



Wood Buffalo
National Park

Protecting

Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site

What's New In This Issue

The last newsletter for Wood Buffalo National Park (WBNP) World Heritage Site (WHS) was released in the fall of 2020 and comprised of Action Plan implementation updates from 2020, including an introduction to task teams and a short story on the use of PlanetScope satellite imagery for the 2020 flood.

The Government of Canada has continued to collaborate with provincial, territorial and Indigenous partners to bring the Action Plan to life. This issue of the newsletter provides

an update on the Strengthening Indigenous Partnerships, Environmental Flows and Hydrology and Monitoring and Science themes by reflecting on task team highlights since September, 2020. Also included is a more detailed look into the Indigenous Task Team, what they have been working on, and their goals for 2021. The newsletter concludes with a story on Wood Buffalo National Park's efforts towards the conservation and recovery of bison.

Environmental Flows and Hydrology

In November 2019, the Environmental Flows and Hydrology (EFH) working group identified the need for task teams to both lead and support Action Plan implementation. The Terms of Reference, Water Control Structures, Strategic Flow Release, Information Sharing, and Indigenous task teams were formed. Updates on the task teams' progress to date are highlighted below

Indigenous Task Team

(EFH 71-72, 10-12, 17, 44 & throughout EFH theme)

The Indigenous Task Team has been working on the development of an Indigenous Knowledge, Sharing and Use Agreement template to identify common principals, expectations and responsibilities of the parties. The agreement is an initial step in the integration of Indigenous Knowledge in EFH actions. For more information on the Indigenous Task Team, see the story titled *A Closer Look* below written by the Indigenous Task Team co-chairs: Kim Dertien-Loubert representing Fort Chipewyan Métis Association and Lindsay Wong representing Mikisew Cree First Nation's Government and Industry Relations.

Water Control Structures Task Team

(EFH 8, 9, 31, 32, 56-58)

The Water Control Structures Task Team is advancing to the preliminary design stage in its investigation into the potential to install new water control structures within the PAD, specifically at both Dog Camp and Big Egg Lake. The Task Team is also continuing its assessment of the performance of the existing Rivière des Rochers and Revillon Coupé weirs.

Strategic Flow Release Task Team

(EFH 23-26; 29)

Staff involved in the task team have been focused on work related to spring break-up flooding throughout much of the PAD system in 2020. Compiling all the observations from 2020 spring break-up will form a good basis for further research into mechanisms for ice jamming, and risk of flow release to communities.

Information Sharing

Task Team (EFH 69-70)

The Information Sharing Task Team continues to advance work to support the establishment of a Knowledge Hub, a web based information portal that will improve access to information on the PAD. The Task Team is also working on the development of a communications strategy for the Wood Buffalo Action Plan, to improve information sharing between task teams.

Monitoring And Science

Both a Peace-Athabasca Delta (PAD), and Non Peace-Athabasca Delta, Monitoring, Science and Indigenous Knowledge Task Team (MSIKTT) have also been established to support the Monitoring and Science theme of the Action Plan.

PAD Monitoring, Science and Indigenous Knowledge Task Team

(MS1-9)

The PAD Monitoring, Science and Indigenous Knowledge Task Team is working on an integrated science and IK approach to monitoring and research with Community Based Monitoring, Parks Canada and ECCC. The Task Team is collaborating with the Non-PAD MSIKTT and the ITT to discuss direction and logistics on IK gathering requirements for the Action Plan.

Non-PAD Monitoring, Science and Indigenous Knowledge Task Team

(MS1-9)

Since the release of the last newsletter, a Non-PAD Monitoring, Science and Indigenous Knowledge Task Team has been formed to support in the implementation of an integrated Research and Monitoring program (using both science-based and IK). The Task Team is in the process of identifying priorities and developing a work plan.

Strengthening Indigenous Partnerships

Since the September issue of this newsletter the Cooperative Management Committee has met twice, with discussion and updates regarding the Action Plan, the State of Conservation Report and Park Operations. There was a focussed discussion regarding the need for a secretariat position and the Cooperative Management Committee's direction was to have an independent, local, third party contract in place to complete secretarial duties and to work with all parties moving forward. The Cooperative Management Committee will be working toward that in the near future, with direction and support for the position provided by a smaller Cooperative Management Working group. The next meeting of the Cooperative Management Committee will be in February/ March.

Implementation of the Action Plan

Since 2019, Parks Canada and its federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous partners have worked together to support the on-going implementation of the Action Plan. Each partner has specific responsibilities for action within their jurisdiction and authority, and with Indigenous governments which have stewardship responsibilities for their traditional territories. Committees, working groups and task teams have been established to ensure collaboration in implementing the Strengthening Indigenous Partnerships, Environmental Flows and Hydrology, and Monitoring and Science themes. Some updates from these groups are outlined below.

A Closer Look: The Indigenous Task Team

by Lindsay Wong and Kim Dertien-Loubert

In November 2019, the EFH working group created 5 task teams to address specific aspects of the Wood Buffalo National Park Action Plan. Because the Action Plan required heavy Indigenous involvement for success, the Indigenous task team (ITT) was created in January 2020 to support the use of Indigenous knowledge in management actions. The ITT presently comprises 11 Indigenous groups which span large sections of the Peace and Slave Rivers, the Peace Athabasca Delta (PAD) and areas surrounding Great Slave Lake. Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada have played supporting roles in this task team.

Indigenous groups in northern Alberta and the NWT have amassed critical knowledge generationally over time, and have developed a symbiotic reciprocal relationship with the extraordinary land surrounding the PAD. Indigenous peoples have relied on the land to sustain health, tradition, and livelihoods. They have been its original steward for generations. These groups are uniquely positioned to ensure that the greater PAD system is properly restored and protected from the impacts of industrial development. As such, an Indigenous knowledge sharing and use

agreement is the first step in sharing and applying Indigenous knowledge in Action Plan activities that would help restore the ecosystem while protecting how the information is used. A smaller working group was formed to draft an information sharing agreement that would include the principal provisions to protect Indigenous information and permit the incorporation of a participating nation's main concerns. It is a comprehensive process that guarantees Indigenous groups that their knowledge is at the forefront of considerations, and is gathered with informed consent, protected, and applied according to its context, and communities' protocols.

The ITT has been a forum for greater Indigenous involvement in the Action Plan as Indigenous groups strive for equal partnership in its work with Canada. In the months ahead, its key goals will be to provide a deeper understanding of the ecosystem through Indigenous perspectives and to leverage this knowledge to improve ecological integrity in the greater PAD.

Bison Habitat Mapping

by Rob Belanger

Once numbering in the tens of millions and hunted to near extinction in the late 1880's, plains and wood bison, both endemic to North America, today number in the tens of thousands, occupying a small fraction of their historic range. Successful conservation efforts have resulted in increased population numbers, protection of habitat, and an optimistic future for bison. Today, however, the conservation of bison faces multiple challenges. While protection measures and continued reintroductions are encouraging for bison, more work is needed to bolster their recovery.

Managed by Parks Canada, Wood Buffalo National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in northeastern Alberta and southern Northwest Territories. The National Park is North America's largest, with more than 44,000 square kilometers of wildland, and is home to the world's largest free-roaming wood bison herd. Multiple levels of government, local Indigenous communities, and non-government organizations are working towards identifying and addressing knowledge gaps in bison

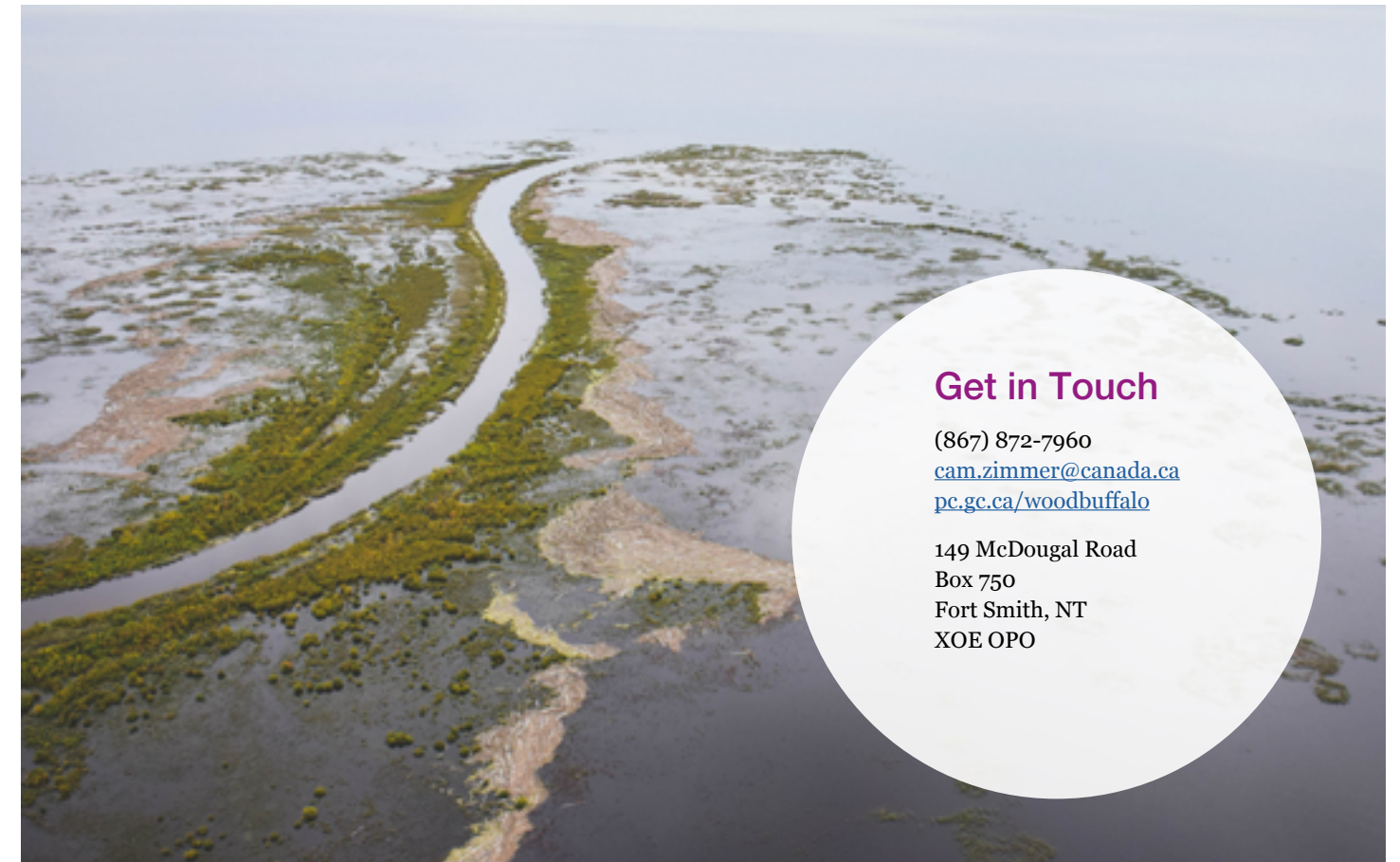
ecology, conservation, and recovery. As part of the Action Plan, Parks Canada is poised to collaborate with local communities to improve our collective understanding of the factors influencing bison habitat selection, movement and migration, and population health and long-term survival. Specifically, the goal is to engage with traditional knowledge holders to better understand bison behaviour, preferred food and habitats, movement pathways, and important indicators of bison health, to enrich past and ongoing field research including aerial, trail camera, and GPS tracking of bison. With this information and improved remote sensing habitat classification for the park, the partnership will construct robust and comprehensive models of bison habitat selection and movement that will address gaps and assist management towards the conservation and recovery of bison within and outside the park.



Announcement: Government Of Canada Investment

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring the ongoing protection of Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site and continues to work together to deliver on all of the measures outlined in the Action Plan. This is why, in December, 2020, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, announced a Government of Canada investment of \$59.9 million over 3 years to continue implementing federal commitments under the Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site Action Plan.

This funding builds on the Government of Canada's initial investment of \$27.5 million through Budget 2018 for work to date on the Action Plan. It will support the delivery of remaining Action Plan initiatives including strengthening park management in collaboration with Indigenous partners, enhancing research, monitoring and management of the Peace-Athabasca Delta using science and Indigenous knowledge, and establishing new mechanisms to support improved water management in the Peace-Athabasca Delta.



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