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Indigenous Rights and Wildlife Conservation Advance with Kitaskino-Nuwenënë Wildland Proposed Expansion and Moose Lake Access Plan

This week the Alberta government announced important advancements for northeast Alberta wildlife conservation and the exercise of Indigenous rights. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) welcomes the proposed expansion of the Kitaskino Nuwenënë Wildland Provincial Park and the approval of the precedent-setting Moose Lake Access Management Plan.

“AWA congratulates the First Nations, industry partners and Alberta government, whose collaboration led to the proposed expansion of the Kitaskino Nuwenënë Wildland Provincial Park,” says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. “In addition, we congratulate Fort McKay First Nation for achieving the Moose Lake Access Management Plan built on its resolute negotiations and legal challenges over the last twenty years.”

AWA believes land-use decisions that prioritize ecological integrity for the exercise of Treaty and aboriginal rights, including cooperative management opportunities for interested Indigenous communities, are important advancements in protected areas and public lands management.

The Moose Lake Access Management Plan is a truly innovative advance in the management of cumulative industrial impacts on Alberta public lands. It applies to a 10 kilometre wide Zone around the Gardiner and Namur Lake reserves of Fort McKay First Nation (the Moose Lake reserves), covering 100,000 hectares total (Figure 1). Half of the Zone is on ‘mixed use’ public lands outside designated protected areas. The Plan recognizes that ‘edge effects’ to wildlife habitat extend 50-200 metres beyond industrial disturbance points. It sets a maximum limit of ‘buffered’ industrial disturbance in the Zone at 15% (it is currently 13.5%); it further allocates the allowed disturbance limit amongst the forestry, oil and gas and sand/gravel sectors. It commits to significant community-based monitoring, enhanced reclamation practices, and restoration of legacy seismic lines. This is a significant, encouraging precedent that should inform management of critical habitat of species at risk – such as woodland caribou, native fish and grasslands species - and further the exercise of Indigenous rights and traditional land uses everywhere in Alberta.

The proposed expansion of Kitaskino Nuwenënë Wildland Provincial Park (Figure 2) is significant in size and habitat value. It covers 144,000 hectares, roughly 15 townships, of boreal highlands and will almost double the existing Park’s size. It will connect more protected lands with the existing Birch River Wildland Provincial Park to the west. It includes significant range lands of the threatened Red Earth woodland caribou population. From a watershed perspective, it will protect more lands south of Wood Buffalo National Park whose waters flow into the Peace Athabasca Delta. The Delta is one of the world’s largest freshwater deltas, supporting globally significant wildlife populations.

The proposed expansion of this ‘buffer zone’ Wildland Provincial Park is an important step in addressing one of the shortcomings in federal-provincial management of the Peace-Athabasca Delta, as identified





in 2017 by UNESCO investigators. More issues remain to adequately manage cumulative impacts and risks from oil sands and hydroelectric industries to the Peace-Athabasca Delta.

Alberta Wilderness Association asks Albertans to:

- take a minute to fill in the Alberta government's short [public consultation survey](#) on the proposed expansion of Kitaskino Nuwenēné Wildland Provincial Park, indicating your support for the expansion and for the Park's management intent (the government survey is [here](#), fact sheet is [here](#)).
- write AEP Minister Nixon (AEP.Minister@gov.ab.ca), and copy AWA (ccampbell@abwild.ca) to:
 - o thank him for finalizing the Moose Lake Access Management Plan to support Fort McKay First Nation treaty rights and the ecological integrity of the Plan lands
 - o request that the Plan be adopted as an enforceable sub-regional plan within the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

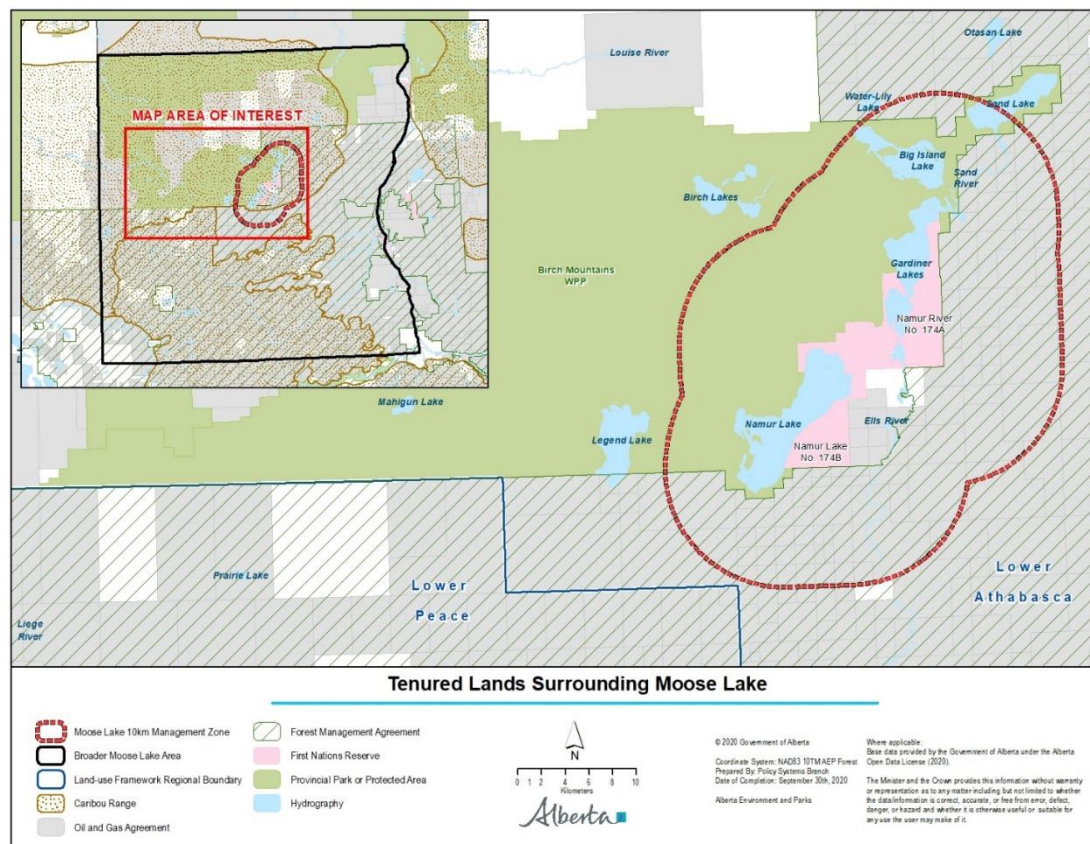


Figure 1. Moose Lake Access Management Plan: 10 Kilometre Buffer Zone (outlined in red), Fort McKay First Nation reserves (pink), current Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park designated protected area (green); Public lands Multi-Use Zone with oil and gas tenure (grey) and forestry tenure (diagonal lines). Map: Government of Alberta, 2020.



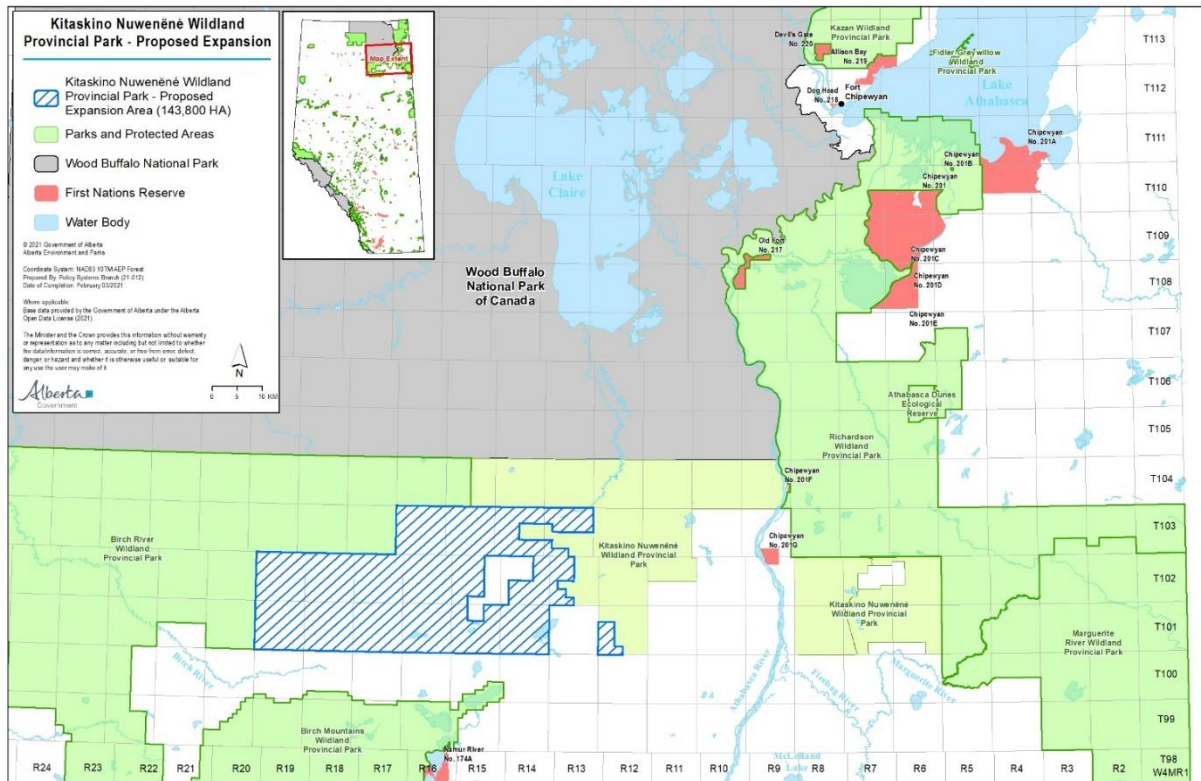


Figure 2. Proposed expansion to Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland Provincial Park, indicated in blue lined polygons. Map: Government of Alberta, 2021.

