



**Alberta Wilderness
Association**

February 26, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**No Update to Action Plan for Wood Buffalo National Park Despite Recommendations –
Environmental Groups Disappointed**

Edmonton, AB/Calgary, AB - Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Northern Alberta Chapter (CPAWS Northern Alberta) and Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) are disappointed in Canada's failure to submit an updated Action Plan implementing the crucial [recommendations](#) from the 2022 Reactive Monitoring Mission Report.

This past September, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee gave Canada three years to follow through on implementing necessary changes to save the park from further environmental degradation or, it would be listed as a World Heritage Site "In Danger." Within the allotted three years, the Committee requested that Canada meet a series of important benchmarks, including an update to Wood Buffalo's Action Plan by February 1, 2024.

But it seems Canada has dropped the ball at its first opportunity to demonstrate commitment to the World Heritage Committee's request, with no indication that updates to the Action Plan have been completed, or even initiated, as of February 2024.

The recommendations report is a summary of a joint investigation into the ecological condition of Wood Buffalo National Park by the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. This investigation included site visits to Fort Chipewyan and Fort Smith in August 2022. The resulting report from the investigation outlined 17 priority recommendations aimed at addressing the ongoing ecological degradation.

Environmental groups were quick to support all recommendations from the monitoring report, emphasizing the urgency of implementing measures such as a tailings risk assessment, expanding protected areas buffering the outside of the national park, including consideration of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), strengthening Alberta's land use plans to address cumulative impacts, improving monitoring and research activities on Whooping Cranes and Wood Bison, and enhancing co-governance structures to improve decision-making powers

with Indigenous communities. The report emphasized the need for increased collaboration with the provincial governments of Alberta and British Columbia to implement important actions.

“We were eager to see an updated Action Plan that implemented the recommendations of the mission, as the report stressed the need for Canada to act with urgency. Many of the risks and stressors have grown, and have kept snowballing, since the Action Plan was originally written five years ago. In fact, since the Action Plan and the release of the report, we have seen the listed threats to the region happen in real time, such as the Imperial Oil Kearsy Spill. With the passage of time, the threats become more imminent, and the Action Plan must be adjusted accordingly,” says Nicole Doll, Boreal Program Coordinator with CPAWS Northern Alberta.

“Canada needs to take urgent action on implementing these crucial recommendations to avoid causing further harm to the ecological values of the park.” According to Phillip Meintzer, Conservation Specialist with AWA. “A comprehensive tailings risk assessment for the oilsands needs to be completed as soon as possible, especially with the proposed expansion of Suncor’s Fort Hills mine, which will add 732 billion litres of new tailings to the landscape on the outskirts of Wood Buffalo. The Action Plan should be updated to reflect this.”

CPAWS Northern Alberta and AWA call on Canada and Alberta to prioritize the ecological values of Wood Buffalo National Park, and its Peace-Athabasca Delta, and work collaboratively with Indigenous communities to submit an updated Action Plan that reflects a commitment to preserving this UNESCO World Heritage site and to implement the actions in the plan immediately.

Background:

The Peace-Athabasca Delta is world-renowned as one of the largest freshwater inland deltas, providing habitat for a swath of wildlife, including millions of migratory birds. The delta is largely encompassed by Wood Buffalo National Park, which due to its global significance, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Deteriorating conditions of the Peace-Athabasca delta has led to investigations by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee into its ecosystem health and threats facing the park.

The decision from the joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission concluded that Wood Buffalo National Park continues to face significant threats as a result of changes in the hydrology of the Peace Athabasca Delta (PAD) exacerbated by the impacts of climate change and industrial development. As part of this decision, the World Heritage Centre requested that the [“State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2024, an updated Action Plan taking into account the recommendations of the 2022 mission;”](#)

The current Action Plan, released in 2019, outlines 142 actions that Parks Canada has taken, or intends to take to improve the outlook of the Park. The Plan depends on collaboration with the Government of Alberta, the Government of British Columbia, and the Government of Northwest Territories. It focuses on research to understand baseline flow and hydrological conditions within the delta, exploring timed releases of water by BC Hydro to replenish the delta, and strengthening partnerships with Indigenous communities by incorporating traditional knowledge in its management plan.

Contact:

Nicole Doll, Boreal Program Coordinator, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Northern Alberta Chapter

ndoll@cpaws.org

780-707-9572

Phillip Meintzer, Conservation Specialist, Alberta Wilderness Association

pmeintzer@abwild.ca

403-771-1647