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**PRIME MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT AND SCRUM ABOUT
ENVIRONMENTAL LAND PROTECTION IN KING CITY**

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(APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Thank you very much. Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Bonjour mesdames et messieurs. Greetings to my caucus colleagues, to John Lounds, President and CEO of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and to the many members of other conservation groups who are present with us today. And thank you, John, for your introduction and for the tremendous job you're doing on environmental issues for the country.

It's a great pleasure to be here in lovely King City. Thank you to Mayor Black for hosting us today. In the past few months, Canada's new government has announced several environmental initiatives, focused mainly on clean air and climate change. Today I want to focus on a completely different aspect of our environmental agenda.

Nous sommes réunis aujourd'hui pour une annonce importante sur la préservation de la faune et de la flore qui s'intéresse vivement les...qui s'intéressent vivement les Canadiens et les Canadiennes partout au pays.

We're gathered today for an important announcement about land and wildlife conservation that will be of great interest to Canadians from coast to coast. Canada's one of the most urbanized countries on earth. Most of us live and work in cities far removed from nature. This is not a bad thing. In fact, it's a reflection of our social, technological and economic progress. But during our century-long transition from a rural agrarian society to a mostly urban one, we never lost our profound appreciation for Canada's natural heritage. The great outdoors is at the heart of the Canadian identity.

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Our bond with the land is embedded in our literature, music and art, our economy, our political system and our values have all been shaped by our geography. That's why Joni Mitchell's lyric about paving paradise to put up parking lots still resonates with millions of Canadians decades after it was first recorded. That's why outdoor recreation is a favourite pastime for nearly 80 percent of Canadians. And that's why Canada has the largest network of national parks and heritage sites in the world.

Aujourd'hui, je suis fier d'annoncer que notre nouveau gouvernement forme un partenariat avec la Société canadienne pour la conservation de la nature. Nous allons mener une campagne nationale pour acquérir et préserver près d'un demi-million d'acres de terre fragile sur le plan écologique dans le sud du Canada. Cette initiative découle d'une autre importante initiative du budget précédent. Le budget 2006 a accordé une exemption totale d'impôts pour les revenus tirés dedans de terres privées à des groupes comme Conservation de la nature Canada.

Today I'm proud to announce that Canada's new government is partnering with the Nature Conservancy of Canada in a national campaign to acquire and preserve roughly half a million acres of ecologically sensitive lands across southern Canada. This campaign flows from an important initiative in last year's budget. Budget 2006 provided for a full capital gains tax exemption for private donations of land to conservation groups like the Nature Conservancy. This rewards the generosity of landowners who donate ecologically sensitive land or easements in covenants on such land to ensure its preservation. The Nature Conservancy will partner with other private, non-profit conservation groups throughout Canada, such as Ducks Unlimited and the members of the Canadian Land Trust Alliance.

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Together they will identify lands that have scientifically demonstrable environmental value. Priority will be given to lands that have national or provincial ecological significance, that offer habitat for species at risk or migratory birds, or that complement existing protected areas such as national parks. The partners will then approach landowners with proposals to either donate or sell the land outright or to sign agreements to ensure it is protected.

Le gouvernement fédéral contribuera à la campagne de Conservation de la nature Canada par un investissement initial substantiel. Conservation de la nature Canada et ses partenaires s'attacheront pour leur part à obtenir une contribution équivalente des donateurs privés. Deux grands leaders canadiens du monde des affaires sont un exemple à suivre: John Risley, Paul Demarais Junior joueront un rôle déterminant auprès de Conservation de la nature Canada en l'aidant et atteindre les objectifs fixés aujourd'hui.

The federal government will seed the Nature Conservancy's campaign with a substantial investment. The Conservancy and its partners will seek matching funds from private donors. Two of Canada's senior business leaders are already leading by example: John Risley and Paul Demarais Junior will be taking major roles in helping the Nature Conservancy achieve the goals we're setting today. The nearby Happy Valley Forest is a perfect example of how this will work. Earlier today I met with Dr. Henry Barnett, one of four landowners in the region who have so far contributed 145 acres to the Conservancy's 250-acre Happy Valley Forest Nature Reserve. Dr. Barnett and his neighbours are to be applauded for their contribution to this extraordinarily important conservation project. (APPLAUSE) As some of you know, nearly all of Southern Ontario's forests were logged at some point

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during the last century, but the Happy Valley is on the cusp of becoming an old growth forest, which is almost unheard of in this region. The trees are tall and healthy, they're home to over a hundred types of birds, and numerous threatened species. The forest is also critical to the ecological health of the Oak Ridges Moraine, which stretches from the Niagara Escarpment to Rice Lake. The forest cover in this area acts as a natural rain barrel and the source of clean water for 65 rivers and streams. It also supplies wells that serve over a quarter of a million people. Without the forest cover, we will have to invest billions in flood protection infrastructure and water treatment facilities. So preserving forests in Southern Ontario is not just the right thing to do from an environmental perspective; it's prudent economic policy as well. Welcome, Dr. Barnett. I just mentioned you, so thank you again for your donation. (APPLAUSE)

L'investissement que j'annonce aujourd'hui nous permettra de protéger des trésors similaires pour la postérité partout au pays comme les (inaudible) Sutton au Québec. Ils viendront s'ajouter au vaste réseau national d'espaces naturelles déjà établi par Conservation de la nature Canada. Depuis sa fondation il y a 45 ans, l'organisme a assuré la conservation de près de 2 millions d'acres de terres les plus vulnérables et les plus précieuses.

The investment I'm announcing today will enable us to preserve similar treasures for posterity all across the country. They will join the vast national wild land bank already established by the Nature Conservancy. Since its founding 45 years ago, the Conservancy has preserved nearly 2 million acres of our most vulnerable and valuable ecosystems. These include the Tall Grass Prairie Reserve in Manitoba, large sections of the rugged Atlantic coast, and the western Lake Erie Islands right here in Southern

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Ontario. Today's initiative complements our government's many other conservation initiatives, including our recent major investment in the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia, the largest temperate rainforest in the world. The public-private partnership at the core of our agreement with the Nature Conservancy also reflects our commitment to a balanced approach that harnesses the energy and focus of the private sector to the cause of protecting the environment.

Chacun doit faire sa part pour protéger l'environnement: les entreprises, les gouvernements, les organismes sans but lucratif et les particuliers.

Everyone must do their part: business, government, non-profits and individuals. Together we can achieve the environmental goals we all share: clean air, clean water, clean land, and natural wilderness areas that will be there for our children and for their children. Thank you. Merci beaucoup. (APPLAUSE)

(SPEECH BY PETER VAN LOAN)

(SPEECH BY JOHN LOUNDS)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: We'll take a few questions I guess.

DIMITRI SOUDAS (Prime Minister's Press Secretary): We'll start with Mark Blanchard, Global Television. Mark, are you here? I guess not. We'll go to Emily Mills, CTV.

REPORTER: Hi Mr. Prime Minister. One of the other important questions for Canadians, or issues, is crime. Wondering if you have a response to Dion's plan on crime. He particularly referred to the

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Conservatives as soft on crime, and has his own initiatives. What's your response?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, this is a...I'm always interested in the latest incarnations of Mr. Dion. After spending the last couple of months opposing every tough-on-crime measure, voting down his own anti-terrorism measures, bashing the police in the House of Commons, he now wants to be tough on crime. Look, I hope it lasts, because the government has a lot of important tough-on-crime legislation, and if this is a sincere conversion, we can get on with actually moving that through the House of Commons. Virtually all those bills have been fought by the Liberals and the other opposition parties for the past year, so I hope this represents a change and we can get the things done that all parties promised to do in the last election.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Hugues de Roussan, Radio-Canada. Juste là.

JOURNALISTE: Oui, en fait j'aurais deux questions. La première, ça serait justement votre réponse en français sur la question de ma consœur. Et ma deuxième, c'est au sujet du débat hier soir à Québec. Est-ce que vous l'avez vu? Qu'est-ce que vous en avez pensé?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Pour la première question, encore, je m'intéresse toujours à des changements de politique de M. Dion. J'ai besoin des employés pour vérifier tous ces changements de politique presque chaque mois. Le mois dernier il était contre toutes nos mesures sur la criminalité à la Chambre des communes. Il était contre même les initiatives de son propre gouvernement contre le terrorisme. Il a attaqué, son parti s'attaque à la police à la Chambre des communes régulièrement.

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Maintenant c'est un changement. J'espère que c'est un vrai changement parce nous avons beaucoup de projets de loi sur la criminalité qui est important que tous les partis ont promis à la population pendant la dernière campagne, et j'espère que nous pouvons maintenant débloquer ces mesures et poursuivre à les adopter, parce que c'est ce que la population veut depuis longtemps.

Pour le débat hier soir, oui, j'ai regardé le débat avec grand intérêt et comme je suis engagé de ne m'ingérer pas dans l'élection provinciale, je n'ai pas de commentaires sur les résultats.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Richard Madden, City TV.

REPORTER: Hi Prime Minister, you were here last week giving a billion dollars for transit here. More money today. While you're in a generous mood, especially with the GTA areas, the mayor of some of the big cities, including Toronto and Mississauga are asking for one cent of the GST that's gathered here in the cities in the GTA back to the municipalities. I'm wondering if this is something that's on your radar screen and if you'll make the mayors' days (inaudible).

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, as you know, we did announce important transit initiatives for the GTA, and these are part of a per capita transit funding announced in the last budget that will go across this country. In terms of GST, as you know, we've cut the GST by one cent already. Our plan is to cut the GST in the next five years by a further cent, return that to the people of Canada.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Mark Blanchard, Global.

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REPORTER: Actually, Prime Minister, this is for Minister Baird, a question from our affiliate in Montreal. I gather, sir, the airport in Montreal doesn't offer recycling to its passengers, yet hundreds of thousand of passengers go through the airport every year. Is that something that you see as a priority of the government in helping airports and other federal institutions bring into being, more recycling in airports, such as Trudeau Airport in Montreal?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: John can answer that if he wants...

REPORTER: Thank you.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: ...but airport authorities like Montreal are run by an independent...they're run by an independent airport authority, not by the government of Canada. Go ahead John.

HON. JOHN BAIRD (Minister of the Environment): We strongly...thank you Prime Minister. (LAUGHTER) I think that's it. (LAUGHTER) Listen, we want to do everything we can to promote recycling right across the country. I think it's a huge challenge, the huge amount of waste that go into landfills and anything we can do right across this country to promote recycling is a good thing, and I'm certainly happy to chat with my cabinet colleague Lawrence Cannon on that. I can tell you, I'm a big and avid recycler. That's only a very small part of our environmental challenge, but I think an important one.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Lane Ferguson, A-Channel.

REPORTER: A lot of people in smaller communities, in places like Simcoe County, but really, all of rural Canada, while we appreciate

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the environment, we'd probably like to see a little bit more emphasis placed on creating more industrial jobs to keep people in the small towns instead of the mass urbanization which is what we're seeing now. When can we expect some sort of initiative on that?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, obviously that goes to the general economic policies of the government of Canada. There has been, as you know, strong job creation growth across the country, although admittedly some rural regions are not experiencing as much of that as some others and certainly than the cities. We have a budget on March the 19th, and it will obviously address a range of economic policy issues.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: And we have time for one last question, Stephanie Matteis, CBC national.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, how does today's announcement mesh with the Census results and a greater need for infrastructure in urban centres, given that that's where the majority of Canadians are living? And my second part of the question is how does today's announcement differ from the previous government's commitments to similar preservation of green space?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, on the first...the latter one's easy to answer. The way it differs from the previous government's actions is we're actually doing something. This is an important partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and other private sector...private sector creators of ecologically sensitive nature preserves across the country. I'm not aware, the previous government didn't have any such arrangement with the Nature Conservancy or anybody else, so I think this is a first. As I say, it stems out of, on our side it certainly is enhanced by the changes we've made in

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the last budget. On your first question, you know, I guess the only thing I would say in relation to the Census is the Census continues to emphasize the urbanization of Canada. And as Canada urbanizes and as its population grows more distant from the land, as we have, you know, more and more people, not just more and more people who live in cities and don't live on the land or don't have a connection with agriculture or forestry or other primary industries, not even necessarily through their parents or grandparents, what's interesting to watch is how Canadians' fascination with the land and their attachment to the land in fact has grown rather than diminished. And I think urban Canadians more than even their rural counterparts seek retreat to nature, seek to preserve endangered species, seek to preserve a range of fragile ecosystems across the country, and the announcement today will ensure that many important areas of the country that would otherwise be overrun by urban or suburban development, like the Oak Ridges Moraine, will not be. They will be in fact preserved forever.

REPORTER: (Inaudible)

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Thank you very much. This brings a close to the press conference. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

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