-operation between leaseholders and people enjoying the outdoors, as a result of new access regulations under the *Public Lands Act*;
- responding to over 11,000 public complaints related to wildlife, and ensuring public safety in more than 1,800 incidents involving direct human conflict;
- continuing discussions with industry partners and other government jurisdictions to develop solutions to the softwood lumber dispute;
- improving Alberta's fisheries by continuing to reduce the number of commercial operators;
- a public hearing by the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) on the Agrium gypsum stack expansion in Sturgeon County, and 111 NRCB decisions regarding confined feeding operations;
- making communities safer by undertaking FireSmart initiatives with municipalities; and,
- completing the Bighorn Access Management Plan and establishing a monitoring committee to implement it.

Copies of SRD's 2003-04 annual report are available from the department's Information Centre in Edmonton. Phone (780) 422-2079 or dial toll-free by first calling 310-0000. The report is also accessible online at www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/about/index.html, as a pdf file directly at http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/dept/reports/annual/2003-2004_Annual_Report.pdf.

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