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## **Press Release**

### **UNESCO requires Canada to turn talk of protecting Wood Buffalo National Park into action.**

*Decision announced today sets specific actions Canada must take to keep Wood Buffalo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, off the List of World Heritage in Danger.*

July 5, 2017, KRAKOW, POLAND – The UN’s World Heritage Committee has formally given Canada until the end of 2018 to demonstrate that it has taken major new steps to protect Wood Buffalo National Park. The Committee today endorsed the decision [presented as a draft](#) last month. The decision calls on Canada to make proven progress towards fully implementing an Action Plan with all [17 of the recommendations](#) from the [Fall 2016 UNESCO mission](#) to Wood Buffalo National Park.

In the decision released today, UNESCO requests Canada:

1. Allocate adequate resources for the elaboration and implementation of an Action Plan to apply all recommendations of the mission report within 17 months
2. Provide an interim report to the World Heritage Centre within 7 months on how Canada will implement the mission recommendations
3. Make every effort to finally assess and understand the potential impacts of the Site C hydropower project
4. Conduct a systematic risk assessment of oil sands tailings ponds and an assessment of impacts to the Park from the proposed Teck Frontier Project and submit those to UNESCO’s advisory bodies for review

The Action Plan will need to include concrete measures to deal with all 17 recommendations from the mission report, which include:

- Transition to a genuine partnership with aboriginal groups in governing the Park;
- Improve and expand monitoring of the Peace-Athabasca Delta;
- Conduct an environmental and social impact assessment of the Site C dam on the Peace-Athabasca Delta;
- Assess options for a buffer zone between the Park and oil sands projects;
- Start a process towards restoring flooding cycles in the Delta; and
- Strengthen Parks Canada’s conservation focus and capacity for managing the park.

The absence of timely action by Canada will result in Wood Buffalo National Park being relegated to the List of World Heritage in Danger.



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Sadly, constructive attempts at dialogue and resolution with Canada, aimed at strengthening the decision, particularly in relation to ensuring ecological flows of water critical to the health of the delta are restored as a matter of urgency, have been entirely dismissed. In fact, we were shocked yesterday at the utter dismissal of the Mikisew's concerns. We do not believe Canada's claim that they are committed to a genuine partnership and have yet to see any actions from Canada to demonstrate it will protect Wood Buffalo in the manner required by the Convention.

Speaking to the World Heritage Committee in Krakow, Mikisew representative Melody Lepine said, "Our community is not convinced that Canada is acting in good faith. Indeed, Canada's actions have contradicted the Committee's 2015 decision (39 COM 7B.18), which requests the State Party not to take any decision related to development projects that would be difficult to reverse. By giving Canada such a generous timeline, more adverse developments will occur. "

"The Prime Minister and Minister McKenna have both said in Question Period recently that they take the UNESCO recommendations seriously. But, just like past governments, they aren't taking action. Today's UNESCO decision makes clear that the time for talking is done. The time to take action is here. It's time for Canada to immediately implement UNESCO's recommendations and start protecting Wood Buffalo National Park," said Mikisew Chief Archie Waquan.

"We applaud the Committee for calling on Canada to take major actions to protect Wood Buffalo National Park, but it's a shame that we had to appeal to the international community in the first place. It says a lot about Canada's relationship with Mikisew and other indigenous communities that we spent Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Europe seeing Canada resist efforts to save a World Heritage Site. The Obed oil spill (resulting in a recent \$4.5 million fine, see [here](#) and [here](#)) and Canada's inaction to save Wood Buffalo National Park are symptoms of a larger problem. Canada makes promises in public and then works against indigenous peoples in private. We intend to continue working with the World Heritage Committee to hold Minister McKenna to her commitment to take real action to protect this amazing area," added Melody Lepine, Mikisew's lead on its UNESCO petition.

**For interviews with Mikisew Cree First Nation representatives:**

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