

March 24, 2025

North Saskatchewan River-adjacent Municipalities

RE: Heritage River Commemorative Plaque and Interpretive Signage

Dear Mayor, Reeve, Councilors,

I am writing on behalf of the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance, and further to a recommendation at our recent Board Meeting, to share some exciting news and encourage collaborative efforts to celebrate our shared heritage along the North Saskatchewan River.

Recently, on September 12, 2024, Smoky Lake County, the NSWA, Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, and Parks Canada celebrated the unveiling of a pair of plaques commemorating the significance of the 718km of North Saskatchewan River which flows across Alberta and being designated as a Canadian Heritage River. This not only honors the rich cultural legacy of our river but also serves as a reminder of the vital role our waterways play in shaping local identities and communities. The plaque is a beautiful addition to the landscape of the Victoria District National Historic Site of Canada, and a source of pride for Smoky Lake County.

Mindful of this milestone, the NSWA Board is inviting municipalities along the North Saskatchewan River to consider establishing your own commemorative heritage plaques, historical markers, or interpretive signage at viewpoints and/or river access points within your jurisdiction. Such markers will serve as important educational tools, enhancing visitors' understanding of our river's history, ecology, and the communities that thrive alongside it. They also foster a sense of place and belonging and encourage stewardship among residents and visitors alike.

By working together to create a cohesive network of heritage markers, we can elevate awareness of our shared history and the ecological significance of the North Saskatchewan River. Indeed, this collective effort will contribute to the promotion of tourism and recreation, and appreciation for the natural beauty that defines our region.

If your municipality is interested in pursuing this initiative, we would be happy to help coordinate and provide advice, including assistance in the planning process, design concepts, etc.

Thank you for your consideration of this opportunity to celebrate and commemorate the cultural, recreational, and natural heritage of the North Saskatchewan River. We look forward to your thoughts and hope to foster a meaningful partnership that enhances our river communities.

Warm regards,



Steph Neufeld
Chair, NSWA Board

Encl:

- March 22, 2024 News Release: Governments of Canada and Alberta officially designate Alberta section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River - Canada.ca
- Sept. 13, 2024 News Release: Parks Canada and Alberta unveil new plaques commemorating the Alberta section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River - Canada.ca
- Sept. 12, 2024 Plaque Text.

cc: Smoky Lake County Council <council@smokylakecounty.ab.ca>
River Valley Alliance (RVA) <contact@rivervalley.ab.ca>
Iron Horse Trail <info@ironhorsetrail.ca>
Explore Nordegg <info@explorenordegg.ca>
Confluence Heritage Society <confluenceheritagesociety@gmail.com>
Fort Edmonton Park <darren.dalgleish@edmonton.ca>
Kyle Schole, Vice Chair, NSWA kschole@outlook.com



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

From: [Parks Canada](#)

News release

The entire section of the river flowing in Alberta is now designated under the Canadian Heritage River System

March 22, 2024

Gatineau, Quebec

Parks Canada

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 Rebecca Schulz, Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, announced the official designation of the remaining 718-kilometre section of the North Saskatchewan River in Alberta, as a Canadian Heritage River.

With this designation, the entire section of the river in Alberta, including the previously designated 49-kilometre section that runs through Banff National Park, is recognized under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

The North Saskatchewan River is a traditional gathering place, travel route, and home to Indigenous peoples including the nêhiyawak (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Ktunaxa, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibwe, Sauteaux, Anishinaabe, Inuit, and Assiniboine. The North Saskatchewan River is known to some Indigenous communities by different names. To some, the river is known as kisiskâciwani-sîpiy, meaning “*swift-flowing river*” in nêhiyawêwin (Cree), to others, Omaka-ty, meaning “*the big river*” in Niitsitapi (Blackfoot). This designation provides an opportunity to foster support for wider use of Indigenous languages and cultural connections to this important waterway.

This section of the North Saskatchewan River was nominated in 2022 by the proponent, Smoky Lake County, for its outstanding cultural and recreational values. kisisâciwani-sîpy connects the Rocky Mountains to the prairies, before meeting with its sister, the South Saskatchewan River, and eventually flows into Hudson Bay. For centuries, the river was a transportation and trade route, first

for Indigenous peoples, then settlers and explorers coming from the east to the Rocky Mountains. kisiskâciwanisîpiy played a pivotal role in the fur trade, early scientific expeditions, human settlement patterns and agriculture. The river was not immune to episodes of conflict and played a role in the outcome of the North-West Resistance of 1885 and the tragic events at Frog Lake National Historic Site.

Oma-ka-ty has influenced human culture, recreation, and arts. It has inspired music and poetry, attracted paddlers and anglers, and hosted festivals. Today, the river continues to provide an important source of drinking water, habitat for plant and animal species, and support for the tourism and recreation industries.

-30-

Additional multimedia





Aerial view of the North Saskatchewan River and City of Edmonton Photo: Travel Alberta / Dan Schykulski



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada

Alberta



Logos of the organizations participating in today's announcement.

Quotes

“With this designation, the iconic North Saskatchewan River will finally receive the recognition it so deserves. Being designated as a Canadian Heritage River is extremely fitting as this waterway has been instrumental in the development of Canada over the last centuries as a main transportation and trade route and as an extremely important cultural and historic site to the many Indigenous nations in the area. Thank you to Smoky Lake County, the North Saskatchewan River Watershed Alliance, Parks Canada, the Alberta Government, and everyone who worked fervently over the past several years to make this designation possible. Because of your efforts, the North Saskatchewan River will continue to provide recreational opportunities and cultural significance for many generations of people living in Canada for years to come.”

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault

Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada

"The North Saskatchewan River is, and always will be, a vital part of Alberta. Many municipalities and Indigenous communities requested this designation as they have a long and deep relationship with this beautiful river and our growing province relies on it for drinking water, a dynamic ecosystem, and many recreational and tourism opportunities."

The Honourable Rebecca Schulz

Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, 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 honour 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 North Saskatchewan River has always been an integral part of our heritage since time immemorial and continues to embody Treaty 6. At Fort Pitt, when Commissioner Morris indicated "as long as yonder river flows" he was pointing to this river, kisiskâciwanisîpiy. Designation as a Heritage River will serve to encourage respect and stewardship of this landscape and grow relations among river communities."

Elder, Nôhkom Jo-Ann Saddleback

A nehiyaw and a member of the Saddle Lake Cree First Nation in Alberta

"The Métis Nation within Alberta is very pleased that the North Saskatchewan River has formally been recognized as a Canadian Heritage River. Like the Métis, this river has played a pivotal role in the development of Alberta and Canada. 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. Today, Métis Crossing overlooks this river and has grown to become an international destination sharing the stories of shared histories and abundant futures."

Andrea Sandmaier, President

Otipemisiwak Métis Government, formerly the Métis Nation of Alberta

"Since 2019, Smoky Lake County has led a collaborative initiative of municipalities, Indigenous communities, and other recreation and stewardship groups to advance the Canadian Heritage Rivers System designation for the North Saskatchewan River across Alberta. This designation will ensure greater awareness and collaboration among various 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. I invite you to experience the rich cultural landscape of the Smoky Lake area which has been nurtured by the North Saskatchewan River."

Jered Serben

Reeve & Division 5 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)

"The beloved North Saskatchewan River is well deserving of a Canadian Heritage River designation, and the River Valley Alliance (RVA) was pleased to support this important initiative. The RVA was founded over 20 years ago to preserve, protect, enhance and connect the North Saskatchewan River Valley by creating North America's longest river valley pedestrian trail. The name given to this trail is Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw, which is in nêhiyawêwin (Cree language), meaning Beaver Hill Road. This trail and its reclaimed name invite everyone to "sing the song" of the River Valley and foster connections with the water, the land, its vast history and the people who call it home."

Kristine Archibald

Executive Director, River Valley Alliance (RVA)

“When I was growing up in Edmonton in the 1970s, the North Saskatchewan was seen as something dirty, something your mother warned you to stay away from. But over the last decade, there’s been a huge cultural shift, as people rediscovered the river as a place for swimming, paddling, floating, and boating. The challenge now is to make the river accessible for recreation and tourism, while still protecting it as a riparian ecosystem, a wildlife corridor, and a source of safe drinking water. This exciting heritage designation, championed by the passionate advocates of Smoky Lake County, helps us to both celebrate the river’s rich social history, as we protect its ecological future.”

*The Honourable Paula Simon
Independent Alberta Senator*

“EPCOR has a long history with the North Saskatchewan River, recognizing its significance over time and the benefits it provides today as the source of drinking water for over a million people in the Edmonton region. We welcome the North Saskatchewan’s designation as a Canadian Heritage River – inspiring communities to work together in caring for the river, to celebrate and support cultural connections of Indigenous Peoples, and protect it as a water resource for future generations. It will also encourage newcomers and youth to learn more about the North Saskatchewan River through education, conservation, and recreation.”

*John Elford
President & CEO, EPCOR Utilities Inc.*

“Explore Edmonton’s 10-year Tourism Master Plan identifies a strategic goal to activate the river valley to create a more vibrant destination and gathering place. We recognize that the river valley and ravine system is one of Edmonton’s greatest natural assets and a significant contributor to the quality of life of Edmontonians. Long established as a gathering place for Indigenous Nations, Edmontonians continue to value the protection and celebration of the natural and cultural heritage of this area. It helps to tell the story of Edmonton and its history and share it with the world. Edmonton provides an incredible combination of urban lifestyle with a verdant river valley and park system – the largest urban greenspace in North America – through the heart of the city.”

*Traci Bednard
President and CEO, Explore Edmonton*

Quick facts

- 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 Icefield 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.
- In 2019, Smoky Lake County took up the project, with an intention to support sustainable heritage and cultural tourism development, and stewardship activities among the many project partners. The North Saskatchewan River's designation document highlights the many cherished stories shared by cultural, heritage and recreational sites throughout the North Saskatchewan River Watershed to be explored and developed in the future.
- As part of the North Saskatchewan River's designation, Smoky Lake County, and the North Saskatchewan River Watershed Alliance (NSWA) will act as the lead organizations conducting annual reporting to the province of Alberta and Canadian Heritage Rivers System Board.
- The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is a collaboration between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. It gives national recognition to Canada's outstanding rivers and encourages long-term stewardship of their natural, cultural, and recreational values for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians, now and in the future.
- There are currently 41 rivers or river segments designated under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, totalling just over 10,000 kilometers across the country.
- Besides the Clearwater/Christina rivers near Fort McMurray (designated in 2003), the North Saskatchewan is the second river in Alberta outside of a national park to be recognized under the program.

Associated links

- [Parks Canada](#)
- [Canadian Heritage Rivers System](#)
- [Alberta Environment and Protected Areas](#)
- [Smoky Lake County Heritage River Initiative](#)
- [North Saskatchewan River Watershed Alliance](#)

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
855-862-1812
pc.media@pc.gc.ca

Ryan Fournier
Press Secretary
Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
780-232-2213
ryan.fournier@gov.ab.ca

Kyle Schole
Vice Chair, Board of Directors
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance
780-650-2059
kschole@outlook.com

Jordan Ruegg
Planning and Development Manager
Smoky Lake County
jruegg@smokylakecounty.ab.ca

Search for related information by keyword: [Nature conservation](#) | [Parks Canada](#) | [Canada](#) | [Gatineau](#) | [Water](#) | [Aboriginal peoples](#) | [general public](#) | [news releases](#)

Date modified:
2024-03-22



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

[Canada.ca](#) › [Parks Canada](#)

Parks Canada and Alberta unveil new plaques commemorating the Alberta section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River

From: [Parks Canada](#)

News release

This section of the river was officially designated in March 2024

September 13, 2024

Smoky Lake, Alberta

Parks Canada

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

Yesterday, a celebration was held at the Victoria District National Historic Site to unveil new Canadian Heritage Rivers System plaques to commemorate the official designation of the Alberta section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River. Flags of Treaty 6 and the Otipemisiwak Métis Nation in Alberta were also installed and raised to commemorate the occasion.

The North Saskatchewan River is a traditional gathering place, travel route, and home to Indigenous peoples including the nêhiyawak (Cree), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Ktunaxa, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibwe, Saulteaux,

Anishinaabe, Inuit, and Assiniboine. For centuries, the river was a transportation and trade route, first for Indigenous peoples, then settlers and explorers coming from the east to the Rocky Mountains and to the west coast. It played a pivotal role in the fur trade, early scientific expeditions, human settlement patterns and agriculture. Today, the river continues to provide an important source of drinking water, habitat for plant and animal species, and support for the tourism and recreation industries.

A 49-kilometer segment of North Saskatchewan River within Banff National Park was designated as a Canadian Heritage River in 1989. The final remaining 718 km section of the North Saskatchewan River within Alberta was initially nominated by Smoky Lake County in 2019 for its outstanding cultural and recreational values. The designation was accepted and officially announced on March 22, 2024 (World Water Day).

This initiative was made possible by many partners working together. The designation document identifies ongoing calls to action related to air and water quality, land use planning, and inter-sectoral/jurisdictional collaboration.

-30-

Additional multimedia





Caption: Plaque unveiling celebration at Métis Crossing. Photo credit: Parks Canada



Logo of the organizations that participated in yesterday's announcement.

Quotes

"Congratulations to everyone involved in the designation of this section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River. With this designation and with the installation of these new plaques, people from near and far will be able to learn more about this magnificent river's contributions to Canada, both historic and contemporary."

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault

Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada

“The North Saskatchewan River has contributed to the foundation of the Canada we know today. It has provided a means of transportation and recreation for millennia and as such is worthy of this designation. The installation of these plaques signifies the importance of this river to the Indigenous peoples of the area, Albertans, and Canadians. Congratulations and thank you to everyone involved.”

The Honourable Randy Boissonnault

Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages

“Smoky Lake County is thrilled to share in the unveiling of these commemorative plaques, which recognize the iconic cultural, environmental, and recreational heritage of this place. These NSR plaques join the existing commemorative plaque-site that celebrates this river as the spiritual center of the more than 10,000-acre Victoria District National Historic Site of Canada (VDNHSC) which was designated in 2001. Earlier this year, the County also shared in receiving an elusive ‘Award of Excellence’ from the Alberta Professional Planners Institute (APPI) for this work.”

Jered Serben

Reeve & Division 5 Councillor, Smoky Lake County

“As a Provincially designated Watershed Planning and Advisory Council (WPAC), the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance welcomes this occasion as an opportunity to continue the work of Truth and Reconciliation, as well as highlight many historical and ongoing efforts for stewardship of the river’s main-stem and indeed the entire basin.”

Scott Millar

Executive Director, North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

“Today, as we unveil these commemorative plaques, we honour the North Saskatchewan River across Alberta not just as a Canadian Heritage River, but as a lifeline woven into the very fabric of Métis history and culture. This river was an important trade route for Métis fur traders, where York boats transported goods and furs. The river remains a symbol of our enduring connection to this land. Up and down the river and at Metis Crossing, we celebrate this river's role in shaping our past and guiding our future.”

Andrea Sandmaier

President, Otipemisiwak Métis Government

“The North Saskatchewan River is, and always will be, a vital part of Alberta. Many municipalities and Indigenous communities requested this designation as they have a long and deep relationship with this beautiful river and our growing province relies on it for drinking water, a dynamic ecosystem, and many recreational and tourism opportunities.”

The Honourable Rebecca Schulz

Minister of Environment and Protected Areas, Government of Alberta

Quick facts

- 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 Icefield 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.
- Besides the Clearwater/Christina rivers near Fort McMurray (designated in 2003), the North Saskatchewan is the second river in Alberta outside of a national park to be recognized in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.
- The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is a collaboration between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. It gives national recognition to Canada’s outstanding rivers and encourages long-term stewardship of their natural, cultural, and recreational values for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians, now and in the future.
- There are currently 42 rivers or river segments designated under the

Canadian Heritage Rivers System, totalling just over 10,000 kilometers across the country.

- Parks Canada represents the Government of Canada on the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board and provides secretariat services, policy guidance, and financial support for the designation and commemoration of Canadian Heritage Rivers.

Related products

- [Governments of Canada and Alberta officially designate Alberta section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River - March 2024 announcement](#)
- [Governments of Canada and Alberta officially accept nomination of the Alberta section of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River - August 2022 announcement](#)

Associated links

- [Parks Canada](#)
- [Canadian Heritage Rivers System](#)
- [Alberta Environment and Protected Areas](#)
- [Smoky Lake County Heritage River Initiative](#)
- [North Saskatchewan River Watershed Alliance](#)

Contacts

Oliver Anderson
Director of communications
Office of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change
819-962-0686
oliver.anderson@ec.gc.ca

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

Kyle Schole
Vice Chair, Board of Directors
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance
780-650-2059
kschole@outlook.com

Jordan Ruegg
Planning and Development Manager
Smoky Lake County
jruegg@smokylakecounty.ab.ca

Kyla Blumentrath
Executive Assistant to the President
Otipemisiwak Métis Government
kblumentrath@metis.org

Ryan Fournier
Press Secretary
Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas
780-232-2213
ryan.fournier@gov.ab.ca

Search for related information by keyword: [Cultural heritage](#) | [Parks Canada](#) | [Canada](#) | [Alberta](#) | [Landmarks and attractions in Canada's Capital](#) | [Aboriginal peoples](#) | [general public](#) | [news releases](#)

Date modified:

2024-09-13