

Canada Still Failing Wood Buffalo National Park A Year After UN Report

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FORT MCMURRAY. On the anniversary of Environment Minister Catherine McKenna characterizing an international report that concluded governments have failed to protect Wood Buffalo National Park as a “call to action”, a coalition of Indigenous and environmental groups is still waiting for that action.

The situation facing Canada’s largest National Park is dire. In 2017, experts from the World Heritage Centre and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature concluded that impacts on the park from development are “far more complex and severe than previously thought.” Since then Wood Buffalo National Park was determined to have the worst conservation outlook for a Natural World Heritage Site in Canada.

According to the World Heritage Committee, Canada has “one opportunity under the World Heritage Convention to immediately develop a structured and adequately funded response” to address the challenges to Wood Buffalo National Park, and anything less than a “major and timely” response to the recommendations would “constitute a case for recommending inscription of Wood Buffalo National Park on the List of World Heritage in Danger.”

From what Indigenous communities and environmental groups have seen since Minister McKenna’s 2017 statement, Canada’s response over the past year is falling far short.

“When our community heard Minister McKenna tell us that the mission report was a ‘call to action’, we were hopeful,” said Melody Lepine, Director of Government and Industry Relations at Mikisew Cree First Nation. “A year later, there is little concrete action to report to our elders except that we keep trying to get government to honour its commitment. So much more needs to be done, and done fast.” Moreover, Indigenous communities continue to await the infusion of additional resources for Wood Buffalo National Park, as the World Heritage Committee requested: “Simply diverting the scarce resources previously allocated for Wood Buffalo alone will not suffice,” noted Becky Kostka, Lands and Resources Manager for Smith’s Landing First Nation.

“It is clear that the World Heritage Committee is expecting Canada to deliver more than a ‘plan to plan’”, said Alison Ronson, CPAWS National Director, Parks Program. “With the commitments for environmental conservation in the new federal budget, Canada can and must develop an action plan with real resources.”

“Canada’s ongoing refusal to consider the impacts of the Site C dam on the Peace Athabasca Delta is astounding,” said Galen Armstrong, Peace Valley Campaigner at Sierra Club BC. “This is Canada’s largest National Park, but provincial and federal governments are still letting it fall through the cracks.”

Given its delays, Canada now has less than nine months to develop an Action Plan to present to the World Heritage Committee. Together, we call on Canada to finally dedicate the resources needed from the new federal budget to save its largest national park and to finally start working with us to achieve that goal.

Supported by

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Mikisew Cree First Nation
Smith’s Landing First Nation
Fort Chipewyan Métis Local 125

For background, visit mikisewgir.com/projects/.

For interviews with Indigenous groups:

Melody Lepine, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Director Government and Industry Relations, 780-792-8736, melody.lepine@mcfngir.ca

Becky Kostka, Smith's Landing First Nation, Lands & Resources Manager, 867-872-5656, lands@slfn196.com

For interview with environmental group representatives:

Kecia Kerr, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Northern Alberta, 780-328-3780, kkerr@cpaws.org

Caleb Behn, Keepers of the Water, caleb.behn@gmail.com

Galen Armstrong, Sierra Club BC, 778-679-3191, galen@sierraclub.bc.ca

Candace Batycki, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, 250-352-3830, candace@y2y.net