

2. 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 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/256/documents/>

International Assistance

Requests approved: 0

Total amount approved: 0 USD

For further details, see <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

- Existing and planned hydroelectric dams, including Site C
- Alberta oil sands mining
- Climate change
- Lack of adequate and comprehensive environmental monitoring
- Lack of engagement with First Nations and Métis in monitoring activities and insufficient consideration of traditional ecological knowledge
- Cumulative impacts

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

Current conservation issues

From 25 September to 4 October 2016, a joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission visited the property. On 31 March 2017, the State Party submitted a report on the state of conservation of the property. Both reports are available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/256/documents/>. Responding to Committee Decision **39 COM 7B.18** and the 2016 mission, the State Party reports as follows:

- Acknowledgement of challenges, particularly in the Peace-Athabasca Delta (PAD), and vulnerability of the property to the impacts of external developments and climate change, and commitment to major management responses in line with Parks Canada's legal obligation to maintain and restore the ecological integrity of the property;
- Acknowledgement of governance deficiencies, including water governance across jurisdictions and environmental assessment and monitoring, noting an ongoing review of federal environmental assessment processes expected to result in improvements of current practices;
- Support to the expansion of the scope of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which should assess the cumulative impacts of all industrial developments on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, for completion by the end of March 2018 as requested by the Committee in 2015, including a full and effective involvement of First Nations in the process;
- No irreversible decisions will be taken as regards hydroelectric or oil sands development projects that may impact the property prior to the completion of the SEA, and commitment to keep the Committee informed of any impending regulatory decisions;
- A "genuine partnership" is envisaged with First Nations as part of a broader governmental commitment to a renewal of the relationship, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership;
- The 2016 mission report is welcomed as a call to action. The State Party outlines its preliminary views, while promising a more detailed response at a later date, informed by the forthcoming decision of the Committee at its 41st session;
- Explicit support to all but one of the 17 specific recommendations of the mission report, thereby rejecting further assessment of the Site C hydropower project on the grounds of lacking legal mechanisms;
- Commitment to develop an Action Plan, compatible with the future Management Plan and a specific Area Management Approach for the PAD and based on the above mentioned recommendations, the best available science, local and indigenous knowledge and close collaboration among all involved stakeholders;
- Commitment to undertake an independent comprehensive analysis of the conservation importance and status of the Ronald Lake Bison Herd within a broader Species Recovery Strategy in full cooperation with First Nations.

On 21 April 2017, the Mikisew Cree First Nation submitted a response to the State Party's state of conservation report.

Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN

The acknowledgement of challenges, as well as the commitment of the State Party to an Action Plan are much welcomed and interpreted as a considerably changed position on the part of the State Party. There is full agreement that the challenges crystallized in the PAD, even though the multiple pressures do not originate in that particularly valuable part of the property. An Area Management Approach for the PAD, to be embedded both within the 2020 Management Plan and the envisaged Action Plan, is strongly supported. It is important to ensure that the elaboration of the Action Plan is based on a fair and transparent communication and negotiation with the broad range of stakeholders and rights-holders, and recognize the significant knowledge and dedication of First Nations, Métis, academia and non-governmental actors. This process is considered to represent a demanding opportunity to turn severe challenges into an example of participatory action. It is recommended that the Committee request the State Party to finalize the Action Plan as a matter of priority and clarify the timeline for its

completion. The State Party's commitment to undertake an analysis of the conservation importance and status of the Ronald Lake Bison Herd in full cooperation with First Nations is welcome in that regard, particularly in light of the mission's observation that reportable cattle diseases, including tuberculosis and/or brucellosis, continue to pose a complex conservation challenge.

The State Party's commitments are in line with broader processes underway, such as the review of the federal environmental and regulatory processes including environmental assessment. Encouragingly, the promise of a meaningful and respectful partnership with First Nations and Métis comes at a time of unprecedented federal commitment to renewing such relationships. Nevertheless, it faces a starting point characterized by longstanding tensions and issues of trust between Aboriginal Peoples and governmental and private sectors, and realizing this vision will require fundamental and consistent efforts, extending across generations. The State Party provides limited information on concrete mechanisms to improve water governance and environmental monitoring.

Recalling Committee Decision **39 COM 7B.18** requesting the State Party not to take any decision on development projects that would be difficult to reverse, its overall commitments in this regard are welcomed. It is appreciated that an environmental and social impact assessment in line with the IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment will be undertaken for proposed and future development projects, which may impact on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, including hydropower, Teck Frontier oil sands mine and all mineral exploration and exploitation. However, it is regrettable that these commitments currently exclude the Site C hydropower project. The ongoing absence of a specific assessment of Site C's potential impacts on the OUV of the property does not permit an informed judgment about irreversible decisions, and this absence should be rectified. It is therefore recommended that the Committee request the State Party to make every effort to understand the possible impacts of the Site C project on the OUV of the property before any further decisions are made that may be difficult to reverse, including but not limited to the expanded SEA. The State Party should also be requested to explore all options to ensure best practices are followed during all stages of the project, including impact prevention and mitigation, and regulating flow, should the Site C dam become operational.

It is understood that the State Party report is otherwise restricted to preliminary views on the way forward due to tight reporting deadlines. The 2016 mission considered the need for a major and timely response by the State Party to immediately develop a structured and adequately funded Action Plan, guided by the mission recommendations. In the absence of such a response, the mission concluded that the property would meet the criteria for inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger, in line with Paragraph 180 of the *Operational Guidelines*. It is therefore recommended that the Committee request the State Party to provide a refined response on the mission recommendations by 1 February 2018, along with an update on the progress achieved.

Draft Decision: 41 COM 7B.2

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC/17/41.COM/7B.Add,*
2. *Recalling Decision **39 COM 7B.18**, adopted at its 39th session (Bonn, 2015),*
3. *Welcomes the State Party's acknowledgement of the property's challenges and vulnerability, and the commitment to embark on a major and participatory management response in the form of an overarching and coherent Action Plan, and requests the State Party to:*
 - a) *Allocate adequate resources for the elaboration and implementation of the Action Plan as a matter of priority, and clarify the timeline for its completion,*
 - b) *Ensure a process enabling fair, transparent and meaningful involvement of all legitimate stakeholders and rights-holders, including First Nations and Métis, based on mechanisms agreed by these stakeholders and rights-holders,*

- c) *Ensure the best possible coherence with all relevant planning schemes affecting the property, including at provincial and territorial levels,*
 - d) *Fully reflect the results of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which should assess the cumulative impacts of all industrial developments on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, and is scheduled for completion by the end of March 2018;*
4. *Also welcomes the State Party's support for the recommendations formulated by the 2016 Reactive Monitoring mission and also requests the State Party to fully implement all the mission's recommendations and to ensure refinement of its preliminary views on the concrete follow-up so as to fully and consistently reflect the management responses to these recommendations in the above-mentioned Action Plan, the 2020 Management Plan and the specific Area Management Approach for the Peace-Athabasca Delta;*
 5. *Further welcomes the State Party's commitment to invest in comprehensive and independent analysis of the conservation importance and status of the Ronald Lake Bison Herd, including threats to it posed by proposed development, within a broader Species Recovery Strategy and to dedicate, in full cooperation with First Nations, adequate attention and funding to the management of Wood Bison, including as regards the development of disease management options other than culling;*
 6. *Further requests the State Party to make every effort to assess and understand the potential impacts of the Site C hydropower project and of the various major dams on the Peace River on the OUV of the property and ensure the application of best practice at all stages of the project, including mitigation measures and strategic flow regulation;*
 7. *Also reiterates its requests to the State Party to assess the potential cumulative impacts of all developments on the OUV of the property in the form of an SEA, including hydroelectric dams, oil sands development, and mining, in line with the IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment and submit it to the World Heritage Centre as soon as it is available, for review by IUCN, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines;*
 8. *Requests furthermore the State Party to conduct, in line with the IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment, and to submit to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines:*
 - a) *An Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of any other hydropower projects potentially affecting the OUV of the property,*
 - b) *An ESIA of any other oil sands development between the current northern frontier of the actively mined area and the property, which may affect the OUV of the property, including the Teck Frontier project,*
 - c) *A systematic risk assessment of the tailings ponds of the Alberta Oil Sands region with a focus on risks to the Peace-Athabasca Delta;*
 9. *Requests moreover the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2018**, a refined response to the 2016 mission recommendations and report on the progress achieved with their implementation, and to submit by **1 December 2018**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, including the Action Plan, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 43rd session in 2019.*



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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

World Heritage

41 COM

WHC/17/41.COM/7B.Add

Paris, 2 June 2017

Original: English / French

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

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

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Forty-first session

**Krakow, Poland
2-12 July 2017**

**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/41COM/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.