



February 01, 2018

Dr. Mechtild Rössler  
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UNESCO  
7, place de Fontenoy  
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France

**Subject: State of conservation of the World Heritage property "Wood Buffalo National Park", progress report**

Dear Dr. Rössler,

As a follow up to decision 41 COM 7B.2 by the World Heritage Committee, I am pleased to provide the requested progress report which includes a refined response to the 2016 mission recommendations and which reports on the progress achieved in their implementation for Wood Buffalo National Park.

The State Party is also submitting this progress report as a response to issues communicated by the World Heritage Centre in the correspondence dated 21 December 2017 (Ref. 10376) and 6 September 2017 (Ref. 10093) respectively regarding the request that Canadian authorities verify the source and content of media articles related to a recent decision by the Government of British Columbia to continue the construction of the Site C project, and as commentary on the environmental assessment and regulatory review process underway by Canada as it pertains to Wood Buffalo National Park.

I look forward to receiving confirmation from the World Heritage Centre that this report has been received in accordance with the 1 February 2018 deadline.

Yours truly,

Joëlle Montminy  
Vice-President

Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage Directorate, Parks Canada Agency and  
Head of Canadian Delegation to the World Heritage Committee

cc H.E. Éleine Ayotte, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Canada to UNESCO  
Sebastien Goupil, Secretary-General, Canadian Commission for UNESCO  
Nathalie Dault, Deputy Director for Specialized Agencies, United Nations Division, Global  
Affairs Canada  
Tim Badman, Director, IUCN World Heritage Programme  
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**STATE PARTY PROGRESS REPORT**

**OF**

**WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK WORLD HERITAGE  
SITE (CANADA)**

**IN RESPONSE TO:**  
**WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE DECISION 41 COM 7B.2**

FOR SUBMISSION BY  
1 February 2018

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site

Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site (WBNP) straddles the boundary between the Province of Alberta and the Northwest Territories. The park is larger than Switzerland at nearly 4.5 million hectares. Established in 1922 to protect the last remaining herds of wood bison, it is Canada's largest national park and is located in the traditional territory of the Cree, Chipewyan, Dene and Métis peoples of the region. The park is home to one of the largest free-roaming, self-regulating bison herds in the world, the only remaining nesting ground of the endangered whooping crane, the biologically rich Peace-Athabasca Delta (PAD), extensive salt plains unique in Canada, and some of the finest examples of gypsum karst topography in North America. These rare and superlative natural phenomena are recognized as elements of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) by the World Heritage Committee. WBNP was inscribed as Canada's eighth UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) in 1983.

Despite its size, remoteness and lack of internal development pressures, WBNP is vulnerable to the impacts of external development and climate change. In December 2014, the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN), whose traditional territory includes the PAD, petitioned the World Heritage Committee to have WBNP added to the List of World Heritage In Danger as a result of their concerns that ascertained and potential dangers to the property from existing and planned hydroelectric and oil sands development projects, climate change and the inadequacies of the management frameworks for the property were compromising the integrity of its OUV.

### 1.2 Decisions of the World Heritage Committee

In July 2015, the World Heritage Committee (the Committee) issued a decision requesting that Canada invite a World Heritage Centre (WHC)/International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Reactive Monitoring Mission to WBNP "to review the impact of the developments on the property, to evaluate its state of conservation, and to exchange in more depth with the State Party, petitioning First Nation, and other stakeholders as appropriate." The Committee also requested that the State Party undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to assess the potential cumulative impacts of all developments on the OUV of the property, including hydroelectric dams, oil sands development, and mining.

Canada welcomed the mission and worked closely with the WHC, the IUCN, and Indigenous partners (including the MCFN) to plan the visit. The mission occurred between September 26 and October 4, 2016 in which representatives of the WHC and the IUCN met with federal, provincial and territorial governments; Indigenous communities; industry; and environmental non-government organizations. The mission report concluded that the PAD, widely recognized as the particularly valuable and vulnerable heart of the park, is being impacted by external developments and climate change and that these impacts are not currently being adequately

addressed. The mission report recommended that the State Party “be given one opportunity under the World Heritage Convention to immediately develop a structured and adequately funded Action Plan” guided by 17 recommendations. In response, Canada submitted a State of Conservation Report to the WHC on March 30, 2017, acknowledging the mission report and committing to the development of the Action Plan in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous communities, industry and stakeholders.

The World Heritage Committee adopted a decision at the July 2017 Committee meeting requesting that Canada submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2018**, a report on the progress achieved with its implementation of the 2016 mission recommendations, and to submit by **1 December 2018**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and an Action Plan, for examination by the Committee at its 43rd session in 2019.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Progress Report

This report constitutes the State Party’s progress report for the deadline of February 1, 2018. It describes progress by the State Party towards the development of a multi-jurisdictional governance process that will provide the framework to develop the Action Plan. In addition, as requested by the Committee in its 2017 decision, a refined response to the mission recommendations is provided. It should be recognized that the forthcoming Action Plan, which will of necessity be implemented over a period of many years due to the complexity of the conservation challenges facing Wood Buffalo National Park, will provide additional clarity on how Canada, and its partners, will address the specific recommendations.

## 2.0 Governance / engagement / coordination

### 2.1 Jurisdictional context

Canada is a federation and the responsibility for natural resource management is shared between the federal, provincial and territorial governments, and in some instances, by Indigenous governments under self-government and land claim agreements. Provinces and territories have jurisdiction over most aspects of land and water management and protection, and may delegate some authorities to municipalities or other local management authorities. The federal government has jurisdiction over federal lands (including national parks, Indian reserves, and military bases; overall a small portion of Canada’s land base) and over water on federal lands. The federal government also has specific responsibilities for certain aspects of fresh water stewardship across all of Canada, including fisheries, navigation, international and trans-boundary waters, and environmental monitoring.

It is important to recognize that the division of powers within Canada’s federal system allows for distinct, but sometimes overlapping, areas of responsibility between the federal government and the provinces/territories. For example, the federal government maintains jurisdiction over Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site, and the governments of

Alberta and Northwest Territories are responsible for land use planning and protected areas in their respective jurisdictions outside of WBNP. The Government of British Columbia has jurisdiction over local works and undertakings (including hydro-electric facilities) in that Province.

## 2.2 Governance approach (between Federal-Provincial-Territorial jurisdictions)

A governance approach has been developed to facilitate the cooperation and engagement between federal, provincial and territorial governments in the development of the Action Plan. The focus of this governance structure is to align various government initiatives, authorities and activities that are related to the Action Plan and recommendations. Action Plan development will also require broader engagement with Indigenous communities, industry and other stakeholders.

A Federal-Provincial-Territorial Senior Management Committee, comprised of senior management officials from each federal, provincial and territorial department involved in the development of the Action Plan has been established. Committee members provide oversight and direction in the development of the Action Plan recognizing the authorities and responsibilities of respective jurisdictions.

A Coordinating Committee has also been established with Secretariat functions and is comprised of Directors from federal, provincial, and territorial departments and agencies. Under the direction of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Senior Management Committee, the Coordinating Committee is responsible for facilitating cooperation and engagement between government and Indigenous communities, and stakeholders required to develop the Action Plan.

The Coordinating Committee has organised the work to address the mission recommendations under seven thematic areas. To ensure that the Action Plan is consistent with relevant planning schemes across multiple jurisdictions, existing federal, provincial and territorial-led forums and processes will be used wherever possible. For example, both the governments of Alberta and the Northwest Territories have established planning processes that prescribe how, when and where new protected and conservation areas are established and managed – these processes will be used to address recommendations 10 and 11 where the establishment of new protected areas adjacent to the site may occur, and/or where complementary management approaches may be encouraged. Alternatively, new processes and efforts are required where existing ones are not in place. For example, defining actions related to environmental flows and hydrology will require a new forum for collaboration (recommendations 3 and 7).

### 2.3 Indigenous and stakeholder engagement

On behalf of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Senior Management Committee, Parks Canada is leading the development of an Engagement Strategy that recognizes jurisdictional responsibilities regarding engagement to ensure a process enabling meaningful involvement of all rights holders and stakeholders, including First Nations and Métis, in the development of the Action Plan.

Building on consultation underway related to the SEA, Parks Canada is undertaking Action Plan engagement with the 11 Indigenous communities that work with WBNP on a regular basis. In collaboration with other federal departments and provincial-territorial governments, Parks Canada has also expanded outreach on the SEA and Action Plan to additional Indigenous communities that have been involved in the environmental assessment of the proposed Teck Frontier oil sands mine project.

Federal-provincial-territorial collaboration will continue on the coordination of existing consultation and engagement processes (led by other federal departments, provinces or the Northwest Territories) to ensure alignment with Action Plan engagement processes. Additional opportunities for Indigenous and stakeholder engagement may be created where new forums for collaboration are required specific to some thematic areas of the Action Plan and where active engagement is not already taking place.

### 2.4 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The SEA is a unique effort to present a consolidated assessment of the potential cumulative impacts of development and climate change on the OUV of Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site. Its objective is to create a shared understanding of how the site's OUV may be impacted by existing, planned and future development projects in the context of possible climate change scenarios. It will provide key information about the OUV and its current state to inform decision-makers managing activities that may impact the OUV.

In December 2016, Parks Canada contracted Independent Environmental Consultants (IEC) to undertake the SEA. In August, 2017, a Draft Scoping Report was shared with other federal departments and provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous partners, industry groups, conservation organizations and was made available for public comment. During the late summer and fall of 2017, IEC representatives visited the PAD, Fort Chipewyan and Fort Smith to meet with representatives of Indigenous communities. Engagement with Indigenous communities continued throughout the fall and is ongoing. Canada has offered funding support to ensure opportunities for Indigenous partners of WBNP to participate in the development of the SEA.

An addendum to the SEA Draft Scoping Report (released December 12th, 2017) summarizes the views heard during the comment period and through engagement with governments,

Indigenous communities, industry representatives, conservation organizations and stakeholders and outlines how the input is being used to inform the SEA report.

The SEA is expected to be finalized in April 2018. Its findings will be used to inform specific work or elements of the Action Plan.

### **3.0 Refined response to recommendations, and progress to date by thematic area:**

The complexity of the conservation challenges facing Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site, and the consequent degree of jurisdictional cooperation needed to develop the Action Plan, are such that the State Party has necessarily focused recent efforts on enabling coordination between federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Given that the focus of the effort has been on developing a governance framework to support a coordinated process for development of the Action Plan, progress towards addressing the recommendations is varied. Where existing processes will be used to develop the response, progress is described. Where new processes are required to support recommendation implementation, this is identified.

#### **3.1 Theme: Indigenous partnerships with WBNP**

##### **Recommendation 1**

Adopt a clear and coherent policy and guidance to enable the transition to a genuine partnership with First Nations and Métis communities in the governance and management of the property.

##### **Recommendation 13**

Further develop the existing Cooperative Management Committee established by the State Party, and consolidate a functional and effective mechanism to involve Aboriginal Peoples in the management of the property.

##### **Recommendation 14**

Ensure that the preparation and skills of involved governmental staff correspond to the requirements inherent in the evolving relationship with First Nations and Métis communities.

The Government of Canada is committed to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

In the case of Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site, Parks Canada is committed to strengthening partnership-based decision-making with all its Indigenous partners with a view to

improved management of WBNP. While the current Cooperative Management Committee (CMC) of the park involves all 11 Indigenous partners with direct interests in park management, several of these partners have indicated that they seek a different relationship based on their specific interests. Parks Canada is committed to working bilaterally with these Indigenous partners, where this is requested.

The Government of Canada is working with Indigenous communities at over 50 discussion tables across the country to explore new ways of working together to advance the recognition of Indigenous rights and self-determination. The goal is to bring greater flexibility to negotiations based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership. At these tables, Canada and Indigenous communities explore new ideas and ways to reach agreements with a view to recognize the rights of Indigenous communities and advance their vision of self-determination for the benefit of their communities and all Canadians.

These federal discussions are community-driven and respond to the unique rights, needs and interests of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis groups where existing federal policies have not been able to do so. This may involve jointly developing new ways to recognize rights and title in agreements, exploring ways to advance treaty rights and interests, using existing tools that are available government-wide outside of treaty and self-government processes to help address the unique needs of each group and building awareness of the treaty relationship.

Given the evolving nature of the relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples and the federal government's commitment to reconciliation, new training platforms and resources for federal public servants have been developed to increase cultural competency and awareness about First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada and the federal government's roles and responsibilities. Under the themes of recognition, respect, relationships and reconciliation, the Indigenous Learning Series will provide access to resources, courses, workshops and events that share the history, heritage, cultures, rights and perspectives of Indigenous peoples in Canada and their relationship with the Crown. Parks Canada will use this platform, and pursue other opportunities with Indigenous partners of Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site, to ensure that staff have an improved understanding of the specific histories of Indigenous peoples in and around WBNP with an aim to strengthening relationships with these Indigenous partners.

**Recommendation 12**

Consolidate the management resources and capacity to a standard commensurate with World Heritage status and adequately respond to the challenges facing the property by:

- a) Reinstating a year round status and staffing of WBNP;
- b) Recruiting a full-time Superintendent exclusively in charge of WBNP;
- c) Ensuring an adequate Parks Canada presence in Fort Chipewyan, part of the critical PAD area and a major ecological region of WBNP.



Parks Canada has increased funding for the 2017/18 fiscal year to support improved staffing levels. A dedicated full-time superintendent for Wood Buffalo has been established, and seasonal positions have been extended. Parks Canada has begun an assessment of the needs of the Fort Chipewyan office to determine how best to support a stronger presence in the community with a view to strengthening relationships between Parks Canada and Indigenous communities, as well as to strengthen monitoring activities in the PAD.

### 3.2 Theme: Environmental Assessment

#### **Recommendation 4**

Conduct, in line with the IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment, an environmental and social impact assessment of the Site C project and, if moved forward, any other hydropower projects potentially affecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

As noted in the 2017 State of Conservation report, the State Party has rejected this recommendation with regard to the Site C project as there is no legal mechanism to suspend or negate an authorization and undertake a new environmental assessment for a project that has been approved.

The Site C Hydroelectric Project (currently under construction) was approved in October 2014 (prior to Decision 39 COM 7B.18) after the completion of a cooperative environmental and socioeconomic assessment of the project by Canada and British Columbia, including a Joint Review Panel. The specific framework for the assessment was set out in the [Joint Review Panel Agreement \(http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca/050/documents/p63919/81725E.pdf\)](http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca/050/documents/p63919/81725E.pdf), and met many of the standards set out in the IUCN World Heritage Advice note referenced.

On August 2, 2017, the provincial government of British Columbia directed the British Columbia Utilities Commission to undertake an economic review of the Site C project. The Utilities Commission examined the costs associated with completing the project as currently planned, suspending the Project with the option to resume construction in 2024, and terminating the project. The Utilities Commission submitted its final report to the provincial government on November 1, 2017. On December 11, 2017, after taking into consideration the review of the project by the Utilities Commission, the British Columbia government decided to allow the construction of the Site C Project to proceed.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is actively verifying compliance with the federal Decision Statement and associated conditions issued under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act 2012* for the Site C Project. Since the issuance of the Decision Statement, the Agency has conducted 7 inspections of the Project to verify that BC Hydro is in compliance with the conditions.

With respect to hydroelectric developments, Canada has referred the proposed Amisk Hydroelectric Project to an independent review panel. The proponent is not expected to submit its environmental impact statement until 2020. Canada is committed to working with the Government of Alberta and Indigenous communities to amend the Guidelines for the Preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement to provide specific direction to the proponent regarding the consideration of the potential effects of the project on the OUV of the Park, including the PAD, in its Environmental Impact Statement.

**Recommendation 5**

Conduct an environmental and social impact assessment of the proposed Teck Frontier oil sands mine project in line with the IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment, fully taking into account the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including the PAD.

**Recommendation 9**

Expand the scope of monitoring and project assessments to encompass possible individual and cumulative impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and in particular the PAD.

The proposed Frontier Oil Sands Mine Project has been undergoing an environmental assessment by an independent joint review panel since May 2016. On August 24, 2017, together with the Alberta Energy Regulator, Canada announced an amendment to the Joint Review Panel Agreement to mandate the independent Joint Review Panel to specifically consider and report on the potential environmental and cumulative effects of the project on the OUV of the World Heritage Site, including the PAD. The amendment was developed in consultation with Indigenous communities. Immediately following the announcement, the Joint Review Panel requested additional information from the project proponent to address the changes to its mandate.

Canada is also collaborating with the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN) to develop a joint methodology for the assessment of the potential impacts of the Frontier project on their Indigenous and Treaty rights. Canada and the MCFN intend to submit the methodology to the Joint Review Panel for its consideration in the environmental assessment process. The proposed methodology includes criteria that could be used in the assessment of the potential impacts of the Project on culture and Indigenous rights that are linked to the OUV.

Canada has committed to ensuring that all current and future environmental assessment reviews conducted pursuant to federal environmental assessment legislation (CEAA 2012) explicitly consider both the incremental and cumulative impacts of upstream development on the OUV of WBNP and are aligned with the IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment and World Heritage, to the extent possible.

**Recommendation 8**

Expand the scope of the SEA, which was requested by the Committee in its Decision **39 COM 7B.18**, so that it adequately reflects the scale, pace and complexity of industrial development, land use changes and river flow manipulations in the Peace and Athabasca River watersheds, both in terms of individual and cumulative impacts.

It is the position of the State Party that the scope of the SEA currently reflects the scale, pace and complexity of industrial development, land use changes and river flow manipulations in the Peace and Athabasca River watersheds.

**Other: Status of Environmental Assessment Legislation**

The federal government has made significant progress on its review of environmental and regulatory processes. In June 2017, after taking into account input from other levels of government, Indigenous communities, and a wide range of stakeholders, as well as Expert Panel reports and Parliamentary Studies conducted over the past year, the federal government released a discussion paper for public input on its proposed approach to environmental and regulatory processes. The proposed approach includes:

- A broadened scope of assessments from environmental assessment to impact assessment. Assessments are to include environmental, economic, social and health impacts and require a gender-based analysis. Also, they would support sustainability and integrated decision-making;
- A new early planning and engagement phase for impact assessments that would ensure early dialogue with Indigenous peoples, the public and stakeholders and identify issues upfront, leading to better project design;
- An open science and data platform and mandatory consideration of Indigenous knowledge alongside other sources of evidence. There will also be stronger peer review of science and greater openness and transparency;
- Addressing cumulative effects through regional and strategic assessments; and
- A more integrated model for Indigenous engagement throughout project reviews to recognize and respect their rights and interests, and promote their participation as partners in the economic development of their territories.

The proposed changes will be guided by the following principles:

- Fair, predictable and transparent environmental assessment and regulatory processes;
- Participation of Indigenous peoples in all phases of the assessment process that advances the Government's commitment to reconciliation and to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples;
- Inclusive and meaningful public engagement;
- Timely, evidence-based decisions reflecting the best available science and Indigenous knowledge; and

- Scale of assessment aligned with the scale and potential impacts of the project.

The discussion paper has been subject to a public review period. The feedback received will help inform the government’s consideration of any potential legislative, policy or regulatory changes.

### 3.3 Theme: Conservation Area Connectivity

**Recommendation 10**

Conduct a comprehensive assessment of options, in order to underpin decision-making to put in place an effective buffer zone, as defined in the Operational Guidelines. The Birch River deserves particular attention as the only relatively intact major watershed of the PAD.

**Recommendation 11**

Conduct a systematic assessment of options to better realize synergies between the property and land-use planning in its immediate vicinity, including the existing and planned provincial protected areas.

As part of Canada’s commitment to Aichi Target 11, Canada has committed to conserving at least 17% of terrestrial areas and inland water through a network of protected areas and other area-based measures under the “Pathway to Canada Target 1” (Pathway). The objectives of the Pathway initiative are to encourage efforts among governments and land management partners to contribute to achieving Canada Target 1, including conserving at least 17% of terrestrial areas and inland waters of Canada by 2020 through protected areas, Indigenous protected and conserved areas, and other effective area-based conservation measures across Canada that are effectively and equitably managed, well-connected and integrated into the wider landscape, including areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services and that together achieve ecological representation.

A key element in this pan-Canadian initiative is the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE), created to ensure Indigenous expert advice is applied to all elements of the Pathway initiative. Within the Pathway, the ICE is leading efforts to consider how a spectrum of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) could be realized in Canada and contribute toward achieving Canada Target 1 in the spirit and practice of reconciliation. The ICE has been mandated to produce a report with recommendations and guidance on IPCAs that will be publicly available and submitted for consideration to Indigenous, federal, provincial and territorial governments. In 2017, the ICE hosted regional gatherings to hear from Indigenous peoples across Canada on the IPCA concept, and inform its recommendations with Indigenous knowledge and local experiences in Indigenous-led conservation.

The Government of Alberta is developing a response to the Pathway to Canada Target 1 initiative that will inform provincial strategies to achieve conservation of at least 17 per cent of

Alberta's land base by 2020. Strategies could include additional protected areas adjacent to Wood Buffalo National Park. In the response, the primary mechanism for identifying and establishing conservation lands will continue to be through the Land-use Framework, regional planning and amendment processes. Opportunities that arise outside of regional planning will undergo cross-ministry, Indigenous and stakeholder reviews.

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (2012) established six new conservation areas, bringing the total conserved land in the region to two million hectares, or 22 percent of the region. Three of these new conservation areas (Birch River Conservation Area, Kazan Wildland Provincial Park, and Richardson Wildland Provincial Park) are adjacent to Wood Buffalo National Park, and provide landscape connectivity. The Birch River Conservation Area includes part of the Birch River watershed. These conservation areas are intended to be added to Alberta's inventory of parks and protected areas and are currently provided interim legislative protection through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan regulations under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* until they are designated under the *Provincial Parks Act* by Order-in-Council. The Birch River Conservation Area will be designated as a Public Land Use Zone under the *Public Lands Act*. As such it will have legislative protection through the *Public Lands Act* and Lower Athabasca Regional Plan regulations under the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*.

Alberta's Draft Provincial Woodland Caribou Range Plan (2017) identified candidate conservation areas in support of caribou range planning. One of these candidate conservation areas is Forest Management Unit F10 in the Lower Peace Region located adjacent to Wood Buffalo National Park. Conversations on boundaries and management intent of this candidate conservation area will continue with stakeholders, industry, municipalities and Indigenous communities as part of public engagement on the draft Range Plan.

Another example of linkages between the Pathway initiative and regional land use planning process is the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) 5 year work plan, *Healthy Land, Healthy People: Government of the Northwest Territories Priorities for Advancement of Conservation Network Planning 2016-2021*. This initiative maintains that part of developing a robust conservation network requires that connectivity which maintains intact ecosystem processes, be strongly considered when making landscape decisions. Further, that lands that are outside of the conservation network are managed in a way that supports ecosystem processes and allows for the movement of species populations across the landscape. A community-based area of interest for protection has been proposed adjacent to the northwest boundary of WBNP. This area is known as Ejié Túé Ndáde Candidate Area and is being advanced by the Kátlódeèche First Nation. It is one of the GNWT's conservation network planning priorities to advance this candidate area to a point of decision on establishment. This would be accomplished through a coordinated process in which the

GNWT will work with planning partners to maximize conservation outcomes and apply innovative northern solutions to conserve values on the land.

### 3.4 Theme: Tailings Ponds Risk Assessment

**Recommendation 6**

Conduct a systematic risk assessment of the tailings ponds of the Alberta Oil Sands region with a focus on risks to the PAD, and submit the report of this assessment to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

In 2015, the Government of Alberta released the Tailings Management Framework for the Mineable Athabasca Oil Sands. The Framework provides direction to manage fluid tailings volumes during and after mine operation in order to manage and decrease liability and environmental risk resulting from the accumulation of fluid tailings on the landscape. As part of Framework implementation, Alberta will be evaluating aspects of risk related to cumulative effects of oil sands tailings and the potential impacts on downstream ecosystems.

### 3.5 Theme: Environmental Flows / Hydrology

**Recommendation 3**

To enable informed decision-making, conduct environmental flows assessments to the highest international standards for the Peace, Athabasca and Slave Rivers as they pertain to the health of the PAD, in order to identify water flows needed to sustain the ecological functioning of the PAD under the circumstances of existing and planned future dams and water withdrawals. These assessments should incorporate projections of climate change and should determine the cumulative effects on the PAD and the property of flow regulation of all existing and proposed dams on all three rivers.

**Recommendation 7**

Establish adequate baseline hydrological information of the Peace and Athabasca River Basins to enhance the reference for monitoring and assessing current and future hydrological conditions.

In review of Recommendations 3 and 7, and noting the emphasis on ecological functioning of the PAD as integral for the maintenance of the OUV of WBNP, it is important to note that the water flows needed to maintain traditional use of the PAD by rights holders will also be an equally important consideration for the response to these recommendations.

Given the inter-jurisdictional nature of the considerations needed to address these recommendations, and the number of interested stakeholders that need to be engaged, the Government of Canada and its provincial and territorial partners recognize that a multi-jurisdictional effort is required to respond to the recommendations.

Currently, federal, provincial and territorial governments are engaged in discussions of the scope of work that may be required, including the development of a workplan and timeline for engagement with Indigenous communities and stakeholders.

### 3.6 Theme: Monitoring and Science

#### **Recommendation 2**

Considering the increasing pressures on the property at this time, prioritise conservation and ensure that the State Party's science capacity enables Parks Canada's legal obligation to maintain and restore the Ecological Integrity of the property.

Given the trans-provincial nature of the pressures on the property, enhanced inter-jurisdictional collaboration and coordination will focus on research and monitoring efforts needed to maintain and restore the ecological integrity of the PAD. To be comprehensive and effective, this collaboration and coordination needs to address community-based monitoring programs and Indigenous knowledge. To that end, the governments of Canada and Alberta have been discussing collaboration with, and committing support for, a community-based monitoring program in the PAD.

### 3.7 Theme: Wildlife and Habitat Conservation

#### **Recommendation 15**

Further harmonize and adopt the Species Recovery Strategy for Wood Bison throughout its range, including but not limited to the Greater WBNP Ecosystem, and specifically:

- a) Urgently invest in comprehensive and independent analysis of the conservation importance and status of the Ronald Lake Bison Herd (RLBH), including threats to it posed by proposed development, within a broader Species Recovery Strategy;
- b) Dedicate, in full cooperation with Aboriginal Peoples, adequate attention and funding to the management of Wood Bison, including as regards the development of disease management options other than culling.

Canada is addressing this recommendation in the context of recovery planning in Canada. In May 2016, the "proposed" *Recovery Strategy for the Wood Bison (Bison bison athabascaae) in Canada* was released for public comment. It is expected that the final version of the strategy will be released in 2018.

The Ronald Lake Bison Herd, numbering about 200 bison, is a disease-free wood bison herd located between the Athabasca River and the Birch Mountains. The herd ranges south into the area of active oil sands leases and north into WBNP. While the Recovery Strategy recognizes that the herd is vulnerable to mine development impacts and to disease transmission from WBNP bison, much remains unknown about the status of this bison herd.

To better understand the conservation importance of the herd, and to better inform regulatory and management decisions which could affect the herd's viability on the landscape, the multi-stakeholder Ronald Lake Bison Herd Technical Team seeks to address knowledge gaps. The Technical Team has developed a program of study to better understand the status of the herd, including: herd range / distribution, habitat quality and quantity, disturbance impacts, herd population parameters and predation impacts.

To better protect the herd, and to respond to concerns expressed by Indigenous communities about the impacts of sport hunting and industrial development on herd viability, the Alberta government designated the Ronald Lake bison as a "subject animal" in March 2016, meaning these animals can only be hunted for subsistence by First Nations and Métis peoples. In the park the bison remains a protected species and cannot be hunted.

Alberta supports many activities aimed at sustaining the Ronald Lake bison, primarily through leadership of the Ronald Lake bison herd Technical Team. In 2016 Alberta began discussions with 9 local indigenous communities about entering into a cooperative management relationship to manage the Ronald Lake bison herd. Those discussions are continuing.

In addition, the Canadian Wildlife Service is currently developing an imminent threat assessment in response to requests for Canada's *Species at Risk Act* emergency orders from two First Nations. The assessment is focusing on two herds in Alberta; Ronald Lake and Wabasca. The objective of the assessment is to determine if there is an imminent threat to the survival or recovery of the species. Consultations on the imminent threat assessment are currently underway with nine Indigenous communities whose traditional territories overlap the ranges of the Ronald Lake and Wabasca bison herd. If it is determined by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada that an imminent threat exists, Canada has discretion to issue an emergency protection order under section 80 of the *Species at Risk Act*.

**Recommendation 16**

Continue to closely monitor the entire used and potential nesting area of the Whooping Crane within the Greater WBNP Ecosystem so as to be able to respond to possible changing management requirements.

The Canadian Wildlife Service and Parks Canada continue to closely monitor the nesting area of the Whooping Crane within the Greater WBNP ecosystem. This work involves annual aerial monitoring of habitat conditions, nest establishment and recruitment of young whooping cranes into the population. Current and proposed research efforts include satellite tracking to learn more about threats to the population and high-resolution remote sensing to assess the extent and use of breeding habitat. The whooping crane population is continuing on its path to recovery, with a record number of nests (98) established in 2017 resulting in 63 fledged chicks, including the very rare occurrence of 4 sets of fledged twins.



**Recommendation 17**

Incorporate invasive alien species (IAS) into the overall monitoring of the property and the PAD based on science and local and traditional knowledge, and based on monitoring results, develop an appropriate management response to control the spread of IAS.

Monitoring of invasive alien species, such as Canada thistle and sow thistle, is currently incorporated into the vegetation monitoring program for the PAD. Adjustments to the program to better incorporate local and traditional knowledge, and to expand the program to other priority species or areas, will be considered by park management, as required.

**4.0 Next steps and timeline to Action Plan Completion**

The process to develop the Action Plan is summarized in figure 1, below. It is anticipated that the Action Plan will be a long term initiative (10+ years) developed through collaboration efforts across multiple jurisdictions, with Indigenous groups and key stakeholders. Projected dates are indicative to denote progress with key milestones and are subject to change.

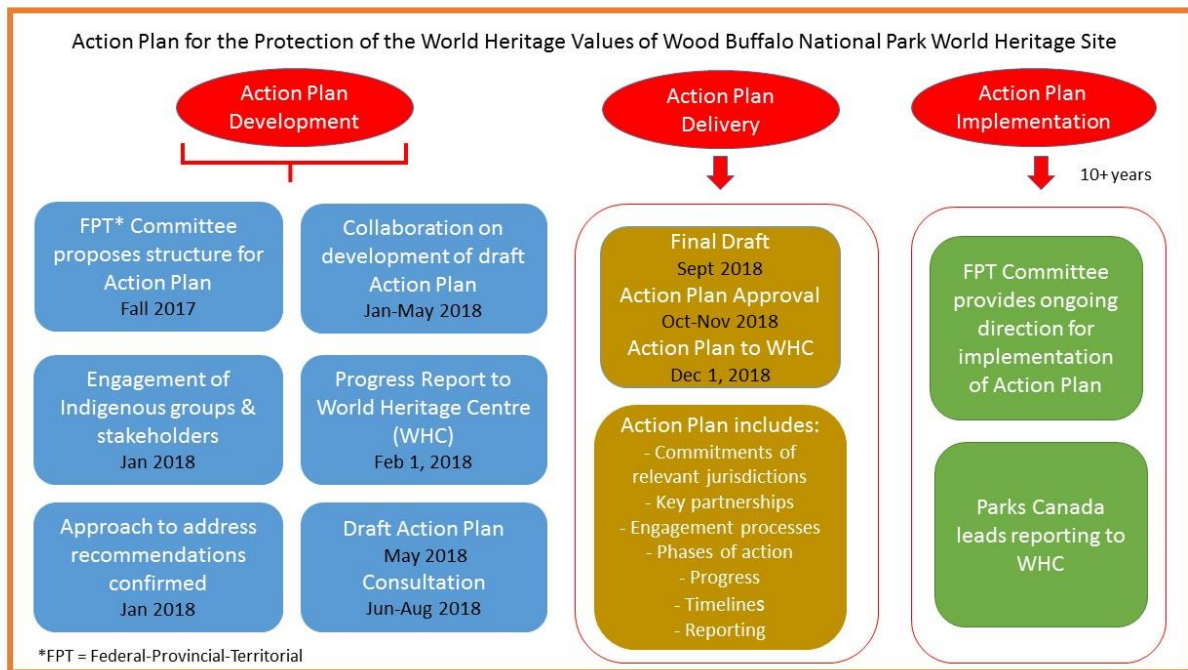


Figure 1: Process and timeline for Action Plan development.

Parks Canada, as the State Party representative for Canada to the World Heritage Convention, will continue to work closely with Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and in partnership with the governments of Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories, as well as with Indigenous partners and stakeholders to develop the Action Plan.