

The background of the cover features a light beige color with a pattern of white, irregular, concentric lines that resemble topographical map contour lines. In the bottom-left corner, there is a large, solid green shape that overlaps the bottom edge of the page. Within this green shape, the title is written in white.

Annual Report 2023–2024



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A message from the Executive Director and Board chair

Hello to all of our supporters! Thank you for taking the time to read this short summary of some of the work we did to advance conservation of public lands and waters in Northern Alberta during the 2023-2024 Fiscal Year.

Over the last year, our team primarily focused their time on supporting the Indigenous-led conservation initiatives that we are partnered on, parks and protected areas issues, species at risk (caribou and bison in particular), forestry, wildfires, coal, and oil sands tailings. We helped deploy and service wildlife monitoring cameras, trained Indigenous Guardians, and engaged with community members across Northern Alberta. Our public and government communications pushed for better conservation outcomes and commitments and increased transparency and accountability.

Our small but mighty team changed slightly over the year. Gillian Chow-Fraser, the lead on our Boreal Program for over 5 years, took a new position focusing on community-based forestry innovation at the Bulkley Valley Research Centre. We miss her dearly but wish her all the best in her new role. We welcomed several new staff: Jocelyn Portillo, Outreach Coordinator, Wesley Bell, Policy Analyst, Kaitlyn Philip, Boreal Program Manager, and Carolyn Bouwsema, Fund Development Coordinator for both the Northern and Southern Alberta chapters.

Our Board of Directors is made up of seven dedicated members who have been on the Board for several years. One Director, Kyle Wheeler, stepped down this year, and just after the end of the 23-24 fiscal year, Stuart McCormick joined the Board. Thank you Kyle, and welcome Stuart!

We are very proud of all we have accomplished together over the last year. While we have not seen the urgent advances in conservation that are needed in our province, we will be pushing hard for changes that protect nature and its ability to fight climate change and will halt and reverse the crisis of biodiversity loss. But we can't make change without you. Thank you again for your support and please keep raising your voice for nature in Alberta!

Dr. Kecia Kerr
Executive Director

Steve Donelon
Board Chair



Chapter Staff

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Leigh Goldie
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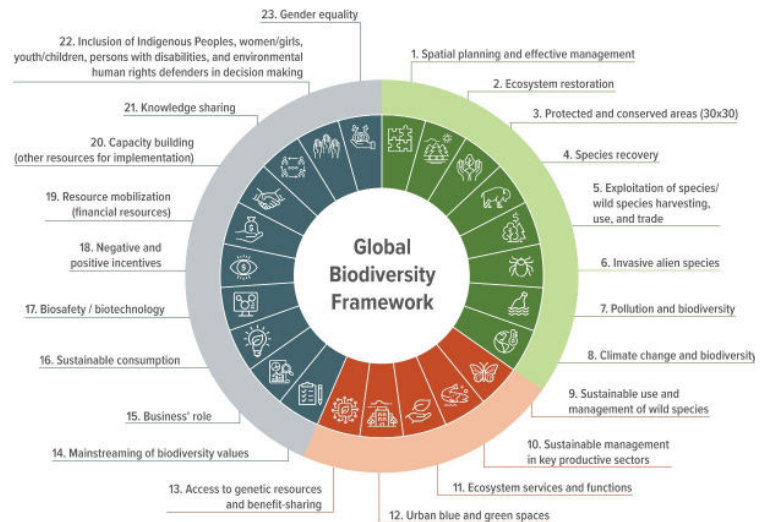
Tisha Raj
Director

Stuart McCormick
Director

Conservation

Biodiversity loss and Species at Risk

Wildlife population declines, local extirpations, and extinctions have reached a crisis point around the globe, including here at home. Countries around the world have committed to a Global Biodiversity Framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss but Alberta has yet to commit to the framework or release an alternative strategy to address the crisis. A plan, and immediate action to implement it, is sorely needed. We will be pushing Alberta to do better.



The Plight of Caribou in Alberta

Caribou conservation in Alberta has reached a critical point as the final years of the conservation agreement between Alberta and Canada are on the horizon. These agreements commit governments to work together in pushing caribou conservation forward. Protecting and restoring caribou habitat is essential to the survival and recovery of the species at risk. Caribou need at least 65% of their habitat left undisturbed, a far shot from the **xx** in Alberta as of spring 2024.

Unfortunately, little to no progress has been made on increasing undisturbed or protected habitat. A small win was when CPAWS Northern Alberta held the Government of Alberta accountable to the Conservation Agreements and advocated for the release of the annual progress reporting they had

committed to. The reports for 2022 and 2023 were eventually released in May 2024. Much of our work for caribou remains “behind the scenes”: engaging with federal and provincial governments and meeting with staff responsible for the provincial sub-regional plans. To stay up to date on any action you can take for caribou, subscribe to our newsletter where you will be informed of any public engagement or advocacy campaigns.

Our caribou conservation work is in collaboration with many other Alberta-based non-government organizations and communities, where we are unified in one strong voice for caribou!

Alberta's Native Trout

Together with CPAWS Southern Alberta, we provided feedback on two new Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) policy drafts – the *Framework for Aquatic Species at Risk Conservation*, and the *Policy for Applying Measures to Offset Harmful Impacts to Fish and Fish Habitat*. We remain hopeful that new policy is an opportunity for stronger protective measures for Alberta's native trout, which are either at-risk or endangered due to habitat loss and degradation such as warmer waters, drought conditions, non-native species, and industrial pressures on watersheds.





National Urban Park Initiative

As you are likely aware, we have been advocating for a National Urban Park along the North Saskatchewan River in the Greater Edmonton Region. We see a National Urban Park as a legacy opportunity to connect people to nature and to invest in long-term protection of the North Saskatchewan River valley. A National Urban Park continues to be a possibility for the Edmonton region, but the process is slow. In early fall of 2023, Edmonton City Councilors voted to move from the pre-feasibility to planning phase of the process. Discussions within diverse communities such as recreationists, landowners, conservationists, and social services have been going on surrounding the project.

We attended the Edmonton Mountain Bike Association festival in September 2023, where we hosted a causal “fire side” conversation with Edmonton’s Protect Our Winters chapter lead about responsible recreation in the river valley. The establishment of a National Urban Park could bolster a culture of environmental stewardship among the diverse user groups in the river valley and foster greater collaboration among the groups.

In December 2023, Bill 204 was introduced in the Alberta legislature by a private member, MLA for Leduc-Beaumont. The bill was framed as protected the province from “federal overreach” and would require any municipality

or landowner to receive approval from the Government of Alberta before entering an agreement with Parks Canada to explore designation of a National Urban Park. [We view the bill](#), which was passed in winter 2024, as redundant, since the Government of Alberta would need to be involved in the process regardless under the Municipal Government Act. Worse, the Government of Alberta has always been included at the Partner’s table and willingly chose to be an ‘interested observer’, instead of a partner. [Introducing Bill 204](#) creates unnecessary barriers to an initiative that would benefit the Edmonton region.

The foundation for the bill is based on misinformation, which we have been countering this year by highlighting the pillars of the Draft Federal policy, a policy that CPAWS contributed to. Over 200 of you sent a letter opposing Bill 204 and voiced your support for the huge opportunity that a National Urban Park presents to the community. The project is still moving forward, albeit slowly, and it needs your voice to be moved along! Send a letter today supporting National Urban Park in the region: <https://bit.ly/3yVjIrf>.

Our work for this file is supported by a grant from the Edmonton Community Foundation. Thank you.

Wood Buffalo National Park

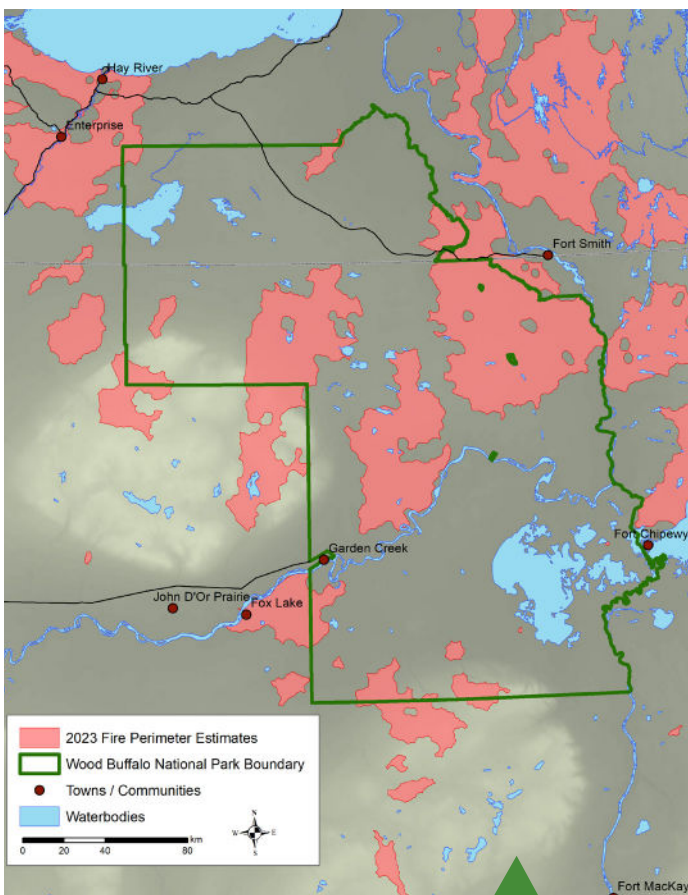


Wood Buffalo National Park is home to a large portion of the Peace-Athabasca Delta, one of the largest inland freshwater deltas in the world. It is a special place with global significance for its high biodiversity and unique habitats. Several Indigenous communities have lived in the delta for millennia, as the center of social, economic, cultural, spiritual and political activities.

The Park is facing ongoing threats that jeopardize the health of the ecosystem. The upstream oil sands mines and tailings ponds are one of the key developments putting pressure on the delta. This past year, the Park was also heavily impacted by wildfire. Approximately 947,000 ha of the park burned in 2023. To see what that looks like within the Park's boundaries, refer to map pictured left. We are continuing to work with Indigenous communities in the area, including Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Fort Chipewyan Metis Association, to push for action to protect the region from further harm.

Following a Reactive Monitoring Mission that was sent to Alberta in 2022 to report on the status of the Park and World Heritage Site, the World Heritage Committee provided a list of recommendations to Canada and Alberta regarding action needed to protect the delta from further degradation. Included in the list of recommendations was a request for an updated Action Plan. We were disappointed when Canada elected not to update the Park's Action Plan in February 2024, despite the call from the World Heritage Committee.

We continue to advocate for the implementation of the Reactive Monitoring Mission's recommendations to protect the Park from further degradation and raise awareness of the values and ecosystems that are at risk of being lost.

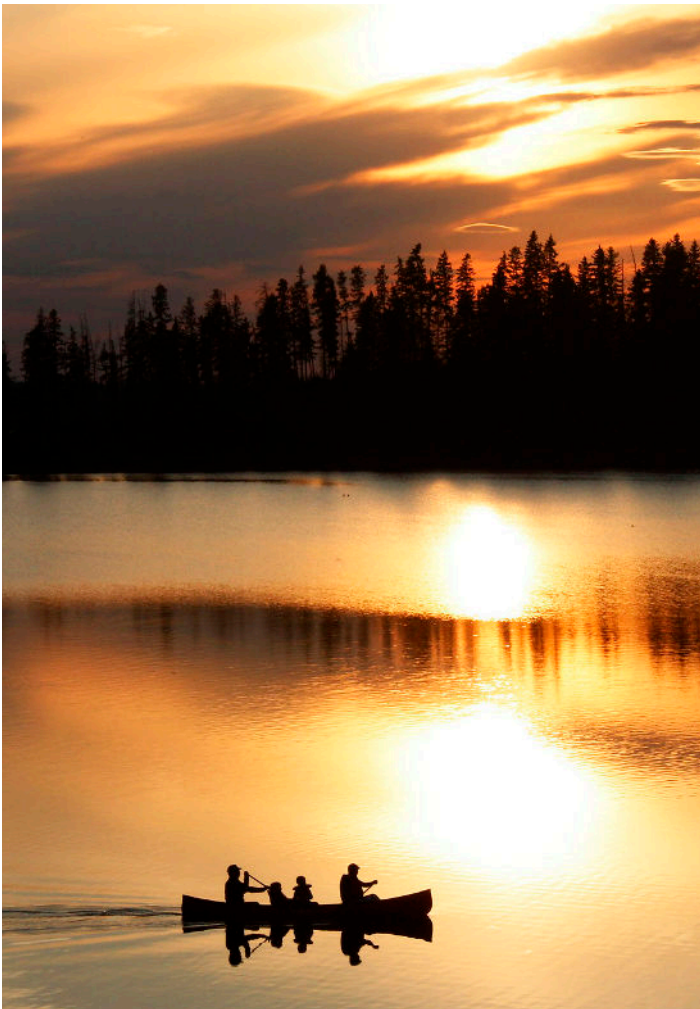


2023 Fire perimeter estimates in and around Wood Buffalo National Park. The estimated burned area in the park 947,000 hectares (ha).

Elk Island National Park

Did you know that Elk Island National Park is one of Parks Canada's oldest National Parks and the only one that is fully fenced? Elk Island National Park is a treasure to have so close to the Edmonton region. The park showcases the two bison sub-species native to Alberta: the wood bison and plains bison and provides bison for reintroductions and population augmentations all over the Northern hemisphere! In March 2023, Elk Island National Park released its drafted park management plan for public comment. These management plans are rare opportunities to shape the future of our national parks and their direction going into the next decade. We saw many parts of the plan as very positive. Over

3,200 supporters sent a letter to Parks Canada emphasizing their support for the management plan with the need for park expansion, added resources for species at risk monitoring, and visitor management. A plan for expanding the park was a huge opportunity for added conservation of the parkland region, which is extremely underrepresented within our parks system and sorely needs additional protections. When the final version of the plan was released in the fall, we were encouraged to see many components of the plan that we supported were ultimately incorporated. Unfortunately, many positive aspects of the plan had been weakened, and any reference to expansion had been removed. After submitting a Freedom of Information and Protection (FOIP) request, we saw communications from the Government of Alberta that demanded removal of reference to expansion and resulted in the weakening of the original drafted plan. Our chapter's ability to submit FOIP and ATIPs are crucial to understanding changed in policy.



Oil Sands Tailings

Oil sands tailings are the waste fluids of the oil sands extraction process, the byproduct of using water and chemicals to separate the bitumen from sand. Tailings continue to threaten the health of Alberta's lands and waters, and downstream communities face negative impacts that are at risk of being exacerbated. Tailings, which are harmful to fish, birds, and many other species, have also degraded water quality in the Athabasca River, impacting Indigenous communities that depend on a healthy watershed.

For years, groups have been sounding the alarm on the huge risk that tailings ponds and their expansion pose to the environment and communities.



Curious to know what type of equipment is used for a tailings spill? Pictured above is a photo sent in from a community member of the Kearl clean up.

In 2023, we saw the fallout of the Imperial Oil Kearl leak. As a reminder, Imperial Oil workers discovered tailings fluid leaking from the company's Kearl oil sands mine, roughly 75 kilometers upstream of Wood Buffalo National Park, in May of 2022. The chronic leak has yet to be contained. In February 2023, nine months after the prolonged leak was discovered, there was a disastrous second spill of 5.3 million liters (about twice the volume of an Olympic-size swimming pool) from the tailings area.

When news of the Kearl spill became public, we were one of the first organizations to comment and bring attention to the issue, and to provide live commentary on the house of commons hearings. To this day, details surrounding the incident remain unclear and no sizeable consequences have been administered to Imperial Oil.

If you are interested in learning more, we have maintained a [Keal Info Hub](#) that remains a popular resource for interested individuals.

We continue to work closely with Indigenous communities, environmental organizations, and other interested parties in advocating for stronger regulations and protection in the oil sands region. We are currently working in partnership with Keepers of the Water on a report that will map out the expected expansion of tailings ponds over the next 50 years.

The report will be complete in 2025, stay tuned for its release.

Coal Mining in Alberta

Mine 14, a coal mine planned for near Grande Cache, is one of the coal mines that was deemed an 'Advanced Projects' and therefore has been permitted to progress in the Rocky Mountains. CPAWS Northern Alberta filed a Statement of Concern in the summer of 2023 regarding Mine 14's Water Act License and Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act license applications, which we maintain are sorely outdated as they were granted over a decade ago. Additional coal mining in the region would be harmful to the budding

recreational and tourism economy, which could allow the community to move away from the boom-and-bust cycles of mining. CPAWS Northern Alberta remains engaged in the work to protect the Rocky Mountains and headwaters from the damaging effects of coal mining by closely monitoring any opportunity to stop this project from moving forward and opportunities for the public to voice their opposition to the Mine 14 in an impactful manner.

Coal Agreements remain in place (seen below) from when the policy was rescinded in 2020. The Coal Policy was reinstated in 2021 and a moratorium was passed in 2023 but the long term affects remain.

SOURCE WATERS WITHIN ALBERTA

- North Saskatchewan
- South Saskatchewan
- Upper Smoky
- Upper Athabasca
- Red Deer

EFFECTS OF REMOVING COAL POLICY

- Open-pit mining now enabled (previously protected as Category 2 under Coal Policy)
- Coal agreements





Alberta's Forests

We worked closely with CPAWS Southern Alberta on forest-related issues this year, particularly in co-developing a webinar series focused on topics most pertinent to the conservation of our forests. The webinars provide a platform for experts to share their knowledge and for CPAWS to engage the public. Featured topics include fire risk and forest management, caribou and forestry, Indigenous fire management, and a look at what needs to change within forestry to achieve environmental and conservation goals. The intensity and extent of the 2023 wildfires

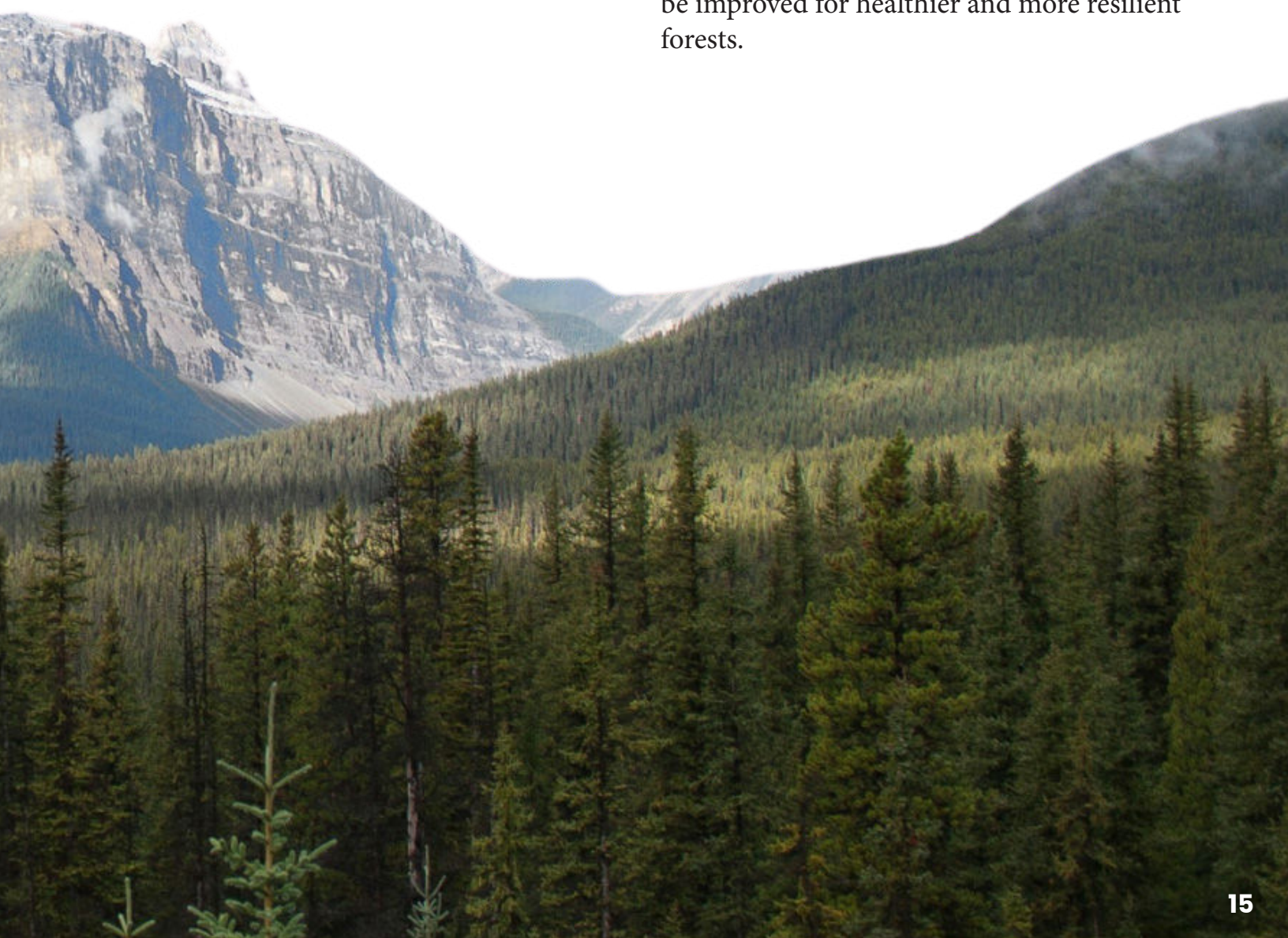
in Alberta, the worst fire season on record, drew forest management issues into sharp focus for many Albertans. In 2023 and leading into the 2024 wildfire season, the forestry industry led public campaigns claiming that increased harvest is a solution to reducing wildfire risk and protecting communities. While forestry can, and does, have a role to play managing our forests, especially in mitigating risk in the wildland-urban interface, many of the claims made in these public campaigns are not based on scientific consensus, and are not in the best interest of protecting biodiversity and the ecological integrity of forests.



Our focus has been to highlight the best available science and to support Indigenous land stewardship in conversation with industry, governments, and the public. Detailed information about forestry myths are captured in a [blog published in November 2023](#) that we have referred to many times throughout the year.

Canada proudly touts the claim of being a global leader in sustainable forestry, but gently scratching the surface of this facade exposes real concerns about the claim. Environmental and social concerns are a secondary priority to the main goal of forestry, which is economic profit through timber harvest and the outdated ethos of ‘feeding the mills’. Alberta’s Forests Act, focused on maintaining a sustainable timber yield. In recent amendments there is now also mention of forests as ecosystems.

Keep an eye out for a new campaign that calls for updates to the Forests Act to reflect new knowledge on environmental threats and address the ways that forestry practices can be improved for healthier and more resilient forests.



Supporting Indigenous-led Conservation

Indigenous-led conservation is a broad method to protect nature and cultural values that are of priority to Indigenous communities, while elevating the rights and responsibilities of those communities. This can include formal land protections as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) or Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), or can include monitoring and restoration programs designed and implemented by communities. As a conservation organization, we can support these initiatives – when appropriate and invited – by sharing our expertise, dedicating staff time to advancing these initiatives, and raise awareness, rooted in reconciliation, of the tools and the specific projects. To learn more about Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), visit our webpage (<https://cpawsnab.org/our-work/ipcas/>).



We continue to support Dene Tha' First Nation (DTFN) in their efforts to establish protection for Bistcho Lake. Located in the remote northwestern region of Alberta, Bistcho Lake is the third largest lake entirely within the province and is surrounded by expansive boreal forests and intact peatlands. The lake itself remains one of the most undisturbed in the province and has been a place of profound cultural and spiritual significance to the Dene people for thousands of years. To capture a glimpse of the important

work being done, River Voice Productions is working with DTFN and CPAWS to produce a new documentary centered around the importance of Bistcho Lake and what the protection of the area would mean. Filming occurred this past winter during community meetings and fieldwork to deploy and service wildlife cameras, capturing interviews with Elders and leadership, including Chief Hooka-Nooza.



Wildlife Monitoring Program

CPAWS Northern Alberta is in its fourth year of collaborative wildlife monitoring work with Dene Tha' First Nation, which is an important component of the protected area proposal for the Nation.

We were thrilled to expand the caribou monitoring program around the Bistcho Lake region from 33 cameras to 51 cameras in March 2024! The locations for these additional cameras were determined using an approach that braids Indigenous knowledge with western scientific methods. First, priority areas were identified by

community members at meetings in Bushe in February. We then employed a stratified sampling design based on different landcover classes to determine the specific locations of the camera sites. The chosen locations were already proving to be successful as the team spotted an abundance of caribou tracks and rest sites in the snow while setting up cameras!

The 33 original cameras installed in 2020 were serviced in Dec 2023, which meant we have been busy analyzing the captured photos. Our teams were once again awe-struck by some incredible photos of wildlife!





Over the next year, the priority for the analysis will be to develop habitat models that can help predict caribou movement and occurrence in a given area. The models will give us insight into areas that are critical for caribou in the Bistcho region and that should be prioritized during conservation planning.

DTFN kicked off another wildlife monitoring project this past December that we are also partnering on. This program focuses on a different species-at-risk: wood bison. Similar to the caribou monitoring project, the camera locations were informed by community members.

The project will expand community-based monitoring which will support greater understanding of wood bison in the region

and their range. Community monitoring is anticipated to further document conservation concerns raised by Traditional Knowledge and will ideally contribute to better management of wood bison in northwestern Alberta. The monitoring program will examine the extent of the herd, their habitat preferences, and possibly, causes of mortality.

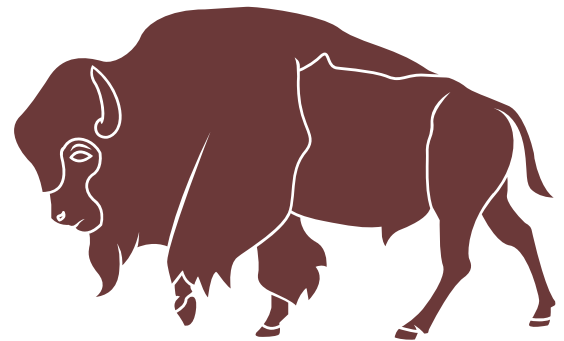
As of August 2024, we know that the region, particularly around Bistcho Lake, has been heavily hit by wildfire. The fires will impact future community gatherings and the research design for the wildlife monitoring programs. We await assessment of the full impacts of the wildfires on the region and the programs.

Wabasca Wood Bison Conservation

The Wabasca herd, whose range is southwest of Wood Buffalo National Park, is a wood bison herd that numbers less than ten individuals and remains at extreme risk of being extirpated. Over the past year, we have continued to collaborate with ShagowAskee, a team of Indigenous trappers, Elders, researchers, and experts, to advance actions to save this herd.

In the fall of 2023, ShagowAskee trappers and CPAWS staff deployed wildlife cameras as part of the effort to better delineate the range of the Wabasca Bison herd. We successfully deployed 15 cameras and recorded several locations of bison signs. This data will be used in efforts to protect the herd, with the long-term goal of the herd growing in numbers.

It is crucial that the Wabasca herd's habitat is protected because it is one of the few disease-free herds in Alberta. Wood bison are also an extremely important animal for many Indigenous cultures. The knowledge, expertise, and passion of Indigenous communities are core to advancing wood bison conservation in the province.



Strategic Partnerships

A BioBlitz in the Cardinal Divide

The Cardinal Divide Conservation Coalition (CDCC) is a group of biologists, botanists, park stewards, and environmental organizations invested in the ecological integrity of the region. CPAWS Northern Alberta is a member of the CDCC, alongside members from the Alberta Native Plant Council, Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park Stewards, PlantWatch Alberta, and Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA). The coalition hosted a [BioBlitz in Whitehorse Wildland Provincial Park](#), including the Cardinal Divide and surrounding region, from July 14th to 16th 2023. Bioblitzes are an engaging way to connect the public to

nature while participating in a meaningful activity that contributes to collective scientific knowledge! The bioblitz's objective was to document as many species as possible over the weekend. The information will help inform conservation management of the region.

The BioBlitz brought together 29 participants from all over the province, including 15 invited experts and 9 public volunteers!

During the BioBlitz, we identified 443 species in the area, including 260 plants, 56 insects, 77 fungi, 33 birds, 10 mammals, and 4 arachnids.





Supporting Community Groups Far and Wide

The West Country Sustainability Coalition remains active and engaged within the communities of the Eastern slopes. These relationships within the community are crucial to ensuring our conservation focus remains rooted in the topical issues of the region. The WCSC are valued allies and our ears and eyes on the ground of the west country.

Education and Communication with the public

Public outreach via tabling events, presentations, and a presence at conferences and hosted events are crucial to fostering community. We were incredibly lucky this year to have funding for a full-time outreach coordinator who reinvigorated our outreach and volunteer program. Educating and communicating with the public is foundational to reaching new audiences, providing a welcoming avenue to learn about conservation and to initiate dialogue on the work our chapter does while connecting with the concerns of the members of our community.



Partnership with Elements

We co-hosted a Trivia night with Elements Outfitters and Protect our Winters (POW) last November. It was an exciting way to bring together like-minded folks for a night of fun and lots of conservation conversations. Our partnership with Elements has grown since the event (we have done a few in-store tabling dates and a couple river valley clean up events). The trivia night was incredibly successful in bringing together new and familiar faces to test their knowledge on current conservation and climate change topics in Alberta.

Summer Reading List Launch

The official 2023 summer season kicked off with our annual reading list launch hosted at the Glass book shop (now closed but Magpie books is in that space now)! Over the summer, nearly all of the books from the reading list sold out and many had long wait lists with the Edmonton Public Library. We continue to create an annual summer reading list as this is an opportunity to create other avenues for people to connect with conservation and environmental topics. The event created a great atmosphere to have good one on one conversation with attendees and a few became reliable volunteers!





Jasper for Parks Day

After a hiatus of a few years, Friends of Jasper National Park hosted its Parks Day celebration in the town center where we were ecstatic to attend. Many of the attendees were familiar with CPAWS's work and were very eager to share their questions and concerns with us. It was one of our busiest tabling events of that year! This was a very fruitful event for our chapter to attend and we left Jasper feeling connected to those who also shared a passion for conserving and protecting the region's wildlife and natural spaces.

Edmonton Valley Zoo – Canada day, Zoobrew and Zoominescence

We have been able to create a great partnership with the Edmonton Valley Zoo this past fiscal year! We were invited in the summer to join the zoo's Canada Day celebration which led to follow up invitations for Zoobrew and Zoominescence during the holidays. We found the zoo provided a great avenue to connect with an audience that may already have an interest in wildlife and was primed to learn, making it feel quite natural to speak on different conservation initiatives. We spoke with many families over the past year who were very excited to learn more about protected areas and species at risk in Alberta.

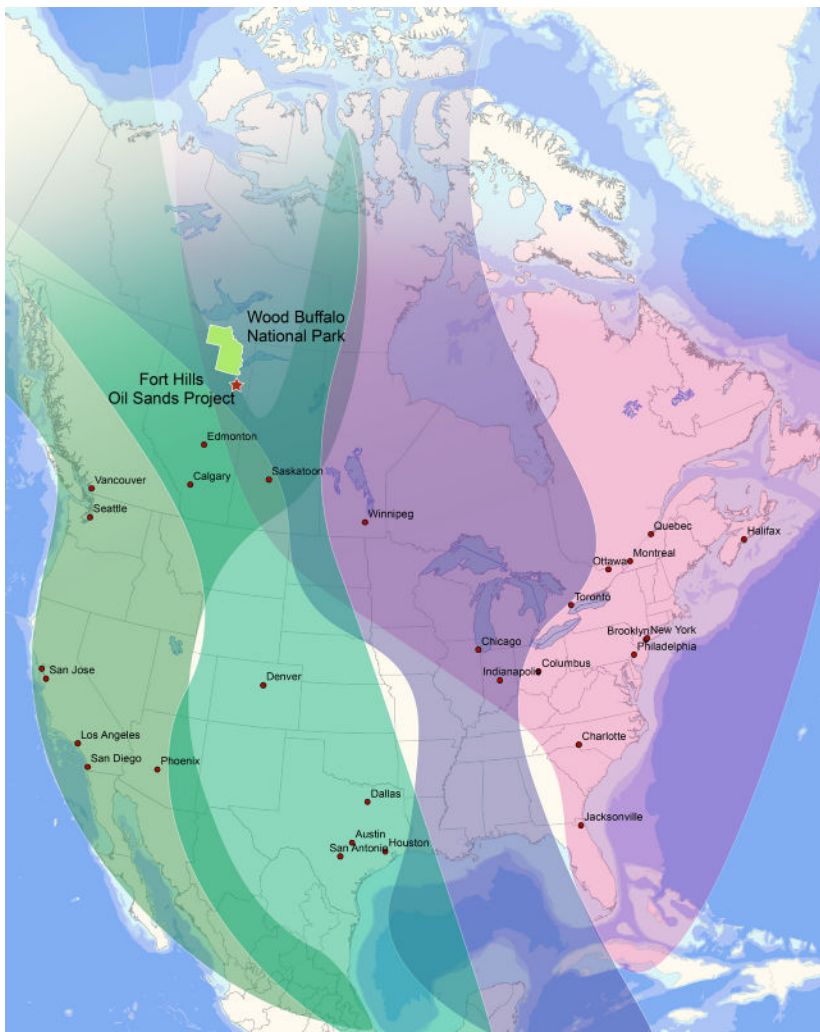


We love markets!

A staple in the outreach calendar were farmer's markets across the city. In 2023, we attended the Callingwood, Old Strathcona, South West Edmonton, Bountiful, and Green for Good Farmers Markets. We found that markets bring in a very diverse group of people with a wide range of conservation knowledge. Shoppers were often very excited to make a connection by talking about their summer road trips to the National and Provincial Parks across the province and to learn more about the role parks play in protecting nature.

GIS in Conservation

One of CPAWS Northern Alberta's important communication tools is the usage of maps and geographic data to share technical concepts to an audience that often does not have an extensive science background.



The CPAWS Northern Alberta created a map in 2023 to communicate the presence of multiple migratory bird flyways over Wood Buffalo National Park, the oil sands area and specifically the Suncor Fort Hills Oil Sands project.

This series of maps, a collaborative product from our conservation analyst and our communications manager, beautifully illustrates the importance of this region using flyway data.

The transparent green and purple colour palette that, when the combined together, emphasize the convergence of the North American flyways over the north-eastern corner of Alberta. This map series was among our most well-liked and shared social media posts in 2023.

Hope as a Discipline

Dr. Kecia Kerr

As environmental advocates, we have chosen a difficult path for ourselves. At times, it can feel like we are up against the whole world and all those in power. Those of us who have chosen this path are driven by passion, and often, a deep sense of justice. But even the most passionate and dedicated people can get beaten down. So how do we ensure that we can keep going and not be consumed by the gravity of the work that we do? We practice hope. And I truly mean practice. As many people have said, hope is a discipline. It is a verb and an action, and as musician Nick Cave recently said, it is “the warrior emotion that can lay waste to cynicism”. Our practice of hope makes us stronger and more resilient – individually and collectively. It opens our (sometimes wounded) hearts to a better future and helps us turn to community and our shared values.

Like all disciplines, it requires work. But we don't need to be perfect at this discipline. We just need to keep practicing.

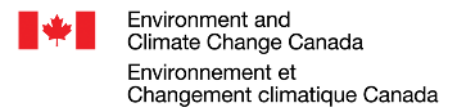


Financial Overview

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 our National office and other chapters of CPAWS across the country (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 finances for 2023-2024 prepared by Peterson-Walker LLP Chartered Professional Accountants.

	Audited 2023-2024	Audited 2022-2023
Revenues		
Grants	320,859	283,922
Contracts	234,284	150,524
Donors & Supporters	95,746	100,882
Gaming	56,315	27,479
Interest	8,887	2,735
Other	67,115	59,295
	783,206	624,837
Expenses		
Salaries, Benefits & Contracts	544,316	475,228
Outreach, Advertising and Travel	107,384	86,479
Rent and Office Supplies	18,590	13,347
Professional Development and Fees	7,448	19,936
Insurance	2,690	2,223
Interest and Bank Charges	1,537	960
Fundraising and Member Events	26,865	2,250
Amortization	1,996	2,002
	710,826	602,425
Revenue Over Expenses	72,380	22,412

Thank you to our partners



And many more 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**



