

# Proposal to Add the Islands of Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park

## What is being proposed?

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (TPR) is committed to providing quality park experiences for all Albertans. A part of that commitment is communicating what types of experiences are offered and where they are available in the parks system. This includes ensuring that sites are appropriately classified and lands that have been reserved for park purposes are legally established.

TPR is proposing to add all the islands in the east basin of Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park. Specifically, the proposal includes the addition of: Currant Island, Birch Island, Red Fox Island, Pelican Island and two un-named islands which have been identified as having conservation value and were thus reserved for inclusion in the provincial park system, as well as the consolidation of High Island and Blackfox Island Natural Areas into Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park. The islands themselves as well as the spits and adjacent bed and shore of these islands would be added to the provincial park and managed consistent with the provincial park.

## Background:

**Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park** is an island located in northeast Alberta, approximately 11 km northeast of the town of Lac La Biche. The provincial park was established on September 29, 1952 as Big Island Provincial Park, and was renamed Sir Winston Churchill in 1962. The park is 239.33 hectares in size and is composed of two islands: Big Island and Long Island. Big Island is the larger of the two and contains all of the recreational facilities and most of the trails. Long Island supports a boat launch and causeway walking trail that connects the islands to the mainland.

All the islands in the east basin of Lac La Biche are included in this proposal. The first two, **High Island Natural Area** and **Black Fox Island Natural Area**, are both located northwest of Sir Winston Churchill in the east basin of Lac La Biche. Both islands were legally established as Natural Areas in 1995. High Island was also known as Shorty's Island, after a fisherman who used to live on the island.

The remaining islands in this proposal are also located in the east basin of Lac La Biche to the north and northeast of Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park and include: **Currant Island, Birch Island, Red Fox Island, Pelican Island** and two un-named islands. These islands have been reserved for park purposes since 1984, but currently have no legal protection.

## Recreational Values:

The Lac La Biche area is valued by visitors for its excellent beaches and well-forested park. In some areas of the lake there is heavy recreational use, with development occurring along the shorelines and on some of the islands. Lac La Biche itself also supports a significant commercial and recreational fishery based on species such as Lake Whitefish, Northern Pike, Walleye, Yellow Perch and suckers.

**Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park** provides recreational opportunities for overnight camping, group use camping and day-use such as picnicking and boating. Water-based recreation within the park includes fishing, swimming and boating. There are 20 km of hiking trails which allow for bird-watching and wildlife viewing. The trails lead to observation posts to view pelican and cormorant rookeries. Wintertime activities include cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, photography, hiking and ice-fishing. The park is used most intensively in the summertime with the majority of overnight camping from visitors in the Edmonton area.

The islands in Lac La Biche are used mostly by local residents during the day for picnicking, hiking and some random overnight camping. Recreation access to the islands is by boat only. Other than a wildlife camera tower located on **High Island Natural Area**, there are no established recreational facilities on the island.



## Natural Values:

The offshore islands and marshes of Lac La Biche support significant concentrations of several colonial waterbird species during the nesting season. Lac La Biche and all of its islands were established as a migratory bird sanctuary in 1922. The province then designated the area a provincial bird sanctuary in 1930, and as recently as 2000 it was designated as an Important Bird Area – an internationally recognized program.

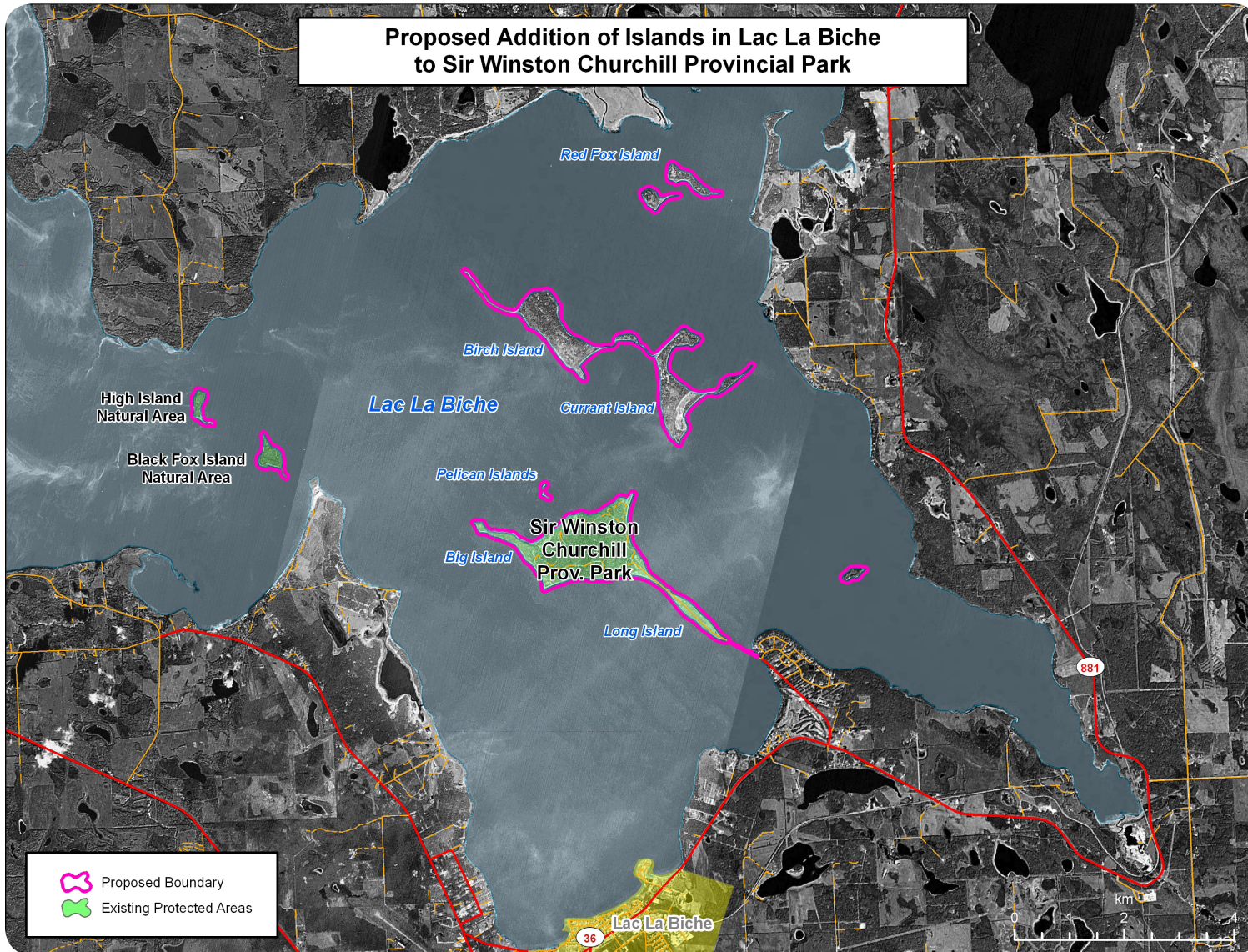
Sir Winston Churchill and all of the islands are located in the Boreal Forest Natural Region. The provincial park is covered with old-growth mixedwood forest, composed of species including white birch, trembling aspen, balsam poplar, white spruce, and balsam fir. Numerous shrub species are found within the park, such as saskatoon, pincherry, willow, chokecherry and raspberry.





# Proposal to Add the Islands of Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park

Proposed Addition of Islands in Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park



Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park is renowned for bird watching opportunities. The park is home to more than 200 bird species, several of which are listed as species of interest.

**High Island Natural Area** is currently a rookery for Double-Crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons and Caspian Terns. It is also a favorite loafing spot for American White Pelicans.

**Blackfox Island Natural Area** is characterized by a grassland with mint and sage, shrub lands dominated by saskatoon and a small wetland in the centre of the island.

**Curreant Island** is also known as Cherry Island due to the chokecherries that grow there.

**Birch Island** is also known as Cucumber Island. Today the island is known for the presence of several species of the rare Moonwort plant (*Botrychium* spp.).

**Red Fox Island** is a small island with some trees and shrubs, its name is thought to be the result of foxes that get marooned on the island after crossing to it in the winter.

**Pelican Island(s)** is a bare, windswept sandbar that is a known loafing area for American White Pelicans.

# Proposal to Add the Islands of Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park

## Cultural Values:

Although not much work has been done to identify historical or archeological artifacts on the islands, there has been some identified pre-historic use on Black Fox Island in particular. The island contains two pottery sites, with prehistoric pottery dating to A.D. 120.

In 1885, Black Fox Island was a refuge for the Grey Nuns of the Lac La Biche Mission and the children they cared for during the Riel Rebellion and was used as pasture for the Mission's cattle in the late 1800's. Birch Island (locally known as Cucumber Island) was once used to grow cucumbers for the Edmonton market, and is allegedly the site of an attempt at badger farming. At one time Currant Island was allegedly settled by a sheep farmer and was used to grow market produce.

## Background on the Proposal to Add the Islands in Lac La Biche to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park:

A proposal to enhance the protection of the islands in Lac La Biche was initially brought forward to the Alberta Parks Division by members of the local community in the summer of 2008. Specifically, protection for the rare moonwort (*Botrychium* spp.) plant that is known to exist on Birch Island was the impetus for the proposal. Inclusion in the provincial park would also provide better management in light of the increased recreational use that is resulting from rising development on the

lakeshore. At that time, the Alberta Parks Division was supportive of the request if the necessary support from the community and stakeholders could be acquired. As such, community members successfully worked to garner support for the proposal from the local community and other key stakeholders including Aboriginal communities, Lac La Biche County, non-governmental organizations and the local MLA.

Adding the islands into Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park and managing the sites as a single unit will result in a number of operational efficiencies and help to clarify the park system in northeastern Alberta. This will improve public understanding of the role of these sites and help Albertans better plan their visit, recognizing the enhanced recreational opportunities that may be available. Adding the islands will also increase the level of protection to these areas in light of growing development on the lakeshore and increasing recreational pressures on the islands.

Although High Island and Black Fox Island are legally protected as Natural Areas, they are currently managed by the Alberta Parks Division consistent with the direction of Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park. Consolidating these Natural Areas into the provincial park would change their classification to a provincial park under the Provincial Parks Act and clarify the management direction and intent of these sites. The remaining islands have been identified since 1984 as having conservation values that could be included in the park system,

although they are not currently afforded any legal protection or designation. Adding these islands to Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park will both formalize and increase their protection and allow for better management of visitor use to these sites.

If added to the provincial park, the islands and adjacent spits and bed and shore would be subject to the uses allowed as a provincial park under the Provincial Parks Act, and managed by the Alberta Parks Division accordingly. Recreational activities that currently occur on the lake such as boating, fishing and snowmobiling in winter will not be affected by the proposal. The minimal recreational activities currently occurring on the islands, such as hiking, picnicking and rustic camping, will continue to be allowed on the islands in designated areas and would not be affected by the proposal. There are no plans to develop facilities on any of the islands at this time. Should facility development be warranted in the future, any development plans would be done in consultation with the public through the management planning process.

Although the Provincial Park designation does not allow hunting, the islands are already located within a migratory bird sanctuary where hunting birds and waterfowl is not permitted. The designation of the islands as a provincial park will have no effect on those regulations.

## Your Input / What do you think?

We want to hear your thoughts about this proposal. Send in your comments, suggestions and concerns by clicking on the online comment button below, sending an email to the address below, or you can mail in your feedback to the address below.

Comments on the proposed boundary amendments will be collected until August 14, 2009

**Online:** [Opinio Survey](#)

**By Email:** [ParkNews@gov.ab.ca](mailto:ParkNews@gov.ab.ca)

**By Mail:**

Sir Winston Churchill Islands  
Boundary Proposal  
2nd floor, Oxbridge Place  
9820 – 106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2J6

## What Happens after this consultation?

A decision regarding the proposal will be made after the 60 day public comment period ends on August 14, 2009, and once all comments have been considered.

A summary of public comments and the resulting proposed action(s) will be posted online once a decision has been reached.

\* Disclaimer: We thank you for providing your input. Those who submit their feedback will not be contacted individually regarding their submission.