

2023

A TIME FOR BOLD ACTION

WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK AT
A TURNING POINT

September 2023

Mikisew Cree First Nation





Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada is a global treasure.

Wood Buffalo National Park contains the world's largest boreal inland delta, the Peace Athabasca Delta.

The Peace Athabasca Delta is a RAMSAR wetland that stores vast quantities of carbon. As a **Key Biodiversity Area**, it supports threatened species at risk like wood bison and whooping crane and is an essential part of one of North America's most important migratory bird corridors. The PAD is **vital for the cultural survival** of Indigenous peoples like the Mikisew Cree.

The Peace Athabasca Delta is vital for the cultural survival of Indigenous peoples like the Mikisew Cree



The 2022 Reactive Monitoring Mission reconfirmed that Wood Buffalo’s OUV is still deteriorating.

In 2014, the Mikisew Cree sounded the alarm about the drying of the PAD to the Committee. The recent (2022) Reactive Monitoring Mission agreed, concluding that:

- ↓ Wood Buffalo’s OUV remains highly threatened with continued negative trends for key attributes
- ↓ Wood Buffalo’s OUV faces numerous major ascertained and potential threats from hydroelectric dams, oil sands mining, cumulative effects and climate change
- ↓ The state of conservation of the PAD remains the major concern for the property
- ↓ The PAD’s hydrology continues to be impacted by industrial developments adjacent to the property, cumulative effects and climate change.

Canada's Action Plan for Wood Buffalo is a glimmer of hope ... but must be strengthened.

Canada has developed an Action Plan for Wood Buffalo National Park with short term funding. The major successes of the Action Plan over the last 3 years have depended heavily on the tireless efforts of the Mikisew Cree to save the PAD.

- Mikisew led the creation of a new protected area between the Park and oil sands mining
- Mikisew helped Canada bring jurisdictions to the table when the development of a flow protocol for a major tributary for the PAD stalled
- Mikisew elders developed the proposal for new water control structures, the only corrective action currently being designed for the Peace Athabasca Delta
- Mikisew is co-developing a new integrated monitoring program.

But ... the 2022 Mission concluded that Canada's Action Plan ...

- is insufficiently resourced
- must be updated to address identified gaps and ongoing jurisdictional challenges
- lacks the water governance mechanisms needed to restore the Peace Athabasca Delta
- needs real timelines and commitments to achieve corrective actions by 2026 to address the impaired hydrology of the Peace Athabasca Delta.



Threats to the PAD have grown since the 2022 Mission.

Since the 2022 Reactive Monitoring Mission, there have been new setbacks to the recovery of Wood Buffalo National Park.

- ↓ Canada has **reduced funding** to Mikisew for monitoring of oil sands effects.
- ↓ More than **5 million litres of tailings were spilled** near an important tributary to Wood Buffalo National Park, the largest oil sands spill in Canadian history.
- ↓ The Kearl oil sands mine, upstream of Wood Buffalo National Park, has been **continuously seeping tailings for over 18 months** without resolution in sight.
- ↓ Canada has made **no progress on a risk assessment for the ponds holding 1.3 billion litres of tailings** near tributaries to the PAD requested by the Committee on multiple occasions and recommended in the mission report.
- ↓ Canada has continued to advance the proposal from major oil sands miners to **develop regulations to allow the release of oil sands effluent into the Athabasca River** flowing into WBNP, for the first time in Canadian history.
- ↓ A major new hydroelectric project (the Site C dam) **will imminently start diverting water from the main tributary to WBNP** to fill an 83km long reservoir, without any of the assessments or modeling requested by the Committee.

Now is the time to secure the future of the Peace Athabasca Delta.

- ✓ Mikisew agrees with the 17 recommendations of the Reactive Monitoring Mission
- ✓ Mikisew agrees with the draft decision, in particular:
 - Canada must update the Action Plan as requested by the Mission
 - Canada must implement all Mission recommendation
 - Canada must allocate sufficient long term resources to the Action Plan
 - Canada must adopt the clear timelines for confirmation of the corrective mitigation measures for correcting the deterioration of the hydrology of the PAD, including ecological flow releases and construction of water control structures
 - Canada must provide the requested updates to the Committee in 2024, including a robust assessment of the 20 tailings ponds upstream of the PAD that contain over 1.3 billion litres of liquid mine waste

It is a time for bold action.