



CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY  
NORTHERN ALBERTA CHAPTER

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear CPAWS Northern Alberta Members and Supporters,

Thank you for another year of your support! The 2022-2023 Fiscal Year was a busy and productive year for our chapter. One of the big highlights was Canada co-hosting, with China, the Convention on Biological Diversity's 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) in Montreal. Kecia, Tara, and Gillian attended the meetings, along with many other CPAWS staff from across the country, and partners from the Dene Tha' First Nation. Our work supporting Indigenous-led conservation initiatives ramped up and is now the primary focus for several of our staff. Our opposition to new coal mines and coal exploration continued. We continue to advocate for improved habitat conditions for species at risk, such as caribou, wood bison, and native trout. The process for a potential National Urban Park in the Edmonton region has continued to advance. We are pleased that Edmonton City Council has approved moving to the planning phase of the process.

Operationally, we continue to have a passionate and dedicated staff and Board. In the last year, we lost one of our long-time staff, Chris Smith, to a new position in his home province with the Government of Nova Scotia. We were sad to see him go, but excited for him for this new opportunity. We hired two new staff for our Boreal Program and outreach. Our Board has remained stable at 7 members over the past year. We continue to be financially stable and plan to maintain or slightly increase our current staffing level of 7 full-time positions.

Our outlook for the next couple of years remains positive in terms of opportunities to make change, but the dire situation of biodiversity loss and the devastating impacts of the climate crisis have made our work more important than ever. We hope to have your continued support in speaking out to make changes to improve environmental conditions in Northern Alberta, and we hope to see more Albertans join our cause. Thank you again for all you do to take action and support this important conservation work!

Sincerely,



**DR. KECIA KERR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



**STEVE DONELON, BOARD CHAIR**

## MEET THE CHAPTER STAFF



Dr. Kecia Kerr  
Executive Director

Jocelyn Portillo  
Outreach Coordinator

Nicole Doll  
Boreal Program Coordinator

Gillian Chow-Fraser  
Boreal Program Director

Tara Russell  
Program Director

Elise Gagnon  
Communications Manager

Ryan Cheng  
Conservation Analyst

Chris Smith, Conservation Analyst  
2018-2023

Samantha Pedersen, Boreal Program Assistant  
2022-2023

## MEET THE BOARD

Steve Donelon, Chair

Anchal Verma, Director

Kyle Wheeler, Director

Donna Tribe, Treasurer

Leigh Goldie, Director

Ramona Blacklock, Secretary

Tisha Raj, Director



## THE CPAWS NORTHERN ALBERTA STRATEGIC PLAN

Our chapter's direction and growth is led by our 2021-2025 Strategic Plan: [https://cpawsnab.org/wp-content/uploads/CPAWSNAB\\_StrategicPlan\\_External\\_12012021-2.pdf](https://cpawsnab.org/wp-content/uploads/CPAWSNAB_StrategicPlan_External_12012021-2.pdf). There are four categories of goals that guide our chapter's work in order to meet our vision of an Alberta that embraces conservation and is a leader in protecting a large network of parks and wilderness areas. Our annual report is organized by the four categories in the strategic plan: Conservation, Supporting Indigenous-led Conservation, Strategic Partnerships and Education and Communication with the public

**OUR TEAM IS EXCITED TO SHARE WITH YOU ALL THE WORK WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED IN THIS YEAR'S REPORT.**

## CONSERVATION

### National Urban Park Initiative in the Edmonton Region

The City of Edmonton could be home to Canada's next National Urban Park! CPAWS Northern Alberta's board chair, Steve Donelon, was a representative on the National Urban Park Stakeholder Committee during the pre-feasibility phase of creating a National Urban Park in Edmonton. We shared our expertise, and advocated for an ambitious conservation plan that encompassed the entire river valley.

Our chapter has been instrumental in promoting the concept of a national urban park with Edmontonians, where the North Saskatchewan River Valley's wildlife

and nature could not only be enjoyed but also protected. Nationally, we have been collaborating with CPAWS chapters across the country to ensure that federal national urban park policy puts nature first. While at the time of this report no sites have been selected, CPAWS Northern Alberta submitted its support for the National Urban Park and recommendations for improvement in early 2023. City Administration and the Urban Planning Committee have recommended moving forward to the planning phase of development for the National Urban Park.

### Elk Island National Park Draft Management Plan

Elk Island National Park released their draft Management Plan in February 2023. Management plans for our national parks are a unique opportunity to have your voice heard in the park's direction (they only come around every 10 years!) Parks Canada opened the draft management plan for public feedback, which we encouraged the public (that's you!) to participate.

CPAWS Northern Alberta submitted its own letter to Parks Canada elaborating on these key comments:

- The park is small and needs to expand.
- Any proposed National Urban Park in the Edmonton region should prioritize connecting to Elk Island National Park.
- The Park needs more resources for species-at-risk monitoring and habitat improvement and generally for improved protection of ecological conditions in the park.
- The connectivity between the two blocks of the park and with the surrounding area needs to be improved.



Over 2,200 letters were sent largely supporting the park's drafted plan and expressing support for expansion, added resources and connectivity. At the time of this report's release, the final Management Plan for Elk Island National Park is not yet public. We hope to see all of the positive things that we applauded in the draft plan remain in the final version!

## CONSERVATION

### Wood Buffalo National Park

The Athabasca and Peace Rivers are two major rivers in Alberta that converge into one of the largest inland freshwater deltas in the world, the Peace-Athabasca Delta, with global significance as an area of high biodiversity and unique habitats that exist only because of the rare dynamics of the large rivers that feed into it. Many Indigenous communities have lived in this delta for millennia, as the center of social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and political activities. We work with these Indigenous communities, including the Mikisew Cree First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Fort Chipewyan Métis Association, to garner provincial, national, and international attention to the delta that has been quietly degrading for decades.

In August 2022, a joint monitoring mission visited Alberta to investigate the status of Wood Buffalo National Park. The investigation (or, the monitoring mission) was underway because the World Heritage Committee had decided there was a likelihood that Wood Buffalo could be added to the list of World Heritage in Danger because of its many overwhelming and unmitigated threats upstream. Threats include oil sands, tailings ponds, forestry, weak regulatory rules, hydropower projects and climate change.

The mission included a session to hear from environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) for their on-the-ground perspective. CPAWS Northern Alberta was honoured to act as chair and present for the session. We brought together collaborators, experts, doctors, lawyers and researchers to send a clear message that our governments were not doing enough to prevent further deterioration to Wood Buffalo National Park.

We ran a ten-day public letter-writing campaign while the mission was underway. Our goal was to let the Canada and Alberta government know that Canadians care deeply about the future of Wood Buffalo National Park. In a shocking turnout, nearly 3,500 letters were submitted! We are so grateful to have supporters like you, that always come together to fight for a better future.

The mission visit was successful in bringing international attention to upstream threats, like oil sands tailings, to Wood Buffalo. A final report from the monitoring mission would be released nearly a year later, which would conclude the Park is increasingly unsafe from upstream activities and would call for immediate interventions in the Delta to reverse declining trends or “the World Heritage values of the [Delta] will be lost.”



## CONSERVATION

### Caribou in Alberta

photo: Chloe and Trevor Van Loon, CC BY 4.0

#### Woodland caribou conservation on Alberta's Public Lands

Woodland caribou have been waiting almost twenty years for Alberta range plans since they were first listed as a “species at risk” in Canada. Under the Species at Risk Act, it is up to the province or territory to create individual “range plans” for caribou which detail how the government will recover the species. For the first time in provincial history, two caribou range plans were finalized and released in April 2022. The plans covered the Bistcho and Cold Lake caribou herds, as well as areas outside herd ranges (called “sub-regions”). The plans set out detailed management approaches and requirements for industrial development while supporting economic, recreational, conservation, and Indigenous opportunities. CPAWS Northern Alberta participated in Task Forces that informed the desired outcomes for each plan, urging for conservation and protected areas as tools to ensure caribou habitat could grow back and remain accessible to caribou. While the final plans did not include any new conservation areas, they did include disturbance limits and a plan to reach the federal requirements for caribou habitat conservation.

CPAWS Northern Alberta has been involved in four caribou Task Forces since 2019 and two of those range plans have been finalized. The status of caribou in Alberta is dire as their habitat is further fragmented. Advocating for caribou habitat protection and recovery is crucial to the species survival in the province. As more range plans are drafted, keep your eyes peeled for engagement opportunities to speak up for caribou!

#### Woodland caribou in the Rocky Mountain National Parks

Significant progress was made this year for the conservation and recovery of woodland caribou in Jasper National Park by Parks Canada. CPAWS Northern Alberta and partners were supportive of Parks Canada's actions, including the difficult decision to buy out two backcountry lodges in the Tonquin Valley and to rule out new licenses of occupation in the valley (January 2023).

In March 2023, Parks Canada made the announcement that they would be moving forward with a caribou conservation breeding program.

CPAWS Northern Alberta encouraged participation in the public engagement on the breeding program last summer (2022), and hundreds of you voiced your support for this emergency measure, as long as it was paired with other commitments to ensure safe habitat for caribou. We are pleased to see these recent decisions from Parks Canada that reflect caribou recovery as a priority. As caribou population numbers dwindle, the two remaining herds in Jasper National Park face extirpation without intervention. The lodge purchases, winter access restrictions and reducing backcountry recreational use are all decisions that have come with their share of criticisms but will be necessary to caribou recovery.

**The strongest driver of caribou decline is predation. Inside national parks, where industrial development is prohibited, human impacts can drive predation like, recreation and tourism. Outside of national parks, on Alberta's public lands, predation rates are impacted by industrial development.**



## CONSERVATION

### Coal in Alberta

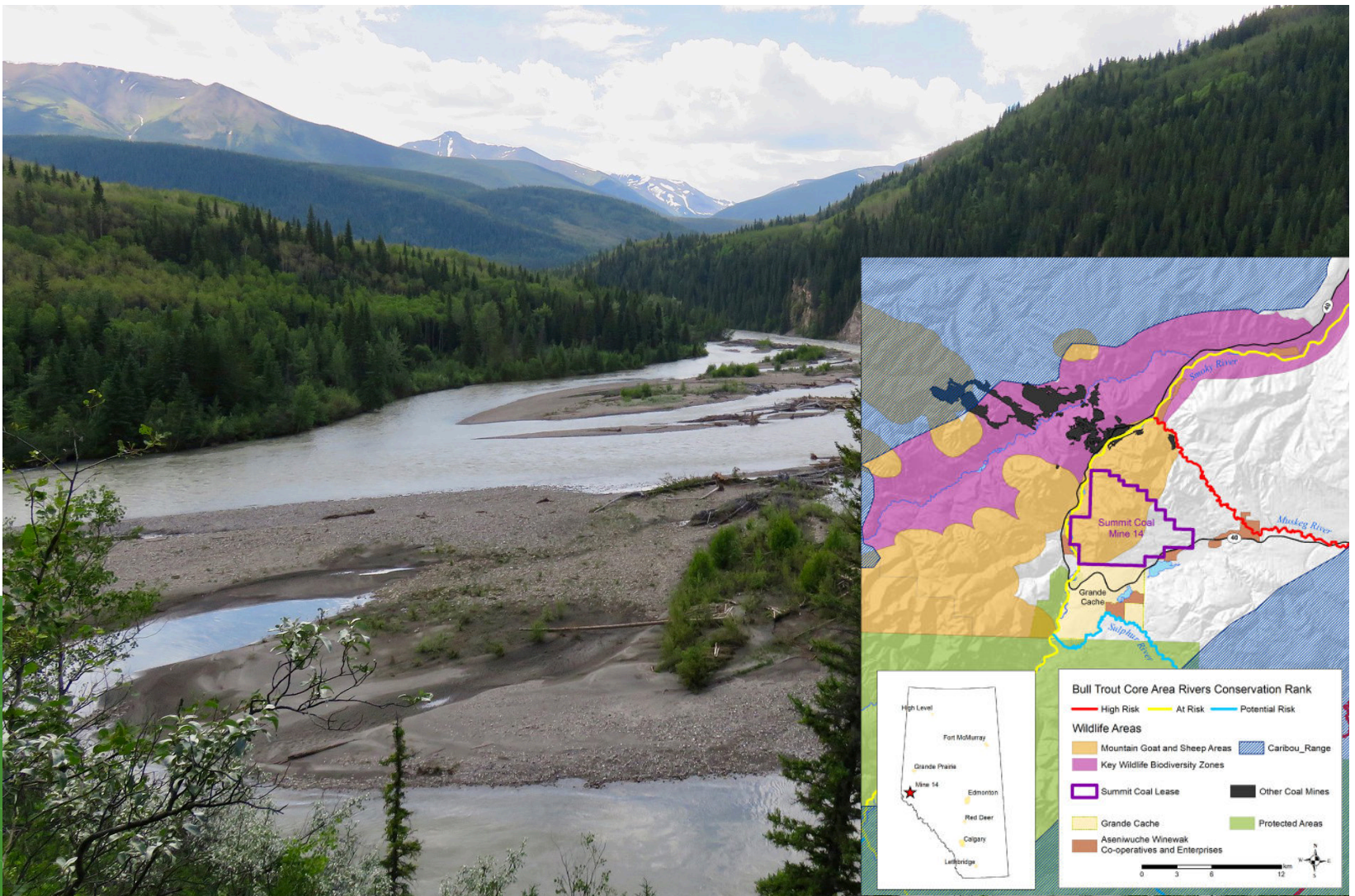
Our work regarding coal exploration and development in Alberta continues through the monitoring, mapping and analysis of new mining activities, including mapping developments of coal leases in southwest Alberta and for Mine 14 in the Grande Cache area. Though this work may not be public facing, the analysis supports our conservation work by outlining water sources, species habitat, recreational areas and more that stand to be impacted from coal activities.

During the summer of 2022, CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta Chapters worked on mapping out the extent of the coal exploration roads in the Livingstone area of southwestern Alberta. The new maps compared the roads that were approved by the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) with the roads that were actually constructed. This analysis enables CPAWS to see the impacts that exploration has across

the landscape and to estimate the costs of reclamation from coal exploration activities.

The track record for coal development and exploration that do not compromise the health of our waters, ecosystems, and communities, is poor. We do not think that new coal projects should proceed. Our letter demanding a coal policy that prioritizes conservation and the health of our communities has been updated regularly throughout the year for you to send to your MLA: <https://action.cpaaws.org/page/121882/action/1?ea.tracking.id=website>. The moratorium on new coal mines has remained in place with exceptions for four projects. This moratorium has prevented any new development in the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River. However, one of those exceptions is Mine 14 near Grande Cache. This mine continues to proceed.

photo: Sharissa Johnson



## CONSERVATION

Hundreds of square kilometers of oil sands tailings ponds threaten the health of Alberta's waters with risks of disastrous tailings spills and leaks causing harm to public health and wildlife downstream. The public takes on enormous risk when mines of any kind are built, whether those risks are environmental, financial, or health related.

photo: Garth Lenz

### Alberta has an oil sands tailings problem

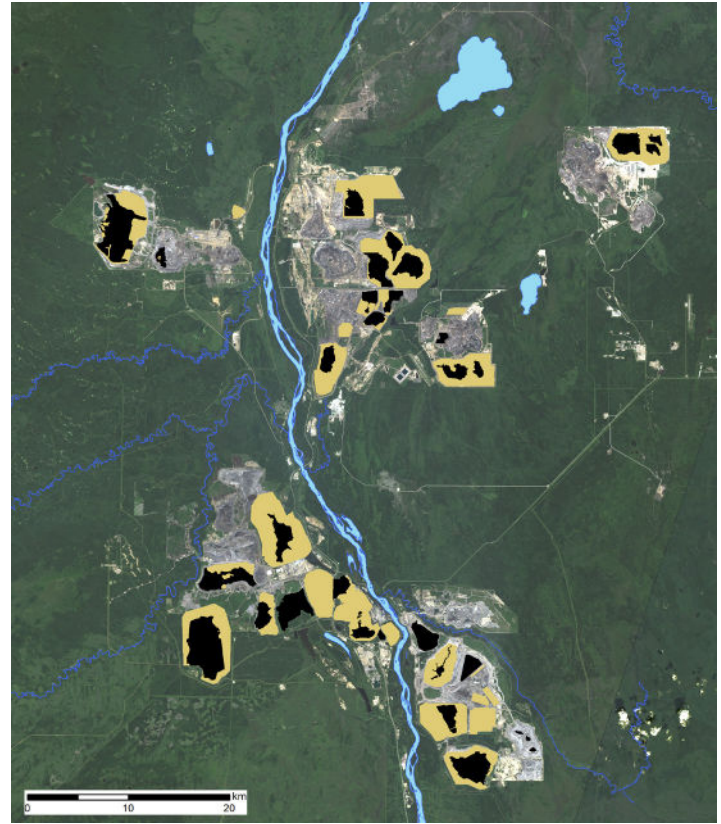
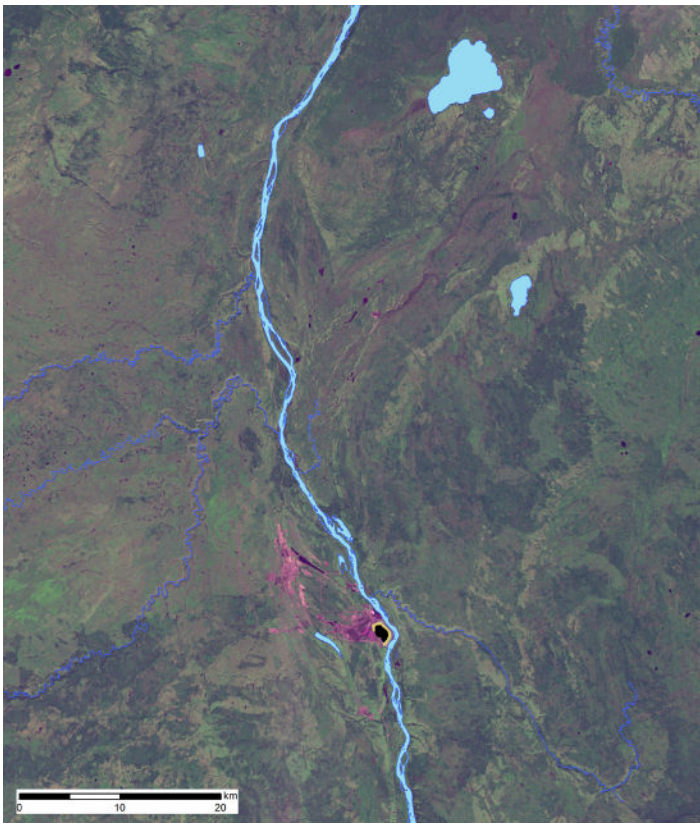
- Tailings are the waste fluids of the oil sands extraction process, the byproduct of using water and chemicals to separate the bitumen from sands. Tailings fluids contain contaminants and toxic compounds, including hydrocarbons, arsenic, and dissolved heavy metals.
- Tailings are harmful to fish and birds and have degraded water quality in the Athabasca River and Peace-Athabasca Delta, impacting the livelihoods of Indigenous communities that depend on a healthy watershed. The construction of tailings results in the irreversible loss of tens of thousands of hectares of carbon-storing peatlands, an invaluable nature-based climate solution.
- Experts estimate total reclamation of tailings will cost a minimum of \$28 billion but could be as costly as \$130 billion. Despite record profit years, the industry has put away less than 3% of the necessary funds to carry out reclamation which poses a significant risk to taxpayers who would be left to pay for the reclamation costs.

### 50 Years of Sprawling Tailings:

In May 2022, we released a report that mapped the growth in tailings ponds since the first oil sands mine in 1975. The report was written in partnership with Environmental Defence Canada and Elders from downstream communities of the oil sands. The report reveals unprecedented growth in tailings ponds with no proven solution for their safe reclamation. In the past 20 years, the total tailings footprint has grown nearly 300 per cent.

Our analysis highlighted the shocking scope of the problem. Tailings fluid covers over 120 km<sup>2</sup> of area in the oil sands region. If you include all associated features, like the beaches, dams, dykes and facilities, then the total tailings area balloons to over 300 km<sup>2</sup> – this would cover the city of Vancouver over two and a half times. If tailings ponds were placed end-to-end, the distance extends over 94 kilometers, which would be equivalent to travelling from Calgary to Canmore, Alberta.

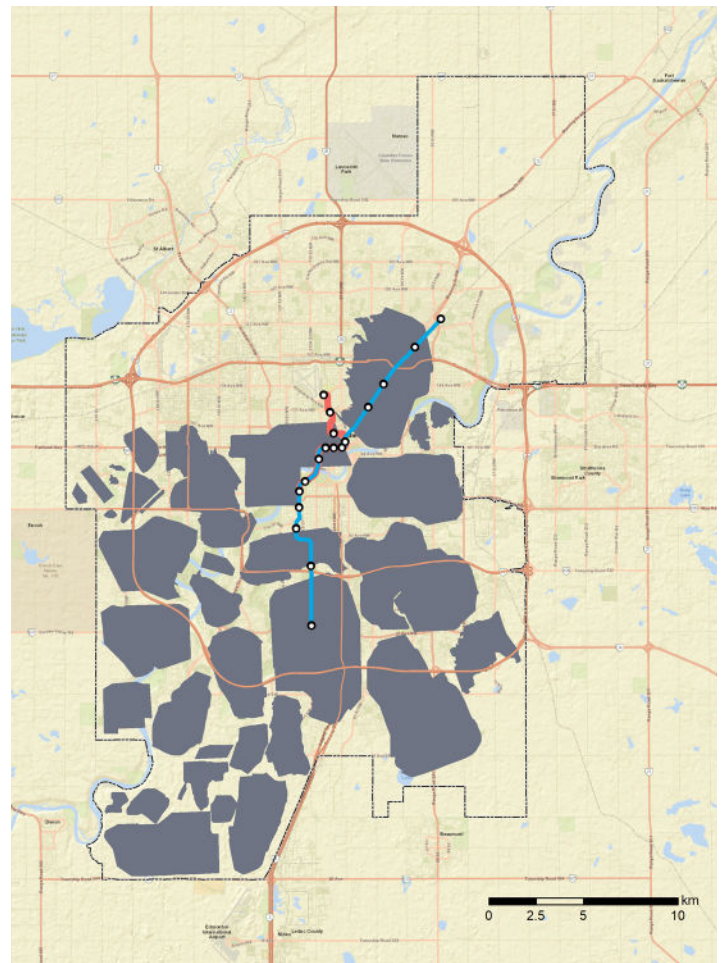
The report provides six recommendations to improve the environmental outlook for oil sands tailings, including a recommendation to develop and implement a comprehensive tailings reclamation plan for the oil sands region, prioritizing environmental outcomes and the concerns of impacted downstream communities.



Tailings pond fluid (black) and associated structures (yellow) in the Alberta oil sands from 1975 (left) to 2020 (right) as pictured in our *50 Years of Sprawling Tailings*.

The oil sands mines of Northern Alberta are often described as “the largest industrial project on Earth”, with tailings ponds so large “they can be seen from space”.<sup>1</sup> A challenge environmental organizations often face is conveying these broad descriptions in a concise and relatable manner to the public. Our featured maps come from the *50 Years of Sprawling Tailings* report, and attempts to address this challenge. The report included a series of maps overlaying transit systems and the footprints of tailings ponds. In many cities, subway maps are ubiquitous and easily recognizable: placemarking subway stations and lines along with tailings ponds can give a sense of scale to the ponds. For example, on the Edmonton map (right) we can see that the larger tailings ponds cover the distance between Stadium and Clareview LRT stations, or Century Park to University stations.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/alberta-canadas-tar-sands-is-growing-but-indigenous-people-fight-back>



## CONSERVATION

### Regulations to release tailings into the Athabasca River

Alberta's oil sands store roughly 1.4 trillion litres of fluid in tailings ponds. Reclamation will be needed to remove tailings ponds from the landscape and stop their negative impacts, but less than 0.1% of the oil sands holds a formal reclamation certificate. Unfortunately, there are no current reclamation approaches that have valid independent scientific review. Despite this fact, Alberta and Canada are set to establish regulations that would allow for the release of treated tailings into the Athabasca River.

These regulations would be enacted under Canada's Fisheries Act, since the treated tailings would be deposited into the Athabasca River, a fish-bearing water body. The federal government has been working with downstream Indigenous communities to develop a solution to address oil sands tailings since 2021.

The Government of Alberta is also developing provincial regulatory requirements for release of oil sands mine water. The Alberta Government has stated they aim to have regulations by 2023 and to be accepting applications in 2024.

There are significant concerns over the release of treated tailings. Regulations and management of tailings need to be grounded in what is safe and supported by downstream and surrounding communities. Many Indigenous communities and community members have voiced strong opposition to the release of tailings into the Athabasca and related regulations.

CPAWS remains extremely concerned over unanswered questions regarding the release:

- Will treatment technology be able to ensure the wastewater is safe for downstream communities and wildlife?
- Will there be long-term impacts in the downstream waters?
- Will there be impacts from the sheer volume of released tailings?
- Are there other alternatives for reclamation?



photo: Garth Lenz

## CONSERVATION

CPAWS Northern Alberta holds steadfast in the stance that release standards that are in the public interest are also those that are safest for the environment. We need evidence that treatment technology would have no impact on water quality, ecosystem health and public health. The federal government's first public engagement on treated tailings release standards will be complete by September 15, 2023.

Our chapter will continue to participate in all public engagements and continue to engage provincially and federally to ensure oil sands tailings reclamation solutions are safe for downstream communities and the environment. We must rethink the future of the oil sands industry by prioritizing the safety of our communities and holding industry accountable.

For further information on oil sands tailings and to sign up for updates, visit [www.cpawsnab.org/tailings](http://www.cpawsnab.org/tailings).

photo: Garth Lenz

## CONSERVATION

### Public Land Management in Alberta

60% of Alberta is public land, owned and managed by the provincial government, meaning the critical decisions on how most of Alberta's land is used, and which activities are allowed to occur, are determined by the government of Alberta. Evidence is clear that in order to protect the diversity of wildlife and landscapes in our province, increased protection through new parks and protected areas is essential.

CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta commissioned polling in the fall of 2022, the results of which demonstrate Albertans' support for the increased protection of nature in the province. The polling results are at odds with the Government of Alberta's restructuring of the Environment and Parks ministries into two: the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas and a separate Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism (October 2022). The split of the ministries is concerning, as it potentially places more emphasis on development and high-impact recreation within Alberta's parks and removes emphasis on the conservation of public lands. The government has also avoided including new protected areas in caribou range plans, and threatened to remove protections for many of our current parks in 2020 (remember Defend Alberta Parks?).

**The polling results are a strong indication that the people of Alberta are expecting more protection of nature.**



# 95%

OF ALBERTANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE LOSS OF SPECIES AND THE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY CRISIS.

# 77%

OF ALBERTANS SUPPORT SETTING ASIDE MORE LAND IN ALBERTA TO PROTECT WILDLIFE HABITAT.

# 85%

OF ALBERTANS SUPPORT THE PROVINCE COMMITTING TO THE INTERNATIONAL TARGET OF PROTECTING 30% OF LANDS AND WATERS BY 2030.

### CPAWS at COP15

Canada and China welcomed the world to COP15 in December 2022 as co-hosts for nature and biodiversity's complement to the better known 'climate COP'. These meetings were an essential international gathering that set conservation goals to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity.

Nations from around the world gathered for this event, alongside Indigenous leaders, and representatives from non-government organizations. The goal of the conference was to reach an agreement for a framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss – and it was a success! The agreement, called the Kunming-Montreal agreement, is an ambitious framework that includes 23 targets for a nature-positive future.

## CONSERVATION

Here are some targets (summarized from the final agreement: <https://www.cbd.int/gbf/>) that we are particularly excited about:

- Target 1. Stipulates that all lands and waters are effectively managed by spatial land use plans that consider the conservation of biodiversity.
- Target 3. Sets an ambitious target to protect at least 30% of land, freshwater, and marine ecosystems by 2030 while recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities!
- Target 18. Outlines a numerical goal for the reduction of subsidies that are harmful to nature and biodiversity. This target aims to reduce subsidies by at least \$500 Billion USD/year. (Recall that it is estimated that on the lowest end there are \$1.8 Trillion USD spent per year on harmful subsidies globally.)
- Target 19. Sets intention to increase the level of financial resources and investment into nature by mobilizing at least \$200 billion USD per year. This target also highlights the need for developed, and wealthy nations to contribute more resources to enable conservation actions in developing nations and address the global inequity of resources.



CPAWS Northern Alberta staff and Indigenous partners from the Dene Tha' First Nation attended COP15 as part of a larger delegation. Events hosted by CPAWS and our presence at the conference served to highlight the opportunities for Indigenous-led conservation and the need for funding and conservation commitments across Canada.

It was energizing to spend time with so many people from around the world that were aligned in the view that we must take urgent action to prevent the destruction of nature and loss of wildlife. The framework places an important emphasis on recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities which is centered throughout the agreement.

CPAWS nationwide is working together to say We Can't Wait. CPAWS Northern Alberta staff have been part of the steering committee for this work.

This campaign is marking the urgency to increase the protection of lands and waters across the country, to ensure that nature and people thrive in the future. We can't afford to wait another moment to make change. Learn more about the campaign and join the movement for the future you want.

<https://cpaws.org/wecantwait/>



**WE CAN'T  
WAIT**  
PROTECT. CONNECT. RESPECT.

## CONSERVATION



Councilor Kendall Metchooyeah of the Dene Tha' First Nation shares a postcard advocating for the protection of Bistcho Lake with Minister Guilbeault.

© JeremyWilliams / RiverVoices



### Dene Tha' First Nation at COP15

Members of Dene Tha' First Nation, including Chief Wilfred Hooka-Nooza, Councilor Kendall Metchooyeah, Lands Department Director, Fred Didzena, and Lands Department Technician, Matt Munson attended COP15 as delegates.

Matt Munson presented on several panels that focused on the role of Indigenous-led conservation in meeting global biodiversity targets, sharing the story of Bistcho Lake. Over 200 postcards advocating for the protection of Bistcho Lake were distributed during the conference to other attendees and political figures. While we were in Montreal attending COP15, the Dene Tha' First Nation's wildlife program and our partnership with them on that work was featured on CBC's The National.



## SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

### Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas

Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, or IPCAs, are a conservation tool that protect nature and cultural values, while elevating the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous communities – and they are on the rise! We are thrilled to have a [formal webpage](https://cpawsnab.org/ipcas/) (<https://cpawsnab.org/ipcas/>) all about IPCAs, their role in reconciliation, how they contribute to biodiversity goals, how they are created and what they mean on-the-ground.

photo: Jeremy Williams

## SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

In a [CPAWS poll](#), 50% of Albertans said they support Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) as a means of conserving ecosystems in the province. While still a large proportion of the population, this result may suggest that IPCAs are not yet well understood, as they are still new in public conversation in Canada. Our role as conservation advocates means we are able to share what we know and raise awareness of this justice-driven conservation tool. Our Executive Director, Kecia Kerr, penned an opinion piece on the topic in the Edmonton Journal, "[Indigenous protected areas can help conserve Alberta's biodiversity](#)", which you can read on page 24. Our work to broadly raise the profile of Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, like IPCAs, occurs in tandem with our strong partnerships with Indigenous communities across the province.

photo: Phillip Meintzer



### Wabasca wood bison conservation in Northern Alberta

In Northern Alberta, very few wild and free-roaming wood bison remain. One of these imperiled herds is called the Wabasca herd, found just west of Wood Buffalo National Park. The most recent surveys have found only nine animals left. This year, our collaborative work with ShagowAskee, a team of Indigenous trappers, Elders, researchers and experts, focused on actions to save this herd. Together, we made significant progress in calling attention to and urging action for the Wabasca herd.

photos: Lorne Tallcree

#### Some successes include:

- Media coverage on the herd, including an investigative piece by the Narwhal, which highlighted important pieces of Indigenous Knowledge that filled in some of the gaps in the government data.
- Preventing the logging of important portions of the Wabasca herd range.
- Meeting with government to guide wood bison conservation priorities, as the province moves forward with a wood bison recovery plan following their formal listing as a species at risk in 2021.
- Initiating an Indigenous-led monitoring program of the wood bison herd range using remote cameras and drones, based on Indigenous Knowledge of the herd's movements and habitat.

Our work focuses to ensure all parts of the herd's habitat is protected from destructive industrial activities and that the knowledge, expertise, and passion of Indigenous communities are core to wood bison conservation in the province.



## SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION



### Dene Tha' First Nation-led conservation work

CPAWS Northern Alberta continues to collaborate with, and support the work of, the Dene Tha' First Nation towards their goals of establishing protection for M'Behcholia (Bistcho Lake). M'behcholia is nestled within the vast expanse of boreal forest and intact peatlands of northwestern Alberta. For millennia, it has been a place of significant cultural and spiritual importance to Dene People.

To celebrate past achievements and to advance ongoing projects, a special community gathering was hosted at M'Behcholia by Dene Tha' First Nation (September 2023). Kecia and Gillian, Dene Tha' First Nation Elders, drummers, and community members joined partners from Alberta Wilderness Association, University of Alberta, University of Dublin, for an action-packed, inspiring, and motivating week surrounded by the beauty of M'Behcholia.

The trip offered a glimpse into the rich history of the area, as days were spent visiting cultural and historical sites, and listening to stories passed down generations. We also spent time working on Dene Tha' First Nation-led initiatives, like deploying wildlife monitoring equipment.

In October, November and February we attended community meetings to discuss ongoing projects and gather knowledge on culturally and ecologically significant values for the area. Community members shared their values and desired outcomes for conservation of the area.

The feedback from community members resulted in a set of "core values" to be at the heart of a draft Management Plan that can guide decision-making for the potential conservation area. We will continue this year working alongside the Nation to achieve their vision of permanent protection for the region and watershed.



## SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION



photo: Phillip Meintzer



### Guardians Programs

CPAWS Northern Alberta entered its third year of the collaborative Traditional Knowledge-informed wildlife monitoring program for Bistcho Lake. Working with the Dene Tha' Lands Department, the camera array (our collection of trail cameras in Dene territory) has been collecting data since 2020 and will be used to fill the many data gaps for the Bistcho Lake woodland caribou herd. We believe the Bistcho caribou herd has a good chance at recovery with stewardship by the Dene Tha' First Nation. The monitoring program will inform caribou range plans and land use decisions to benefit the herd. Over time, it is expected that the data from the camera program will give insight into population dynamics, spatial ecology, and overall herd health for the Bistcho herd.

Dene Tha' First Nation and CPAWS Northern Alberta joined forces to hire our boreal program coordinator to assist in the monitoring program. Nicole has analyzed two years worth of camera trap data (filtering through almost 700,000 photos!)

The most detected animal across the monitoring array was woodland caribou, with a total of 345 occurrences. We were thrilled that 22 out of the 33 camera sites had caribou detections – showing the significant value in working with Elders, trappers, and community members to deploy the cameras in places where caribou visitation was frequent and caribou habitat was high quality. The community meetings attended throughout the year were paramount in exploring these data trends and guiding further research questions.

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

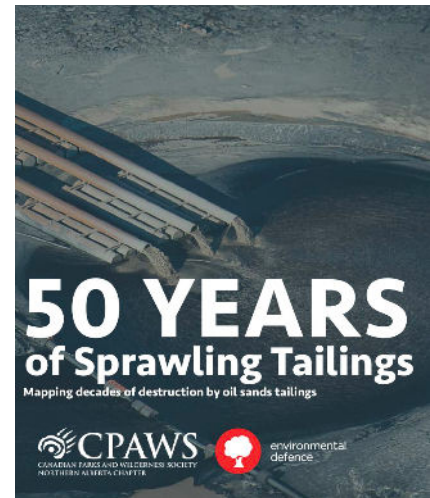


### A collaborative CPAWS Alberta

In July 2022, CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta celebrated their first annual retreat! Much of our conservation work extends throughout the entire province and isn't limited to central and northern Alberta, which is why we often put our heads together with our sister chapter CPAWS Southern Alberta. Our teams bonded while exploring Dry Island Buffalo Jump and swapping stories over a campfire late into the night. Not only is it fun to meet our colleagues outdoors but it strengthens the collaborative work you've seen from our chapters including statements on parks and protected areas, COP15 and coal in Alberta.

### Tailings Report

CPAWS Northern Alberta partnered with Environmental Defence Canada (EDC) to produce a technical report on oil sands tailings. The report mapped the decadal growth in oil sands tailings using aerial imagery. It used several knowledge systems to contextualize oil sands tailings threats, with knowledge from Elders downstream of the oil sands region. Collaborating on this report increased our capacity to follow up with events for the report including a question-and-answer session and a panel discussion.



### Joining forces with partners and collaborators

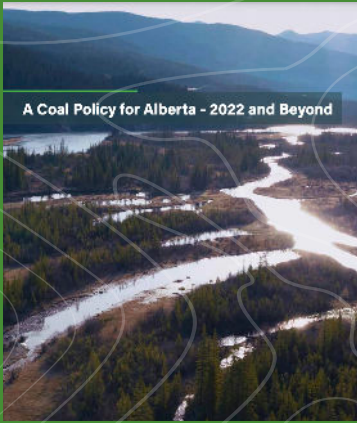
We are fortunate to be a part of a community that works towards common goals of nature conservation and joining forces with partners and collaborators strengthens our voice and increases our reach as an organization by sharing audiences.

CPAWS Northern Alberta joined partners and collaborators on several impactful statements this year, including:

- An open letter to the World Heritage Committee leads on August 17, 2022, on behalf of fifteen civil society organizations and Indigenous groups about Wood Buffalo National Park.
- Two joint press releases supportive of Jasper National Park decision for woodland caribou recovery with Alberta Wilderness Association, David Suzuki Foundation, and Yellowstone 2 Yukon.



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



### Bringing Community Together Against Coal in Alberta

CPAWS Northern Alberta continues to work with the West Country Sustainability Coalition, a group of concerned citizens from the region, to effectively advocate for the conservation of the headwaters. We value this relationship as it allows us to gain a local perspective on interests and concerns in the region.

CPAWS Northern Alberta supported the creation of A Coal Policy for Alberta - 2022 and Beyond. Which is a policy written by Albertans, for Albertans, reflecting extensive public input to the Coal Policy Committee (a committee appointed by the Government of Alberta in 2021 as result of massive public outcry against coal in the Eastern slopes.) A policy like this one would provide clarity on the future direction of coal in Alberta and ensure protection of the Rocky Mountains including:

- No new coal exploration and no new coal mines.
- Assess adequacy of the current mine financial security program.
- Ensure timely and effective remediation of lands disturbed by coal exploration and mining activities.

### Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition

CPAWS Northern Alberta collaborated with the Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition, comprised of the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park Stewards, Alberta Plant Watch, and local biologists, and was successful in securing funding for a BioBlitz in 2023 (at the time of this report's release, the BioBlitz will have already happened, learn more about it here: <https://cpawsnab.org/a-bioblitz-in-the-cardinal-divide/>) The Coalition aims to advocate for and improve conservation of the Cardinal Divide/Coal Branch Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ) region of Alberta. This spectacular region is home to unique biogeography and is habitat to sensitive and rare alpine plants, bryophytes, lichens, mosses, butterflies, and is a refuge for Grizzly bears and bighorn sheep.

photo: Tara Russell

## EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC



### ELLA (Edmonton Lifelong Learners Association) Course

Our chapter celebrated its 4<sup>th</sup> year teaching the 'Conservation in Alberta' course to the Edmonton Lifelong Learners Association. The course centers around conservation topics in Alberta: History of Conservation, Biodiversity Crisis and Mass Extinctions, Climate Crisis & Nature-based Climate Solutions, Cumulative Industrial Impacts, Species at Risk, Headwaters, Tools for Conservation, Parks and Park Management, and Local Conservation topics such as a potential National Urban Park. Each member of our team has the opportunity to lead a lecture and share knowledge and experiences with the class. The course is filled with many great conversations, insights and even a few laughs! Our team finds that this is always a great opportunity to connect with lifelong conservationists or some that have gained an interest in conservation later in life.

### Guest Lectures and School Visits

The CPAWS Northern Alberta team is always flattered and excited when we have the opportunity to speak about our work in lectures for university courses, speak at

### Involving Youth in Bistcho Lake Conservation

As part of our collaborative work with the Dene Tha' First Nation, community members often emphasize involving youth in discussions surrounding conservation values and decision for the Bistcho area. We were excited to join the Dene Tha' First Nation Lands Department to do school presentations in Chateh, one of the Dene Tha' First Nation reserves. We shared with students from Grade 1 to Grade 12 about the importance of Bistcho Lake, its potential as a conservation area, and the Guardians' Program.

conferences and return to an elementary classroom! We find that this exposes students to the work that Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations like ours can do and exposes them to different career avenues in conservation. Jocelyn Portillo, our outreach coordinator, found out about CPAWS as a captive audience member from one of our guest lectures. CPAWS Northern Alberta was once again invited to the Keyano College Climate Change Conference, where Tara spoke on the importance of communication to achieve conservation goals. We were delighted to have provided guest lectures to several University of Alberta classes, as well. Members of our team were invited to speak to a grade 5 classroom in April 2023 on caribou, we had so much fun and hope to return soon. We are looking forward to increased outreach opportunities into our 2023-2024 fiscal year as we now have a full-fledged outreach coordinator.

### The role of media in conservation

Media coverage plays a huge role in spreading awareness about CPAWS Northern Alberta and the conservation issues we focus

on. From traditional print media, to radio, to podcasts and more, our team prioritizes positioning ourselves as an expert voice on conservation issues in Alberta. From April 2022 to March 2023, our chapter has put out 18 press releases ranging on topics from parks and protected areas, changes within our national parks and species at risk. As a result, our team was covered in over 30 media pieces!



## INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS CAN HELP CONSERVE ALBERTA'S BIODIVERSITY

*By Dr. Kecia Kerr, as Published in the Edmonton Journal December 03, 2022*

Next week, thousands of delegates from 196 countries will meet in Montreal at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The aim is to come up with a global agreement to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity, from the genetic level to the level of whole ecosystems. The decisions made in Montreal at this “Nature COP” will have consequences for nature in Alberta, Canada, and around the world.

Biodiversity loss and decline of populations is rampant around the world, and we are now in a dire situation constituting a mass extinction event. This sixth Mass Extinction is the only mass extinction to ever have been caused by a species (that's us!). Alberta and Canada are not immune to this biodiversity crisis. One in five species in the country is facing some level of risk to their survival and many species that are not yet “at risk” are in steep decline. Urgent action is needed.

One of the biggest topics of discussion in Montreal will be negotiations on a target of protecting 30 per cent of lands and waters by 2030 (sometimes called “30 by 30”) to provide habitat protections. Though a popular narrative these days focuses on asserting Alberta's distinctly separate views from the federal government on issues, on this issue that is not the case.

A new public opinion poll revealed that 85 per cent of those polled supported committing to the

international target of 30-per cent protection by 2030. The vast majority (77 per cent) of Albertans support the creation of more protected areas to protect habitat for wildlife, and nearly all (95 per cent) said they are concerned about biodiversity loss and wildlife declines. In short, Albertans want more parks and want to see conditions improve for nature and wildlife.

So how do we do that? The 30 by 30 target is ambitious and will rely on new and diverse solutions to meet it. In come Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas or “IPCAs.” This relatively new conservation tool protects both natural and cultural values, while elevating the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous communities.

While the concept may be new to many of us, IPCAs hold huge potential as a tool to protect biodiversity, maintain community connections to the land, act as nature-based climate solutions, and contribute to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. IPCAs are based in three fundamental and essential criteria: First, they must be Indigenous-led; second, they must commit to long-term conservation; and third, they must elevate the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous communities. Alberta does not yet have any IPCAs, but is poised to see many opportunities for IPCAs in its future — several proposals by Indigenous communities are already public.

Indigenous rights and environmental impacts have long lost out when pitted against immediate economic gains from industrial development. Intact areas that can feasibly support treaty rights are being constantly chipped away by industrial projects, impacting food security, and cultural practices that depend on intact connections to the land.

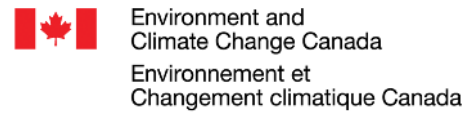


## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

CPAWS Northern Alberta is incorporated as a non-profit society in Alberta and governed by a Board of Directors. CPAWS National holds the charitable number for our organization (106865272 RR0001). Individual donors, granting foundations, the provincial and federal governments, businesses, and the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) financially support CPAWS Northern Alberta. Below are the audited financial statements for 2022-2023 prepared by Peterson-Walker LLP Chartered Professional Accountants and the final audited financial statements from the previous year. As seen below in the audited financials, we had a good year raising funds for our work and have a surplus. This is in part because we lost one of our staff, Chris Smith, to a new position with the Government of Nova Scotia, and we have not yet filled his position. However, we also saw increased donations (THANK YOU!), grant funding, and funds from Fee for Service contracts.

	FINAL AUDITED 2022-2023	FINAL AUDITED 2021-2022
<b>REVENUES</b>		
<b>GRANTS</b>	283,922	285,095
<b>CONTRACTS</b>	150,524	12,509
<b>DONORS &amp; SUPPORTERS</b>	100,882	72,909
<b>GAMING</b>	27,479	6,203
<b>INTEREST</b>	2,735	407
<b>OTHER</b>	59,295	77,700
	<b>624,837</b>	<b>454,823</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
<b>SALARIES, BENEFITS &amp; CONTRACTS</b>	475,228	381,334
<b>OUTREACH, ADVERTISING &amp; TRAVEL</b>	86,479	35,541
<b>RENT AND OFFICE SUPPLIES</b>	13,347	13,928
<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND FEES</b>	19,936	11,565
<b>INSURANCE</b>	2,223	2,090
<b>INTEREST AND BANK CHARGES</b>	960	813
<b>FUNDRAISING AND MEMBER EVENTS</b>	2,250	5,615
<b>AMORTIZATION</b>	2,002	1,352
	<b>602,425</b>	<b>452,238</b>
<b>REVENUE OVER EXPENSES</b>	<b>22,412</b>	<b>2,585</b>

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS



AND TO OUR MANY INDIVIDUAL DONORS THAT  
MAKE OUR CONTINUED WORK POSSIBLE.

## HOW TO SUPPORT US

**DONATE TO CPAWS NORTHERN ALBERTA THROUGH A ONE-TIME OR RECURRING DONATION**



**CONTRIBUTE TO OUR EDMONTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION ENDOWMENT FUNDS**



**TAKE ACTION: SEND A LETTER TO YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES**



**VOLUNTEER WITH OUR CHAPTER**



**STAY UP TO DATE WITH OUR NEWSLETTER**



