

Environmental groups and First Nations Remind Canada of Commitments to Wood Buffalo National Park

ACTION STILL NEEDED TO SAVE WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK IN WAKE OF TECK FRONTIER MINE WITHDRAWAL

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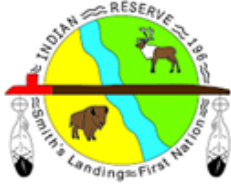
Last month Teck Resources Limited announced the withdrawal of their Frontier open-pit oil sands mine project, which would have been located 30-km south of Wood Buffalo National Park. Despite this welcome decision, cumulative impacts of industrial development continue to threaten the health of Canada's largest national park and its World Heritage Site status. On the heels of the Teck Frontier withdrawal, there is now momentum to take strong action to conserve and improve the biodiversity of Wood Buffalo National Park.

Inscribed on the World Heritage List since 1982, Wood Buffalo National Park has undisputable global heritage value and is also the only World Heritage site in the country at risk of being listed as "in Danger". The Park is threatened by the combined effects of climate change, industrial development and contamination of the Athabasca, Peace, and Slave River watersheds. Disruptions to natural flooding cycles are causing the Delta to dry out, driving out culturally-significant species and inhibiting traditional use of the Park and Peace-Athabasca Delta by Indigenous communities.

"With international eyes watching, Canada now faces the problem of bringing clean water back to Wood Buffalo National Park and surrounding Indigenous communities" states Chief Gerry Cheezie from Smith's Landing First Nation.

There were several strong components of the Wood Buffalo National Park Action Plan submitted by the federal government nearly one year ago with 142 actions listed to improve the outlook of the property. The plan promised actions, but lacked serious commitments to increasing resources to support the plan. As of this year, many of these key actions have not yet been completed and increased funding to achieve meaningful results is still outstanding.

Significant progress would be made by addressing concerns about the adequacy of governance-sharing structures with Indigenous peoples inside and outside of the property, as requested by the World Heritage Committee. Resources need to be allocated to facilitate Canada's commitment to returning clean water to the Park. With communities, animals and plants suffering from widespread drying and water flow changes from the Peace-Athabasca Delta to Slave River Delta, we also urge strong discussions with BC Hydro to develop protocols around adaptive management of water flows into the Park.



The federal and provincial governments should also reform tailings ponds management, which is currently lacking in ability to address threats from spills, leakages and tailings containment failures, with potentially catastrophic effects on all downstream waters and the ecosystems they support. There are additionally increasing risks of releasing treated tailings water into the Athabasca River.

“The federal government has a responsibility to prioritize the ecological health of its national parks, instead of sitting back and watching them deteriorate”, says Gillian Chow-Fraser, Boreal Program Manager at CPAWS Northern Alberta.

This year may well determine the fate of Wood Buffalo National Park’s World Heritage status, with looming deadlines and expected deliverables. Canada has until December of 2020 to submit an updated report on the state of the park showing they are implementing appropriate management actions to address the threats. The Frontier mine project withdrawal should not distract from the very real need for immediate action to save Wood Buffalo National Park.

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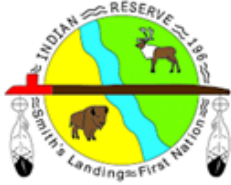
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About the Park:

Once created to protect the remaining herds of Wood Bison in the province, Wood Buffalo National Park now sustains the largest free-roaming herd. The Park captures the convergence of the two major rivers in the Peace-Athabasca Delta, one of the world’s largest freshwater in-land deltas and includes the traditional territories of First Nations and Metis people that continue to rely on the integrity of the Park to maintain their ways of life and culture.

However, with increasingly problematic issues affecting the state of the Peace-Athabasca Delta, UNESCO was petitioned in 2014 by the Mikisew Cree First Nation to officially list the Park as a World



Heritage Site “in Danger”—a classification reserved for properties that are threatened by serious and specific dangers, typically catastrophic events like volcanic eruptions or outbreak of an armed conflict.

For more information, check: www.cpawsnab.org/wood-buffalo-np

Who we are:

We are a multi-stakeholder group of Indigenous communities and local environmental organizations that have closely followed the developments around Wood Buffalo National Park, and advocate for stronger action to save the Park. Our group includes: Smith’s Landing First Nation, CPAWS Northern Alberta, CPAWS NWT, CPAWS National, and Alberta Wilderness Association.