

Ministre de l'Environnement et
du Changement climatique



Minister of Environment
and Climate Change

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0H3

Mr. Kyle Schole
Planning, Development and Project Assistant
Smoky Lake County
P.O. Box 310
Smoky Lake AB T0A 3C0

2022-06-29

FWD: South Saskatchewan River Municipalities

Dear Mr. Schole:

I am pleased to inform you that I have reviewed the recommendation from the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board with respect to the nomination of the North Saskatchewan River (Alberta) to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

As the North Saskatchewan River (Alberta) meets selection and integrity guidelines, I have approved its nomination to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System for further consideration in order to conserve and celebrate Canada's rich river heritage.

As the driving force behind the multi-year project to nominate the North Saskatchewan River (Alberta) to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, Smoky Lake County has every reason to be proud.

I commend you and your partners for your dedication to promoting public appreciation, conservation, and wise use of this important river, and I offer my congratulations to the extended team of volunteers and community partners who have played such a key role in this accomplishment.

I wish to thank you personally for your leadership and passion for sharing the story of the river and its significance with all Canadians.

I look forward to seeing progress by Smoky Lake County on a designation document that further builds a shared vision and strategic direction for management of the river.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P. (il/lui/he/him)



TWEET

718 km of the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta officially nominated as a Canadian Heritage River @ParksCanada @YourAlberta @SmokyLakeCounty @NorthSaskRiver

News Release

For Immediate Release

Governments of Canada and Alberta officially accept nomination of the Alberta section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River

The river can now be considered for full designation in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System

August 3, 2022

Ottawa, Ontario

Parks Canada Agency

Heritage places reflect the rich and varied stories of Canada and provide an opportunity for Canadians to learn more about our diverse history.

Today, the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, and the Honourable Whitney Issik, Alberta Minister of Environment and Parks, announced the official endorsement of the nomination of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River.

The nominated section includes the entire 718 km of the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta from the Banff National Park boundary to the Alberta/Saskatchewan provincial border. The 49 km section of the North Saskatchewan River within Banff National Park was previously designated as a Canadian Heritage River in 1989.

The North Saskatchewan River is a traditional gathering place, travel route and home for Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Ktunaxa, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibwe, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Inuit, and Assiniboine. Further, the river played a pivotal role as the main transportation and communication route from eastern Canada to the Rocky Mountains, from the middle of the 17th century to the middle of the 20th century.

This section of the North Saskatchewan River was nominated by the proponent, Smoky Lake County, for its outstanding cultural value; its role as a primary exploration, transportation, and settlement corridor in Western Canada for thousands of years by Indigenous peoples, as well as during the last four centuries of European and Indigenous exploration, fur trade, and settlement; and also for its outstanding recreational value, affording many diverse opportunities for river travel and adventure.

The nomination complements the potential new national urban park for the Edmonton region, announced in March 2022 under Parks Canada's National Urban Parks Program. Parks Canada, the City of Edmonton, the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, and the Métis Nation of Alberta are collaborating together to lead discussions and engagement around the opportunity for a national urban park in the Edmonton region.

The North Saskatchewan River Valley is one of several sites in the Edmonton region being explored as a potential location for the national urban park. Together, the river valley and park would provide access to nature for communities, protect biodiversity, enhance urban greenspaces for conservation and public enjoyment, and advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Quotes

"For millennia, rivers have been the meeting places, travel routes and trade corridors that stitched this continent together. Canadian Heritage Rivers offer Canadians and visitors a chance to experience great waterways, learn about our shared history, and share in the stewardship of these incredible places. By approving the nomination



of the North Saskatchewan River to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, the Government of Canada recognizes its tremendous value, culturally, historically and recreationally.”

*The Honourable Steven Guilbeault,
Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada*

“Indigenous peoples have a long and deep relationship with the North Saskatchewan River that exists to this day. As our province has grown, more and more Albertans have come to rely on and cherish the North Saskatchewan River, both as a source of drinking water for more than one million people and for the river’s dynamic aquatic ecosystem and the many exciting recreational opportunities that await throughout the entire North Saskatchewan River valley. I’m pleased to endorse the North Saskatchewan River’s nomination as a Canadian Heritage River.”

*The Honourable Whitney Issik,
Minister of Environment and Parks, Government of Alberta*

“For thousands of years, North Saskatchewan River has been an important place of gathering and community for Indigenous peoples. By ensuring its conservation, we can continue to protect the water and honor our collective relationship with nature. Edmontonians are deeply connected to the river and we are committed to making sure it stays clean and accessible for many generations to come.”

*The Honourable Amarjeet Sohi,
Mayor of the City of Edmonton*

“The official nomination of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River is an important step in the process of creating a national urban park in Treaty 6 Territory. Indigenous peoples in Treaty 6 Territory have a deep and spiritual connection to the North Saskatchewan River and its river valley and I am grateful for this development. The river was a traditional travel route, and its valley was home to, and a gathering place for, many diverse Indigenous peoples. This is a positive step in our shared reconciliation journey and will provide opportunities for healing and cultural celebration for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.”

*Grand Chief George Arcand Jr.,
Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations*

The Métis Nation of Alberta is pleased to support this nomination of the North Saskatchewan River to be recognized as a Canadian Heritage River. This river has played a pivotal role in the development of our Nation in Alberta. It was an original transportation route along which our ancestors travelled and sang their songs. It was, and continues to be, a source of cultural, spiritual and economic abundance for our people. Along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River, the Métis people joined our First Nations ancestors, and welcomed our European friends to build homes and communities. It is our responsibility to ensure the long term health and integrity of this river as a source of life and abundance for all people in Alberta.

*President Audrey Poitras,
Métis Nation of Alberta*

“The rich cultural landscape of Smoky Lake County has been nurtured by the North Saskatchewan River, most notably around Métis Crossing, located within the Victoria District National Historic Site of Canada. Since late 2019, the County has led a collaborative Initiative of municipalities, Indigenous communities, and other recreation and stewardship groups to advance the Canadian Heritage River System designation for the North Saskatchewan River across Alberta. This designation will ensure greater awareness and collaboration among jurisdictions and river-users to foster sustainable tourism, business, and recreation opportunities through the recognition and celebration of the outstanding cultural values of this iconic river.”

*Lorne Halisky, Reeve & Division 4 Councillor,
Smoky Lake County*



“The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance is a collaborative partnership that seeks to enhance our understanding of the watershed so we can best manage our rivers, wetlands, and lakes. We began some of the early work towards heritage recognition for the North Saskatchewan River in the early 2000s, and so we are pleased to be supporting this Initiative being led by Smoky Lake County, which aims to amplify the stories and the culture of the North Saskatchewan River and its watershed.”

*Scott Millar, Executive Director,
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance (NSWA)*

Quick Facts

- The North Saskatchewan River's name originates from the Cree, 'kiskâciwani-sîpiy', (meaning "swift-flowing river") or in Blackfoot, 'omaka-ty' (meaning 'Big River').
- The North Saskatchewan River flows within the North Saskatchewan watershed across central Alberta and into Saskatchewan. The river travels 1,287 km from its origin in the Columbia Icefields in the Rocky Mountains of western Alberta to the 'Forks' within the province of Saskatchewan. This route transects four of Alberta's six natural regions: Rocky Mountains, Foothills, Boreal Forest, and Parkland.
- The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is Canada's national river conservation program. Established in 1984, it is a collaboration among the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. It gives national recognition to Canada's outstanding rivers and encourages their long-term management to conserve their natural, cultural and recreational values for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians, now and in the future. There are currently 41 Canadian Heritage Rivers, totalling just over 11,000 kilometers, across the country.
- Establishing Canadian Heritage Rivers is a two-step process: nomination and designation. Each candidate river is assessed according to strict guidelines to determine whether or not it meets the selection and integrity criteria that define Canada's leading rivers. To be considered, the river must have outstanding natural, cultural and/or recreational values, a high level of public support, and it must be demonstrated that sufficient measures will be put in place to ensure those values will be maintained.
- Following the nomination, and to receive full designation under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS), a management plan that describes how the river will be managed must be prepared. The document is then reviewed by the Technical Planning Committee and tabled with the CHRS Board for its recommendation to the appropriate provincial or territorial Minister and Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada to formally designate the river.
- The CHRS Board is made up of federal representatives from the Parks Canada Agency and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, and one representative from each of the participating provinces and territories.
- The Village of Vilna has secured an Alberta Community Partnership (ACP) Grant from Alberta Municipal Affairs, which is supporting work towards a Heritage River Management Plan for the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta.
- The North Saskatchewan River is the 'spiritual center' of the Victoria District National Historic Site located in the Smoky Lake area. Thanks to the efforts of groups such as the Victoria Home Guard Historical Society, the Victoria District was designated a national historic site in 2001. Encompassing more than 10,000 acres, the site commemorates the heritage of Ukrainian and Métis settlement in the area and is the largest national historic site in Western Canada.

Related Links

[Canadian Heritage Rivers System](#)

[Parks Canada website](#)

[Parks Canada National Urban Parks Program](#)

[Alberta Environment and Parks](#)

[Smoky Lake County Heritage River Initiative](#)



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Canada

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Contacts

Kaitlin Power
Press Secretary
Office of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change
819-230-1557
kaitlin.power@ec.gc.ca

Media Relations
Parks Canada Agency
855-862-1812
pc.media@pc.gc.ca

Paul Hamnett
Press Secretary
Alberta Environment and Parks
780-203-0913
paul.hamnett@gov.ab.ca

Kyle Schole
Planning Technician
Smoky Lake County
780-650-2059
kschole@smokylakecounty.ab.ca