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Elk Island

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

2011



Canada

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or this management plan:

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**Elk Island
National Park of Canada
Management Plan**

August 2011

Foreword



Canada's national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas are part of a century-strong Parks Canada network which provides Canadians and visitors from around the world with unique opportunities to experience and embrace our wonderful country.

From our smallest national park to our most visited national historic site to our largest national marine conservation area, each of Canada's treasured places offers many opportunities to enjoy Canada's historic and natural heritage. These places serve as sources of inspiration, relaxation, learning and discovery. They represent the very best that Canada has to offer, and it is through these special places that we are all deeply connected to what it means to be Canadian.

Having been entrusted with this important legacy for over a hundred years, we reflect upon the steady growth of the Parks Canada network of protected areas as we continue to expand it. As we plan for the years to come, we can encourage lasting connections to our heritage and promote our protected places to be enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.

We see a future in which these special places will further Canadians' appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of Canada, the economic well-being of communities, and the vitality of our society.

Our Government's vision is to build a culture of heritage conservation in Canada by offering Canadians exceptional opportunities to build personal connections with our natural and cultural heritage.

These values form the foundation of the new management plan for Elk Island National Park of Canada. I offer my appreciation to the many thoughtful Canadians who helped to develop this plan, particularly to our dedicated team from Parks Canada, and to all those local organizations and individuals who have demonstrated their good will, hard work, spirit of co-operation and extraordinary sense of stewardship.

In this same spirit of partnership and responsibility, I am pleased to approve the Elk Island National Park of Canada Management Plan.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Peter Kent". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter Kent

Minister of the Environment and Minister responsible for Parks Canada

Recommendation Statement

Elk Island National Park of Canada Management Plan

Recommended for approval by:



Alan Latourelle
Chief Executive Officer
Parks Canada



Alan Fehr
Field Unit Superintendent, Northern Prairies
Parks Canada

Executive Summary

Parks Canada administers a world-renowned system of national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. Canada's national parks are established to protect, for all time, special places representative of Canada's natural regions, and to connect Canadians with the enduring natural and cultural legacy of these places. Under the *Canada National Parks Act*, management plans are a legal requirement for national parks, and serve to guide Parks Canada decision-making and actions in protecting, managing and operating a national park.

Elk Island National Park of Canada is located 45 km east of Edmonton, Alberta. It is the sixth oldest and seventh smallest of Canada's forty-two national parks. Initially created as a wildlife sanctuary for elk in 1906, Elk Island has evolved as a national park. The park's purpose is to protect a representative portion of the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region and to enable present and future generations to appreciate and experience its outstanding and representative characteristics.

The 2011 management plan weaves together the three elements of Parks Canada's mandate -- conserving heritage resources, facilitating visitor experiences, and fostering public appreciation and understanding -- into a new park vision, *reintroducing you to nature*. The plan also outlines the key strategies for managing the park, addressing the challenges and opportunities identified in the Elk Island National Park of Canada 2010 State of the Park Report. The focus of the management plan is to:

- Instil in the hearts and minds of Canadians that Elk Island National Park is a sanctuary -- a place for wildlife and people; it is the pride of one of Canada's major urban centres -- Edmonton; and it is a welcoming and learning place, where public participation is strong and new traditions are created; and,
- Showcase to Canadians, Elk Island National Park's continued conservation legacy not only in protecting and re-establishing wildlife populations, but also as a nationally significant protected heritage area

contributing through partnerships to the biodiversity and sustainability of the Beaver Hills.

Following is a description of the four key strategies:

Welcoming Visitors and Canadians

As the Canadian mosaic continues to become more diverse, with an increasing proportion of new and urban Canadians, there is a growing risk of disconnect with nature, generally; and with parks and protected areas, specifically. To ensure Canadians have opportunities to enjoy, experience, and learn about the natural and cultural heritage of Elk Island National Park, Parks Canada is focusing its effort on the creation of visitor offers that are attractive to these groups and that achieve a connection to place. By engaging these groups, Parks Canada's vision can be shared with all Canadians, connecting them with their nature and history.

The *Welcoming Visitors and Canadians* strategy focuses on Elk Island National Park being more recognizable as a national park; more inviting and accessible for the greater Edmonton area population of urban and new Canadians, who may be unfamiliar with a natural park experience; and more appealing to Yellowhead Highway travellers as a place to visit or return.

Inviting Participation for Enjoyment, Learning and Advocacy

Inviting Participation engages Canadians in the *whys* and the *hows* of managing and experiencing Elk Island National Park. It also provides tangible ways for the public to participate in the maintenance and restoration of the park's ecological integrity. It includes increasing opportunities for Canadians to be involved with Parks Canada through volunteer and other experiences; developing a framework to engage Aboriginal peoples in park management and programs of relevance and importance to them; promoting the park as a living classroom for the many educational institutions in the region; and enabling park stakeholders to get more involved in park management through an advisory process.

Practicing and Showcasing Leadership in Conservation

Originally established to protect one of the last remaining herds of elk in Canada, Elk Island National Park has since become a leader nationally and internationally for its conservation leadership and best practices. Herds of elk, and plains and wood bison are managed in the only national park in Canada that is completely fenced. Nursery herds of bison have been trans-located throughout North America and into Russia, supporting many re-population conservation initiatives. Successfully managing this diverse ecosystem within a small fenced area requires effective active and adaptive management practices, and an integrated ecological integrity monitoring program. Sharing these practices, stories, and experiences with the public, stakeholders, and Aboriginal communities along with showcasing and involving the public in the park's rich heritage of wildlife conservation is a priority for the park. Elk Island National Park will provide the opportunity for Canadians to make a difference – to become part of the park's century of conservation legacy.

Beyond the Fence: Working with Others in Support of Ecological Integrity and Sustainability

Elk Island National Park is central to maintaining the biodiversity of the Beaver Hills. The park plays a vital role in protecting one of the last remaining habitat corridors in east-

central Alberta, and is part of the 200 km² Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve. The park is identified as one of two protected core areas of the proposed Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Elk Island National Park is also located adjacent to an area of intensive industrial development known as the Industrial Heartland of Alberta. *Beyond the Fence* focuses on opportunities and means for the park to participate in regional planning processes for lands adjacent to its boundary, and to achieve shared goals for protecting ecological integrity and cultural resources, and promoting quality visitor experiences.

In support of the key strategies, the management plan includes three specific management approaches for a park Welcome Area; the Astotin Lake Area; and the Area South of the Yellowhead Highway. The management plan also includes: an updated park zoning plan with regard to protection and use; a summary of park administration, operations and environmental stewardship; and a strategic environmental assessment of the plan.

The management plan includes targets and actions used to implement, evaluate and report progress in achieving the park objectives and ultimately the vision. The plan and its implementation is formally reviewed five years after its tabling in Parliament to ensure that it remains relevant and effective in the management of Elk Island National Park.

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1.0 Introduction

“The National Parks of Canada are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment and shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for future generations” (*Canada National Parks Act*).

Parks Canada is responsible to the people and Parliament of Canada for administering a world-renowned system of national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. Canada’s national parks are established to protect, for all time, special places representative of Canada’s natural regions, and to connect Canadians with the enduring natural and cultural legacy of these places. The *Parks Canada Agency Act*, the *Canada National Parks Act* and the Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies (1994) set the context for this responsibility.

Under the *Canada National Parks Act*, management plans are a requirement for national parks. A park management plan is the key reference document that guides Parks Canada decisions and actions in protecting, managing and operating a national park. As a strategic document, a management plan is not an end itself; rather it provides a framework within which subsequent management, planning and implementation can take place. For each national park, a plan is developed with the involvement of the Canadian public and is formally reviewed every five years to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

This is the fourth management plan for Elk Island National Park of Canada. Located 45 km east of Edmonton, Alberta, Elk Island National Park is the sixth oldest and seventh smallest of Canada’s forty-two national parks¹. Initially created as a wildlife sanctuary for elk in 1906, Elk Island National Park has evolved considerably as a national park, with its responsibilities and programs for conservation, and visitor enjoyment and learning that are

centred on its natural and historical values. This plan builds on Elk Island National Park’s 2005 management plan and aims to fulfill Parks Canada’s vision, that “*Canada’s treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*”

This plan brings the three elements of Parks Canada’s mandate - conserving heritage resources, facilitating visitor experiences, and fostering appreciation and understanding – to life, weaving them together in a way where new synergies are created. The plan’s vision, key strategies, and area-specific management approaches strive for cohesiveness, building on past successes while creating new ways of working together to maintain ecological integrity (see glossary), protect cultural resources and achieving the plan’s desired objectives.

Developed in consultation with the public, stakeholders and park staff, this plan creates a clear identity and direction for Elk Island National Park. The strategies are focused; the objectives measurable and the actions achievable.

The focus of the management plan is to:

- Instil in the hearts and minds of Canadians that Elk Island National Park is a sanctuary – a place for wildlife and people; it is the pride of one of Canada’s major urban centres – Edmonton; and it is a welcoming and learning place, where participation is strong and new traditions are created; and,
- Showcase to Canadians, Elk Island National Park’s continued conservation legacy not only in protecting and re-establishing wildlife populations, but also as a nationally significant protected heritage area contributing through partnerships to the biodiversity and sustainability of the Beaver Hills.

¹ On March 28, 1906, Elk Park was established. It was renamed Elk Island Park in 1908 and became a national park in 1913.

2.0 The Importance of Elk Island National Park of Canada – Regionally, Nationally and Internationally

2.1 Protecting and Presenting One of Canada's Natural Regions

A national parks system plan was devised in the early 1970s that divides Canada into 39 distinct National Park Natural Regions based on land characteristics and vegetation. The fundamental principle of the system plan is to protect a representative sample of each of Canada's landscapes. Elk Island National Park, along with Riding Mountain and Prince Albert national parks, represent a portion of the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region. This area is defined by its gentle blend of plains and plateaux, represented by a transition zone from prairie through deciduous forest to boreal forest. Comprising 194 km², Elk Island National Park lies within the 900 km² Beaver Hills region, which is underlain by the Cooking Lake Moraine

(Figure 1). The moraine is a plateau of wetland, mixed wood and aspen forest and grassland that sits twenty metres above the surrounding plains.

The forests, grasslands and biodiversity of the Beaver Hills made it an important place for generations of First Nations and later Métis, and Canadian and immigrant settlers.

Archaeological research has identified more than two hundred Aboriginal camps and other sites within Elk Island National Park, dating as far back as 5000 years ago.

Wildlife on the landscape defines Elk Island National Park in many ways. As a park that actively manages plains and wood bison, elk and moose, it is the only national park in Canada that is completely fenced. In addition, more than 42 species of mammals, 250 species of birds, five species of amphibians, one reptile species and

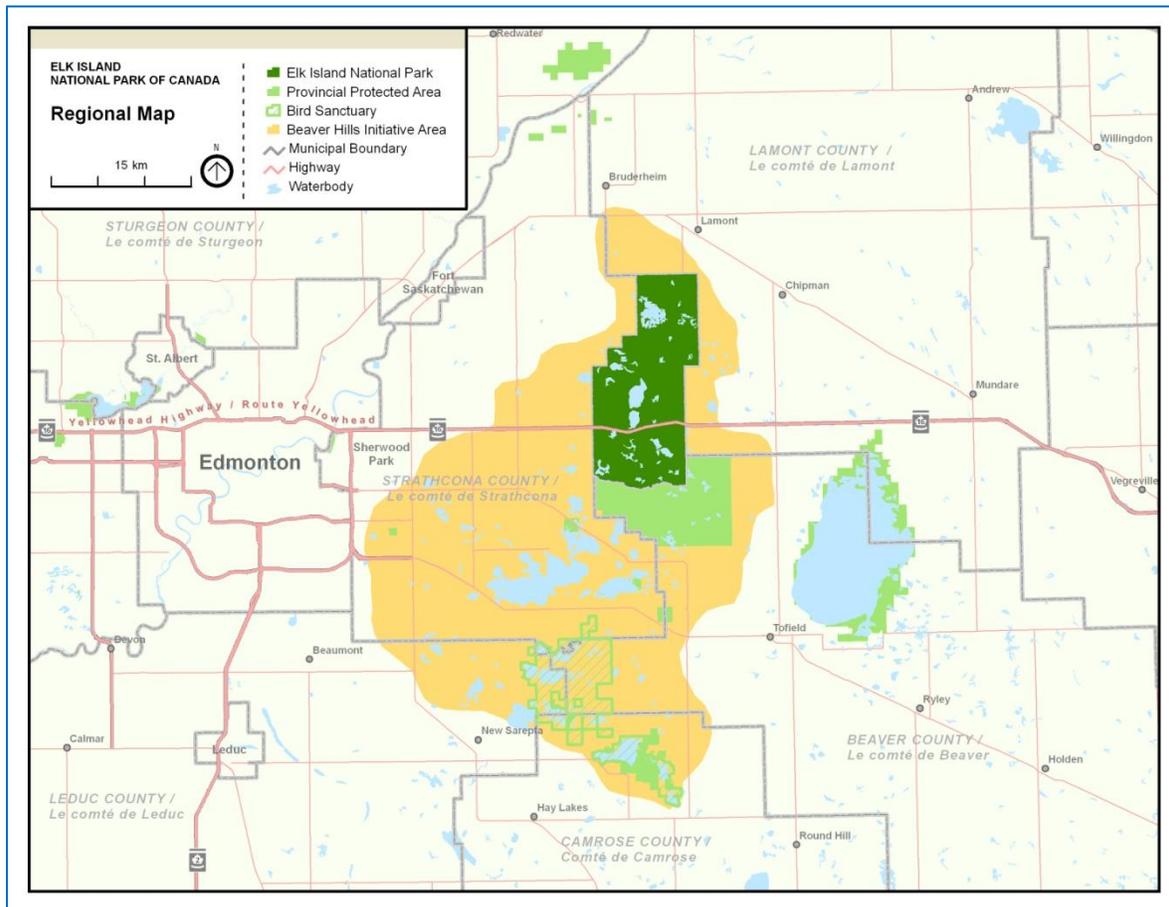


FIGURE 1. REGIONAL SETTING, ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

two species of fish live in Elk Island National Park's diverse landscape of forests, lakes, wetlands and grasslands. On the doorstep of Edmonton, Elk Island National Park is "nature in your backyard".

Visitors can choose from day outings on foot, ski or by canoe; various recreation activities such as golfing, camping and canoeing at Astotin Lake Area; and wildlife viewing on park trails and the scenic 20 km Elk Island Parkway. Nearly 200,000 people visit the park every year. In 2006, Elk Island National Park added to its protection role and visitor experience opportunities by becoming part of the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve.

The greater Edmonton area, which includes the Elk Island National Park regional setting, is the Industrial Heartland of the province. This situation may pose risks to the park from airborne pollution as well as from development pressures on the surrounding landscape. The park exists in a regional context of native habitat that has been extensively converted to farmland and urban use. The remaining habitat is highly fragmented and inherently vulnerable to future development.

Elk Island National Park is a founder and major supporter of the Beaver Hills Initiative, formed to create an ecologically, socially and economically sustainable Beaver Hills region through shared initiatives and coordinated action. It is a collaboration of municipal, provincial and federal governments, private land owners, non-government groups and industry. The Beaver Hills Initiative is in the process of proposing the Beaver Hills as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Reserve. The Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve proposal recognizes Elk Island National Park as one of two core protected areas within the proposed reserve.

2.2 Re-establishing Threatened Species Nationally and World-Wide

In 1906, Elk Park, as Elk Island National Park was then known, began as a 41 km² fenced enclosure around Astotin Lake to protect one of the last remaining herds of elk in Canada. A year later, a small herd of plains bison en route from Montana to another planned national park at Wainwright, Alberta, were temporarily penned at Elk Park. Some of these bison eluded capture and their offspring remain to this day. The preservation of the plains bison through the establishment of a herd at Elk Island National Park and the distribution of their offspring to other national parks and locations is commemorated as a National Historic Event.



PLAINS BISON (PARKS CANADA)

The park's fenced boundaries have expanded to their current location to support the growth in numbers of the elk and bison. In 1965, a small herd of wood bison from Wood Buffalo National Park was brought to Elk Island National Park to establish a disease-free herd for future recovery initiatives. Elk, plains bison and wood bison from Elk Island National Park have been relocated and successfully re-established as far away as Russia, Alaska, Tennessee, and in about half of the provinces and territories of Canada.

Elk Island National Park's contribution to conservation goes beyond bison and elk. In 1941, beaver were successfully re-introduced into the park, after an absence of over 100 years, trumpeter swans were reintroduced in 1987, and fishers in 1990 and 1992.

Thirty wood bison from Elk Island National Park will have found a new home in 2011.

The animals are being transferred to the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in eastern Russia as part of a bison repopulation project, coordinated by the Republic of Sakha, Parks Canada, and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

This transfer is similar to one that took place in 2006, when 30 wood bison were sent to the same location and released into a region where they once flourished thousands of years ago. This wood bison sub-species is not exactly like the bison that used to populate the area in Russia, but are the only close relative.

The wood bison are listed as Threatened under the *Species at Risk Act*.

2.3 History of Visitation and Current Use

Elk Island National Park has always and continues to welcome visitors to experience solitude, nature, outdoor recreation, and history through many activities, including hiking, camping, golfing, canoeing, wildlife watching, picnicking, cycling, and cross-country skiing. Through seasonal interpretative programs, people of all ages learn first-hand about Canada's national parks and the natural region Elk Island National Park represents.

In the past, visitor facilities included a dance hall, hotel, private cottages, band shell, police detachment, pavilion, theatre, campground, and a gas station. Many of these facilities were removed to reduce the park's footprint on ecological integrity. Practices such as motorized boating and aggressive water management for swimming no longer occur.



CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING ON ONE OF THE PARK'S TRAILS (PARKS CANADA)

Recreational and other activities that are supported by the park services and facilities and enable visitors to experience and enjoy Elk Island as a national park include:

- Hiking/walking;
- Mountain biking and cycling;
- Summer camping (semi-serviced, group camping, and self-sufficient tenting);
- Golfing;
- Canoeing, kayaking, and sailing;
- Wildlife viewing;
- Bird watching;
- Film and photography;
- Orienteering;
- Picnicking;
- Astotin Lake Area playground activity;
- Pleasure driving;
- Snowshoeing;
- Cross-country skiing;
- Night sky viewing / astronomy;
- Geocaching; and
- Kite boarding.

Since 2004, Elk Island National Park began to experience a slow but steady increase in attendance:

Year	Visitor Numbers
2004/05	171,447
2005/06	180,946
2006/07	182,736
2007/08	186,855
2008/09	198,231
2009/10	185,323

The much needed infrastructure improvements, such as potable water and resurfacing of the parkway, improve the attractiveness of Elk Island National Park as a destination by addressing the most significant sources of visitor complaints. New learning opportunities, such as night sky viewing, and enhancements to interpretation and visitor services have also improved the attractiveness of the park.

3.0 Planning Context

3.1 Park Management History

This will be Elk Island National Park's fourth management plan; previous plans were approved in 1978, 1996 and 2005.

1978 – While captive herd management continued to be the major objective for the park since its establishment in the early 1900s, protection of the park's characteristics of the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region came into play with provisions for appropriate recreational use over the larger park area.

1996 – The park worked to improve the ecological integrity of the park through principles and practice of ecosystem-based management. These changes reflected the 1988 *National Parks Act*.

2005 – The park furthered its ecological integrity objectives with measurable indicators and targets, continuing to reduce the impact of ungulate grazing on biodiversity, restoring natural processes of flood and fire, and identifying long-term ecological monitoring requirements. Elk Island National Park further participated in the Beaver Hills Initiative to address ecosystem stressors affecting the park from outside its boundaries.

2011 – The park role continues to evolve from species conservation to a core protected heritage area of the Beaver Hills ecosystem, along with improved opportunities for public participation, diverse visitor experiences and learning, and with attention given to recognizing Elk Island National Park's century-old wildlife conservation legacy.



PAVILION AT ASTOTIN LAKE, A FEDERAL HERITAGE BUILDING (PARKS CANADA)



ELK (PARKS CANADA)

3.2 State of the Park

The Elk Island National Park of Canada 2010 State of the Park Report evaluates the condition of Elk Island National Park's ecological integrity, cultural resources, park visitor experiences and learning opportunities, Aboriginal peoples involvement, and public and stakeholder support. The report identifies key considerations and valued ecosystem components for management planning. Key results of the report are summarized.

Ecological Integrity

The ecological condition and trends of Elk Island National Park are measured in terms of forest, grasslands, lakes and wetlands. The forest indicator is in good condition with a stable trend for forest structure through reduced ungulate foraging and use of prescribed burning. The declining condition of lakes is due to regional drought conditions over the past 10 years. Grassland and wetland indicators could not be rated due to limited monitoring and absence of thresholds for some measures.

Species at Risk

Although the wood bison is categorized as stable, there is insufficient information to rank the other two species at risk, the western toad and the yellow rail.

Cultural Resources

The archaeological sites, objects and historic buildings are in fair condition as are the park's cultural resource management practices.

Visitor Experience

Visitor experience is rated in terms of trends. Visitation is improving as indicated by a fifteen percent increase in park attendance in the past five years. Learning opportunities and visitor enjoyment improved through strategic deployment of staff to increase their contact with visitors and offer more in the way of programs and special events. Visitor satisfaction is rated as

stable. Although the visitor experience evaluation tends to be positive overall, improvements are required in terms of understanding park messages and satisfaction with camping services.

Public Appreciation and Understanding

Indicators show this aspect of Elk Island National Park is improving through work with the Beaver Hills Initiative, although the park's public education outreach initiatives are limited.

Aboriginal Relations

With no land claims or treaty land entitlements on Elk Island National Park, relationships with First Nation and Métis communities have been opportunistic and project-specific. Public consultation on the management plan has led to positive discussions, furthering their engagement with the park.

2005 Management Plan Implementation

Park actions flowing from the 2005 plan met a number of its strategic goals, including ungulate management contributing to improved forest conditions; a research and monitoring framework completed in collaboration with the Beaver Hills Initiative; increased staff presence at the Visitor Centre and Astotin Lake Area to improve visitor experience opportunities; repaving the parkway; and providing potable water.

Parks Canada Agency Corporate Performance

Elk Island National Park has *met or exceeded* 80 percent of the Agency's corporate expectations for the period from 2005. The park *somewhat met* expectations to improve ecological integrity; there remains a need to improve ecological integrity monitoring and reporting programs. The park also *partially met* corporate objectives for visitor understanding of Elk Island National Park's significance.

3.3 Current Park Audiences

Current park audiences include visitors, students, teachers, and virtual visitors.

Park Visitors

Visitor surveys conducted in both 2005/06 and 2010 provide some details about people coming into the park for the purposes of recreation and heritage appreciation: two-thirds (66%) of visitors are from the area immediately around the park (the greater Edmonton area); four-fifths (82%) of all visitors come from Alberta. Few visitors come from other parts of Canada (9%) or from other countries (9%). Twenty percent of visitor parties include children (<18 years of age) and the average visitor party size is 2.4. One-quarter (27%) visited Elk Island National Park for the first time. The three top motives for planning a visit to the park are to: experience the natural outdoors; be in a peaceful, quiet place; and, spend time with friends and/or family.

Summer visits can be segmented on the basis of three activities:

- *Park Sightseeing* (50% of surveyed visitors) – Typical visits are driving through the park and looking at the attractions. Visits focus on the areas of the park accessible by car; hikes tend to be less than two hours in length. Motivations for the visit are to experience the natural outdoors and to be in a peaceful, quiet place.
- *Park Experience* (40%) - Visits are more engaged with nature, with most visitors in this segment participating in walks and hikes of short and long durations. Motivations for the visit are to experience the natural outdoors and be in a peaceful, quiet place, while having a recreational experience.
- *Golfing* (10%) - Visits are limited to golfing at the Elk Island Golf Course, with almost no stops in other areas of the park. The primary motivation for this visit is having a recreational experience, while getting good value for money.

Research conducted in Elk Island National Park in the summer of 2010 suggests the profile of visitors is representative of the greater

Edmonton area. There does not appear to be a specific market segment of the Edmonton population drawn to visit the park.

Winter visits are predominantly sightseeing, with some park experience activities (hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing) also occurring. New activities include night sky viewing, bird watching, and kite boarding.



PICNICKING AT ASTOTIN LAKE (PARKS CANADA)

Students and Teachers

Since 2004, school programs have generally been conducted between May - June and September - October. From 2004-2009, 64% of all student visits were from Edmonton schools. The majority of the remaining attendance was spread across several central-northern Alberta school boards and districts. Target audiences include Grade 4 classes in the Beaver Hills Initiative counties of Strathcona, Lamont, Beaver, Leduc, Camrose, Flagstaff, as well as the City of Fort Saskatchewan and the Town of Vegreville. For these audiences, there is a direct link between Parks Canada and park-specific messaging to the Alberta curriculum. In 2009, the scope of target audiences increased to include the Alberta Grade 5 curriculum. In addition, it has been noted that high school level Biology 20 and Science 20 curricula align well with currently offered school interpretation programming, and visits from high schools.

Virtual Visitors

Virtual visitors are those individuals who discover and learn about Elk Island National Park through print, radio, television and other media, such as the Parks Canada website.

3.4 Challenges and Opportunities

Renewal within Parks Canada

Parks Canada is undergoing agency renewal to better serve the needs of Canadians today and into the future. There are many factors currently influencing Parks Canada: shifts in the cultural makeup of cities; an aging population; Canadians' changing connection to their environment; increasing threats to natural and cultural heritage; and changes in how Canadians spend their leisure time. For Parks Canada programs to continue to be relevant, the Agency must take a fresh look at the needs and desires of Canadians. Parks Canada is seeking ways to better connect Canadians with Elk Island National Park, increase visitation, strengthen outreach education and promote heritage stewardship.

Challenges

(from the Elk Island National Park of Canada 2010 State of the Park Report)

- *Visitor Service Offer* – Elk Island National Park does not always provide positive, memorable experiences. Outdated signs and exhibits, and small non-serviced campsites leave the impression of a dated park and low satisfaction for fees paid. Staff offices are located away from the Astotin Lake Area, limiting opportunities for staff-visitor interaction.
- *Urban and Aboriginal Relationships* – Despite its proximity to a large urban audience, there is a lack of public awareness about Elk Island National Park due to limited outreach, and an outdated marketing strategy. There are also no continuous, partnered initiatives between Aboriginal groups and Elk Island National Park. Possible partnering opportunities lie in areas related to bison and other wildlife management programs.
- *Moose Population in Main Park Area* – The park moose population north of the Yellowhead Highway has declined significantly since 2002 and could lead to the loss of moose in this area. The decline may be

from the giant liver fluke, a parasite reported to be fatal in moose.

- *Grassland Health* – Park grasslands are impacted by weed invasion and forest encroachment. Covering less than five percent of the park, the combined loss from these impacts is a significant threat to grassland health. An invasive plant species control program was expanded in 2009 to mitigate the continual invasion of non-native plants. A fire management program that restores or maintains park grasslands while ensuring public and visitor safety could also be used as an effective management tool.
- *Lake and Wetland Water Levels*– Drought in east-central Alberta continues to contribute to the decline of water levels in park lakes and wetlands, affecting the diversity and distribution of wildlife and plant species, including a decline in the beaver population.
- *Vulnerability to Outside Development* – Elk Island National Park's location and small size makes it vulnerable to external stressors as a result of developments outside its boundary. Two prominent external stressors near to the park are population growth and industrial development in the greater Edmonton area.



MOOSE (PARKS CANADA)

Opportunities

- *Working Beyond the Boundary* – Elk Island National Park benefits from the shared initiatives and coordinated actions of the Beaver Hills Initiative. This voluntary collaboration of more than thirty organisations is recognized as a key means to sustain the unique landscape and quality of life in the Beaver Hills. The presence of a

national park in the Beaver Hills continues to be a significant factor in maintaining the region's sustainability and biodiversity.

- *Fostering Greater Involvement With Aboriginal Peoples* – Elk Island National Park is investing in new relationships by committing resources to support working relationships and partnerships over the coming years.
- *Accessibility* – Two of the top barriers to people considering a visit to a national park are real or perceived notions that they do not have time to visit and they are too far away. Elk Island National Park is within 40 minutes of more than one million Canadians living in Edmonton and region. Over the course of this plan, the park will work with partners to identify and strategically plan out the removal of real or perceived barriers.

3.5 Planning Process

Beginning in spring 2010, a Parks Canada planning team began conceptualizing a future vision for the park using the Parks Canada Guide to Management Planning (Parks Canada 2008). The Elk Island National Park 2010 State of the Park Report (Parks Canada 2010), and the Parks Canada Agency Corporate Plan (Parks Canada 2010) were fundamental to framing the planning process.

In August 2010, Elk Island National Park initiated the public consultation process for this management plan, providing the public with information and feedback options through the Elk Island National Park website, circulating two public newsletters, holding two rounds of open houses in Lamont and Edmonton and hosting a one-day stakeholder workshop. Input was also sought from First Nation and Métis communities surrounding the park, and an introductory meeting on management planning was held in one interested First Nation community. Taking input from the public, stakeholders and staff into consideration, the planning team prepared this management plan.



MANAGEMENT PLANNING WORKSHOP WITH STAKEHOLDERS, SEPTEMBER 2010 (PARKS CANADA)

4.0 Park Purpose and Vision Statement

The park purpose and vision statement for Elk Island National Park provide a focus for park management, helping guide decisions and actions, whether strategic or operational. The vision statement is meant to articulate the special character of Elk Island National Park, and paint a picture of its desired future. While

the achievement of the vision will be challenging, it helps foster common understanding and cooperation among those who use, care for, work in and live near the park. It also conveys a sense of place to Canadians who may never be able to visit Elk Island National Park.

4.1 Park Purpose

Elk Island National Park's purpose is to protect a representative portion of the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region and to

enable present and future generations to continue to appreciate and experience the park's outstanding and representative characteristics.

4.2 Vision Statement



Parks Canada

The thundering sound of bison hooves resonates among the hills of this knob and kettle landscape. A gentle wind sighs through the aspen leaves, scattering their sweet smell across the forest floor. The distinct call of a trumpeter swan signals its flight over lush wetlands. Cautious elk pick their way through grassy plains.



Bob Bittner

The bison's hooves, the elk's bugle, and swan's trumpet were once nearly silenced forever. Elk Island National Park stands foremost among agencies and individuals whose work has brought these iconic North American wild animals back from the edge of extinction. This sanctuary has been set aside by people, protecting it for tomorrow, ensuring sustainability and coexistence. Elk Island National Park's rich human and conservation history demonstrates leadership in the preservation of species while honouring the stories and artifacts of the past.



Parks Canada

Reintroduction, restoration, learning, and experiences are the essence of Elk Island National Park and we share the passion for conservation with the world. As stewards of the greater ecosystem, we work together with partners to maintain the ecological integrity of Elk Island National Park, maintaining healthy landscapes of the Beaver Hills to promote an appreciation and understanding of this special place for future generations.



Parks Canada

Facilitating connection to place is key to the long term relevance of Elk Island National Park to visitors and the surrounding population. Here, stars replace the city lights. Those who visit appreciate this familiar haven, so close to the bustle of city life, and yet so far from the city experience.



Parks Canada

Educational activities are rooted in action and experience, creating stewards of the environment and cultural heritage through on the ground learning in this living classroom. Elk Island National Park is a learning place for all and an introduction to national parks for new and urban Canadians, youth and educators. Through exploration of new opportunities and by embracing diverse cultures, a new Canadian experience is defined: a place where Canadians can make a difference and become part of Elk Island National Park's century of conservation legacy.



Alan Dyer

Success is sustained by the strength of partnerships and the willingness to work towards common goals. As the core protected area of the Beaver Hills region, Elk Island National Park works collaboratively with partners and stakeholders across the Beaver Hills ecosystem to provide tourism and environmental opportunities while showcasing the park to the world. The renewal of relationships with local Aboriginal peoples connects our understanding of past, present and future.



Parks Canada

From its tallest spruce tree to its smallest song bird; from its visionary beginning as a sanctuary to a future of conservation, sustainability, environmental learning and family traditions; Elk Island National Park's ecological and experiential diversity is woven through this park ... come discover it for yourself.

Elk Island National Park – reintroducing you to nature.

5.0 Key Strategies

Key strategies translate the vision into a set of strategic directions with concrete results and actions. The objectives, targets and actions that support each strategy, channel park resources towards addressing challenges and exploring opportunities, and do so in a way that integrates the mandate elements of conserving cultural resources, maintaining ecological integrity, facilitating visitor experiences, and fostering appreciation and understanding.

No one key strategy takes precedence over another; each set of objectives, targets and actions clearly establishes park management priorities for the next five to ten years.

The management plan for Elk Island National Park presents four key strategies:

- Welcoming Visitors and Canadians;
- Inviting Participation for Enjoyment, Learning and Advocacy;
- Practicing and Showcasing Leadership in Conservation; and,
- Beyond the Fence: Working with Others in Support of Ecological Integrity and Sustainability.

There are three area-specific management approaches associated with the key strategies. They provide a more detailed approach to management and planning within specific locations in the park. The Elk Island Parkway links these area concepts, and is itself a visitor experience. The area-specific management approaches for Elk Island National Park include:

- Welcome Area (south entrance to the park);
- Astotin Lake Area; and,
- Area South of the Yellowhead Highway (Wood Bison Area).

5.1 Welcoming Visitors and Canadians

As the Canadian mosaic continues to become more diverse, with an increasing proportion of new and urban Canadians, there is a growing risk of disconnect with nature, generally; and

with parks and protected areas, specifically. To ensure Canadians have opportunities to enjoy, experience, and learn about the natural and cultural heritage of Elk Island National Park, Parks Canada focuses its effort on the creation of visitor offers that are attractive to these groups and that achieve a connection to place. By engaging these groups, Parks Canada's vision can be shared with all Canadians, connecting them with their natural and cultural history.

The *Welcoming Visitors and Canadians* strategy focuses on Elk Island National Park being more recognizable as a national park; more inviting and accessible for nearby populations of urban and new Canadians, who may be unfamiliar with a natural park experience; and more appealing to Yellowhead Highway travellers as a place to visit or return to. In implementing this strategy, Elk Island National Park fully considers and ensures protection of the park's ecological integrity, species at risk, and cultural resources when planning, designing, and providing visitor facilities, services, and programs. Proposed recreational activities are assessed using the Parks Canada Management Bulletin for Recreational Activity and Special Event Assessments.



FAMILY OUTING, ASTOTIN LAKE (PARKS CANADA)

The Elk Island Parkway is integral to the effective implementation of this strategy. The parkway provides visitors with an opportunity to embark on their journey of park experiences. Whether they take a leisurely stroll, a scenic drive, watching wildlife, or to meet up with friends and family for a hike or picnic, the

parkway is the focal feature of the park that all visitors experience.

The *Welcoming Visitors and Canadians* strategy has three objectives. The targets and actions for these objectives are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective 1: Themes and messages about Elk Island National Park's significance and values as a national park are clear, concise, and communicated to the public and stakeholders enabling them to understand the purpose of Elk Island National Park and Parks Canada's family of national parks.

Objective 2: Target markets for Elk Island National Park are known and understood and this knowledge is used in planning and decision-making to enhance visitors' experiences.

Objective 3: Elk Island National Park is more accessible to Canadians, including urban and new Canadians, by reducing physical, cultural, seasonal, economic, transportation, and information barriers to experiencing the park.



INTERPRETATION (PARKS CANADA)

5.2 Inviting Participation for Enjoyment, Learning and Advocacy

Inviting Participation engages Canadians in the challenges and opportunities facing Parks Canada to manage this place for future generations. It also provides tangible ways for

the public to participate in the maintenance and restoration of ecological integrity at Elk Island National Park. Specifically, this strategy focuses on building people's connection to and support for Elk Island National Park and its vision, including:

- Increasing opportunities for Canadians to get involved in Parks Canada activities they consider meaningful and relevant through volunteer and other experiences;
- Developing a framework to engage Aboriginal peoples in park management and programs of relevance and importance to them;
- Promoting the park as a living classroom for the many educational institutions in the region; and
- Enabling park stakeholders to get more involved in the management of Elk Island National Park through an advisory process.



ASTRONOMY GROUP AT THE PARK (PARKS CANADA)

The *Inviting Participation* strategy has four objectives. The targets and actions for these objectives are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective 1: Through active participation in park programs, visitors are advocates for Elk Island National Park and for Parks Canada's mandate.

Objective 2: Elk Island National Park is considered by park neighbours as an integral part of their communities and a good neighbour.

Objective 3: Elk Island National Park is a living classroom offering on-site and web-based

experiential learning opportunities at various learning levels about conservation, stewardship, and the ecological integrity of the Beaver Hills ecosystem.

Objective 4: Elk Island National Park's stakeholders are actively involved in park decision-making processes, creating support and advocacy for the park.

5.3 Practicing and Showcasing Leadership in Conservation

Originally established to protect one of the last remaining herds of elk in Canada, Elk Island National Park has become a leader nationally and internationally for its conservation leadership and best practices. As a park that actively manages plains and wood bison, elk, and moose, it is the only national park in Canada that is completely fenced. Nursery herds of plains and wood bison have been trans-located throughout North America and into Russia, supporting many re-population conservation initiatives. Successfully managing this diverse ecosystem within a fenced area requires effective active as well as adaptive management practices, and an integrated ecological integrity monitoring program. Sharing these best practices, stories, and experiences with the public, stakeholders, and First Nations and Métis communities along with showcasing and involving the public in the park's rich heritage of wildlife conservation is a priority for Elk Island National Park.



POND BOG (PARKS CANADA)

Showcasing heritage includes conserving cultural resources. There are more than 5000 years of human use history in the Beaver Hills and the park contains 226 pre-contact

archaeological sites and 18 historic sites from the early settlement period. The individual sites are small, reflecting transitory use. First Nations people came to this area as part of their seasonal round to hunt, fish, and trap, leaving behind artifacts and evidence of usage patterns on the landscape. As part of the conservation legacy, we protect these cultural resources and share their stories with visitors. As the land surrounding the park is altered and the archaeological resources damaged or destroyed, the cultural resources within the park become increasingly important.

Maintaining or restoring ecological integrity and protecting cultural resources is what Parks Canada does every day. Elk Island National Park provides the opportunity for Canadians to make a difference – to become part of Elk Island National Park's century of conservation legacy.



BISON HANDLING FACILITY (PARKS CANADA)

The *Practicing and Showcasing Leadership in Conservation* strategy has four objectives. The targets and actions for these objectives are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective 1: The park's rich history and present conservation activities in the park and within the context of the greater Beaver Hills region are successfully showcased to Canadians.

Objective 2: The park landscape, representative of the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region, is preserved by ensuring that the key ecological processes of this landscape are maintained or restored (i.e. fire, herbivory, flooding), and the park has a means to identify and report on the health of the park ecosystem.

Objective 3: Disease-free, genetically viable bison continue to be available for conservation

efforts aimed at restoring self-sustaining, free ranging bison, thus contributing to the recovery of the species.

Objective 4: The park offers opportunities for advanced involvement and learning in ecosystem management and protection, enhancing stakeholder awareness and understanding of the park's ecological integrity, cultural resources, and management efforts.

5.4 Beyond the Fence: Working with Others in Support of Ecological Integrity and Sustainability

Elk Island National Park is at the core of maintaining the biodiversity of the Beaver Hills. The park plays a vital role in protecting one of the last remaining habitat corridors in east-central Alberta, and is part of the 200 km² Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve.



NIGHT SKY AT ASTOTIN LAKE (ALAN DYER)

Elk Island National Park plays a significant role in the Beaver Hills Initiative. This initiative was established in 2000 in collaboration with municipal partners, environmental groups, the provincial government, and industry. Its mission is to work together for a sustainable region, through shared initiatives and coordinated action. This initiative supports cooperative efforts to sustain the quality of water, land, air, natural resources, and community development.

Elk Island National Park is identified as one of two protected core areas of the proposed United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve. If designated, the Beaver Hills Biosphere Reserve

will help partners create strong and credible messages of conservation and influence sustainable development in the region.

People have been living in the Beaver Hills for many thousands of years, as part of a seasonal round that took in a much wider part of central Alberta. The archaeological sites in Elk Island National Park can tell us about human use of the landscape and its natural resources over the past. In order to better understand the cultural history of Elk Island National Park, it is desirable to understand the archaeological record of the surrounding Beaver Hills area. Understanding and protecting cultural resources should be considered in regional planning initiatives.

In addition, Elk Island National Park is located adjacent to an area of intensive industrial development known as the Industrial Heartland of Alberta. *Beyond the Fence* also focuses on opportunities to participate in regional planning processes and influence decision making for lands adjacent to the park boundary. It also aims to achieve shared goals for protecting ecological integrity, cultural resources, and promoting quality visitor experiences.



WETLANDS OF ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK (PARKS CANADA)

The *Beyond the Fence* strategy has three objectives. The targets and actions for these objectives are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective 1: The quality of visitor experiences associated with the park is enhanced through coordination with other complementary regional tourism interests.

Objective 2: Regional planning processes and land use decisions assist Elk Island National Park's efforts in working towards protecting the ecological integrity and cultural resources of the park, facilitating opportunities for visitor

experiences and providing educational programs.

Objective 3: As an active participant in the Beaver Hills Initiative, Elk Island National Park

works collaboratively with partners to effectively co-ordinate land use, promote sustainability, and address ecological losses and fragmentation in the Beaver Hills region of Alberta.

6.0 Area Management Approaches

Associated with these key strategies are three area management approaches. While key strategies focus on management approaches that affect a park as a whole, there are certain places within a park that merit a specific management focus for the time span covered by the management plan. Three areas in Elk Island National Park are identified for area-specific management approaches – two for their primary focus in facilitating visitor experiences and one for its unique conservation and visitor use.

6.1 Welcome Area

The Welcome Area includes the parkway entrance from the Yellowhead Highway to the South Gate kiosk, the Visitor Centre and its parking and picnicking area, and the nearby Farm Headquarters Horse Barn (Figure 2).

Previous plans for the Visitor Centre considered its closure because it was underused and difficult to staff. A renewed outlook as to the centre's role in facilitating visitor experiences and engaging Canadians, as well as office technology enhancements, revitalized the vision of this area as a focal point for people arriving at Elk Island National Park.

The Welcome Area not only receives and orients park visitors, but also welcomes Canadian and international travellers to Elk Island National Park and Parks Canada by raising awareness and appreciation for the Agency's mandate. Located north of the Yellowhead Highway (#16), the Welcome Area is a window into the park. As a "window" into the park and of the many things to see and do along and further up the parkway, travellers are keen to visit the park or return later. Some interim steps were completed to

improve the look of the current Visitor Centre, including installation of a full wall bison mural and new displays and exhibits.

The area surrounding the Visitor Centre also allows visitors and travellers to enjoy the park's natural beauty of aspen forest, thus providing an opportunity to expand visitor experiences beyond the indoor structures.

The Farm Headquarters Horse Barn, built in 1938, is a Federal Heritage Building, as well as part of Elk Island National Park's wildlife refuge and park conservation history. The barn's size, age, and former role make it a park landmark.



FARM HEADQUARTERS HORSE BARN (PARKS CANADA)

The *Welcome Area* management approach has one objective. The target and actions for this area are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective: Throughout the year, near the main park entrance, visitors and the travelling public receive a strong, positive sense of arrival and orientation to Elk Island National Park and its visitor experience opportunities, and to Parks Canada.

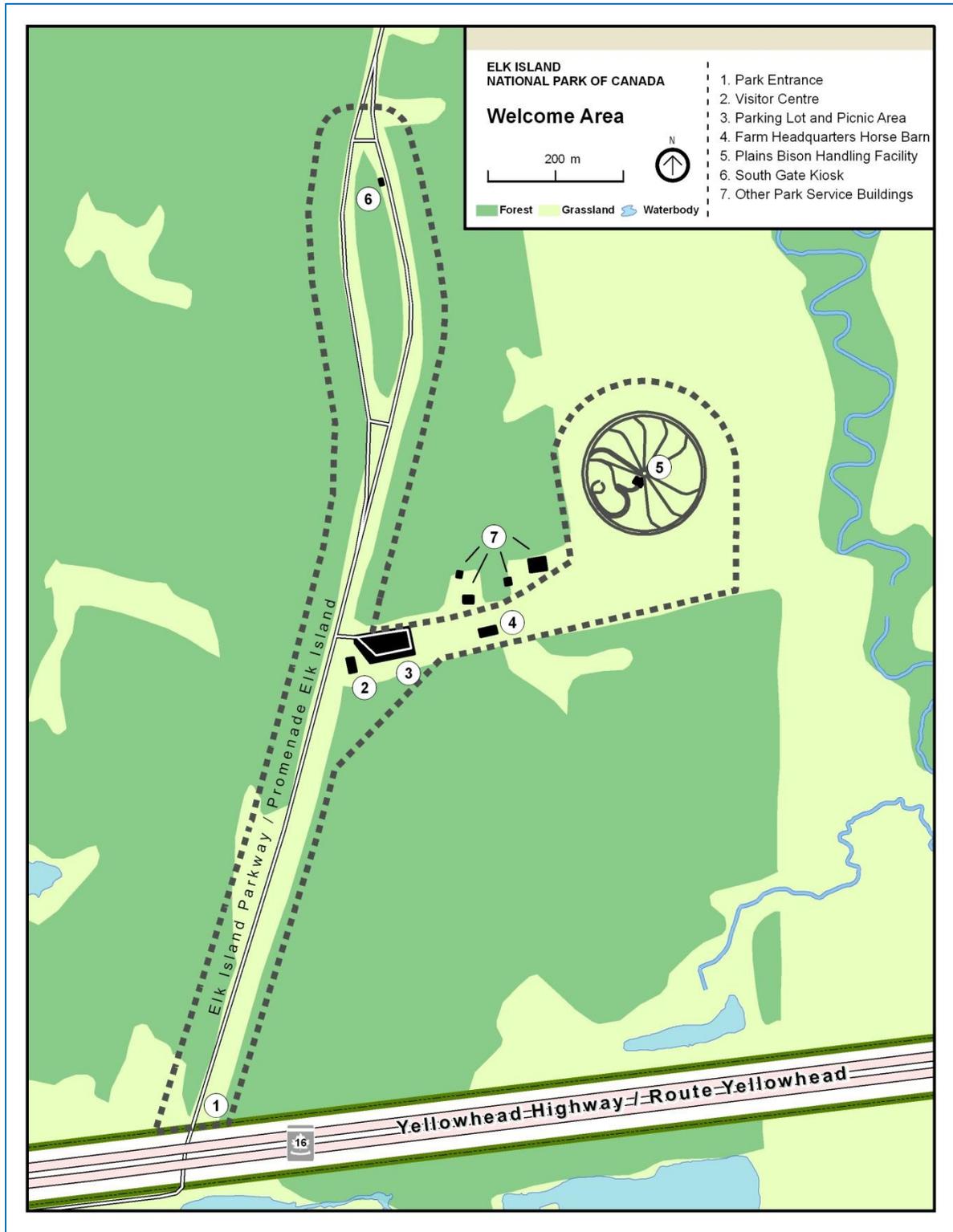


FIGURE 2. WELCOME AREA

A Vision for the Welcome Area

Travelling down the Yellowhead Highway, the presence of Elk Island National Park invites travellers in. They are inspired to experience a national park. Directions and access from the highway are easy – they know where to go. Arrival is truly a welcoming experience. There is a feeling of “we’re there”. The Welcome Area is great – just what is needed. Kids play; others stroll through aspen forest along interpretive trails while some explore the various exhibits. The staff is passionate and knowledgeable, sharing stories and suggesting personalized opportunities for enjoying the park. The Welcome Area is an appetizer to what the park has to offer – a compelling invitation to experience more, starting with the Elk Island Parkway. It is with anticipation that visitors enter the park; their expectations already exceeded. Travellers are refreshed and prepared to continue their journey with thoughts of returning another time to visit more of Elk Island National Park.

6.2 Astotin Lake Area

The Astotin Lake Area is the focal point for year-round visitor activities (Figure 3). It is fenced to keep bison from this area because of the concentration of visitors and services.

The amenities at the Astotin Lake Area are well suited for first time users, families, novice campers and groups looking for a safe and comfortable experience. This area is also used by area residents as a community park and for its golf course.

The cultural history found along the south and east shores of Astotin Lake where high concentrations of pre-contact archaeological sites are located provide an opportunity for park

staff to share a cultural story. Whether the story is about pre-contact sites, the oldest superintendent’s house, or an interpretation program about the long human history of the park around a warm campfire, Astotin Lake Area has something for everyone.

This area management approach has one objective. The targets and actions for this area are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective: Visitors to Astotin Lake enjoy facilities, services, and activities that provide them with a safe and memorable recreational and learning experience.



CAMPING SITE, ASTOTIN LAKE (PARKS CANADA)



PLAYGROUND, ASTOTIN LAKE (PARKS CANADA)

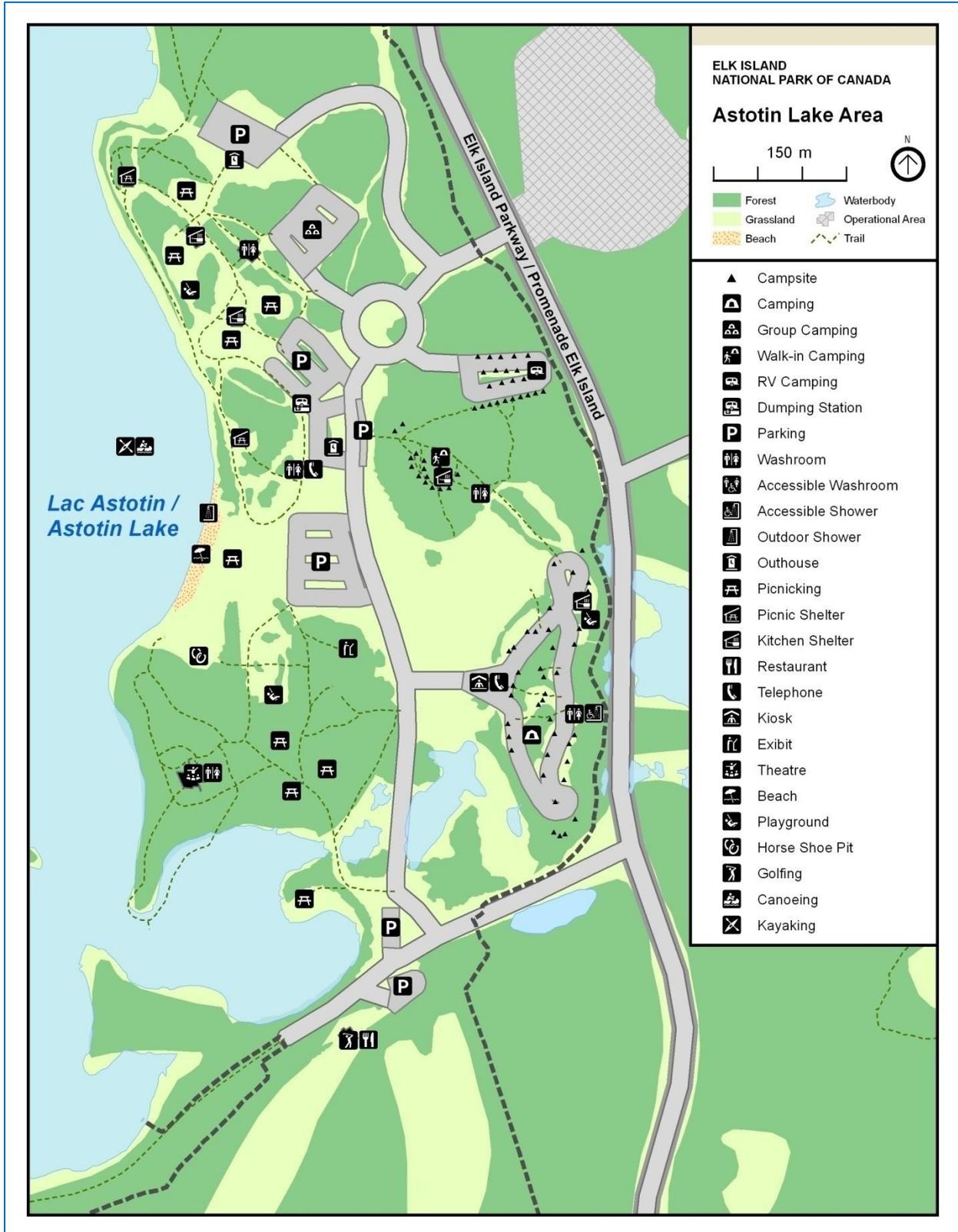


FIGURE 3. ASTOTIN LAKE AREA

A Vision for the Astotin Lake Area

Astotin Lake is Elk Island National Park's year-round recreational core, offering a variety of visitor opportunities in a natural setting of lake, hills, forest and wetland. Discovering what to do is made simple through easy to access information, including a seasonal calendar of program activities and special events.

In the summer, booking camping sites online is easy and upon arrival, finding the sites even easier. The campground services and sites are just what visitors hope for. Exploring this wonderful area is fun to do with personalized suggestions from helpful staff, volunteers and well-placed way-finding signage. The natural setting provides a variety of viewing experiences including beavers and waterfowl in the nearby wetland areas. The beach is a gathering place. Canoeists glide across the lake, families enjoying the trail along its shore – it is truly an iconic Canadian scene. The park's story is told through captivating displays along the trails. The boardwalk provides a close encounter with the lake and its ecosystem. The creative staff at the Interpretation Centre present park stories, infusing fun into learning. Shade provides a great place for resting and enjoying a picnic. Families enjoy their time together; some play golf; others use the green spaces for sport. A mix of languages is heard; new traditions are created here. As the sun sets, campers relax and enjoy the sounds of nature around them. Campfires crackle and the stars are bright.

In the winter, the Astotin Lake Area is blanketed by snow and seclusion. Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and kite boarding are among the active ways to experience Elk Island's quieter time of year. Winter camping, day use, that can include an inviting campfire and shelter, and special events hosted by the park and others, are other ways for visitors to reconnect with nature in winter.

6.3 Area South of the Yellowhead Highway

This 60 km² area, also known as the Wood Bison Area, is located south of the Yellowhead Highway (#16) (Figure 4). It was added to the park in 1947. In 1965, a small herd of bison originating from Wood Buffalo National Park was released in this fenced area of the park to establish a disease-free, pure strain wood bison herd for future recovery initiatives. This area has been maintained as the wood bison management area since that time. However, with respect to ecological integrity objectives for national parks, wood bison are not native to Elk Island National Park.

Visitor facilities and services are restricted to the 16 km Wood Bison Trail. Visitors who use this side of the Yellowhead Highway describe their experience as different, more "backcountry" than the main park area. There are opportunities in this area and along the trail to view free-roaming wood bison, moose, elk, waterfowl and the benefits of fire as an ecological process on the landscape.

The 2005 Elk Island National Park Management Plan recognized the important role the park plays in the re-establishment of wood bison, a threatened species under the *Species at Risk Act*, through the maintenance of a viable population and the provision of surplus animals to national and international conservation projects. Parks Canada continues to maintain and manage the herd, but the recovery strategy process for wood bison in Canada is led by Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service).



WOOD BISON (PARKS CANADA)

The future of wood bison in Elk Island National Park is tied to the goals established during the development of the recovery process which is prepared pursuant to the *Species at Risk Act*. Parks Canada supports Environment Canada and other wildlife management agencies during the development of the strategy, and Elk Island National Park will work within this framework to implement the approved strategy.

This area management approach has one objective. The targets and actions for this area are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective: The Area South of the Yellowhead Highway is maintained as both a unique backcountry experience for visitors and a natural area for managing the wood bison national recovery herd.

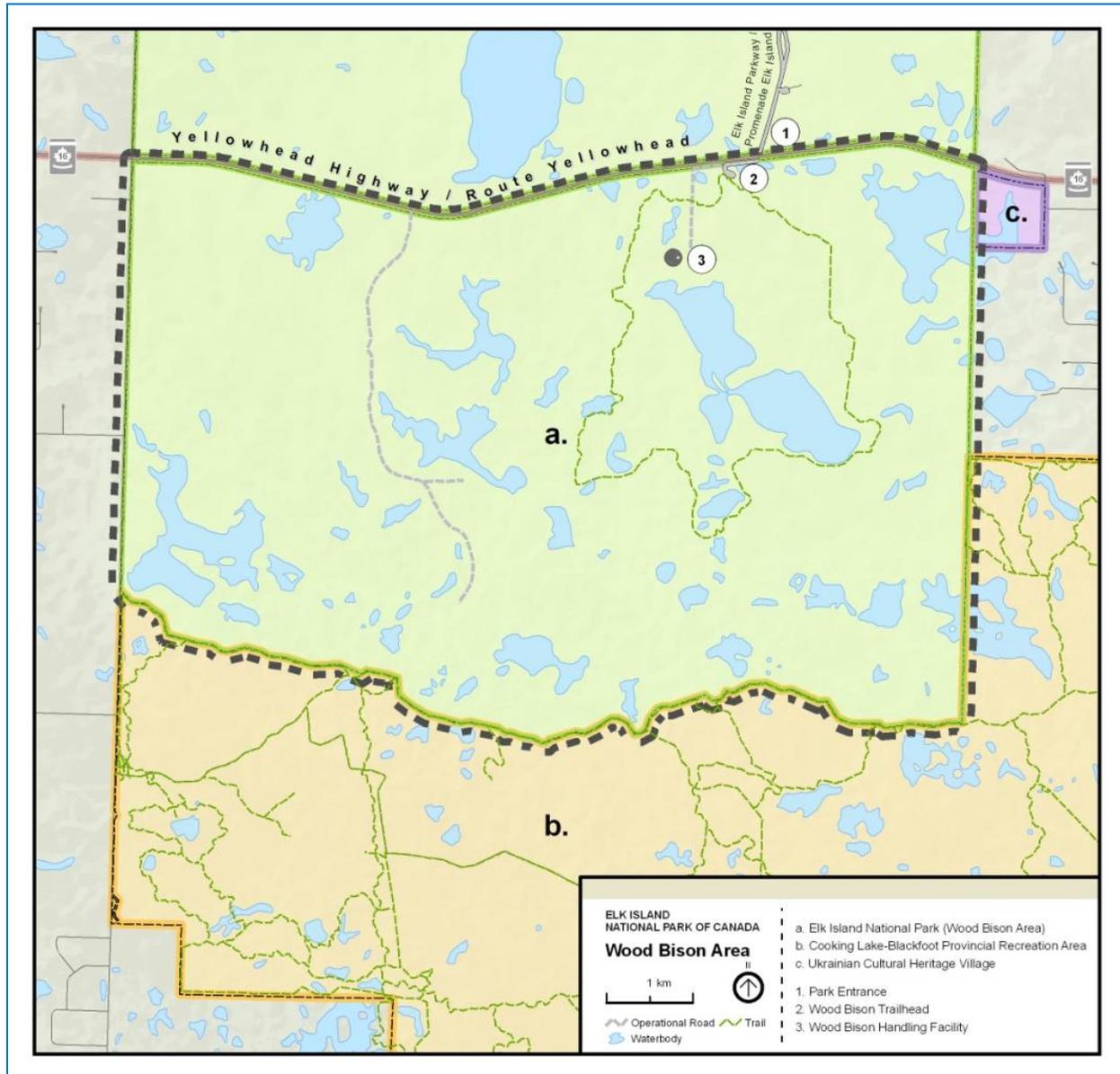


FIGURE 4. AREA SOUTH OF THE YELLOWHEAD HIGHWAY

A Vision for the Area South of the Yellowhead Highway

Head south, cross the highway and step into nature. Step into this lush ecosystem that showcases years of effort to conserve a species at risk. As you explore this wilderness area; the story of the wood bison envelopes you. Pause and admire the viewscapes of this rare and unique habitat– a mosaic patchwork of lush wetlands, open grasslands, fragrant aspen forest and picturesque lakes. Discover how this landscape is managed through processes such as fire. Strolling along this back-country trail, you feel at one with this environment – nature is all around you.

7.0 Partnering and Public Engagement

Elk Island National Park depends on the cooperation and support of many neighbours, partners, stakeholders, First Nation and Métis communities, the private and non-profit sector, and others to achieve the park vision.

Priorities for partnering and public engagement over the next five years include:

- Establishing a park advisory process that provides for an annual public forum to review implementation of the park management plan, furnishing strategic advice on ecological integrity and cultural resource management, quality visitor experience, opportunities for learning, and updates to major operational plans;

- Engaging Aboriginal peoples in planning and management. Building strong, effective, and mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal peoples is an ongoing goal for Parks Canada and for Elk Island National Park;
- Promoting and supporting volunteerism and citizen science in the park; and
- Continuing to work with the Beaver Hills Initiative to achieve shared goals.

These priorities are identified further in the key strategies, particularly *Inviting Participation* and *Beyond the Fence* (Chapters 5.2 and 5.4).

8.0 Administration and Operation

Most park administration and operation facilities are concentrated on the west side of Astotin Lake. These facilities include a trades shop, garage, equipment storage compound, staff offices, and staff residences. Physical condition of the buildings varies, and generally all require some maintenance or rehabilitation. Their location creates challenges in park operation efficiencies and enabling frequent visitor-staff contact. Repair or replacement of some administration and operations facilities is needed, and the location of some facilities and their associated services should be reconsidered. An investment plan that supports efficient, economical and effective park operations, reduces the infrastructure footprint and impact on ecological integrity, and enhances staff-visitor interaction is needed. It will direct the location

and design of future buildings, consolidation of operations, demolition of buildings, and site rehabilitation.

In 2008, the parkway was improved by resurfacing. The road coming into the park from the west gate to the parkway is identified for future improvements.

There is one objective in this management plan for administration and operation. The target and actions for this objective are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective: Administration and operations facilities effectively support the delivery of quality services to the public and staff while minimizing impact on the ecological integrity and cultural resources of the park.

9.0 Environmental Stewardship

Environmental stewardship reduces the impact of daily activities on the environment. The idea of stewardship includes a range of issues from water quality and energy consumption, to chemical use and contaminated sites. It also includes a wide variety of activities from recycling and reducing consumption to restoring disturbed landscapes. While Elk Island National Park is responsible for providing leadership in environmental stewardship, in some cases

effective action requires support from its stakeholders, partners and visitors.

There is one objective in this management plan for environmental stewardship. The target and actions for this objective are provided in Chapter 12.

Objective: Operational impacts on the environment and cultural resources are reduced over time in Elk Island National Park.

10.0 Zoning and Other Land and Feature Classifications

10.1 Zoning System (Figure 5)

The national park zoning system classifies areas within a park according to their need for protection, with consideration given to areas

suitable for visitor activities. The system’s five zoning categories are described in *Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies*.

Zone I Special Preservation	<p>Specific areas or features that contain or support unique, threatened or endangered natural or cultural features, or are among the best examples of the features that represent a natural region. Preservation is the key consideration. Motorized access and circulation will not be permitted.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Zero percent of the park.</i></p>
Zone II Wilderness	<p>Areas that are a good representation of a natural region and that will be conserved in a wilderness state. The perpetuation of ecosystems with minimal human interference is encouraged. Opportunities for outdoor recreation activities will be encouraged only when they do not conflict with maintaining the wilderness itself. Motorized access and circulation will not be permitted.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>96 percent of the park</i></p>
Zone III Natural Environment	<p>Areas that are managed as natural environments and provide opportunities for visitors to experience a park’s natural and cultural heritage values through outdoor recreation activities requiring minimal services and facilities of a rustic nature. Motorized access, where allowed, is controlled.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><i>Two percent of the park, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 25-metre buffer along the north and south sides of the Yellowhead Highway; ▪ 25-metre buffer along the inside of the entire boundary fence; ▪ Oster Lake group camping area and access road; and ▪ Bison handling infrastructure and the area known as Hay Meadows, south of the Plains Bison Loop Road.

<p>Zone IV Outdoor Recreation</p>	<p>Areas capable of accommodating a broad range of opportunities for understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the park's heritage values and related essential services and facilities, in ways that impact the ecological integrity of the park to the smallest extent possible. Direct access by motorized vehicles is allowed.</p> <hr/> <p><i>One and one-half of a percent of the park, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Elk Island Parkway and associated trailhead parking;</i> ▪ <i>Wood Bison Trail access road and trailhead parking at the south side of the Yellowhead Highway;</i> ▪ <i>West Gate Road;</i> ▪ <i>Plains Bison Loop Road; and</i> ▪ <i>Astotin Lake Area, which includes the golf course.</i>
<p>Zone V Park Services</p>	<p>Communities in national parks that contain a concentration of visitor services and support facilities. Major park operation and administrative functions may also be accommodated in this zone.</p> <hr/> <p><i>One-half of a percent of the park, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Park administration building, operations compound, lagoon, oil yard and staff residences west of Astotin Lake;</i> ▪ <i>The Welcome Area; and</i> ▪ <i>Three animal handling facilities and their access roads (Mud Lake elk, plains bison and wood bison handling facilities).</i>

10.2 Environmentally Sensitive Sites

Parks Canada's policy provides for the designation of environmentally and culturally sensitive sites to complement the zoning system. This designation applies to small areas that contain significant and sensitive resources that require special protection or management without completely restricting other park uses in the vicinity.

At present nine features in the park warrant designation as environmentally sensitive sites, including: saline marshes, soap holes, needle-leaf evergreen and deciduous wetlands, spruce islands of Astotin Lake, old growth mixed wood forest, the sand hills, white birch communities, and natural licks and springs. All these features are located in Zone II. These features are described in the *Elk Island National Park 1996 Management Plan*.

10.3 Culturally Sensitive Sites (Archaeological)

Culturally sensitive sites include archaeological sites, all in Zone II, but some of which may require special management attention because of impact from natural processes (e.g., bison wallowing and bison trails). Due to their isolated locations, visitor impacts on the sites are negligible. They continue to be monitored on a regular basis. An inventory has been undertaken and artifacts are in the care of Parks Canada.

10.4 Federal Heritage Buildings

Elk Island National Park has four buildings that are classified as federal heritage buildings: the Superintendent's Residence (*recognized*), Pavilion at Astotin Lake Area (*recognized*), Farm Headquarters Horse Barn (*recognized*) and the Ukrainian Pioneer Home (*classified*). As classified and recognized federal heritage buildings, proposed changes or interventions to

these buildings must be formally reviewed in accordance with the Federal Heritage Buildings Policy to ensure their heritage character is protected.

10.5 Declared Wilderness

The 2005 park management plan states that Elk Island National Park “does not have areas large or remote enough to qualify for wilderness

designation as outlined in the *Canada National Parks Act*”. The park cannot represent a system where large-scale ecological processes can be completely returned to a natural state as per the *Canada National Parks Act* 14(1). Fencing and the absence of large predators means that active management by the park will be an ongoing requirement for bison and elk. Therefore, Elk Island National Park will not pursue designation of declared wilderness.

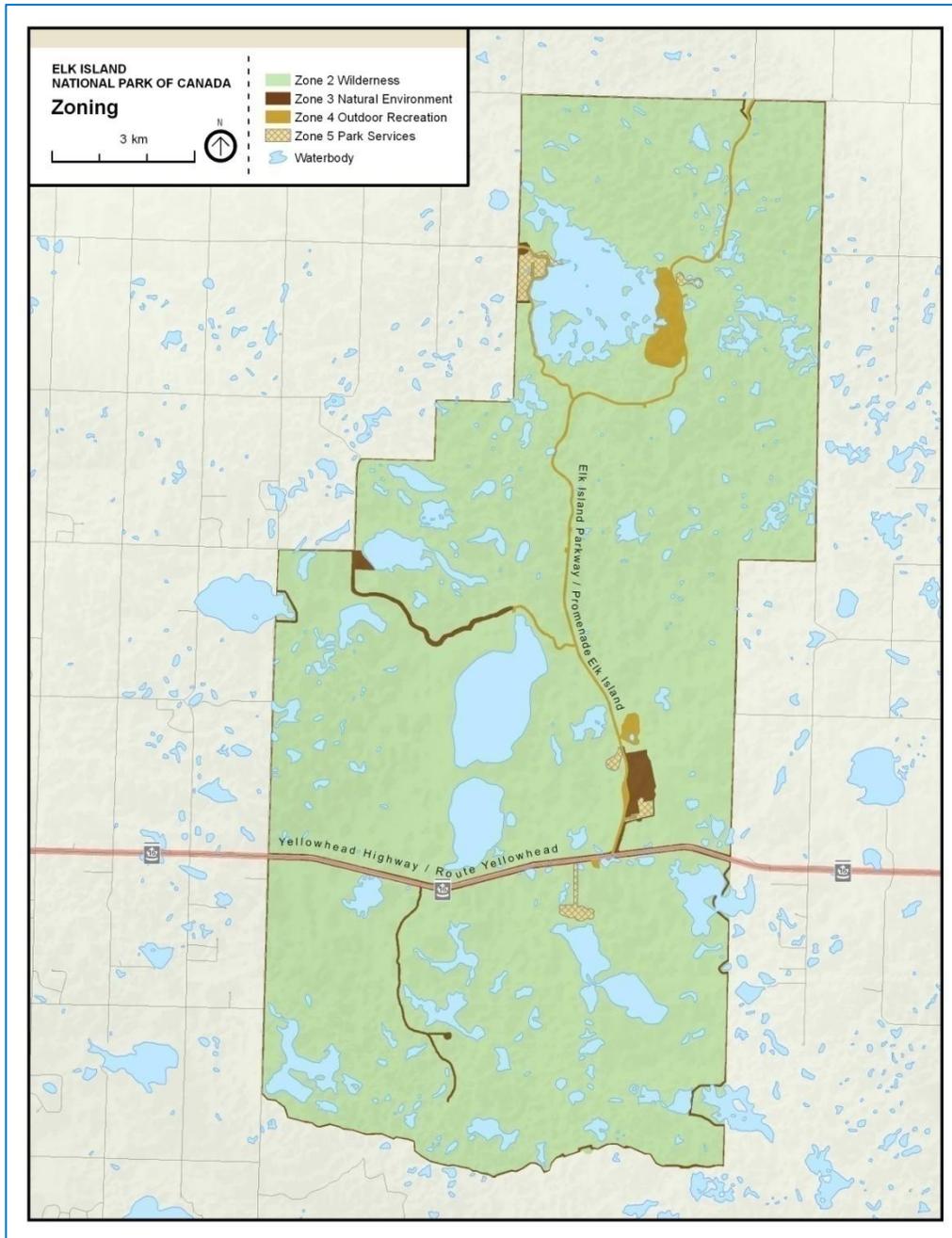


FIGURE 5. ZONING, ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK

11.0 Tracking Success: Monitoring and Reporting on the State of the Park

Every five years, Parks Canada completes an assessment of each national park, called a State of the Park Report. The first State of the Park Report for Elk Island National Park was completed in 2010. The report is integral to Parks Canada's management process as it provides a measured understanding of the park's condition and trends in terms of its ecological integrity and cultural resources protection, public outreach education, facilitation of visitor experiences and people's connection to place. It also documents the implementation and effectiveness of the park's management plan and identifies issues and challenges to be considered in the management plan review done every five years. The State of the Park Report also contributes to the State of the Protected Heritage Areas Report, which reports on the state of all national parks, national historic sites and

national marine conservation areas administered by Parks Canada.

The information in the State of the Park Report is the best available description of the current state and trends of various aspects and activities of the park. The information comes primarily from monitoring and research undertaken by Parks Canada, other government agencies, partner organizations and universities.

An ecological monitoring framework was completed for Elk Island National Park in 2008. It is in the process of being updated to identify measures and thresholds for ecological indicators that were identified in the *Elk Island National Park of Canada 2010 State of the Park Report*. Additional monitoring requirements with regard to visitor use and experiences, and also for cultural resources, have been identified in this management plan.

12.0 Management Plan Implementation with Five-Year Targets and Actions

This management plan provides long-term strategic direction and more immediate measures for Parks Canada managers of Elk Island National Park. It is a framework for more detailed planning and decision-making, and a strategic reference for capital expenditure forecasts and future management and operations.

Implementation of the management plan is the responsibility of the Northern Prairies Field Unit Superintendent. Implementation will be done through the Northern Prairies Field Unit business plan. The business plan identifies which actions of the management plan will be realized within a five-year period. Any changes to the five-year forecast are captured by the

annual review and updating of the business plan. Implementation of the strategies and actions may be reconsidered in response to new circumstances or information, or changing national priorities and decisions.

Progress on management plan implementation will be communicated through annual reporting and the next Elk Island National Park *State of the Park Report*. The management plan will also be subject to periodic review (at least every five years) and can be amended to reflect changing circumstances. The public will be consulted about proposed major changes.

The following tables identify the five-year targets and actions for the objectives of this management plan.

Key Strategy 1: Welcoming Visitors and Canadians

Objective 1: Themes and messages about Elk Island National Park's significance and values as a national park are clear, concise, and communicated to the public and stakeholders enabling them to understand the purpose of Elk Island National Park and Parks Canada's family of national parks.	
Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 60% of visitors at surveyed locations consider that they learned about the natural and cultural heritage of Elk Island National Park and understand its significance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an interpretation plan that includes key messages and themes to ensure effectiveness of learning opportunities. 2. Develop a strategy to increase learning opportunities along the Elk Island Parkway, Bison Loop Road, and trails. 3. Conduct an assessment of cultural resources to, in part focus the interpretation plan's cultural resource messages. 4. Promote and celebrate the Centennial of Parks Canada, the world's first national park service.
Objective 2: Target markets for Elk Island National Park are known and understood and this knowledge is used in planning and decision-making to enhance visitors' experiences.	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On average, 90% of visitors at surveyed locations are satisfied, and on average, 50% at surveyed locations are very satisfied with their visit. ▪ The number of park visits increases annually in accordance with corporate direction. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and begin implementation of a visitor experience strategy, using social science data. 2. Provide a suite of activities matching Explorer Quotient traveller types. 3. Use social science research to gauge and respond to visitor needs and interests, satisfaction and understanding, targeting the greater Edmonton area. 4. Locally implement Parks Canada's branding program.
Objective 3: Elk Island National Park is more accessible to Canadians, including urban and new Canadians, by reducing physical, cultural, seasonal, economic, transportation, and information barriers to experiencing the park.	
Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accessibility challenges and opportunities are known with accessibility improvements phased in over the next 5 years. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In cooperation with current and potential user groups, identify accessibility opportunities, barriers, options, and recommendations for increasing access to the park. 2. Implement accessibility improvements immediately where feasible and include any major capital improvements into the long-term investment plan. 3. Develop and implement a park trail plan, using the recommendations from the Elk Island National Park Trail Assessment and General Trail Plan (2009) as its foundation and giving consideration to target markets, intended trail use, the winter offer of walking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, and visitor experience accessibility. 4. Facilitate activities and events that invite new Canadians to experience the park (e.g., citizenship ceremony, facilitated

	<p>camping, and accommodating and encouraging cultural group activities).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Explore options for public transit and/or guided bus tours into the park. 6. Complete and implement a park way-finding plan. 7. Improve and update the park's website content on a regular basis, include information about accessibility and link the website to partner organizations or businesses that can enhance accessibility to Elk Island National Park. 8. Use social networking media to inform Canadians about Elk Island National Park, its importance as a protected place, and reasons to visit.
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Key Strategy 2: Inviting Participation for Enjoyment, Learning and Advocacy

Objective 1: Through active participation in park programs, visitors are advocates for Elk Island National Park and for Parks Canada's mandate.	
Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is an increase in volunteerism and the diversity and richness of volunteer opportunities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop, implement, and maintain a volunteer strategy that uses Elk Island National Park's unique opportunities to provide exceptional place-based learning experiences. 2. With partners, create and promote opportunities for people to participate in events and activities that contribute to learning and appreciation, and to the park's role as an "outdoor classroom".
Objective 2: Elk Island National Park is considered by park neighbours as an integral part of their communities and a good neighbour.	
Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neighbours and local communities are aware of and understand operations that may potentially affect them. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regularly inform and seek input from neighbours and local communities about proposed park activities (e.g., open houses, newsletters, information bulletins to media). 2. Provide information updates to local municipal councils and attend council meetings, as necessary and appropriate. 3. Participate in local community activities such as special events, trade fairs, festivals and chambers of commerce meetings.

Objective 3: Elk Island National Park is a living classroom offering on-site and web-based experiential learning opportunities at various learning levels about conservation, stewardship, and the ecological integrity of the Beaver Hills ecosystem.

Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Over the five years of this plan, the number of people participating in learning programs increase annually. ▪ Each year, there are opportunities for people to become actively involved in citizen science projects. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with the formal education system to develop a strategy for curriculum-based learning opportunities (e.g., consider the potential of a young explorer program for the park). 2. Increase opportunities for self-conducted learning programs (e.g., GPS way-points and self-guided trails) and communicate these opportunities to Canadians. 3. Work with partner organizations to collaborate on educational, interpretive, and outreach programming that can enhance learning and understanding of their and Elk Island National Park's stories, themes, and messages. 4. Develop pilot projects to create virtual communities of park-related topics (e.g., social networking, e-Bird, shared photograph galleries). 5. Identify 'citizen science' opportunities in park management and monitoring projects and communicate these opportunities to Canadians.

Objective 4: Elk Island National Park's stakeholders are actively involved in park decision-making processes, creating support and advocacy for the park.

Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An Elk Island National Park advisory process plays a role in park planning and is a forum for reporting and soliciting advice and feedback. ▪ Opportunities for interested Aboriginal communities to participate in park management and planning increase and are strengthened. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish a park advisory process within one year of plan approval to advise park managers on implementation of this management plan. With representatives from various stakeholder groups, there is a broad range of expertise and viewpoints represented. 2. Facilitate opportunities for non-profit, volunteer organizations to work with Elk Island National Park. 3. Formalize relationships with partners that provide programs in and with the park. 4. Initiate dialogue with Aboriginal communities and organizations toward establishing Aboriginal advisory relationships with the park.

Key Strategy 3: Practicing and Showcasing Leadership in Conservation

Objective 1: The park's rich history and present conservation activities in the park and within the context of the greater Beaver Hills region are successfully showcased to Canadians.	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The baseline measure for visitor and neighbour understanding and appreciation is identified by 2012. ▪ Visitors and neighbours have learned about the conservation story of Elk Island National Park and understand its significance. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a strategy to deliver Elk Island National Park's conservation story to partners and Canadians, using traditional and emerging tools. 2. Investigate broadening the National Historic Event that recognizes the recovery of plains bison in Canada to include the restoration activities for other wildlife species.
Objective 2: The park landscape, representative of the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region, is preserved by ensuring that the key ecological processes of this landscape are maintained or restored (i.e. fire, herbivory, flooding), and the park has a means to identify and report on the health of the park ecosystem.	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vegetative cover is maintained or restored to more closely resemble the composition characteristic of the pre-settlement landscape as outlined in a vegetation management strategy. ▪ Fire is reintroduced on the landscape as a means to achieve targets for vegetative cover. ▪ Ungulates are managed at numbers that ensure viable populations and levels of herbivory that support vegetation targets. ▪ Infrastructure is managed to allow natural processes to occur wherever possible. ▪ Elk Island National Park's ecological monitoring and reporting plan is reviewed and revised regularly with input from external partners and experts. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a strategy for sharing information about the current resource conservation initiatives and efforts to maintain and restore ecological integrity. 2. Develop an overarching vegetation management strategy that considers fire, herbivory, flooding, and other ecological processes to achieve vegetation targets. 3. Strengthen the park's adaptive management program by improving understanding of how the three ecological processes of fire, flooding by beavers, and ungulate herbivory affect one another and the landscape. 4. Continually identify ecological and cultural knowledge gaps and investigate opportunities to gather information and address these gaps. 5. Develop, consult, and begin implementation of a fire management plan. 6. Maintain ungulate populations at target levels and continue to implement measures to achieve them. 7. Investigate the cause of the moose population decline in the main park area and develop a strategy to maintain an appropriate population level. 8. Implement the ecological monitoring plan and revise as protocols are tested and refined. 9. Continue to participate in regional environmental monitoring and research programs particularly those involving habitat fragmentation and trans-boundary effects. 10. Develop and implement an invasive plant species monitoring and management program in cooperation with local partners.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Continue ongoing ungulate disease surveillance in partnership with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Alberta Government and implement disease management strategies as required (e.g., chronic wasting disease).
<p>Objective 3: Disease-free, genetically viable bison continue to be available for conservation efforts aimed at restoring self-sustaining, free ranging bison, thus contributing to the recovery of the species.</p>	
Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The plains bison population is maintained and managed at 250-275 animals and the wood bison population at 260-300 animals. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to play an active role at national and international levels for the recovery of the species (e.g., translocations). 2. Maintain a viable population of wood bison for the provision of surplus animals to national and international conservation projects, taking direction from the national species at risk recovery process. 3. Maintain and develop new regional, national, and international partnerships. 4. Work with partners to maintain disease-free bison populations.
<p>Objective 4: The park offers opportunities for advanced involvement and learning in ecosystem management and protection, enhancing stakeholder awareness and understanding of the park’s ecological integrity, cultural resources, and management efforts.</p>	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canadians have many opportunities to be directly involved in ecosystem monitoring and management actions, becoming part of the conservation legacy for Elk Island National Park. ▪ Opportunities for advanced learning partnerships are identified and implemented. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop opportunities for Canadians to be directly engaged in park monitoring and management actions. 2. In partnership, host conservation management workshops designed to engage Canadians, professional, Aboriginal, and other groups for sharing of knowledge and best practices. 3. Explore opportunities to develop partnerships with educational institutions for hosting a ‘researcher in residence’ program that contributes to the achievement of Elk Island National Park’s vision. 4. Facilitate opportunities for community involvement in providing park-based learning (e.g., First Nation and Métis communities interested in protected areas).

Key Strategy 4: Beyond the Fence: Working with Others in Support of Ecological Integrity and Sustainability

Objective 1: The quality of visitor experiences associated with the park is enhanced through coordination with other complementary regional tourism interests.	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional tourism opportunities are identified by June 2011. ▪ Partners, neighbours, and key stakeholders understand and support these tourism opportunities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage partnering opportunities and promote the Beaver Hills Tourism Development Opportunity Assessment to develop a range of new and enhanced visitor experience opportunities for the Beaver Hills, including Elk Island National Park. 2. Explore options for expanding the park's visitor experience offer with adjacent recreational and protected heritage areas (e.g., include Waskahegan trail links to the park on trail maps). 3. Participate in local, regional, and provincial tourism organizations and increase cooperation and coordination with the regional tourism sector (e.g., contribute to the completion of a regional tourism assessment, a regional tourism data collection system, marketing efforts and trade shows). 4. Work with partners to promote new and existing visitor experience products on a regional level.
Objective 2: Regional planning processes and land use decisions assist Elk Island National Park's efforts in working towards protecting the ecological integrity and cultural resources of the park, facilitating opportunities for visitor experiences and providing educational programs.	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The park participates in all key regional planning processes and collaborates with neighbouring jurisdictions to influence regional land use decisions for protecting the park's ecological integrity and cultural resources, and facilitating opportunities for visitor experiences and educational programs. ▪ Parks Canada participates in all environmental impact assessments and regulatory reviews for proposed developments that may have trans-boundary effects on the parks ecological integrity, cultural resources, visitor experience and education objectives. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a strategy to guide Elk Island National Park's participation and involvement in regional planning processes to protect the park's ecological integrity. 2. Contribute to shared ecological monitoring initiatives and environmental management projects in the region to work towards long-term sustainability of the environment. 3. Participate in environmental impact assessment and regulatory reviews that may have trans-boundary effects on the park. 4. Conduct an assessment of cultural resources, ensuring that the information is accessible for regional planning, decision-making, and sharing with visitors and partners.

Objective 3: As an active participant in the Beaver Hills Initiative, Elk Island National Park works collaboratively with partners to effectively co-ordinate land use, promote sustainability, and address ecological losses and fragmentation in the Beaver Hills region of Alberta.

Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elk Island National Park is actively involved in and provides support to the achievement of the Beaver Hills Initiative goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visitors and neighbours understand Elk Island National Park's role and accomplishments related to the Beaver Hills Initiative. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In collaboration with the Beaver Hills Initiative, develop and implement a regional communication strategy that can be delivered by partners including Elk Island National Park. 2. Determine through the next visitor information survey, the number of people that are aware of Elk Island National Park's involvement in the Beaver Hills Initiative. 3. If the biosphere reserve proposal is successful, work with the Beaver Hills Initiative to develop an implementation plan. 4. Support the Beaver Hills Initiative through participation on committees, working groups, and board of directors.

Area Management Approach: Welcome Area

Objective: Throughout the year, near the main park entrance, visitors and the travelling public receive a strong, positive sense of arrival and orientation to Elk Island National Park and its visitor experience opportunities, and to Parks Canada.

Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visitor and traveller attendance to the Welcome Area increases. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make short-term improvements to the Welcome Area to make it more attractive to visitors and travellers (e.g., the use of effective imagery, facility upgrades, and staffing). 2. Improve park directional and service signage along the Yellowhead Highway, at the Elk Island Parkway entrance, and on the parkway approaching the Welcome Area. 3. Develop an area concept plan to guide medium (>5 year) and long-term improvements to facilitate and promote visitor experiences, enhance visitor services and promote heritage stewardship. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expand and maintain high quality information and media in the Welcome Area to help park visitors make informed decisions about their stay and to entice travellers to consider a visit in the park. b. Investigate opportunities for developing a guided or self-guided tour in the area of the heritage barn that focuses on the park's history and its elk and bison conservation legacy. c. During the area concept planning process, incorporate short and long-term planning improvements for the parkway and Visitor Centre location options, consistent with Strategy 5.1, Welcoming Visitors and Canadians.

Area Management Approach: Astotin Lake Area

Objective: Visitors to Astotin Lake enjoy facilities, services, and activities that provide them with a safe and memorable recreational and learning experience.	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sandy Beach campground meets changing visitor needs and appeals to a wider demographic audience. ▪ Recreational opportunities in this area appeal to a wide demographic audience (e.g., age and ethnicity). ▪ Visitors learn, understand, and appreciate the significance of natural and cultural resources of Astotin Lake Area. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a phased-in area concept plan to guide improvements for visitor experiences in this area. The area concept plan broadens the visitor offer by investigating alternative camping opportunities, such as teepees, group camping, first time campers; and consider rebranding of the Astotin Lake theatre as an Interpretation Centre. 2. Enhance way-finding at entrance to and throughout the Astotin Lake Area. 3. Assess the current campground offer in the context of visitor experience and the area concept plan including consideration of a campground redevelopment plan for Sandy Beach and for group, overflow and winter camping. 4. Enhance enjoyment and aesthetics of beach area, such as more shade opportunities and food services. Communicate messages to visitors about environmental management challenges at the beach. 5. Incorporate natural and cultural resources into the visitor experience offer, paying particular attention to the Ukrainian Pioneer Home, Pavilion picnic shelter, Plains Bison National Historic Event monument, and pre-contact archaeological sites along Astotin Lake shoreline.

Area Management Approach: Area South of the Yellowhead Highway

Objective: The Area South of the Yellowhead Highway is maintained as both a unique backcountry experience for visitors and a natural area for managing the wood bison national recovery herd.	
Targets	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The wood bison herd is maintained as a recovery herd until further guidance is provided via an approved species at risk recovery strategy. ▪ Trail users are satisfied with their experience. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Upgrade the Wood Bison trailhead to create a sense of arrival and welcome to Elk Island National Park, and provide basic park messages. 2. As part of a park trail plan, develop and implement a phased approach for improvements to the Wood Bison Trail (e.g., rerouting, rest stops, interpretation, viewing points). 3. Explore opportunities to connect the Wood Bison Trail with the trail system in the Cooking Lake – Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area, and to coordinate with partners, the trail operation, interpretation and promotion.

Administration and Operation

Objective: Administration and operations facilities effectively support the delivery of quality services to the public and staff while minimizing impact on the ecological integrity and cultural resources of the park.

Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Priority projects are identified for implementation in the next management planning cycle. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake interim measures to accommodate staff at the Visitor Centre, the Welcome Area and Interpretation Centre (formerly known as Astotin Lake Theatre) at Astotin Lake Area. 2. Using park guiding documents, revise the investment plan, paying particular attention to Elk Island National Park's strategic needs in the three focus areas identified in this plan, the Elk Island Parkway, and the administration and operations area on the west side of Astotin Lake.

Environmental Stewardship

Objective: Operational impacts on the environment and cultural resources are reduced over time in Elk Island National Park.

Target	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sound environmental practices are regularly demonstrated in the management of park facilities, services and activities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve wastewater treatment systems. 2. Implement outstanding actions from the Environmental Management System for the park. 3. Integrate the use of sound environmental practices and technologies into park operations and management. 4. Through a phased-in approach, implement dark sky lighting practices throughout the park.

13.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

13.1 Introduction

A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was conducted for the 2011 Elk Island National Park of Canada Management Plan, in accordance with The Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan, and Program Proposals (Canada, 2004). The SEA also supports the recently released Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (Canada, 2010).

The SEA was carried out during the development of the management plan as an integrated, iterative process. This allowed for contributions and adjustments to be readily made to the plan in order to enhance positive effects and to avoid or reduce potential negative effects.

13.2 Park Management Plan Description

The management plan identifies a vision for the park, which conveys the special character of the park, and indicates the future desired state of the park. This vision is supported by related key strategies, directions, and actions, which provide overall guidance in the management of the park. These key strategies are: –*Welcoming Visitors and Canadians; Inviting Participation for Enjoyment, Learning and Advocacy; Practicing and Showcasing Leadership in Conservation; and Beyond the Fence: Working with Others in Support of Ecological Integrity and Sustainability.*

The plan also includes a number of area concepts that provide more specific objectives and actions to guide implementation of the broader strategic direction in specific areas of the park. The area concepts are for: *Astotin Lake Area, Welcome Area, and the Area South of the Yellowhead Highway.* Additional specific consideration is given to Parks Canada's Administration and Operations.

All of these strategies and concepts are integrated between each other. They also integrate natural and cultural heritage resource protection, visitor experience, and educational opportunities: the three pillars of Parks Canada's mandate.

13.3 Environmental Analysis of the Park Management Plan

The updated vision statement has a strong focus on the natural attributes and key ecological values that are unique to Elk Island National Park. The vision statement profiles the park and indicates the importance of connecting people with the park, the role of regional cooperation, public involvement, and stewardship. This vision will facilitate ensuring that the landscape and ecosystem remain healthy.

Critically, the vision is based on Parks Canada's mandate. This mandate is broad, and includes at its very core the concepts of environmental sustainability, the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity and the conservation of the environment in general. In other words, when Parks Canada's mandate is accomplished, then so too is the intended mandate of the Cabinet Directive and the *Federal Sustainable Development Strategy.* The park management plan's strategies, actions, and area concepts are all consistent with the vision.

Many aspects of the management plan were specifically intended to result in positive effects to ecological and cultural resources, to visitor experiences, and to public understanding. When possible, these beneficial effects were further enhanced. For example, by encouraging participation and forming partnerships, a better understanding and delivery can be had of the role and management of the ecological processes of herbivore grazing, flood regimes, and fire regimes; all of these processes play a critical interrelated role in sustaining the southern limits of the lower boreal mixed wood forest dominated by aspen ecozone which is representative of the natural area. Similarly, the park's main memorable visitor experience activities and service offer are closely linked and focussed on the park's key messages, which critically include ecological integrity, species at risk, and cultural resource values; this facilitates both connecting visitors to the park and instilling a sense of sustainable stewardship.

It was recognized and respected that some aspects of the park management plan have the

potential to adversely influence environmental elements. For example, the presence of more visitors could result in a disturbance of herbivore grazing patterns; or the increased use and maintenance of roadways could alter flood regimes; or public safety concerns could fetter the use of fire regimes. Where there was such potential to have a negative influence on environmental elements, steps were taken to avoid such influences and to mitigate any such influence as much as reasonably possible; for example, by enhancing visitor opportunities predominantly within existing developed areas, and by continuing the trend of restoring ecological integrity in these developed areas in a manner that actually enhances authentic visitor experiences.

The setting of Elk Island National Park requires it to be totally enclosed by fence. This situation is unlikely to change. As such, a residual effect is that the movement of large ungulates is prevented, or at least greatly hindered. This is beneficial in some aspects; for example, in ensuring effective disease control. It can also be detrimental; for example, in effecting population dynamics and genetic connectivity. To the extent that this situation is detrimental, Parks Canada monitors the effects, and takes active management measures when warranted to minimize and counter such effects.

The park is being subjected to some internal cumulative stressors. Even greater are external cumulative stressors, such as climate change and intensive land use. The park management plan recognizes the implications and importance of these cumulative effects, and strives to avoid or mitigate them as best possible. A key tool for dealing with such cumulative effects is regional cooperation; examples include the Beaver Hills Initiative, involvement in regional planning processes and participation in environmental assessment review of industrial proposals.

13.4 Future Projects and Follow-Up

In the future, Parks Canada will strive to meet the desired objectives when assessing development projects, human-use initiatives, and ongoing activities. Assessments pursuant to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* will be undertaken when appropriate.

Parks Canada's Ecological Integrity Monitoring Program will continue to be used to understand and confirm environmental conditions, including as they pertain to the park management plan and to make informed management decisions. Similarly, monitoring will also be conducted for other mandate elements: cultural resource protection, visitor experience, and public understanding. State of the Park Reports and similar documents will be used to report the results of this monitoring, and appropriate management actions taken in response to these results.

13.5 Public and Aboriginal Peoples Engagement

The public engagement undertaken during preparation of the park management plan and the SEA provided many opportunities for input from the public and stakeholders. Similarly, arrangements were made for engagement of Aboriginal peoples. Numerous comments and suggestions were received during the engagement process, and these were taken into consideration and meaningfully incorporated into the park management plan. This has resulted in stronger direction related to all aspects of Parks Canada's mandate, and also allowed for an enhanced connection to the park by Canadians.

13.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the park management plan is likely to result in many positive effects on environmental and cultural resources, visitor experience, and public understanding. Furthermore, the park management plan will not likely result in any notable incremental or cumulative negative effects. Residual and cumulative impacts can be reduced by implementing Parks Canada's commitment to managing for ecological integrity as the first priority. As such, ecological integrity will be maintained in Elk Island National Park, and there will be a direct and indirect contribution to stewardship and sustainable development.

Thus, implementation of the plan is expected to support Parks Canada's objectives related to improved ecological integrity, cultural resource protection, visitor experience, and public education for Elk Island National Park.

14.0 Glossary

Cultural resource: is a human work, or a place that gives evidence of human activity or has spiritual or cultural meaning, and that has been determined to be of historic value.

Ecological integrity: with respect to a national park, is a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components, the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change, and processes.

Explorer Quotient: is a tool that helps identify visitor needs, interests, and expectations based on their personal values and travel motivations.

Public Outreach Education: is reaching Canadians at home, at leisure, at school and in their communities through effective and relevant learning opportunities designed to increase understanding and appreciation of the natural and historical heritage of Parks Canada places, and to encourage individuals and communities to support and become engaged in their protection and presentation.

Restoration (ecological): is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. It initiates or accelerates recovery of an ecosystem

with respect to its function (processes), integrity (species composition and community structure), and sustainability (resistance to disturbance and resilience) (Canadian Parks Council 2008).

Species at Risk: are extirpated, endangered or threatened species or a species of special concern. "Extirpated species" means a wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere in the wild.

"Endangered species" means a wildlife species that is facing imminent extirpation or extinction. "Threatened species" means a wildlife species that is likely to become an endangered species if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction. "Species of special concern" means a wildlife species that may become a threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Visitor: is a person entering the park (including the Welcoming Area) for recreational, educational or cultural purposes.

Visitor Experience: The sum total of a visitor's personal interaction with heritage places and/or people that awakens their senses, affects their emotions, stimulates their mind and leaves them with a sense of attachment to these places.

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