



SENATE | SÉNAT  
CANADA

THE HON./ L'HON  
PAULA SIMONS

SENATOR | ALBERTA  
SÉNATRICE | ALBERTA

Dear Members of the Heritage Rivers Board,

As an Independent Senator from Alberta, as a member of the Senate Standing Committee on Energy, the Environment, and Natural resources, and as a born-and-bred Edmontonian, I'm writing to you in support of the application to have the North Saskatchewan River declared a national heritage river.

I grew up on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River valley. The river has helped to define my life. And it has helped to define my city and my province. I believe the river is a natural candidate for this designation. In the first place, it is an important environmental legacy. Because it has been relatively untouched by industrial development, or heavy transportation, it remains for much of its length a healthy riparian ecosystem. Clean-up efforts over the last decades have seen a return of many of the fish species that historically populate the river. The valley itself is an essential wildlife corridor that connects Banff National Park to the environs of Elk Island National Park. And of course the river is the source of fresh drinking water for many communities large and small all along its banks.

Secondly, it is a much-storied river with a rich multicultural heritage. The Cree called it *kisikâciwanisîpiy*, the swiftly flowing river. For the Blackfoot, it was *omaka-ty*, the big river. For centuries the river sustained the First Nations as a source of water and food and as a corridor that made trade connections. Later, it brought the fur traders west to Edmonton and carried their furs back to Hudson Bay for shipment to Europe. It was the river that brought French-Canadians voyageurs, labourers from the Orkney Islands, and even Alberta's first black resident (a Hudson's Bay Company navigator) who arrived via canoe in 1799. It was the river that helped to give birth to Alberta's Metis Nation, and this river carried the poetic Earl of Southesk west in 1859 to visit Fort Edmonton as the first celebrity tourist. It was the river that brought many of the first settlers to northern Alberta long before the railway arrived, whether they were from Lebanon or Ukraine or Norway. It was the riverside where people farmed or built their mines and brickyards. That history deserves to be recognized and celebrated, not just locally but as part of the Canadian story.



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Finally, I support this effort led by the County of Smoky Lake because it has gained the broad, almost universal support of communities and cultural institutions that line the river. The politicians and planners of Smoky Lake have achieved the near impossible – they have united Albertans all along the river in endorsing this initiative.

Today, the river is seeing a new kind of life as Albertans embrace its recreational potential, whether they are canoeing, tubing, swimming, fishing, or letting their dogs frolic in the water. Declaring the river a national heritage resource could be a boon for all sorts of ecotourism initiatives.

In short, I hope you will give some serious consideration to accepting this application to name Alberta's full-length of the North Saskatchewan River one of Canada's remarkable heritage rivers.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Senator Paula Simons  
Senator, Alberta