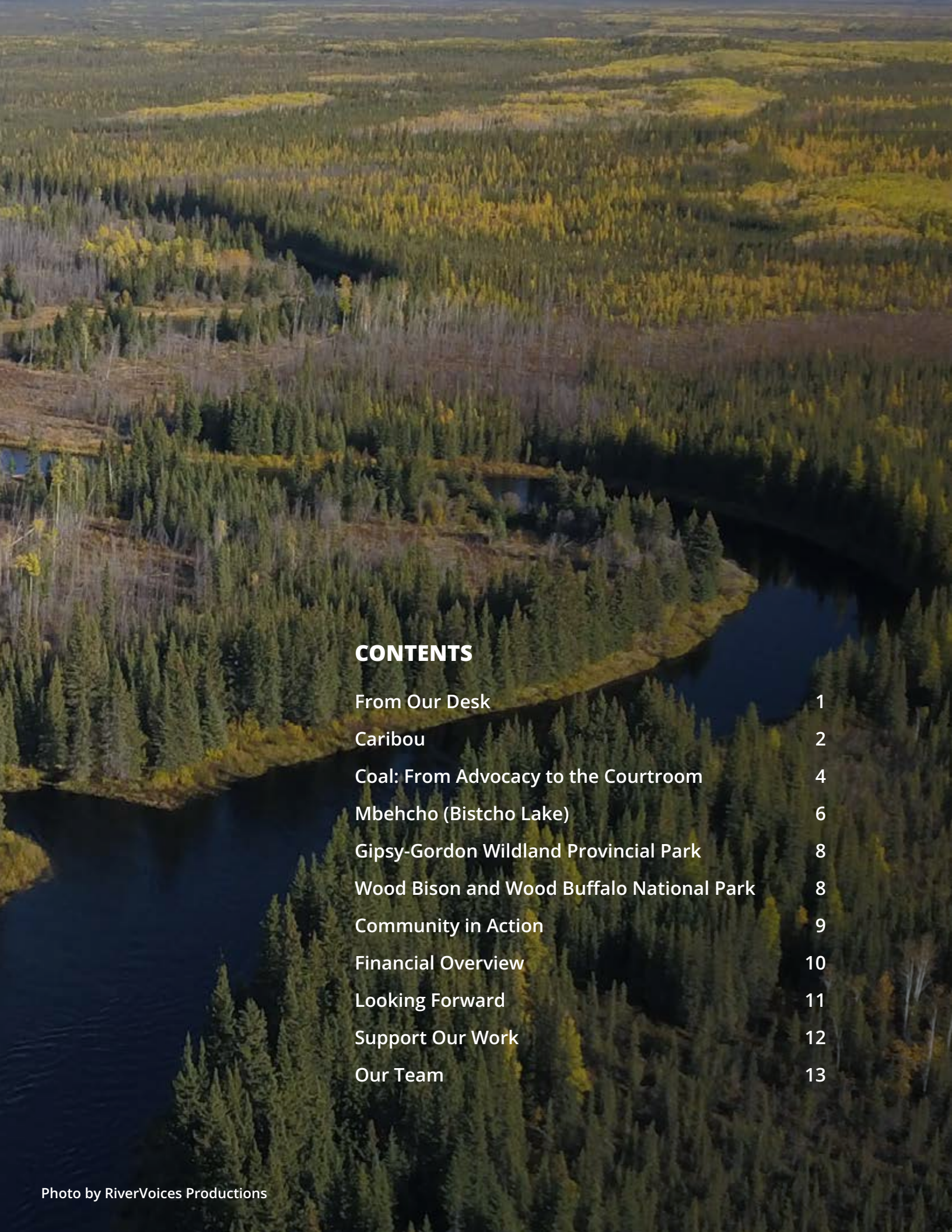




2025–2026

Annual Report



CONTENTS

From Our Desk	1
Caribou	2
Coal: From Advocacy to the Courtroom	4
Mbehcho (Bistcho Lake)	6
Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Provincial Park	8
Wood Bison and Wood Buffalo National Park	8
Community in Action	9
Financial Overview	10
Looking Forward	11
Support Our Work	12
Our Team	13



From Our Desk

A MESSAGE FROM CPAWS NORTHERN ALBERTA'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

Last year, we wrote about how Albertans continued to speak up and show their love for the natural world, even when faced with discouraging news. Though the outcomes from our efforts aren't always what we hope, this year reminded us that progress can be slow and sometimes the work of one year only becomes visible much later.

People took part in public consultations, wrote to decision-makers, came to our events, donated to campaigns and helped us keep pressure on important conservation issues. We saw public input reflected in planning decisions, and we saw supporters step up when our work on coal moved into the legal system. Our work with Dene Tha' First Nation around Mbehcho reached new audiences and we celebrated new protection for Gipsy Gordon Wildland Provincial Park after many years of effort.

This work depends on more than the people within our organization. It depends on good information, strong partnerships and people who are willing to pay attention and speak up when something matters to them.

As we head into the next few years, CPAWS Northern Alberta is becoming more focused about where we put our time and energy. We know there are some difficult conservation challenges ahead, but we also know there are a lot of people in Alberta who care deeply about these places.

To everyone who filled out a survey, wrote a letter, came to an event, shared our work, worked alongside us or made a donation this year: thank you. Your support makes this work possible, and we're very glad to have you with us.



Dr. Kecia Kerr
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Steve Donelon
BOARD CHAIR



Caribou

Caribou Close Up: property of Dene Tha' First Nation.



For southern mountain caribou, recovery depends on habitat. The Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway herds rely on forested winter ranges in the Upper Smoky region, where industrial disturbance has already put significant pressure on the landscape.

In spring 2025, Alberta released a draft Upper Smoky Sub-regional Plan for public input. CPAWS Northern Alberta reviewed the plan alongside conservation partners and compared proposed timber harvesting with caribou telemetry data and winter range. The overlap raised serious concerns about whether the plan would leave enough habitat for these threatened herds to recover.

We [published analysis](#), prepared resources to help Albertans participate in the consultation and hosted a webinar with caribou expert Kirby Smith. When the [final plan](#) was released in November, however, our concerns remained.

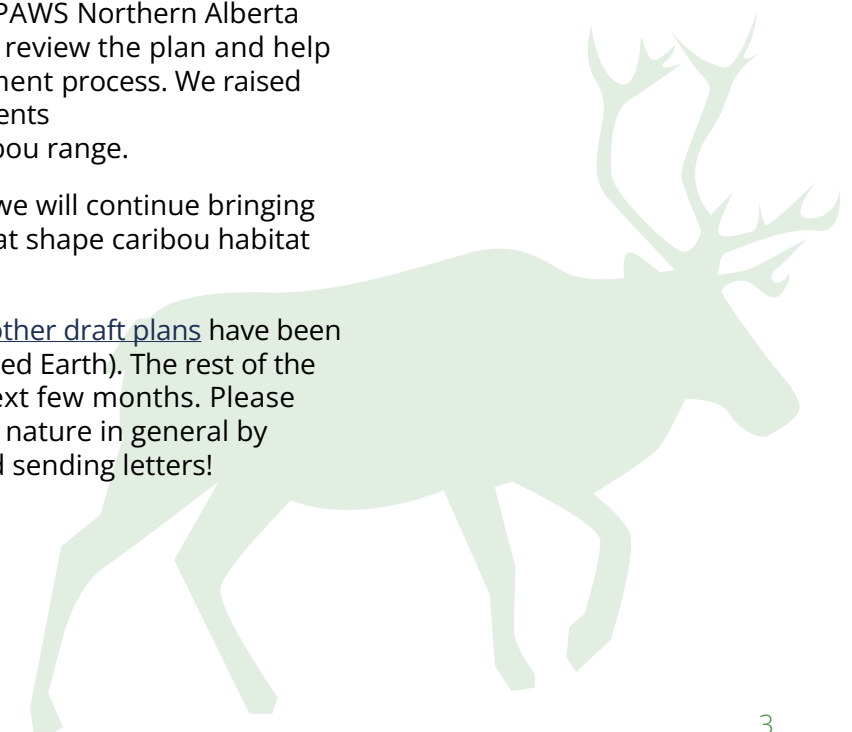
Our analysis found that permitted timber harvesting would continue to reduce important old-forest habitat, leaving the Redrock-Prairie Creek and Narraway populations with less than half of the old forest habitat they need. In our assessment, the final plan did not provide the habitat commitments needed to give these herds a realistic path toward recovery.

The work continues

Upper Smoky was not an isolated case. In early 2026, Alberta released the draft South Athabasca Sub-regional Plan which covers the Cold Lake and East Side Athabasca caribou ranges. CPAWS Northern Alberta again worked with conservation partners to review the plan and help Albertans participate in the public engagement process. We raised concerns about weakened habitat commitments and additional industrial activity within caribou range.

As more sub-regional plans move forward, we will continue bringing science and public attention to decisions that shape caribou habitat for decades to come.

Since the end of the 25-26 fiscal year, [three other draft plans](#) have been released (Berland, Caribou Mountains, and Red Earth). The rest of the plans are expected to be released in the next few months. Please continue to raise your voice for caribou and nature in general by participating in the government surveys and sending letters!





Coal

From Advocacy to the Courtroom

For years, CPAWS Northern Alberta has worked alongside communities and conservation partners to push for stronger protections from new coal development in Alberta's Eastern Slopes. This year, that work took us from the regulatory process into the courtroom.

Mine 14 is a proposed underground metallurgical coal mine near Grande Cache, in the headwaters of the Smoky River. CPAWS Northern Alberta and Alberta Wilderness Association were granted full participant status in the Alberta Energy Regulator's public hearing process and prepared written submissions and expert evidence outlining concerns with the project and its environmental impacts.

That hearing never happened. On August 21, 2025, the AER cancelled the public hearing and transferred the applications back to its Regulatory Applications branch for a decision. The Mine 14 applications were subsequently approved in September.

For CPAWS Northern Alberta, the issue extended beyond one coal mine. We were concerned that cancelling a hearing after participants had been granted standing and prepared evidence undermined a meaningful opportunity for public participation in decisions affecting Alberta's lands and waters. Together with Alberta Wilderness Association, we asked the Alberta Court of Appeal for permission to challenge the AER CEO's decision.

In November, that permission was granted on all grounds presented. This did not decide the appeal itself, but allowed our legal challenge to proceed and the court to consider whether the hearing cancellation was lawful.

Our supporters stepped up as well. After we set a goal of raising \$15,000 toward the legal campaign, more than \$20,000 was contributed to help cover legal costs and support our continued work opposing new coal development in the Eastern Slopes. A huge thank you to all who donated or sent a letter!

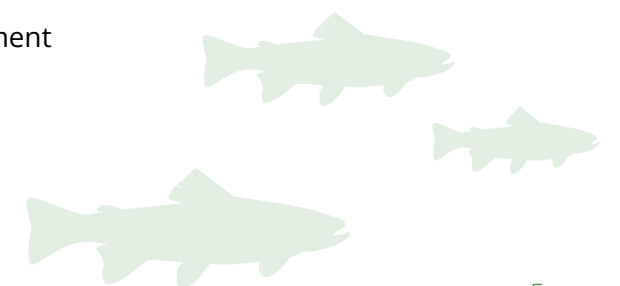
What's Next?

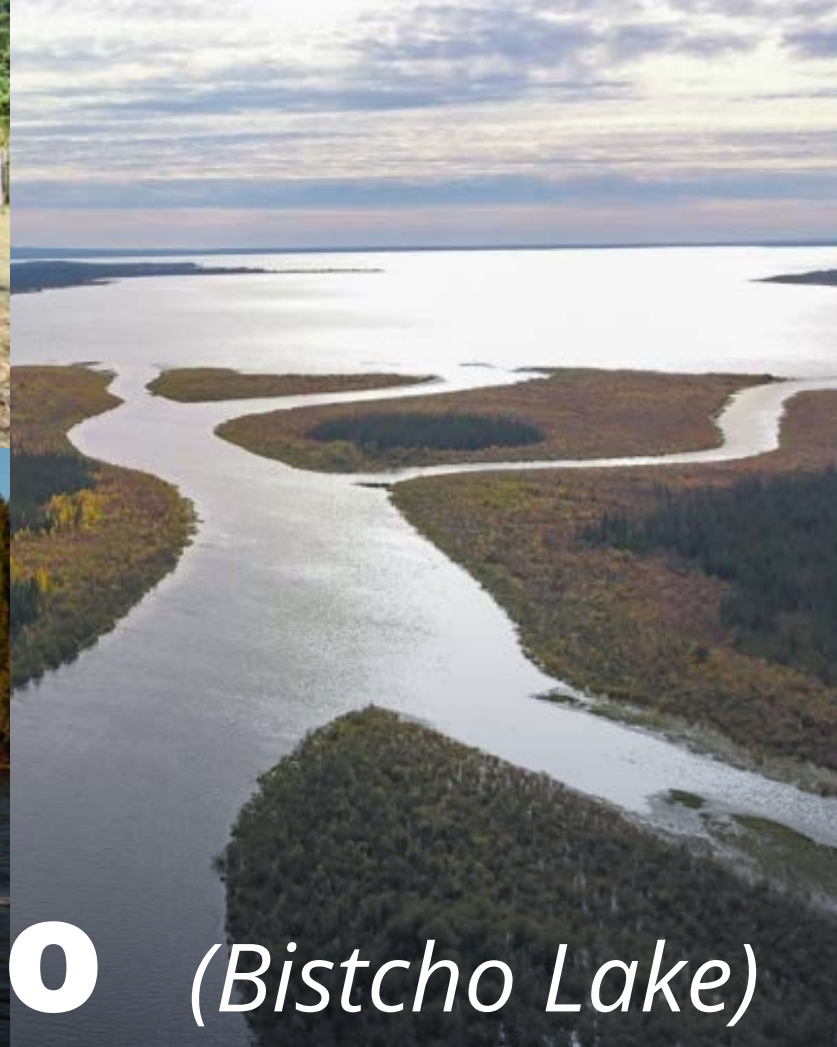
Mine 14 is not the only coal project we are watching. The proposed Blackstone mine, south of Nordegg in the North Saskatchewan River headwaters, has also returned to our attention.

In 2025, CPAWS Northern Alberta submitted a Statement of Concern regarding an application to extend exploration activity at Blackstone. Our concerns included new information about sensitive habitat in the area, including streams connected to known bull trout spawning and habitat zones.

As planning for the David Thompson region moves forward, we will continue watching Blackstone and other proposed coal developments closely. Whether through regulatory participation, public advocacy or the courts, our goal remains the same: ensuring decisions about Alberta's Eastern Slopes properly consider the lands, waters, wildlife and communities that depend on them.

If you haven't already, please send a letter telling the government that you oppose new coal mining in our headwaters!





Mbehcho *(Bistcho Lake)*



Mbehcho Story Photos provided by RiverVoices Productions and CPAWS NAB Staff

In the northwest corner of Alberta, Mbehcho (Bistcho Lake) lies at the heart of Dene Tha' traditional territory. Its name means "big knife," reflecting the sweeping shape of the lake. For Dene Tha' First Nation, Mbehcho is much more than a remote boreal landscape. It is the home of their ancestors and a place the Nation has stewarded for generations.

Dene Tha' First Nation has been working toward formal protection and long-term management of the region for years. CPAWS Northern Alberta began collaborating with the Nation on this work in 2018 and continues to support Dene Tha'-led conservation projects, including wildlife monitoring and the Guardians of the Territory program. The Nation's vision is centred on conserving caribou habitat, cultural sites and practices, biodiversity, and the ecological integrity of the region.

Learning from the Land

In 2026, the Dene Tha'-led wildlife monitoring program around Mbehcho entered its sixth year. The program now includes 54 wildlife cameras and helps fill important information gaps about the remote Bistcho caribou herd and the other wildlife that share its habitat.

The data are helping answer community-driven questions about where wildlife are found, how they move through the landscape and how they use areas affected by wildfire and industrial disturbance. Following major wildfires in 2023 and 2024, the long-running camera network also provides an opportunity to compare wildlife activity before and after fire across the region.

The monitoring work is closely connected to Dene Tha' First Nation's Guardians program. CPAWS Northern Alberta and the Nation have also co-developed a surveying app that allows land users to record information about wildlife, land use and places of cultural significance.



Wildlife Monitoring Photos: Property of Dene Tha' First Nations

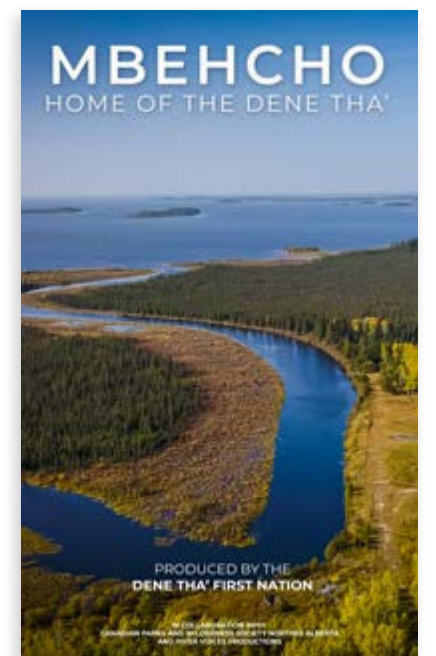
Sharing the story of Mbehcho

This year also brought the story of Mbehcho to new audiences. Created by River Voices Productions, the documentary Mbehcho: Home of the Dene Tha' features Guardians, Elders, leadership and collaborators sharing the Nation's connection to the region and its ongoing work to protect it.

In March, the film had its first public screening in Edmonton. Dene Tha' First Nation drummers opened the evening, followed by the film and a panel featuring Chief Wilfred Hooka-Nooza, Elder Charlie Chambaud, former Lands Department Director and Technician Matt Munson, and CPAWS Northern Alberta Executive Director Kecia Kerr.

The work to protect Mbehcho continues. Dene Tha' First Nation has opposed proposed year-round access to Bistcho Lake, and in March the Nation secured a temporary injunction stopping work while concerns about consultation were considered.

For CPAWS Northern Alberta, our role remains to support the Nation's leadership and contribute our expertise where invited as Dene Tha' continues its work to care for and protect Mbehcho for future generations. An updated version of the Bistcho Sub-regional Plan is expected to be released soon. This public engagement will be a crucial opportunity for us all to push for permanent protection of Bistcho Lake!





Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Provincial Park

Some conservation wins arrive quickly. Others take decades.

In July 2025, [Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Provincial Park](#) finally received legal protection, safeguarding approximately 186,000 hectares of boreal forest east of Fort McMurray.

The new park protects habitat for species at risk, including threatened woodland caribou. It also contains the region’s remaining Intact Forest Landscape—a large area of forest with very little human disturbance.

What makes this announcement especially meaningful is how long it took to get here. Plans to protect the Gipsy-Gordon area date back to land-use planning discussions for the Lower Athabasca Region in the early 2000s. More than two decades later, that protection is now in place.

At a time when conservation progress can feel slow, Gipsy-Gordon is an important reminder that persistence matters. The decisions, planning and advocacy happening today may not always produce immediate results—but they can lay the groundwork for lasting protection years down the road.



Wood Bison and the Health of Wood Buffalo National Park

Wood Buffalo National Park is home to the world’s largest free-roaming herd of wood bison, one of the species that contribute to the park’s internationally recognized ecological significance. But the future of the park and its inhabitants are closely tied to the health of the much larger landscape around them.

The park continues to face overlapping pressures, including changes to the Peace-Athabasca Delta, upstream industrial activity, water-management challenges and climate change. Disease management within Wood Buffalo National Park is also an ongoing concern for wood bison recovery across Canada.

Canada’s 2019 Action Plan for Wood Buffalo National Park was intended to address threats to the park’s ecological and cultural values. In its latest State of Conservation report, the federal government reported that 80% of the plan’s 137 measures were underway or complete. CPAWS

Northern Alberta, however, raised concerns that this figure does not necessarily reflect meaningful ecological improvement on the ground. Indigenous partners including Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation have also called for clearer timelines, greater transparency and stronger involvement in decision-making.

For wood bison, those broader questions matter. Protecting a species at risk requires more than managing individual herds; it also means maintaining the land, water and ecological processes those herds depend on.

Since the end of the reporting year, a UNESCO Reactive Monitoring Mission took place in August 2026. CPAWS Northern Alberta continues to call for renewed commitment to the park’s Action Plan, stronger collaboration with Indigenous partners and measurable improvements in the ecological health of Wood Buffalo National Park.

Community in Action

From public consultations and letter-writing to fundraisers and creative projects, we’re proud of the ways our community puts its support into action.

Coming Together to Say No to Coal

Community action also looked a little louder this year. Our Say No to Coal Hall Party brought supporters together for an evening of music, conversation and solidarity around the ongoing fight against new coal development in Alberta’s Eastern Slopes.

Together, attendees helped raise more than \$2,500 toward CPAWS Northern Alberta’s legal work on coal. Just as importantly, the night gave people a chance to connect with one another and share the concerns and experiences that keep this work grounded in the communities it affects.

Creativity and Connection for Conservation

At Shimmering Creeks & Rivers, we explored another way of bringing people into conservation work. The evening celebrated Alberta’s waters through CPAWS programming, button-making, letter-writing and collaborative art.

Not every act of conservation looks the same. Sometimes it means submitting feedback on a government plan. Sometimes it means writing a letter, donating to a campaign, showing up to an event or simply spending an evening with people who care about the same places you do.

All of those connections help build a stronger community for nature.

Your Voice Helped Shape Alberta’s Plan for Parks

In 2025, Albertans had another opportunity to weigh in on the province’s draft Plan for Parks. CPAWS Northern Alberta encouraged people to participate and shared resources to help supporters understand the plan and speak up for conservation.

When the final Plan for Parks was released in January 2026, public feedback had helped shape the finished document. The Government of Alberta itself notes that public, Indigenous and stakeholder input informed the new plan. CPAWS also saw priorities raised through the engagement reflected in the final version, even as some concerns about how conservation will be balanced with other uses remain.

It was a welcome reminder that taking the time to complete a survey or speak up during a public consultation can make a difference.

Financial Overview

CPAWS Northern Alberta is incorporated as a non-profit society in Alberta and governed by a board of directors. CPAWS Northern Alberta is an incorporated regional chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. CPAWS National holds charitable number (106865272 RR0001). Individual donors, granting foundations, the federal government, businesses, and the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) financially support CPAWS Northern Alberta.

Below are the audited finances for 2025–2026, with 2024–2025 figures shown for comparison, prepared by Peterson-Walker LLP Chartered Professional Accountants.

Revenues	Audited 2025-2026	Audited 2024-2025
Grants	\$441,653	\$341,644
Fee for service	\$125,845	\$147,636
Funds from supporters	\$217,268	\$390,401
Other	\$98,974	\$50,565
Gaming	\$76,573	\$28,731
Interest	\$4,674	\$4,590
In-Kind	\$1,861	
	\$966,848	\$963,567

Expenses	Audited 2025-2026	Audited 2024-2025
Salaries, benefits & contracts	\$702,833	\$694,186
Outreach, advertising, travel	\$151,799	\$92,172
Rent & office supplies	\$54,108	\$24,606
Professional development & fees	\$11,695	\$17,789
Insurance	\$3,004	\$2,561
Interest and bank charges	\$1,022	\$983
Fundraising and member events	\$9,348	\$7,080
Amortization	\$1,883	\$2,259
In-kind	\$1,861	
	\$937,553	\$841,636

Revenue Over Expenses	\$29,295	\$121,931
-----------------------	----------	-----------

Looking Forward: 2026–2030

Over the next four years, CPAWS Northern Alberta is narrowing our focus so we can put more time and energy toward the conservation issues where our work can have the greatest effect. Our strategy balances realistic opportunities for progress now with building the public support and organizational strength needed for longer-term change.

Our Focus

Our new Strategic Plan identifies three priority areas for the years ahead:

BOREAL FORESTS AND CARIBOU:

Improving land-use planning, reducing disturbance and strengthening habitat protection and restoration.

THREATS TO THE EASTERN SLOPES:

Continuing our work on coal while addressing broader threats to headwaters, water and the surrounding landscape.

PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS:

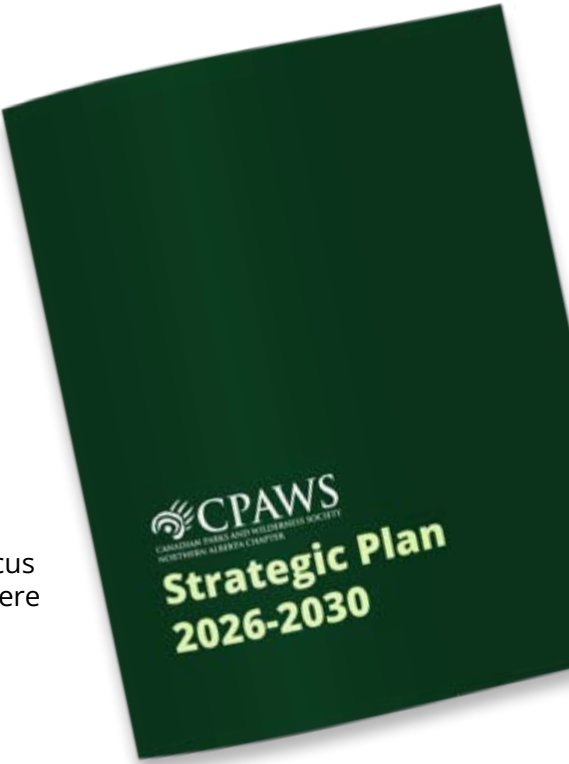
Defending existing protected areas, participating in planning decisions and supporting opportunities for new protection.

Working Toward Bigger Change

Alongside individual campaigns, we want to influence the policies, plans and regulations that shape what happens across entire landscapes. We'll continue bringing ecological science, mapping and spatial analysis into those decisions, while working with communities and partners to make conservation information useful and accessible.

Success will not always come as one big announcement. It can mean nature being better considered in a land-use decision, preventing further damage in an important landscape or making sure an existing protected area remains protected as intended.

Building a larger community of people who care about Northern Alberta's lands and waters is part of that work too. The more people who stay informed and speak up when it matters, the stronger our conservation work becomes.



Support Our Work

The work ahead will take strong public support. Whether you stay informed, contribute financially or speak up when important decisions are being made, there are practical ways to help protect Northern Alberta's lands, waters and wildlife.



SUBSCRIBE

Stay connected to conservation issues across Northern Alberta. Our newsletter shares emerging issues, public consultations, events and opportunities to get involved.



DONATE

Your financial support helps sustain the research, advocacy, public engagement and legal work behind the campaigns in this report. Make a one-time gift or become a monthly donor to help keep this work moving forward.



TAKE ACTION

Public participation matters. Respond to action alerts, take part in consultations, write to decision-makers and add your voice when decisions affecting Alberta's public lands and waters are being made.



JOIN OUR BOARD

Looking for another way to contribute? CPAWS Northern Alberta is seeking a new Treasurer and Board members with experience in fundraising. Board members help guide the organization and strengthen the work behind our conservation campaigns.

Our Team

2025-2026 STAFF

Kecia Kerr	Executive Director	Nicole Doll	Boreal Program Coordinator
Tara Russell	Program Director	Wesley Bell	Conservation Policy Analyst
Elise Gagnon	Communications Manager	Claire Morrison	National Urban Park Campaign Coordinator
Ryan Cheng	Conservation Analyst	Leah Crandall	Wildfire & Forestry Research Assistant
Kaitlyn Philip	Boreal Program Manager	Nakita Rubuliak	Wildfire & Forestry Research Assistant

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Steve Donelon	Chair	Connor Thompson	Director
Donna Tribe	Treasurer	Leigh Goldie	Director
Ramona Blacklock	Secretary	Tisha Raj	Director
Cheryl Hunter-Loewen	Director	Stuart McCormick	Director

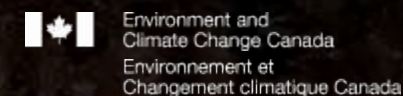
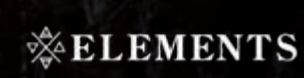
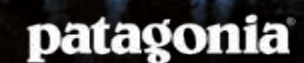
STAFFING CHANGES

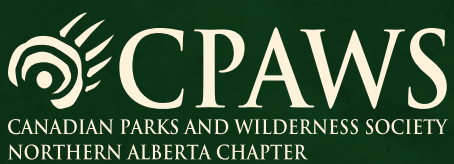
Since the end of the reporting year, our team has seen a few changes. We wish Elise well in her next chapter and Tara a wonderful year away. We're excited to welcome Victoria Colyn (Communications & Public Engagement Coordinator), Luke Ehrenholz (Communications Manager) and Sherry Young (Operations Manager) to the CPAWS Northern Alberta team.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Dene Tha' First Nation
ShagowAskee
Keepers of the Water

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT





cpawsnab.org