



**Society of Vertebrate Paleontology**  
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Sent by fax 14 January, 2010

13 January 2010

To the members of the Nunavut Impact Review Board,

I am writing on behalf of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP), an international society with over 2000 members whose goal is to advance the science of vertebrate paleontology, including the conservation and preservation of fossil sites. I am grateful for the opportunity to write you concerning the proposed Westar coal exploration activities.

There is mounting evidence from science and traditional knowledge that the Earth's climate is changing. In particular, polar regions are experiencing rapid warming, and we need information on how climate change affects Earth's life in order to predict what the world will be like for future generations. Questions such as "How fast will the climate change?" and "How will the plants and animals adapt?" are as yet unanswered. Nunavut, and especially Ellesmere Island, is one of the few places in the world that may provide some answers from the fossil record.

Rocks within Westar's proposed development area near Strathcona Fiord preserve fossil plants and animals that lived during one of the warmest times in all of Earth history, when Ellesmere Island was blanketed in forests inhabited by alligators, turtles, primates and hippo-like *Coryphodon*. Their discovery in the 1970s and 80s was among the greatest contributions to paleontology of the last century. These unique fossil sites are world-renowned, and despite over three decades of searching the High Arctic, no sites of comparable age and fossil richness have been discovered elsewhere in the Canadian Arctic. Younger fossil sites near the head of Strathcona Fiord indicate that this area was home to larch forests, horses, and beaver just a few million years ago, and underscore how quickly and dramatically the Arctic can change. These fossils are irreplaceable. Destroying these fossil sites will impact our ability to understand (and predict) the effects of future climate change in polar regions.

For this reason, the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology urges protection of these sites and recommends that the Nunavut Impact Review Board advise the Minister, pursuant to article 12.4.4(a) of the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement, that the project proposal requires review under Part 5 or 6.

If we can be of assistance in providing information to you regarding the importance of these unique fossil sites near Strathcona Fiord, please contact us through the SVP (Society of Vertebrate Paleontology) business office at: [svp@vertpaleo.org](mailto:svp@vertpaleo.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blaire Van Valkenburgh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'B'.

Blaire Van Valkenburgh, Ph.D.  
President, Society of Vertebrate Paleontology  
Professor, University of California, Los Angeles