

Annual Report

2020-2021

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A Message from the Chapter

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the past year has been a big one for CPAWS Northern Alberta. Defend AB Parks was a huge success, and we are incredibly grateful to all Albertans who spoke out against the proposed changes! Open pit coal mining in the Eastern Slopes became the next big issue. Our work on that issue is far from over but we feel that the collective voice of Albertans is making a difference!

The 2020-2021 year was an incredibly busy one for our organization. From March 2020 into the new year, our staff, Board and volunteers were working hard on our 'Defend Alberta Parks' campaign. Defend AB Parks is a collaboration with CPAWS Southern Alberta and the Alberta Environmental Network. Our Team did an excellent job of engaging the public through virtual events and social media. Albertans blew us away with their response to this campaign. Over 20,000 Albertans sent letters to the government opposing the proposed closures and removal of protection of 175 parks. Over 20,000 lawn signs went to houses and businesses across the province. The campaign grabbed national media attention and was commented on by academics. Our collective voice worked! On December 22, 2020 (Kecia's birthday!), the Government of Alberta backed down and said that the parks would not be closed or protections removed! What a great Christmas present for our staff and all Albertans! The campaign was awarded an Emerald Award for Outreach and Public Engagement by the Alberta Emerald Foundation in the spring of 2021!

We didn't get much of a chance to rest after the win on parks. We engaged on the Government's Crown Land Vision and proposed Trails Act, and the focus of our team (and the public) shifted strongly to opposing coal mining in the Eastern Slopes of the Rockies. We continued to work on species at risk issues, particularly by serving as members of three of the Government's Subregional Caribou Task Forces. Through a collaboration with Elders from Little Red River Cree First Nation, we have refocused our work on changing the status of bison in Alberta. We collaborated with several Indigenous communities on issues including Wood Buffalo National Park, a proposal by the Dene Tha' First Nation for an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area around Bistcho Lake and co-developed a wildlife monitoring program in the same area.

As always, we welcomed both new staff and board members while saying farewell to some others. We are deeply appreciative of the invaluable contributions that all CPAWS staff, board, volunteers, and supporters make to our success. The outpouring of support from Albertans for our work has meant a lot to our Team. We look forward to continuing to serve as a respected and



Dr. Kecia Kerr
Executive Director



Steve Donelon
Chair, Board of Directors

About CPAWS Northern Alberta

Overview

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) believes that Canada's magnificent landscape deserves to be enjoyed by all - now and into the future. That's why CPAWS is the only nation-wide charitable organization dedicated solely to protecting Canada's public lands and waters for current and future generations to appreciate.

The Northern Alberta Chapter was established in 1968 and we have been leading the way in conservation in Alberta for over 50 years. We aim to protect Alberta's waters, wilderness, and wildlife between the northern provincial border and Red Deer using a three-pronged approach: science-based decision making, collaboration, and advocacy. CPAWS Northern Alberta is pushing towards more parks and protected areas, and better management of the land, which will help Canada's pledge to reach 30% protection of land and inland waters by 2030.

The Board of Directors

Steve Donelon, Chair

Donna Tribe, Treasurer

Ramona Blacklock, Secretary

Bryan Adkins, Director

Anchal Verma, Director

Leigh Goldie, Director

Outgoing Board Members

Myles Curry

Cindy Olsen

Martin Prentice

The Chapter Staff

Kecia Kerr, Executive Director

Tara Russell, Program Director

Chris Smith, Conservation Analyst

Gillian Chow-Fraser, Boreal Program Manager

Ryan Cheng, Conservation Analyst

Elise Gagnon, Communications Coordinator

Outgoing Staff

Taylor Maton, Conservation Outreach Coordinator (Spring 2020-21)

Sarah Nason, Communications Coordinator (Spring 2020-21)

Eamon Riordan-Short, Indigenous-Led Conservation Collaboration Assistant (Spring 2020-21)

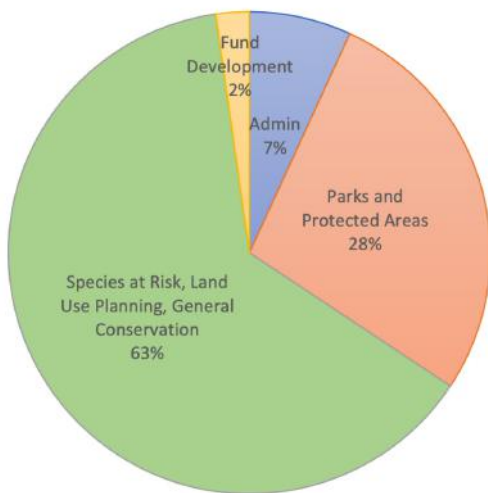
Staffing Updates

We have maintained our staff capacity over the last year at 6-7 full-time staff members. Importantly, we increased our communications capacity by hiring a full-time Communications Coordinator, Sarah Nason, in spring 2020. Sarah and Taylor Maton, our Outreach Coordinator, did much of the communications and engagement work related to the Defend AB Parks campaign. Both Sarah and Taylor have moved on to new positions, but we now know firsthand the value that trained communications staff bring to the organization! We miss Sarah and Taylor but wish them the best in their new positions. Fortunately, in May 2021, we welcomed our new Communications Coordinator, Elise Gagnon! We also had a short-term staff member, Eamon Riordan-Short, in the role of Indigenous Conservation Collaboration Coordinator for 7 months. Eamon coordinated the many projects that we collaborate on with the Dene Tha' First Nation.



▲ Staff and Board Members attend our virtual Christmas party in 2020.

Staff Time



- Admin
- Parks and Protected Areas
- Species at Risk, Land Use Planning, General Conservation
- Fund Development

◀ Pie chart summary of staff time over the period of this annual report (April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2021).

In 2020 - 21 we again dedicated 91% of our time to our conservation and advocacy programs. The “Conservation” category (the largest portion in green) includes our caribou and other Species at Risk Work, Land Use Planning, and our other general conservation programs. Time spent in “Parks and Protected Areas”(28%) has nearly doubled since 2019-2020 (16%) due to the ‘Defend AB Parks’ campaign. The remainder of staff time was spent on administrative work (7%) and Fund Development (2%).

Program Updates

Defend Alberta Parks



In June 2021, the Defend AB Parks campaign received an Emerald Award in the Public Engagement & Outreach Category.

In February 2020, the Government of Alberta announced their intention to remove or close 175 parks from the Alberta parks system, the “Optimizing Alberta Parks” plan. The plan was to remove protected area designation and revert them to public land status. Some sites would have become available for private management, or have their infrastructure sold. CPAWS Northern & Southern Alberta chapters collaborated with the Alberta Environmental Network (AEN) to launch a public campaign to prevent the loss of Alberta’s parks. We provided crucial information on what the Government of Alberta’s plan meant, and how it would impact park users, and the environment. Our chapter published dozens of detailed blogs, infographics, and filed Freedom of Information requests regarding the government’s decision rationale. We then successfully relayed this information to the public via several online events, our website and social media.

The “Optimizing Alberta Parks” plan was initially announced within just a few weeks of serious public health measures being put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Our traditional methods of engaging with our supporters had to change. Fortunately, our team rose to the challenge with lots of creative solutions, resulting in one of the largest and most successful environmental movements in Alberta.



Our campaign brought so much profile to the parks issue that our staff were interviewed for over 90 news articles, radio and TV segments, blogs, podcasts and more.

Alberta's Parks Successfully Defended

In December 2020, the decision was reversed, and no parks were lost. This was only possible because of pushback from tens of thousands of Albertans.

Defend Alberta Parks Lawn signs ready to be picked up by volunteers and brought to CPAWS supporters!



Albertans for Coal Free Rockies

In June 2020, without any public consultation, the Government of Alberta cancelled a provincial Coal Policy that had been in place since 1976. Consequently, large, sensitive areas of the eastern slopes of the Rockies were left open to the devastating impacts of coal development. This change allowed coal mining companies to swap their existing coal agreements to official coal leases across large areas of the eastern slopes. This also allowed applications for exploration and development in areas where this activity was previously prohibited.

The cancellation of the Coal Policy removed land zoning that restricted open-pit coal mining and coal exploration in some of Alberta's most environmentally sensitive areas. These areas provide Albertans, and much of the prairies, with drinking water and they are crucial habitat for species at risk such as grizzly bears, caribou, and native trout.



NORTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER, CREDIT: STEFFEN SAUSER CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0

Of particular concern for CPAWS Northern Alberta is coal development in these regions:

- Bighorn region (or also known as the West Country), which houses the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River
- The headwaters of the Athabasca
- Areas that overlap with caribou habitat
- Athabasca rainbow trout habitat

Our chapter has actively coordinated with concerned citizens and other environmental groups over the year. We have engaged with municipal councils within the North Saskatchewan River corridor, and held virtual presentations and town halls for Albertans.

CPAWS Northern & Southern Alberta chapters have collaborated to call for the interim re-instatement of the policy and a return of coal leases to the government of Alberta. Our letter writing tool (launched in August 2020) recorded over 11,000 letters sent to the Minister of Energy and MLAs.



ABRAHAM LAKE, CREDIT: MARTIN PRENTICE

Albertans for Coal Free Rockies

(continued)

In response to concerns from Albertans across the province, the Coal Policy was reinstated in February 2021, with a commitment to develop a new policy. For the development of a new coal policy, the Government of Alberta struck an external committee to meet with concerned parties and provide recommendations for a new policy. CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta were invited to present to the committee, and provide a written submission.



CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta would like to see no new coal development or coal exploration in Alberta's eastern slopes.

NORDEGG CREDIT: SHARISSA JOHNSON, UNSPLASH LICENSE

Consequences of a cancelled Coal Policy

186,187 hectares of land previously unavailable for coal mining (known as 'Category 2' under the Coal Policy) were leased to mining companies. These leases remain in place.

Many mining companies received exploration permits for their coal leases and developed hundreds of kilometers of roads and test drill pits, between the time the Coal Policy was removed (June 2020), and the Coal Policy's re-instatement and cancellation of exploration permits (February 2021).



GRANDE CACHE, CREDIT: DAVID HEBERT

CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta would like new coal development and coal exploration in Alberta's eastern slopes to be prohibited.

National Parks Update

Wood Buffalo National Park

The dire ecological state of Wood Buffalo National Park remains an ongoing concern. The unique qualities that once earned the park a designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site continue to deteriorate, contributing to the drying of the Peace-Athabasca Delta and significantly impacting Indigenous communities that depend on a healthy Delta. CPAWS has continued to fight for better action to address unmitigated threats, including poor management of tailing ponds in the oil sands, the continued construction of Site C dam without an environmental assessment of its impacts on Wood Buffalo, and cumulative industrial impacts. CPAWS also continues to push for true co-management of the park with Indigenous communities that elevates Indigenous voices through joint decision-making processes. Our Chapter has remained firm in support of Wood Buffalo National Park being placed on the World Heritage sites “in danger” list.

In December 2020, CPAWS Northern Alberta, along with Indigenous groups and partner organizations, submitted a letter to the World Heritage Committee stating our significant concerns over the slow implementation of the Government of Canada’s Action Plan (2019) to improve the ecological state of the park. There has been a lack of progress on several critical pieces of the Action Plan and the necessary resources to implement the plan were absent.

Later that month, our chapter celebrated a small win as the Federal Government announced additional funding of \$59.9 million towards the implementation of Wood Buffalo National Park’s Action Plan.

The possibility of listing Wood Buffalo National Park as a World Heritage Site In Danger was reviewed at the 44th World Heritage Committee meeting in July, 2021.



PEACE ATHABASCA DELTA, WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK, CREDIT: GARTH LENZ

Jasper National Park Management Plan

CPAWS Northern Alberta is keenly aware of the role national parks hold within the world of advocacy and conservation, their importance to park visitors and their ecological significance. The Rocky Mountain National Parks, which include Banff, Jasper, Kootenay and Yoho, have been developing their 10-year management plans which were last updated in 2010. These plans will provide guidance on how the parks will be managed over the next decade, and they are crucial documents that provide Canadians a way to help shape the future of our parks.

National Parks Update

(continued)

Jasper National Park released their draft park management plan earlier in 2021 after delays due to COVID-19 in 2020. Public feedback on the plan was accepted from April 17 - July 7, 2021, and CPAWS Northern Alberta worked collaboratively with CPAWS National and CPAWS Southern Alberta to provide recommendations on how the plan could be improved and strengthened. We submitted a detailed 20-page report to the superintendent of Jasper National Park providing positive comments as well as feedback on areas that could be further improved



MALIGNE LAKE, CREDIT: CHRISTOPHER CZERMAK, UNSPLASH LICENSE

In our feedback we highlighted three overarching recommendations for the entire draft management plan:

- All targets should be measurable, even if they are accomplished over the long term.
- More intentional collaboration with other adjacent protected areas and land managers regarding species at risk management is required.
- Development guidelines require clarification to ensure they do not result in activities that negatively impact the park's ecological integrity.

Parks Canada is currently reviewing the feedback received on the draft management plan, and a final version will be tabled in Parliament sometime in the next year.

Caribou in Jasper National Park

The extirpation of the Maligne caribou herd from Jasper National Park was announced in 2020, calling into question actions needed to conserve the remaining caribou herds in the national park: the Tonquin, Brazeau, and A La Peche herds. CPAWS gave particular focus to the conservation of the Tonquin herd because of the more intense impacts from recreation and tourism activities that the herd experiences.



TONQUIN CARIBOU, CREDIT: ANNE ROBINSON

Winter recreational activities, like snowshoeing and skiing, can negatively impact caribou by creating access routes for predators into caribou habitat. Winter access restrictions are critical in caribou habitat during the winter seasons to limit chances of predation, especially for such small herd sizes. However, strong action is needed to make sure these protective measures are not too little, too late.

Over the past year, CPAWS Northern Alberta has been working in partnership with the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) and the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) to reduce recreational pressures on the Tonquin caribou herd. There are so few caribou left in the herds in Jasper, that every single individual caribou counts.



The groups asked Parks Canada to be guided by best available evidence and:

- Close Tonquin backcountry to human access all snow season, instead of opening it mid-February for recreation and lodging operations
- Re-assess and reduce impacts to caribou from backcountry access.

The Alpine Club of Canada voluntarily suspended bookings at its Tonquin backcountry Wates-Gibson hut for the entire 2020-2021 winter season. The groups (CPAWS Northern Alberta, AWA, DSF, and ACC) asked all backcountry winter recreationists to lead by example and to ask their peers to stay out of the Tonquin backcountry all snow season to support caribou survival.

SKIING IN THE TONQUIN VALLEY,
CREDIT: JASPER GUY, UNSPLASH LICENSE

HOW WINTER RECREATION IMPACTS CARIBOU

and what you can do to help



Indigenous-Led Conservation

Bistcho Lake Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA)

CPAWS NAB was pleased to continue its collaborative work with the Dene Tha' First Nation to create an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) in their traditional territory around Bistcho Lake in the northwest corner of the province. In particular, both CPAWS and DTFN participated as Task Force members to provide recommendations on Alberta's Bistcho Lake Sub-Regional Plan. The final recommendations included a full consensus recommendation to consider an IPCA in the sub-region. A draft version of the full sub-regional plan is anticipated by the end of 2021.

The Dene Tha' First Nation showcased their work for this area through their compelling short documentary, *Bistcho Lake: Indigenous Leadership in Conservation*. The documentary includes interviews with community members, Elders, and our Executive Director, Kecia Kerr. The Nation additionally released a public-facing report making the case for an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area around Bistcho Lake. Both the documentary and the report can be read on their informative website bistcholake.ca.



BISTCHO LAKE, CREDIT: JEREMY WILLIAMS



The year also marked the launch of the caribou monitoring program around Bistcho Lake, developed and carried out in partnership with CPAWS and DTFN. In early 2021, team members from CPAWS were fortunate to make a trip up to Bistcho Lake to retrieve a years-worth of camera images from remote motion-triggered cameras set up around the area. Trail camera locations were based on a weaving of Traditional Knowledge and western science, and our chapter is still sorting through thousands of photos! The photos will help the Nation monitor the caribou herd and develop appropriate management plans that conserve areas important to the caribou.

CARIBOU FOOTAGE FROM TRAIL CAMERAS

Indigenous Guardians App



WILDLIFE MONITORING CAMERA, CREDIT: JEREMY WILLIAMS

CPAWS Northern Alberta and the Dene Tha' First Nation (DTFN) have continued their collaboration with the Indigenous Guardians field data collection application. The smartphone-based App has been used to record hundreds of points of interest to the community and has been an important component to the wildlife monitoring program. In addition, the app has been used by the Nation for a joint project with our chapter examining the distribution of Bison within the Dene Tha' First Nation Traditional Territory. CPAWS Northern Alberta is excited to continue to work with the Nation and explore additional partnerships to advance conservation opportunities in Northwestern Alberta.

Bison Conservation with Little Red River Cree Nation

CPAWS Northern Alberta collaborated with trappers and Elders from the Little Red River Cree Nation, part of a collective called ShagowAskee, to conserve and protect the Wabasca wood bison herd in northern Alberta. The Wabasca herd is ecologically and culturally important, as one of the last remaining disease-free and wild wood bison herds in Alberta. Sadly, the herd is extremely small, with recent surveys finding only 9 wild animals left. Hunting of this small herd is still legally allowed, which is why we supported the ShagowAskee team in urging the government to provide immediate protections for the Wabasca herd, and more broadly, provide 'Wildlife' status for all wild wood bison herds so we can protect this important species across its historical range.

More can be learned about this work, and our broader bison conservation campaign, on our new webpage: <https://cpawsnab.org/bison-in-alberta> . For more information on ShagowAskee, explore <https://shagowaskee.com/>.



WOOD BISON, CREDIT: PETE NUJJ, UNSPLASH LICENSE

Outreach

Engaging the public in new ways

Together without being in-person

- We hosted four virtual events and Q&As over Zoom, with our November 2020 town hall garnering over 800 registrations.
- We held a virtual 'Rally From Home' encouraging Albertans to call their MLA or the Minister of Environment and Parks while wearing outdoor gear or setting up camp from home! Some MLAs said they received more calls on this issue than they had on any other.
- Dozens of Albertans participated, and we even received an incredible video submission!
- We launched the lawn sign portion of our Defend Alberta Parks (DAP) campaign in September 2020 to put more pressure on the provincial government and encourage Albertans to write their MLAs.
- What started as a small campaign in Central Calgary neighborhoods quickly expanded to 24 cities and towns across the province. This explosive growth was based purely on demand, where Albertans requested signs for their areas.
- To date, over 23,000 lawn signs have been ordered - and requests continue to roll in
- The distribution of lawn signs and mail drops was and continues to be supported by an incredible team of over 1,500 volunteers across the province
- Over 20,000 letters have been sent to MLAs using our online writing tool.
- We partnered with local businesses to distribute Defend Alberta Parks buttons and stickers that were hosted in storefronts such as Campers Village, Switching Gear, Track'N'Trail and Arc'teryx in Edmonton, Calgary, and Canmore.

▼ Supporters with their homemade Defend Alberta Parks Signs. Photo Credit: Meghan Tran



Digital Engagement

- The Defend Alberta Parks website and Twitter feed became a universal resource hub for all things Alberta Parks.
- We engaged and motivated our audience using the viral hashtag #DefendABParks.
- We created a community hub for Albertans to celebrate their memories in the parks set to be delisted called Mapping Memories.
- We developed a series of infographics and blogs that were shared tens of thousands of times.
- Our supporters showed their love for Alberta parks by using our custom frames for their social media profile pictures.
- We used a photo contest on Instagram called Lights and Lawn Signs to create community by encouraging and rewarding our supporters to decorate their lawn signs for the holidays.

Financial Overview

Financial Status

CPAWS Northern Alberta is incorporated as a non-profit society in Alberta and governed by a board of directors. CPAWS Northern Alberta shares a charitable number with the other chapters of CPAWS across the country (106865272 RR0001). Individual members, granting foundations, the provincial and federal governments, businesses, and the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) support CPAWS Northern Alberta. We ended the Fiscal year 2020-2021 with a surplus. We are projecting a deficit for 2021-2022, however, we are on a good trajectory for reducing the projected deficit for the current fiscal year.

The financials reported below for the fiscal year 2020-2021 have been audited by Peterson-Walker LLP Chartered Professional Accountants.

Summary of Revenues & Expenses

	2020-2021	2019-2020
Revenue		
Grants & Contracts*	\$ 337,178	\$ 310,283
Gaming	\$ 39,749	\$ 50,442
Donors & Supporters	\$ 108,179	\$ 50,850
Other	\$ 16,135	\$ 19,928
	\$ 501,241	\$ 431,503
Expenses		
Conservation Programs	\$ 458,067	\$ 431,227
Core Mission Support	\$ 24,808	\$ 24,336
	\$ 482,875	\$ 455,563
REVENUE (UNDER) OVER EXPENSES	\$ 18,366	(\$ 24,060)

*Includes Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy for 4 months

Funding Sources

Grants and contracts awarded by the following entities:

- Government of Alberta
- Government of Canada
- Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis (AGLC)
- Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA)
- Alberta Ecotrust
- Edmonton Community Foundation (Community Grant, Small Grant, Cinders Fund, Doris Tanner Pimm Fund, CPAWS Endowment Funds)
- Uplands Foundation Resources Legacy fund
- TGear Family Trust
- Wyss Foundation
- Patagonia
- Mountain Equipment Co-op
- Arc’Teryx
- Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative
- Nature Canada (Make Room For Nature initiative)
- TD Friends of the Env. Foundation
- Clean Foundation
- United Nations Association of Canada, Green Corps
- United Way
- Many individual donors!

In 2021 CPAWS Northern Alberta is particularly grateful to the former Alberta Provincial Parks Alumni Association which made a contribution to create a new Endowment Fund with the Edmonton Community Foundation called the "Alberta Provincial Parks Alumni Association Fund for CPAWS Northern Alberta. The fund will create an ongoing legacy in support of Parks advocacy and furthering conservation in Alberta.

Want to help this fund grow and ensure your donation contributes to our financial stability in perpetuity? You can donate by contacting DonorServices@ECFoundation.org

Partners

- Dene Tha First Nation (DTFN)
- Mikisew Cree First Nation
- Alberta Environmental Network (AEN)
- CPAWS Southern Alberta
- CPAWS Saskatchewan
- CPAWS Northwest Territories
- CPAWS Yukon
- CPAWS National
- Alberta EcoTrust
- Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y)
- Ducks Unlimited
- Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition (ERVCC)
- Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF)
- Mistik Management
- Alberta Pacific
- Patagonia
- Track N’ Trail
- MEC
- Arc’Teryx
- Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECC)