

Peace-Athabasca Delta, Alberta - Ramsar Site

Environment Canada. 2007. Peace-Athabasca Delta, Alberta - Ramsar Site. Retrieved March 9, 2009, from <http://www.mb.ec.gc.ca/nature/whp/ramsar/df02s06.en.html>

Overview (Principal Characteristics):

This site comprises about 80% of the total area of the Peace-Athabasca Delta. The Peace-Athabasca Delta is one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world comprising three deltas: Athabasca (1,970 sq. km.), Peace (1,684 sq. km.) and Birch (168 sq. km.).

Reasons for Ramsar Designation:

The Peace-Athabasca Delta is the largest boreal delta in the world and is relatively undisturbed by civilization. It is one of the most important waterfowl nesting and staging areas in North America and is the staging area for breeding ducks, geese and swans on their way to the MacKenzie River lowlands, Arctic river deltas and Arctic islands. Up to 400 thousand birds may use the delta in the spring, with more than one million birds in the autumn.

The site contains some of the largest undisturbed grass and sedge meadows in North America which are the prime range for an estimated five thousand Wood and Plains Buffalo (*Bison bison athabascae*) and (*Bison bison bison*).

Date of Ramsar Designation:

24 May 1982.

Jurisdiction:

Fort Chipewyan Reserve, Federal - Parks Canada Agency; Provincial - Alberta Department of Sustainable Resource Development.

Land Tenure:

- **Site:**

Most of the Ramsar site is within Wood Buffalo National Park and is owned by the Government of Canada. Fringe areas of the delta lie on First Nations Reserve land and provincial Crown land.

- **Surrounding Area:**

Provincial Crown land.

Conservation Measures Taken:

Much of the site is managed and protected under the regulations of the National Parks Act and National Parks Policy by Parks Canada. Wood Buffalo National Park is a World Heritage Site.

Conservation Measures Proposed:

None currently.

Current Land Use/Activities in:

- **Site:**

Hunting, fishing and trapping by First Nations are traditional land uses. A portion of the National Park area until recently had logging rights but these were rescinded by Environment Canada in 1992.

- **Surrounding Area:**

Provincial Crown land.

Threats to Integrity of:

- **Site:**

Some form of intensive manipulation of the bison herd may be required in the future due to the presence of anthrax, brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis on the bison range. Outbreak control measures for anthrax have been carried out and will be continued. An Environmental Assessment Panel in 1991 recommended the full herd be destroyed but this is still under consideration pending consultation with stakeholders.

- **Surrounding Area:**

At present, major threats to the delta are the W.A.C. Bennett Dam, located upstream on the Peace River in British Columbia, petroleum exploration and development including the oil sands projects upstream on the Athabasca River, forestry operations, land use change in the watershed, and climate change. Operation of the W.A.C. Bennett Hydroelectric Dam commencing in 1968 caused a significant drop in water flow to the delta resulting in insufficient water levels to fill the numerous perched basins in the area. Studies in the early 1970s identified that water levels on the delta required regulating to mitigate the effects of the dam, and weirs were subsequently constructed at Rivière des Rochers and Revillon Coupé. The weirs restored the natural summer peak water levels in the larger delta lakes but the amplitude of seasonal and annual fluctuations over most of the delta wetlands is still less than under the natural water flow regime.

Management Authority:

Superintendent
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