

Valhalla Wilderness Society, New Denver, British Columbia
Wild Wilderness, Bend, Oregon

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PRESS RELEASE

Declaration on the Principles of Parks Signed by 73 Canadian and US Environmental Groups

Seventy-three Canadian and US environmental groups have issued a declaration on the principles of parks. The joint statement is a repudiation of the privatization and commercialization of parks now occurring in both countries. It says that the primary purpose of parks is to preserve land in a totally natural condition, for the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and the enjoyment of the public.

“Parks were a public trust to be protected from economic exploitation,” says Anne Sherrod, Chair of the Valhalla Wilderness Society. “But in the last few years, anti-environment governments are literally destroying our park systems by dismantling the laws that imposed barriers against private control, economic exploitation, and damaging activities.

In British Columbia, the BC government has rewritten the *Park Act* to allow resort development. A new policy, called the BC Park Lodge Policy, allows the government to use taxpayer’s dollars to aggressively market leases of BC park land in Japan, the US, Europe and Canada. Most recently, another policy invites private interests to make applications to the government to rewrite park boundaries to further their business interests. And leaked documents reveal that the government plans to completely rewrite the *Park Act* by 2007.

"In the US, special interests favoring industrial tourism and motorized recreation have been working with the Bush Administration behind the scenes in an effort to commercialize, privatize and motorize recreational opportunities within America's National Parks", says Scott Silver, Executive Director of Wild Wilderness. The recent discovery of a hitherto secret proposal written by the Department of Interior's Paul Hoffman, further confirms the scope of these efforts to discard the very principles by which parks have been managed for the past century. "Never before has it been so vital to

restate, reaffirm and rally in support of the principles that have guided the management of our parks as it is today," says Silver.

How do the groups that signed the Declaration know what these principles are? "Firstly," says Sherrod, "the driving forces behind all our protected areas were the spirit, the willpower and tax contributions of the public," says Sherrod. "The organizations that signed the Declaration represent thousands of those people and did much of the work for preservation. Secondly, the laws that created our park systems are clearly based on these self-evident principles. Thirdly, park planning processes have repeatedly confirmed that the majority of the public passionately believes in these principles. They include:

- The purpose of parks is the preservation of nature. This means no logging, mining, drilling, hydro development or human settlement. Commercial tourism development should stay outside park boundaries.
- Preservation is the most important purpose and top management priority over recreation.
- Parks must not be sold or privatized; they should be fully supported by taxes.
- Parks are for the public interest; private leases in park land undermine the rights of the public.
- Parks are meant to be permanent. Unmaking parks, changing their boundaries, or changing park laws to weaken protection are all betrayals of the public trust.

"The Declaration forms a guidepost against which all claims about the purpose and intent of our parks can be measured," says Silver. "In these troubled times, with wild winds of change blowing, our parks help connect society with our most outstanding natural, cultural and historical treasures. The more firmly we hold fast to the principles of parks, the greater will be the benefit for all."

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For the full text of the principles of parks and the list of signatories see www.vws.org and www.wildwilderness.org/docs/parks.doc . To sign on your organization, contact anne@vws.org.