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News Release

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Edézhíe Candidate Area Withdrawn for Five Years

YELLOWKNIFE (October 25, 2002) – First Nations’ leaders in the Northwest Territories (NWT) are welcoming yesterday’s federal government decision to temporarily protect Edézhíe, a 25,000 kilometre NWT site, from development. Protection of the area, which is nearly as big as Vancouver Island, is an important step in safeguarding First Nations’ culture and the environment.

“Edézhíe is the highest point in the Deh Cho and the area deserves special recognition,” said Grand Chief Michael Nadli of the Deh Cho First Nations. “ The withdrawal of Edézhíe is timely seeing that resource development predominates in the north at this time. We always need to have a balance, especially keeping in mind the land and our cultural values associated with Edézhíe. I would like to acknowledge the commitment of our leaders and elders for making this a reality as well as our Dogrib neighbours for working with us. Last but not least are the environmental non-government organisations and the federal and territorial governments for taking this important step. A day like this is rare and I am very grateful.”

“Protection of these lands has long been identified as a priority of the Dogrib Treaty 11 Council and we join with other partners in celebrating this stage where temporary protection has occurred, that will lead to permanent protection of Edézhíe,” said Grand Chief Joe Rabesca of the Dogrib Treaty 11 Council.

The Deh Cho First Nations and the Dogrib Treaty 11 Council requested protection for Edézhíe, a plateau that rises out of the Mackenzie Valley to the west of Great Slave Lake. The region is a central First Nations’ cultural and spiritual gathering place. The land is ecologically important

and a traditional hunting ground when harvesting is poor in the valley below. There are provisions, as required, for a pipeline corridor at the western tip of Edézhíe.

“This is a very emotional time for me. The elders have been working since 1992 to protect Edézhíe and now we’re leaving a piece of land for our kids. They will always have the run of it, providing they don’t abuse it,” said Chief Rita Cli of the Liidlii Kue First Nation.

“Edézhíe was a gathering place and a harvesting area for our people. The elders also wanted to protect the water, which is the lifeline of everything. If you pollute and destroy the water, then you have nothing.”

Edézhíe rises abruptly up to 600 metres above the surrounding flat landscape and stores huge quantities of freshwater in its headwater lakes and muskeg. It includes key migratory bird habitat at Mills Lake and the Horn River, which are important waterfowl staging areas during spring and fall migration. Edézhíe also supports a population of woodland caribou, a species listed as vulnerable by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. The Horn Plateau, a major part of Edézhíe, is designated as an International Biological Program Site due to its extensive, deep lichen development over raised peat.

Edézhíe has been withdrawn for five years under the NWT Protected Areas Strategy (PAS). The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) sponsored the First Nations request for withdrawal, which was carried out through an Order in Council. During the five-year period, more consultations will be held and the area’s cultural, ecological and economic resources will be further assessed, in order to determine the final boundaries and levels of protection under CWS’s Canada Wildlife Act.

During the interim land withdrawal, lands cannot be leased or sold by government. Also, no new mining claims or oil and gas rights will be issued for the withdrawn lands. New leases can be issued on areas where there are existing mineral rights.

A working group will oversee the evaluation and consultation process. The group will include representatives from the Deh Cho First Nations and communities of Fort Providence, Wrigley, Fort Simpson and Jean Marie River, Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, Canadian Wildlife Service, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Government of the NWT,

Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, NWT Chamber of Mines, World Wildlife Fund, and Ducks Unlimited.

“Protection of Edézhíe is a tangible symbol of partnership between communities, governments and environmental not-for-profit organizations to safeguard important cultural and ecological areas,” said Bill Carpenter, WWF-Canada’s Regional Conservation Director in the NWT. “Five communities from two different First Nations coming together to protect Edézhíe shows that community-driven conservation works in the NWT.”

The NWT Protected Areas Strategy is a community-driven process designed to protect special natural and cultural areas, and to protect core representative areas within each eco-region.

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