

ELK ISLAND NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA

VISITOR GUIDE

Aussi disponible en français



WELCOME

Welcome to Elk Island National Park of Canada, a beautiful, unique and historically rich national park. The Park protects one of the most endangered habitats in the country, the Southern Boreal Plains and Plateaux Natural Region. One of the few places in North America where you can see all of the original grazing species coexisting; the untamed beauty of Elk Island will impress you for a lifetime.

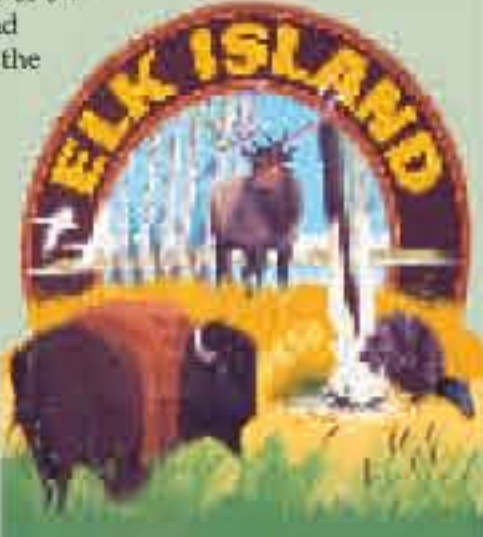
A Place for Nature
Elk Island is a unique transitional area that towers thirty to sixty metres above the surrounding plains. The Park's role in the conservation of rare, threatened and endangered species has continued since its creation as the first wildlife preserve in Canada in 1906.

A Place for Culture and History
Archaeological research has identified more than two hundred Aboriginal camps and stone tool-making sites within Elk Island. Over the years, this area has been home to Aboriginal peoples, and German, English and Ukrainian settlers.

National Parks Are Places for People
Canadians and visitors to Canada come and experience solitude, nature, outdoor recreation, and history.

Places for the Future
The national parks of Canada protect and present significant examples of our country's natural and cultural heritage, in the past, today, and for future generations. Elk Island National Park celebrates its past, while looking to the future.

Welcome and enjoy your national park experience!



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are pets allowed on the trails?
Yes, pets must be kept on a leash at all times. Please exercise caution while on the trails due to potential conflicts with wildlife.

Are bicycles allowed on the trails?
Yes, please travel at a reasonable speed and make noise. Startled animals may react aggressively. Bicycling is not permitted on Amisk Wuche Trail or the Living Waters Boardwalk but is recommended on the main parkway and other roadways.

Are boats allowed on the lakes?
Yes, non-motorized boats are allowed on Astotin Lake and Oster Lake. You may sail, canoe and kayak on Astotin Lake, and have up to 4 canoes or kayaks on Oster Lake. Boaters should be prepared to self-rescue.

Can you swim in the lakes?
Yes, you may swim in Astotin Lake. *Swimmer's Itch* is present and may cause skin irritation and itching. Take a shower (outdoor shower located at Astotin Lake) and wipe off with a towel immediately after leaving the water.

Why can't I pick berries or flowers or feed the animals in the Park?
Plant matter plays many important roles in nature and is a source of food for wildlife. Human food can make animals sick and interfere with their natural ability to gather food. Removing, altering or damaging anything found in the Park is considered poaching and is illegal.

Why is this national park named 'Elk Island'?
When Elk Park was established in 1906, it consisted of a 41 km² area surrounding what was formerly known as Island Lake (now called Astotin Lake). In 1913, when the area was designated a Dominion Park, the name Elk Island Park was selected because of two outstanding features, the elk and Island Lake.

Do I have to pay to drive through the Park?
Elk Island is bisected by the Yellowhead Highway (Hwy 16) that divides the Park into the main park and the wood bison area. As in the mountain national parks, there is no fee to travel on a public highway for through travel. Visitors who use parkways such as the Elk Island Parkway or wish to stop and use park facilities are charged a park user fee. A portion of these fees goes towards maintenance of scenic drives.

SUMMER

BICYCLING

- main parkway and other roads
- for your safety, not recommended on trails

BIRDWATCHING

- 253 of Alberta's 370 species have been sighted
- located on several flight paths, habitats and at the meeting point of several natural regions, all creating a paradise for birds and birders alike

BOAT LAUNCH

- canoe, kayak and sail boat launch
- picnic shelter, washrooms and parking

BOATING

- canoes, kayaks and sailboats on Astotin Lake
- canoes and kayaks on Oster Lake; self-rescue
- motorized boats are not permitted
- boat rentals are not available

CAMPING

- Sandy Beach Campground
- Oster Lake Campground, by reservation only
- group camping

FAMILY FUN

- Soccer field, horseshoe pits and playground located in the Astotin Lake Area

GOLF COURSE

- nine-hole golf course located in the Astotin Lake Area
- equipment and cart rentals available from pro shop
- golf fees do not include park user fees
- licensed clubhouse with meal service; open to the public

PICNICKING

- picnic tables, fire boxes and firewood provided
- located throughout the Astotin Lake Area
- accessible picnic sites at Tawayik Lake and boat launch
- Beaver Bay picnic area (not accessible)



PROGRAMS - INTERPRETIVE

- environmental education programs for students
- evening theatre, guest speaker series, wildlife-watching and junior naturalist programs

SHOWERS

- free hot showers at Sandy Beach Campground; campers only
- cold outdoor shower at the beach at Astotin Lake

SWIMMING

- in Astotin Lake
- risk of contracting *Swimmer's Itch*; shower off immediately

TRAILS - ACCESSIBLE

- Shoreline Trail is wheelchair accessible
- an all-terrain wheelchair, manually operated by a companion, is available on loan, at no charge, during the summer season

TRAILS - HIKING

- trail maps are available at the Gates, Warden Office, Visitor Information Centre, Campground, or on our website
- Please keep pets on a leash at all times

WASHROOMS

- flush toilets in Astotin Lake Area, Astotin Theatre and Visitor Information Centre

WEATHER AND TRAIL SAFETY

- be prepared for rapid changes in the weather
- take along a trail map
- travel with others and keep your group together
- stay on the trail; retrace your steps if unsure of your route or if you encounter threatening wildlife
- cell phone reception is unreliable

WILDLIFE VIEWING

- hike a trail
- stay awhile!

WINTER

BIRDWATCHING

- year round residents flock in winter
- chickadees, woodpeckers, nuthatches, blue jays, magpies and grouse

CAMPING

- free winter camping at the boat launch
- Oster Lake group camping, by reservation only; must hike or ski in

PICNICKING

- cook shelters located in Astotin Lake Area, Tawayik Lake
- pavilion cook shelter near shores of Astotin Lake
- picnic tables, fire boxes and firewood provided

PROGRAMS - INTERPRETIVE

- environmental education programs for students
- outreach education, Parks Canada in the classroom

PULL OFFS

- located on main parkway, for safe viewing of wildlife and scenery

TRAILS - CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

- trail maps are available at the Gates, Visitor Information Centre, Warden Office, or on our website
- some trails are groomed



TRAILS - SNOWSHOEING

- recommended on Lakeview Trail, Amisk Wuche Trail and Astotin Lake
- please do not walk on groomed trails

WASHROOMS

- flush toilets at Astotin Theatre and Visitor Information Centre
- pump-out toilets at the boat launch parking lot and most trailheads

WEATHER AND TRAIL SAFETY

- check local weather forecast before heading out on trails
- bring along extra clothing to protect yourself from the elements
- dress in layers; adjust to prevent overheating or overcooling
- bring water and food
- tell someone where you are going and when you will be back
- beware of thin ice

WILDLIFE VIEWING

- smaller mammals such as porcupine, snowshoe hare and weasels enjoy the warmth of the winter sun
- excellent photography opportunities
- keep a safe distance and study animal tracks

WILDLIFE VIEWING

Spring is calving time. Cow elk hide their calves for 10 days or more after birth. Orange-coloured bison calves are easy to spot on the landscape at this time of year. Animals can be more aggressive during the calving season; extra caution should be taken to give wildlife plenty of room.

Summer is the breeding season for bison. The "roaring" of the bull bison can be heard day and night, as bulls challenge each other in the rutting ritual. Opportunities to view plains bison, moose, elk and deer are best at dusk and dawn as animals feed before bedding down. Beavers are also busiest at dusk and dawn.

Autumn is the breeding season for members of the deer family. Elk are highly vocal animals; when alarmed, cows give sharp barks to warn the rest of the group. The whistling bugle of rutting bull elk is a spine-tingling sound and an experience unto itself on a frosty autumn morning.

Winter is an excellent time to watch for elk and moose. Wary, elusive elk are easier to spot as they spend more daylight hours foraging for food.

Year Round Scenic Wildlife Viewing Drives
There is something new to see with each season. Tune in to **FM 93.3** for up to date information on what is happening in Elk Island.

1) Yellowhead Highway (Hwy 16) bisects Elk Island National Park for 10 km. As you travel on the highway, watch for wood bison to the south and plains bison to the north.

2) Elk Island Parkway is the major roadway through the Park. 20 km north and south. Plains bison, moose, elk, deer and coyotes may be seen. Bison herds gather during the rut (mid-July to mid-August); elk herds are commonly seen during the winter. Take your time!

3) Tawayik Lake Picnic Area is located 1 km off the Elk Island Parkway. The short drive takes you to a serene lakeshore picnic area with an accessible viewing platform and telescope. Shorebirds and waterfowl are abundant and bison often graze in the area.

Travelling on the Parkway
Be patient and careful as motorists may not be familiar with the Park and may stop suddenly. Animals may attempt to flee from a car by continuing to run alongside the vehicle. If safe to do so, pull over or slow down until the animal leaves the road.

Exhibits and Viewpoints are located at most trailheads. The most spectacular views can be seen on the shores of Astotin and Tawayik Lakes, especially at sunrise and sunset. When safe to do so, pull over to enjoy the wildlife and scenery; use a pull off, a trailhead parking lot, or watch for signs indicating viewpoints.

From Dusk to Dawn
Be extra careful at sunrise, sunset and at night, this is when animals are most likely to be on the road. Animals may panic when they see your headlights; slow down until you are well past them.

Caution! You Are In Bison Country
If you encounter bison while in your vehicle:

- bison are used to motor vehicles and may 'appear' docile;
- stay in your vehicle and do not approach bison;
- wait for the bison to move off the road or drive slowly around the group;
- do NOT honk your horn when you encounter a bison herd; and
- hurrying the bison may result in damage to your vehicle.

*Report injured or aggressive bison to Parks Canada staff.

Distances (in km) from...		North Gate
Highway 16		
0.0	Highway 16	19.5
0.8	Elk Island Visitor Centre	18.7
1.5	South Gate	18.0
4.7	Tawayik Lake/Oster Road	14.8
6.7	Shirley Lake/Simmons Trailhead	12.8
7.1	Hayburger Trailhead	12.4
11.7	Moss Lake Trailhead/Picnic Area	7.8
14.0	Astotin Lake Area*	5.5
14.4	Amisk Wuche Trailhead	5.1
16.3	Beaver Pond Trailhead	1.9
19.5	North Gate	0.0
25.0	Lamont	5.5

*Astotin Lake Area is the focal point for many visitor activities

CAMPING

Sandy Beach Campground
Main Loop - Walk-in Tenting - RV Sites - Overflow

- located in the Astotin Lake Area
- open: May long weekend to Thanksgiving weekend (weather permitting)
- staffed part-time; self-registration
- 77 semi-serviced sites; advanced reservation and first-come first-served
- accessible
- potable water
- sanitation
- flush toilets, free showers, firepits and pay telephone



Sandy Beach Campground Reservation
1-877-737-3783 (1-877-RESERVE)
www.pccamping.ca

Overflow camping is only available when Main and RV loops are full. No fires are permitted.

Group Camping is by reservation only. Call: 780-922-5833.

- Sandy Beach is available May to September, except on long weekends. Minimum 10 people, maximum 60.
- Oster Lake is a limited access site that is available year round and can accommodate up to 75 people.

Winter Camping is permitted free of charge for self-contained vehicles in the boat launch parking lot.

Long-weekend Liquor Ban at Sandy Beach Campground
Elk Island is a place where families can enjoy an abundance of activities, reconnect with nature and experience a national park at its best. To encourage this memorable experience the Superintendent has banned the possession and consumption of alcohol on all long weekends from May to September. These liquor bans are enforced for the duration of each long weekend.

BARE Campground Program
Please store all food and any other items that attract wildlife, in a hard-sided vehicle when not in use.

BEAVER HILLS DARK SKY PRESERVE

Elk Island expands its scope of protection by including the dark sky. On September 3, 2006, the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve (BHDSPP) was designated through a partnership among Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada - Edmonton Centre and the Parks Canada Agency. Elk Island is the third site in the Parks Canada family to be designated as a Dark Sky Preserve.

The BHDSPP encompasses all of Elk Island National Park and the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area for a total protected area of 293 km². Within it are a wide range of habitats and numerous wildlife species.

The Beaver Hills DSP will protect nocturnal habitats for present and future generations and encourage public enjoyment and awareness of the cultural heritage of the night sky. It will also help reduce artificial light glare, increasing the visibility of the night sky, to benefit all life on Earth.

Celebrate the dark sky on Labour Day long weekend in the Park.



PARK USER FEES

National park user fees support the maintenance of scenic drives, trails, picnic areas, information services and interpretive opportunities for visitors. Park fees are an investment in the future, so that generations to come will also enjoy all that our national parks and historic sites have to offer. Parks Canada offers you quality services and excellent value.

Day Pass
Valid from the date of issue until 4 p.m. the following day, in any national park. Children under 6 enter free. For longer stays you can use your day passes as a credit to upgrade to an annual pass. Ask Parks Canada staff for more information.

To Purchase Your Park Pass Before you arrive:

- call us at 780-992-2950 or toll free at 1-800-748-PARK
- e-mail: elk.island@pc.gc.ca
- national park passes are available at the Strathcona County Taxation Office, Sherwood Park

At the Park Gates, Visitor Information Centre or Warden Office

- major credit cards, Debit, Travellers Cheques or cash
- day passes are available 24-hours a day from the Automated Pass Machines by Visa, MasterCard, American Express or coin.

Early Bird discounts are available for Elk Island National Park Annual Passes from Dec. 1 to March 31.

Vehicles must display a valid park pass at all times.

Your Fees At Work

Potable water in the Astotin Lake Area and at the Visitor Information Centre

In an effort to provide better services for park visitors, resurfacing of the main Parkway and five new pull-off areas will allow for better wildlife viewing and will enhance public safety.

REGULATIONS

KEEP THE WILD IN WILDLIFE
To preserve Canada's natural and cultural heritage for future generations, visitors to Elk Island National Park must comply with national park regulations. Park Wardens work in co-operation with other conservation agencies to deter poaching, conserve wildlife, protect natural resources, and to ensure your safety.

The Park offers wonderful opportunities to observe wild animals in their natural surroundings. Wildlife should be treated with respect and great caution.

Keep 100 metres (300 feet) away from large mammals. Wild animals are unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Never approach nesting colonies, dens, lairs, beaver lodges, dams or an animal with young.

Do not touch or feed wildlife. Your body odour or chemicals on your skin can harm wildlife. Human food may be difficult for the animals to digest and may condition them to being fed, resulting in the loss of their ability to fend for themselves.

Minimize wildlife harassment. Calling or enticing an animal puts you and the animal at risk. Elk bugling, game calling and coyote howling are considered wildlife harassment and are prohibited.

Keep pets on a leash. For your safety, pets must be kept on a leash at all times. Droppings must also be removed.

Poaching includes killing wildlife, collection of wildlife parts such as skulls, horns and antlers, removal of eggs and picking of flowers, plants, berries, and mushrooms. Poaching is strictly prohibited.

Stay on existing roads, trails and pathways to avoid trampling the vegetation. Off-road vehicles are prohibited. **Gathering firewood and kindling is prohibited.**

If you witness any of the above activities, require more information on wildlife safety or to report aggressive wildlife, please contact Parks Canada staff.

PARK DIRECTORY (Area Code 780)

**Some facilities are operated on a seasonal basis.*

EMERGENCY:	
RCMP/FIRE/AMBULANCE	911
Warden 24-hour Dispatch Line	992-6389
General Information	992-2950
Environmental Education Programs (office hours)	992-2965
Visitor Information Centre	922-5790
Elk Island Golf Course	998-3161
Campgrounds	
Sandy Beach	992-0017
Group Camping Reservations	922-5833
Campground Reservation Service	
www.pccamping.ca	1-877-737-3783 (1-877-RESERVE)
Parks Canada Wildlife Watch	1-888-927-3367
Alberta Environment Report-A-Poacher	1-800-642-3800
Write to:	
Superintendent	
Elk Island National Park of Canada	
R.R.#1, Site 4	
Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta T8L 2N7	
Fax: 992-2951	
E-mail: elk.island@pc.gc.ca	
www.pc.gc.ca/elkisland	
Jobs @ Parks Canada	
Parks Canada is always hiring.	
Visit www.pc.gc.ca/agen/empl/ to learn about the types of work Parks Canada staff do, the staffing process and information for students and others.	

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