

Visitor guide and map



Aussi disponible en français. This photo was taken with a zoom lens. Stay 500 m away from bison and do not enter your vehicle within 100m of bison.

Welcome to Elk Island

Elk Island National Park is located within Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis. The land is enriched by the history, languages, cultures and ongoing contributions of Indigenous nations and peoples.

Elk Island National Park is where bison roam beneath wide prairie skies. As a core protected area of the Beaver Hills Biosphere, Elk Island protects aspen parkland, wetlands, and grasslands and shelters diverse wildlife, including over 250 bird species. Elk Island is a place of rich history and a conservation success. It is home to thriving wood and plains bison populations. The park has been instrumental in restoring bison to landscapes worldwide and is a leader in global bison conservation efforts. For generations, people have visited Elk Island to enjoy a range of activities such as picnicking, camping, hiking, biking and wildlife viewing.



Safety

Be prepared

- **Plan your trip** – Know your route, terrain, forecasted weather, road conditions and daylight hours. Share your trip plan with a trusted adult outside your group.
- **Pack essentials** – Flashlight, food, water, extra clothes, map/GPS, phone, fire starting kit, whistle, first aid kit, emergency blanket, pocket knife and sun protection.
- **Check the website** – Look for closures and safety notices.

Beaches

- **No lifeguards and not patrolled** – Use at your own risk.
- **Watch young children closely** – Keep within arm's reach at all times.

Trails

- **Not patrolled** – Use at your own risk.
- **Travel in groups** – Make noise on trails.

Emergency response

- **Be self reliant** – Elk Island has limited response capabilities.



For more information, visit AdventureSmart.ca

Activities

Camping – Stay at **Astotin Lake Campground** or try backcountry camping at **Oster Lake**. Reserve your campsite: reservation.pc.gc.ca 1-877-737-3783

Hiking – Explore 80 km of trails. Reduce the chance of surprising wildlife. Slow down, stay alert, travel in groups and make noise. **Protect park lands from invasive species** – Use the boot brush stations at trailheads before and after your hike.

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

Paddling – Launch at Astotin Lake. Rentals available in the Astotin Lake Recreation Area; no motorized boats allowed. Wear a high visibility personal flotation device.

Geocaching – Find 8 hidden caches. Visit geocaching.com or pick up the Elk Island Guide to Geocaching brochure at the Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre.

Cycling – Ride scenic routes; share trails with hikers and watch for wildlife. Travel the parkway (20 km one-way) or the administration road (5 km one-way). Share the road and trail. Ride single file and wear a helmet and high-visibility clothing.

Picnicking – Enjoy an outdoor meal or a campfire in a designated firepit or one of Elk Island's picnic shelters. Firewood is available for purchase at the Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre.



Paddling



Canoe rentals are available in the Astotin Lake Recreation Area. Visit ParksCanada.ca/ElkIsland for operating hours and more details.

Gas and electric motors are not permitted.

Protect park waters from invasive species – Clean, drain and dry all watercraft and water-related gear, including trailers, personal flotation devices, paddles and beach toys.

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.
- Check Important Bulletins on the Elk Island website for area closures or blue-green algae updates.

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 and Gift Shop:
780-922-5790
pnelkisland-elkislandnp@pc.gc.ca
ParksCanada.ca/ElkIsland

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!



Connect with us!

- @ElkIslandNP
- [Facebook.com/ElkIslandNationalPark](https://www.facebook.com/ElkIslandNationalPark)



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.

Rent a pair of snowshoes from the Wahkotowin Visitor Information Centre.



Bear safety

Black bears live in the park and sightings are common.

BE BEAR AWARE

- **Make noise and stay together** – Hike in groups, leash pets and supervise kids.
- **Keep sites clean** – Secure food, garbage and scented items. Never feed wildlife.
- **Carry bear spray** – Keep it handy and know how to use it.
- **Do not stop for bears** – Stopping to view bears from vehicles teaches them to approach people, which often leads to their destruction.
- **If you see a bear** – Stay calm, speak firmly, stay with your group, and leave space for the bear to escape.
- **Pets must be on leash at all times throughout the park** – It keeps your pet and wildlife safe.

Bears den throughout the park. Staying on trails in the winter and spring can reduce your chance of disturbing a bear from its slumber.

Bears may go into their dens as early as October and come out as late as May, but some bears are awake in December and arise out of hibernation in March.

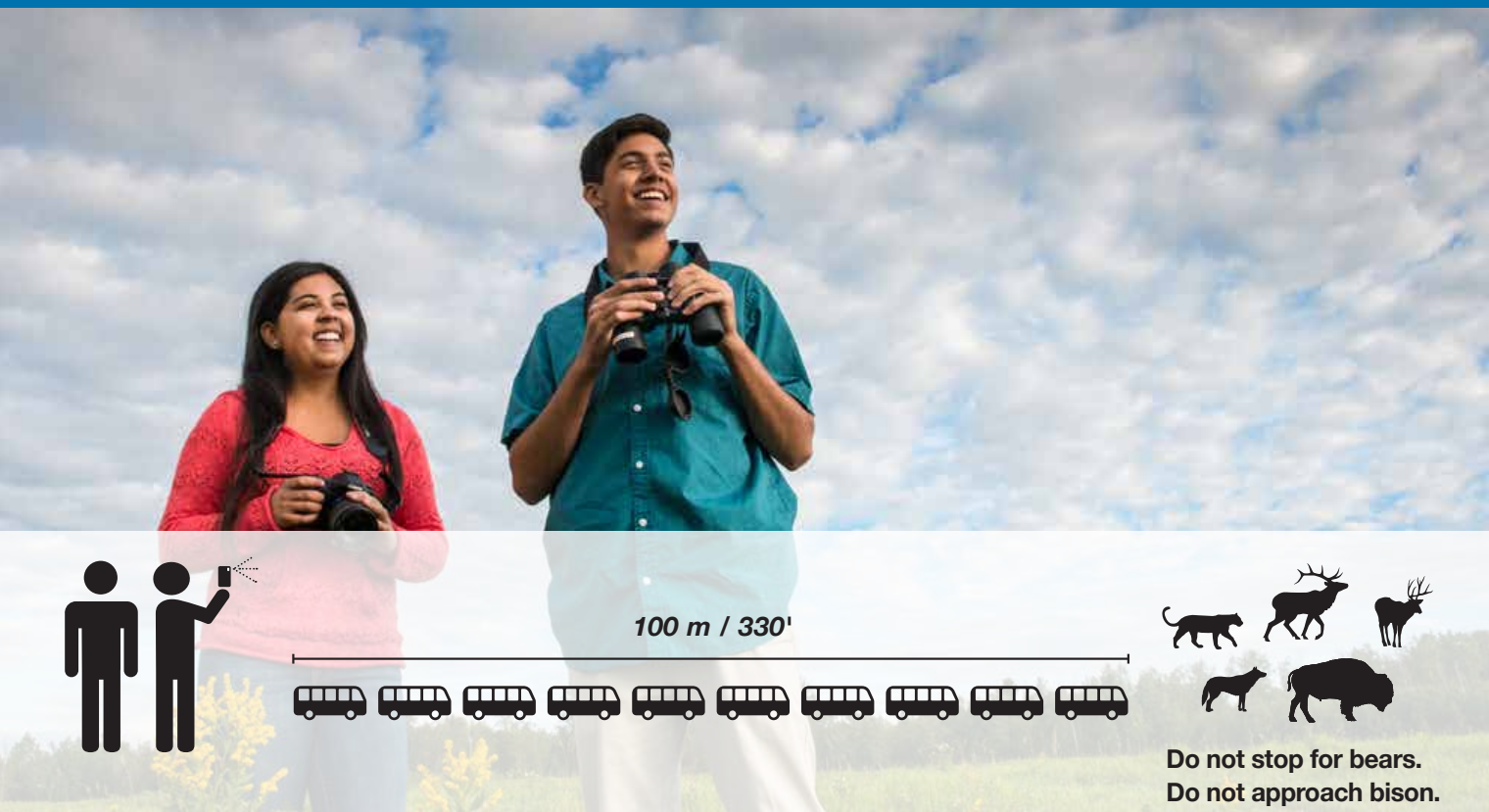


Wildlife viewing

Use your thumb

Wild animals need space. To check your distance:

1. Arm out fully extended, thumb up.
2. Close one eye and cover the animal with your thumb. If fully covered, you're about **100 m away** – a safe viewing distance. If not, back up or enter your vehicle.



Do not stop for bears.
Do not approach bison.



Plains bison

Identified by their long beard and the large, bushy hairstyle on their heads, plains bison are located on the north side of Highway 16, and 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. Located on the south side of Highway 16, 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 animals.

The Canadian government purchased one of the last herds of bison 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.
- Elk Island National Park provides bison for conservation and Indigenous repatriation initiatives.



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

Trail information

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.

National Park regulations

Breaking the law in a National Park can result in eviction, a ticket or in more serious instances, arrest. Canadian National Park offences can carry heavy fines and could result in jail time or restitution. For some offences, such as poaching or pollution, fines can be in excess of \$25,000.

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.

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: Drones are not permitted anywhere in the park.

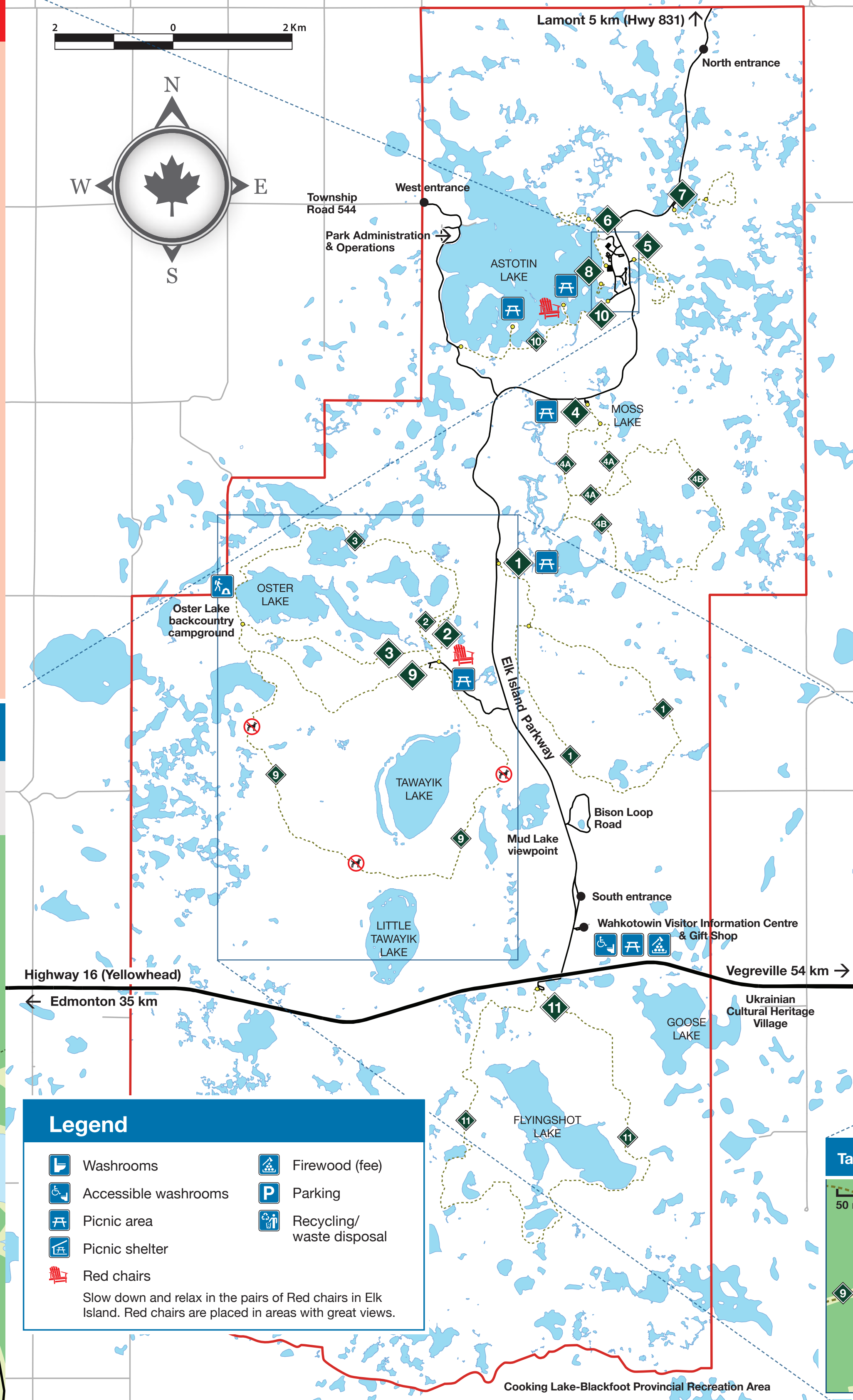
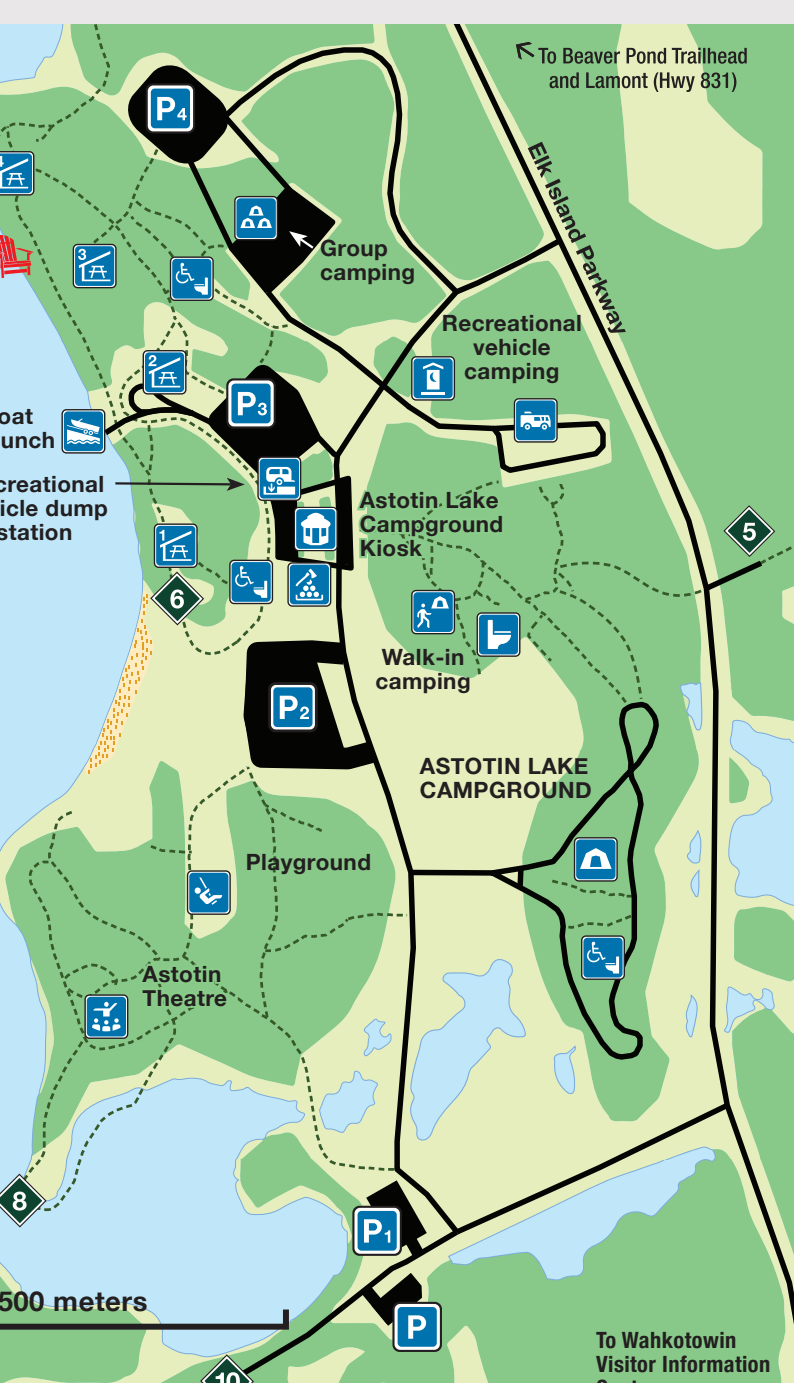
It is illegal to let any pet off leash in Elk Island National Park.

Do not litter: Place all garbage in garbage bins.

If you see something suspicious such as poaching, vehicle off-roading, drones, littering, illegal fires, removal of natural objects, dogs off leash, feeding and harassment of wildlife or day use area liquor use, please let us know. Report to Parks Canada dispatch 1-877-852-3100 (available 24/7) or to Park staff.

Astotin Lake Recreation Area

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



- ### Legend
- Washrooms
 - Accessible washrooms
 - Picnic area
 - Picnic shelter
 - Red chairs
 - Firewood (fee)
 - Parking
 - Recycling/waste disposal
- Slow down and relax in the pairs of Red chairs in Elk Island. Red chairs are placed in areas with great views.

Practice day-use area etiquette

Elk Island National Park day-use areas are shared spaces – please be considerate of other visitors' enjoyment and help keep these shared spaces welcoming and safe for everyone.

- **Liquor and cannabis** – Not allowed in day-use areas.
- **Noise** – Keep music and loud activities to a minimum. Do not use speakers to amplify music or voices.
- **Tables** – Do not hold tables or save a site from other visitors.
- **Dogs** – Keep your dog on a leash and under control at all times.



Keep a clean picnic site

- **Keep a clean site** – Properly store all food, garbage, and scented items as these can attract wildlife. Never leave them unattended.
- **Clean as you go** – Pick up garbage immediately, do not wait until you leave.
- **Remember micro trash** – Even tiny wrappers, bits of plastic, and food scraps belong in the garbage bins.
- **Burning** – Do not burn food or garbage. Dispose of all waste in designated bins.
- **Wash dishes properly** – Use the outdoor washing stations near the washrooms for dishes.

Tawayik Lake Area

- Trail
- Road
- Forest & grassland
- Water

