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Hon. Catherine McKenna
Minister, Environment and Climate Change
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Hon. Bill Bennett
Minister of Energy and Mines and Minister Responsible for BC Hydro

Dear Ministers:

RE: Report of UNESCO Mission to Wood Buffalo National Park

On March 10, 2017 the World Heritage Committee released a report with its findings from a 10 day monitoring mission that UNESCO sent to Wood Buffalo National Park in the fall of 2016.

The monitoring mission determined that dams on the Peace River and oils sands projects south of Wood Buffalo National Park are having impacts on the Park that are “far more complex and severe than previously thought.” The report concludes that anything less than a “major and timely” response to these threats would “constitute a case for recommending inscription of Wood Buffalo National Park on the List of World Heritage in Danger.”

The UNESCO report is part of a United Nations process initiated by a petition filed by the Mikisew Cree First Nation in December 2014 to have Wood Buffalo National Park added to UNESCO’s List of World Heritage in Danger. Mikisew took this novel step after decades of federal and provincial governments ignoring their concerns about the health of the Peace Athabasca Delta, which is an important area for the exercise of Mikisew’s rights and culture within Wood Buffalo National Park.

The report recommends giving Canadian governments one opportunity to “immediately develop a structured and adequately funded response” to the 17 recommendations in the report. The recommendations fall in three general categories: (1) developing a plan to fix the problems with the Peace Athabasca Delta, (2) enhancing the Park’s resources for environmental monitoring and protection and (3) correcting Canada’s outdated approach to working with indigenous peoples in the Park.

Two of the report’s recommendations focused on the potential impacts of the planned Site C hydroelectric dam on the Peace Athabasca Delta, if completed. UNESCO’s concerns are outlined in nearly six pages of detail related to hydrology, climate change, biodiversity and cumulative effects. The two specific recommendations from the report are:

1. *“To enable informed decision-making, conduct environmental flows assessments to the highest international standards for the Peace, Athabasca and Slave Rivers as they pertain to the health of the Peace-Athabasca Delta (PAD). In order to identify water flows needed to sustain the ecological functioning of the PAD under the circumstances of existing and planned future dams and water withdrawals. These assessments should incorporate projections of climate change and should determine the cumulative effects on the PAD and the property of flow regulation of all existing and proposed dams on all three rivers.”*
2. *“Conduct, in line with the IUCN World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessments, an environmental and social impact assessment of the Site C project and, if moved forward, any other hydropower projects potentially affecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.”*

Given these recommendations, the purpose of this letter is to request what your respective governments are and will be doing to address the impacts of the proposed Site C dam as so well crystalized in the UNESCO report. Specifically, we request that any regulatory granted approvals, by either of your governments, be withdrawn and approval be discontinued until the recommendations stated in this report be undertaken and reported on to the appropriate bodies.

As Melody Lepine, Mikisew’s lead for the UNESCO petition, stated: “This report confirms what Mikisew elders have been saying for years. Canada may have ignored the Peace-Athabasca Delta and the Mikisew Cree in the past, but now the world will be watching. It’s time for Canadian governments to start working with us to protect the Delta.”

We look forward to your timely and positive response.

Yours sincerely,



Galen Armstrong

Sierra Club BC



Andrea Morison

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cc.

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