

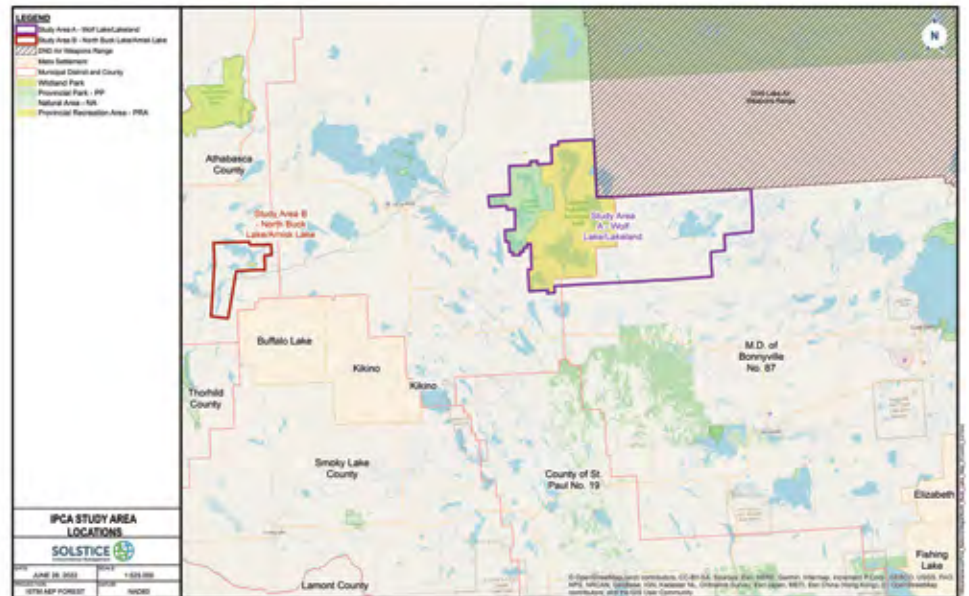
Metis Settlements Explore Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas

AWA strongly supports an initiative by the Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC) to examine the feasibility of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) in two areas of northeast Alberta. The eight Settlements chose Wolf Lake/Lakeland and North Buck Lake as their two IPCA “study areas” because of their cultural, spiritual and ecological significance (see Map).

MSGC describes IPCAs as “areas of land and water where indigenous peoples and governments have long-term commitment to protection, conservation and management.” MSGC has gathered information on historic and current land uses and ecological values in these study areas. It has drafted a vision and objectives for protecting Indigenous rights, lands and waters through a potential phase-in of IPCA governance and stewardship options. It is currently engaging with other Indigenous rights holders and with stakeholders including AWA to obtain their perspectives.

The Wolf Lake/Lakeland study area overlaps with AWA’s Primrose-Lakeland Area of Concern. As part of AWA’s conservation activities I have canoed, backpacked and hiked in Lakeland, and I knew generally of Indigenous peoples’ use of the area. However, I was unaware that Touchwood Lake and Wolf Lake were the sites of two of Alberta’s original 12 Metis Settlements, established under a 1938 law. Both settlements were dissolved unilaterally by the Alberta government: Touchwood Lake settlement was dissolved in 1940, and Wolf Lake settlement in 1960. The families living there had to leave and settle elsewhere.

AWA strongly supports IPCA governance over the entire Wolf Lake/Lakeland study area. Its mixedwood forests and extensive lakes, rivers and wetlands provide exceptional habitat for boreal wildlife and fisheries. There are outstanding opportunities for carefully managed low-impact recreation, compatible with ecological values and the exercise of Indigenous rights. The study area includes the important existing protected areas of Lakeland Provincial Park and Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area. It



AWA strongly supports the initiative of the Metis Settlements General Council to investigate IPCAs to help protect Indigenous rights, waters and wildlife habitat in these two study areas in northeast Alberta. Map courtesy of Metis Settlements General Council.

also extends east across the Sand River valley and around Wolf Lake, both of which are ‘Environmentally Significant Areas’ of provincial significance. The Sand River valley and Wolf Lake area are now zoned as multi-use public lands, and face extensive oil, gas and oil sands industrialization pressures.

Wolf Lake/Lakeland is in Alberta’s Cold Lake sub-region. The IPCA initiative aligns well with a recommendation adopted by consensus within the Alberta government-appointed Cold Lake Task Force in 2020. Task Force recommendation #10 states: “Through the sub-region planning process, identify areas that are valuable to Indigenous people for proposed conservation areas, that show long term commitments to conservation and support that [sic] practice of traditional uses.” Alberta finalized a Cold Lake subregional land-use plan in April 2022. AWA has expressed concern that the Cold Lake plan shows very little firm commitment to deliver on Indigenous land-use priorities. A Wolf Lake/Lakeland IPCA could be one measure to help fill this gap.

MSGC’s North Buck Lake/Amisk Lake study area is west of the Cold Lake sub-region, near the northwest boundary of the Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement. Cultural values of this study area include homestead-camp areas pre-dating Metis Settlement establishment, as well as traditional fishing, hunting, trapping and medicinal plant and

berry harvesting areas. There are parcels of private and public lands within this study area, and lease-holdings for oil and gas and grazing. AWA is supportive of IPCA governance extending over parcels of land in this study area that the Metis Settlements may propose as most appropriate and significant.

We look forward to the next steps of this important Metis Settlements initiative.

- By Carolyn Campbell