

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

18. Wood Buffalo National Park (Canada) (N 256)

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List 1983

Criteria (vii)(ix)(x)

Year(s) of inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger N/A

Previous Committee Decisions see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/256/documents/>

International Assistance

Requests approved: 0

Total amount approved: USD 0

For details, see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/256/assistance/>

UNESCO extra-budgetary funds

N/A

Previous monitoring missions

N/A

Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- Urban Pressure (issue resolved)
- Road construction (issue resolved)

Illustrative material see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/256/>

Current conservation issues

In December 2014, Mikisew Cree First Nation, an indigenous community of the property, sent a petition to the World Heritage Centre (available online <http://cpawsnwt.org/news/mikisew-first-nations-petitions-unesco-to-list-wood-buffalo-np-as-world-her>), requesting to inscribe the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger for the following reasons:

- Hydroelectric dams on the Peace River outside of the property are affecting its hydrology and biodiversity, and a third dam on the river, Site C Hydroelectric Dam, has now been approved at regional and federal levels;
- Large industrial development of Alberta's oil sands region, located upstream of the Park, is releasing contaminants, extracting significant volumes of water from the Athabasca River system, and disrupting migratory bird movements;
- A proposal has been submitted for an open-pit mine, which falls partially within a watershed sub-basin that flows directly within the property into Lake Claire, the largest lake within the Peace-Athabasca Delta (PAD);
- Threats from climate change are not being adequately taken into account in the management of the property;
- Indigenous communities are not taking part in the federal government's monitoring programme, and the environmental management tools that are critical to address upstream threats have been omitted from the monitoring programme.

In response to the World Heritage Centre's letter of 11 December 2014 requesting comments on the above, the State Party reported on 13 March 2015 (available online at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/256/documents/>) that:

- Site C Hydroelectric Dam underwent a thorough federal-provincial environmental assessment by an independent panel in consultation with the Canadian public and Aboriginal groups, and the project is legally required to fulfil over 80 conditions set out by the government besides to obtaining additional federal and provincial authorizations in order to proceed;
- The governments of Canada and Alberta are committed to develop oil sands with an environmentally responsible approach;
- PAD Ecological Monitoring Program was established in 2008 to address concerns about the cumulative impacts of regional developments and climate change on the delta.

Furthermore, the State Party reports that the Minister of Environment of Canada corresponded with the Chief of the Mikisew Cree First Nation regarding the issues raised in the petition, which has led to three key commitments by the federal government:

- Continue monitoring water levels and stream flow of the Peace River and in the PAD, as well as ecological integrity monitoring in the PAD;
- In collaboration with the relevant stakeholders, enhance the monitoring and research of the regional hydro-climatology and ecology of the PAD, and the effects of flow regulation, water withdrawals, and climate change on its productivity and biodiversity;
- Participate in discussions with stakeholders on best management practices for restoring and preserving the aquatic resources in the PAD.

Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN

It is noted that Site C Hydroelectric Dam on the Peace River, which will be located outside the property, was approved by the government of British Columbia in December 2014, and that the construction work is expected to start in summer 2015. However, the Mikisew have reported that First Nations have expressed significant concern about its impacts on their hunting, fishing and agricultural areas. The IUCN World Heritage Outlook 2014 identified the existing dams to have significantly altered the hydrological regime of PAD and hence, any further activities should be evaluated prior to commencement of constructions, including an assessment of potential (cumulative) impacts on Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

A Joint Alberta-Canada Implementation Plan for Oil Sands Monitoring (JOSM) was created to support decision-making by governments and stakeholders; however the Mikisew have reported that all indigenous groups in the region have withdrawn from JOSM, due to concerns about the engagement process, limited incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge, and lack of transparency. Furthermore, Alberta's Auditor General's 2014 report concluded that further work is required to understand cumulative environmental impacts for oil sands development.

It is recommended that the Committee urge the State Party to review the cumulative impacts of all of the hydroelectric dam projects, oil sands development and open pit mining on the property's OUV, taking the effect of climate change into full consideration, and to complete a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), in line with IUCN's World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment. Furthermore, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, it is recommended that the Committee request the State Party not to take any decision related to any of the development projects that would be difficult to reverse, and to submit the SEA to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN.

It is finally recommended that the Committee request the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the property to review the impact of the developments on the property, evaluate its state of conservation and exchange in more depth with the State Party, petitioning First Nation, and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Draft Decision: 39 COM 7B.18

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-15/39.COM/7B.Add,
2. Notes that the World Heritage Centre has received a petition submitted by the Mikisew Cree First Nation expressing their concern about the state of conservation of the property, as well as a response from the State Party;
3. Notes with concern the environmental impacts on the Peace-Athabasca Delta from hydro-electric dams, oil sands development, and proposed open-pit mining in the vicinity of the property, which could negatively impact its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);
4. Also notes with concern the lack of engagement with indigenous communities in monitoring activities, as well as insufficient consideration of traditional ecological knowledge, and takes note of the State Party's three commitments to strengthen monitoring and management with a wide participatory approach in order to address the concerns raised by the Mikisew Cree First Nation;
5. Requests the State Party to 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, in line with IUCN's World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment;
6. Also requests the State Party not to take any decision related to any of these development projects that would be difficult to reverse, and to submit the SEA to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines;
7. Further requests the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission 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;
8. Requests moreover the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 December 2016**, an updated report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 41st session in 2017.



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

World Heritage

39 COM

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**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Thirty-ninth session

**Bonn, Germany
28 June – 8 July 2015**

**Item 7B of the Provisional Agenda: State of conservation of properties
inscribed on the World Heritage List**

SUMMARY

This document contains information on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Committee is requested to review the reports on the state of conservation of properties contained in this document. The full reports of reactive monitoring missions requested by the World Heritage Committee are available at the following Web address in their original language: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/39COM/documents>

All previous state of conservation reports are available through the World Heritage State of conservation Information System at the following Web address:

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>

Decision required: The World Heritage Committee may wish to adopt the draft Decision presented at the end of each state of conservation report.