



Release Date: March 10, 2017

Canada-Alberta Failing to Address Peace-Athabasca Delta Threats

International investigators have found major shortcomings in federal and provincial governments' management of industrial impacts to the Peace-Athabasca Delta, located in the heart of Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP). Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) strongly supports the UNESCO mission's [findings](#) that Canada and provincial governments must strengthen protection of this World Heritage site.

"AWA congratulates the Mikisew Cree First Nation for raising these issues with UNESCO," says Carolyn Campbell, AWA Conservation Specialist. "This investigation confirms that Peace River hydro dam impacts to the Peace-Athabasca Delta are already far too high, and that threats from oilsands development and climate change require much stronger, more coordinated actions."

Wood Buffalo National Park straddles the Alberta-Northwest Territories border over an area larger than the Netherlands. The Peace-Athabasca delta within the Park is one of the world's largest inland freshwater deltas, an internationally significant waterfowl stopover and breeding area. Investigators concluded that "the scale, pace and complexity of industrial development along the critical corridors of the Peace and Athabasca Rivers is exceptional and does not appear to be subject to adequate analysis to underpin informed-decision-making and the development of matching policy, governance and management responses."

The report responds to a 2014 petition by the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN), whose traditional territory includes lands now within the Park. MCFN asked the World Heritage committee of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to assess threats to the 'outstanding universal values' of Wood Buffalo National Park that made it a World Heritage site in the first place. One major finding by the investigators was that relations between governments and the region's indigenous communities remain unjustifiably poor, and that more cooperation is needed to address environmental threats to WBNP in a clear effort towards reconciliation.

In terms of hydro dams, investigators underlined how BC Hydro's existing dams have dried the Peace-Athabasca Delta, significantly affecting human navigation, habitat richness and species diversity. They urged authorities to properly assess environmental flow needs for the Delta and its source rivers. AWA believes that current hydro projects must go further than merely assessing their incremental impacts, and address the drastic changes to natural flows that have occurred since the mid-1960s Bennett dam.

AWA also strongly supports the report's findings that a buffer zone should be established in line with World Heritage site requirements, and that encroachment by the proposed Teck Frontier tar sands mine into habitat of the disease-free Ronald Lake Wood Bison Herd is a major conservation concern.

For more information:

Carolyn Campbell, Alberta Wilderness Association, (403) 283-2025

