



# Protecting Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site

Volume 1, Issue 2, December 2017

## WHAT'S NEW IN THIS ISSUE: THE SEA AND PROGRESS SO FAR

The first newsletter (August 2017) for WBNP World Heritage Site about the response to the World Heritage Committee contained information about the park's significance on the world stage. The newsletter included information on the Reactive Monitoring Mission, and decisions of the World Heritage Committee regarding WBNP. It introduced the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), noted the relevance of the SEA to Indigenous peoples, and outlined the importance of ongoing consultation and engagement with Indigenous communities and stakeholders. Finally, the newsletter introduced the team members who are leading Parks Canada's work on the SEA and the Action Plan.

This second newsletter (December 2017) offers a more detailed look into the goals of the SEA, and reflects on highlights so far. Since August, the Draft Scoping Report was a significant development – this newsletter includes a summary of the input that was received during the comment period in September. The team working on the SEA and Action Plan present their own “tidbits” on the various phases of the projects. Finally, the newsletter introduces the Action Plan, and outlines the next steps in Canada's response to the World Heritage Committee on WBNP World Heritage Site.

## Purpose of the Strategic Environmental Assessment

In response to a request from the World Heritage Committee, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been underway since early in 2017 and is scheduled to be completed in April 2018.

The SEA is an independent assessment of development pressures that potentially impact the world heritage values of Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site. As a 'strategic' environmental assessment, it is different from typical impact assessments. A typical impact assessment is focussed on a single proposed project and looks outward from the project, downstream, to see what the impacts of that particular project may be. In contrast, the SEA is focussed on the cumulative effects of threats to the world heritage values of the park. The SEA looks outward from the park, upstream, to see what projects, activities, conditions and trends could be threats to the park's globally significant values, like the Peace-Athabasca Delta (PAD).

The purpose of the SEA is to provide an independent assessment of the activities and trends that may threaten the health or integrity of the park's world heritage values. There are other studies that present information on possible impacts that might affect the park, but the SEA is an effort to assemble a collective view of cumulative impacts.



Parks staff journey into the Peace-Athabasca Delta with local traditional land users and consultants.

The SEA is benefitting from the input of relevant federal, provincial and territorial departments; Indigenous communities, including the Indigenous traditional knowledge of land users; representatives of industry and non-government environmental organizations.

The SEA will help identify what activities and trends may be of highest concern. Findings from the SEA can be used by decision makers and affected parties to focus the collective response to protecting the world heritage values of WBNP. The collective response will include the inter-governmental Action Plan that will respond to the World Heritage Committee and the recommendations of the United Nations' Reactive Monitoring Mission. Recommendations from the RMM can be found here: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/156893>

*“Ultimately, the aim of Environmental Assessment is to equip decision-makers with the information necessary to preserve these exceptional [World Heritage] sites for future generations.”*

IUCN World Heritage Advice Note  
on Environmental Assessment

## About this newsletter –

This newsletter is to keep WBNP partners and stakeholders informed as Parks Canada and the Government of Canada, in consultation with Indigenous groups, other government partners, and stakeholders, respond to the World Heritage Committee. For additional detail on the world heritage values of WBNP and the Reactive Monitoring Mission, please visit the WBNP website at this link: [http://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/nt/woodbuffalo/info/SEA\\_EES](http://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/nt/woodbuffalo/info/SEA_EES)



## Progress continues on SEA with consultations, draft reports

Since the fall of 2016, Parks Canada has hosted the UN Reactive Monitoring Mission; awarded the contract for the SEA; held a Cooperative Management Committee meeting; produced a State of Conservation Report (April 2017); published newsletters; updated the WBNP website; and met with and updated the Indigenous partners of WBNP and others.

The Draft Scoping Report has also been reviewed, and the SEA report is taking shape. Through the feedback provided in September, the SEA is being informed by a diverse range of views. Parks has invited ongoing comments from Indigenous partners and other affected parties.

In early 2018, the contractors, Independent Environmental Consultants (IEC), will return to Fort Chipewyan and Fort Smith to present their preliminary findings for review and discussion. Feedback received during the meetings will help shape the draft SEA report, which will be available for comment during February.

### What We Heard: Review of the SEA Draft Scoping Report

An important step for developing the SEA was to share a scoping report to help define and communicate the purpose and focus of the SEA.

A Draft Scoping Report was circulated in August 2017. The report was shared with Indigenous groups, government departments, NGOs, industry groups, the World Heritage Committee, and the public. Comments



Workshop participants in Fort Chipewyan discuss a map of the Peace-Athabasca Delta in southern Wood Buffalo National Park. Consultation is a vital step in shaping the SEA.

on the scoping of the SEA were received until the end of September.

Among other highlights, the scoping report indicated a focus on the PAD as the element of the park's world heritage values that would require specific attention to further identify key changes, objectives, values, and indicators. During the review of the scoping report we received 4 submissions from Indigenous groups, 2 from industry, 4 from government, 4 from NGOs, and 1 public comment.

The comments were analysed by Parks Canada and the contractor preparing the SEA. Meetings with commenters, where needed, also took place to ensure the highest degree of understanding of the submitted comments. The input provided valuable guidance and resulted in improved direction for the SEA, including the need for a better description of what the SEA is, and what it's intended to accomplish.

IEC has prepared an addendum to the Draft Scoping Report that highlights key directions taken from the review period. This newsletter

also summarizes the main messages communicated during the review period.

### Summary of Input

Feedback on the Draft Scoping Report generally noted that the SEA process lacked meaningful involvement of Indigenous peoples, and needed more clarity on how Indigenous traditional knowledge would be presented.

Several reviewers noted that the SEA needs to express its purpose more clearly, and to refine its objectives, desired outcomes, and indicators.

Comments indicated the SEA needs to be transparent and objective, considering the full range of views on all issues and making use of complete range of published literature, grey literature, and Indigenous knowledge sources.

A number of remarks were received regarding the need for better descriptions of the assessment approach. There were comments on the need to explain key assumptions made throughout the report.

Additionally, comments pointed out that the relationship between the world heritage values and the values or issues that would

be assessed in the SEA was unclear. Commenters asked for clearer descriptions of what the SEA is, what it will assess, what information it will rely on, and how it will be used.

By providing increased clarity in the SEA report, the contractors want to ensure it can provide direction for policy and decision makers.

### Current Priorities

From November to January, the contractors have been working on a first draft of the SEA final report. Parks Canada continues to communicate with Indigenous partners, inviting ongoing engagement in the SEA process. The draft SEA will be circulated for review in February. As the SEA progresses, the Parks team is also working with other federal departments, provincial and territorial governments, and affected Indigenous groups on the initial steps to develop the Action Plan. The collective response will include the inter-governmental Action Plan being developed in response to the World Heritage Committee and the RMM.

# ACTION PLAN UPDATE: PROGRESS TO DATE AND PATH FORWARD

Action Plan for the Protection of the World Heritage Values of Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site



To respond to the recommendations of the 2016 Reactive Monitoring Mission, the World Heritage Committee has asked that Canada develop an Action Plan for WBNP WHS. The Action Plan will be an overarching, coherent work plan implemented over time to ensure the World Heritage Values of WBNP WHS are maintained for generations to come.

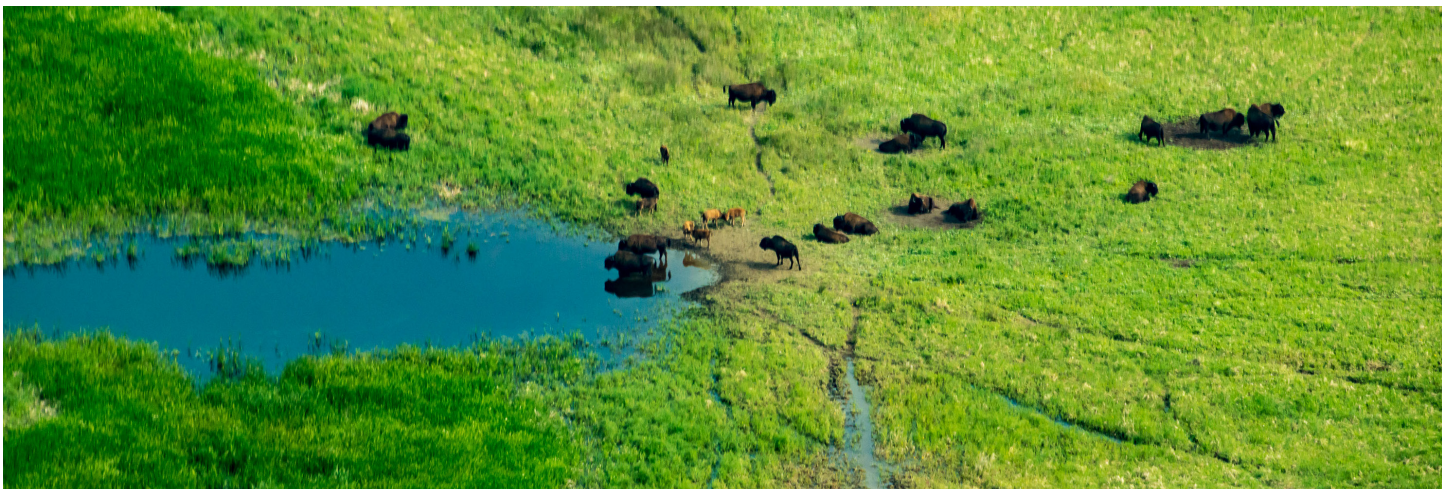
The Action Plan will reflect the findings of the SEA, and development of the Action Plan will require the involvement of Indigenous groups, other levels of government, industry and other stakeholders. Parks Canada has been reaching out to these groups to seek their cooperation, and together a more formal working relationship will be developed. For the development of the Action Plan, Parks Canada is

playing a coordinating role on behalf of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Steering Committee (FPT Committee). Canada will issue a Progress Report to the World Heritage Committee on February 1, 2018.

**Next Steps:** Findings from the SEA will provide additional focus for the Action Plan. The Action Plan will guide how relevant authorities will address

recommendations from the RMM, and how Indigenous groups and stakeholders will be involved. The Action Plan describing how initiatives of different jurisdictions will be used to respond to the RMM recommendations is due on December 1, 2018. Implementation of the activities captured in the Action Plan will be ongoing.

\* FPT  
Federal - Provincial - Territorial



Protecting Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site

## Comments on the process from Parks Canada team members



There was a range of views on SEA scoping and the discussion of world heritage values. Some agreed with focus on the PAD, others wanted to see more values scoped in. All world heritage values are included in the scope of the SEA, however, the process assesses the relative likelihood of various values being impacted by past present and future activities. The level of effort investigating and researching individual elements will vary based on the relative importance of individual impact pathways and their effects on specific values.

It has been rewarding working on the SEA with so many people from such a wide range of interests. For me, this has reinforced the need to be inclusive and balanced, so that the SEA methodology is informed by the full range of views and evidence when potential impacts are assessed. I look forward to continued dialogue and engagement.

**Steve Oates, Project Manager for the Strategic Environmental Assessment**

Working in Wood Buffalo has always meant working together with our Indigenous partners. It's great to see this cooperation continue with the SEA, but it's also been great to see the and involvement of other jurisdictions and stakeholders.

I'm looking forward to working with everybody on the development of the Action Plan.

**Stuart Macmillan, Project Manager for the Action Plan**



The highlight has been the SEA meeting in Fort Chip and the field trip into the delta. Being in the Delta with the Elders for the day was a great experience. As the SEA develops it will be great to get a better understanding of the cumulative impacts from activities outside the park and to better understand the Indigenous perspectives regarding these impacts.

**Cam Zimmer,**

**Acting Superintendent of Wood Buffalo National Park**

A highlight has been getting involved in the community engagement process and getting up to speed on the huge amount of work that everybody is engaged on in this multi-faceted process.

**Don Aubrey**

**Consultation and Engagement**



A highlight so far was travelling to Fort Chip, getting into boats, and connecting the contractors writing the SEA with Mikisew land-users who could share their environmental and cultural knowledge of the Delta. That trip in August helped the SEA take off.

Parks and IEC would like to thank Mikisew for the invitation to the Elder's Retreat. We would also like to thank the representatives of other communities who have also made time to come to meetings or have phone calls with the SEA contractor (IEC).

**Patrick Yarnell**

**Consultation and Engagement**



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