

For Immediate Release
2007OTP0003-000046
Jan. 21, 2007

Office of the Premier
Environment Canada

\$120M FOR COAST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & CONSERVATION

VANCOUVER – The Honourable John Baird, Minister of the Environment, today signaled that the government will proceed with a \$30-million contribution to support the Conservation Investments and Incentives Initiative (CIII) fund. This fund, supported by governments and private foundations, is aimed at preserving the integrity of the Spirit Bear Rainforest for generations to come. This announcement is yet another milestone in the environmental agenda of Canada's New Government.

"We know there is a strong link between a healthy ecosystem, a healthy society and Canada's economic prosperity," said Minister Baird. "This ambitious and collaborative initiative will achieve just that, and we are committed to work closely with First Nations and non-government organizations to bring it to life."

The planned federal commitment matches the \$30 million for economic development initiatives for First Nations on the coast committed by the Province. Private conservation organizations and philanthropic associations have committed to contribute an additional \$60 million in funding for conservation activities if government provided matching funding for economic development. The federal commitment therefore brings the total public and private funding to \$120 million. The announcement was made today by Minister Baird and B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell.

"This marks another milestone in ensuring the economic and environmental sustainability of the coastal regions of British Columbia, building on the historic Central Coast and North Coast land use decisions announced last February," Premier Campbell said. "This commitment recognizes that this unique part of our province truly is a national treasure and that we must work in partnership to advance economic opportunities for First Nations who have been such strong partners in charting the future of the coastal regions of B.C."

This ancient forest, the largest intact temperate rainforest left on earth, is home to thousands of species of plants, birds and animals. There are 1,000 year old cedar trees and 90 metre tall Sitka spruce lining rich salmon streams that weave through valley bottoms, providing food for orcas, black bears, grizzlies and eagles.

Through the Central Coast and North Coast Land Use Plans announced by the Province of British Columbia in February, the total protected areas for these regions are 1.8 million hectares, or more than three times the size of Prince Edward Island. They include more than 200,000 hectares of the Spirit Bear's habitat, including the 103,000 hectare Kitasoo Spirit Bear Conservancy that was enshrined in legislation by the Province last year. With this announcement, Canada's New Government has signalled its intention to contribute \$30 million towards a \$120 million total investment to support a global model of sustainable development planning.

The combined federal-provincial contribution to the CIII will be directed toward economic development opportunities for First Nations businesses involved in activities such as sustainable fisheries, forestry and tourism. The matching private funding will provide an endowment fund for conservation management and research projects in the region.

“By working together governments, foundations and First Nations have created a unique approach to sustainable development on B.C.’s coast,” said Art Sterritt, executive director of the Coastal First Nations. “The funds will ensure the well-being of our people, lands, and waters. We look forward to working closely with all our partners as we move forward to create an economically and ecologically sustainable coast.”

“We’ve been waiting a very long time for this federal funding and I’m pleased it has finally come,” said Kitasoo First Nations Elder Percy Starr. “This would not have happened without the leadership of the provincial government who facilitated and brokered what I hope will be a long-lasting relationship that will bring many benefits to our people.”

“This initiative is a clear illustration of the partnerships and cooperation that are necessary to build a diversified economy on the coast,” said Dallas Smith, chair of KNT First Nations.

“WWF applauds the hard work and collaborative efforts of First Nations, environmental groups, industry, communities and governments in this initiative aimed at the greater protection of B.C.’s globally significant coastal rainforests,” said Dr. Chris Elliot, WWF’s Pacific Region vice-president. “The intended funding contribution announced today by Minister Baird is key to the successful implementation of the agreement and improved management of the coastal forests of British Columbia.”

The commitment of Canada’s New Government to the Spirit Bear Rainforest sustainable development initiative will involve close co-operation with the Government of British Columbia, the Coastal First Nations and private conservation foundations. All First Nations whose territory lies within the initiative’s area will be formally consulted. Once such consultations are successfully finalized, and subject to Parliamentary and Treasury Board approval, Canada’s New Government will proceed with the signature of a formal contribution agreement.

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