

Press Release

UNESCO calls urgently on Canada to protect Wood Buffalo National Park.

New draft decision calls on Canada to conduct a proper assessment of Site C dam and make good on earlier promises.

June 6, 2017, FORT MCMURRAY – The UN’s World Heritage Committee is preparing to push Canada for immediate action to better protect Wood Buffalo National Park following Friday’s release of a [strong decision](#) proposed for the 40th session of the World Heritage Committee this summer.

The draft decision calls on Canada to, by February 1 2018, have made progress towards fully implementing all [17 of the recommendations](#) from the fall 2016 UNESCO mission to Wood Buffalo National Park. This includes finally conducting a proper assessment of the downstream impacts of the Site C dam and developing concrete mechanisms to improve water governance for the Peace Athabasca Delta. The draft decision also urges Canada to make good on its promise to develop a major Action Plan for ensuring the Wood Buffalo’s protection and to move more quickly to develop and implement that Action Plan. The absence of a timely action by Canada will result in Wood Buffalo National Park being relegated to the list of World Heritage in Danger.

“Once again the international community is calling on Canada to safeguard Wood Buffalo National Park against encroaching industrial pressures. It’s time for Canada to immediately implement UNESCO’s recommendations and start protecting the Peace Athabasca Delta,” said Mikisew Chief Steve Courtoreille.

“The UNESCO report was a wake up call for Canada. We intend to continue working with the World Heritage Committee to hold Minister McKenna to her commitment to take real action to protect this amazing area,” added Melody Lepine, Mikisew’s lead on its UNESCO petition.

Mikisew’s supporters also welcomed the draft decision.

"This decision lays out what Canada's governments need to do to live up to their responsibilities under the UN World Heritage Convention to safeguard Wood Buffalo on behalf of the world community," said Alison Woodley, National Director of CPAWS Parks Program. "It's a clear message from the UN that the threats facing the park from upstream hydro-electric projects and oil sands development are unacceptable, and that Canada needs to take concerted and immediate action to save this global treasure, working in partnership with Indigenous peoples."

“We are pleased that the World Heritage Committee is poised to strongly reaffirm its position that the Site C dam poses a threat to Wood Buffalo National Park and the Peace Athabasca Delta, and that impacts from Site C must be understood,” Says Galen Armstrong of Sierra Club BC. “Sierra Club BC is calling on the Trudeau government to suspend its approval of Site C and order an immediate halt to

construction, while Canada assesses the report's recommendations and implements changes. In the long run Site C simply cannot be built."

"Canada keeps saying that nothing can be done about Site C, but the World Heritage Commission isn't buying that and neither are we," says Candace Batycki of Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. "The incoming BC government has committed to send Site C for assessment by the BC Utilities Commission. Meanwhile Canada is being asked to make every effort to understand the possible impacts of the Site C project on Wood Buffalo. They don't need a legal mechanism to do that, they just need the will."

The World Heritage Committee will vote on the draft decision at its upcoming meeting in July 2017.

For more information, visit mikisewgir.com/projects/.

For interviews with Mikisew Cree First Nation representatives:

Melody Lepine, Mikisew Cree First Nation Industry and Government Relations, 780-792-8736, melody.lepine@mcfngir.ca

For interview with environmental group representatives:

Alison Woodley, BSc, MA, CPAWS, 613-203-1172, awoodley@cpaws.org

Caleb Behn, Keepers of the Water, caleb.behn@gmail.com

Galen Armstrong, Sierra Club BC, 778-679-3191, galen@sierraclub.bc.ca

Candace Batycki, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, 250-352-3830