

# How CEPA activities carried out within Ramsar Sites contribute to their successful management and conservation

12 May 2017

Canada



Dene Elder Francois Paulette gives a presentation on the importance of Indigenous traditional knowledge at a Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring Program meeting in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories.

How CEPA activities carried out within **Peace-Athabasca Delta** and **Whooping Crane Summer Range** Ramsar Sites in Canada contribute to their successful management and conservation.

Wood Buffalo National Park is an outstanding example of ongoing ecological and biological processes encompassing some of the largest undisturbed grass and sedge meadows left in North America. It sustains the world's largest herd of wood bison, a threatened species. The park's huge tracts of boreal forest also provide crucial habitat for a diverse range of other species, including the endangered whooping crane. The continued evolution of a large inland delta, salt plains and gypsum karst add to the park's uniqueness.

Within the park there are two Ramsar Sites: **Peace-Athabasca Delta** (#241, designated 1982) composed of three river deltas and four large freshwater lakes and **Whooping Crane Summer Range** (#240, designated 1982) a huge complex of thousands of basically continuous water bodies including lakes, bogs, marshes, shallow ponds and streams.

What are CEPA activities carried out within these Sites that contribute to the successful management (conservation)?

The delta meadows provide grazing for several hundred free-roaming bison, one of over 40 other mammals recorded.

Maintaining and strengthening cultural and traditional practices and knowledge embedded in eleven local Indigenous peoples living in the Park are vital in order to deliver on the wider conservation management objectives.

Could you please give examples of such



Fort Smith Elder, Henry Beaver teaches schoolchildren from Fort Smith (Northwest Territories) about bush skills during a school trip to Sweetgrass Station in Wood Buffalo National Park. The goal of the trip is to introduce local schoolchildren to the backcountry of Wood Buffalo National Park and the cultural practices of the Indigenous peoples who have made their home in the park for centuries.

## activities?

**Educational events:** The Sweetgrass School Trip is held each fall in partnership with the local school board and involves Park staff and local Elders taking grade 7 and 8 students from Fort Smith (Northwest Territories) out into the Park for three-days of land experiences. The kids learn about the history of the Sweetgrass area, and plants and wildlife of the boreal grasslands. Local Indigenous Elders work with the children on cultural programming including traditional harvesting, country food and Indigenous storytelling.

**Research collaborations:** The Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring Program is made up of Indigenous governments, traditional harvesters, industry, government, and non-governmental organizations and uses both science and traditional knowledge to develop an assessment of the current health of the delta ecosystems. Park management practices are also informed by the Co-operative Management Committee which includes local Indigenous governments and park management who work together on wildlife management and other resource conservation initiatives.

## How do they contribute to the success of the Site's conservation? What is the impact?

The Sweetgrass School Trip directly builds a bigger awareness of the Sweetgrass site, its cultural importance to local Indigenous people amongst local schoolchildren who are immersed for three days in the distant backcountry of the Park with Indigenous Elders and park staff. These wilderness experiences have built a greater understanding of the park among schoolchildren, many of whom come to us years later and talk positively about the experience.

The Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring Program is specifically built on the model of shared ways of knowing. In other words, the combination of traditional knowledge and science is intrinsic to the model, and helps us shape a vision of the delta that is informed by each perspective. Management decisions can then be based on both; traditional knowledge and scientific data.

## Do any of these CEPA activities highlight cultural values and community participation? And if yes, Could you please give examples?

Both of the examples mentioned above include significant involvement from local Indigenous partners whose input directly influences the management practices within the Park. Also, CEPA activities contribute in how the park is interpreted to visitors through outreach programming, the

visitor's experiences and the education programs.

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