

**In the Beginning (Prior to 1900)**  
 For centuries, Aboriginal peoples travelled through the western landscape. The Beaver Hills provided relief along the journey; a place to hunt, gather and rest. Aspen thickets surrounded by prairie provided forage, protection and plenty of water for plains bison, elk, moose and deer.



**Men of Vision – Establishment of Elk Park (1900 to 1910)**

On March 28, 1906 Canada's first wildlife sanctuary was established. Five local men pledged by bond to the Dominion Government of Canada to protect one of the last remaining herds of elk in Canada. William Andrew Dickson Lees, Johnson Carscadden, Ellsworth Simmons, William H. Cooper and Francis Austin Walker signed a \$5000 bond to establish Elk Park, a 41 square kilometre fenced enclosure around Astotin Lake.

In 1908, Elk Park was renamed Elk Island Park.



**Return of the Plains Bison (circa 1910 – 1920)**

The plains bison in Elk Island National Park originated from a private herd owned by Charles Allard and Michel Pablo of Roman, Montana. For \$245 a head, the Dominion Government of Canada purchased Pablo's share of the herd. In 1907, approximately 400 plains bison were shipped to the Park by railway, via Lamont, en route to their final destination, Buffalo National Park at Wainwright. Forty-eight animals eluded capture; their offspring remain in Elk Island to this day. This herd flourished and over the next century thousands of plains bison from the Park were sent to other natural areas in North America to re-establish herds where they once roamed. Their return represents one of the most significant events in Canadian conservation history.

Elk Island National Park designated 2007 as the "Year of the Bison" marking 100 years of bison conservation.

**Growth and Development (1920 – 1930)**

By 1922, the Park was increased in size to allow for growing wildlife populations. Development for visitor use began in 1923 and by 1924, the Elk Island Parkway was constructed from the north to the south.

**Elk Island Becomes a National Park (1930 – 1940)**

In 1930, the Park was renamed Elk Island National Park as declared under the new *National Parks Act* and was obligated to preserve the natural environment for the enjoyment and use by the people of Canada and for future generations.



**Dual Mandate for the National Park – Preservation and Recreation (1940 – 1950)**

New recreation facilities were constructed after World War II including two bungalow camps, a dance hall, a band shell, tennis courts and a service station. Sandy Beach Campground opened in 1947. In keeping with the preservation mandate, a program was initiated, in 1941, to bring back the beaver to the Beaver Hills after centuries of over-trapping. Today more than 1000 beaver reside in the national park.

**Ukrainian Pioneer Home (1950 to 1960)**

In 1951, Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent officially opened the Ukrainian Pioneer Home, a replica of a typical home built by early Ukrainian settlers. The Ukrainian Pioneer Home was federally designated as the oldest purpose-built Ukrainian museum in Canada. The home remains unoccupied, as it does not meet today's building standards.



**Wood Bison (1960 – 1970)**

Thought to be extinct, a small herd of pure wood bison were located in 1957 in a remote corner of Wood Buffalo National Park. For conservation purposes, 23 animals were transported to Elk Island National Park in 1965. Most wild populations of wood bison that currently exist in North America can be traced back to the Elk Island herd.

**Fire Management (1970 – 1980)**

In 1979, fire was reintroduced into the Park through carefully planned prescribed burns. After decades of fire suppression, the aspen forest in Elk Island National Park began to dominate the grassland areas. Fire became recognized as an essential tool to re-establish the balance of forest, grassland and other types of vegetation, thus maintaining healthy ecosystems.



**Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction Program (1980 – 1990)**

In 1987, Elk Island National Park began a trumpeter swan reintroduction program. The trumpeter swan population declined in the 1800's when the settlement of the prairies resulted in over-hunting and loss of critical habitat.

After an absence of over a hundred years, the largest waterfowl in North America has once again firmly established itself in the Park.

**Beaver Hills Ecosystem (1990 – 2000)**

At the turn of the millennium, the Beaver Hills Initiative was established in collaboration with Elk Island National Park, municipal partners, environmental groups, the provincial government and industry. Its mission is to support cooperative efforts to sustain the quality of water, land, air, natural resources and community development.

**A Place for Protection and People (2000 and Beyond)**

The year 2006 marked the 100th anniversary for Elk Island as the first wildlife preserve in Canada. The Park has evolved in many ways, but the vision remains the same. Today it continues to be a place for nature and for people.

A hundred years have come and gone, and with that vision, an incredible legacy began. Imagine what the next hundred years will bring...



**HAVING A SAFE VISIT**

Parks Canada wants to help you enjoy your trip and stay safe. Please limit your impact on park wildlife by giving all animals the respect they deserve and the space they need. Enjoy a safe visit and ensure that future generations have the chance to see wildlife that is truly wild.

- To Increase Your Enjoyment While on the Trails**
- Travel with others, on established trails, during daylight hours.
  - Dress in layers, carry sufficient water, insect repellent and sunscreen.
  - Pick only trails suitable for your fitness level. Let someone know where you are going, and when you expect to be back.

Give animals the right of way and stay at least three bus lengths away (100 metres).



- Remember, You Are in Bison Country!**
- Make noise to let the bison know you are in the area.
  - Keep a watchful eye on the bison and the trail, leave a wide berth and walk slowly past.
  - Avoid approaching bison. They may charge if they feel threatened.
  - Retreat immediately to the trailhead if signs of aggression occur.
  - Bicycling is not recommended on the trails.

**Elk Alert!**

- Cow elk can be especially dangerous during calving season (mid-May to the end of June).
- Bull elk are most dangerous during mating season (mid-September to the end of October).

**If You Are Approached by a Predator**  
 Predators occur in many shapes and sizes and help prevent overpopulation of prey species, which helps maintain ecological integrity. If a predator approaches you, send a clear message that you are NOT potential prey. Keep your pet on a leash and walk them during daylight hours only.

**THE BIG SIX**

**Elk or Wapiti**  
*Cervus canadensis*  
**Size:** second largest member of the deer family at 4 to 5 feet tall  
**Average Weight:** bulls up to 450 kg  
**Pelage:** mainly medium brown with a cream coloured rump  
**Head:** dark brown throat mane, only males have antlers  
**Diet:** grazer – eats grasses and sedges in the spring and summer; browses on twigs in winter



**Moose**  
*Alces alces anderson*  
**Size:** largest member of deer family at 6 to 7 feet tall  
**Average Weight:** bull 450 kg  
**Pelage:** dark brown upperparts fade to grey on legs  
**Head:** long with a humped nose and a bell hanging from the throat. Males have shovel like antlers.  
**Diet:** browser – eats twigs in winter and leaves in summer; aquatic plants for salt

**BISON**

Bison are the largest native terrestrial mammals in North America. Wood bison and plains bison have the same general characteristics. The bison in Elk Island National Park live in separate fenced areas of the park to ensure they don't interbreed.

**Bison or Buffalo? So what is the difference, anyway?**  
 Simply put, the correct term for the largest land mammal in North America is bison. Bison may resemble their relatives, but they are different species than that of the Asian water buffalo and African buffalo that live in Southeast Asia and Africa.

There are three distinct sub-species of bison in the world today. European bison live in Poland and European portions of the former Soviet Union. Plains bison and wood bison are exclusive to North America.



**Wood Bison (south of Highway 16)**  
*Bison bison athabasca*  
**Size:** average length 3.9 metres  
**Average Weight:** bull 840 kg  
**Pelage:** winter coat is dark brown; little or no chap hair on forelegs. Cape does not form a distinct boundary from the rest of the body.  
**Head:** massive heavy head and longer neck; straight long hair on head, sloping down on forehead, horns extending over hair, small pointed beard  
**Hump:** square shoulder hump; highest point well forward of shoulder  
**Tail:** longer with long hairs  
**Diet:** grasses & sedges

**Plains Bison (north of Highway 16)**  
*Bison bison bison*  
**Size:** average length 3.4 metres  
**Average Weight:** bull 730 kg  
**Pelage:** winter coat is medium brown; chaps of long hair on forelegs – usually lighter in colour. In summer, cape forms a distinct boundary from the rest of body.  
**Head:** massive heavy head and short neck; frizzy hair on head  
**Hump:** round shoulder hump; highest point over front legs  
**Tail:** short  
**Diet:** grasses & sedges

**BIRDER'S PARADISE**

Elk Island National Park is a transitional zone between boreal forest and aspen parkland containing several distinct habitats within a small area. This variety of upland habitat and extensive wetlands provides opportunities for many species to forage and breed.

Of the 253 species recorded in the national park, 137 are known to breed here.

**Trumpeter Swan Conservation Success**  
 Trumpeter swans used to be abundant in North America, however by the early 1900s they were hunted to near extinction. The trumpeter swan conservation project began in Elk Island National Park in 1987, with the objective of establishing a migratory, breeding flock of ten or more pairs in the Park. Minimizing harassment to the swans and maximizing their sense of security is vital to the success of the transplant program.

Please remain in your vehicle or if hiking, avoid approaching trumpeter swans. They are extremely susceptible to human disturbance and may not return to the Park.

**VEGETATIVE COMMUNITIES**

Located in the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region, Elk Island National Park is a unique transitional area where aspen dominate the lower boreal mixed wood forest. Vegetation patterns change constantly due to the Park's geography, climate and a variety of other natural processes.

The Park includes a variety of habitats for plant and animal life. Hummocky terrain creates a variety of microclimates that support a rich mosaic of aspen forest, wetlands, boreal mixed-wood forest, sedge meadows, shrubs and grasslands.

