



## Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada

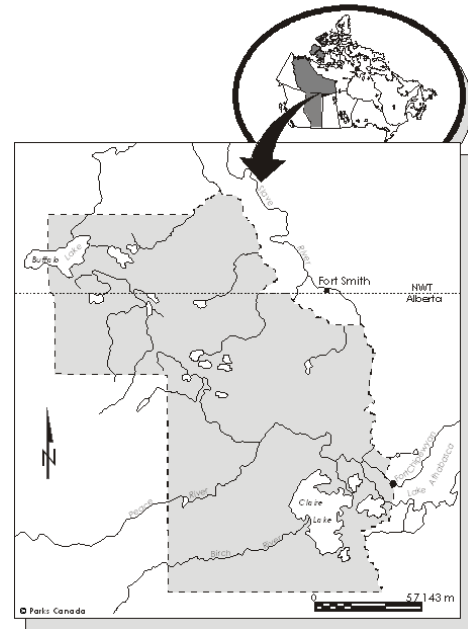
### Climate

The climate of the northern boreal plains, with its cold winters, cool summers, and light precipitation, is generated by a mixture of warm air from the west (in the summer) that loses much of its moisture passing over the mountains, and cold, dry arctic air (in the winter). Unstable weather patterns with frequent thunderstorms are produced when these different air masses meet.

### Location

Wood Buffalo National Park straddles the Alberta-Northwest Territories border. With an area of 44,807 km<sup>2</sup>, it is Canada's largest national park and the second largest national park in the world. It is representative mainly of the Northern Boreal Plains Natural Region, with small portions falling within the Southern Boreal Plains and the Northwestern Boreal Uplands. Wood Buffalo is located in the Boreal Plains and Taiga Plains Ecozones.

The park's ecological significance was recognized to be of global significance with its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. The Peace-Athabasca Delta and the Whooping Crane nesting habitat have also been recognized as Wetlands of International Significance under the Ramsar Convention.



### Geology

Wood Buffalo's landscape consists largely of poorly drained, flat or gently undulating boreal plain. Wetlands are common and often extensive, as seen in the Peace-Athabasca Delta. In much of the park, the soils are sandy and home to fire-prone jack pine forest. The park also protects some of the best examples of karst topography in the world. Here, much of the terrain is made up of soft, water-soluble limestone and gypsum-based bedrock. At the park's famed Salt Plains, saline water is forced to the surface where the limestone bedrock meets the impermeable granite of the Canadian Shield. As the water evaporates on the plains, salt mounds and formations are left behind.





## Vegetation

The vegetation communities of the park are dynamic. They can respond slowly to changing environmental conditions, or to sudden disturbance events such as fire, flooding and wind throw. On drier upland sites, there is typically jack pine forest with an understory of buffalo berry, prickly rose, and bear berry. Wetter sites may be more conducive to aspen parkland, with an understory of dogwood and alder. Over time, these communities may be succeeded by white spruce, and the associated species of raspberry and lowbush cranberry. In flood plain areas that are submerged seasonally, the common species are sedges, bulrushes, and cattails. Aquatic species include pondweeds and duckweeds.

## Wildlife

Wood Buffalo National Park was established to protect the last remaining herds of wood bison. In 1893, it was estimated that there were less than 500 remaining. Today, there are about 5000 bison in the park, one of the largest free-roaming herds in the world. Other large animals include moose, black bears, caribou, wolves and lynx. There are 47 mammal species known to exist in the park, as well as 226 species of birds, 5 species of amphibians and one reptile.

During peak migration periods, the Peace-Athabasca Delta sees waterfowl concentrations exceeding a million individuals, and the world's only remaining nesting site of the Whooping Crane is located in the northeastern corner of the park. The red-sided garter snake is also at the northernmost extent of its range, using the cracks and fissures of the karst topography to hibernate beneath the frost line. Wood and chorus frogs, along with 33 fish species, are also known to occur in the park.



## Activities

Summer activities might include camping or swimming at Pine Lake, enjoying the solitude of the backcountry, hiking or strolling on a variety of trails, and viewing wildlife such as bison, black bears, or even rare birds such as Whooping Cranes. Water enthusiasts can canoe, kayak, or boat on the gentle aquamarine waters of Pine Lake, on the park's mighty, meandering rivers, or into the magnificent Peace-Athabasca Delta. Winter provides opportunities for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, winter camping, and viewing of the northern lights.

The main Visitor Reception Centre is located in Fort Smith, NT. Here you can visit with knowledgeable and friendly staff and learn more about the park's natural and cultural heritage. Park interpreters are available year-round, with scheduled events and guided hikes during the summer months.

For more information please contact:

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