

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

15. 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

September/October 2016: Joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission

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 impact

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

Current conservation issues

The State Party submitted a progress report on 1 February 2018, a state of conservation report of the property on 30 November 2018 and the final Action Plan on 1 February 2019, all of which are available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/256/documents/>. A draft version of the Action Plan had previously been submitted for technical review by IUCN. Through regular correspondence, the State Party also informed the World Heritage Centre about the proposed Horizon North Pit Mine Extension Project, engagement with First Nations and Métis, and the creation of a protected area complex through the designation of provincial parks, partly adjoining the property. On 5 June 2018, the State Party also submitted the final Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which assessed the cumulative impacts of industrial developments on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property.

The State Party's report responds to Committee Decision **41 COM 7B.2** as follows:

- The elaboration of the Action Plan was based on a participatory, multi-jurisdictional cooperation between the federal and provincial governments, Indigenous partners and other stakeholders, and on the recommendations of the 2016 Reactive Monitoring mission and the 2018 SEA. 27.5 million Canadian dollars (approximately USD 20.6 million) has been allocated in the federal budget over five years to support the Action Plan;
- An Imminent Threat Assessment is being undertaken for the Ronald Lake Bison Herd, which could lead to an issuance of a federal emergency protection order;

- A proposed new federal legislation (Bill C-69), if approved, would strengthen the impact assessment processes of future project proposals that may impact on national parks;
- The State Party commits to consider incremental and cumulative impacts of any future hydroelectric development projects upstream of the property on its OUV in line with the IUCN Advice Note on Environmental Assessment, to the extent possible. The understanding of the impacts of hydropower developments on the Peace River has enhanced through multi-stakeholder work on environmental flows, hydrology and through the SEA. The proposed Amisk hydroelectric project on the Peace River has been referred to an independent review panel and an Environmental Impact statement is due in 2020;
- Assessment of the proposed Frontier Oil Sands Mine Project will include cumulative impacts on the OUV of the property, including on the Peace Athabasca Delta (PAD). The report of the Joint Review Panel (JRP) is expected in spring 2019. Implementation of Alberta's Tailings Management Framework for the Mineable Athabasca Oil Sands aims to reduce the risks from potential seepage or breach of fluid tailing ponds.

In response to various third party information, the State Party informed the World Heritage Centre on 6 and 7 May 2019 that it focuses, *inter alia*, on detailed implementation planning of the Action Plan, including the identification of additional funding as well as commitments currently under negotiation.

Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN

The SEA and Action Plan constitute a systematic framework and swift follow-up to the Committee's requests and mission recommendations. It is underpinned by a participatory analysis and demonstrates an improved involvement of indigenous peoples.

The creation of the protected area complex adjacent to the property, described as the largest contiguous protected boreal forest globally, is a commendable achievement and could serve as a basis for the designation of a buffer zone for the property. Adequate resourcing to enable effective coordination and management should be encouraged. Furthermore, it is encouraging that the proposed Bill C-69, if approved, would enable more rigorous assessments of development projects potentially impacting on national parks. The threat analysis for the Ronald Lake Bison Herd is welcomed, and the findings, once available, should be considered in the overall Species Recovery Strategy.

Whilst acknowledging these efforts, it is of serious concern that the SEA confirms the severity of the challenges and attests the downward trend of the indicators for the property's OUV, especially in the PAD. Considerably more effort will be needed to reverse the negative trends, at a time when climate change combined with upstream industrial developments and resource extraction are intensifying.

While studies on the impacts of hydropower development on the Peace River have been undertaken, a detailed response on the impact of Site C hydropower project on the property's OUV as requested by the Committee is missing. It is recommended that the State Party provide an update on the outcomes of the reported processes and initiatives related to environmental flows and hydrology in the Action Plan, given the potential impacts of the Site C hydropower project and other major dams on the Peace River on the OUV of the property.

It is noted that the JRP report for the Teck Frontier Oil Sands Mine project upstream of the property was not yet available at the time of writing of this report. However, it is of concern that the project would move the oil sands development closer to the southern boundary of the property. It is appreciated that the Alberta tailings management framework is implemented and that the risk assessment of the tailings ponds is foreseen in the Action Plan. Nevertheless, it is noted that 47 further oil sands projects are being considered, besides the 37 already operating facilities, whose current and potential cumulative impacts on the OUV are of serious concern. It is recommended that the risk assessment be submitted to the World Heritage Centre once it is available.

In order to avert further deterioration of the property's OUV, which could eventually lead to the inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, in line with Paragraph 180 of the *Operational Guidelines*, it is important that the SEA's recommendations are fully considered in future Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and decision-making on relevant developments and that the Action Plan is implemented in a timely manner with adequate funding. While the funds assigned to the Action Plan above and beyond the property's current budget are significant, more funding will likely be needed given the size of the property and complexity of issues to address, as already acknowledged in the Action Plan as 'strategies to seek new resources will be developed in 2019'. The pending preparation of the next Management Plan for the property is an opportunity to further substantiate and amend the valuable

information generated by the SEA and Action Plan processes and link action with adequate governance and resource allocation, including effective sharing of governance and management with indigenous peoples inside and outside of the property.

Draft Decision: 43 COM 7B.15

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/19/43.COM/7B.Add,
2. Recalling Decisions **39 COM 7B.18** and **41 COM 7B.2**, adopted at its 39th (Bonn, 2015) and 41st (Krakow, 2017) sessions respectively,
3. Commends the State Party for having developed a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and an Action Plan to underpin and guide an adequate management response for the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, including its conditions of integrity;
4. Also commends the State Party for its efforts and renewed commitment to fair, transparent and meaningful involvement of all legitimate stakeholders and rights-holders, including First Nations and Métis, in line with the UNESCO policy on engaging with indigenous peoples;
5. Welcomes the creation of a protected area complex next to the property through the designation of provincial parks, and also encourages the federal and the provincial governments to allocate adequate resources to enable effective coordination and management for the property and the new protected areas, and to consider the designation of a buffer zone for the property;
6. Also welcomes the threat analysis undertaken for the Ronald Lake Bison Herd, and requests the State Party to fully consider the findings of the ongoing assessment in the overall Species Recovery Strategy;
7. Noting with concern the continued threat the Site C hydropower project and other major dams on the Peace River pose on the OUV of the property, also requests the State Party to provide a detailed update on the progress towards undertaking an environmental flow and hydrology assessment as recommended in the 2016 mission;
8. Appreciates that the Alberta's tailings management framework is implemented and that a systematic risk assessment of the tailings ponds of the Alberta Oil Sands region is foreseen by the Action Plan, but notes with serious concern the potential and current cumulative impacts of 47 oil sands projects being considered besides the 37 already operating facilities;
9. Also requests the State Party to conduct a systematic risk assessment of the tailings ponds of the Alberta Oil Sands as a matter of priority, and to submit it to the World Heritage Centre, for review by IUCN, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines;
10. Also notes with serious concern the downward trend confirmed by the SEA of the indicators for the property's OUV, considers that continued deterioration of the OUV could eventually constitute a case for inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, in line with Paragraph 180 of the Operational Guidelines, therefore further requests the State Party to ensure that the SEA's recommendations are fully

considered in future Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and decision-making for relevant developments and that the Action Plan be implemented in a timely manner with adequate funding, in order to avert continued deterioration of the property's OUV;

11. *Further welcomes the significant funding already assigned to the implementation of the Action Plan, but also considers that more funding will likely be needed given the size of the property and complexity of issues to address;*
12. *Further encourages the State Party to take advantage of the pending Management Plan review for the property to further substantiate and amend the valuable information generated by the SEA and Action Plan processes and link action with adequate governance and resource allocation, including effective sharing of governance and management with indigenous peoples inside and outside of the property;*
13. *Finally requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 December 2020**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, including detailed information on the outcomes of continued assessments, mitigation and compliance measures, in relation to potential impacts of the Site C hydropower project and of other major dams on the Peace River on the OUV of the property, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 45th session in 2021.*



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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World Heritage

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WHC/19/43.COM/7B.Add

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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Forty-third session

Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan
30 June - 10 July 2019

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: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/43COM/documents>

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