



Wood Buffalo

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

2010



JUNE 2010

Wood Buffalo National Park
of Canada
Management Plan

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Management Plan

Foreword



Canada's national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas offer Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast unique opportunities to experience and understand our wonderful country. They are places of learning, recreation and inspiration where Canadians can connect with our past and appreciate the natural, cultural and social forces that shaped Canada.

From our smallest national park to our most visited national historic site to our largest national marine conservation area, each of these places offers Canadians and visitors several experiential opportunities to enjoy Canada's historic and natural heritage. These places of beauty, wonder and learning are valued by Canadians - they are part of our past, our present and our future.

Our Government's goal is to ensure that Canadians form a lasting connection to this heritage and that our protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.

We see a future in which these special places will further Canadians' appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of Canada, the economic well-being of communities, and the vitality of our society.

Our Government's vision is to build a culture of heritage conservation in Canada by offering Canadians exceptional opportunities to experience our natural and cultural heritage.

These values form the foundation of the new management plan for Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada. I offer my appreciation to the many thoughtful Canadians who helped to develop this plan, particularly to our dedicated team from Parks Canada, and to all those local organizations and individuals who have demonstrated their good will, hard work, spirit of co-operation and extraordinary sense of stewardship.

In this same spirit of partnership and responsibility, I am pleased to approve the Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada Management Plan.

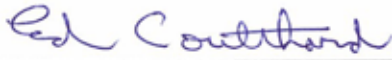

Jim Prentice
Minister of the Environment

Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada Management Plan

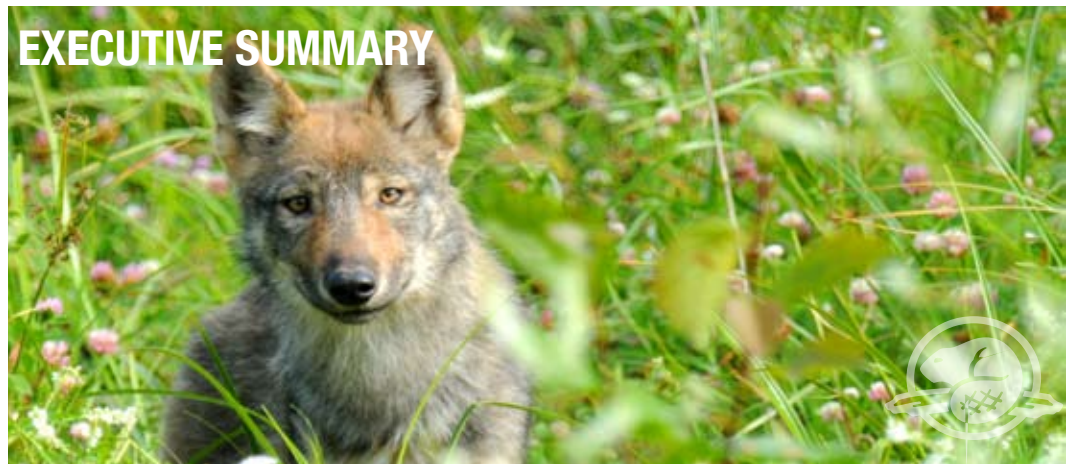
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Coyote cub at Sweetgrass © Parks Canada/J. McKinnon

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic areas in the world. We protect and present these treasures on behalf of Canadians and management plans are a key tool in fulfilling this commitment. This document presents the management plan for Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada. It contains commitments to the public of Canada regarding the on-going protection of one of Canada's natural treasures and the provision of real and inspiring experiences and learning opportunities.

Wood Buffalo National Park spans the boundary of Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Encompassing an area of 44,807 square kilometres, Wood Buffalo National Park is Canada's largest national park, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site and the second largest national park in the world.

Wood Buffalo National Park was originally created in 1922 to protect the last free roaming herds of wood bison in northern Canada. The park was later identified as critical habitat for the endangered whooping crane and it continues to protect the only wild, self-sustaining population of whooping cranes in the world. In 1982 the

Peace-Athabasca Delta and the whooping crane nesting area were added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance and in 1983 UNESCO recognized Wood Buffalo National Park for its many natural wonders.

Wood Buffalo National Park attracts local, national and international visitors who wish to experience and learn about the unique cultures, landscapes and wildlife of the boreal region. The 2010 management plan for Wood Buffalo National Park establishes a course of action to facilitate the inspired discovery of one of Canada's wilderness icons and to provide Canadians with an opportunity to create a sense of connection to Wood Buffalo National Park. It also sets the stage for Parks Canada to establish a management structure with local Aboriginal groups and build stronger relationships with stakeholders, and it presents a comprehensive strategy to address disease within the park's wood bison population.

There are three key strategies that form the foundation of the 2010 management plan. These strategies support the park's ten vision elements and the three elements of Parks Canada's integrated mandate – the protection of heritage resources, the facilitation of visitor experiences and public

outreach education. Each key strategy will move Wood Buffalo National Park towards its future best and a set of corresponding objectives and actions will provide concrete direction with measurable targets. The three key strategies for Wood Buffalo National Park are as follows:

Key Strategy 1: Towards a Shared Vision

Towards a Shared Vision focuses on building relationships with local Aboriginal groups and communities. Parks Canada will work towards the establishment of a management structure with local Aboriginal groups and ecological integrity and cultural resources will be improved with support from local Aboriginal groups. Local communities will be aware of and provided with opportunities to actively and meaningfully participate in park management decisions, and visitor experience in the park and public outreach education efforts for the park will involve both local Aboriginal groups and local communities.

Key actions:

- Building and developing a management structure between Parks Canada and local Aboriginal groups.
- Collaborating with local Aboriginal groups and local communities to create a Vision Statement.
- Working with communities around the park to expand partnering opportunities and incorporate Wood Buffalo National Park into their tourism offer.
- Engaging local Aboriginal groups in cultural and ecological research and monitoring programs.

Key Strategy 2: Connecting to the Magic of the Boreal Plains

Connecting to the Magic of the Boreal Plains will position the park as a dynamic

destination to inspire discovery and experience the diversity of the northern boreal plains. An increased number of visitors will have meaningful experiences in Wood Buffalo National Park and more Canadians will feel connected to and understand the significance of the park within the Canadian park system and internationally. An understanding of audiences' needs, expectations and desires will improve visitor experience and public outreach education initiatives.

Key actions:

- Completion of Visitor Information Program surveys in 2011 and 2014.
- Collaborating with local Aboriginal peoples to identify appropriate cultural stories for heritage presentation.
- Developing a public outreach education strategy to support the Boreal Plains theme by 2011.
- Develop a visitor experience plan by 2012.

Key Strategy 3: Bison Management in the Greater Wood Buffalo National Park Ecosystem

An integrated program of monitoring, research and management will be developed under Bison Management in the Greater Wood Buffalo National Park Ecosystem. This strategy will ensure the long-term viability of the Wood Buffalo National Park wood bison herd and it will minimize the risk of transmission of bovine diseases to adjacent disease-free wood bison and cattle herds.

Key actions:

- Implement a research program to improve our understanding of wood bison population dynamics (including the interaction of disease with predation and other environmental factors), movement and habitat use

- Develop and implement a disease containment strategy by 2012.
- Work with Aboriginal partners to bridge traditional knowledge with western science in wood bison management and communication strategies.

Area Management Approaches

There are two area management approaches for Wood Buffalo National Park: the Peace-Athabasca Delta Area Management Approach and the Pine Lake Area Management Approach. Area management approaches are effective for specific geographic locations within the park that require more detailed planning. The Peace-Athabasca Delta Area Management Approach addresses the challenges of maintaining, or in some cases improving, the delta's ecological integrity and cultural value in cooperation with Aboriginal partners, stakeholders, government and industry. The Pine Lake Area Management Approach promotes compatible land-use and development for reserve and park lands at Pine Lake.

Wood Buffalo National Park represents a measure of protection for land, water and wildlife that might otherwise be lost or impaired. The above key strategies and area management approaches will improve ecosystem conservation and facilitate visitor experience and public outreach education initiatives that will strengthen the place of Wood Buffalo National Park in the hearts and minds of Canadians. Monitoring and evaluation will provide a ensure the protection of the park's heritage resources and the integrated delivery of Parks Canada's mandate and with the identification of new issues and challenges over time Wood Buffalo National Park will move into its next phase of park management planning.



Bison trotting © Parks Canada/J. McKinnon

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South Loop Hike © J. Jaque

Parks Canada is responsible to the people and Government of Canada for administering a world-renowned system of national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. Canada's national parks are established to protect for all time special places representative of Canada's natural regions and to connect Canadians with the enduring natural and cultural legacy of these places. The *Parks Canada Agency Act*, the *Canada National Parks Act* and Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies set the context for this responsibility.

Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada spans the Alberta/Northwest Territories boundary. Encompassing an area of 44,807 square kilometres, Wood Buffalo National Park is Canada's largest national park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the second largest national park in the world. The Park was originally created in 1922 to protect the last free roaming herds of wood bison in northern Canada. It was later identified as critical habitat for the endangered whooping crane and in 1982 the Peace-Athabasca Delta and the whooping crane nesting area were added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Wood Buffalo National Park is an icon of the Canadian wilderness. The terrain is

dotted with lakes, wetlands and streams amidst vast stretches of boreal forest. From above, the landscape looks like a contemporary painting: a beautiful mixture of gold, grey and green and its sheer size inspires a sense of peaceful wonder. Wood Buffalo National Park sets the stage for visitors to create memorable experiences and learn about the cultural heritage, wildlife and natural landscape that capture the spirit of the boreal north. In 1983 UNESCO recognized Wood Buffalo National Park for its many natural wonders and the park became a member of the prestigious family of World Heritage Sites.

1.1 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

A park management plan is the key reference document that guides Parks Canada decisions and actions in protecting, managing and operating a national park. As per the *Canada National Parks Act*, management plans are a legal requirement for all national parks. They are developed with the involvement of the Canadian public and are formally reviewed every five years to ensure they remain relevant and effective. The management plan is not an end in itself, but rather it constitutes a framework that guides park planning, management and implementation. In the case of Wood Buffalo National Park this will be the second plan that has been approved for the park.

The 2010 management plan for Wood Buffalo National Park contains updated management objectives and it is consistent with new government policy, directions and decisions. Supporting documents include the *Parks Canada Agency Act* (1998), the *Canada National Parks Act* (2000), Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies (1994), Parks Canada Corporate Plans (annual) and the Parks Canada Guide to Management Planning (2008).

This management plan review provides an opportunity to build upon the ecological gains of the existing plan, while also positioning Parks Canada to better meet the needs and expectations of current and future generations. The revised plan will incorporate new content that will enable park staff to facilitate meaningful visitor experiences and broaden Parks Canada's base of support.

The 2010 Management Plan aims to fulfill the Agency's goal that:

Canadians have a strong sense of connection, through meaningful experiences, to their national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas and these protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.

It does so by integrating the three elements of the Parks Canada's mandate -- the protection of heritage resources, the facilitation of visitor experiences and public outreach education -- into the park's vision elements and supporting key strategies and objectives.

The focus of the 2010 Wood Buffalo National Park management plan is to:

- Establish a management structure with local Aboriginal groups.

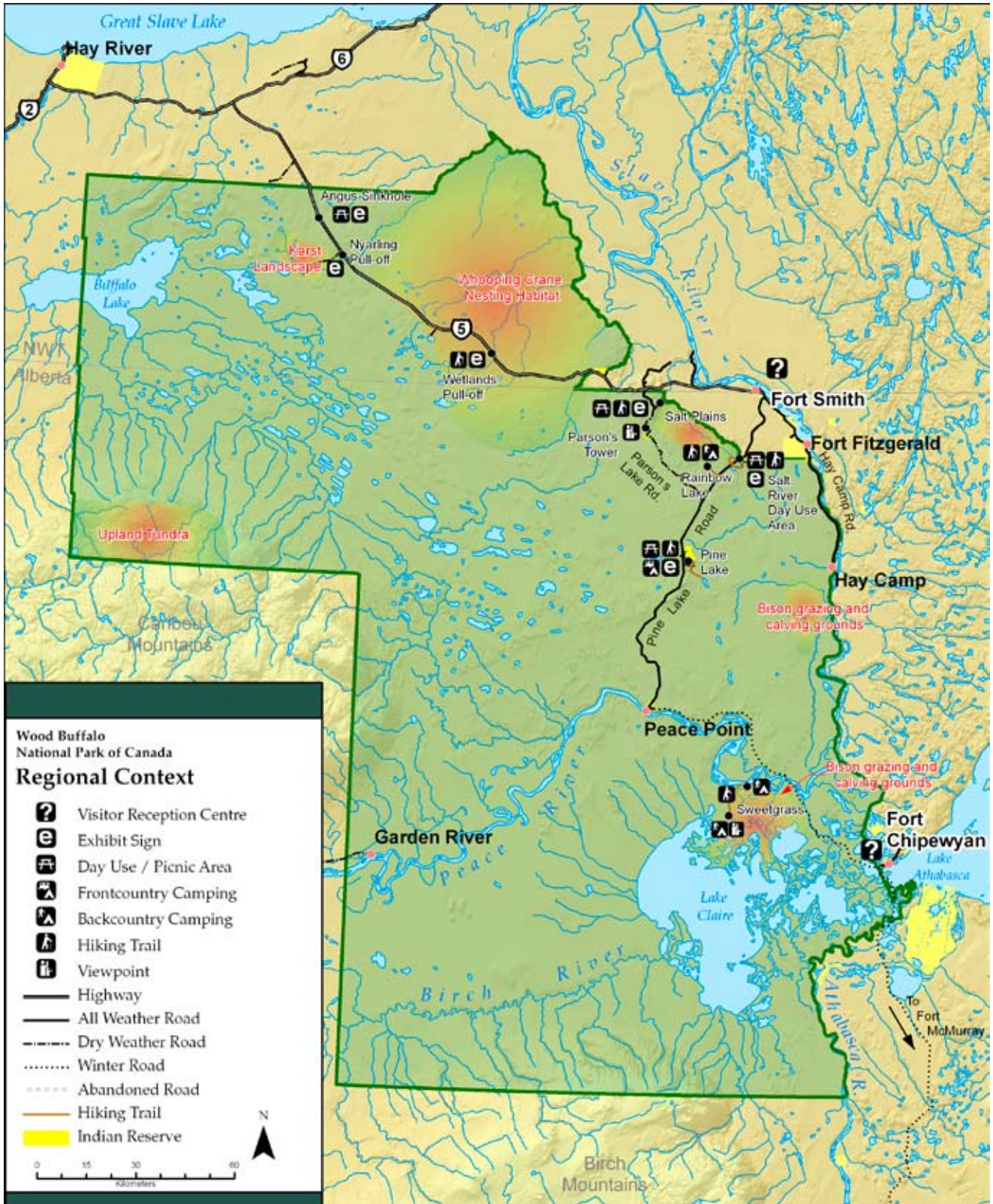
- Position the park as a dynamic destination and increase visitation in a way that results in a high degree of of visitor satisfaction.
- Increase the park's relevance to non-visiting Canadians to ensure public awareness and strong support for on-going management of natural and cultural resources.
- Develop a program of monitoring, research and management actions to ensure the long-term viability of the park's wood bison population.
- Minimize the risk of transmission of bovine diseases to adjacent disease-free wood bison and cattle herds.
- Develop a program of monitoring, research and management actions to understand, protect and present the ecological integrity and cultural value of the Peace-Athabasca Delta.
- Establish an area management approach that promotes compatible land-use and development for reserve and park lands at Pine Lake.



Pine Lake © J. Jaque



MAP 1. Geographical context of Wood Buffalo National Park.



MAP 2. Regional context of Wood Buffalo National Park.



Whooping crane ponds © Parks Canada/J. McKinnon

Wood Buffalo National Park is Canada's largest national park and a place of natural wealth. As a protected area, the park helps maintain biodiversity at the landscape, community, species and genetic levels. The park is set within one of the largest intact boreal forest ecosystems, it is home to the only wild breeding population of whooping cranes and it is the only place where the predator-prey relationship between wolves and wood bison has continued unbroken over time.

Within the nation-wide family of protected areas managed by Parks Canada, Wood Buffalo National Park represents two different regions: Natural Region 11: The Northern Boreal Plains and Natural Region 12: The Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux. The northern boreal plains region accounts for 92% of Wood Buffalo National Park. It is characterized by lowlands underlain by sedimentary rock and a vast wilderness of bogs, forests, meandering streams, huge silty rivers and great tracts of spongy muskeg. The southern boreal plains and plateaux make up the remaining 8% of the park and these regions are defined by seemingly endless stretches of black spruce muskeg on flat poorly drained land.

2.1 BROADER ROLE OF WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK

National parks are becoming increasingly important in national and international

efforts to maintain biodiversity and genetic resources. National Parks protect some of the world's most complete ecosystems and they provide habitat for thousands of species. Wood Buffalo National Park has been recognized for its outstanding range of bird species. A total of 227 bird species have been recorded and the protection and intensive management of the whooping crane within the park's boundaries (and protection of their wintering ground in Texas) may have averted its extinction. Conservation efforts have allowed the whooping crane population to grow from a mere 14 birds in 1938, to a record 270 birds in 2008.

The whooping crane remains one of the world's most endangered birds. Its road to recovery, however, is a success story in the making and it illustrates the importance of national parks and cross-border conservation initiatives. Canada has entered into co-operative relationships with the United States and other countries in order to protect our natural and cultural heritage. As part of global conservation efforts, Canada is a signatory to international agreements including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the landmark 2009 Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation for Wilderness Conservation with Mexico and the United States.

Canada is also a signatory to the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention. This convention recognizes examples of the world's natural and cultural heritage that are so outstanding that their protection and preservation are considered to be of concern to the global community. In 1983 Wood Buffalo National Park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site as it encompasses some of the largest undisturbed grass and sedge meadows left in North America. The salt plains and gypsum karst were also recognized for the value they add to the park's outstanding natural wealth. Other sites of international significance include two Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance: the Peace-Athabasca Delta and the whooping crane nesting area.



Salt Plains © Parks Canada/ R. Coleman



Prairie River © S. Hunt

Aboriginal people living in and around the park have a long-standing and on-going relationship with the land. The human use of Wood Buffalo National Park extends back thousands of years and archaeological finds reveal that the park was inhabited by the Beaver, the Slavey, the Chipewyan and the Cree. While increasingly fewer Aboriginal people make their living primarily from subsistence activities, they still value how they and their families relate to the land that eventually became Canada's largest national park.

For Aboriginal peoples, the land represents a reservoir of knowledge and resources and ultimately a sense of meaning that connects generations. Hunting, trapping and other traditional Aboriginal uses are still being practiced in Wood Buffalo National Park. Trapping is no longer the dominant economic activity it once was: however, hunting remains popular and the fall moose hunting season is when many families harvest food to supplement their needs for the winter season.

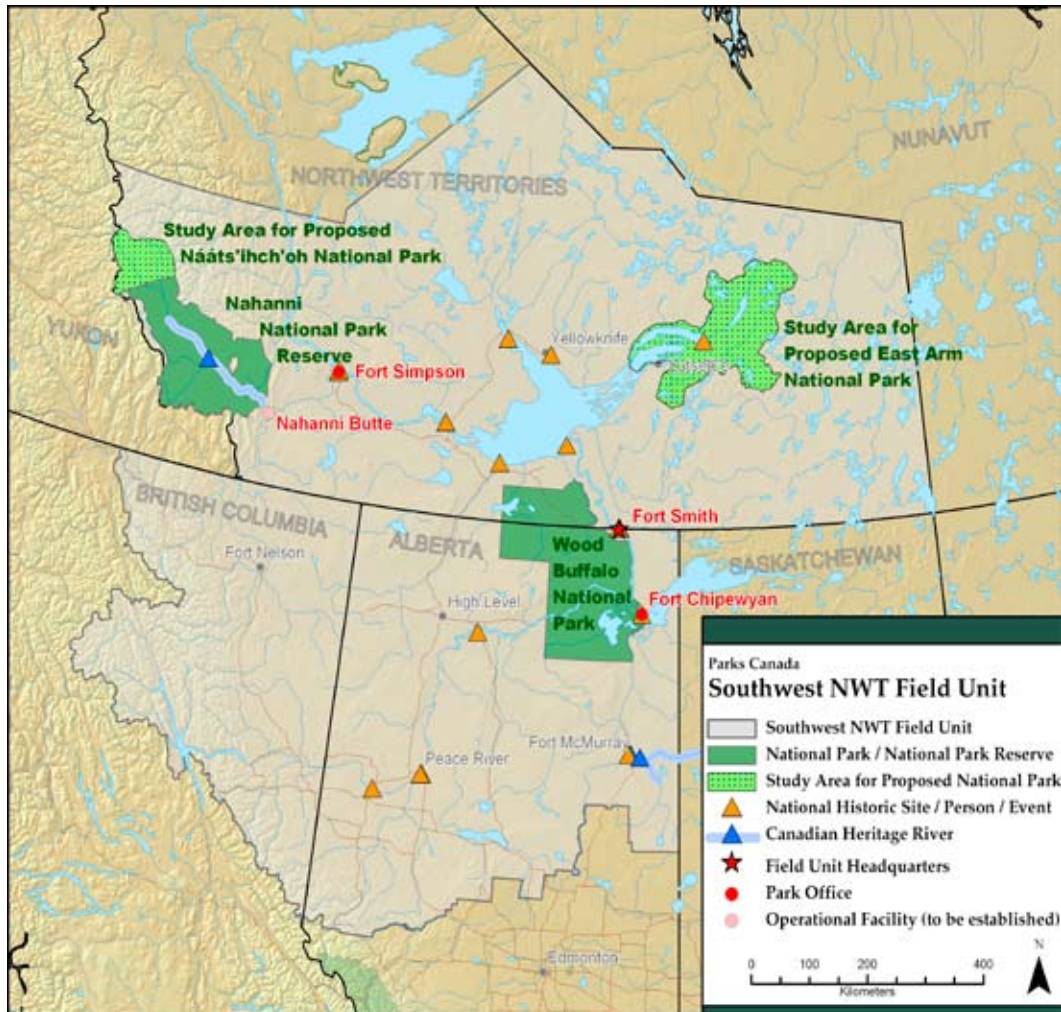
Over the life of the park, the management and regulation of traditional use has been a contentious right-versus-privilege based issue. This was clarified with the Supreme Court of Canada decision, which recognized Treaty rights. More recently, the collaborative revision of the park's Game Regulations with local Aboriginal people has contributed to the development

of a more cooperative environment and this process has set a precedent for the constructive resolution of park-related issues with local Aboriginal groups.

Wood Buffalo National Park was first created as a national park in 1922. In 1926 its boundary was extended south of the Peace River to encompass a large portion of the Peace-Athabasca Delta. Today, twenty percent of the park's landmass is located along the southern border of the Northwest Territories, with the remainder of the park located in the north-east corner of Alberta.

Park administration and operation is the responsibility of the Southwest Northwest Territories Field Unit. The Field Unit office is located in the community of Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. With a population of just over 2,400 people, Fort Smith is the education capital of the Northwest Territories and the gateway to Wood Buffalo National Park. Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, is also a close neighbour of the park. This community has approximately 1,200 residents and it is surrounded to the north and west by Wood Buffalo National Park.

There are 11 distinct Aboriginal groups in and around the park that come from Chipewyan, Cree and Métis roots and eight Indian Reserves within its boundaries. The park currently works with five communities that are located around the park's borders



MAP 3. Southwest Northwest Territories Field Unit.

and one community (Garden River) that is located within its borders. Efforts are underway to expand working relationships given the impact of the park on the region and there is great potential to coordinate park activities with neighbouring provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments.

3.1 PARK MANAGEMENT

Wood Buffalo National Park was originally placed under the jurisdiction of the Northwest Territories Branch of the Department of the Interior. It was not until April 1969 that the administration for the park was transferred to Parks Canada; then known as the National Parks Branch.

Efforts were undertaken to bring Wood Buffalo National Park into conformity with national park policy and practice and in 1984 the park's first long-range management plan was completed.

The 1984 management plan provided a comprehensive approach to the future management and development of the park. A revised management plan was prepared in 1992-93, however, this plan was never approved. In 2006, a Game Regulations consultation process was undertaken at the request of Aboriginal groups. This marked the first step in rebuilding key relationships for shared management of Wood Buffalo National Park.

Parks Canada and its partners have taken a number of actions to achieve the objectives of the 1984 Wood Buffalo National Park management plan. These actions address ecological integrity, the protection of heritage resources, improved visitor education and the equitable settlement of land claims. Park milestones include:

- The development of basic interpretive presence on Highway 5, including improved signage, exhibits and a whooping crane pull-off.
- Significant advancement of negotiations for the adjustment of park boundaries to excise the community of Garden Creek from the park.
- Formal excision of the Peace Point Reserve from the park through land claims process.
- Cessation of commercial timber harvesting operations in the park.
- Initiation of resource-monitoring programs, including the Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring Program (PADEMP).
- An on-going and collaborative review of park game regulations.
- Claire River restoration.
- Collection of archival information regarding the signing of the Peace Treaty between the Beaver and the Cree Indians at Peace Point.
- Launch of a cultural resource management process.
- Continuation of negotiations with Aboriginal communities that led to the establishment of seven new Indian Reserves in the park with two First Nations.

3.2 STATE OF THE PARK REPORT

Parks Canada requires each national park to prepare a five-year State of the Park report before beginning the management planning process. The first State of the Park report was prepared for Wood Buffalo National Park in April 2009. The report provides an analysis of all components of the Parks Canada mandate – protecting heritage resources, facilitating opportunities for visitor experiences and providing public education.

The State of the Park report is intended to help raise awareness among key partners and visitors about the condition and status of park resources, activities and relationships. The report also assesses major management actions taken in recent years and it identifies key issues and challenges facing the park. The 2009 State of the Park report provided an assessment of Aboriginal perspectives, ecological integrity, cultural resources, visitor experience, public outreach education and Aboriginal and stakeholder engagement.

3.3 ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE PARK

The 2009 State of the Park Report identified the current challenges in Wood Buffalo National Park. These challenges relate to some of the park's ecological integrity indicators, making the park meaningful to Canadians, facilitating visitor experiences, further developing collaborative relationships with local Aboriginal groups and cultural resource management.

Evolving Relationships

ISSUE: A management structure that reflects the change from the past relationship of park privilege to the new rights-based environment is required. Functional cooperation is occurring at an opportunistic level and priority issues are

the point of focus rather than cooperation on regular basis within an agreed upon framework and process. This segmented approach requires the park and Aboriginal groups to develop a new working approach for each opportunity.

CHALLENGE: Engaging local Aboriginal groups in the future management of Wood Buffalo National Park and developing a management structure by which it will be achieved.

The Peace-Athabasca Delta

ISSUE: The biological productivity and diversity of the Peace-Athabasca Delta depends upon regular inputs of water and nutrients from the Peace, Athabasca and Birch Rivers and Lake Athabasca. Impacts of external stressors and climate change on water quantity and water quality are of primary concern. Local people are reporting that ecological changes (such as changing plant communities, water levels, and use by wildlife) have affected their traditional use of, and connection to, the area.

CHALLENGE: To better understand the current status and trend of the Peace-Athabasca Delta ecosystem and to identify and address the cumulative impacts of external stressors, particularly with respect to water quantity and quality.

Managing Wood Bison

ISSUE: The cattle diseases tuberculosis and brucellosis are present in the park wood bison population. The potential for disease transmission to disease-free wood bison recovery herds and domestic cattle is a major concern. These diseases may interact with other environmental factors (predation, winter severity, and range condition among others) to affect population growth and vigor.

CHALLENGE: To better understand the impact of bovine diseases and other environmental factors on wood bison population dynamics and to minimize

the risk of bovine disease transmission to disease-free wood bison and cattle herds.

Cultural Resources

ISSUE: The cultural resource inventory is incomplete, there is no Cultural Resource Values Statement in place and a formal monitoring system has not been created. The archaeological sites and buildings and structures in the park are identified as threatened and have been rated as poor under the national framework.

CHALLENGE: To advance cultural resource management priorities in light of the size and remoteness of the park and the duty to meaningfully consult with 11 different Aboriginal groups who use the park.

Increasing Visitation and Improving Satisfaction

ISSUE: Local and regional visitors who may represent the bulk of the park's visitation typically bypass the visitor centre and have not been captured by the Visitor Information Program (VIP) survey. Visitation numbers are low under the current enumeration system and there is a need for improved social science to measure park use trends and satisfaction. A promotion and interpretation strategy is also required.

CHALLENGE: Improve the park's Visitor Experience offer with an emphasis on local and regional audiences.

Public Outreach and Education

ISSUE: Park outreach has been opportunistic, using tools such as film, photographers and travel writers. Broad public awareness of Wood Buffalo National Park as a national park and a potential destination for Canadians is required.

CHALLENGE: Raise the profile of Wood Buffalo National Park at a national level while ensuring that the park maintains

a desirable level of public education at the local and regional level. Explore opportunities to engage local Aboriginal groups and expand into regional urban centres such as Yellowknife and Fort McMurray.

3.4 CURRENT PARK AUDIENCES

Park users vary from one national park to another. Park users at Wood Buffalo National Park include: touring public, wilderness adventurers, local and regional residents, happenstance visitors and traditional users. Surveys have shown that visitors come to Wood Buffalo National Park to experience the wildlife and scenery of the northern boreal plains and to learn about nature and the environment. Key attractions in the park include free-roaming wood bison and other animals of the boreal forest, unique salt plains, sinkholes and other karst features, a garter snake hibernaculum (hibernating area), the beautiful aquamarine waters of Pine Lake and the Peace-Athabasca Delta.

Visitation to Wood Buffalo National Park has been stable at about 1,000 to 1,100 visitors per year over the last four years. The average visitation at the visitor reception centres was 1,093 to the Fort Smith centre and 157 to the Fort Chipewyan centre. These figures exclude visits by those who bypass the visitor reception centres. This segment primarily includes regional residents who are visiting for recreation or travel between communities and traditional users.

Based on visitor reception centre records from 2004-2008, 81 per cent of park visitors are from Canada, 11 per cent are international visitors and seven per cent are from the United States, with one per cent unknown. Of the Canadian visitors, 66 per cent are from either Alberta (30%) or the Northwest Territories (36%). As road and water access to the park is uncontrolled there is no method in place to track regional resident use; however, it

is estimated that actual visitation is in the range of 2,500 to 3,800 visitors annually.

The Touring Public

The touring public segment refers to visitors who include Fort Smith and Wood Buffalo National Park on their travel itineraries. These visitors generally arrive in Fort Smith by road. They spend time at the visitor reception centre viewing the exhibits and multi-media presentations and talking with visitor information staff. These visitors are interested in experiencing frontcountry attractions and activities. June to September is the peak season for this segment.

Wilderness Adventurers

Wilderness adventurers enjoy pitting their personal wilderness travel and survival skills against the challenges of travelling in remote and rugged terrain. Most are canoeists on extended trips along the major rivers of the region. Other wilderness adventurers include backcountry hikers, non-local boaters, wilderness skiers and winter campers.

Local and Regional Residents

Local and regional residents are repeat users of the park both for practical purposes (travel between communities) and for recreation and enjoyment. Residents of Fort Smith, Fort Fitzgerald, Hay River, and Fort Resolution can access the park by all-weather road year-round. Residents of Fort Chipewyan access the park via waterways or the winter road. Residents of Fort McMurray can access the park via the Athabasca River, the winter road, or by driving around the park to the northern entrance on an all-weather road - a distance of 1,554 kilometres.

Happenstance Visitors

Happenstance visitors are those who visit the communities of Fort Chipewyan or Fort

Smith for non-park related reasons. They are mostly business travelers from regional centres, including Yellowknife, Hay River, Edmonton or Fort McMurray. This group primarily makes use of the slide shows, exhibits and general information at the visitor reception centres. Time constraints and a lack of transportation often prevent happenstance visitors from visiting the park directly.

Traditional Users

Traditional users (Aboriginal peoples) hunt, trap, fish and pick berries among other activities. They access the park by road, boat, all-terrain vehicle, or snowmobile. Some traditional users have cabins in the park and requests to build cabins are increasing.



Cultural resource excavation © Parks Canada/L. Frank



Cultural resource management workshop © Parks Canada/L. Frank

The park purpose and vision elements articulate the long-term desired state of Wood Buffalo National Park. They give focus to on-going park management efforts and they help foster common understanding and cooperation among those who use, care for, work in and live near the park. The vision elements give expression to the park purpose statement and together they provide the foundation for this management plan.

4.1 PARK PURPOSE

Wood Buffalo National Park represents two different regions: Natural Region 11: The Northern Boreal Plains and Natural Region 12: The Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux. The purpose of Wood Buffalo National Park is to protect outstanding and representative examples of both of these natural regions and to enable present and future generations to continue to appreciate and experience the park's wilderness environments.

4.2 VISION ELEMENTS

A vision statement has not yet been developed for Wood Buffalo National Park. The 1984 management plan contains a park purpose and objectives and the planning team took these into consideration when creating vision elements for the park. Through consultation with local Aboriginal groups and stakeholders these elements

will be shaped into a strong vision for Wood Buffalo National Park.

1. As Canada's largest national park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Wood Buffalo National Park is an integral part of the national park system. A patterned landscape of muskeg, shallow lakes and coniferous and mixed forest, the park exemplifies the vast and pristine sub-arctic landscape of the northern boreal plains, along with small sections of the southern boreal plains and northwestern boreal uplands.
2. The vast wilderness of Wood Buffalo National Park is home to one of nature's laboratories where the processes of fire, hydrology, predation, herbivory and traditional human use shape a dynamic mosaic of habitats, which sustain both rare and representative ecological treasures. The park is home to two Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance and the only wild breeding population of whooping cranes. As the second largest national park in the world, the park maintains biodiversity at all levels: landscape, species and genetic.
3. The expansive undisturbed grass and sedge meadows of the Peace-Athabasca Delta are a sanctuary that provides habitat for the world's largest free-roaming and most genetically diverse herd of wood bison. Home to some of the most

significant waterfowl breeding and staging habitat in North America, the Delta is alive with a diversity of life.

4. Wood Buffalo National Park protects the world's largest free-roaming herd of wood bison in the only place where the predator-prey relationship between wood bison and wolves has remained unbroken over time. The wood bison population is an important part of the park's ecological and cultural landscape, and a key visitor attraction. As the polar bear is to the Canadian arctic the wood bison is to the Canadian boreal forest.

5. The overwhelming size and level of protection enjoyed by Wood Buffalo National Park support an exceptional opportunity for bridging traditional knowledge and western science. Aboriginal peoples of the area continue to maintain their bond and symbiotic relationship with the land, which is defined by its undisturbed ecosystem. These characteristics work together to create a unique setting for the exchange of knowledge and ideas in a move towards a better understanding of natural boreal ecosystems.

6. Wood Buffalo National Park is a storied landscape and cultural activities are alive in the park. Traditional knowledge is not only incorporated and passed down to future generations, but it is also shared with visitors. Personal connection and meaningful interactions bring to life the history and experiences of local Aboriginal peoples so that others have the opportunity to learn, appreciate and understand.

7. Visitors to Wood Buffalo National Park connect with nature, culture, history and people. Visitors can explore the wonders of the salt plains and karst formations, marvel at free-roaming wood bison, relax and play in the aquamarine waters of Pine Lake, camp under the magic of the northern lights, enjoy the

camaraderie of an interpretive event and connect with rich Aboriginal cultural traditions.

8. Wood Buffalo National Park is a unique and welcoming destination that offers visitors a true northern experience year-round. The tranquility of the backcountry offers visitors unparalleled opportunity for adventure and moments of solitude. Paddling down the river or hiking across the land, the park comes to life. Soaring eagles, bobbing pelicans and grazing wood bison herds please the eye and the sound of wolves howling echoes across the landscape as the sun sinks in the northern sky.

9. Wood Buffalo National Park is a cultural landscape valued by local Aboriginal peoples because of their complex and enduring relationship with the land. Wood Buffalo National Park has a respectful and meaningful relationship with local Aboriginal people and in the spirit of working towards a shared vision, they will help to guide the long-term direction and management of park resources; identifying issues and establishing protocols that guide and contribute to the on-going monitoring of cultural resources and ecological integrity.

10. Wood Buffalo National Park will capture the hearts and minds of Canadians as they learn of its role and value within the broader system of national parks. A symbol of the Canadian wilderness, targeted audiences will gain knowledge about the park's natural and cultural heritage and will experience a sense of personal connection to the park.





Salt Plains © Parks Canada/C. MacDonald

Key strategies are a critical integrating tool for management planning. The hierarchy of objectives, targets and actions that supports each key strategy translates the vision elements underpinning the plan into a set of concrete directions (see Figure 1.). Key strategies channel park resources towards overcoming challenges and they focus on the broad approaches needed to integrate the delivery of Parks Canada's three mandate elements: the protection of heritage resources, visitor experiences and public outreach and education. No one key strategy takes precedence over another and each set of objectives, targets and actions clearly establishes park management priorities for the next five years and beyond.

The management plan for Wood Buffalo National Park presents three key strategies:

1. Towards a Shared Vision.
2. Connecting to the Magic of the Boreal Plains.
3. Bison Management in the Greater Wood Buffalo National Park Ecosystem

There are two area management approaches associated with the above key strategies. Area management approaches allow for a more detailed approach to management and planning at a specific location in the park. The area management approaches for Wood Buffalo National Park include:

1. The Peace-Athabasca Delta Area Management Approach.
2. The Pine Lake Area Management Approach.

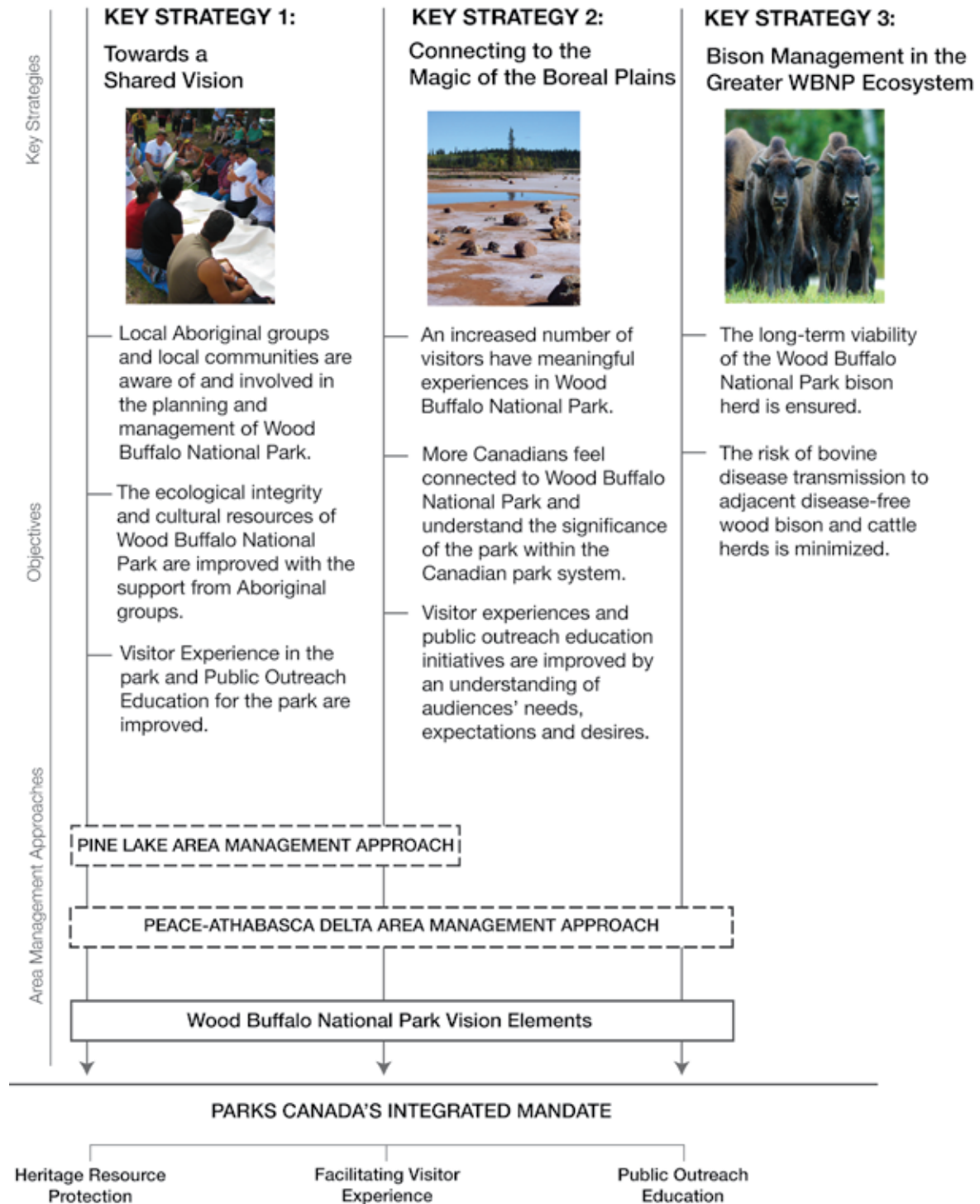


FIGURE 1. The Results Management Framework diagram illustrates the relationship between the park's vision elements, key strategies and area management approaches and their connection to the Parks Canada integrated mandate.

5.1 TOWARDS A SHARED VISION

“Wood Buffalo National Park is a cultural landscape valued by local Aboriginal peoples because of their complex and enduring relationship with the land. Wood Buffalo National Park has a respectful and meaningful relationship with local Aboriginal people and in the spirit of working towards a shared vision, they will help to guide the long-term direction and management of park resources; identifying issues and establishing protocols that guide and contribute to the on-going monitoring of cultural resources and ecological integrity.”

- Vision Element #9



Hand games at Pine Lake Picnic

© Parks Canada/M. Keizer

Building and improving relationships with partners and stakeholders is one of the main objectives of this management plan. The engagement of stakeholders and partners in an open, transparent and equitable manner can foster appreciation and understanding for Wood Buffalo National Park and the system of heritage places administered by Parks Canada.

Towards a Shared Vision focuses on further building relationships with local Aboriginal groups and local stakeholders (individuals, communities, external groups and organizations). Parks Canada will work towards the establishment of a collaborative management structure with local Aboriginal groups that will guide the long-term direction of the park. The nature of management relationships and the level of involvement by each group will be determined on an individual basis. Accountability on behalf of all parties in these decision-making processes will ensure openness and transparency.

Work will also take place to ensure that ecological integrity and cultural resource management will be improved with support from local Aboriginal groups. Aboriginal people have centuries of traditional knowledge, oral traditions and land use practices that have shaped the cultural and physical landscape of Wood Buffalo National Park. To date, the park has invested in cooperative research to record the cultural history of the park. Since 2007, Parks Canada staff members have been working with each Aboriginal group to identify their unique cultural history within the park and the goal is to have a Cultural Resource Values Statement in place in the next four years.

Local communities will also be provided with opportunities to actively and meaningfully participate in management decisions across the full spectrum of the Parks Canada mandate. Communities will have opportunity to be engaged in meaningful and relevant activities, such as volunteering, consultation and partnering. Communication approaches and products will also be produced in collaboration with the communities around Wood Buffalo National Park. Finally, visitor experience in the park and public outreach education efforts for the park will involve both local Aboriginal groups and local communities, as will the creation of a park vision statement.

KEY STRATEGY: TOWARDS A SHARED VISION

OBJECTIVE 1: Local Aboriginal groups and communities are aware of and involved in the planning and management of Wood Buffalo National Park.

TARGETS:

- By 2013 collaboration and information sharing is improved between Wood Buffalo National Park and local communities.
 - Local Aboriginal groups participate in planning and management decisions under a collaborative park management structure by 2015.
 - A representative park vision statement for Wood Buffalo National Park is created by 2015.
-

ACTIONS:

- Build and develop a management structure(s) between Parks Canada and local Aboriginal groups.
- Collaborate with Aboriginal groups and local communities to create a Vision Statement.
- Establish two-way communication approaches and products with communities around Wood Buffalo National Park.
- Engage communities in meaningful and relevant activities, such as volunteering, consultation and partnering.

KEY STRATEGY: TOWARDS A SHARED VISION

OBJECTIVE 2: The ecological integrity and cultural resources of Wood Buffalo National Park are improved with support from local Aboriginal groups.

TARGETS:

- By 2014 a Cultural Resource Values Statement will be in place.
 - A Cultural Resource Management Strategy is established by 2014.
 - By 2015 local Aboriginal groups will be given increased opportunity to engage in park research, monitoring, heritage presentation and public outreach education.
-

ACTIONS:

- Engage local Aboriginal groups in research and monitoring programs.
- Educate the public about the role of Traditional Knowledge in supporting ecological integrity and cultural resources.
- Weave local Aboriginal perspectives and themes into the park's heritage presentation and public education offer.
- Continue documenting the park's cultural history in collaboration with local Aboriginal groups.
- Develop formal partnering relationships to advance park management objectives, including partnering arrangements with northern-based non-governmental organizations.

KEY STRATEGY: TOWARDS A SHARED VISION

OBJECTIVE 3: Visitor experience in the park and public outreach education efforts for the park are improved with the involvement of local Aboriginal groups and local communities.

TARGETS:

- By 2015 visitor experience programs and products incorporate Aboriginal messages developed with support from local Aboriginal groups.
 - By 2015 public outreach education initiatives and products incorporate Aboriginal messages developed with support from local Aboriginal groups.
 - Local communities have increased opportunities to be involved in developing and expanding park products by 2015.
-

ACTIONS:

- Collaborate with local Aboriginal peoples to identify culturally appropriate stories for heritage presentation, visitor experience and public education and outreach.
- Develop partnering arrangements with local Aboriginal groups of Wood Buffalo National Park.
- Establish a baseline to measure awareness of local Aboriginal culture in Wood Buffalo National Park.
- Work with communities around the park to expand partnering opportunities and incorporate Wood Buffalo National Park into their tourism offer.
- Establish formal and informal working relationships with third parties for the enhancement of visitor experience and public education initiatives.
- Work with the Parks Canada Service Centre to develop social science to measure the significance of local Aboriginal culture in Wood Buffalo National Park amongst survey respondents.

5.2 CONNECTING TO THE MAGIC OF THE BOREAL PLAINS

“Visitors to Wood Buffalo National Park connect with nature, culture, history and people. Visitors can explore the wonders of the salt plains and karst formations, marvel at free-roaming wood bison, relax and play in the aquamarine waters of Pine Lake, camp under the magic of the northern lights, enjoy the camaraderie of an interpretive event and connect with rich Aboriginal cultural traditions.”

- Vision Element # 7



Grosbeak Lake © Parks Canada/ C. Hval

As Canada’s largest national park and a World Heritage Site, Wood Buffalo National Park is an integral part of the national park system. A patterned landscape of muskeg, shallow lakes and coniferous and mixed forest, the park exemplifies the vast and pristine subarctic landscape of the northern and southern boreal plains.

Wood Buffalo National Park is a unique and welcoming destination that offers visitors a true northern experience year-round. Visitor surveys reveal that 65% of visitors are very satisfied with their visit, exceeding the national Agency target of 50%. This trend continues and 93% of park visitors report being satisfied with their overall visit as a recreational experience. This result compares favourably with the proposed Agency target of 90%.

The park’s most recent survey collected data for two newly established national targets and positive feedback was received from visitors. A total of 96% of visitors responded that Wood Buffalo National

Park is meaningful to them, which is above the national Agency target of 85%. Finally, 92% of visitors enjoyed their visit to the park, which is above the national Agency target of 90%.

As a remote wilderness park there are challenges to increasing awareness of the park as a unique and desirable tourism destination. Connecting to the Magic of the Boreal Plains will position the park as a dynamic destination that inspires discovery: where visitors can experience the natural wonders, unique wildlife viewing opportunities and cultural diversity of the boreal forest. The thrust of this key strategy will nurture understanding. Visitors and audiences will have an improved understanding and awareness of Wood Buffalo National Park and staff within the field unit will have an improved understanding of the needs, expectations and desires of park visitors and Canadian and international audiences.

Actions under Connecting to the Magic of the Boreal Plains will attract both new and repeat visitors and ensure that an increased number of visitors have meaningful experiences in the park. Visitors will have greater opportunities to connect to the boreal plains through traditional knowledge projects and ecological and cultural monitoring activities. Management actions will also increase the park’s relevance to non-visiting Canadians. This will ensure that more Canadians feel connected to Wood Buffalo National Park and that they understand the significance of the park within the Canadian park system and internationally.

KEY STRATEGY: CONNECTING TO THE MAGIC OF THE BOREAL PLAINS

OBJECTIVE 1: An increased number of visitors have meaningful experiences in Wood Buffalo National Park

TARGETS:

- Visitor enjoyment increases to 95% by 2014.
 - Increase park visitation to 5,000/annum by 2015.
 - By 2015 visitors have increased opportunities to connect to the boreal plains through Traditional Knowledge projects and ecological research and monitoring activities.
-

ACTIONS:

- Complete Visitor Information Program survey in 2011 and 2014.
- Develop a Visitor Experience Plan by 2012.
- Collaborate with local Aboriginal peoples to identify appropriate cultural stories for heritage presentation.
- Develop a promotional strategy by 2012.
- Seek out appropriate partnering arrangements to achieve cross promotion.
- Identify and target media outlets that will reach target audiences for promotion.
- Invest in promotions at the intersection of major travel routes and in key trip planning sources.
- Work with Service Centre and National Office to establish social science measures and measure invisible visits.
- Diversify and improve visitor experience opportunities, including shoulder season products.
- Improve key visitor facilities and ensure their on-going maintenance.

KEY STRATEGY: CONNECTING TO THE MAGIC OF THE BOREAL PLAINS

OBJECTIVE 2: More Canadians feel connected to Wood Buffalo National Park and understand the significance of the park within the Canadian park system and internationally.

TARGETS:

- By 2011 a baseline for awareness of Wood Buffalo National Park is established using results from the 2009 National Survey of Canadians.
 - Opportunities to be engaged and support park operations through outreach initiatives are increased by 2015.
 - By 2015 the results of ecological and cultural research and monitoring activities are incorporated into public outreach education initiatives.
-

ACTIONS:

- Develop a public outreach education strategy to support the Boreal Plains theme by 2011.
- Integrate ecological and cultural themes into public outreach education products.
- Review and revise the park website by 2011 and update annually.
- Develop an internal and external communications plan by 2011.
- Promote awareness of Wood Buffalo National Park as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Identify and target media outlets that will reach target audiences for increased Wood Buffalo National Park awareness.

KEY STRATEGY: CONNECTING TO THE MAGIC OF THE BOREAL PLAINS

OBJECTIVE 3: Visitor experience and public outreach education initiatives are improved by an understanding of audiences' needs, expectations and desires.

TARGETS:

- Explorer Quotient tools will be used to understand visitor interests and needs by 2012.
 - Targeted public outreach education products and initiatives are based on National Survey results by 2012.
 - Visitor satisfaction increases to 95% by 2014.
-

ACTIONS:

- Establish a baseline for regional satisfaction levels by 2012.
- Identify techniques to survey the regional population beyond normal practices.
- Develop effective communication techniques with partners and stakeholders.
- Work with Service Centre to interpret national survey results in a manner meaningful to Wood Buffalo National Park.

5.3 BISON MANAGEMENT IN THE GREATER WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK ECOSYSTEM.

“Wood Buffalo National Park protects the world’s largest free-roaming herd of wood bison in the only place where the predator-prey relationship between wood bison and wolves has remained unbroken over time. The wood bison population is an important part of the park’s ecological and cultural landscape, and a key visitor attraction. As the polar bear is to the Canadian arctic the wood bison is to the Canadian boreal forest.” -

Vision Element #4



Bison calves © Parks Canada/J. McKinnon

Wood bison are the largest land mammals in North America. Historical estimates suggest that there were once over 168,000 wood bison in Canada. Heavy hunting and severe winters are believed to be the main causes for the historical decline of the wood bison population and they are classified as a threatened species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Today, the wood bison population in Canada is estimated at around 10,000 animals and Wood Buffalo National Park protects fully half of these animals in the largest free-roaming and self-regulating wood bison herd in the world.

In the 1920s, 6,600 plains bison were transferred from Buffalo National Park in Wainwright, Alberta to Wood Buffalo National Park. These wood bison were infected with the cattle diseases tuberculosis (Tb) and brucellosis (Br), which introduced disease into the park’s wood bison population. These diseases continue to persist within the greater

Wood Buffalo National Park wood bison population and they may interact with other environmental factors (predation, winter severity and range condition, amongst others) to affect population growth and vigour.

Despite the presence of bovine diseases, the park wood bison population has been increasing since 1999 (to about 5,000 animals). This indicates that more information is needed about the impact of disease and other environmental factors on wood bison population dynamics. As well, the potential for disease transmission is a major concern for the Government of Alberta and the livestock industry. The Bison Management in the Greater Wood Buffalo National Park Ecosystem key strategy will address both of these issues.

An integrated program of monitoring, research and management will be delivered under this key strategy. This program will improve our understanding of wood bison population dynamics and support the long-term viability of the Wood Buffalo National Park wood bison herd. Parks Canada will collaborate with partners, including the Government of Alberta, to develop and implement a disease containment strategy. This will minimize the risk of disease transmission to adjacent disease-free wood bison recovery herds and domestic cattle.

Actions under this key strategy will also focus on the role of wood bison in Canada’s northern identity. The wood bison represent an unbroken link to Canada’s

Aboriginal history and wilderness heritage and recognition of their importance contributed to the World Heritage Site designation. Public outreach education initiatives will build on the strong links between wood bison and local Aboriginal culture, as well as Wood Buffalo National Park's role in protecting and presenting these impressive animals.

Visitor experience initiatives will harness opportunities around the cultural and natural history of wood bison in Wood Buffalo National Park. Wood bison grant visitors a unique wildlife viewing opportunity and their presence on the landscape provides the park with a dynamic learning tool that can facilitate the creation of distinctive and memorable experiences.

KEY STRATEGY: BISON MANAGEMENT IN THE GREATER WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK ECOSYSTEM

OBJECTIVE 1: The long-term viability of the Wood Buffalo National Park wood bison herd is ensured.

TARGETS:

- Maintain a population of at least 4,000 wood bison.
 - By 2012 wood bison-specific public outreach education products will be developed to deliver to the local region and the Montreal-Toronto-Vancouver communities.
 - By 2014, at least 60% of surveyed visitors consider that they learned about the cultural and biological significance of the protection of wood bison in Wood Buffalo National Park.
-

ACTIONS:

- Continue to monitor Wood Buffalo National Park herd size and composition.
- Implement a research program to improve our understanding of wood bison population dynamics (including the interaction of disease with predation and other environmental factors), movement and habitat use.
- Work with Partners to bridge traditional knowledge with western science in wood bison management and communication strategies.
- Integrate wood bison themes into interpretive products.
- Identify potential partners, including local Aboriginal groups, government, universities and industry.

**KEY STRATEGY: BISON MANAGEMENT IN THE GREATER WOOD BUFFALO
NATIONAL PARK ECOSYSTEM**

OBJECTIVE 2: The risk of transmission of bovine diseases to adjacent disease-free wood bison and cattle herds is minimized.

TARGETS:

- Disease transmission from wood bison in the park to adjacent wood bison or cattle herds does not occur.
-

ACTIONS:

- Identify and collaborate with partners to develop a disease containment strategy, including the Government of Alberta.
- Develop and implement a disease containment strategy by 2012.
- Develop a communication strategy to support implementation of the containment strategy.

6.0 AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACHES



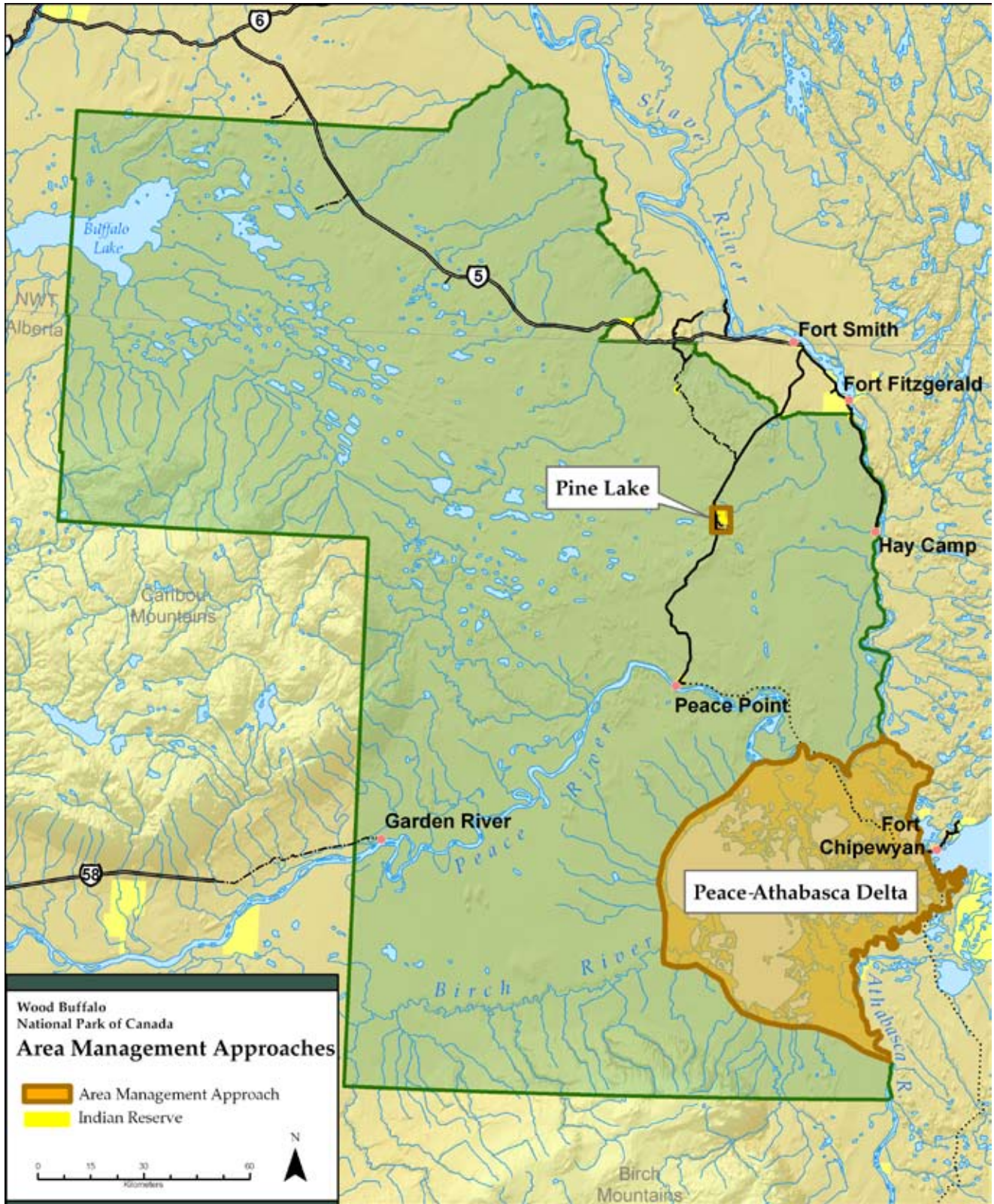
Rainbow Lakes trail © Parks Canada/J. Jaque

An area management approach is written for a specific geographic location in a national park. These approaches present strategies for sections of the park that require more detailed direction beyond the general framework of the management plan. An area management approach reflects Parks Canada's integrated mandate and its objectives address resource protection, visitor experience opportunities and public education.

There are two area management approaches for Wood Buffalo National Park: the Peace-Athabasca Delta Area Management Approach and the Pine Lake Land Area Management Approach. The Peace-Athabasca Delta Area Management Approach addresses the challenges of maintaining, or in some cases improving, the delta's ecological integrity and cultural value. This work will be carried out in cooperation with Aboriginal partners, stakeholders, government and industry. The Pine Lake Area Management Approach promotes compatible land-use and development for reserve and park lands at Pine Lake.



Pine Lake picnic © S. Hunt



MAP 4. Area management approaches in Wood Buffalo National Park.

6.1 PEACE-ATHABASCA DELTA AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH: THE LIVING DELTA



Peace-Athabasca Delta © Parks Canada/J. McKinnon

The Peace-Athabasca Delta is a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance and one of the largest inland deltas in the world. The rivers flowing into the Peace-Athabasca Delta drain 600,000 square kilometres of northern British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan and the delta is one of the most important waterfowl nesting and staging areas in North America. Eighty percent of the delta lies within Wood Buffalo National Park and it is therefore an indicator of the park's ecological integrity.

The biological productivity and diversity of the delta depends upon regular inputs of water and nutrients. The Peace, Athabasca and Birch rivers and Lake Athabasca

feed the delta and the impacts of external stressors and climate change on water quantity and quality are of concern. These changes also impact the delta's cultural value. The Peace-Athabasca Delta is an important area for Aboriginal groups. Local people are reporting that changing plant communities, water levels and use by wildlife have affected their traditional use of, and connection to, the area. Actions under this area management approach will address these challenges in full.

The Peace-Athabasca Delta area management approach will deliver an integrated program of ecological monitoring and research and visitor experience and public outreach education initiatives. The area management approach will result in a better understanding of the naturally dynamic and variable delta ecosystem. It will address the challenges of maintaining, or in some cases improving, the delta's ecological integrity and cultural value, in cooperation with Aboriginal partners, stakeholders, government and industry. Management actions will cultivate stewardship for the Peace-Athabasca Delta, as well as public appreciation and understanding. The delta remains one of the park's key visitor attractions and opportunities for visitor experiences will be promoted and enhanced. Public outreach education initiatives will also be designed to cultivate a connection to the delta by those who are unable to visit.

The Peace-Athabasca Delta area management approach links all three key strategies: *Connecting to the Magic of the Boreal Plains*, *Towards a Shared Vision* and *Bison Management in the Greater Wood Buffalo National Park Ecosystem*.



MAP 5. Peace-Athabasca Delta area management approach.

PEACE-ATHABASCA DELTA AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH: THE LIVING DELTA

OBJECTIVE 1: The Peace-Athabasca Delta's ecological integrity and cultural value is better understood, improved and maintained..

TARGETS:

- By March 2012 a State of the Peace-Athabasca Delta Assessment will be completed.
- An Area Management Approach to improve and maintain the delta's ecological integrity and cultural value will be developed by 2015.
- The delta monitoring program is fully developed by 2015.

ACTIONS:

- Engage Aboriginal partners, government, industry and universities to facilitate ecological and cultural monitoring, research and management in the Peace-Athabasca Delta.
- Identify and implement required suite of monitoring measures as part of the ecological integrity monitoring plan.
- Identify and implement required suite of management actions and monitor their effectiveness.

PEACE-ATHABASCA DELTA AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH: THE LIVING DELTA

OBJECTIVE 2: Canadians feel a sense of stewardship and support for the Peace-Athabasca Delta through increased awareness.

TARGETS:

- A methodology is established to measure the number of Canadians that appreciate the ecological and cultural significance of the Peace-Athabasca Delta by 2012.
- By 2013 a suite of public outreach education products support the awareness and protection of the Peace-Athabasca Delta.

ACTIONS:

- Identify key messages, key audiences and appropriate communication tools with Parks Canada internal units (National Office, Western & Northern Service Centre, SWNWT Field Unit and WBNP units working in Resource Conservation, Visitor Experience and External Relations), Aboriginal groups and research partners.
- Communicate the importance of the Peace-Athabasca Delta to Canadians at the local, regional and national level with formal public outreach education programs.
- Produce a comprehensive internal and external communications plan by 2011.
- Generate feedback from Canadians on the value and importance of the Peace-Athabasca Delta and its protection.

PEACE-ATHABASCA DELTA AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH: THE LIVING DELTA

OBJECTIVE 3: Visitors feel a sense of connection through meaningful experiences to the delta's natural and cultural heritage.

TARGETS:

- By 2014 85% of surveyed visitors understand the cultural and biological significance of the protection of Peace-Athabasca Delta in Wood Buffalo National Park.
 - Baseline data will determine the capacity for visitation to the Peace-Athabasca Delta by 2014.
-

ACTIONS:

- Work with stakeholders and Aboriginal groups to develop personal and non-personal interpretation for the Peace-Athabasca Delta.
- Develop a staffing strategy for guided programming in the Peace-Athabasca Delta.
- Build relationships with Aboriginal groups and interested stakeholders to participate in learning activities in the Peace-Athabasca Delta.
- Diversify and increase the visitor experience opportunities to connect to the Peace-Athabasca Delta.
- Establish baseline data to determine the delta's threshold for visitation.

6.2 PINE LAKE AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH



Aquamarine waters at Pine Lake

© Parks Canada/J. McKinnon

The aquamarine waters of Pine Lake are a landmark at Wood Buffalo National Park. The lake is formed by several sinkholes that have merged together and it is fed by underground springs. Pine Lake is surrounded by mixed wood boreal forest and it is a highly-prized community recreation asset.

The land surrounding Pine Lake is shared amongst three groups: Parks Canada, Salt River First Nation and Smith's Landing First Nation. Treaty Land Entitlement Agreements grant both First Nations a parcel of land on the east side of Pine Lake. These lands, which abut one another at the edge of the lake, are accessible via foot around the lake's perimeter or by boat across the lake; no development at either site currently exists.

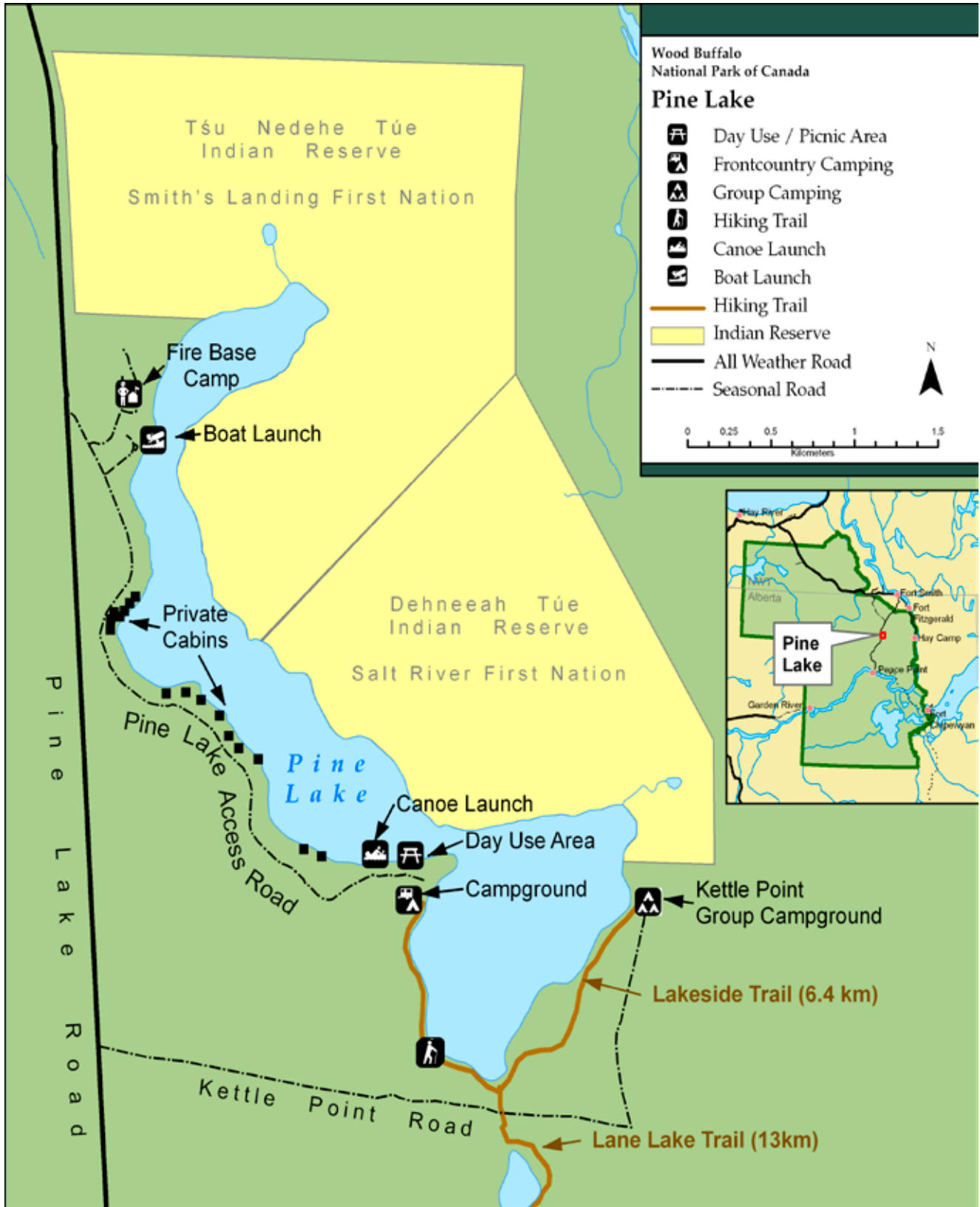
On the west side of Pine Lake, Parks Canada land accommodates the only serviced campground in the park. This facility receives moderate use throughout the summer months; serving primarily

local users and, on occasion, park visitors from more distant points. Associated with the campground is an interpretive theatre and nearby is a day-use area which can accommodate 10 groups. At the south end of the lake, is a group camp accessible via a low-grade road, which can accommodate 50 people.

At the northwest edge of the lake are park cabins with a public parking area, and boat launch facility. Directly north of these facilities, is the Parks Canada Fire Base Camp. Other facilities at Pine Lake include 16 private cottages situated on the west shore of the lake on Crown lands. The cottages are owned by residents of Fort Smith but the lot tenancies are currently in lease over-holding situations with the Crown.

The purpose of the Pine Lake Area Management Approach is to provide Wood Buffalo National Park, Smith's Landing First Nation and the Salt River First Nation with a plan that promotes compatible land-use and development for reserve and park lands at Pine Lake. The Pine Lake Area Management Approach will provide opportunities for sustainable land-use that meet the needs and requirements of the Smith's Landing First Nation and the Salt River First Nation as defined in their Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement and Parks Canada as defined under the *Canada National Parks Act*.

The Pine Lake Area Management Approach links to the key strategies: *Towards a Shared Vision* and *Connecting to the Magic of the Boreal Plains*.



MAP 6. Pine Lake area management approach.

PINE LAKE AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH

OBJECTIVE 1: A plan that promotes compatible land-use and development around Pine Lake is created for Wood Buffalo National Park, Smith's Landing First Nation and the Salt River First Nation.

TARGETS:

- A Pine Lake Land Use Advisory Committee will be formed by 2011.
 - An area management approach for sustainable land-use at Pine Lake is in place by March 2012.
 - By 2013 the visitor experience offer at Pine Lake is improved.
 - Maintain and improve the ecological integrity of the Pine Lake area by 2015.
-

ACTIONS:

- Parks Canada, Salt River and Smith's Landing First Nation shall each appoint members to the Pine lake Land Use Advisory Committee.
- Aboriginal groups and Parks Canada will work co-operatively in relation to land use and management issues affecting park land and Aboriginal land at Pine Lake.
- Capitalize on existing resources at Pine Lake for further development and enhancement of visitor experience, including the development of new programs.
- Continue to develop and implement the ecological monitoring program for Pine Lake.



North Loop hike © Parks Canada/J. Jaque

Parks Canada is committed to enhancing public involvement in the protection and presentation of Canada’s nationally significant heritage places. The Agency’s success in safeguarding these areas for future generations will depend on its ability to: fully engage Aboriginal groups and Canadians through a sense of connection to heritage places; to share its passion for the use and enjoyment of these special places; and, to build commitment to long-term ecological and commemorative objectives.

Canadians with an interest in Wood Buffalo National Park will have increased opportunity to be involved with Parks Canada. Future opportunities for meaningful involvement may include volunteering, consultation and partnering arrangements. Key stakeholders with an interest in Wood Buffalo National Park include the following:

- Surrounding communities (Fort Smith, Fort Chipewyan, Garden River, Hay River, Fort Resolution, Fort McMurray, Fort McKay, Fort Vermilion, Fox Lake, Jean D’or Prairie, Fort Fitzgerald and High Level) and their local governments;
- Regional/provincial/territorial organizations including the Government of the Northwest Territories, the Government of Alberta, industry and the academic community;

- Federal departments such as Environment Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Agriculture Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada;
- Environmental non-governmental organizations including CPAWS (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society) Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Sierra Club;
- Local businesses and tourism associations; and,
- General public and visitors.

7.1 CONSULTING WITH ABORIGINAL GROUPS

Canada’s special relationship with Aboriginal peoples is set out and defined by *The Constitution Act, 1982*, legal statutes, and courts of law. Because of this relationship, Parks Canada considers Aboriginal peoples not as stakeholders but as privileged partners. This relationship has resulted in the cooperative management of over half our national parks through arrangements with surrounding Aboriginal groups.

The need for partnering and collaboration is demonstrated by the firm statements that appear in the Parks Canada Corporate Plan and other documents. Parks Canada’s

Guiding Principles and Operational Policies acknowledges this special relationship with Aboriginal peoples, particularly with respect to the exercise of certain Aboriginal or treaty rights in some national parks or national park reserves. Most of our national parks and national parks reserves already have some form of engagement process with surrounding Aboriginal communities and it is our responsibility that this process is inclusive, meaningful and built on the principles of respect and trust.

7.2 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Wood Buffalo National Park has relationships with 11 local Aboriginal groups in northeast Alberta and the southeast portion of the Northwest Territories. These groups include: Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Fort Smith Metis Association, Little Red River Cree Nation, Fort Chipewyan Metis Association Local 125, K'átl'odeeche First Nation, Hay River Metis Association, Deninu'Kue First Nation, Salt River First Nation, Smith's Landing First Nation and the Fort Resolution Metis Association.

Wood Buffalo National Park has increasingly sought to engage Aboriginal groups on either an individual or collective basis where opportunities have occurred or circumstances have dictated. Projects that demonstrate how the park is shifting to new ways of working with local Aboriginal groups include:

Resource Protection - Ecological Integrity

→ The Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring program is a collaborative attempt to assess the state of the delta ecosystem. Although at an early stage, this program will use Aboriginal traditional knowledge in the monitoring and management of one of the park's most complex ecosystems.

- In 1999–2000, study areas and a methodology for assessing moose distribution and abundance in the park were established through a series of meetings with local Aboriginal groups.
- A collaborative process to develop a set of game regulations for the park has been underway since 2006 (see 7.3 below).

Visitor Experience

- Parks Canada regularly participates in local Aboriginal events in the communities surrounding the park, as well as in tourism marketing events in Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

Cultural Resource Management

- Since 2007, Parks Canada staff members have been working with the K'átl'odeeche First Nation in the documentation of cultural sites around the Buffalo Lake area in the northwest corner of the park. Work has also begun on identifying and documenting all the cultural resources associated with Sweetgrass Station.
- In 2009, Smith's Landing First Nation trained Parks Canada staff in their methodology for place name research so that collaborative place name research could be conducted in the park.;
- Parks Canada is working with each local Aboriginal group to identify their unique park cultural history. Workshops started with Dene and Métis groups in Fort Smith in the fall of 2007.
- Parks Canada has been working with Smith's Landing and Salt River First Nations to develop a joint land use plan for the area around Pine Lake, a popular destination in the middle of the park.

7.3 WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK GAME REGULATIONS

Since July 2006, Parks Canada has been engaged in a collaborative review of the Wood Buffalo National Park Game Regulations with traditional users from all of the groups surrounding the park. The review, which is the most comprehensive review since the game regulations were last updated in 1978, has involved representatives from all of the Treaty 8 and Métis groups in the five communities surrounding the park.

Group representatives have met six times to discuss the new game regulations. Forums have been held to discuss both the desired approach and a set of guiding principles for the development of the regulations. The design of the Wood Buffalo National Park Game Regulations is an on-going process and Aboriginal groups and Parks Canada continue to build a partnering agreement approach based on mutual recognition, respect and trust. The review of the game regulations was completed in 2009 before being legally drafted by Justice Canada. Aboriginal partners will continue to be consulted on these proposed regulations.

7.4 MANAGEMENT PLANNING CONSULTATIONS

The management planning cycle is one of many opportunities to involve stakeholders and Aboriginal peoples in the planning and operation of heritage places. One of the objectives of this plan is to build relationships with local Aboriginal groups and local communities and determine their values, views and aspirations before moving forward with any changes in Wood Buffalo National Park.

This was the first interaction with Parks Canada for some members of local Aboriginal groups. Others had met with the Park before, but were new to the park management planning process. Aboriginal groups were invited to a series of meetings in January that introduced

the Parks Canada management planning process and explored how groups want to be involved in the future management of Wood Buffalo National Park. The values, views and aspirations of Canadians are also reflected in the park management planning process and open house events for the general public were held in February 2010 in the communities of Fort Smith, Fort Chipewyan and Hay River.



Management plan consultations

© Parks Canada/M. Keizer



Shore of the Slave River © Parks Canada/C. MacDonald

Parks Canada’s zoning system provides a means to reflect principles of ecological integrity by protecting park lands and resources and ensuring a minimum of human-induced change. The zoning system classifies areas in national parks according to their need for protection and it establishes limits on what uses can occur in the park, including the suitability of these areas for visitor activities.

8.1 PARK MANAGEMENT ZONES

The zoning system has five categories: special preservation, wilderness, natural environment, outdoor recreation and park services. The Wood Buffalo National Park zoning plan gives recognition to outstanding natural and cultural resources, contributes to protection of the wilderness qualities of the park and its ecosystems and provides opportunities for visitor access and use of the park.

Zone I – Special Preservation (10% of the park)

Zone I lands deserve special preservation because they contain or support unique, threatened, or endangered natural or cultural features, or are among the best examples of features that represent a natural region. Preservation is the key consideration. Motorized access is not permitted. Visitor access is strictly controlled.

There are six Special Preservation areas designated for Wood Buffalo National Park.

1. **The Whooping Crane Nesting Area:** This area is the only natural nesting ground of the cranes left in existence. All of the prime habitat that is identified at this time will remain under active management. If the birds expand their nesting grounds beyond the area boundary, that boundary will be altered to include additional area.
2. **The North Arm of Lake Claire in the Peace-Athabasca Delta:** The area is a prime wood bison-grazing and calving ground and the vast sedge-meadows are the largest undisturbed grasslands left in North America.
3. **The Salt Plains:** The boreal salt plains are aesthetically, ecologically and geologically unique in Canada. Disjunct saline plants, wood bison grazing areas and waterfowl nesting and staging habitat add to the significance of this park landscape.
4. **The Karst Landscape:** The assemblage of karst features in the Needle Lake area include the largest sinkholes in the park. This area is the best representation of a widespread and highly significant park landscape.

5. Darough Creek Meadows: These meadows are important grazing and calving grounds for wood bison north of the Peace River.

6. Upland Tundra of the Caribou Mountains: The spruce-willow-lichen tundra on the upper surface of the Caribou Mountains, rising 500 metres above the surface of the rest of the park, is a unique landscape within the national park system. No other tundra environment is protected by parks on the interior plains.

Zone II – Wilderness (86% of the park)

Class II Wilderness Zoning has as its basic purpose the preservation of large areas that are good examples of the ecosystems of the park and will be maintained in a wilderness state. Motorized use is not permitted, although strictly controlled air access to remote areas may be permitted. Parks Canada's Guiding Principles and Operating Policies state that the majority of a national park is to be designated Zone II. The perpetuation of ecosystems with minimal human interference is the key consideration and Zone II areas offer opportunities for visitors to experience the wilderness qualities of the park environment. In keeping with Parks Canada's policy, most of Wood Buffalo National Park is designated as Zone II.

Zone III – Natural Environment (3% of the park)

Zone III areas facilitate visitor experience of the park's natural and cultural heritage through outdoor recreational activities that require minimal services and facilities of a rustic nature. Zone III applies to areas where visitor use requires facilities that exceed the acceptable standards for Zone II. Remote, designated campgrounds in the park, if established, will be designated as Zone III because of the requirement for a basic level of facilities. This intermediate level zone is applied to portions of the water surfaces of Lake Claire and Lake

Mamawi in the Peace-Athabasca Delta and the corridor from the Peace River to the Sweetgrass station area on the north margins of the Delta. Zone III provides for controlled motorized access.

Zone IV – Outdoor Recreation (1% of the park)

Zone IV accommodates a broad range of opportunities for understanding, appreciating and enjoying the park's heritage. Essential services and facilities are provided in ways that have the least possible impact on the ecological integrity of the park. Direct access by motorized vehicle is permitted. Outdoor recreation zones in the park include all major rivers and channels, the Highway 5 corridor, the winter road, the Pine Lake recreation area, the Peace Point road terminus and boat launch area, the salt plains viewpoint and the Parsons Lake and Peace River road corridors.

Pine Lake Cottages

Wood Buffalo National Park, like many other national parks in western Canada, contains a formally surveyed cottage sub-division (registered as Canada Lands Surveys Records Plan Number 50101). This subdivision, located on the west side of Pine Lake, was surveyed in 1959 and cottage lots were put up for lease in 1961. The subdivision currently consists of 16 cottages. The area is accessible by an existing road and a number of beach and shoreline areas within the cottage subdivision are high quality in terms of recreation capability.

Pine Lake is defined as a Resort Subdivision as per Schedule II of the Lease and License of Occupation Regulations and it is designated Zone IV. Parks Canada will provide for the continued use of the cottages; however, tenure arrangements need to be addressed. In 1992, the Pine Lake Subdivision leases were put into over-holding upon expiry, until such time as a

new management plan was put in place. In 1995, the 16 cottage leases were again put into over-holding and the over-holding status expired in 2005. Park staff will address the issue of tenure arrangements in 2010. In the interim, the cottage leases will be brought out of expiration and back into over-holding status. As well, an appraisal of the lands has been conducted to facilitate an updated rent review.

Zone V – Park Services (0% of the park)

Zone V classification applies to communities in national parks with a concentration of visitor services, support facilities, and commercial enterprises. Major park operational and administrative functions are also located centrally to minimize impact on ecological integrity. There is no Zone V designation in Wood Buffalo National Park.

8.2. SENSITIVE SITES DESIGNATION

Parks Canada's policy provides for the designation of Culturally and Environmentally Sensitive Sites to complement the five zoning designations. This designation applies to small areas that contain significant and sensitive resources that require special protection or management. A designation can be applied within any of the five zones. Specific guidelines for each sensitive area will define visitor use and resource management strategies. Because of the sensitivity of these areas and their potential to change location, they are not shown on maps.

Environmentally Sensitive Sites

Environmentally sensitive sites (ESS) in the park include the Birch River great blue heron rookery, colonial gull and tern nesting site on Lake Claire, red-sided garter snake hibernaculæ and caves where bats overwinter. The park is home to several peregrine falcon nesting sites, one of Canada's species at risk. A significant

bed of fish scale fossils that is used by geologists as an important stratigraphic indicator occurs at a point on the slope of the Caribou Mountains. Its precise location is not mapped due to its susceptibility to disturbance. These environmentally sensitive sites listed above are referenced in the 1984 management plan.

Culturally Sensitive Sites

Culturally sensitive sites (CSS) include features that may be considered sacred by Aboriginal groups, such as medicine wheels and burials, and cultural resources that require special actions for their protection. Wood Buffalo National Park is home to a rich collection of cultural resources, which range from archaeological sites to oral and recorded human history. Significant archaeological resources are located at Peace Point and Lake One. The Peace Point site has wide significance as a deeply stratified prehistoric campsite complex. The Lake One Dune site has yielded numerous artefacts, many with diagnostic characteristics.

8.3. NON-CONFORMING USES

Non-conforming uses are those uses that are permitted but are not in keeping with national park standards and values. They may be designated where unique circumstances require the recognition and permitting of exceptional activities. Non-conforming uses are usually short-term and guided by prescriptions that set out the time frame and special circumstances that apply to this designation. The key objective is to ensure that these uses do not become permanent, by recognizing them as temporary and conditional. The following are identified as non-conforming uses.

Park Operations and Administrative Activities

The zoning directive specifies that only in exceptional circumstances involving public safety and resource protection, and then only upon approval of the Superintendent,

can park administrative activities occur that are non-conforming to a zone. In Wood Buffalo National Park there are two operational activities which are necessary for effective park management but which do not conform to conditions of public use established for the zone designated.

Motorized Access by Park Staff in Wilderness Areas

i) Resource harvesting by Aboriginal communities follows a rights based approach and it is carried out in the park subject to regulations. Resource harvesting is not affected by the zoning plan and it is outside the purview of the national parks zoning system. Parks Canada staff members monitor resource harvesting to ensure effective understanding, management and communication of the activity. It does so in cooperation with the Aboriginal community. Park patrols are conducted using various modes of transport including aircraft, over-snow vehicles, airboats and conventional watercraft. Patrols occur in a number of zones and special provisions permit these activities for the period of the plan.

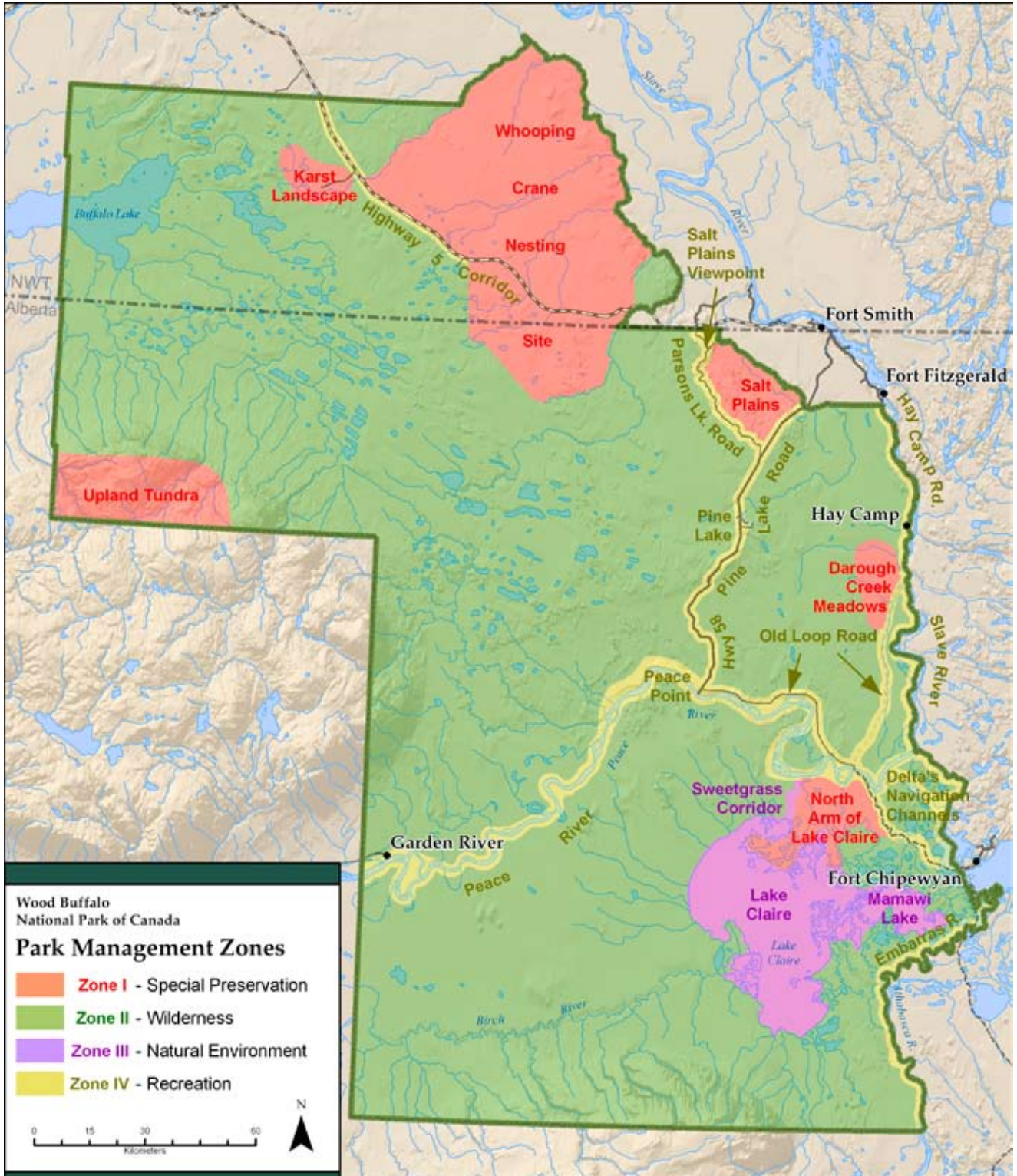
ii) Parks Canada staff members require access throughout the park for infrastructure development and maintenance. Operational and visitor assets are located in a number of zones and will on occasion require motorized access. Without special provisions in the zoning plan, motorized access would be considered a non-conforming use in Zones I, II, and III. This provision will sanction these activities for the period of the plan. It is provided in recognition of the size of the area that must be covered to reach park operations and visitor assets and provide an appropriate measure of visitor safety and satisfaction.

Forest Fire Fighting Activities

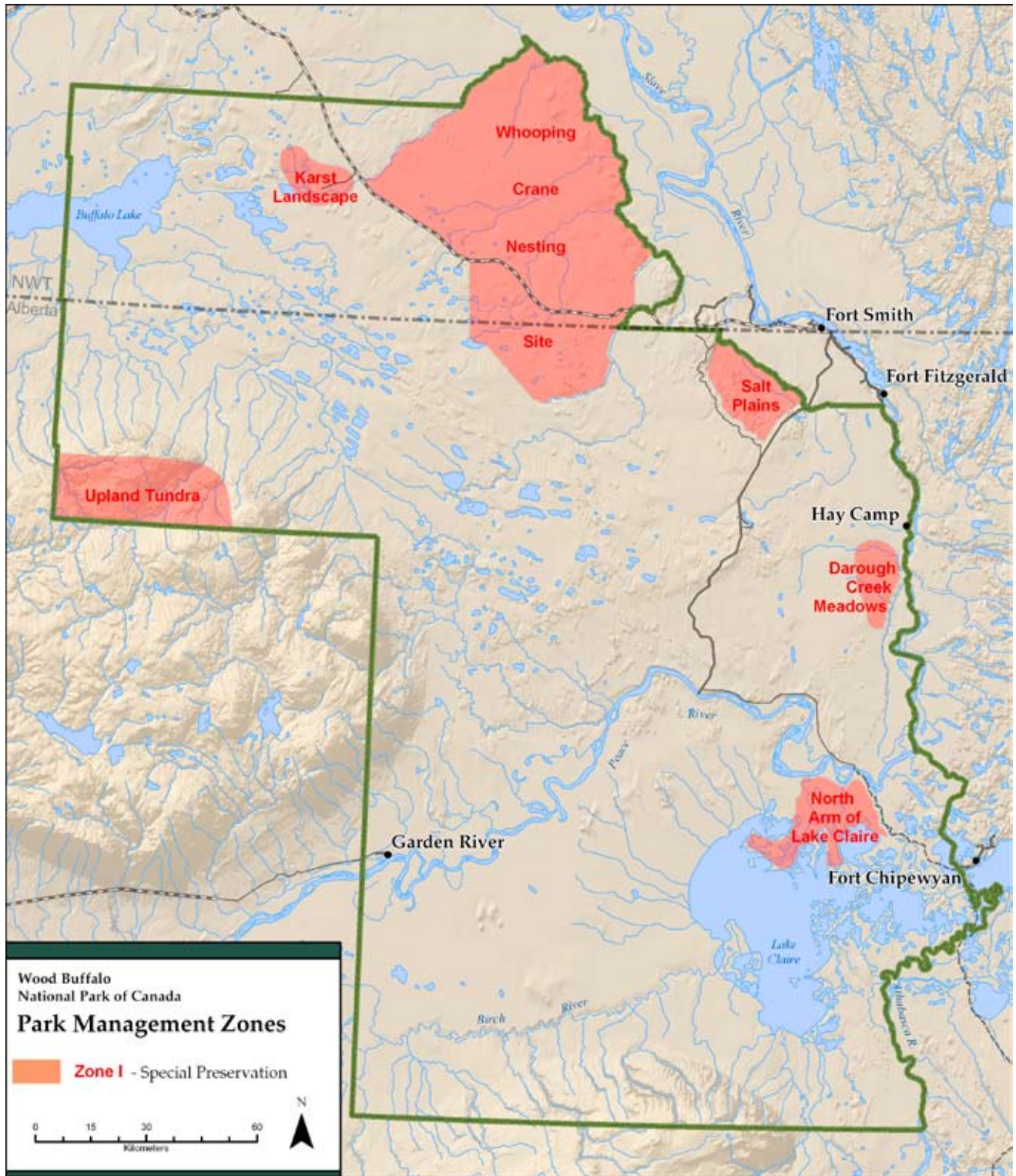
Fire management activities have equipment and access requirements that involve motorized vehicles that may be considered non-conforming to zone one, two and three. Wood Buffalo National Park's fire management organization, policies and planned general responses for wildfires and prescribed fires are detailed in the Wood Buffalo National Park Fire Management Plan. The plan directs both the use and control of fire to achieve specific management and protection objectives in Wood Buffalo National Park.



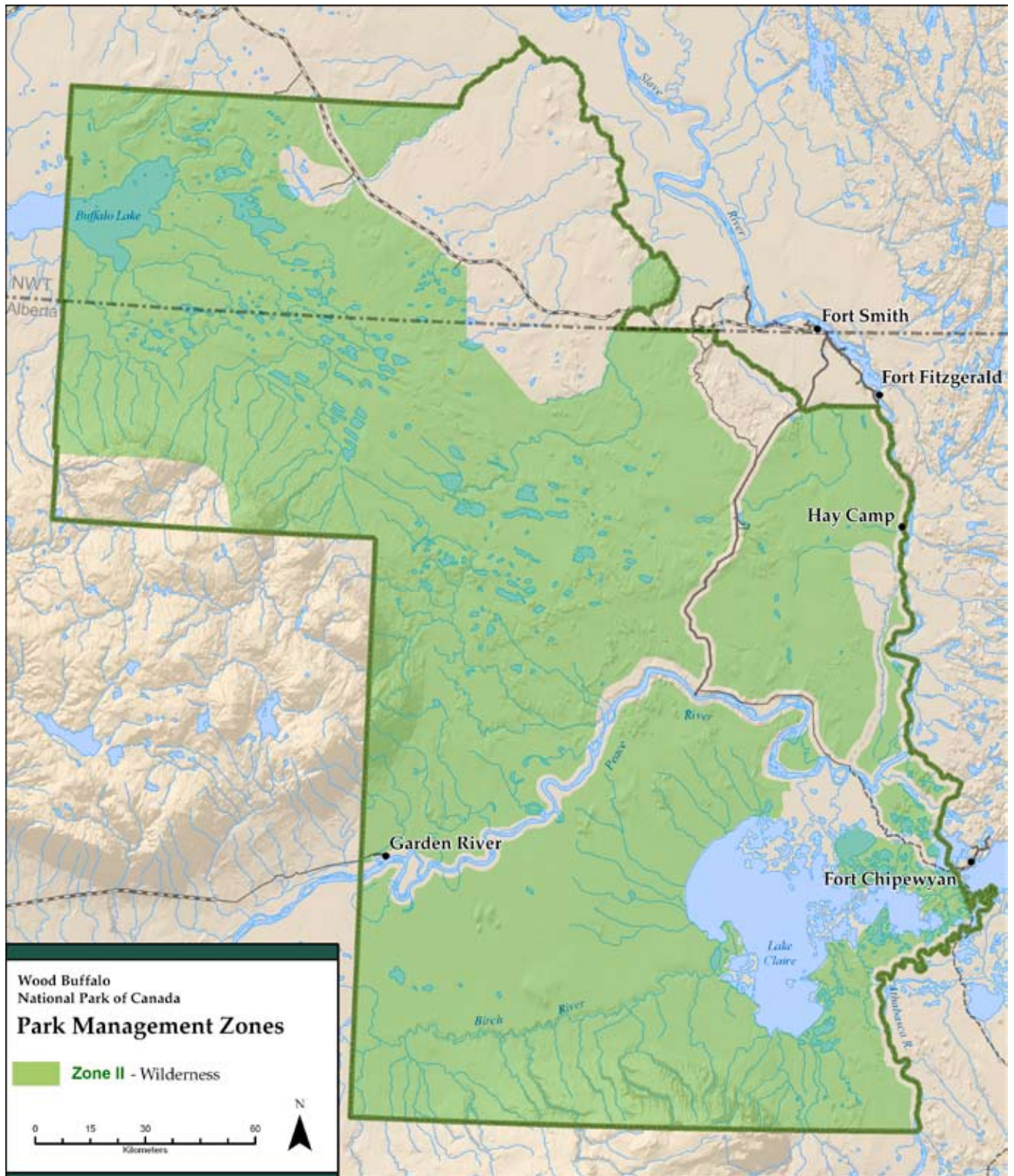
Fire base © S. Hunt



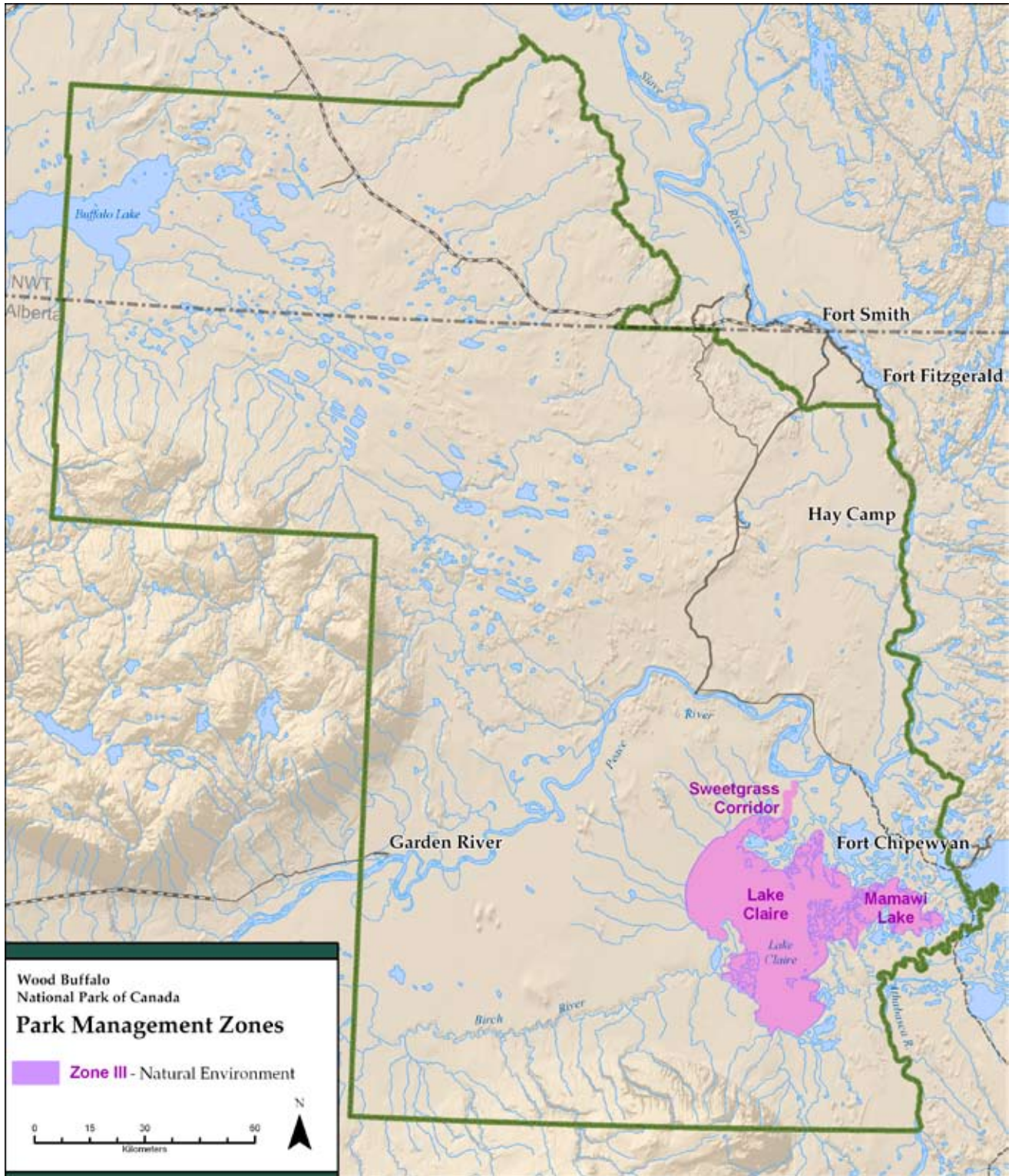
MAP 7. Park management zones for Wood Buffalo National Park.



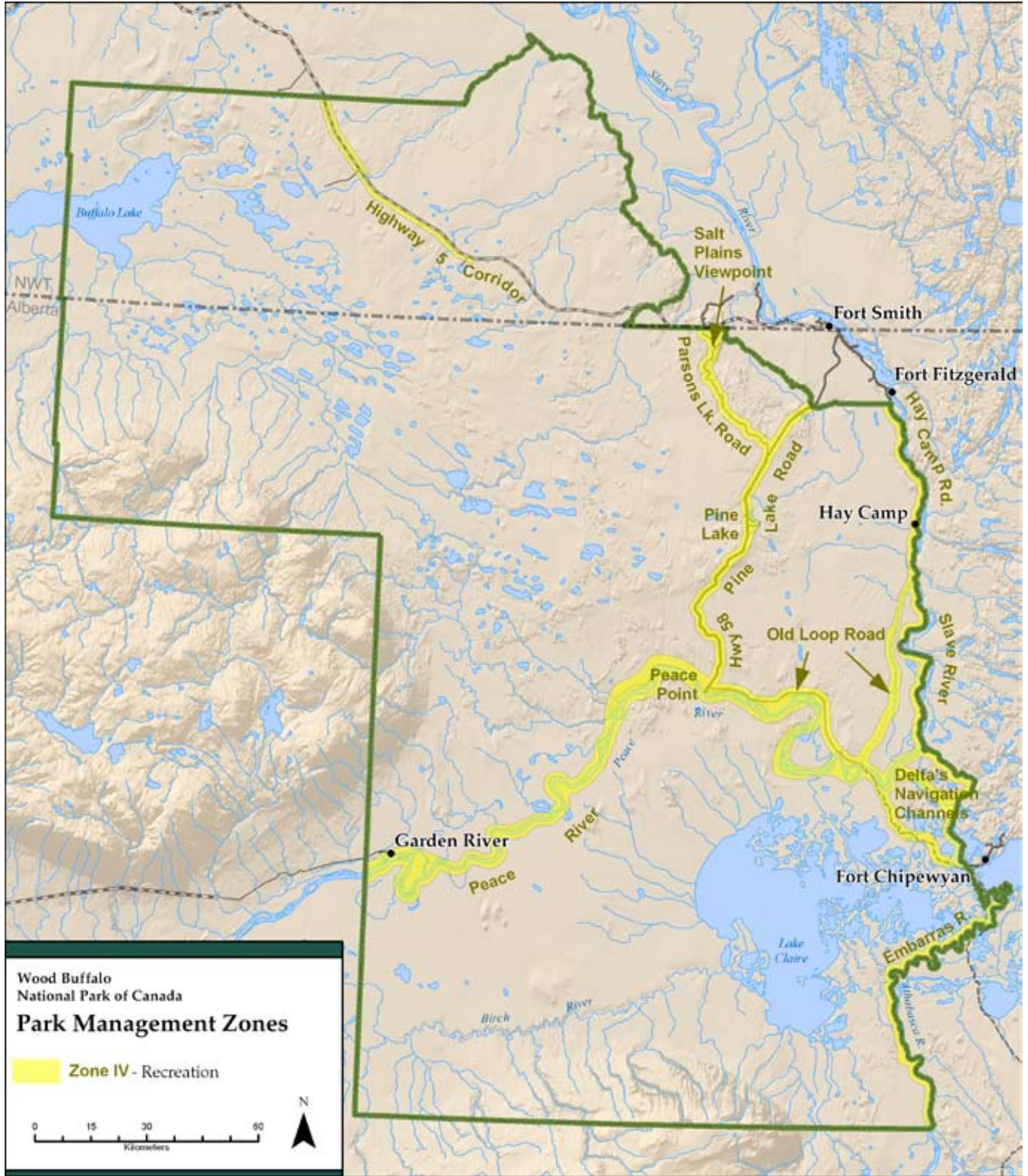
MAP 8. Zone I - Special Preservation, Wood Buffalo National Park.



MAP 9. Zone II - Wilderness, Wood Buffalo National Park.



MAP 10. Zone III - Natural Environment, Wood Buffalo National Park.



MAP 11. Zone IV - Recreation, Wood Buffalo National Park.

9.0 PARK ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS



Fire run © S. Hunt

Fort Smith, Northwest Territories is the administrative headquarters for the Southwest Northwest Territories Field Unit and the majority of park staff carry out their jobs from this community. Public Works and Government Services Canada provides the office space that Parks Canada occupies as a tenant. Space is also leased for a visitor information centre, theatre and library. The Operations Compound is owned by Parks Canada and it is located off Highway 5 on Raven Street.

Fort Chipewyan, Alberta is the administration centre for the southern section of the Park. Parks Canada owns all facilities that it uses and the occupied space accommodates a visitor information centre and offices for staff. Ancillary buildings include a garage, storage building and five staff residences. Fire crews are located at Fort Chipewyan and Fort Smith during the summer months.

There is a Parks Canada cabin and warehouse located at Garden River, Alberta. This facility is staffed as required and managed out of Fort Chipewyan, Alberta. There are also 16 patrol cabins located throughout the Park.

9.1 GUIDING AND OUTFITTING

Licensed guides and outfitters have the potential to play a larger role in the park's visitor experience offer. Strong and

supportive relationships with guiding and outfitting businesses would ensure that they contribute towards the achievement of management goals such as visitor safety, resource protection, promotion of the park and broadening the overall experience offer. As guiding and outfitting markets evolve, Wood Buffalo National Park will re-evaluate the policy and procedures involved with guide licenses while respecting the interests of local Aboriginal groups.

9.2 ADMINISTRATION OF TREATY LAND ENTITLEMENTS

In 2009 there were eight Indian Reserves within Wood Buffalo National Park and numerous others in close proximity to its borders in the Northwest Territories and Alberta. Recent negotiations with the Mikisew Cree, Smith's Landing and Salt River First Nations have produced Treaty Land Entitlement Agreements that have led to the creation of Indian Reserves within park boundaries.

Canada continues to negotiate three outstanding land claims processes with the Northwest Territories Métis Nation, the Akaitcho Dene and the Dehcho Dene and Métis. Each of these negotiations will have some impact on the management of the park and based on precedent they are expected to produce new opportunities for collaboration on park ecological

and cultural resource management and the development of the park's visitor experience offer. Canada is also negotiating regional land and resource agreements with other groups, such as the Deninu K'ue First Nation in Fort Resolution, K'átl'odeeche First Nation in Hay River and the Northwest Territories Métis Nation.

9.3 BOUNDARY ALTERATIONS AND REVIEW

Since the 1984 management plan the park has overseen the excision of the community at Peace Point, the inclusion of seven separate Indian reserves within the park's boundaries and negotiations are underway for the excision of the community at Garden River.

Community of Peace Point

Peace Point Indian Reserve was excised from Wood Buffalo National Park in 1988. A reserve of 1,280 acres on the north side of the Peace River at Peace Point was agreed to between Parks Canada and the Mikisew Cree First Nation under the terms of a Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement signed on December 23, 1986.

Community of Garden River

Parks Canada and Little Red River Cree Nation are in the final stages of negotiating an agreement in principal for the excision of Garden River, a small Cree settlement located 11 kilometres inside the west park boundary, on the north bank of the Peace River. Once removed from the park, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has agreed to establish the community as an Indian Reserve. The excision is provided for under s. 38 (1) (a) of the *Canada National Parks Act*. In the meantime, Parks Canada will enter into an interim management agreement with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to define the responsibilities and jurisdiction for the administration and management of the Garden River Settlement.



Peace River sunset © Parks Canada/J. Jaque



Wolf tracks © Parks Canada/J. McKinnon

Management planning is a dynamic process. The strategies, objectives and actions contained within the park management plan need to be evaluated for their effectiveness and to establish if they are helping to steer the park in the right direction. Every five years Parks Canada undertakes this assessment through the State of the Park Report. The report provides an analysis of all components of the Parks Canada mandate. It is intended to help raise awareness among key partners and visitors of the condition and status of park resources, activities and relationships. It also identifies key issues and challenges facing the park, which will lead to the next phase of planning, the Scoping Document and review of the Management Plan.

The State of the Park Report is integral to Parks Canada's management process. It provides a measured understanding of the park's condition and trends in terms of its ecological integrity and heritage resources protection, public education, facilitation of visitor experiences and people's connection to place. The information in the State of the Park Report is the best available description of the current state and trends of various aspects and activities of the park and it comes primarily from monitoring and research undertaken by Parks Canada, other government programs and partnering organizations, and universities.

Parks Canada's monitoring program covers two aspects: effectiveness and conditions. Condition monitoring is designed to answer the question "What is the state of the protected heritage place?" Effectiveness monitoring looks at what we did and whether those actions accomplished what we set out to do. Wood Buffalo National Park has an active monitoring program and is gathering results for four ecological integrity indicators that are in place: Forest, Delta, Wetlands, and Streams and Rivers. Work is underway to develop measures for the remaining indicators – Lakes and Grasslands and further, the Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring program will be fully developed by 2015. As the park ecological integrity monitoring program is refined, traditional knowledge and western science will be further integrated into monitoring activities.

Visitation will continue to be monitored using counts of the visitors to the Wood Buffalo National Park visitor centres in Fort Smith and Fort Chipewyan as reported for the last eight years. A second stream of visitation monitoring will be expanded to count visitation as defined by Parks Canada. This may include counts of participation in programs and activities, use of camping facilities, visitation to day-use and picnic areas, recreational cabin use,

and trail and road use. This second stream of data will help the park capture invisible visits. Various types of surveys including the 2011 and 2014 Visitor Information Program Survey will monitor visitor satisfaction and enjoyment, meaningful experiences and learning around natural and cultural heritage.

Social science will play an important role in the development of indicators and baseline measures. External relations is currently lacking social science data to accurately determine and measure its public education outreach efforts and the park will work with National Office to interpret national survey results in a manner meaningful to Wood Buffalo National Park. Staff will also work with the Service Centre's Social Science unit to identify appropriate tools and techniques to measure and collect data through its programs and deliverables for Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and the region.



Salt Plains lookout © S. Hunt

11.0 SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT



Mushrooms at Pine Lake © Parks Canada/J. Jaque

A strategic environmental assessment was conducted for the Wood Buffalo National Park of Canada Management Plan pursuant to the 2004 “Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals” (CEA Agency/Privy Council Office 2004). Strategic environmental assessments of draft management plans provide an opportunity to identify the broad and unintended impacts of proposed management actions and to assess the cumulative effects of multiple activities on the environment. The strategic environmental assessment also aids in the identification of future environmental requirements under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEAA) or the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*.

This strategic environmental assessment was initiated early in the management planning process to ensure that the environmental effects of the initiatives contained in the plan were fully considered.

Each of the actions in the Plan was evaluated to determine if it might have adverse environmental effects. Many actions are not expected to cause adverse environmental effects. Other actions are expected to lead to positive

effects including: greater knowledge of ecosystems through plans to develop monitoring programs and intentional consideration of aboriginal knowledge; expanded public education and visitor opportunities; increasingly cooperative relationships with local aboriginal groups; and greater connections with visitors, park stakeholders and the broader Canadian community.

The plan focuses on developing future strategies and actions, including monitoring and partnering strategies to contribute to knowledge and management of park ecology and cultural resources. Many of these strategies will require further strategic environmental assessment as they are developed. These include: Peace-Athabasca Delta Area Management Approach, if appropriate; Bison disease containment strategy, if appropriate; Pine Lake Area Management Approach; and, the excision of Garden River settlement from the national park. Where specific actions may result, a project-level screening will be required.

Because the focus of the plan is on strategy development during this management cycle, there are few actions that could cause additional adverse cumulative environmental effects.

Follow-up

The plan describes strategies to identify and implement monitoring measures, informed by traditional aboriginal knowledge, to provide information to decision-makers for the protection of key areas like the Peace-Athabasca Delta and for the management of the wood bison population. Monitoring programs will inform the development of the area-specific management strategies and results can be incorporated into the strategic environment assessment of these strategies.

Public Engagement

The plan was developed by Parks Canada staff. Public consultation was initiated during a series of open house events in January 2010. This was primarily an introduction to the planning process and an exploration of how involvement in future planning processes can occur. Key stakeholders and a range of involvement opportunities were identified and will be considered as more fully developed strategies take shape.

Conclusion

As a result of the actions in the plan, it is expected that increased knowledge and improved planning strategies will enhance the understanding of the indicators of ecological and cultural integrity of Wood Buffalo National Park, while encouraging an appropriate scale of meaningful visitor experiences into the operation of the park. With additional assessment of management strategies as they are developed and project-specific environmental assessment mitigation, negative cumulative effects are not expected to be important.



Sinkholes © Unknown

Selected References

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National Park System Plan. Parks Canada (3rd Edition) (2004).

Parks Canada Agency Act (1998).

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Parks Canada Guide to Management Planning (2008).

Parks Canada Agency Corporate Plan 2008/09-2012/13 (2008).

Wood Buffalo National Park Management Plan (1984).

Wood Buffalo National Park State of the Park Report, 2009.

APPENDIX A

Summary of Actions

This management plan provides long-term strategic direction and more immediate measures for Parks Canada managers of Wood Buffalo National Park. It is a framework for more detailed planning and decision-making, and an important reference for sustainable business planning and future management and operations.

Progress on management plan implementation will be communicated through annual reporting and the Wood Buffalo National Park State of the Park Report, which is produced every five years. The management plan will also be subject to periodic review (at least every five years), and it can be amended to reflect changing circumstances. The public will be consulted about proposed major changes.

Implementation of the management plan is the responsibility of the Southwest Northwest Territories Field Unit Superintendent. Implementation will be done through the Field Unit's Business Plan, which identifies priority actions of the management plan that will be realized within a five-year period. Any changes to the five-year forecast will be captured by the annual review and updating of the business plan. Implementation of the strategies and actions may be reconsidered in response to the Corporate Plan, new circumstances or information.

SUMMARY OF PLANNED ACTIONS

TOWARDS A SHARED VISION

- Build and develop management relationships between Parks Canada and local Aboriginal groups. This includes the establishment of a management structure between Parks Canada and Aboriginal groups and collaboration with Aboriginal groups and local communities to create a park Vision Statement.
 - Engage local Aboriginal groups in ecological and cultural research and monitoring programs. A plan is underway to identify sites/places/resources in the park by Aboriginal groups to direct a multi-year survey of resources not represented in the existing inventory.
 - Work with communities around the park to expand partnering opportunities and incorporate Wood Buffalo National Park into their tourism offer. This includes continuing to develop existing partnerships with local communities for Visitor Services and developing and improving existing Tourism agreements with the Governments of the NWT, Alberta and the Yukon.
-

SUMMARY OF PLANNED ACTIONS

CONNECTING TO THE MAGIC OF THE BOREAL PLAINS

- Develop a Visitor Experience Plan by 2012. This will include strategic planning of product development, interpretation and promotion. Visitor experience product and market analysis will be conducted and reviewed to address gaps.
 - Develop an internal and external communications plan by 2011. This will involve undertaking an inventory of existing products and services, developing a strategy for the future development and delivery of these programs and linking to new and existing expertise and resources in other Field Units, the National Office and Service Centres.
 - Work with Service Centre to interpret national visitor monitoring and survey results in a manner meaningful to Wood Buffalo National Park. The Field Unit will contribute to reaching urban audiences through its network with National Office and Service Centres by linking into opportunities that are identified through their research. The Field Unit will enquire into possible zoo and natural museum outreach education opportunities in these urban centres.
-

BISON MANAGEMENT IN THE GREATER WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK ECOSYSTEM

- Implement a research program to improve understanding of wood bison population dynamics, including the interaction of disease and predation and other environmental factors, movement and habitat use.
 - Develop and implement a disease containment strategy by 2012.
-

PEACE-ATHABASCA DELTA AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH

- Develop and implement a delta management approach by 2015. This will involve the engagement of Aboriginal partners, government, industry and universities to facilitate ecological and cultural monitoring, research and management in the Peace-Athabasca Delta. This includes developing agreements with northern-based non-governmental organizations.
 - Identify key messages, key audiences and appropriate communication tools with Parks Canada internal units, Aboriginal groups and research partners.
-

PINE LAKE AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH

- Aboriginal groups and Parks Canada will work co-operatively in relation to land use and management issues affecting park land and Aboriginal land at Pine Lake.
- Capitalize on existing resources at Pine Lake for further development and enhancement of visitor experience. This will include undertaking improvements to Pine Lake infrastructure in response to visitor feedback from surveys and the development of new programs.

APPENDIX B

Glossary of Terms

Aboriginal Peoples

Descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people – Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

Actions

Established in the management plan to ensure that the plan's implementation will either achieve or move towards the targets set, address identified issues and ultimately help achieve the vision. The list of actions for an objective are not comprehensive, but give an indication of where effort will be directed in the implementation of the plan for a five-year period. Actions are what Parks Canada can control and undertake to influence the achievement of an objective.

Area Management Approaches

Involves describing objectives and an integrated set of actions for resource protection, visitor experience opportunities, and public education to be achieved over time in a distinctive area of the protected heritage place. The area can be based on: the complexity of issues; the size of the heritage place; the logical grouping of resources; the special attachment to the area by local residents or visitors; or simply lends itself to a distinct management approach.

Backcountry

Those parts of the park not accessible by motor vehicle.

Biodiversity

The total genetic, species, and landscape variation within a given ecosystem. In a broader sense, biodiversity refers to the variety of life on earth, including all the

different plants, animals and other living organisms, and landscapes.

Boreal

Cool, temperate regions of the northern part of the earth in which vast forests of evergreen trees such as black spruce and balsam fir are found.

Connection to Place

Reflects the relevance and importance of protected heritage places to Canadians. The concept expresses the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual attachment Canadians and visitors feel towards our natural and cultural heritage places. Parks Canada works to foster this sense of attachment through meaningful opportunities for enjoyment and learning provided on-site and through public outreach education. Respecting, understanding, and facilitating the relationship between heritage places and Canadians, including Aboriginal peoples, visitors, partners and stakeholders help promote a shared sense of responsibility for heritage places and engage minds and hearts to support their protection and presentation now and for future generations.

Consultation

The term public consultation refers to the two-way process of Parks Canada providing and seeking information and advice from the general public, governments, Aboriginal peoples, interest groups and others on the management of protected heritage places. Consultation is only one of the many aspects of the overall public engagement.

Cooperative Management

Generally refers to “the sharing of power and responsibility between government

and local resource users”. At Parks Canada, it refers to varying degrees of participation with Aboriginal parties from close working relationships such as advisory boards to more formal agreements such as Aboriginal management boards.

Corporate Plan

A yearly five-year plan developed to achieve Agency objectives. It is a single document that outlines the Agency’s overall corporate direction for the next five years. It is Agency wide and assigns responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities at the corporate level.

Culturally Sensitive Sites

Sites that warrant special management due to the sensitive nature of the cultural resources found there. Guidelines for the protection and use of these sites may be required.

Cultural Resource

A human work or a place that gives evidence of human activity or has spiritual or cultural meaning, and that has been determined to be of historic value. Cultural resources are distinguished from other resources in a park by virtue of their assigned historic value. This value derives from an association with an aspect or aspects of human history. Parks Canada may apply the term cultural resource to a wide range of resources in its custody, including, but not limited to, cultural landscapes and landscape features, archaeological sites, structures, engineering works, artefacts and associated records.

Cultural Resource Management

Applies to all activities that affect cultural resources administered by Parks Canada, whether those activities pertain primarily to the care of cultural resources or to the promotion of public understanding, enjoyment and appropriate use of them.

Cultural Resources Values Statement

A strategic document that identifies cultural resources and their values for heritage places located outside national

historic sites and managed by the Parks Canada Agency, and sets out objectives to protect cultural resources and present their values.

Ecological Integrity

“An ecosystem has integrity when it is deemed characteristic for its natural region, including the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes.” In plain language, ecosystems have integrity when they have their native components (plants, animals and other organisms) and processes (such as growth and reproduction) intact.

Environmentally Sensitive Sites

Sites that warrant special management, due to the sensitivity of the natural resources found there. Guidelines for the protection and use of these sites may be required.

Explorer Quotient

The Explorer Quotient tool helps identify visitor needs, interests, and expectations based on their personal values and travel motivations.

Field Unit

An administrative division developed by Parks Canada, combining the management and administration of one or more national park(s), national historic site(s), marine conservation area(s) or historic canal(s). There are 32 Field Units across Canada.

Frontcountry

Those parts of the park accessible by motor vehicle.

Hibernaculum

The protective place where an animal hibernates or spends the winter.

Indicator

A nationally or bio-regionally consistent summary reporting statement that provides a comprehensive synopsis of each element of the agency mandate. It is based on a combination of data, measures and critical success factors that provide a clear message

about current condition and the change since the last measurement.

Karst

Karst topography is a landscape shaped by the dissolution of a layer or layers of soluble bedrock by groundwater. An area of irregular limestone in which erosion has produced fissures, sinkholes, underground streams and caverns.

Key Strategy

Concrete expression of the vision statement that provides heritage place-wide direction. Must give a clear overview of how the protected heritage place will be managed and how the three mandate elements will be achieved in a mutually supportive manner.

Land Claim Agreement

A constitutional protected treaty with an Aboriginal group whose Aboriginal rights have never been extinguished by means of a treaty or any other legal process. The Federal Government seeks to clarify the rights of ownership and use of the land and resources, as well as the right of self-government by means of a final settlement that is fair to the Aboriginal Peoples involved and other Canadians. These agreements may apply within all protected heritage places that are owned and administered by Parks Canada.

Management Plan

A document that outlines the objectives for managing a protected heritage place as well as the implementation means and strategies established to achieve these objectives.

National Historic Site of Canada

A “historic place” as defined in the *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* or a place set aside as a national historic site under section 42 of the *Canada National Parks Act*. The name is commonly used to refer to the area administered by Parks Canada, or another owner, as a national historic site.

National Marine Conservation Area of Canada

A national marine conservation area named and described in Schedule 1 to the *Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act*.

National Park of Canada

A national park named and described in Schedule 1 to the *Canada National Parks Act* or a park established pursuant to a federal-provincial agreement that is under the responsibility of the Parks Canada Agency and that is not described in Schedule 1 to the *Canada National Parks Act*.

National Park Reserve

A national park reserve named and described in Schedule 2 to the *Canada National Parks Act* or a national park reserve that is under the responsibility of the Parks Canada Agency and that is not described in Schedule 2 to the *Canada National Parks Act*.

Objectives

A description of the conditions sought through management which serve as criteria for necessary policies and actions. Clearly stated objectives are the key to effective management plans.

Over-holding

Occurs when the tenant remains in possession after the term expires.

Parks Canada Agency

The Parks Canada Agency is a public agency created by an Act of Parliament dated February 1998 (Bill C-29). The Agency has the mandate to conserve, protect and present nationally significant natural and cultural heritage. The Agency reports directly to the Minister of Environment.

Public Outreach Education

Reaching Canadians at home, at leisure, at school and in their communities through effective and relevant learning

opportunities designed to increase understanding and appreciation of the natural and historical heritage of PC places, and to encourage individuals and communities to support and become engaged in their protection and presentation.

Ramsar Convention

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Scoping Document

A document to inform the Chief Executive Officer of Parks Canada of the planning program's intended scope and context, and to receive endorsement to proceed with the planning process.

Service Centre

A network of professional and technical staff who provide guidance, advice and expertise to field units. There are four service centres across the country.

Species at Risk

Extirpated, endangered or threatened species or a species of special concern.

- “Extirpated species” means a wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere in the world.
- “Endangered species” means a wildlife species that is facing imminent extirpation or extinction.
- “Threatened species” means a wildlife species that is likely to become an endangered species if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.
- “Species of special concern” means a wildlife species that may become a threatened or an endangered species

because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

State of the Park Report

This report provides a synopsis of the current condition of a national park, national historic site or national marine conservation area, and assesses performance in meeting established goals and objectives for indicators associated with the Agency's mandate. These reports are produced on a five-year cycle, and are the basis for the scoping document and five-year management plan review.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

A systematic, comprehensive process of evaluating the environmental effects of a proposed policy, plan or program and its alternatives. A SEA is needed when there is a proposed policy, plan or program that requires Cabinet or Ministerial approval and when it may result in important environmental effects either positive or negative.

Targets

Aims or objectives set by managers and to be achieved within a specified time frame. A target is written in conjunction with an objective and facilitates measuring and reporting progress in achieving the objective.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

TEK is a cumulative body of knowledge that is handed down through generations. Like science, TEK is based on observation and views nature as a system of relationships between organisms and their environment. In the Parks Canada context, TEK refers to Aboriginal knowledge.

Treaty Land Entitlement Agreement

Treaty Land Entitlement claims are intended to settle the land debt owed to those First Nations who did not receive all the land they were entitled to under historical treaties signed by the Crown and First Nations. Settlement agreements

are negotiated among First Nations, the Government of Canada and provincial/territorial governments. According to the terms of the agreement, a specified amount of Crown lands is identified and/or a cash settlement is provided so that a First Nation may purchase federal, provincial/territorial, or private land to settle the land debt.

Vision Statement

A passionate, inspirational, unique, picture of the heritage place at its desired future. It must portray the integrated relationship between the mandate components and be prepared with the involvement of the public, Aboriginal communities, stakeholders and partners.

Visitor

A person entering the park (including the Visitor Centre) for recreational, educational or cultural purposes.

Visitor Experience

The sum total of a visitor's personal interaction with heritage places and/or people that awakens their senses, affects their emotions, stimulates their mind and leaves them with a sense of attachment to these places.

World Heritage Site

A cultural or natural site that is designated as having outstanding universal value by the World Heritage Committee according to its set of criteria. The committee was established to oversee implementation of UNESCO's 1972 World Heritage Convention.

Zoning

The zoning system is an integrated approach by which the land and water areas within a park are classified according to ecosystem and cultural resource protection requirements, and their capability and suitability to provide opportunities for visitor experiences.

APPENDIX C

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