

## **PAA Celebrates Major Conservation Announcement for Labrador**

Protected Areas Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PAA) congratulates Parks Canada and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for having taken a major step in conservation for Labrador, the province, and indeed Canada as a whole.

On Friday, February 5, creation of Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve was finally announced. The 10,700 Km<sup>2</sup> Park will be located in central-eastern Labrador, between Cartwright and Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

The Eagle River is not included inside the final boundaries of the national park, but the Province has promised to protect it as a Provincial Waterway Park of "about 3,000 km<sup>2</sup>." We are urging the Province to protect this watershed as soon as possible under provincial legislation that is equal to or stronger than that of the nearby national park. Classifying this area as an ecological reserve, for example, with traditional uses, under the province's Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act, would be far superior for conservation as well as for nature-based tourism.

The final national park boundaries capture less than half the 22,000 km<sup>2</sup> study area, but the establishment of this new national park means that a very special piece of Labrador is protected under strong national legislation, including part of the range of the endangered Mealy Mountains caribou herd. The lands in the south-west and north-east of the park study area will be those of the Innu Nation and Nunatsiavut (Inuit) governments. PAA trusts that these aboriginal groups, with histories of close connections with the natural world, will implement strong conservation measures within these areas that will now not fall under the legislative protection of the National Parks Act.

Protected Areas Association (PAA), now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year as a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity in Newfoundland and Labrador, congratulates all parties on reaching this historic agreement to create a magnificent national park with significant sweeps of boreal forest.

Mealy Mountains National Park is a true gem representing Labrador's natural and cultural beauty – in fact, portions of half of Labrador's 10 ecological regions. PAA, members, board and staff, along with the people of Labrador, are thrilled to see this important expanse of land finally protected. PAA's Labrador Coordinator, Corinna Freake, was present at the announcement in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Laura Jackson, Executive Director of PAA, says, "It has been over 20 years since the process of creating this world-class national park began. PAA finds it very gratifying to have been part of the process. Now the people of Labrador, not to mention the province and the country, will finally have this magnificent park to enjoy -- now and for future generations. Development is important, but we must always remember to balance it with *Conservation First*."

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