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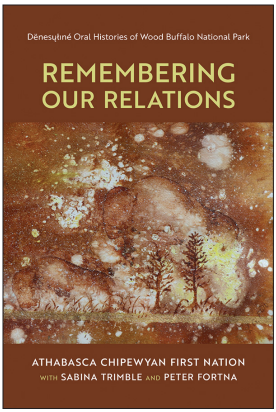

REMEMBERING OUR RELATIONS: DËNESŲŁINÉ ORAL HISTORIES OF WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation with Sabina Trimble and Peter Fortna

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t'ahú ejeré néné hólį ú t'ahú nuhghą nįh łą hílchú

In the early 2000s, the late Elder Alec Bruno described Wood Buffalo National Park as a violation of Treaty 8. He stated, "our people were promised that as long as the sun rose, river flows, and the grass grows, the people will never be interfered with as to where they lived and maintained their way of life traditionally. Their land will never be taken away from them. Yet twenty-some years later our people were told to leave their respective area and relocate elsewhere."[1] Dene histories of Wood Buffalo National Park, like Alec Bruno's, consistently return to this important interpretation. The title of this chapter, t'ahú ejeré néné hólį ú t'ahú nuhghą nįh łą hílchú, translates to "when the Park was created, and when a lot of land was taken from us," emphasizing the profound loss of access to Dene homelands that accompanied the creation of the Park. In interviews from the 1970s to the present, Elders have consistently indicated that the Park was both established in 1922 and expanded in 1926 without the knowledge or consent of most of the Indigenous residents in the area who would be most affected by it. Rather, oral histories suggest that the few Dene leaders who were told about the Park were led to believe that the existence of a bison sanctuary in Dene lands would only be temporary—that Dene lands were being loaned to the government for the protection of bison. Additionally, the restrictions subsequently imposed on Dene lives and lifeways through a permitting system, harvesting laws, and forced relocations and exclusions of Dene families and harvesters from their homes and harvesting places in the Park, represented a violation of Treaty 8. Finally, these restrictions resulted in widespread and intergenerational harm to Dene families, harvesters and community.

This chapter focuses on the establishment of Wood Buffalo Park in 1922 and the subsequent expansion of its boundaries in 1926, after the importation of nearly 7,000 plains bison to the Park starting in 1925. Drawing together the

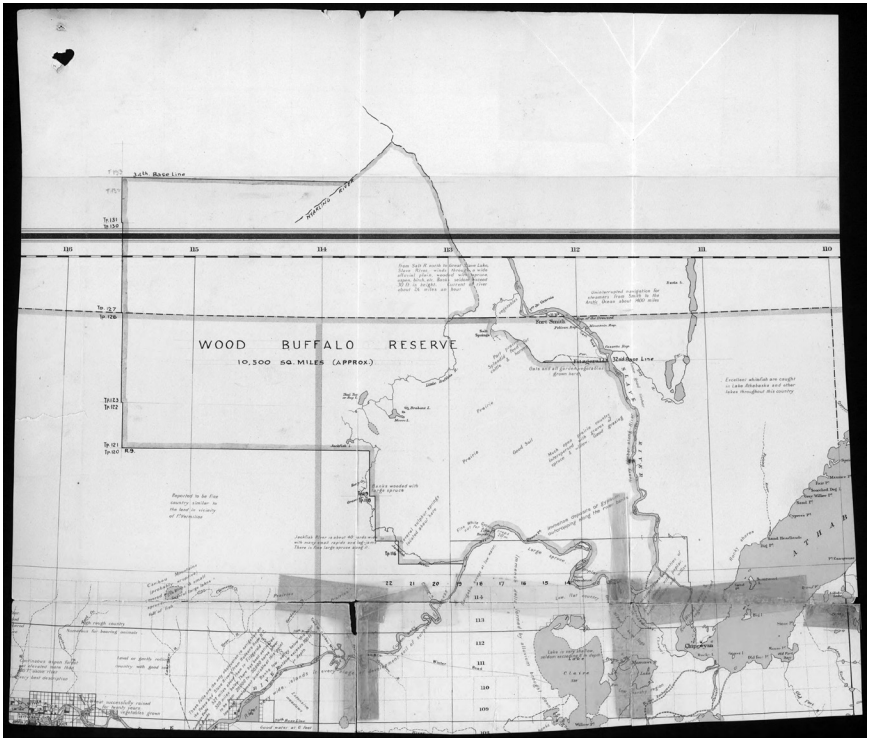

Fig. 3.1 Map of the original Wood Buffalo Park boundaries, 1922. LAC RG85, vol. 1390, file 406-13.

oral histories and the expansive archival record from the early decades of the Park, it becomes apparent that the intentions and management of the Park shifted over time, often reactively as issues emerged. Prior to 1922, officials positioned the preservation of wood bison as essential to the Dominion and Empire—and to "the entire civilized world" as Maxwell Graham put it in a letter to Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin in 1912.[2] They contended that the presence and ways of life of Indigenous Peoples were a threat to the wood bison's preservation, implying that Indigenous Peoples and ways of life did not belong to the so-called "civilized world" and were therefore unwanted. As was the case elsewhere in the British Empire's growing network of parks and game sanctuaries, such implications justified the forcible displacement of Indigenous Peoples who lived and harvested throughout the Peace-Athabasca

Delta, and of non-Indigenous peoples for the first four years of the Park's existence. Through this kind of discourse and subsequent displacements and restrictions on Indigenous ways of life, the Park and policies governing it explicitly became tools of colonial elimination in the region, with long-term implications for the relatives of ACFN.

The intentions and policies governing the Park also shifted over time, often reactively. Dene resistance and interventions by the Indian Affairs Branch prevented the total displacement of all Indigenous Peoples within the Park in the early years. When the herd of plains bison in the boundaries of Buffalo National Park in Wainwright, Alberta became too large to manage, from 1925–28 officials moved some of them north to Wood Buffalo Park, despite widespread opposition from local Indigenous residents and the global scientific community. The newly imported plains bison migrated out of the 1922 boundaries of Wood Buffalo Park immediately afterward. In turn, officials expanded those boundaries south of the Peace River, into Dene homelands in the Peace-Athabasca Delta. They then established a permitting system to regulate the movement and activities of residents and harvesters throughout the Park. The Park also became a means to shore up state control over the northern fur economy. Seven years before the Park was established, Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin suggested that a bison sanctuary could serve as a sanctuary for fur-bearers and a designated area to provide sport and recreation opportunities for those living nearby.[3] In the early decades, then, Park policy was intent on taking up lands to preserve wood bison and to manage wildlife resources; in turn officials could restrict Indigenous lives and lifeways that stood in the way of state control. Ultimately, the restrictions imposed on human access and movement throughout the Park, resulted in the displacement of Dene people from their homes and harvesting areas. This was especially the case after the 1926 Park expansion and subsequent establishment of a strict permitting system regulating movement and activity in the Park. While officials' intentions vacillated from preservation to conservation to resource management, their goals were inextricable from state attempts to control, restrict, and eliminate Indigenous lives and lifeways as the power of the colonial state over lands, waters, and natural resources shifted north.

Dene oral histories articulate the community's perspective that while the original establishment of the Park posed challenges, the 1926 expansion of Wood Buffalo Park had more severe and wider spread impacts. Following the 1926 annex of Dënesųłiné lands to expand the Park south of the Peace River,

the strict new permitting regulations increased state control over Dene lives, movements, and land-use. Permit revocations or denials, coupled with expulsions of Dene people from their homes and harvesting areas, led in turn to hunger and economic hardship, as people struggled to procure enough food, supplies or money to subsist. As Elder Horace Adam and other ACFN members hold, this was a clear violation of treaty that resulted in harm for Dene families. He states, "after the Treaty was signed and the federal government took over the National Park . . . the Indigenous Peoples didn't get access. So the Park was stolen." Colonial policies of displacement and control in Dene territories were then enforced and strengthened through the expansion of the Park's warden system, discussed further in Chapter 5. Imposed restrictions ensured that many Dene people stayed out of the Park out of fear of violent repercussions. "Even today," states one ACFN Elder, "I will not go to the Park. I wouldn't even think of going to the Park . . . in all our family, nobody goes to the Parks. Nobody."

"Steps cannot be taken too soon": Early plans for a bison sanctuary

The idea to establish a bison sanctuary was first proposed as early as 1911 as a solution to what some officials perceived as the urgent need to preserve the last-known remaining wood bison herd in North America. At this time, bison hunting (including by Indigenous harvesters) had been prohibited under the 1894 *Unorganized Territories Preservation Act*. But this ban was set to last only until 1912. Foreseeing that state control over wood bison protection would soon come to end, and concerned that the population was still endangered, officials from the Department of the Interior—especially Maxwell Graham, Parks Branch, Animal Division; O.S. Finnie, Director, Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch; and F.H. Kitto, Natural Resources Intelligence Branch—sought to establish more permanent protections through the creation of a sanctuary or national park covering the entire wood bison range from the Caribou Mountains to the Slave River. One Parks Branch memorandum emphasized that "it seems very desirable that some action be taken as soon as possible to afford additional protection to the wood buffalo" and that "there is grave danger" facing the bison because of the 1912 conclusion of the ban on bison hunting.[4]

Claims about the urgent need to preserve species like the wood bison of this region and to manage and conserve other species went hand-in-hand with a widely held view that wolves and human hunters were a "menace," and that a sanctuary where all hunting was prohibited and wolves were culled was the best means of protecting species of interest.[5] Officials considered Indigenous harvesters in particular to be a threat. In a 1912 letter to Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin, heavily laden with preservation rhetoric of the time, Maxwell Graham recommended that a park that would remove the presence of local Indigenous Peoples to preserve bison be established north of the Peace River. "The only way to continue in abundance and in individual vigour any species of game, is to establish proper sanctuaries," where "no hunting or trapping . . . should be allowed," according to Graham.[6] He claimed this was in the interest of the Dominion and Empire: "The interest of the entire people of this Dominion, and to some extent that of the entire civilized world, is centred on the continued existence of the forms of animal life."[7] Like in the context of other Parks across Canada, discourses about preservation were usually mixed with racist rhetoric about Indigenous harvesters, and this was often used to justify the creation of park boundaries that excluded and evicted Indigenous residents.[8] Elimination of Indigenous Peoples was a key focus of the early agendas of Park proponents. Graham's concerns for the interests of the "entire people" of the Dominion and of the so-called "civilized world" necessarily implied the exclusion, and, indeed, the elimination of the concerns and ways of life of the people who had lived in the region since time immemorial. In these ways, as Valaderes writes, like other Parks, the wood bison range, imagined as a sanctuary, became "a symbolic landscape used for identity formation" that necessitated first "a denial of access and subsistence rights" and the severance of Indigenous People's connections to lands, waters, and ways of life.[9]

Racist assumptions about Indigenous People's ways of life were, of course, unfounded. Deeply embedded responsible stewardship practices have always been at the heart of Dënesųłiné legal systems and social worlds. ACFN Elder Pat Marcel's oral history explains that "the Dënesųłiné have always had the responsibility of living in balance with the natural environment."[10] McCormack writes that the decline of wood bison in the late nineteenth century was more likely the outcome of devastating natural disasters and overhunting by settlers for the supplying meat to fur traders of the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company in the 1880s—rather than the "low

hunting pressures" that Indigenous Peoples placed on the species.[11] Reports by Dominion surveyors and researchers in the region also suggested that local Indigenous hunters were widely obeying the game laws and not killing wood bison in the early twentieth century.[12] In park warden reports and Indian Affairs records from the 1920s and 1930s, wardens and Indian Agents suggested that this remained the case in later years as well.[13] Wardens' diaries from the 1920s to the 1930s also contained frequent references about Dene residents reporting to the wardens if they had come across a deceased bison, maybe to assist with the information gathering that wardens had to do in early decades of the Park, or maybe to avoid accusations that they had something to do with the death.[14] Thus, although the game laws represented an imposition of colonial restrictions on Dene ways of life and an infringement of the Treaty—as Dene oral histories emphasize—people generally abided by them. Nonetheless, some administrators were "willing to exaggerate the dangers facing the bison population" as Sandlos writes, especially the threat they perceived Indigenous harvesting posed.[15] These exaggerations fed what Teresa Ferguson calls the dominant "literary tradition" in the history of the Park, which established and perpetuated inaccurate images of Indigenous Peoples as "non-conservers" and underpinned shifts in control over lands, waters and wildlife into the hands of the colonial state.[16] Racialized rhetoric worked alongside urgent appeals to preserve the species, justifying the creation of a Park and the imposition of increasingly strict game regulations over time.

In 1916, following several months of research and land surveys, Maxwell Graham drafted and forwarded to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs an Order-in-Council, outlining detailed plans to establish a Dominion Park of roughly 23,300 square kilometres.[17] But Graham and his peers' goals of creating a sanctuary devoid of all human activity faced strong opposition from Indigenous residents, Indian agents, and missionaries working in the area, discussed later in this chapter. This ultimately delayed the process and resulted in a more moderate arrangement in the initial years. At first, Indian Affairs Superintendent General Arthur Meighen stated that he "would be very glad to cooperate in any way" with the Parks Branch.[18] However, several other ministers vehemently opposed the bison sanctuary fearing it would interfere with local Indigenous People's subsistence practices, which would in turn lead to hunger and increased reliance on social assistance. Imposing park boundaries over such a large area, some critics suggested, could only worsen existing hunger and hardship: unlike southern parks such as Banff

or Jasper, displaced Indigenous residents in the Delta would not be able to engage in an agricultural way of life to survive on if their subsistence practices were interrupted by a park. Indian Affairs wished to avoid the potential financial consequences they might face as a result. Meighen shifted his position on the bison sanctuary, agreeing with his colleagues that it would be undesirable for social assistance to "take the place of that ability to help themselves which Indians alone can exercise if they are in the environment of wildlife."[19] Frustrated by this disapproval, Graham argued that time lost was precious. He urged that "steps cannot be taken too soon to ensure the successful carrying out of the carefully prepared plans made by this Branch for the preservation of the beneficent animal life." He also claimed that only "a few" people regularly hunted in the area, and that these people did not "possess any special rights entitling them by Treaty to hunt through that territory," contrary to the provisions of Treaty 8.[20] Despite Graham's urgent appeals, the plans for the sanctuary were put on hold during the First World War after Parks Commissioner James Harkin concluded for various reasons—not the least being Indian Affairs' opposition—"the matter must stand."[21] A hiatus on park planning took place from 1916–1920.

Park Planning Resumed

In 1920 the discussion resumed. F.H. Kitto, from the Natural Resources, Intelligence Branch of the Department of the Interior, who had spent two weeks in the bison range for a natural resource survey earlier that year, raised the suggestion once more to create a bison sanctuary to solidify state control over the wood bison.[22] On the wood bison range, he wrote: "I would strongly urge that a prompt settlement of the question of ownership be made with the Alberta authorities, and that this area be made a national park, in order that these buffalo, the last remaining herd roaming in a free state, be preserved."[23] Kitto reiterated the earlier views of Park champions that the sanctuary could have multiple purposes. Within the limits he proposed, Kitto noted "many species of valuable fur-bearing animals, large game and many birds" and suggested to J.B. Harkin that a breeding ground or sanctuary for those species would bring additional value if the bison sanctuary were established.[24]

The Advisory Board on Wildlife Protection passed a resolution calling for the creation of a park in June 1920.[25] Two summers later, Graham accompanied Dominion land surveyor Fred Siebert on an investigation to gather more information and determine the boundaries of a proposed sanctuary.[26]

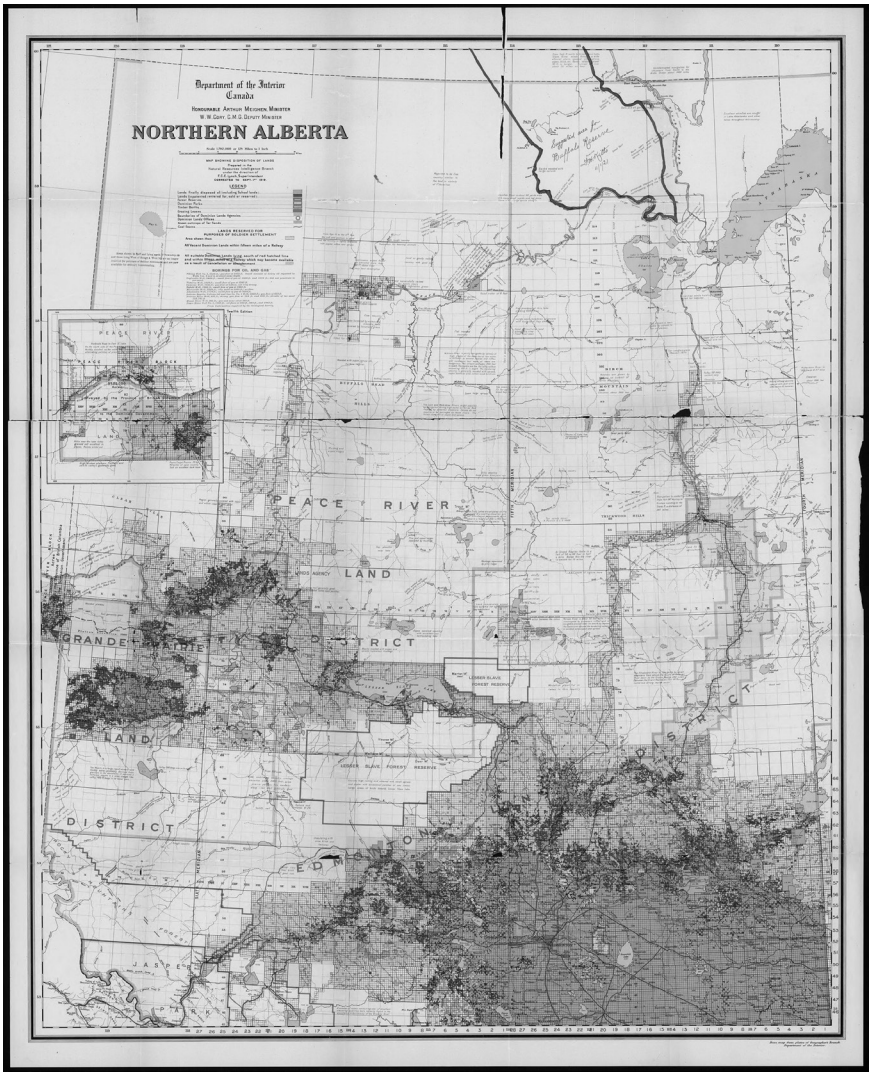

Fig. 3.2 F.H. Kitto's map of proposed boundaries for a bison preserve. F.H. Kitto to Harkin, 12 January 1921, LAC RG85, vol. 1390, file 406-13.

The Department of the Interior committed to providing the surveyors with "'every possible facility' for carrying out a thorough investigation."[27] Seibert and Graham mapped out the potential boundaries based on their observations of herds on both sides of the boundary between Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Throughout the autumn of 1922, Graham continued to advance his view that a prohibition on trapping and hunting in the area was urgently required in order to protect the bison herd, and that he considered the situation to be "acute," fearing that trappers scared bison away from their winter habitats.[28] Following Graham and Seibert's final report, Order-in-Council P.C. 2498 established Wood Buffalo Park in December 1922. The Park boundaries, encompassing 27,000 square kilometres on both sides of the Alberta/NWT border, were made official, and the Department of the Interior was granted administrative authority over the new park.

Officials conceived the new Park as a multi-purpose sanctuary, not only necessary for the preservation of bison, but also useful for the conservation of other game and the management of the fur-based economy. A 1912 memorandum penned by J.B. Harkin suggested that the bison sanctuary space could also serve as a "natural fur-breeding sanctuary as it abounds with fur-bearing animals of all kinds and through the probable overflow, provide food and sport for the surrounding district."[29] Tourism was another opportunity some officials imagined for the Park. In 1923, Maxwell Graham wrote that, although the potential for tourism in Wood Buffalo Park was not as great as in the southerly national parks, he hoped that "with proper publicity being given to the presence of the buffalo in the park, the fact that these buffalo are today the only wild ones left in the world, the further fact of their being fairer specimens than any others of their species, and the further fact that transportation facilities by water from Waterways to Peace Point will enable anyone to step off the boat into the park, will draw many tourists."[30] As historians have shown of other parks in Canada, the boundaries of Wood Buffalo National Park were imagined as necessary not just to preserve wood bison, but also to control Indigenous lives and to increase the profitability of the land, water, and wildlife for the Dominion.[31]

Ongoing opposition from Indian Affairs limited restrictions on Indigenous harvesting in the Park. Park planners eventually came to a compromise. Whereas no harvesting was allowed in any other national park per the *Dominion Parks Act*, Wood Buffalo National Park became the first in Dominion history to allow some Indigenous land use via a special clause

added to the Order-in-Council. Harvesters with Treaty Status could continue to live, travel, and harvest in the Park, as long as they abided by game laws and did not kill bison. All other harvesters were excluded. As Finnie later wrote to Graham, "If we had not allowed the Treaty Indians to hunt and trap in the Park there would have developed such strong opposition to the creation of the park that we would not have been able to secure it at all."[32] But pressured as they were by Indian Affairs, Parks administrators never referred to Indigenous Peoples' access to the Park as a Treaty Right. Rather, in both policy and discourse, Indigenous Peoples' rights were often framed as privileges, granted by the government on grounds of compassion rather than as Treaty obligation. Graham claimed that "the game and the forests belong to the nation and not to the individual and the use of them by the individual is limited to such privileges as may be accorded him by law."[33] He wrote to Finnie in 1923, "a great concession is made in granting hunting and trapping privileges to Treaty Indians in a special game sanctuary," and in 1924, he noted that the Branch considered the granting of these "privileges" as an "ethical consideration" rather than an obligation.[34] This attitude persisted throughout the twentieth century. Federal fur supervisor R.I. Eklund wrote in 1955, for example, "The fact that Wood Buffalo Park is a National Park as is Elk Island, Banff and Jasper, it is my humble opinion that hunting, trapping or fishing by any person, whether Treaty Indian or not, is a privilege and not a right."[35] The main reason Dënesųłiné people could maintain access to the Park under Order-in-Council P.C. 2498 in the first few years of its existence was because of cost-savings for the Indian Affairs Branch—officials wanted to prevent an increase in the need to distribute more federal social assistance.

Ultimately, the Park became an instrument in the expansion of colonial control in Dene homelands in the twentieth century. Dene leaders had signed the Treaty in 1899 under the impression that their lives and movements on the land would never be restricted. After the Park was created, however, they perceived that treaty promises would not be upheld forever and that the Park would likely restrict them in the future. Indeed, although Dene families could remain within the original park boundaries initially, new restrictions and expanded Park boundaries imposed after 1926 denied many access to their homelands and harvesting grounds, as Dënesųłiné leaders had suspected. As Elder Jimmy Deranger explained, "after they got the land, things changed . . . they developed policies saying that 'you can't do this, you can't do that.'" The establishment of the Park in 1922 thus marked the start of a history

of broken Treaty promises, creating serious hardship for the Dënesųłiné residents that the Park dispossessed.

The 1926 annex: "it will never be a sanctuary"

Though Finnie, Graham, and Kitto had achieved their victory by establishing the bison sanctuary with limited human use in 1922, they continued to pursue the total elimination of Indigenous residents and harvesters from the Park in the years that followed. Finnie wished to find "some means by which all Indians may be kept out of this area," arguing that "[a]s long as they are permitted to enter it will never be a sanctuary" and "we will be in constant suspense regarding fires and the killing of buffalo, and the wild life of course will seriously suffer."[36] Graham and Finnie were both unhappy with their earlier compromise with Indian Affairs. "The fact remains," Finnie reiterated in December 1925, "that so long as anybody is allowed to shoot, or otherwise disturb the game in the Park, it will lose its effectiveness as a sanctuary."[37] He hoped an arrangement could be made with Indian Affairs to "buy off these Indians" in order to keep them out of the Park since he felt there was no way to know "whether they are killing buffalo or not."[38] Yet Finnie's elimination goal faced continued disapproval from Indian Affairs agents and his superiors. Deputy Superintendent General Duncan Campbell Scott, for example, responded to one of Finnie's proposals to expand the Park in 1925 stating, "it is my view both official and personal that the vital interests of the Indians should be paramount and should have precedence even over the protection of wildlife."[39] District agent John McDougal agreed. He felt that, even though "every unbiased person in the North country will agree" bison protection was important and local harvesters could be "a nuisance and a menace," eviction would result in severe hardship for families who had been harvesting in the region for many generations.[40]

Because of ongoing opposition, the plan to eliminate Indigenous Peoples from the Park was largely unsuccessful. However, further displacements of Dene people from their homelands and restrictions on their lives were yet to come. The importation of several thousand young plains bison from the Buffalo National Park in Wainwright, Alberta, to Wood Buffalo Park was the catalyst for these displacements. Plans to import plains bison started in 1923, when Deputy Minister W.W. Cory suggested to Parks Commissioner Harkin that "it would be a good idea to transfer some of the healthy young stock to the Wood Bison Reserve administered by the Northwest Territories Branch."[41]

Fig. 3.3 *Buffalo scow unloading at Peace River, 1925.* Provincial Archives of Alberta, A4723.

Fig. 3.4 *First shipment of 200 Wainwright Bison arrives in Wood Buffalo National Park, 1925.* Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary, CU1103322.

Fig. 3.5 *Buffalo calves unloaded and being moved west at Peace Point along a seven-mile long timber cut to open lands, 1925.* Provincial Archives of Alberta, A4727.

This was largely a response to the rapid growth of the Wainwright herd, which was now escaping the southern park boundaries and destroying nearby pastureland. Despite widespread concerns that the tuberculosis-infected herd would mix with and infect the northern Alberta wood bison, Park officials pursued the scheme with vigour. They ignored the warnings of Dominion zoologists and members of the global scientific community, who repeatedly, and at times vehemently, expressed opposition in the media, directly to the Department of the Interior, and even to Prime Minister Mackenzie King.[42] Between 1925 and 1928, 6,673 plains bison were shipped by rail and barge to the Park and released on the west side of the Slave River.[43] As predicted, the imported plains bison mixed with the wood bison and introduced tuberculosis and brucellosis, a problem Parks Canada still manages to this day. Furthermore, the plains bison began migrating out of the Park boundaries almost immediately, and wardens reported gradual but continuous southward migrations for months.[44] Many moved to the Lake Claire area and other Dene homelands to feed there.

Administrators were suddenly faced with the problem of protecting the bison that had migrated. They decided to enlarge the Park by annexing the

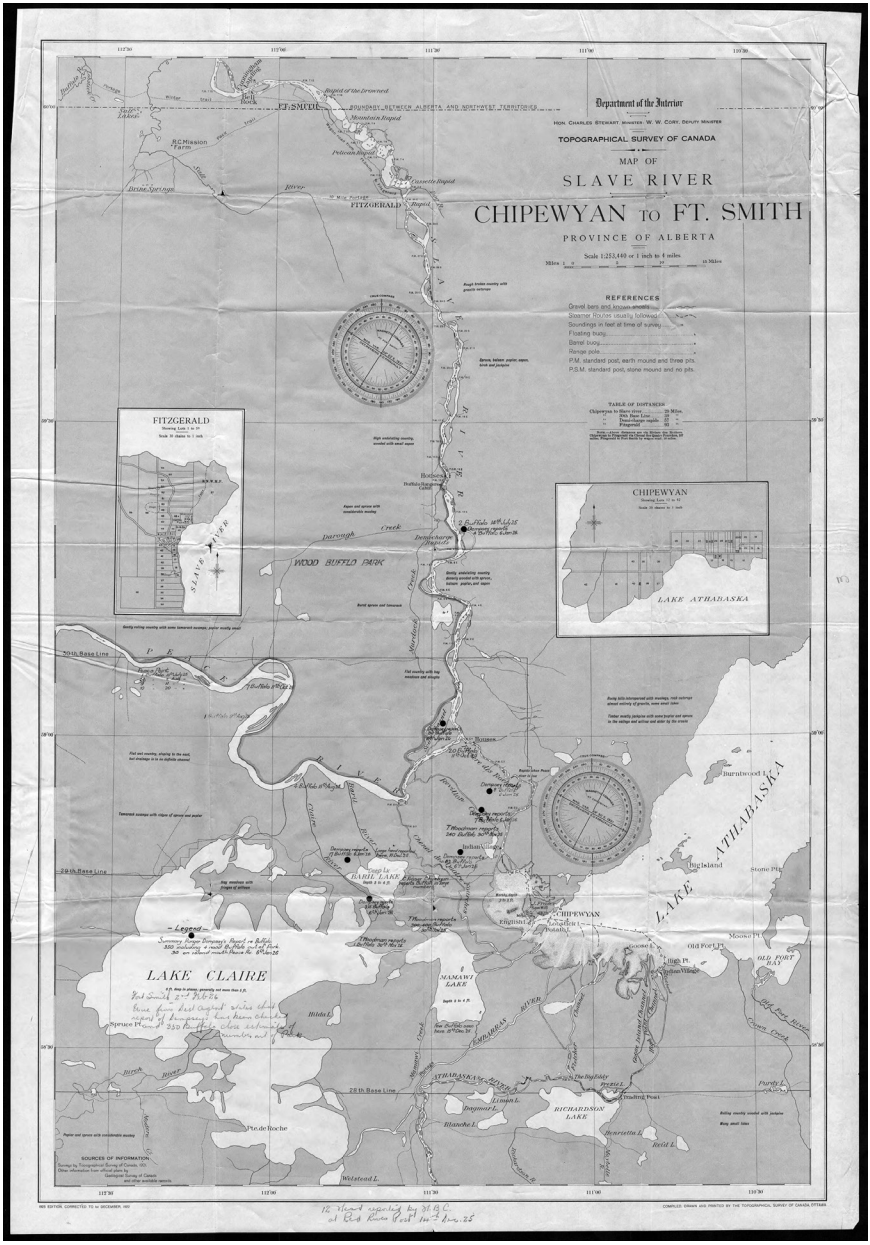

Fig. 3.6 Summary of Warden Dempsey's report *Buffalo—Map showing location of Buffalo that have left the Park up to 6th Jan. 26*, April 1926, LAC RG85-D-1-A, vol 1391, file 406-13.

lands that made up the new bison range, primarily south of the Peace River, where many Dënesųłiné families lived, harvested, and moved since time immemorial. Finnie wrote to McDougal in February 1926, instructing him to map out potential boundaries of the expanded Park and to ensure that they were "liberal" enough to respond to future migrations of the bison "farther afield." McDougal knew the plan would spur strong opposition. He replied that Parks administrators "must expect strong opposition from the residents of Chipewyan . . . since the area would include the main rat breeding grounds and the best duck, goose, and wavey shooting in Canada." Dempsey also feared that expanding the Park or creating an adjacent sanctuary to the south would "create a hardship" for local families if they were deprived of the ability to harvest there.[45] Though Finnie communicated this concern, Cory believed that those who might be affected by an expanded Park could harvest to the east of the Athabasca River—ignoring not only the implications of forcing people to move away from their homes and established harvesting areas but also the impacts of a Park expansion on Dene people's settlements, homes, and lives in the areas where the plains bison had wandered.[46]

When word of the expansion circulated in early 1926, Indigenous residents feared it would restrict their movements, land-use, and lives. Indian Agents and missionaries tended to oppose the expansion for similar reasons.[47] A March 1926 telegram pointed to fears that the park extension would lead to bison destroying muskrat habitat, interfere with trapping, and lead to additional restrictions.[48] Dene oral histories also recount that, just like with the original Park establishment in 1922, the expansion occurred with little to no consultation with Indigenous residents and harvesters. When consultation did occur, Dene people may only have agreed if the expansion was presented by the Parks officials as a temporary loan. One Fort Chipewyan Elder told TARR researchers in 1974:

> Apparently, it was just loaned to them. After five years, the population of the buffalo grew in size. It was at this time the [federal] government had, as the provincial government for the land south of the Peace River and north of the Peace River is the old buffalo park, the provincial government also loaned the federal government the land south of the Peace River for the WBNP. Now that land is also filled with buffalo as far as the twenty-seventh baseline.[49]

Despite the clearly stated concerns of Dene people, Indian Affairs agents, and missionaries, the park's administration proceeded with the annex. In response to the 1926 petition, O.S. Finnie wrote a letter that justified the expansion, citing the clause of Treaty 8 that stated lands could be "taken up" from time to time for various purposes and suggesting the Park expansion would further benefit local Treaty Peoples by restricting white and Métis access to the area.[50] In the end, Elder Ray Ladouceur explained, Indigenous residents "had no choice. No choice after they [officials] brought in the other animals, the prairie buffalo." The Park was extended south of Peace River by Order-in-Council P.C. 634 on 26 April 1926, then further to include Buffalo Lake by Order-in-Council P.C. 1444, on 26 September of the same year.[51] This expanded the Park to a total of 44,800 square kilometers.

The New Permitting System: Inscribing Divisions

The Parks Branch did acknowledge the potential for "considerable opposition" should the new Park displace the many residents and harvesters, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with the annexation.[52] Rather than impose an outright ban on harvesting in the annex, a formal amendment to the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act specified that some people could remain in both the original park and the annexed area on a permit-only basis. The amendment stated that

> No person shall enter the Wood Buffalo Park unless he holds a permit from the Superintendent of the Park authorizing his entry to the said Wood Buffalo Park; and any person found within the Park boundaries without the necessary permission from the Superintendent, may be summarily removed from the Park by order of the Superintendent.[53]

In June and September 1926, new access regulations were enshrined in Dominion law through Orders-in-Council P.C. 1444 and 2589: "all Treaty Indians who formerly hunted and trapped in the Park will be allowed to continue to do so, but must first secure a permit from the Park Superintendent. In the new area south of the river, whites and half-breeds, who formerly hunted and trapped there will also be allowed to continue."[54] The park was thus split into three zones with varying levels of access, and each with a different set of game laws: Zone A in the Northwest Territories, Zone B in the Alberta

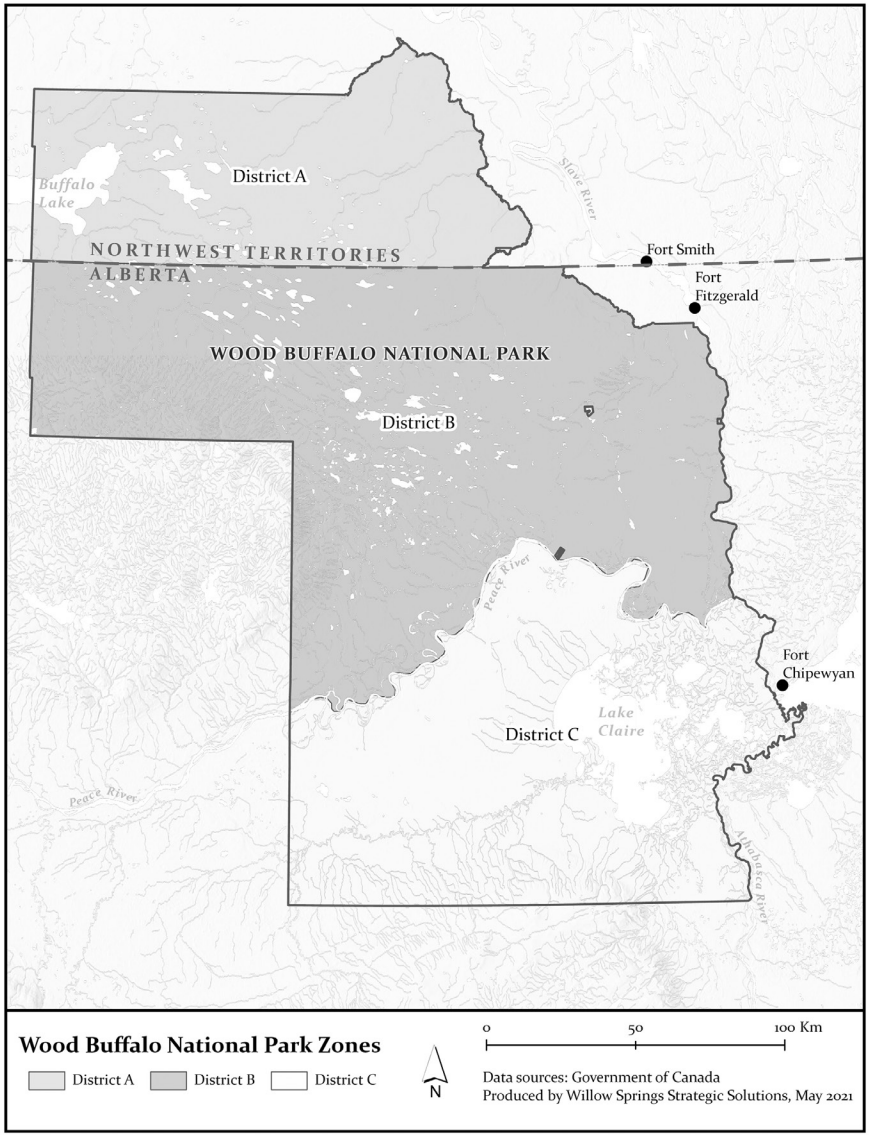

Fig. 3.7 Map of permitting zones A, B, and C established to differentiate among access rights for harvesting after the 1926 expansion. Map produced by Emily Boak, Willow Springs Strategic Solutions, 2021.

section of the original Park north of Peace River, and Zone C in the annexed section south of Peace River. Treaty harvesters could continue to access Zones A and B if they procured permits. Those who resided in Zone C at the time of the 1926 annex could apply for permits to stay.[55] White and Métis harvesters could only apply for permits in Zone C.[56] Parks administrators believed that this permitting system granted special privileges to permittees who would be protected from competition from other trappers and hunters who could not obtain permits. O.S. Finnie wrote that "this Order-in-Council will practically make a monopoly for them. They may continue to hunt and trap, but no new-comers will be allowed to do so."[57]

But far from creating a generous monopoly free of competition, the regulations were damaging to Dene families. The new Orders-in-Council gave park administrators a great deal of latitude to distribute or withhold harvesting and visiting permits; this continued throughout much of the twentieth century. A 1954 consolidation of game laws summarized the unilateral power of superintendents and parks officials to grant, deny, or revoke Indigenous rights to the Park: "The Minister may . . . cancel, suspend, or refuse to issue or renew any license or certificate of registration for any cause that to him seems sufficient."[58] Most of the members of the Cree Band, now Mikisew Cree First Nation, who resided in the Park annex in 1926, were able to obtain permits and remain at their homes on the Peace River. However, not all Dene families with a strong connection to the area in the expanded Park boundaries happened to be residing or harvesting in the Park at the time of the annexation—whether because they were staying near relatives outside the Park or harvesting in the wider Delta region outside of what became expanded Park boundaries. Several Dene families therefore did not apply for permits in the early years. As a result, the permitting system essentially split those who were members of the Chipewyan Band in half, separating families and the community between those with and those without access. Over time, permitting laws and the warden system that upheld them, combined with the shifting array of other colonial processes at work in northern Alberta, obstructed Dene lives in their homelands taken up by the Park and surrounding region.

Permit applicants had to make a strong case to obtain a permit under strict criteria: they must be "bona fide residents of the Park area" and be "dependent upon the game supply of the Wood Buffalo Park for their livelihood."[59] But many applications were refused. The reasons for declining

permit applications were fairly inconsistent and could include a wide range of justifications such as a perceived shortage of game or the perception that an applicant was in some way "undesirable." For example, in 1935 Adam Boucher was denied a permit "owing to his gambling tendencies," and he and his wife Victoire Boucher and mother-in-law Sophie Ratfat were evicted from the Birch River settlement even though the family had cabins in the Park and had harvested there for generations.[60] Chief Jonas Laviolette was denied a trapping permit in 1928 and 1933 because his name was not added to the list of permittees when the permitting system was first established. The warden superintendent, M.J. Dempsey, felt that by granting Chief Laviolette a permit, he would be setting an unwanted precedent of granting permits to "a large number of treaty Indians who are in the same position as Mr. Laviolette as to having at some time trapped or hunted in the area which is now the Park, whose applications would follow closely upon the granting of a permit to Jonas Laviolette."[61] The permitting system regulating access to the Park was as much about exercising state control over Indigenous movement and lives as it was about conservation.

Visiting rights to WBNP were also restricted. Park laws required that those residing outside the Park boundaries must apply for a permit to visit family and friends in the Park. This restriction was similar to the pass system that had been introduced in Treaty 7 territory and elsewhere in the Dominion in 1885. According to Courtney Mason, colonial surveillance and control of Indigenous lives and off-reserve movements created through the pass system closely aligned with the Rocky Mountains Park Act, which "specified that the forceful exclusion and removal of 'trespassers' who did not adhere to the new park regulations was critical to the early development of the park."[62] While the pass system was not enforced in the homelands of ACFN at the time of the Park's expansion, Wood Buffalo National Park's permitting system played a remarkably similar role in limiting Dene movements and ways of life and subjecting them to colonial surveillance. Chief Jonas Laviolette had to apply for a permit to enter the Park to see his Nation's members who lived within its boundaries.[63] Wardens also limited visiting rights among the three park zones. Indian Agent John Melling relayed complaints from Cree and Dene peoples in the Park who had been warned against visiting family or friends in different zones and therefore "unanimously felt quite incensed over this restriction to their personal freedom . . . even relatives were denied the right of visiting each other."[64] Despite such complaints, Parks Canada administration

declined to revise its policy around visiting, maintaining that "it does not seem unreasonable for the Wood Buffalo Park Officials to keep a check on the movements . . . by requiring any visitors to obtain permission from the resident Warden so that he may keep track of their movements."[65] As ACFN's oral histories relate, the permitting restrictions had profound implications for families whose movements in and out of the Park were closely watched and strictly limited, resulting in long-term impacts on community connectedness, kinship and family ties, and on connections to Dene homelands.

People who did not have permits to reside or harvest in the Park had to request permission even to use trails or roads that traversed the Park—even if their travels through the Park were transitory. Those travelling through the Park with harvesting gear, such as guns or traps, and evidence of furs were also required to declare these to Park wardens and Alberta Game Guardians before entering the Park. In 1948, for example, Park warden F.A. McCall reported Dene harvesters Theodore Bouchier and Pierre Piché, who both were considered "Alberta Indians," or people who did not have permits to reside and harvest in the Park, after he stopped them travelling from Poplar Point to Fort Chipewyan via the Park. Piche and Bouchier had furs, traps, and guns in their sleds, so McCall wrote them up and informed them of the need for permission to travel through the Park. He also informed the Indian Agent and Alberta Game Guardian of what had happened and asked them to ensure travellers without Park permits seek permission to use Park roads and declare any furs or gear before entering.[66] In many ways then, permitting regulations that were intended to restrict harvesting within the Park also restricted Dënesųłiné people's freedom of movement throughout their territories as well as their use of the network of pathways, portages, winter roads, and trails that Dene people had always used. These regulations had the effect of separating communities and families, alienating people from their territories, and increasing surveillance and disciplinary power of the colonial government.

Like the other policies governing Indigenous homelands in the twentieth century, the permitting system was characterized by inconsistencies and uncertainties and often was updated on an ad hoc basis and reactively. Confusion over the three zones and sometimes contradictory rules led to frustrations. Even some Park wardens recognized the problems policy inconsistencies could create: "[t]here are some doubts as to what the regulations really are, which may be a cause of friction," wrote Park Warden Dempsey to District Agent A.L. Cummings in 1935.[67] For example, there were often

questions around permits for family members of existing permit holders. Marriage sometimes complicated things. At first, a person without a permit could not become eligible through marriage to a permit-holder who resided within the Park. Widows occasionally were granted permits, but women who grew up in the Park annex and later married non-permit holders faced specific challenges. Rules around marriage and Park access could cause a Dene woman to lose her access to her home and family in the Park, while the *Indian Act,* which stripped women of their Status if they married non-Status men, enhanced the power and longevity of these restrictions and cut women off from their families, lands, and communities. Some ACFN members' family histories shared in this chapter suggest several women eventually lost their permits and homes and had to leave the Park.

Additionally, the issue of granting permits to the sons of existing permit-holders was only settled after 1935, a decade after the annex occurred. Prior to that, the children of permittees could accompany their parents into the Park on harvesting trips, but administrators sometimes denied them their own permits after they turned 18. A 1935 law clarified and tightened the rules. It determined that if "the applicant is over eighteen years of age and . . . he is the son of a holder of a Wood Buffalo Park hunting and trapping permit," then his request should be granted.[68] But these young applicants were often denied if they did not apply for a permit immediately upon coming of age or if they were found to be making a living elsewhere and then, as Parks officials put it, they "suddenly decide they want to hunt and trap in the Park as their fathers do."[69] There was some uncertainty around adoption as well. One series of letters between wardens and officials in 1949 suggests that permits for adopted children would only be approved if the adoption had taken place "legally"—that is, documented and recognized by the systems and structures of the colonial state. This likely meant that adoptions according to local Indigenous kinship structures and customs were not taken into account.[70] In these ways, the new permitting system became a key instrument not only for controlling access to game and wildlife, but also for alienating people from their families, kinship ties, and lands and waters.

People could also have their permits revoked. Those who had received permits in 1926 but later harvested outside of Park boundaries, sometimes had their permits taken away.[71] Breaking game laws could also result in temporary revocations and sometimes permanent expulsions.[72] Numerous RCMP reports from the 1920s–1950s detail cases of Indigenous harvesters

arrested and tried for breaking harvesting regulations; it was not uncommon for the defendants to lose their permits temporarily or permanently, have their game confiscated, and face fines.[73] Wardens reported Julian Ratfat, for example, for having two beavers in his possession during closed season in 1928; they revoked his license to trap temporarily and he and his family were expelled from the Park.[74] Sandlos counts at least forty people whose access "privileges" were revoked from 1934–1939.[75] The practice continued throughout the 1940s. Melling complained to Indian Affairs that people who lost their permits suffered: "the only source of livelihood for these Indians is derived from their work pursuant to hunting and trapping. There is practically no casual labor to be had in our settlement."[76] When harvesters lost their Park permits temporarily or permanently, he wrote, they were cut off from their main source of income and food. With few other options, many could not feed their families and were forced to rely on often insufficient government relief.

The oral history shared in this chapter discusses the history of the creation and expansion of Wood Buffalo National Park as they have heard it from their Elders. Their oral histories stress a lack of direct consultation and communication with local Indigenous Peoples when the Park was created and later expanded. ACFN Elder Edouard Trippe de Roche suggested that this was common practice at the time: "there was no consultation then." Elder Ernie "Joe" Ratfat agreed: "they didn't tell people back then. They just did whatever they wanted to do. Well, we had no say, when it came to government things, we had no say. They just did it." Elder Jimmy Deranger discussed his experiences as an interviewer for the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research team in the 1970s, an Indigenous-led initiative established by the Native Indian Brotherhood to conduct research about Indigenous perspectives and experiences of treaties, including Treaty 8. During interviews with Dënesųłiné Elders, many of whom were adults at the time the Park was created, Deranger learned that there was no systematic mode of local communication. Parks officials visited individual settlements and some families, but "there was no large assembly of them together . . . the official didn't say that 'I have gathered you here today, because we want to use the land for buffalos.' They didn't say that, they just went to camps I think . . . and told them." A Fort Chipewyan Elder confirmed in 1974, "Yes, our land was made to be part of the Park. It is like something sitting in the middle of a plate. They do whatever they want with the Park. They never consult us."[77] In much the same way as decisions

were made about Indigenous lands and lives in what became national parks to the south such as Banff and Jasper, Treaty obligations and communication with Indigenous residents were ignored.[78]

Occasionally, indirect communication took place, typically involving Indian Affairs agents and missionaries claiming to speak on behalf of Indigenous residents. In a 1916 memorandum, Indian Agent Henry Bury wrote to the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs that he had had a conversation with local Indigenous leaders about the original proposal for a bison sanctuary. According to his report, after conferring for a while about the matter, the "leading Indians . . . expressed their conviction that provided they were allowed some reasonable time during which to locate other hunting grounds they would not presume to register any claims for compensation, as they contended that the country was large and the game plentiful in other localities."[79] As Sandlos cautions in his analysis, Bury was an advocate of the Park, and therefore his conclusions were likely filtered through this lens rather than representing the actual views and words of Indigenous leaders with whom he spoke, and it is unclear from the memorandum who Bury spoke with beyond those he described as "chiefs and headmen," likely referring to those Indian Affairs understood to be political leaders.[80] His suggestion that Indigenous leaders were willing to consider being excluded from the area taken up by the proposed sanctuary without compensation does not align with the oral histories shared in this chapter.

According to the Elders speaking about the history of the Park in the 1970s and early 2000s, if Dënesųłiné leaders were consulted about the Park in the early days, they may have only agreed to it because they were led to believe that the lands would only be loaned temporarily for the bison sanctuary—they understood that their ability to continue moving and harvesting across the region would not be impeded. Indeed, oral testimony suggests that Parks officials promised residents and land-users that the land transferred to the Park would be returned. Some Elders were told that the loan would be no more than one or two decades, while others recalled oral stories of a 99-year lease. As one Fort Chipewyan Elder told interviewers in 1974, "apparently it was just loaned to [them]." Elder Alec Bruno stated decades later that "the Government had promised the trappers that they intended to use this WBNP area just for ten to fifteen years only. After that they will return the land back to Indigenous trappers to use it as they had done for many years

before. Eighty plus years later, the WBNP is still in existence. Another broken promise to our people."[81]

As ACFN Elder Dora Flett explained, "They said that they'd have the park for 100 years. It's over 100 years now, so. Yeah. So I guess they [should] give it back now." A written record of this loan has not yet been identified in the archives. Whether the promise, like other Treaty 8 promises, was made orally in good faith by government officials and then broken, or the document was destroyed, is unclear. One way or the other, the oral record contains extensive evidence of this promise. The lack of communication and broken or forgotten Treaty promises were key components of the history of relations between the Park and the Dënesųłiné, shaping relations to the present-day and creating a general distrust of Parks administration and experiences of exclusion, misrepresentation, and dismissal.

Oral histories also suggests that some families were evicted from their homes in the Park after its expansion. While the archival documents contain ample evidence of permitting policies and permit revocations that restricted Dene people's access to their family homes and harvesting areas in what became the expanded Park, these texts do not mention forcible evictions. However, the oral archive has several stories of forcible removals of Dene residents who had lost their permits or otherwise were unable to prove to the administration's satisfaction their claim to be in the Park, even if they had family members with permits. Once evicted, some people's homes were burned down; they lost cabins and belongings. As Elder Edouard Trippe de Roche explained: "Once you leave, you can't come back. And the people that left their homes were burnt down. They went back [to] get some furniture or whatever they had, and they came back to a burnt home." In these ways, Park policy and practice became an important part of the encroachment of colonial power into Dene people's lives and homelands, resulting sometimes in dispossessions and violence to increase colonial power over lands, waters, and resources in northern Alberta in the twentieth century.

ORAL HISTORY

Chief Allan Adam (2 February 2021)

They brought in the buffalo and they gave all the rights to the buffalo. The buffalo were protected more than anything else, and [it was] pretty much 'save the buffalo, shoot the Dene.'

Only ACFN was the one that was kicked out. And ACFN members, they spread out and they joined other First Nations. You know when I went up, I became a Chief in 2008, but when I went up to Yellowknife in 2008 or 2009, I forget when it was, but I went up there for a water conference. And when I was talking to Dene people up there one guy told me that his parents were from Fort Chip. I didn't dig into the story because I knew right away, his parents were probably one of the ones that were kicked out of the Park as well. But they moved up north, and they became part of Wood Buffalo up in that area too. So, you know, and people from Salt River, people from Smith Landing, we're all members of ACFN pretty much, half of the population from Mikisew is ACFN you know. The history runs deep. It's like a vein. Right?

Horace Adam (19 March 2021)

Now, at that time, after the Treaty was signed, the federal government took over the National Park, so the Indigenous People didn't get access. So the Park was stolen. They took it, you know. . . . And it's so sad for the Indigenous people at that time.

Louis Boucher (1974)

Richard Lightning (RL):[82] There are many buffalo in the Park. Were your people ever allowed to hunt them before?

LB: No, it is difficult in the Park. A person could starve there. It is difficult for someone to get buffalo meat because there are park officials who guard the Park.

RL: Do you remember when the Park was first made or when the fence was built around it?[83] Maybe you could tell me about it.

LB: Yes, I remember. When I first arrived here, they hadn't brought the buffalo yet.[84] When the buffalo were brought, I was already married and had two children. They were brought from the south in 1922. But the wood buffalo were already there. That is across the lake from here, they were in the

wood buffalo area before when we were trapping there. That place at Peace Point we are now looking at, is the area where I spent thirty-four years. It is upstream on the Peace River, and I trapped in the Buffalo Park. But it was difficult. We used to bring with us some goldeye [fish] which we caught during the fall. We travelled with pack horses when trapping. So there is no reason why I shouldn't be familiar with the country.

RL: Why was the Wood Buffalo Park established there?

LB: We feel it was a dishonest deal which was made with the Chiefs. When the Parks officials were going to bring the buffalo on to our lands, they [the Chiefs] had said, 'Yes.' That is the reason the Park was made. If they had refused, there would be no Buffalo Park.

RL: Do you remember the name of the Chief who they made the deal with?

LB: His name was Woy a Kash. His father was Chief first. His name was Nik Soo. Then it was Pierre Whitehead, but the buffalo had already been moved from the south.

RL: The Park was extended southward, what was the reason for this?

LB: The reason is that people who lived in the new park area were not allowed to go into the old park, not even to camp. Then the Chief, the one after Pierre Whitehead, made arrangements so the Indians could move back and forth from the old park across to the extended one.

Alec Bruno (n.d.)

The Government had promised the trappers that they intended to use this WBNP area, just for ten to fifteen years only. After that they will return the land back to the trappers to use it as they had done for many years before. Eighty plus years later the WBNP is still in existence. Another broken promise to our people.

The Elders often talked about how the WBNP was formed. Many Elders said they weren't aware of a WBNP being created. The Government officials came and surveyed the boundaries for the perimeter of WBNP and when that was done next came the bison which were barged in from the south. No one consulted or had any input to the formation of WBNP, because of this WBNP many of our members were lost to MCFN [Mikisew Cree First Nation] and others just moved elsewhere.

Many Elders recalled that no government officials ever came to them for consultation or input from the trappers and hunters of the region. So this

proves that they, the government, didn't intend to share this with our people. Trappers and hunters weren't given any say in the formation of WBNP. We the ACFN are the biggest losers, not only in land but also many members to MCFN.

Our people, [ACFN] members, probably felt like they didn't exist in reality. Not only did they lose their rights to their traditions, way of life, they were told to leave the area of Birch River. Trappers were the ones that had the bigger loss. They refused to change bands, so they had no choice but to move elsewhere. This was their home base; families were raised from one generation to another.

In 1899, Treaty 8 was signed between the federal government and the First Nation People. Our people were promised that as long as the sun raised, river flows, and the grass grows, the people will never be interfered with as to where they lived and maintained their way of life, traditionally their land will never be taken away from them. Yet twenty some years later our people were told to leave their respected area and relocated elsewhere. As I see it the government had eradicated our people from their homeland just to be replaced by bison. This is unacceptable at any given time—the government had more concern for the animals than they did for our people.

Fredoline Deranger/Djeskelni (19 March 2021)

Wood Buffalo [Park] is not what we expected from the newcomers, because before Wood Buffalo, the Dënesųłiné, from day one, looked after all the Europeans when they came into Canada. They had . . . poor clothing, no roads, no machines at that time. So the Dënesųłiné went ahead and clothed them and fed them and looked after them for over 200 years. Yeah. So that's a common knowledge amongst the Dënesųłiné people of our country. . . .

They [the government officials wanting to create a park] came out of the blue. There was never direct dialogue between the [Park] people coming in and Dënesųłiné from Lake Athabasca. For 200 years we supplied them. We did everything for them. And they never consulted us.

Jimmy Deranger (24 March 2021)

In this passage, Jimmy refers to oral histories he had heard from Elders he interviewed as part of the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research in the 1970s.

Now some of our Elders are saying that that land [in the Park annex] is ours—you [Parks board] should just give it to us. There's no need for us to negotiate it. We let them use it for X number of years, and the use has expired. Now give it back to us. And they haven't even compensated them [the Dene people who were displaced].

They [the government] said they were going to give it back. That's what those Elders said. They were going to give it back after they used it for a certain period of time. So they should just give it back, we don't need, we shouldn't have to negotiate that land, that's ours in the first place, to negotiate it back. If we're going to negotiate, we should negotiate for compensation. But the premise of negotiating something that's already yours is pointless. They knew it was our land to begin with, the Treaty said it was our lands. The Elders said it was our lands. The Creator said it was our lands. And now they want us to negotiate back because of something legally. What makes sense to all of us, I think that they should compensate us for using the land for those number of years.

When I was with the TARR, Indian Association of Alberta Research Project, I was hired as a researcher, to interview Elders. I talked to Elders of both bands [ACFN and MCFN] because some of the Elders of Mikisew were Dene Elders. But they were Mikisew after the Park. Before that, they were Dene Elders. And they remembered what the officials who were representing the National Park, how they wanted to bring the buffalo in, and when they were bringing the buffalos in, and how long they were going to be on the land. And all that was done by like, sort of individual or families that were trapping in there or were using the land in Wood Buffalo Park. But there was no large assembly of them together. Got to our place and said—the official didn't say that, 'I have gathered you here today, because we want to use that land for buffalos.' They didn't say that; they just went to camps, I think. They went to the camps and then they told them. And like, the Shortmans, who are Mikisew, they were supposed to be Dene people, and the Ratfats, Peter Ratfat, and Pierre Ratfat and Claire Ratfat, were supposed to be Dene people but they were in Wood Buffalo Park [at the time of the membership transfer in 1944]—now Mikisew. [The] Vermillion [family] was also in Wood Buffalo but they were Dene. Then there was the Simpsons, some of the Simpsons were supposed to be Dene but there was Wood Buffalo Park. And some of the Denes were supposed to be Dene, but they were at Wood Buffalo Park too.[85] So that's what

happened, like you know at that time when the Elders were talking to me and Salman Sepp, he was Wood Buffalo too, he is Dene.

So when the people [government officials] that came to talk to the Dene [the Indigenous residents], they were saying that buffalo was declining down south and they wanted land for the buffalo. And they could use that land for a number of years. And First Nations people in that region, in the area, on the land, can just go on doing what they want to do.

But after they [the government] got the land, things changed, yeah? They developed policies saying that 'you can't do this, you can't do that.' And, they [Dene leaders] were trying to tell the officials that it's not what the first official said.

And now, we're saying this. Then that's when the treaty question came up, when they were first saying that because the Elders at the time [of the TARR interviews], probably remembered some of the things that the government said on behalf of the government, between them, the Northwest Territories was then the Government of Canada [at the time of Treaty]. And then [Dene Elders] told them [the government officials], the Treaty says this: that if the land that's going to be opened up for forestry, agricultural mining, settlement, and other use, that the said Indians of that region, the said Indians of that land, were going to be consulted, and they [the government] needed the consent of them [the Dene people]. Before that, you can just go take it.

And they were supposed to be compensated because it's their land to begin with. But that always never happened. Because how they did it was, they didn't do it properly, I don't think they did it properly from what the testimony was of the Elders then, when I was doing the treaty research.

Dora Flett (19 March 2021)

They said they'd have the park for 100 years. It's over 100 years now, so it's time to give it back.

Leonard Flett (30 April 2021)

Yeah, they were removed from the National Park, I guess because the Park was established. And the Indian Agent, or the Parks Canada, went to my parents. That was my mum I guess—my dad wasn't even there, my dad was from a different reserve kind of deal. Kind of up the lake, I mean, up the river at Poplar Point . . . I think it wasn't right to her.[86] She didn't have a voice—she was just a kid, right? And my grandpa was there and my grandma.

Scott Flett (17 March 2021)

Yeah, I heard that too, I heard it's [WBNP] supposed to be built because the buffalo. When they made the Park, [it] was north of Peace and the buffalo start migrating south of the Peace into Lake Claire and that area. And they [Parks officials] said they're just going to borrow that area for a while for the Park. And the big dispute even with the Park boundary . . . so a lot of people are in dispute over the Park boundary. It was the Chip and stuff. But that's what I heard back—that's what they said—[the Park] is supposed to borrow [the lands] just for a while and that's how they told the people.

Felix Gibot (1974)

FG: It is like the Buffalo Park, when it was first established. I will tell you about it too. It was during the time a herd of buffalo was moved up here. They were taken far in the north country. Two seasons after that they made their way into our land. Those were the plains buffalo. When they came upon our land that is when the Park was established [expanded]. The Chief was asked, 'The buffalo entered your land. What do you think?' He replied, 'I don't know.' The Park official who was in charge, as there had been buffalo up north before, said, 'What do you think about the idea where they are going to include your land in the Buffalo Park, are you willing?' The Chief replied, 'No.' Park official: 'Will you lend it out or give it up?' The Chief told him he would lend it out, 'but I can't give it to you people. I'll just lend it to you.' The Park official told him that of all the buffalo that wandered into his land, the Indians could use them for a livelihood. They would multiply and they could live from the buffalo. If the Indians were experiencing difficulty, they could approach the Park officials and he would take charge. He told the Indians that they could kill them at their discretion whenever it was necessary, not anytime. I myself worked in the Park for a long time. We used to slaughter buffalo for the Indians and the missionaries.[87] That was the agreement on the Buffalo Park. But after a while it seems they [parks officials] didn't think that way anymore. If someone is caught killing a buffalo, he will get a 6-month sentence. That is not what they had agreed upon.

RL: They've already broken their promise.

FG: Yes, they broke their promise, after they made an agreement. My uncle was once lacking for food. They were very hungry out in the bush. They killed a buffalo. They were arrested and had to go to jail in Saskatchewan [Fort Saskatchewan].

RL: Did that legislation come from Ottawa?

FG.: Yes, the Park officials are hired through the government.

RL: Is anybody allowed to hunt buffalo today?

FG: Recently, 200 buffalo were slaughtered for the Indians.

RL: Does this happen every year?

FG: No, not every year. Some time ago, they slaughtered some. That was about three winters ago. It was only recently they slaughtered 200 for the Indians and Métis and Chipewyan.

RL: That land which you say is yours, does it enter the Park boundary?

FG: Yes, our land was made to be part of the Park. It is like something sitting in the middle of a plate. They do whatever they want with the Park. They never consult us, they own it.

RL: Thank you for talking to me.

FG: This discussion I just finished is all truth because I have seen it. I would be happy if my conversation could be heard somewhere. I thank you very much for talking to me. I wish to thank anybody, Indian or white man, who may listen to this conversation.

Ray Ladouceur (18 March 2021)

Well, those days a lot of those people that was in the Park here, the Dene, they didn't want a park, eh? Because it was their land. But when the white man came there and made laws, of course as the buffalo is down, trying to save the woodland buffalo. . . .

Yeah, prairie buffalos, they brought them in from the south. But the woodland buffalo always was there. Yeah, they pretty near cleaned out those woodland buffalos that's when they brought the prairie buffalos in. Oh, it helped people you know, but a lot of people had to poach to get a buffalo to feed their family. What else are you going to do, you know? You know you try to get something to feed your family, their family can't starve to death because there's thousands of those prairie buffalos, you know. That's what happened to woodland buffalo, I know. There was quite a few thousand, but what else did they have those days? They had to get those buffalos to feed their family.

They [the Dene people] had no choice. No choice after they brought in the other animals, now the prairie buffalo are totally different. They brought in quite a few thousand of those buffalos. I don't know, two, three thousand into the Park. And then that's why they increased them [the Park boundaries].

Some [of the buffalo] headed more further south, near Birch Mountain area here, the herd that they brought. But they migrated, some of them migrated to try to go back south.

Leslie Laviolette (22 March 2021)

I mean how many buffalo, two barges full of buffalo that they dropped off at Hay Camp, and mixed in with the real bison that were here for a long time. And that, this Ronald Lake [wood bison] herd here, I think there's about 300 original buffalo that have been here for a long time, got away from that herd. These ones migrate by themselves. And I think they became a—there's a little park there now they can't hunt or do anything to them.[88] So that's where we fought for. Cause those were original buffalo, the real bison.

Big John Marcel (18 March 2021)

Well, as far as I know, when Parks took over, and then when everybody had to get out of there if you don't belong to the Park, you know, they were burning houses and everything as far as I know. Parks did that.

Frank Marcel (n.d.)

From what I understand, the Government just went ahead and grabbed as much land as they needed for their own use—no input from the locals. People were not notified of the changes they will face because of this WBNP creation. They just came and took our traplines without telling us anything. Most of the trappers in the area of Birch River, Birch Mountains, and Peace River area were all ACFN members.

Keltie Paul and Edouard Trippe de Roche (25 November 2020)

KP: The park superintendents [each] had different ideas. Every time you get a new superintendent in, he's got a different idea based on probably another myth of what the Park is. At first, you know, people in Canada were saying, 'well, we have to save the Native populations.' And then, 'we have to save the buffalo. And this is how we're gonna do it.' And it's all based on nonsense. I would call it bureaucratic nonsense. That was based on a myth, total mythology, it has nothing to do with anything.

So they moved the people around, they moved the bison around, and very much you can kind of see parallels between moving the bison around

and moving the people around to try to control everything. And they also have different ideas. One superintendent might think 'well, it'd be [a] really good idea to have the Park for trophy shooting the buffalo. We get a whole bunch of money from rich Americans, and we let them shoot our buffalo and then they take a head home.' Honest to goodness, this is what some people thought. And then the next superintendent will come in and he'd go, 'well, you know, this isn't what we're here for. We're here to preserve and protect the bison. And then that means that we have to come down on the Native people,' because they were kind of treated like the wolves. I don't know if you know this, but this has been causing controversy over on the other side, about the wolves and the caribou? So they treated the Native people like wolves. They said, 'okay, you can't, you're not supposed to hunt bison here, you don't hunt bison there.' The only thing was that if they got outside the Park, which is another story entirely, then they could shoot them and eat them if they were free of disease.

So, I guess that's what I'm trying to say, is there was, there's been a lot of different superintendents coming in with very many different ideas. There's been a lot of epochs: the conservation epochs, the preservation epoch, and the management epoch. And in each of those three time periods, there's all these people coming in with very different ideas, and remember, superintendents get replaced, then somebody goes to another national park, etc. And when you have a regime change like that, you get a whole different somebody coming in with a whole different idea about what they should be doing. But I think the basic thing was that they were basing it on bad data . . .

ST: Do you know if there was any point where government officials were looking for input from the community when they created the Park?

ER: There is no consultation then.

KP: Nothing. They plopped everything down. Just—they had no consultation; they didn't say anything to anybody. They really considered that—when you look back on it—and all of the things that they were doing *with*, I would say, *for* the Native People, not *with* the Native People, the expansion of the residential school, based on that data, everything that they were doing back there, they're justifying by saying, well, it says here . . . so they went with, I guess, prevailing mythology of the time, which was not well formed, not well executed, certainly not researched. And based on [that], I would call it hearsay. . . .

In a lot of ways, they sort of put the bison very much ahead of the people. Their livelihoods, their belief system, and ways of knowing, the ways of knowing that was passed on to their children, their culture, everything.

Ernie "Joe" Ratfat (19 March 2021)

ER: They brought up other ones [the plains bison]. They're smaller buffalo. Yeah.

ST: And that's when they made the Park bigger, too?

ER: Yes.

ST: Did they ever tell anybody that's what they were going to do?

ER: No, they just—they don't tell people back then. They just do whatever they wanted to do. Well, we had no say, when it came to government things, we had no say. They just did it.

Alice Rigney (16 March 2021)

I did hear something about a commitment for 100 years [that the lands were being leased for the Park], which is coming up next year. And it sure would be nice to find the document if it does exist and present it to the Parks. And never mind the apology, just give us back our land. . . .

And they did that, you know. They were there and bringing those diseased prairie buffaloes here, I mean they were diseased because of their travel from Wainwright or wherever it is, and then on a train and then on a barge to here, you know, to put them in the Park. I remember going to Hay Camp in the Park, my sister actually lived with a park warden there and how they used to corral them, and they used to slaughter so many and that was for, they would ship them south. The hides would be sent south for tanning [as part of the commercial slaughter in the 1960s and 1970s]. But the buffalo there were not slaughtered for the people, for the community here.

Mary "Cookie" Simpson (11 March 2021)

CS: There was no consultation at all. That word didn't even exist a long time ago [for talking to Indigenous Peoples]. They never came to my grandpa or my uncles or my father, and they never ever did say, 'hey, we're going to be expanding, we're going to be bringing buffalos in, and we're going to take this land.' That was their [the Indigenous Peoples] traditional land and they just lost everything . . .

ST: And one other thing that we've heard about when the park was made, we've heard from a couple of Elders, that they were told that the Park would be just temporary?

CS: Yes, yes. That's what my dad always said. He said, 'when are they gonna leave anyways?' he would say, 'because it's only temporary.' And that's what they said when they first brought the buffalo in, when they first made the Park. They said it was just temporary and the land would go back to them, to the people. And that was it. He always said that, and my uncles always said that too . . . they're all gone now. But they [the Elders] would talk about it, and I would sit there and listen to them. That was one of the main things they said when we talked about the Park, was that it was just on loan.

ST: And do you know how long it was supposed to be before they gave it back?

CS: No, I never heard them say a date.

ST: So that means that all that land right now, that's up there that Parks Canada has, it's all loaned, it's not theirs?

CS: That's right. It's not theirs. They just took it. They just took it, and they never even gave anything to the Aboriginal People that were living there. They never give them nothing. They told them they couldn't shoot the animals. They couldn't shoot the buffaloes that they brought in. They didn't even get reimbursed for nothing. They just took their land and that was it. You know, they're just so evil.

Beverly Tourangeau (21 March 2021)

The Park had, from my understanding, from what the Elders have told me that have passed on, they had a 100-year agreement. The Park signed an agreement, a 100-year agreement. Well, that should be coming up soon. I think it was 1929 when they signed that 100-year agreement. But, from my understanding, the Park was established in 1922. You know, that agreement [that the Park lands would be returned to the people after the 100 years had passed] should become an absolute.

And, because the Park did this, they established the Park without consulting with the Native people. You know, they should have consulted with the Native people. Now they have eleven different First Nations [who are members of the Park's Cooperative Management Committee]. They're called Indigenous Partners, and ACFN is one of them. And they're from Alberta and NWT. But, in the beginning, they never consulted with First Nations

or with anybody in Treaty 8. They just established the Park. And they had released the buffalo in 1929, by Buffalo Landing by Hay Camp, Stony Island. That's how little I know. But from what I heard, people were kicked out of the Park and out of Birch Mountain, but I was told by an Elder there's lots of ACFN graveyards in by Birch Mountain.

Leslie Wiltzen (21 January 2021)

Leslie discusses the oral histories shared by his uncle Elder Pat Marcel about the impacts of losing access to harvesting areas in the Park after the 1926 expansion. A portion of this interview is available as a digital audio recording online.[89]

When [the Park] was expanded, [that] was when the Dene people, the Chipewyan people of Fort Chip, were really affected—through the expansion, because the original boundaries of Wood Buffalo National Park were the Peace River. The Peace River north was the original boundaries when it was formed in 1922. And it was not until the bison crossed the Peace River into the Peace-Athabasca Delta that the Park boundaries were expanded to its present-day borders.

And that's when we were really affected because although we were on, as our Treaty says, 'the Chipewyan Indians of the Athabasca, of the Birch, the Slave, the Peace, and the Gull,' were already on the Peace and were all already on the Slave . . . and that expansion of the Park, from the Peace River boundaries to its current-day boundary, that's when it really affected [the Dene]. That's when everybody was forced [to leave]. And, you know, talking with my Uncle Pat and oral history that I have, that he had written, it explains that. It explains really a lack of desire of the Dene peoples to go [to leave their territories in the Park] originally because . . . you know, hunting in the Park and the Delta, that was a good area for providing food and a living for families of Dene people. And then 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 traditional territory. So when they were given the option [to transfer], when they were asked to leave, Uncle Pat said that was the harder part for them. They knew it was going to be rougher on the outside [of the Park boundaries] because the furs had been depleted by non-Aboriginal trappers coming

down. So, resources and, you know, if you're hunting along the river system . . . you're hunting for fur-bearing animals, but you're also hunting moose, you're hunting all the animals that you need to survive. And 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 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 being able to provide food for your family was difficult. . . .

You know, the question that's always, always on my mind is, we go back to that expansion of Wood Buffalo National Park, and for some reason, the Chipewyan people took the brunt. It's our traditional territory, like I said previously, we've got documentation that verifies that Dene people have been in that area for tens of thousands of years. It is truly traditional territory.

Anonymous Fort Chipewyan Elder (7 February 1974)

One Elder had told me of this. His name was Pierre Whitehead. He was a Chief. The land was loaned to the government for the buffaloes. This was mentioned to me by Philip Gibot. It seemed to me that the land was given to them, but apparently it was just loaned to them. After five years, the population of the buffalo [in Buffalo National Park in Wainwright] grew in size. It was at this time the [federal] government had, as the provincial government for the land south of the Peace River, for the Wood Buffalo National Park. Now that land is also filled with buffalo as far as the twenty-seventh Baseline.

Anonymous ACFN Elder (11 March 2021)

A long time ago, there were two parks, a long time ago. That first park they made is across Peace River [north of the river]. And, when they brought in buffalos, 1925, 1930 maybe, then they took the other park in the Delta [south of the Peace River]. That's the old-timers—they call it the old park and new park. They [the government] wanted to bring buffalos here, to the Delta. And then the story is, what they said, my Elders, they said they would borrow it, they were going to give it back. They never gave it back yet . . . and they borrowed, took over the Park. They took a big one.

They borrowed it, so they have to give it back. You borrow, you have to give it back. That's the stories anyway.

Anonymous ACFN Elder (16 March 2021)

Yeah, it's not fair at all. You know what I mean? Our people never went to the Parks after that [after the expansion]. [In the] '60s and '70s, my mom, I mean my dad and my brothers never went hunting there. You don't even dare go across the river. You know what I mean? [My family would] jump on their dogs and they went to north shore. We weren't allowed. We weren't even thinking that way. That's how much they brainwashed the Indians there. We could go to north shore, but I mean on the rivers, on the Park side, we never did go there.

So like, I don't know nobody, even today, I will not go to the Park. I wouldn't even think of going to the Park. You know what I mean? Yes, I mean all our family, nobody goes to the Parks. Nobody. Even today, I wouldn't even go to the Parks. I'd rather go up to our [ACFN's reserves] country. Like my dad won't talk about it but, they will not do it, they will not go. We had our own area to go, us guys, but we never shot a buffalo. Our family never saw the buffalo, put it that way. Because no one knows in those days, eh? And most of controllers were white. They didn't care how us Indians [were] those days. Right?