Leslie Wiltzen

I think more, moreso the latter part of it, when the – when it was expanded was when the Dene people, the Chipewyan people of Fort Chip were really affected was through the expansion, you know? Because the original boundaries of the original Wood Buffalo National Park were the Peace River. The Peace River north was the original boundaries when it was formed in 1922. And you know, it was not until that the bison crossed the Peace – the Peace River, into the Peace-Athabasca Delta, that the Park boundaries were expanded to its present-day boundary, present-day borders.

And, you know, that's when we were really affected because, you know, although we were on, you know, as our Treaty says, ‘the Chipewyan Indians of the Athabasca, the Birch, the Slave, the Peace, and the Gull,’ were already on the Peace and were already on the Slave. You know, with that, that expansion of the Park from the Peace River boundaries to its current day boundary, that's when we were really affected. That's when everybody was forced.

And, you know, talking with my Uncle Pat and the oral history that I have, that he had written, it explains that. It explains, you know, the really, a lack of – a lack of desire of the Dene people to go originally because, you know, in those oral histories, the Park, you know, even though it was already – it was already expanded, it was created 1922 north of its present-day boundaries. But, you know, hunting in the park in the Delta that was a good, good area for providing food and a living for families of Dene people. And then, you know, with the expansion now, they had to go out and leave that area of the Park where it was good hunting. They had to go into areas where there was more non-Aboriginal hunters and trappers coming down the Athabasca River from more southern populated areas, expanding into their – to their traditional territory and, you know?

So, when they were given the option, when they were given, when they were asked to leave, that was what was, you know, some of the stories that my Uncle Pat said was that was the harder part for them – was, you know, they knew it was going to be rougher on the outside because the furs had been depleted by non-Aboriginal trappers coming down.

So, resources, you know? If you're hunting along a river system, you're hunting for furbearing animals, but you're also hunting moose, you're hunting all the animals that you need to survive. When you get a large group, like a First Nation group, where there's many families to feed, I mean, one moose doesn't go far. So, they knew that there was going to be hardship and it's in those oral histories. That's what he told me – that they were really reluctant to leave, but they were forced to leave. They weren’t given the choice.

And that's what I recall from the stories is that they knew there was going to be a hard times in the years that followed. After they were forced to leave the Park were very, very trying times for the people, the Chipewyan people of that area because food was scarce, furs were scarce. And just having a – being able to provide food for your family was difficult.