

## **What We Heard: Elk Island National Park Management Plan, Species at Risk, Species of Interest and Invasive Species Day on the Land Consultation**

**June 15, 2022**

The purpose of this report is to present a summary of the discussions held during the Indigenous Day on the Land event hosted at Elk Island National Park on June 15, 2022. This Day on the Land was a result of the consultation processes for both the Elk Island Management Plan and the Species at Risk, Species of Interest and Invasive Species initiatives and was hosted with the intention of building relationships between Treaty 6 and Métis nations and Elk Island National Park.

Indigenous participants in attendance represented Alexander First Nation, Cold Lake First Nation, Enoch Cree Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation, Frog Lake First Nation, Heart Lake First Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Métis Nation Region 2, Onion Lake First Nation, Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Samson Cree Nation, and Whitefish Lake First Nation.

Parks Canada staff collected a summary of themes that emerged from the discussions, as well as recommended future steps for both the Management Planning and Species at Risk, Species of Interest and Invasive Species initiatives. Previous discussions highlighted the importance of ensuring Indigenous knowledge is protected, and as a result, any stories, teachings and locations of medicines and spiritual plants shared through this process have been omitted from this record.

### **Monitoring Changes to the Landscape**

Indigenous participants have observed many changes to the species and landscape in and around the area now known as Elk Island National Park over time, both positive and negative. Observations of large carnivores such as bears and wolves have recently become more frequent and they appear to be returning to the full range of their historic habitat. There is an interest among Indigenous partners in seeing Parks Canada continue to monitor and support the increase in habitat. However, there are concerns over the potential decline in ungulate species that continue to serve as an important food source to Indigenous communities.

Overall, Parks Canada staff are advised to spend more time out on the landscape observing the changes occurring in order to resolve environment issues of importance to Indigenous partners.

### **Valuing Traditional Management Practices**

Indigenous participants in attendance recommend fire be returned to the landscape. Traditionally, cultural fires renew and cleanse the land, create forage for ungulates, stimulate berry production and reduce parasite loads.

Mechanical removal is another preferred management method for invasive species. There is interest in coming to the park to help with this and participants encouraged Parks Canada to send out a bulletin when invasive plants are in season. Biocontrol is also a supported method but Indigenous partners would like more research on all aspects prior to release. More traditional methods such as prescribed fire are preferred over the use of herbicides.



Elk Island  
National Park

### **Nature's Intuition and Interconnectivity**

There is a spiritual side to plants and animals, and each plant and animal has both a consciousness and a purpose. Nature has an intuition: wildlife know the purpose of plants and may consume plants considered toxic to them to help as a medicine, or to remove themselves from a population to prevent the spread of an illness. Additionally, protecting one species can help another, (eg: protecting birch and aspen can help protect spiritually important fungi).

Plants, including invasive species, may have uses that we are not yet aware of. The spirit of the plant will spread and travel where it needs to go. Indigenous partners advised management activities should not hurt other animals or parts of the ecosystem. Traditionally, elders in attendance think it is best to let nature take its course.

### **Next Steps:**

Elk Island National Park is committed to fostering respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous peoples. We value collaboration with our Indigenous partners and are committed to recognizing and honouring the contributions of Indigenous peoples, their histories and cultures, as well as the special relationships Indigenous peoples have with Elk Island National Park. By working closely with Indigenous partners, Elk Island National Park can build and strengthen these relationships which, in turn, will help the park make better decisions. Elk Island National Park will be circulating the draft management plan and are looking forward to connecting again with the representatives to discuss park management. Both Elk Island National Park and the Indigenous partners express gratitude to this first step on the landscape and look forward to maintaining an ongoing relationship with future gatherings as conditions allow.