

Visitor Guide and Map 2025/2026

Welcome to Elk Island

We respectfully acknowledge that Elk Island National Park is within the present-day territory of Treaty 6 and the homeland of the Métis. The lands and waters of Elk Island National Park have been and continue to be used by Indigenous Peoples for sustenance, ceremony, trade and travel. Elk Island National Park is enriched by the history, languages, cultures and ongoing contributions of local Indigenous partners.



A true wilderness experience 35 minutes east of Edmonton

At Elk Island National Park, the bison still roam and stars twinkle overhead. See the plants and animals that call the park home on one of more than 80 km of trails or paddle on the lakes. Learn about how Elk Island contributes to global bison conservation. There's something for everyone at Elk Island.

Aussi disponible en français.

Guided programs

Enjoy FREE drop-in programs with paid park entry

Learn about these topics with guided programs

- Bison conservation
- Archaeology
- Indigenous cultures
- Stargazing
- Community science
- Human-wildlife coexistence

Stop by the Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre or visit ParksCanada.ca/ElkIsland for seasonal program schedules.



Camping

Sleep under the stars

Share stories around the campfire as the stars in the night sky twinkle above. **Reserve your campsite:** reservation.pc.gc.ca 1-877-737-3783

ASTOTIN LAKE CAMPGROUND is within walking distance of the beach, playground and theatre.

oTENTiks are a cross between an A-frame tent and a cabin that can sleep up to six people comfortably.



OSTER LAKE BACKCOUNTRY CAMPGROUND is a hike-in only (4 km) campground providing a truly unique camping experience on the west shore of Oster Lake.

Visit parks.canada.ca/elkisland to stay informed about camping details and important park updates.

Geocaching

Hide and seek

Geocaching is a fun, high-tech adventure where participants use a GPS (Global Positioning System) to hunt for containers called "caches." Most cell phones have a built-in GPS system. Caches in the park range from easy finds with vehicle access to challenging half-day finds on longer trails.

Visit geocaching.com or pick up the **Elk Island Guide to Geocaching** brochure at the Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre.



Winter

Lace up your boots or strap on a pair of snowshoes and enjoy one of the park's many trails. Exploring Elk Island National Park in the winter is an excellent way to see the park and some of its inhabitants.



SNOWSHOE RENTALS

Listen to the crunch of snow underfoot and watch for resident wildlife while roaming more than 80 km of trails. Rent a pair of snowshoes from the Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre.



Stay safe on your winter adventure

- Thin ice may exist anywhere at any time in the park in the winter season. Parks Canada does not monitor natural ice surfaces.
- Be prepared for shorter daylight hours.

Contact information



Emergency
911 – Police, fire and ambulance

Parks Canada Dispatch
1-877-852-3100 – Lost persons, poaching, wildfires, issues with wildlife, park violations and off-leash pets.

Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre & Gift Shop:

780-922-5790
pnelkisland-elkislandnp@pc.gc.ca
ParksCanada.ca/ElkIsland

Reserve Your Campsite Now!

1-877-737-3783
reservation.pc.gc.ca

Stay informed about upcoming events, important park updates and conservation work at Elk Island National Park. Get the latest news straight to your inbox with the click of a button. Subscribe to our newsletter today!



Like us on Facebook
Facebook.com/ElkIslandNationalPark

Follow us on X
@ElkIslandNP

Paddling



A canoe or kayak is the best seat in the house

Paddling is a low-impact way to discover the natural wonders of the park. Access Astotin Lake using the boat launch and enjoy your day on the water.

Gas and electric motors are not permitted.

Visit ElkIslandPaddleRentals.com (ridgewilderness.com/rentals/) in the Astotin Lake Recreation Area for paddling rentals

Use your thumb

Your actions matter

Protect yourself and wildlife by giving animals space. Animals in the park are wild and may react to perceived threats when startled, threatened or protecting their young. To determine if you are at a safe distance use your thumb:

1. Hold your fist straight out in front of you
2. Raise your thumb
3. Cover the animal with your thumb

If the animal is totally covered by your thumb, you are a safe distance away (about 100 m). If your thumb does not cover the animal you are too close and should back away.

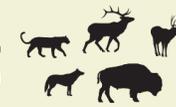
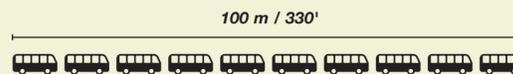


Wildlife viewing



STAY SAFE AND PROTECT WILDLIFE

- Do not stop to view bears on roadways.
- Do not exit your vehicle within 100 m of bison.
- Be aware of your surroundings and travel in groups.
- If you see wildlife on a trail, make noise to alert animals. Wait for them to move on or slowly back away and go back the way you came.
- Keep pets on leash and under control at all times. Off-leash pets cause stress to wildlife which can put you, your pet and other visitors at risk.
- Do not feed wildlife.



Do not stop for bears.

Plains Bison



Identified by their long beard and the large, bushy hairstyle on their heads. Plains bison have:

- a full beard
- hairy leg chaps and a shaggy cape
- a round back hump with the highest point directly over their front legs.

Wood Bison



Compared to plains bison, wood bison are larger and taller, with longer legs, darker fur, and hair that often droops over their forehead. Wood bison have:

- small, pointy beards
- tall and rectangular humps.

Bison conservation

Millions of bison once roamed across the continent from Alaska to Mexico. However, within a single human lifetime, bison populations in North America were reduced to less than a thousand.

The Canadian government purchased one of the last herds of bison and between 1907 and 1912, over 400 wild bison were transported to Elk Island National Park.

- Today, there are more bison in Elk Island National Park than there were in the whole of North America in 1890.
- Elk Island National Park is the only national park that maintains herds of both subspecies of North American Bison: Wood Bison on the south side of Highway 16 and Plains Bison on the north side.
- Elk Island National Park provides bison for conservation initiatives around the world.



Join an interpretive park program or stop at the Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre for more information on bison conservation.

Safety while at Elk Island

Be Prepared

- Trip Planning: Plan your travel route, know the terrain and conditions, check the weather, and always let someone outside of your group know your plans.
- Training: Get the knowledge and skills you need before heading out. Know and stay within your limits.
- Take the Essentials: Flashlight, food and water, extra clothing, navigational/communication devices, fire-making kit, signaling device (i.e. whistle), first aid kit, emergency blanket/shelter, pocket knife, sun protection.
- Wear a Canadian-approved personal flotation device (PFD) or lifejacket on all water bodies, including Astotin Lake.
- Trails and beaches are not patrolled: use at your own risk.
- Check important bulletins for closures and important notices.
- Parks Canada has limited response capabilities and operations are conditioned by weather, access or staff availability. Response times could be delayed depending on location and circumstances.



Visit adventuresmart.ca for safety tips and trip planning resources.



PADDLING SAFETY

- Wear a Canadian-approved personal flotation device (PFD) or lifejacket.
- Check the weather forecast and be prepared for conditions to change suddenly.
- Carry essential safety equipment on board, as required by Transport Canada.

Trail information

Astotin Lake Recreation Area

Legend

- Hiking
- Cycling
- Picnic area
- Picnic shelter
- No dogs
- Accessible
- Easy
- Moderate
- Difficult

Larger trail numbers on map indicate trailheads. All trailheads outside the Astotin Lake Recreation Area have parking, outhouses and garbage facilities.

1 Hayburger Trail

11.6 km loop (3-4 hours) – Flat terrain
A wagon path until the 1930s, this trail winds through open forest and meadows. Keep an eye out for bison and moose where the trail crosses into a black spruce forest.

2 Simmons Trail

2.6 km loop (1-1.5 hours) – Rolling hills
This trail goes through aspen forest and hills. Open areas along the trail offer the opportunity to watch beavers and muskrats in action.

Note: This trail begins on the north side of Tawayik Road 100 m east of the Tawayik parking lot.

3 Shirley Lake Trail

11.6 km loop (3-4 hours) – Rolling hills
This trail is teeming with life. Listen for the frogs and birds as you walk amongst aspen forest and meadows.

4 Moss Lake Trails

Walk amongst the songbirds and take the winding trail through the forest. The west side of the trail is challenging, and the grasslands there are ideal for seeing a bison or two.

4A Moss Lake Moderate Trail

4.8 km loop (1.5-2.5 hours) – Hills

4B Moss Lake Difficult Trail

12.6 km loop (3.5-4.5 hours) – Hills

5 Amisk Wuche Trail

2.7 km loop (1-1.5 hours) – Moderate to steep terrain
This loop is short and sweet. Follow it through aspen, birch and spruce trees, go over beaver ponds on floating boardwalks and take in sweeping views at the top of hills.

6 Lakeview Trail

3.7 km loop (1-2 hours) – Limited steep sections
Watch for changing plant life as the trail bends through aspen and black spruce forest. With its panoramic views of Astotin Lake, this trail is perfect for photos.

7 Beaver Pond Trail

3.6 km loop (1-2 hours) – Flat terrain
Open aspen forest and sedge meadows along this trail are ideal for spotting birds or beavers in the summer. Watch for bison grazing in the winter.

8 Living Waters Boardwalk

400 m loop (15-30 minutes) – Boardwalk
Start behind the Astotin Theatre and take the boardwalk over the water of Astotin Lake. Watch for beavers and birds or peer into the water to see aquatic life.

9 Tawayik Lake Trail

15.6 km loop (4-5 hours) – Rolling hills
Winding through an aspen forest and meadows, this trail is great for seeing birds and bison. Fire pits and picnic tables are available near the trailhead. For your safety, dogs are not allowed on the south portion of the trail. Please check the important bulletins page on the park website for updated information.

10 Shoreline Trail

6 km return (2-3 hours) – Flat terrain
This paved trail follows the original road around Astotin Lake. Short paths off this trail lead to clearings that are great for observing waterfowl or picnicking on the shore of Astotin Lake.

11 Wood Bison Trail

15.6 km loop (4-5 hours) – Rolling hills
Go south of Highway 16 to spot North America's largest land mammal, the wood bison. This trail is challenging and goes through aspen forests, wetlands and along ridges.

- Trail
- Road
- Forest
- Grassland
- Water
- Beach

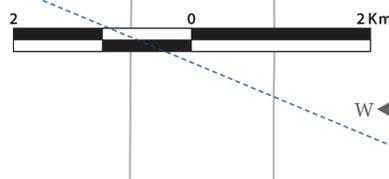


- ## Legend
- Washrooms
 - Accessible Washrooms
 - Picnic Area
 - Picnic Shelter
 - Firewood (fee)
 - Parking
 - Recycling/Waste Disposal
 - Red Chairs
Slow down and relax in the pairs of Red Chairs in Elk Island. Red Chairs are placed in areas with great views.

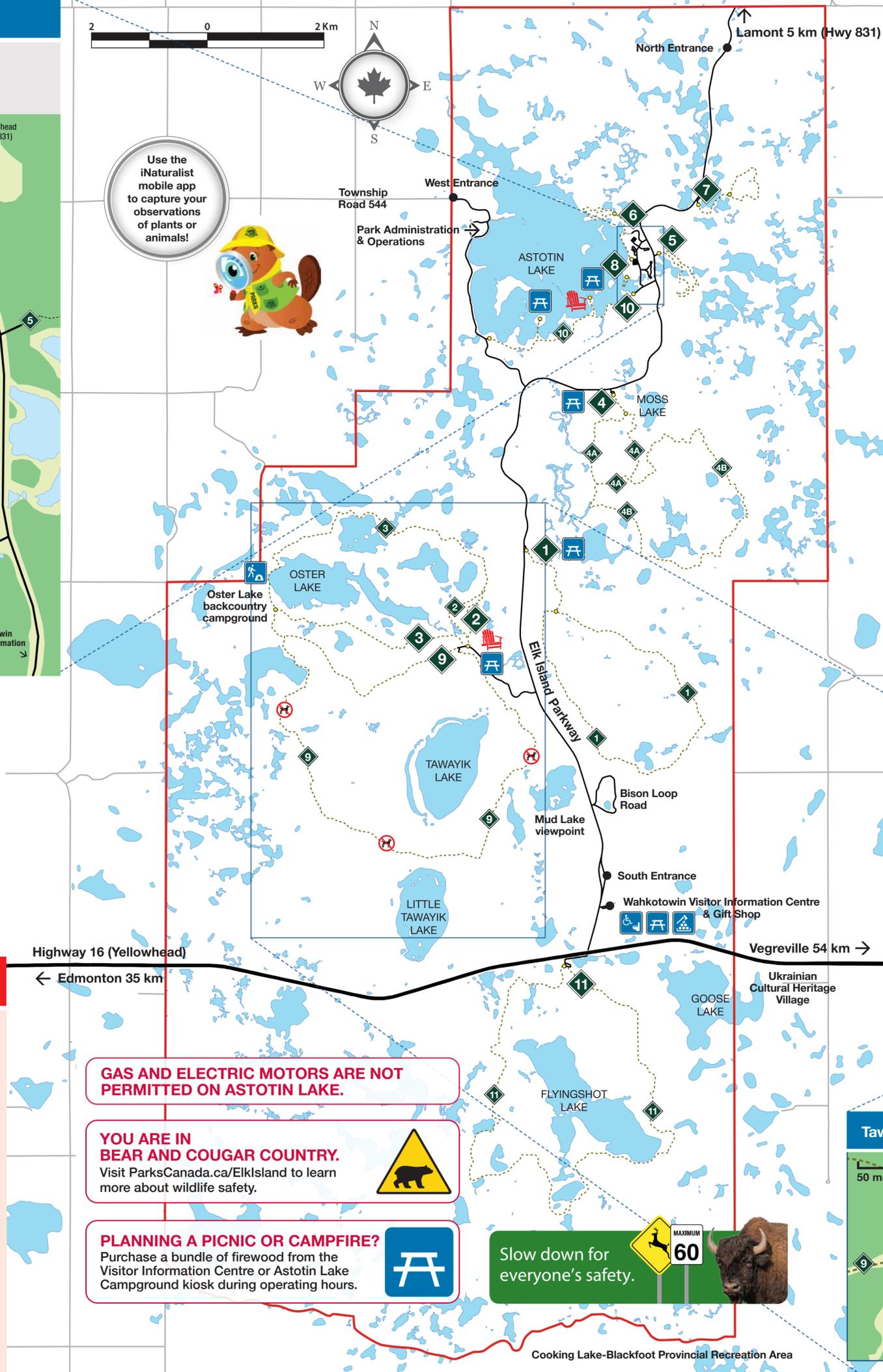
National Park Regulations

Follow all National Park regulations. More information is available online under the Canada National Parks Act and at Parks Canada visitor centres.

- Do not feed wildlife. Leaving food, garbage and scented items unattended can result in inadvertent feeding of wildlife. Securely store all wildlife attractants when not in use.
- Preserve the park. Leave flowers, rocks, antlers, artifacts and all other objects undisturbed.
- Obey all posted speed limits, area closures, restrictions and warning signs.
- Fires are only permitted in designated fire pits.
- No drone zone: Leave drones at home and enjoy Elk Island National Park from the ground!
- For the safety of pets and wildlife, it is illegal to let any pet off leash in Elk Island National Park.



Use the iNaturalist mobile app to capture your observations of plants or animals!



GAS AND ELECTRIC MOTORS ARE NOT PERMITTED ON ASTOTIN LAKE.

YOU ARE IN BEAR AND COUGAR COUNTRY.
Visit ParksCanada.ca/ElkIsland to learn more about wildlife safety.

PLANNING A PICNIC OR CAMPFIRE?
Purchase a bundle of firewood from the Visitor Information Centre or Astotin Lake Campground kiosk during operating hours.

Slow down for everyone's safety.

Hiking and Cycling

Explore the park at your own pace

There are over 80 km of shared trails to explore by foot or by bike. All designated trails have parking, viewpoints, washrooms and garbage facilities.

With ample wildlife viewing opportunities, paved roads in Elk Island National Park are a great option for road cyclists. Travel the parkway (20 km one-way) or the administration road (5 km one-way).

- ### USING THE TRAILS
- Fast, quiet travel increases the chance of sudden wildlife encounters. Slow down, stay alert and make noise.
 - Do not get between bison gathered on the road.
 - Share the road and trail. Ride single file.
 - Wear a helmet and high-visibility clothing.

Reduce the spread of invasive plants

Help reduce the spread of harmful invasive plants by removing dirt and seeds from your footwear and equipment before you arrive, before you travel to new areas in the park and before you leave the park by using the boot brush stations available at all trailheads.



Tawayik Lake Area

- Trail
- Road
- Forest & Grassland
- Water

