Elk Island
National Park

Visitor Guide and Map
2019/20

Aussi disponible en français.

Parks Canada Parcs Canada

Canada

Welcome to Elk Island

Enjoy a true wilderness experience 35 minutes east of Edmonton

A short drive east of Edmonton lies Elk Island National Park, a year-round oasis where bison roam freely, sun glistens off lakes, and stars light-up the night sky. Learn the story of how bison were saved from the brink of extinction, hike or bike more than 80 km of trails, paddle around the islands in Astotin Lake, or gaze at a night sky full of stars.

To ensure a safe and enjoyable experience, plan your visit and pack appropriate equipment:

PLAN

- Visit parkscanada.gc.ca/elkisland for the latest info on park activities, events, and conditions.
- Select a trip which best suits the group's abilities, experiences, interests, equipment, and time available.
- Inform friends or family of travel plans and file a trip plan with them.
- Check weather and road conditions.
- Learn what to do if encountering wildlife.
- Stop at the Visitor Information Centre for park updates and to purchase your entry pass.

PACK

Natural hazards exist in any national park. Being prepared can minimize risky situations; be sure to pack the basics:

- ☐ Weather appropriate clothing
- ☐ Visitor guide and map
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Sun protection
- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ Navigation and communication devices
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ Food, water, and equipment to be self-sufficient

Some activities require additional gear. Visit adventuresmart.ca for more information on how to stay safe and what to pack.

Guided programs

Enjoy drop-in programs and events FREE with paid park entry

Programs include:

- Bison Backstage tours
- Pemmican making
- Pond-dipping
- Stargazing
- Bird watching
- Campfire programs

ASTOTIN THEATRE

Stop by the Astotin Theatre to watch a documentary, speak with Parks Canada staff, borrow a Discovery Kit, or pick-up an Xplorer book.

PRIVATE PROGRAMS

Parks Canada interpreters are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Private programs are available for school groups, organizations, and families.

Stop by the Visitor Information Centre or visit parkscanada.gc.ca/elkisland for seasonal program schedules.

Camping

Sleep under the stars

Share stories around the campfire as the stars in the night sky twinkle above. **Reserve your campsite today for camping dates between May 17 and October 14, 2019:**

reservation.parkscanada.gc.ca
1-877-737-3783

ASTOTIN LAKE CAMPGROUND

Nestled in the Astotin Lake Recreation Area, this campground is walking distance to the beach, boat rentals, playground, golf course, and theatre.

Astotin Lake Campground offers:

- Potable water
- Flush toilets
- Firewood (fee)
- Hot showers
- Picnic shelters
- RV dump station

oTENTiks

For an easy and relaxing camping experience try an oTENTik. This A-frame tent and cabin in one offers a unique blend of homey comfort and a taste of outdoor adventure. oTENTiks can sleep up to six people in comfort.

EQUIPPED CAMPING

No gear? No problem! An equipped campsite comes with a tent, propane stove, camp chairs, and sleeping pads for up to six people.

OSTER LAKE BACKCOUNTRY CAMPGROUND

This **hike-in only** (4 km) campground provides a truly unique camping experience on the west shore of Oster Lake.

Stargazing

Lose yourself in the wonder of a star-filled sky

Navigate the sky of the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve from Elk Island National Park; without the glow of city lights around, you'll see more than you knew existed.

The Astotin Lake Recreation Area and the Bison Loop area are open spaces ideal for viewing the night sky above. Bring a blanket and experience seasonal meteor showers, the northern lights, and shooting stars.

STARGAZING TIPS

1. **Find an open dark area with few obstructions.** View as much of the sky as possible.
2. **Use a red light to preserve night vision.** Standard white lights disrupt night vision.
3. **Know when to look.** Season, time, and weather all impact what is visible in the night sky. Check the weather forecast and astronomy calendars online.
4. **Use a star chart or app.** Have the proper tools to help identify constellations.

Contact the Visitor Information Centre or visit parkscanada.gc.ca/elkisland for information on dark sky programs taking place throughout the year.

Contact information

Visitor Information Centre & Gift Shop:
780-922-5790
pc.pnelkisland-elkislandnp.pc@canada.ca
parkscanada.gc.ca/elkisland

Parks Canada Campground Reservation Service:
1-877-737-3783
reservation.parkscanada.gc.ca

Follow us on Twitter: @ElkIslandNP

Emergency
911 – Police, fire, and ambulance
1-877-852-3100 – Parks Canada Dispatch

DRIVING DIRECTIONS FROM EDMONTON

Travel east on Highway 16. The park entrance is located on the north side of Highway 16 approximately 35 minutes east of Edmonton.

The first large Elk Island National Park sign on Highway 16 marks the park boundary. Continue 7 km further east to reach the main park gate.

Come prepared with a full tank of gas as there is no gas station in the park.

Save the date

Elk Island National Park is home to a number of exciting events every year

BISON FESTIVAL – June 1, 2019
CANADA DAY – July 1, 2019
PARKS DAY – July 20, 2019
MILKY WAY DAY – September 1, 2019
FAMILY DAY – February 17, 2020

Visit parkscanada.gc.ca/elkisland for event details.

Hiking

Explore the park at a slower pace

With over 80 km of trails to explore, a memorable experience awaits. Watch a busy beaver construct its dam, listen to songbirds sing a tune, or take in a breathtaking sunset over Astotin Lake. Most trails have parking, viewpoints, washrooms, and garbage facilities.

Trail descriptions and locations are listed on the back of this guide.

Cycling

Feel the breeze as you pedal through nature

Bring a bike and breathe in the fresh air while cycling along trails or roadways in the park.

TRAIL RIDING

Watch for wildlife as you cycle through forest and across open grasslands on more than 75 km of trails.

ROAD CYCLING

With ample wildlife viewing opportunities, paved roads in Elk Island National Park are a great option for road cyclists. Travel the parkway (20 km one-way) or the administration road (5 km one-way).

CYCLING SAFETY

- Fast, quiet travel increases the chance of sudden wildlife encounters. Slow down, stay alert, and make noise.
- Pair up with a motor vehicle to navigate through bison herds gathered near the road.
- Wear a helmet and high visibility clothing.

Paddling

A canoe or kayak is the best seat in the house

Paddling is a great low-impact way to discover the natural wonders of the park.

Bring a canoe, kayak, or paddleboard or rent one at the Astotin Lake Recreation Area. Gas and electric motors are not permitted.

For information on watercraft rentals, visit haskincanoe.ca or call 780-922-4324.

PADDLING SAFETY

- Wear a Canadian approved personal floatation device (PFD).
- Check the forecast and monitor changing weather conditions.
- Carry essential safety equipment on board, as required by Transport Canada.

Wildlife viewing

Moose

Mule Deer

Wildlife viewing tips

- Visit at dawn and dusk when animals are most active. Be alert as females and their young travel at these times.
- Slow down. Bison and coyotes often travel the parkway.
- Get wet. Moose and waterfowl are most active in rainy weather.
- Be patient. Stop and look around, kick back and wait to see what wanders by.

Elk

Wolf

Coyote

White-tailed Deer

Black Bear

Beaver

Plains Bison

Wood Bison

Bring your binoculars: over 250 species of birds can be spotted in Elk Island throughout the year!

Stay safe and protect wildlife

- **Keep a safe distance from all wildlife.** Follow the rule of thumb.
- **Do not approach or entice wildlife.** Store all food, garbage and scented items when not in use.
- **Give wildlife the right of way.** When encountering elk, moose, or bison on a trail, make noise to alert animals. Wait for them to move on or slowly back away.
- **Avoid startling wildlife.** Be aware of surroundings and travel in groups.
- **Stay in the vehicle when driving by wildlife.** Only stop to observe if it is safe to do. Move on after a few moments to prevent traffic jams.
- **Follow posted speed limits.** Slow down and be aware of surroundings.
- **Keep dogs on leash and under control at all times.** Pets cause stress for wildlife.

Rule of thumb

Animals in the park are wild and may react to perceived threats when startled, threatened, or protecting their young. Protect yourself and wildlife by giving animals space. To determine if you are at a safe distance use the rule of thumb:

1. Hold your fist straight out in front of you,
2. Raise your thumb,
3. Cover the animal with your thumb.

If the animal is totally covered by your thumb, you are a safe distance away (about 100 m). If your thumb does not cover the animal you are too close and should retreat.

Geocaching

Hide and seek

Geocaching is a fun high-tech adventure where participants use a GPS (Global Positioning System) to hunt for containers called "caches."

Caches range from easy finds with vehicle access to challenging half-day finds on longer trails. Try to locate them all!

Visit geocaching.com or pick up the Elk Island Guide to Geocaching brochure at the Visitor Information Centre.

Discovery Kits

Pick up a pack to fun

Visit the Astotin Theatre or the Visitor Information Centre to **borrow a free Discovery Kit**. These themed backpacks are loaded with tools such as binoculars, animal identification guides, pond dipping kits, star charts, GPS units, and other items to suit park exploration interests.

Choose between the:

- Nature kit
- Geocaching kit
- Pond-dipping kit
- Dark sky kit

Golfing

Designed by Stanley Thompson, the 9–hole Elk Island Golf Course blends nature and recreation. Enjoy a round or grab refreshments at the clubhouse.

For more information or to book a tee time visit elkislandgolf.com or call 780-998-3161.

Trail information

Legend

- Hiking
- Cycling
- Picnic area
- Picnic shelter
- Accessible
- Easy
- Moderate
- Difficult

Larger trail numbers on map indicate trailheads.

All trailheads outside the Astotin Lake Recreation Area have parking, outhouses, and garbage facilities.

1 Hayburger Trail

11.6 km (3-4 hours) – Flat terrain

Used as a wagon path by the Hayburger family until the 1930s, this trail winds through open forest and meadows. Keep an eye out for bison and moose where the trail crosses a black spruce forest.

2 Simmons Trail

4 km (1-2 hours) – Rolling hills

This trail makes its way through aspen forest and rolling hills. Open areas along the trail offer the opportunity to watch beavers and muskrats in action.

Note: This trail begins on the north side of Tawayik Road 100 m east of the Tawayik parking lot.

3 Shirley Lake Trail

10.9 km (3-4 hours) – Rolling hills

Numerous shallow lakes and ponds are nestled between aspen forest and meadows. Listen for the calls of frogs filling the air and watch for nesting waterfowl.

Note: This trail intersects with Tawayik Lake Trail; Pay attention to trail markers and maps at intersections.

4 Moss Lake Trail

12.6 km (3.5-4.5 hours) – Rolling hills

Listen to the call of songbirds as the trail winds up and down hills, around ponds, and through mixed wood forest. The west side of the trail passes through grassland habitat ideal for spotting bison, elk, and deer.

5 Amisk Wuche Trail

2.7 km (1-1.5 hours) – Moderate to steep terrain

This diverse trail winds through aspen, birch, and spruce stands. A series of floating boardwalks cross small kettle lakes and beaver ponds. Part of the trail follows ridgelines, providing elevated views of forest and grassland habitat.

6 Lakeview Trail

3.7 km (1-2 hours) – Limited steep sections

Discover changing vegetation as the trail bends through aspen and black spruce forest. With panoramic views overlooking Astotin Lake, this trail provides wonderful photo opportunities.

7 Beaver Pond Trail

3.6 km (1-2 hours) – Flat terrain

Open aspen forest and sedge meadows along this trail are ideal for spotting birds or beavers in the summer and observing bison grazing in the winter.

8 Living Waters Boardwalk

400 m (15-30 minutes) – Boardwalk

Starting just behind the Astotin Theatre, this boardwalk loops over the water of Astotin Lake. Watch beaver and waterfowl break the surface or peer into the water to see various aquatic life.

9 Tawayik Lake Trail

15.1 km (4-5 hours) – Rolling hills

Winding through aspen forest and meadows, this trail is great for watching bison graze and waterfowl forage. Take advantage of fire pits and picnic tables at the trailhead. Be sure to stop by the bench commemorating the 1984 visit of Saint John Paul II near the trailhead.

Note: Portions of this trail are shared with Shirley Lake Trail and a staff only access road. Pay attention to trail markers and maps at intersections.

10 Shoreline Trail

6 km return (2-3 hours) – Flat terrain

This paved trail follows the original road around Astotin Lake. Short paths off this trail lead to clearings that are great for observing waterfowl or picnicking on the shore of Astotin Lake.

11 Wood Bison Trail

15.6 km (4-5 hours) – Rolling hills

Spot wood bison, the largest land mammal in North America, from the only trail south of Highway 16. This challenging trail crosses through aspen forest, wetlands, and along ridges.

Astotin Lake Recreation Area

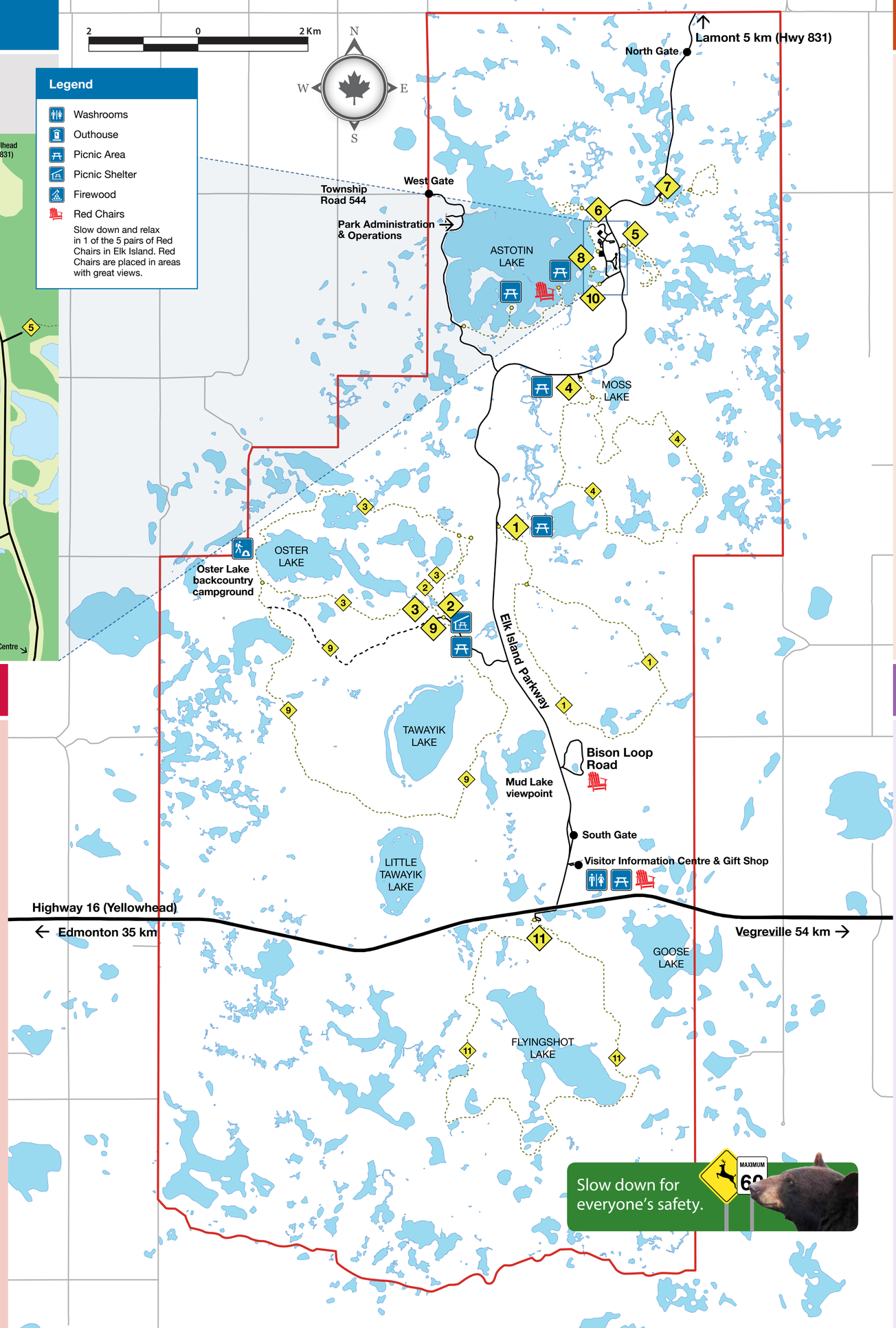
Trail — Road

Forest — Grassland — Water — Beach

Legend

- Washrooms
- Outhouse
- Picnic Area
- Picnic Shelter
- Firewood
- Red Chairs

Slow down and relax in 1 of the 5 pairs of Red Chairs in Elk Island. Red Chairs are placed in areas with great views.



Safety information

Safety is a shared responsibility

- **Trails and beaches are not patrolled.** Use at own risk.
- **Be self-reliant:** prepare to be self-sufficient in all weather conditions and emergency situations.
- **Create and share a trip plan** with a friend or family member.
- **Stay alert.** Be aware of surroundings and avoid using headphones.
- **Respect wildlife:** wildlife encounters are possible. Learn more on the other side of this guide.
- **Check the weather forecast:** conditions can change from minute to minute and place to place.
- **Check for closures and restrictions:** review the website or contact the visitor information centre.
- **Stay hydrated:** bring enough water and food to last through an emergency or unexpected delay.
- **Do not rely on a cellular telephone:** cell coverage varies and may not be available in all areas of the park.

Visit adventuresmart.ca for more safety information and trip planning templates.

DO NOT FEED OR APPROACH WILDLIFE.

KEEP DOGS ON A LEASH AT ALL TIMES.

NO CAMPFIRES OUTSIDE OF DESIGNATED FIRE PITS.

NO DRONE ZONE!
All Parks Canada places are "no drone zones." Leave drones at home and enjoy Elk Island National Park from the ground!

Bison conservation

Millions of bison once roamed across the continent from Alaska to Mexico. However, within a single human lifetime, bison in North America were hunted from the tens of millions to less than a thousand.

When almost all hope for bison seemed lost, a few people saved the species from extinction. The Canadian government purchased one of the last herds of bison and between 1907 and 1912 over 400 wild bison were shipped by train to Elk Island National Park.

- Today, there are more bison in Elk Island National Park than there were in the whole of North America in 1890.
- Elk Island National Park is the only national park that maintains herds of both subspecies of North American Bison; Wood Bison on the south side of Highway 16 and Plains Bison on the north side.
- Wood bison are the largest land mammal in North America.
- Elk Island National Park provides bison to conservation initiatives around the world.

Join a park program or stop at the Visitor Information Centre for more information on bison conservation.

Winter

Come play in the snow

Experience a whole new adventure with a winter visit to Elk Island National Park. Follow wildlife prints through the snow, hike across pristine snow-covered meadows, share stories around a crackling campfire, or enjoy the following winter activities:

- Snowshoeing
- Skating
- Stargazing
- Tobogganing
- Winter programs
- Winter camping

Visit parkscanada.gc.ca/ElkIsland or contact the Visitor Information Centre for more on winter activities and program schedules.

WINTER SAFETY

Winter weather can present additional hazards to park visitors. Consider cold temperatures, storms, challenging travel conditions, and short daylight hours when planning a winter visit to Elk Island National Park.

- Dress in weather appropriate clothing and footwear.
- Bring extra clothes in case of changing winter conditions.
- Exercise caution and watch for icy sections, deep snow, and fallen trees.
- Assess ice thickness and never go onto ice alone. Thin ice may exist on water bodies at any time.
- Drive appropriately for winter road conditions.
- Travel with a full tank of gas in case of unexpected delays or emergencies.