



Information Bulletin

SOME AREAS OF WOOD BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK NOW OPEN FOLLOWING TEMPORARY CLOSURES

FORT SMITH, NT, December 8th, 2023 — Some areas of Wood Buffalo National Park have re-opened following temporary closures put in place due to wildfire operations and active fire on the landscape.

While much of the fire is now dormant, recently burned forests should be avoided because of multiple hazards including ash pits and danger trees. Danger trees are those with burnt root systems, or trees that are partially burnt and can fall easily without warning regardless of wind conditions. Despite significant snowfall in the Fort Smith area, ash pits continue to pose a risk to land users. **Do not enter an area or road that is currently under a closure order, and do not move barricades —closures are in place for your safety.**

What is an ash pit, and how can you avoid them?

Ash pits are holes in the ground filled with ash and embers, and they pose a significant risk to land users, even in winter. It is important to understand that given the extreme drought codes seen in the Fort Smith area, certain areas of the fire are continuing to smoke and smoulder underground. The previous drought record reached in the Fort Smith area was 840. A drought code over 300 is considered extreme, and this year the drought code sat around 1,200 for many months.

As a result, the fire has burned deep in the ground and is expected to 'hold over' throughout the winter months in some areas. The fire is burning under the peat moss, which acts as a thermal blanket and keeps heat in these pits. Some ash pits have the potential to be deeper than 3-feet and could still cause significant burn injuries.

If you are travelling through the park and notice that there is less snow in previously burned areas, it is safe to assume that there is significant heat present. Land users are asked to exercise extreme caution when in forested areas.

The following areas of Wood Buffalo National Park are now open:

- **Hay Camp Road is now OPEN**
 - While crews have completed danger tree assessments and felling immediately next to the road, there are still partially burnt trees or trees with burnt root systems that remain along the length of the Hay Camp Road. These trees can fall easily and without warning, regardless of wind conditions and drivers should use extreme caution when travelling the Hay Camp Road.
 - Additionally, ash pits still present a danger, despite the presence of snow.
- **The Salt River Day Use Area is now open to the public, including the Dëldël Kué Day Use Shelter**



Information Bulletin

- **Please note:** the wood stove inside the shelter is not available for use at this time due to damage sustained during wildfire operations – we apologize for this inconvenience.
- **Trails in this area remain closed until further notice.** Do not go around or move barricades – these closures are in place for your safety, as trees in this area are likely to fall easily and without warning.

The Salt Plains Day Use Area and Parsons Lake Road remain under an area closure due to significant damage and infrastructure loss at the Salt Plains Day Use Area. The viewing platform, bathrooms and picnic tables were lost in the fire, and hazardous debris and danger trees remain in the area.

As a reminder, the following area closures remain in place:

- Parsons Lake Road
- Salt Plains Road and Day-Use Area
- All hiking trails within Wood Buffalo National Park
- Kettle Point Road and Group Campsite
- Pine Lake Campground
- Backcountry camping is prohibited
- There is a No Stopping—Traffic Control Zone in place for Pine Lake Road starting at the Salt River Bridge (park boundary) until the road's junction with Parsons Lake Road.

For up-to-date information regarding roadways throughout the season, please call the Visitor Centre at 1-867-872-7960, or visit the road conditions webpage here: <https://parks.canada.ca/pn-np/nt/woodbuffalo/visit/roads>.

For all other important bulletins, please refer to the Important Bulletins webpage: https://parks.canada.ca/pn-np/nt/woodbuffalo/Securite_Safety/bulletins

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