Reactive Monitoring Mission
UNESCO World Heritage Committee
Re: Wood Buffalo UNESCO World Heritage Site

Submitted via email to:

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October 1, 2026

Joint NGO Submission to the UNESCO Reactive Monitoring Mission regarding Wood Buffalo National Park.

Dear Reactive Monitoring Mission leads,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission for consideration in the 2026 Reactive Monitoring Mission to Wood Buffalo National Park. This submission has been prepared by Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) based in Canada who have been dedicated to advocating on behalf of the Park, including the people and the wildlife that depend on the region remaining a healthy, habitable landscape.

We write to express our collective concern and input with regards to the deterioration of Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) of Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site.

Since the last Reactive Monitoring Mission in 2022, pressures on the region have continued to mount:

A. **Climate Change:** Alberta has continued to experience the impacts of a changing climate. The province's worst fire year on record was 2023, during which fires consumed 2.2 million hectares[1] — more than double the previous record and nearly seven times more than the historical average (Natural Resources Canada 2024).
B. **Political shifts:** Canada has been moving away from its climate commitments and environmental standards through new regulations and legislation such as the Building Canada Strong Act, citing industrial development and economic growth as their top priorities.
C. **Alberta introduced the International Agreements Act:** The Act makes the World Heritage Convention non-binding in areas intersecting with Alberta's

[1] https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/db7cdfde-7ccd-4419-989f-09f8bb28da22/resource/181322ca-63c0-4a09-8a08-1d53e8c2c26b/download/fp-alberta-wildfire-seasonal-statistics-2023.pdf

jurisdiction. Under this provincial Act, international agreements entered into by Canada are non-binding in Alberta in matters that fall under provincial jurisdiction, unless the agreement or its specific terms pass through Alberta's legislature.

D. **Oil Sands Treat and Release**: Growing liability of tailings ponds and threat of tailings release into the Athabasca River as Canada and Alberta prepare regulations to permit the release.
E. **Threats to migratory birds and other biodiversity:** Negative impacts to migratory birds continue to be observed throughout the region.
F. **Canada-Alberta energy agreements:** Canada and Alberta have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with regards to building a new west coast pipeline.
G. **Alberta's mandate to double oil and gas:** Premier Smith has mandated all ministries to allow for the doubling of oil and gas production across Alberta. This new mandate is being prioritized above all else.
H. **Continued negative impacts to Treaty Rights:** Indigenous communities in the Park region continue to experience infringements to their Rights.

In light of our concerns, our recommendations are:

1) Protect the rights-holders, stewards, species, and waters upon which this Park relies.
2) The Reactive Monitoring Mission should assess progress based on demonstrated ecological improvements and the reduction of threats to the Park's Outstanding Universal Value.
3) A federal tailings risk assessment must be completed immediately, and federal regulatory tools put in place that elevate ecological and human health protection, ponds clean-up, leak prevention, and de-emphasize industry-driven effluent release permits.
4) Monitoring must lead to management action.
5) Major projects and cumulative effects must be considered as part of the threats to the Park.
6) State of Conservation reporting should accurately reflect remaining challenges.
7) Long-term federal commitment beyond the current Action Plan timeline.
8) Wood Buffalo National Park should be listed as a World Heritage Site In Danger.

Our concerns in detail are as follows:

A. A changing climate threatens the future of the Park. Canada continues to experience the impacts of a changing climate. In Alberta, climate-related

extremes are becoming more pronounced, with some regions experiencing severe drought while others experience record breaking precipitation. Additionally, wildfires continue to worsen. The province's worst fire year on record was 2023, during which fires consumed 16.5 million hectares—more than double the previous record and nearly seven times more than the historical average (Natural Resources Canada 2024). These increasingly extreme conditions are placing additional pressure on an already stressed water system and have significant implications for the Peace-Athabasca Delta, where timing and magnitude of water flows are critical to the health of the wetlands and ecological processes.

B. A changing political climate threatens the future of the Park. Improving the Universal Values of the Park depends on addressing growing pressures, such as climate change. And yet, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced earlier this year that Canada is no longer committed to meeting their emissions reduction target. As the State Party faces economic pressures from the United States to the south, both Alberta and Canada are working to repeal environmental regulations in order to accelerate industrial operations across the country. The loss of environmental protections for the purpose of industrial expansion will have a direct negative impact on both ecosystem health, species at risk, and the Rights of Indigenous communities in the region.

C. Alberta introduced the *International Agreements Act* which makes the World Heritage Convention non-binding in areas intersecting with Alberta's jurisdiction. Under the Act, international agreements entered into by Canada are non-binding in Alberta in matters that fall under provincial jurisdiction, unless the agreement or its specific terms pass through Alberta's legislature. The Act applies retrospectively, meaning it impacts long-standing treaties including the World Heritage Convention.

In effect, the *International Agreements Act* makes the World Heritage Convention non-binding in areas intersecting with Alberta's jurisdiction. These areas include decisions about lands, forests and non-renewable resources on provincial Crown lands, regardless of their proximity or downstream impacts to World Heritage sites.

While the federal government has jurisdiction over Wood Buffalo National Park along with Banff and Jasper national parks (which are components of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site), Dinosaur and Writing-on-Stone World Heritage Sites are provincial parks, therefore controlled

by Alberta. 34% of the primary protection area of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage Site is also on provincial Crown land.

Furthermore, the Act has the potential to impact implementation of international human rights treaties and instruments. It provides a legal mechanism codifying Alberta's opposition to directly implementing provisions of UNDRIP that intersect with its jurisdictions. These issues could further undermine how human rights are realised in the province: already, numerous rights accorded to Indigenous Peoples under international law are at risk of infringement because of Wood Buffalo's deterioration (see Background section at end of letter.)

D. **Concern over the management of Alberta oil sands tailings remain.** Despite repeated opposition from Indigenous communities and civil society organizations, Alberta continues to advance regulations that would allow the release of partially treated oil sands tailings effluent into the Athabasca River. The State Party has also been undertaking work through the Crown Indigenous Working Group to determine if regulations should be implemented to permit the release of tailings. The next report from the Crown Indigenous Working Group is expected fall of 2026, and recommendations from Canada with regards to the release of tailings are anticipated in 2027.

   If the State Party allows oil sands operators to release tailings effluent into the Athabasca River, it will pose extreme risks to the future of the Peace Athabasca Delta and the overall health of the Park. The oil sands tailings facilities contain over 1 trillion litres of toxic effluent and the volume continues to increase. The long-term management of the growing tailings volume represents a significant and unresolved environmental liability. Allowing this volume of waste to be released into the river creates a direct pathway for contaminants to enter downstream aquatic ecosystems, threatening the OUVs of the Park as well as the health and livelihood of downstream communities.

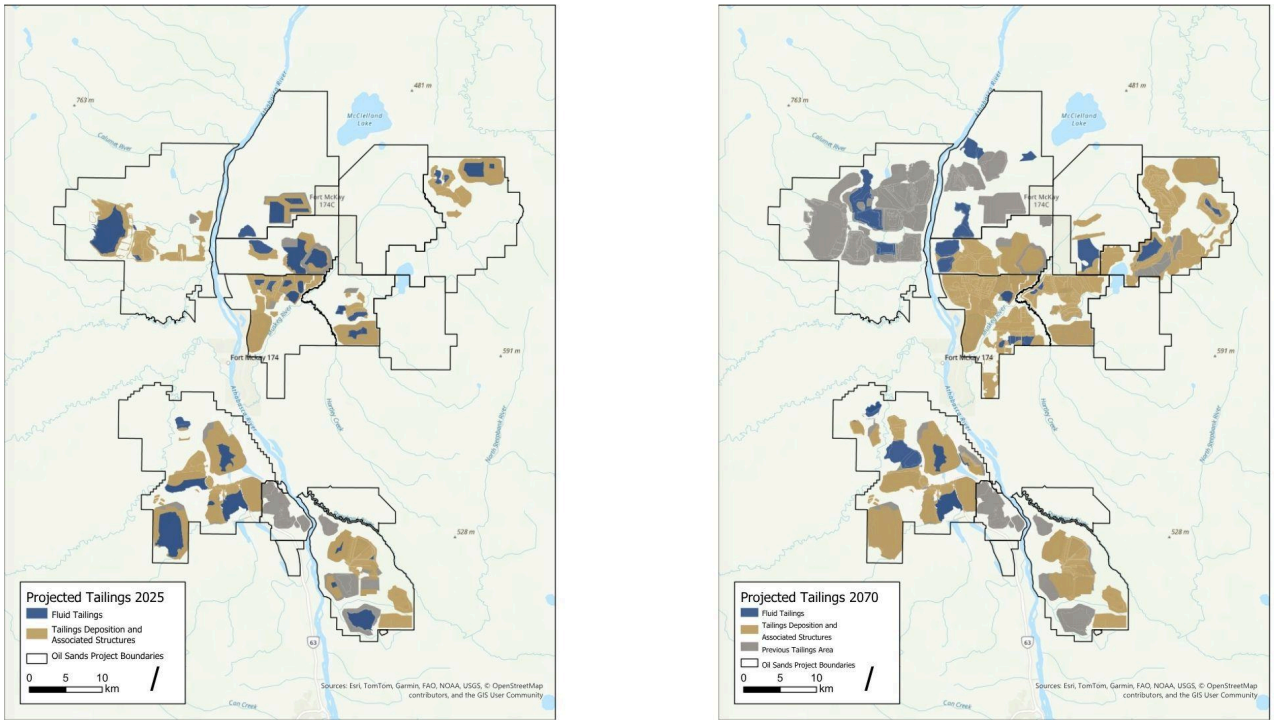


Figure 1. Forecasted growth of Alberta oil sands tailings to 2070 based on current mine approvals. Maps by Ryan Cheng at CPAWS Northern Alberta.

E. The tailings facilities continue to negatively impact migratory birds and other biodiversity. We are concerned about the growing development of the Athabasca oil sands region, as well as associated tailings ponds, which pose significant risk for migratory birds that move through the region along four continental flyways. These risks are particularly heightened for the endangered whooping crane, whose recovering population are now at a precarious 500 individuals, and for which rely on Wood Buffalo National Park as their sole natural nesting grounds.

Moreover, the whooping crane breeding habitat continues to be threatened by significant changes in water level and flows associated with upstream development, including the Site C hydroelectric project on the Peace River.

In addition to whooping crane, the Peace-Athabasca Delta supports globally significant breeding populations of Redhead, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Bufflehead, and American Wigeon, and is a nationally significant migration staging area for Tundra Swan. The broader Wood Buffalo National Park and the surrounding area contain the last populations of American Bison persisting in their native range in Canada, and the second largest extant population of wild American Bison in the world next to Yellowstone National Park. This ecological significance led to the designation of Wood Buffalo and area as a global Key

Biodiversity Area, further highlighting the significance of this area, and the threat that increased development can pose.

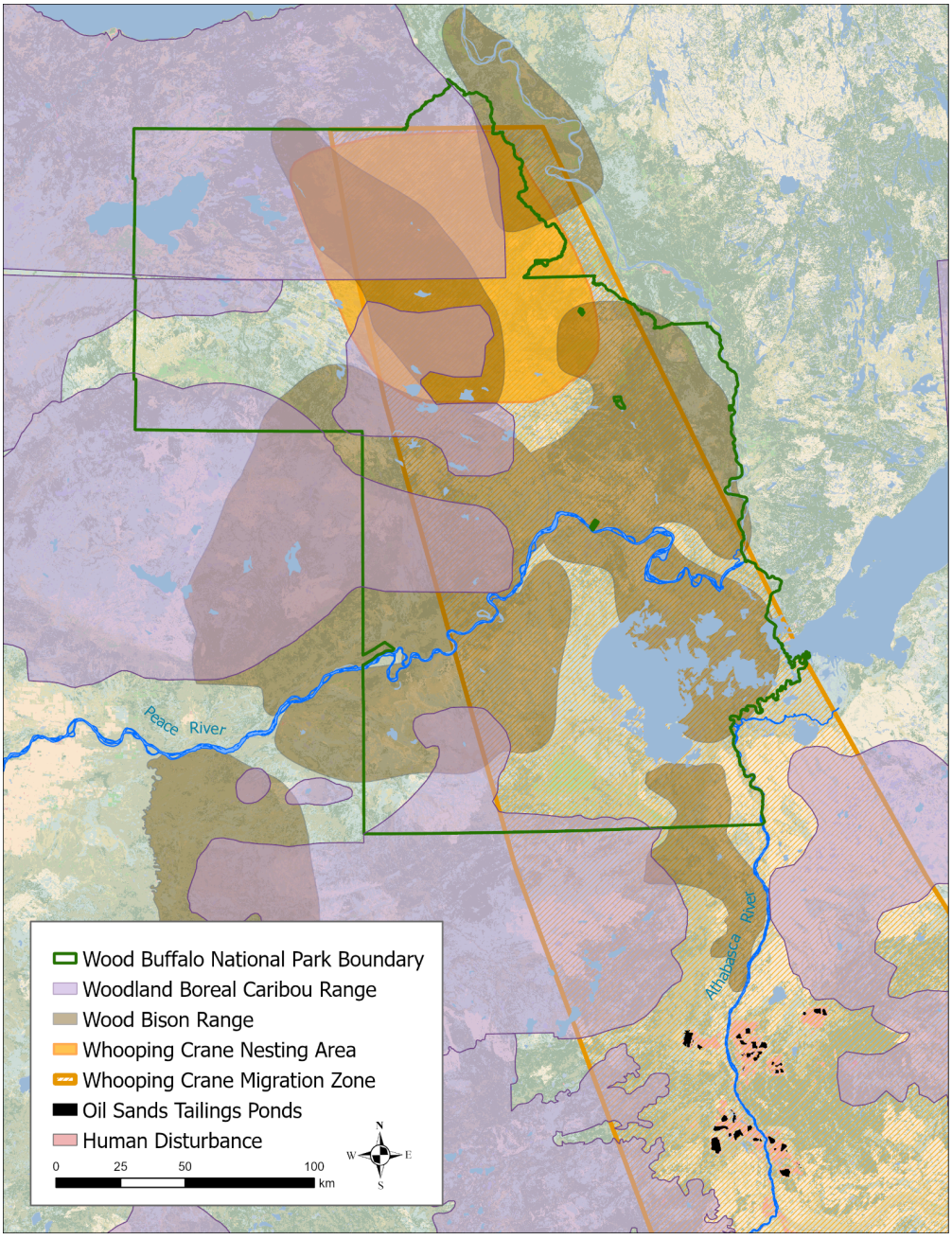


Figure 2. Map of Wood Buffalo National Park Boundary and surrounding area.

F. **Canada-Alberta energy agreements and future development pressure.** Recent federal initiatives to accelerate major infrastructure and "nation-building" projects raise important questions regarding the future trajectory of industrial development within the broader region surrounding Wood Buffalo National Park. While infrastructure projects may be located outside of the Park, they can facilitate increased patterns of resource extraction, transportation capacity, land use, and associated cumulative effects across the Athabasca watershed. In particular, recent agreements between Canada and Alberta to advance new energy infrastructure and facilitate future oil exports could contribute to increased upstream development pressures, including additional tailings production, water withdrawals, habitat disturbance, and air and water pollution concerns.

   The Mission should seek clarity regarding how Canada's obligations under the World Heritage Convention are being incorporated into decisions concerning major infrastructure projects and whether the cumulative impacts of future industrial expansion enabled by that infrastructure are being assessed alongside the direct effects of individual projects. Protecting the OUV of Wood Buffalo National Park will require ensuring that economic development objectives do not undermine the ecological conditions upon which the site depends.

G. **The Alberta land use planning process and the mandate to double oil and gas**. The Alberta Premier released a mandate to double oil and gas production in the province. This includes both bitumen and traditional oil and gas production, including the expansion of associated well sites. In addition, Alberta is currently in the process of releasing subregional land use plans (SRPs) for the province. While the original purpose of these SRPs was to implement a plan to recover the endangered woodland caribou populations, the Premier has redirected planning staff to develop the plans to allow for the doubling of oil and gas production. Two of the SRPs that are currently out for public engagement, Caribou Mountains and Red Earth, share borders with the Park.

   Alberta's goals of doubling oil and gas production is deeply concerning given the existing pressures that industrial activity places on the Peace-Athabasca Delta. Oil sands development has contributed to extensive land disturbance, peatland loss, water withdrawals, tailings production, and other cumulative impacts within the watershed. Expanded development will increase these pressures and place further stress on the ecological processes that sustain the Peace-Athabasca Delta, threatening the OUV of the WBNP UNESCO World Heritage site.

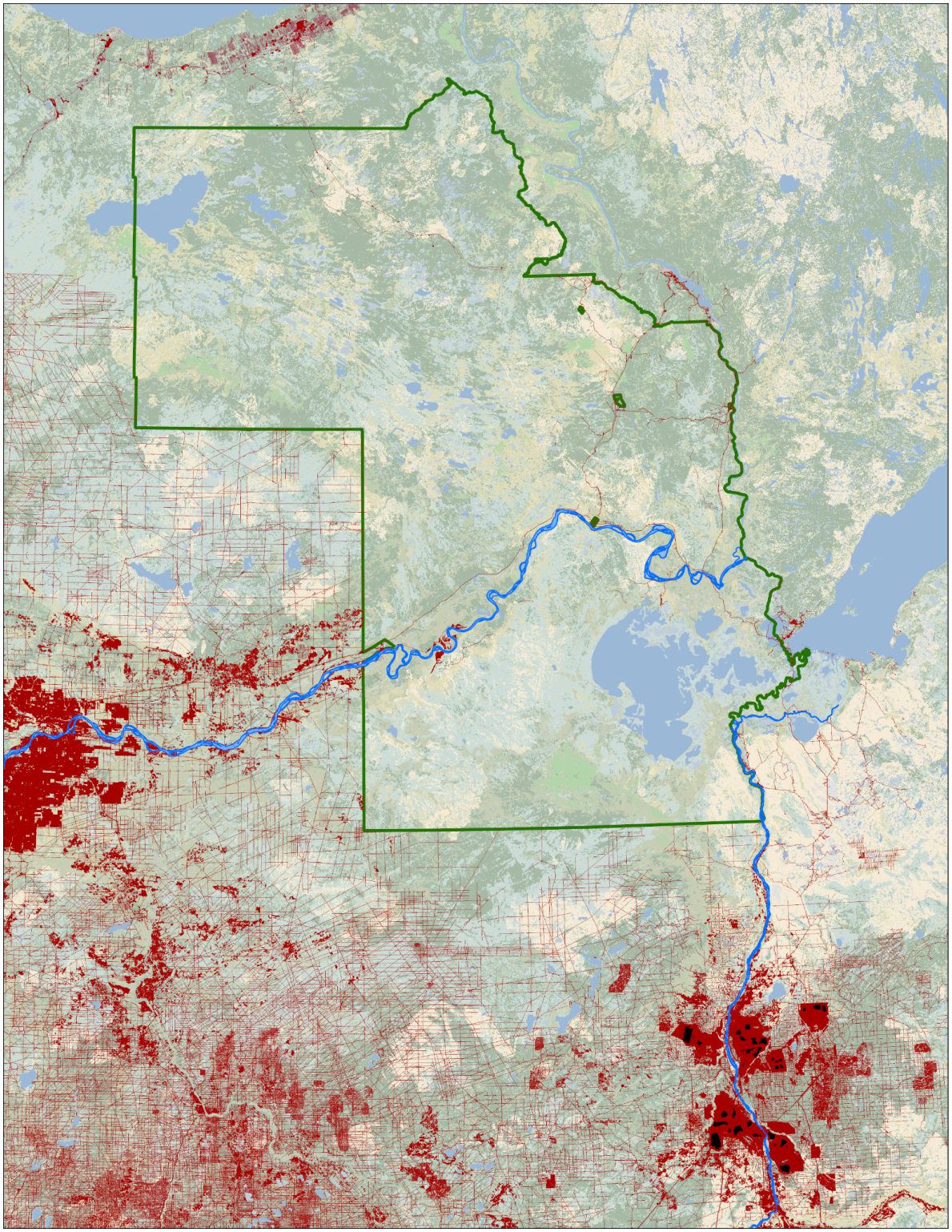


Figure 3. Map of the 2025 human footprint bordering on Wood Buffalo National Park boundaries.

H. **Continued negative impacts to Rights and Traditional Territories.** Treaty Rights and Section 35 Rights have been sidelined in the province starting nearly a century ago when the Federal government gave the management of natural resources to Alberta in the 1930 Natural Resources Act without consulting the Treaty Nations whose traditional territory held these resources. This historical context continues to shape concerns regarding how decisions about resource development are made on Treaty lands.

In the present, Alberta's regional and subregional plans continue to raise concerns regarding the meaningful recognition and protections of Treaty Rights. Consultation and engagement with Rights Holders has not been consistent across plans and there is concern over the opportunities to meaningfully participate.. Industrial development continues to impact Rights Holders' ability to practice their Rights in their traditional territories, including the ability to hunt, trap, fish, gather and maintain cultural connections to the land. The cumulative impacts from decades of industrial development have altered the way people interact with the land and have reduced access to areas traditionally used. Continued industrial expansion, without meaningful consideration of cumulative effects and Treaty Rights, risks further restricting the ability of Rights Holders to exercise their rights within their traditional territories.

Our recommendations in detail as are follows:

1) **Protect the rights-holders, stewards, species and waters upon which this Park relies.** As risks to the Park and its IUCN status escalate, Indigenous People are pushing back[2] on the harms to the waters upstream of the Park. This Mission and its report must reinforce their rights in the face of polluters, and reinforce the need for the federal government to regulate the major source of pollution in the watershed — toxic oil sands process water, or tailings— under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*. The Mission should also seek clarity regarding how the State Party is ensuring that Treaty and Section 35 rights are meaningfully incorporated into land-use and resource management decisions, especially where development may affect the lands and waters upon which the exercise of these rights depends.

2) **Progress should be measured by conservation outcomes, not completed activities.** Canada has invested significant resources into implementing the

[2] https://www.keepersofthewater.ca/news/uwn865zmueesc2qnwh5assdmkotw5i https://cabinradio.ca/303098/news/environment/land-water/dene-nation-signs-water-protection-pact-with-alberta-treaty-8/

Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site Action Plan, and important work has been undertaken to improve monitoring, research, collaboration, and planning. These efforts are valuable and should be recognized. However, the success of the Action Plan should ultimately be measured by whether it is improving the ecological conditions that support the OUV of Wood Buffalo National Park.

We encourage strong action from the Government of Canada to address inadequacies in management of habitat that migratory birds depend on, both within Wood Buffalo National Park and throughout the broader watershed. This includes stronger management of cumulative impacts of existing and proposed oil sands mines and tailings, as well as measures to safeguard the hydrological conditions necessary to maintain critical migratory bird habitat within the Park.

To date, reporting has focused heavily on activities undertaken and milestones completed, but significant concerns remain regarding cumulative effects, water governance, industrial development pressures, pollution risks, Indigenous Rights, and the long-term health of the Peace-Athabasca Delta. The completion of studies, monitoring programs, and planning processes should not be conflated with the achievement of conservation outcomes. The Reactive Monitoring Mission should therefore assess progress based on demonstrated ecological improvements and the reduction of threats to the Park's OUV.

3) **A tailings risk assessment must be conducted immediately.** A tailings risk assessment was one of the original recommendations from past Reactive Monitoring Missions. Despite the extreme risk tailings pose to the future of the Park, Canada has not delivered on this action. In order to understand the extent of the risks and manage them accordingly, it is crucial that a tailings risk assessment be completed by the State Party before discussions around possible treatment solutions progress.

4) **Monitoring must lead to management action.** Significant progress has been made in improving monitoring and research within Wood Buffalo National Park and across the broader watershed. However, monitoring alone will not address the threats facing the Park. The purpose of monitoring should be to inform management decisions, guide corrective actions, and evaluate whether interventions are successfully protecting the OUV of the site. Despite substantial investments in understanding ecological conditions, important questions remain regarding how monitoring results are translated into concrete management responses, particularly in relation to water management, cumulative effects, and

ecosystem health. Canada must demonstrate how monitoring findings inform decision-making, what actions are triggered when ecological conditions deteriorate, and how these actions contribute to measurable conservation outcomes.

5) **Major projects and cumulative effects.** Many of the most significant threats facing Wood Buffalo National Park originate outside its boundaries. As a result, the long-term protection of the Park's OUV depends not only on the management within the park, but also on decisions regarding industrial development across the broader watershed. Oil sands development, hydrological alteration, habitat fragmentation, pollution, and climate change are already placing pressure on the ecological systems that support the Park.

   Future major project decisions should therefore be evaluated through a cumulative effects lens that considers how multiple stressors interact and affect the Park over time. While individual projects may be assessed separately, the combined impacts of existing and proposed developments can pose significant risks to ecological integrity and Indigenous use of the region. The Strategic Environmental Assessment for Wood Buffalo National Park identified pathways through which upstream activities could affect the Park, underscoring the need for decision-making that considers cumulative impacts at the watershed scale rather than on a project-by-project basis.

   These concerns are particularly relevant as major new infrastructure is being advanced across the region. In July 2026, the Government of Alberta submitted its proposed West Coast Oil Pipeline to the federal Major Projects office. At the same time, recent federal regulatory changes removed interprovincial pipelines from the Impact Assessment Act's project assessment list, narrowing the scope of the assessment and shifting responsibility for their assessment to a captured regulator, the Canada Energy Regulator. This raises concerns about whether the full environmental, health and social implications of the West Coast Oil Pipeline and other major projects—including their potential cumulative effects on Wood Buffalo National Park—will be adequately identified and equally assessed along with the ecnomic benefits of these projects.

   The need for a cumulative effects approach is particularly important at a time when both federal and provincial governments are advancing major infrastructure and economic development initiatives that may facilitate increased industrial activity across the broader region.

6) **State of Conservation reporting should accurately reflect remaining challenges.** State of Conservation reporting plays an important role in helping the World Heritage Committee understand both progress and ongoing risks facing Wood Buffalo National Park. While recent reporting has highlighted actions undertaken through the Action Plan and associated investments in monitoring, research, and collaboration, it should also provide a clear account of unresolved challenges and areas where outcomes remain uncertain.

   Significant concerns persist regarding cumulative effects, water governance, industrial development pressures, tailings management, and the impacts of climate change on the ecological integrity of the Park. The completion of case studies, plans, and monitoring programs should not be presented as evidence that threats have been addressed or that desired conservation outcomes have been achieved. We encourage the Mission to assess progress based on measurable ecological improvements, Indigenous knowledge and observations, and whether the ecological values that underpin Wood Buffalo National Park's World Heritage status are being maintained or restored.

7) **Long-term federal commitment must extend beyond the current Action Plan timeline.** The challenges facing Wood Buffalo National Park extend well beyond the timeframe of the current Action Plan. The issues identified above are long-term concerns that require sustained attention and resources. While the Action Plan has provided an important framework for collaboration and action, it should be viewed as a foundation rather than a conclusion. As the current implementation period draws to a close, Canada must demonstrate how it intends to maintain momentum, secure long-term funding, and continue advancing the corrective actions necessary to protect the Park's OUV.

   A renewed commitment should emphasize measurable conservation outcomes, adaptive management, Indigenous leadership and knowledge, and transparent reporting on progress and remaining challenges. The long-term protection of Wood Buffalo National Park will depend not only on completing current commitments, but on establishing a durable framework capable of responding to emerging anthropogenic threats and changing ecological conditions.

8) **A World Heritage Site In Danger.** In light of the degraded health of the Park, and serious and specific dangers that continue to threaten the Park, and the significant challenges that undermine major components of the Wood Buffalo National Park Action Plan, we believe there is a strong and well supported case

for inscription of the Park on the List of World Heritage in Danger until rapid and adequate conservation action is taken, and threats have been addressed for this globally significant ecosystem. We urge the Reactive Monitoring team to include a recommendation that Wood Buffalo National Park be listed a World Heritage Site In Danger.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input towards the 2026 Reactive Monitoring Mission to Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site.

Sincerely,

Alberta Wilderness Association

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society Northern Alberta Chapter

Keepers of the Water

Background on Wood Buffalo National Park

Since time immemorial, the Delta has been home to several Indigenous communities who rely on the land for food, water, and shelter. However, when the Federal Government established the park in 1922, the communities were forcibly removed from park boundaries and mandated to move off site. Despite this, these communities continue to care for the land and the animals and rely on the region to sustain their quality of life.

Wood Buffalo National Park is listed as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), recognizing its outstanding international importance and deserving of special protection. Its outstanding ecological characteristics include the largest Great Plains-Boreal Grassland ecosystem in North America where the relationship between wolves and wood bison remain untouched, the provision of breeding habitat for the endangered whooping crane, and, the inland delta, salt plains, and gypsum karst that support a great concentration of migratory wildlife.

In response to ongoing environmental degradation, Parks Canada was required to produce an Action Plan (2019) to identify the actions they will take to halt and reverse the ecological decline. The most recent State of Conservation Report, released in December 2024, reveals that much work remains to successfully protect the Park. The focus we are seeing from Alberta and industry on pursuing the release of tailings into the Athabasca River threatens any chance of recovery for the region.

Oilsands operations already have a significant impact on the ecosystem and downstream communities. Within the greater oil sands region, there are consumption advisories in place for fish species, due to concerns of elevated methyl mercury concentrations. Rates of fish abnormalities and deformities are higher than expected in downstream waters. Downstream communities are at risk of adverse health effects, especially if they drink the river water and eat resources within which contaminants have bioaccumulated. The threat of treat-and-release stands to increase the burden on the environment and communities.

Canada has a duty to uphold binding legal and moral duties to the fundamental rights of Indigenous Peoples and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as provided under international human rights law. These include:

The right to health: Pollution from oil sands contaminating traditional foods and water sources exposes Indigenous communities to toxic substances and risks adverse health impacts, undermining the right to health expressed in numerous provisions of international human rights law. Article 21 of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) affirms Indigenous Peoples' right, without discrimination, to the improvement of social conditions, including health.[1] Furthermore, Article 24 expresses the right of Indigenous Peoples to traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. It also provides that "Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" (ibid, p.18) and that states parties should "take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realisation of this right".(ibid)

We also refer to provisions of Article 12 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), a binding legal treaty to which Canada is a state party. ICESCR affirms the human right to the highest attainable standard of health and that states parties should take steps to realise the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene; and the prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases.[2] Additionally, Canada has ratified the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Under Article 24, Canada shall ensure all children, including Indigenous children, enjoy the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which incorporates access to nutritious food and clean water. Accordingly, Canada should take into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution upon children's right to health.[3]

The right to cultural survival and cultural expression: Canada has obligations to uphold numerous provisions of international law affirming the right to culture, and to take all necessary steps to mitigate threats to cultural survival caused by pollution and industrial development. The Peace-Athabasca Delta and Wood Buffalo National Park are intrinsic to Indigenous identities, spiritual and cultural practices, and transmission of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. These connections are disrupted by pollution and industrial development, posing a threat to Indigenous Peoples' right to maintain and strengthen their distinct cultural heritage as expressed in Article 31 of UNDRIP.[1] This issue prompts utmost concern in respect of mental wellbeing as well as physical health. Indigenous cultural continuity is positively linked with Indigenous youths' sense of mental wellbeing and collective identity, and is a protective factor against youth suicide.[4–6]

The right to culture is also affirmed by the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR). Article 1(1) of ICESCR recognises the rights of all peoples to self-determination and to freely pursue their cultural development. ICESCR Article 15 affirms the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, and that states parties take appropriate steps for the conservation, development, and diffusion of culture. [2] Furthermore, Article 27 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) states that persons belonging to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture.[7] The rights of Indigenous children to their cultures are affirmed in Article 30 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* [3.] States parties to the convention also agree that children's education includes development of respect for the natural environment.[(ibid)]

In sum, Indigenous cultural practices including harvesting, fishing, ceremonies, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge are inseparable from the health of their traditional territories, and pollution which degrades traditional lands and waters undermines Indigenous cultural survival, in violation of international human rights law.

The right to a healthy environment: Article 29 of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources".[1] Additionally, as a state party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Canada holds obligations to reduce pressure on biodiversity, while decreasing environmental degradation in order to reduce risks to health. This includes reducing pollution

risks and “the negative impact of pollution from all sources by 2030, to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, considering cumulative effects”. [8] Furthermore, recent jurisprudence in international law affirms that the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a binding right, integral to the enjoyment of other fundamental human rights as described above. In its July 2025 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found that the right to a healthy environment is pivotal to realisation of other rights set forth in international law including the right to life, health, food and water.[9 para. 380,10] Pollution of traditional territories can constitute a breach of Canada's obligations under international law in respect of the newly affirmed right to a healthy environment.

Wood Buffalo National Park and the Peace Athabasca Delta are inextricable from Indigenous collective identities, cultures, food security, and self-determination. The ICJ ruling of July 2025 establishes that environmental harms impacting Indigenous Peoples’ health, livelihoods, and cultural survival violate internationally protected human rights. The advisory opinion of the ICJ also establishes that the principle of "intergenerational equity" is a guiding principle for interpretation and application of legal rules governing environmental and climate obligations. [9 para.157] Under international law, the ICJ opinion establishes that states have binding obligations to ensure the protection of the climate system and environment for future generations, framing this as integral to the broader human right to a healthy environment.

Wood Buffalo is recognized as a globally significant Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). KBAs are sites that contribute to the persistence of biodiversity nationally and globally, and represent the places that are most important for preventing the permanent loss of species or ecosystems. Found across land, freshwater, and marine environments, KBAs support rare and threatened species and ecosystems, as well as key natural processes. Developed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), KBAs are designated based on specific, measurable criteria that are nationally and internationally standardized. The designation does not give the site a particular management prescription or legal status, but provides a science-based recognition of the importance of an area for biodiversity. The Wood Buffalo KBA spans much of Wood Buffalo National Park and extends into the surrounding lands in Alberta and the Northwest Territories. It follows some of the most significant habitat for buffalo in the region (including about 20% of all American Bison individuals estimated to live in the wild, and 50% of all estimated wild Wood Bison), and includes important areas like the entire summer nesting habitat for the endangered Whooping Crane, and the Peace-Athabasca Delta that supports hundreds of thousands of breeding waterfowl like Bufflehead and Canvasback, as well as migrating waterfowl like Tundra Swan. Surrounding those areas also supports the last populations of American Bison persisting in their native range in Canada, and the second largest extant population of wild American Bison in the world next to Yellowstone National Park. The area also supports hundreds of other mammals, fish, plants, insects, and birds.

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