

MEDIA RELEASE

Wood Buffalo National Park Receives Worst Conservation Outlook for World Heritage Sites in Canada Indigenous communities and conservation groups call for Canada to take appropriate action

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EDMONTON – This week the International Union on the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) released its 2017 World Heritage Outlook – an assessment that looks at threats to the conservation of natural World Heritage sites around the world.

Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP), Canada’s largest World Heritage Site, was classified as having the worst conservation outlook in all of Canada and the second worst conservation outlook of all North American World Heritage Sites. WBNP is the only site in North America to receive a “Significant Concern” rating and to have had a deteriorating conservation outlook since the last review in 2014.

The Outlook report finds that the Peace-Athabasca Delta within WBNP is at significant risk from upstream industrial development. These developments include existing and planned hydro-electric dams along the Peace River in British Columbia – including the Site C dam -- and from oil sands development along the Athabasca River in Alberta. The Outlook report also finds that Canada’s management response to the deterioration of the Park is inadequate “in light of the scale, pace and complexity of the challenges,” and recommends that “significant investment in better understanding and monitoring the impacts and risks from industrial development... is needed, as is enhanced water governance across jurisdictions and more meaningful [sic] of First Nations and Métis in the management and governance (decision-making) of the national park and its surroundings.”

Concerns about WBNP’s failing ecosystems have received international scrutiny since the Mikisew Cree First Nation filed a [petition](#) to have WBNP placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. In July of 2017 the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations requested Canada create an Action Plan that addresses threats to the Park.

“Elders in our community have been concerned with the deteriorating state of the Park’s ecosystem for years. This Outlook report is another wake up call for Canadians and creates more pressure on Canada to take action to better protect and manage the Park,” stated Melody Lepine, Mikisew Cree First Nation’s lead for the petition. “We are asking Canada, Alberta, and BC to start taking action with us to turn this situation around. We also call again on British Columbia to cancel the Site C dam.”

“This Outlook just reinforces the need for better management of ecosystems both within and outside of our protected areas,” says Kecia Kerr, Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society’s Northern Alberta chapter. “As the Outlook states, ‘it is troubling that well-known and massive environmental management challenges do not receive the deserved attention despite consistent concerns by a wide range of credible actors, stakeholders and rights-holders.’”

The *IUCN World Heritage Outlook 2: A Conservation assessment of all natural World Heritage Sites* is available here:

<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2017-053.pdf>

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For more information:

Melody Lepine, Mikisew Cree First Nation, 780-792-8736, melody.lepine@mcfngir.ca

Kecia Kerr, Executive Director, CPAWS Northern Alberta, 780-328-3780 ext. 1, kkerr@cpaws.org

Carolyn Campbell, Alberta Wilderness Association, 403-921-9519, ccampbell@abwild.ca

Galen Armstrong, Sierra Club BC, 778-679-3191, galen@sierraclub.bc.ca

Candace Batycki, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, 250-352-3830

Jule Asterisk, Keepers of the Athabasca 780 805-1709, keepers.communications@gmail.com