



Environmental Groups Support Mikisew Cree First Nation Call for Urgent Action to Protect Wood Buffalo National Park

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EDMONTON -- Environmental groups will meet today with members of UNESCO's international monitoring mission, in Canada to investigate threats to Wood Buffalo National Park's World Heritage status. The groups will express their support for the Mikisew Cree First Nation's petition to put the Park on UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites in danger, and call on Canada to take action to protect this global treasure from the growing threats, including upstream hydro-electric and oil sands developments.

Wood Buffalo National Park was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983 in part because it contains the Peace-Athabasca Delta, the largest freshwater boreal delta in the world, and the breeding grounds of the world's only wild population of whooping cranes. However, hydro-electric dams along the Peace River in BC and oil sands activities along the Athabasca River in Alberta have significantly reduced the flow of water to the delta and affected migratory bird populations, the health of fish populations, and the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples who have relied on the Delta for millennia.

In recent years, new development proposals upstream from the park, including the Site C dam in British Columbia and the Frontier Oil Sands mine in Alberta, threaten to further exacerbate these problems. This led to the Mikisew Cree's petition to UNESCO, and the World Heritage Committee's subsequent expression of concern and monitoring mission.

"Federal and provincial governments have had every opportunity to protect the Peace Athabasca Delta, the Ronald Lake Bison herd and our rights but have failed to do so. We hope this process is a wake-up call that governments must do more to give Wood Buffalo National Park and our treaty rights the respect that the international community expects. Mikisew, and now the world, are watching closely," said Mikisew Cree Chief Steve Courtoreille.

"By nominating Wood Buffalo National Park as a World Heritage site back in 1983, Canada promised to do all it could to protect this treasure, on behalf of the entire world community." said Alison Ronson, Executive Director of CPAWS Northern Alberta Chapter. "The question now is whether Canada will live up to this promise and tackle the very serious threats Wood Buffalo is facing from new and existing developments upstream."

"There is strong evidence, including from Indigenous traditional knowledge, that water levels in the Delta have already been affected by dams on the Peace River," said Jule Asterisk, Project Coordinator, Keepers of the Water. "We are very concerned about the additional impact of Site C, of contaminants

from oil sands developments, and of climate change, on the Rivers, the Delta and its people. We look forward to sharing our concerns with the members of the monitoring mission.”

“Adding Site C to the current development pressures on the park, could be a “straw that breaks the camel’s back” for the Delta,” said Ana Simeon, Peace Valley Campaigner for the Sierra Club of BC. “We’re calling for an immediate halt to construction of Site C while a full environmental assessment is conducted, including on the Outstanding Universal Values of the Delta. This is needed to comply with UNESCO’s 2015 request that Canada conduct an environmental assessment of the cumulative impacts of all threats to Wood Buffalo, and to not take any decisions that would be difficult to reverse until this was completed and submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review.”

“What happens upstream on the Peace and Athabasca Rivers, including the Site C dam, impacts people and ecosystems downstream in the Peace-Athabasca Delta,” said Candace Batycki, BC and Yukon Program Director for the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. “Rivers don’t care about provincial borders, or park boundaries. Canada, BC and Alberta are obliged to protect Wood Buffalo National Park, a global treasure. We must do better.”

The World Heritage monitoring mission has been in Canada for the past eight days, visiting communities around the park and meeting with First Nations, scientists, government officials, industry representatives, and now environmental groups. They will wrap up their visit on October 4th, and are expected to submit their report to the World Heritage Centre in six weeks.

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For interviews with environmental group representatives:

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Live stream of press conference via Facebook at 9:30 MT, Tuesday Oct 4th

Facebook.com/cpaws

Media can ask questions by posting a comment, which will be relayed to group representatives

Photos (credit Bruce MacLean) and B Roll available at:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ik33wgitriw2h0z/AAA_S8EKqa9dyV3Srfrbsyeea?dl=0