



December 13, 2000

## **NCC, TimberWest forge agreement to protect high conservation value lands**

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VICTORIA – The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) and TimberWest Forest Corp. have signed a landmark agreement that will result in the protection of key areas of the company's private lands that support high conservation values on Vancouver Island.

The first benefit of this agreement is the dedication of significant forestlands in the Greater Victoria Sea-to-Sea Blue Green Belt.

NCC President John Lounds said: "This agreement between a private, non-profit conservation organization and a timber land management company is probably the most significant in North American history."

"We are delighted to be entering into this agreement with TimberWest," Lounds said. "It will significantly increase the amount of ecologically sensitive land preserved on Vancouver Island and advance our knowledge of the ecosystems of this area through ongoing support for scientific research and eco-regional planning."

Highlights of the agreement include:

- An initial gift by TimberWest of 121 hectares located within the Capital Regional District (CRD) Sea-to-Sea corridor and valued at \$340,000;  
  
\$50,000 from TimberWest over two years in support of eco-regional planning for coastal forests;  
  
\$300,000 from TimberWest over 10 years to support scientific assessment of portions of the company's lands that are surplus to its business operations and have high conservation value.

TimberWest President and Chief Executive Officer Paul McElligott said that over the next 10 years his company will work with the NCC to identify portions of its private lands containing high conservation values. "We are committed to sustainable forest management and recognize that some of our private lands have higher value uses than timber production," McElligott said. "We are very excited about our relationship with the Nature Conservancy because it enables us to participate in a disciplined process for assessing portions of our land and then working together to conserve unique ecological values on those lands." The Honourable Herb Gray – Deputy Prime Minister and Minister responsible for the Government of Canada millennium initiative – said: "TimberWest's generous 121-hectare land donation to the NCC, under the Natural



Legacy 2000 program, will help ensure that valuable British Columbia wilderness areas are preserved for wildlife and people." "The Government of Canada is proud to support the Nature Conservancy through a \$10 million contribution to the Natural Legacy 2000 program, offered under the Canada Millennium Partnership Program (CMPP)," Gray said. This program contributes up to one third of eligible project costs while other organizations and the private sector provide the remaining funding. NCC BC Regional Director Jan Garnett indicated that the initial gifted lands, immediately adjacent to the Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park, will be transferred to become part of the Capital Regional District Regional Parks system. CRD Parks Committee Chair Karen Watson said the gift of 121 hectares is a key addition to the park. She added that this donation constitutes a "vital central link" in the region's Sea-to-Sea green belt vision.