



## FISH AND WILDLIFE BOMBARDIER SNOW BUS

### UNIT WBF0143

*April 25 2017*

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***Wikipedia, April 2017- Snow Coach: An early example of a snow coach was the Snow Bus, built by Bombardier in Canada. It was equipped with front skis and rear tracks and typically could seat 12 passengers. Alternatively, the front skis could be removed and replaced with front wheels. The Bombardier Snow Bus was used as a school bus, for mail delivery and as emergency vehicles, but was also used for tours and transportation in snowbound areas.***

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*The Bombardier Snow Bus has been described as the ultimate Canadian machine. These utility vehicles have been around a long long time (circa early 1950s) and perhaps their persistence in part reflects their reliability and durability. These trusted machines, known as bombis by those who used them, were used by Fish and Wildlife officers in northern regions to support remote winter patrols, commercial fishing checks, trapline patrols, and apparently some not-so-official uses.*

*The following information was provided by various Alberta officers who had the opportunity to use and abuse buses in the Fish and Wildlife fleet spanning a period from the early 1960s until now. One snow bus, Unit WBF0143, currently is undergoing restoration for eventual display in the Fort McMurray Heritage Museum. An enquiry aimed at verifying appropriate colours and door decals has blossomed into a series of brief memories and escapades that together breathe new life into the old snow buses.*

*m.j. pybus*

***Jack Williams***

My name is Jack Williams. F&W officer Joe Williams was my father. I grew up in the culture and knew many of the early officers well. The picture is of Joe and the bombardier on Lac La Biche in 1964. It was dark blue and had a 6 cylinder industrial Chrysler engine. It was used a lot and was kept in the garage attached to the office on the South side of Main Street.

My Dad is not holding a coyote, it's a "bluebill" (worth \$5 in the round ).

Jack



***FWO Joe Williams on Lac La Biche 1964***

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***Wayne Brown***

I remember a dark blue Bombardier in the Cold Lake Warehouse in 1967 when I was there. It looked "shiny new" to me and Chuck Scott may have used it once or twice - - I never rode in it though. Reading the other comments, I wonder if there may have been several such units sprinkled around the north districts with large lakes [[ Indeed, there were]].

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**Jim Nichols    Badge 34, 1**

I believe the machine currently in Ft McMurray is a 1965 Bombardier that I used for patrol work in Fort Chip from 1968 to 1970. It was blue in Color and did not have any door decals on it as we didn't mark our vehicles at that time. It had a Chrysler 318 motor in it and was serviced just like any other truck of that time period. Every 3000 miles as I recall. It was a great vehicle and I used it to patrol as far as Uranium City from Fort Chip on a joint patrol with the RCMP. The RCMP bombi broke a ski but this one made the trip unscathed. It took us three days to make the trip across Lake Athabasca. I also made several trips down the Athabasca River to check trappers and collect fur tax at Pelton's Store at the Embarras Portage. Unfortunately I don't have any photos.

This unit was different from the others in service at the time because it was a wide gauge and the others were narrow gauge. No idea when it was removed from service, but I believe it was reconditioned after I used it. Ron Boyer our head mechanic at the time would know a lot more of the history or perhaps Ian McInnis.

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**Dennis Giggs    Badge 41**

Dennis Weisser and I used the Blue machine Jim Nichols was referring to a few times on Lake Athabasca. Spent the night on the lake one time when we threw a track. Ended up with a couple of frost bitten toes, nothing serious.

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***Dave Robertson***

***Badge 66***



***Lesser Slave Lake 1974***

This photo was taken in 1974 on Lesser Slave Lake just east of Canyon Creek. Dog Island is in the background. This Bombardier was built in the 1950s, I believe 1952 but not quite sure. I believe it had a 6 cylinder Chrysler engine and a three on the tree transmission. This Unit was a narrow gauge and was stationed at Slave Lake District. It was still in use when I left in 1975. Fish and Wildlife vehicle unit colours didn't come in until the late 1970s [[1980s]] so I have no knowledge if this unit was ever painted [[Note this is NOT the machine currently in Ft McM]] .

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***Doug Nothstein***

***Badge 90***

Ron Black and I [Doug Nothstein] used the machine Dave Robertson referred to at Slave Lake District in 1974. There had been a fire inside the machine that happened when Ron Hanson and Dennis Weisser used it during the fall (perhaps moose hunting ?!). In December 1975 Ron [Black], Murray Bates, and I used the machine on the Peerless Lake Fishery and unfortunately that was Ron's last patrol – he had a sudden heart attack and passed away on December 14.

In March 1977 Gerry Labrie and I were on Utikuma Lake checking Commercial Fishermen when the engine quit. Got pulled off by a larger machine owned by Cadrones (local commercial fishing outfit).

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***Murray Bates    Badge 76***

I used the old F/W 'Bombardier' in the Slave Lake detachment in the '70s. During this time it was blue (an original factory color). It was also quite run down with most of the factory parts needing an upgrade as well. It had a six cylinder motor, three speed manual transmission, and two skis for the front in winter, or two interchangeable wheels for use on harder surfaces. We used it mostly (entirely) for commercial fisheries supervision on lakes in the Slave Lake detachment in the 1970s. These would include, but would not be limited to: Lesser Slave Lake, Burnt Lake (most people don't even know where this lake is (some 40 miles S.W. of Wood Buffalo Park). We also took it to the Wabascas, Sandy, Peerless, Graham, Equisetem, Utikuma, Nipisi, Macmillan (Lily - local name), Brintnell, Muskwa, Cranberry, Chip, and Cranberry lakes. Of course most if not all of these lakes had a commercial fishery, although on some we used it for sport fishing or hunting patrols. I'll probable date myself when I mention the fact, that one of its last uses at Slave Lake was on 14 December 1975. We were loading the snow bus onto the trailer when Ron Black had a massive heart attack. Officer Nothstein and I used a snowmobile skimmer to move Officer Black to the warmth of a native's cabin to wait for a medi-vac plane on skis; however, our best efforts of CPR and wilderness first aid were not successful. He was 39.

This machine was in terrible condition and after the incident in December 75, it was removed to Peace River to be repaired, painted with a high visibility 'bright' paint job, and refurbished. The Slave Lake sub-division was the largest, having no less than 18 lakes which were open most years to various types of commercial fishing. Unfortunately, I was transferred before the machine made it back to Slave Lake, where the heaviest demand for its use was, and possibly still is.

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**Kim McAdam     Badge 149**

Not sure if it is the same machine or not, but Dennis Weisser and I used it or one just like it on Lake Athabasca a few times in the mid 1980s. I think he put it to good use!

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**Gerry Labrie     Badge 29**

In regards to your inquiry of the Fish and Wildlife bombardiers I offer the following:

I started my career in 1964 as a forest officer as I was too young to be a Fish and Wildlife officer. I transferred to F&W in 1967 and was posted to Lac La Biche. There was a dark blue snow bus there with new narrow gauge skis and sprockets. This was Unit # GL-670. In February '68 I used it for fisheries patrols on Beaver Lake. By end of February we replaced the skis with wheels, an annual end of season event.

In 1976 when I was stationed in Manning the division acquired a brand new yellow Bombardier snowmobile (bus). This machine was brand new and powered by an industrial Chrysler 318 V8 Engine. It was a wide track machine with metal skis. It was placed in the Peace River Region as a pool vehicle to be used by the districts which had commercial fisheries to supervise, namely High Prairie, High Level, and Slave Lake. As I had some prior experience with these machines, in March 1976 I hauled the machine from Peace River to Manning, High Level, and on to Bistcho Lake for the maiden patrol of the new bus. I assisted Al Farrants with the commercial fishery. Farrants and I actually slept in the machine in -40 degree weather. Things were pretty frosty in the mornings.

I was transferred to Slave Lake in July 1976 and learned that we had an older narrow gauge Bombardier [[as described by Dave Robertson]] on inventory which was also used mainly for commercial fishery supervision. This machine was dark blue in colour and was powered by a 6 cylinder Chrysler engine as was described by Dave Robertson and Doug Nothstein. This old machine was used on Slave Lake but was also used on Peerless Lake and Utikuma Lake.

It was used sparingly as it had seen better days. We had the good fortune of being able to access the Forestry mechanic, Don Willier to help us keep the old girl running. We installed

a circulating propane heater to help with starting on the cold days. I once heard that the fire, previously mentioned [[by Doug Nothstein]], happened when someone tried to warm the engine with a torch in order to get it started – it always was hard to start these buses in cold weather. And they often frosted up on the inside so when they did finally warm up, there was a steady rain as the frost melted. The old bombi was still at Slave Lake in 1980 but it was very temperamental.

In the winter of 1977 we had the use of the new pool vehicle from Peace River for the fishery on Utikuma Lake. I am attaching a photo of Officer Murray Bates holding a 35 lb. pike caught in a net on Utikuma Lake by Robert Herroux a commercial fisherman at Faust. I bought that fish and mounted it myself. It hung in the office in Slave Lake until I left the Dept. in June of 1980.

I believe there was a Bombardier in the St. Paul region also that was used on Lac La Biche and many of the other lakes in that region.



***Officer Murray Bates and the NEW bombardier on Utikuma Lake, winter 1977***

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***Ian Tarr     Badge 62***

To put in another two-bits on the Bombardier saga, from 1985-1990 I made many trips to Ft. Chip both when we had an officer there but mostly when it was vacant, we used the bombardier 5-6 times. It had a set of wheels that changed out with the skis. I think it was the winter of 1988 we found budget money (thanks to Dennis Giggs) to repair and modify it. We had the unit low-boyed over the ice road to Ron [Boyer] & Ian [McInnis] at the warehouse. The modifications I recall discussing with Ian, were regular maintenance & engine repair, paint in Fish & Wildlife Enforcement green & white, modify the seats to make fold down beds, install a kerosene heater, extra fuel tanks carried on the roof rack, and removable rack on front and rear to carry two Elans. The premise for this was to allow for trapline patrols off Lake Athabasca---or maybe it for "fish sampling" in isolated areas??? I also recall when it was low-boyed out that National Parks in Chip was getting new units to replace their bombardiers and donated all their spare parts to us.

Went thru my photos but couldn't find any of the re-done unit. I did find one of Jim Songhurst and myself [Ian Tarr] in front of the new Ft. Chip hotel just before we left on patrol to Old Fort Point on 20 January 1988.



***Officers Jim Songhurst and Ian Tarr, Ft Chip, Jan 1988***

(a few months before it was painted with F&W green and white)



**Don English    Badge 141**

[photo only]



***Officer Don English, Fort Chip late 1980s, Unit WBF0143***

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**Doug Slatnik    Badge 59**

In the late eighties Len Butler and I brought this machine [[the one currently in the Ft McM museum]] out from Ft Chip on the winter road using the flat deck truck from Ron Boyer's shop. Len had also procured an almost identical machine from Wood Buffalo National Park. The park machine was robbed of parts for our machine. After Len left, I am not sure if anyone ever used the unit. I know several commercial fishermen in Ft Chip would have loved to have it!

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**Larry Bergeron    Badge 175**

After Len [Butler] departed Ft Chip. I used the bombi for a few trips out to Jack Fish cabin and did some joint patrols with the Wood Buffalo wardens along the north shore. It ran great and afforded lots of memories.

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***J Ron Boyer***

Yes we did various repairs and modifications on a number of bombardier snow track machines over the years in the F&W shops. Most repairs involved tracks, wheels, and installation of solid tires (no air), as well as engine tune-ups, transmission and drive line repairs, and sometimes an engine replacement. We also did body repairs and installed auxiliary heaters, as the heaters that were installed at the factory did not have enough output to keep our officers warm on long extended trips. Work was done on both the narrow and wide gauge machines. Most of these machines were located at Fort Chip, Cold Lake, Slave Lake, Lac La Biche, and I also think there was one in the Peace River country at one time. [[stories herein from each of these locations]]

All the best to all our former F&W employees, I always enjoyed working with them.

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***Trevor Sellin    Badge 254***

I believe the initial thought of restoring Unit WBF0143 came from the Officers in Fort McMurray at the time. Local officers repeatedly gave public presentations at Heritage Park and during passing conversations with the museum folks the suggestion came up about restoring the old snow bus. Among other things, we thought it would be great to use as an item in the Santa Claus parade – since it had the skis and all. But we knew it needed to be spruced up before it could ever go back in front of the public.

Between 2006-2008 I was approached by Ft McMurray Heritage Park on a restoration initiative. They had personnel on hand that were interested in refurbishing the old F&W bombardier snow bus and putting it on display. They had a look at it and confirmed they would accept it. We had it transported to the park where it sat ever since. A loan agreement was signed and not much was done with it after that. [[... until 2016]]

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**Danny Boyco Badge 151**

As of January 2017, the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Branch has three bombardiers on current inventory – the one at Ft. McMurray and two in the Northwest Region. These machines were used primarily by Fish and Wildlife officers to monitor commercial fisheries; however, I have little doubt they were used for other things from time to time. The green and white colour scheme belongs to the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Branch (then called Enforcement-Field Services) and was in use for at least 20 years. I believe the unique greenish colour pantone was owned by the Branch. You may recall that all of our marked patrol units were this colour. At one time, only the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Branch used the door decal (we were the only branch in the department that used law enforcement markings on our vehicles). It has, since then, been adopted in various forms by other branches in Environment and Parks.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SNOW BUSES**

| <i>LOCATION</i>       | <i>YEAR</i>   | <i>COLOUR</i> | <i>ENGINE</i>      | <i>DETAILS</i>                                | <i>REFERENCE</i>                       |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Lac La Biche          | 64-68         | Blue          | 6-cyl, Unit GL-670 | Roof rack                                     | Williams, Labrie                       |
| Cold Lake             | 67            | Blue          |                    | Shiny new                                     | Brown                                  |
| Ft Chip               | (65)<br>68-70 | Blue          | Chrysler 318<br>V8 | Wide gauge                                    | Nichols, Giggs,                        |
|                       | 85-90         | Blue          | Unit #<br>WBF0143  | Green& white in<br>1988                       | Tarr                                   |
|                       | Early 90s     | Gr&Wh         |                    |                                               | English, Slatnik,<br>Bergeron          |
|                       | 2008          | Gr&Wh         |                    | Loaned to Ft<br>McM museum                    | Sellin                                 |
| Slave Lake            | 72-80         | Blue          | Chrysler V6        | Narrow gauge,<br>no roof rack, fire<br>inside | Bates, Robertson,<br>Nothstein, Labrie |
| Peace River<br>(pool) | 76-77         | Yellow        | Chrysler V8        | Wide gauge                                    | Labrie                                 |

***Barry Wijnandts***

January 2017

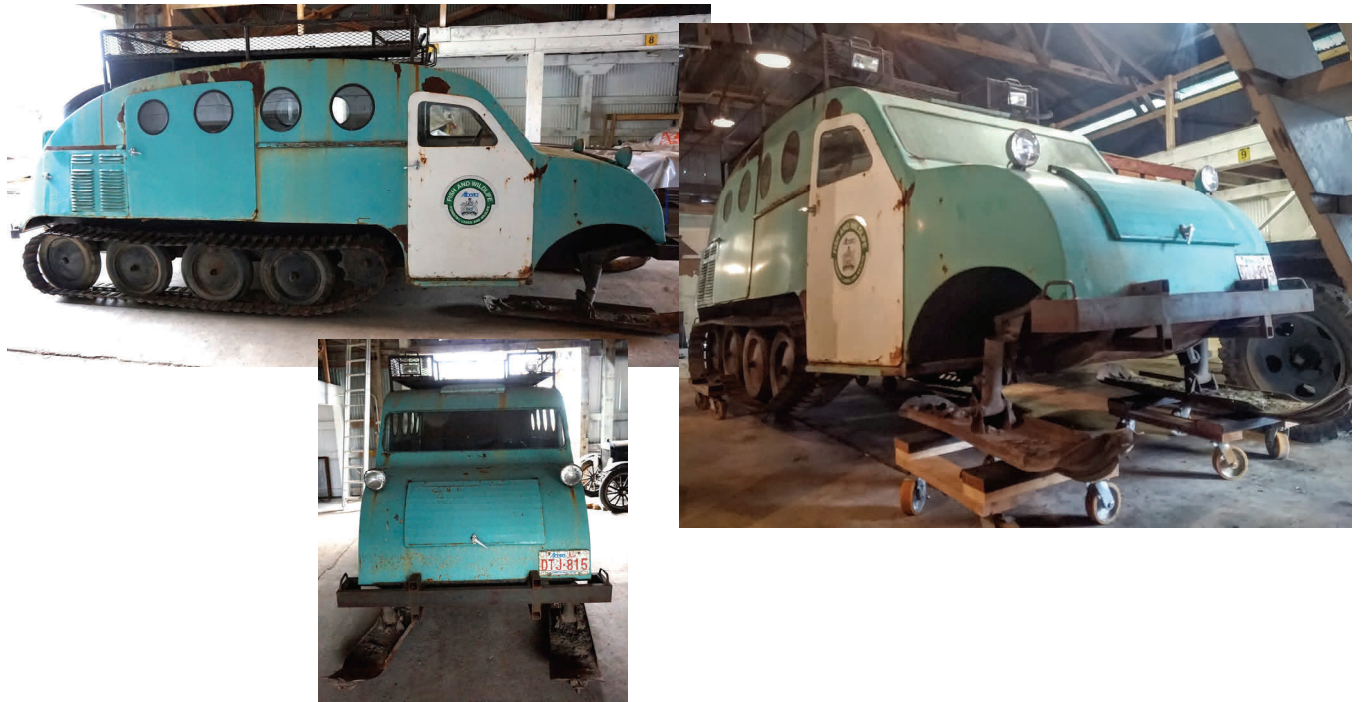
My name is Barry Wijnandts and I work for a timberframe company called Macdonald & Lawrence in Cobble Hill, British Columbia. We are involved in a lot of heritage projects and one of them is the Fort McMurray Heritage Park. One of the artefacts we are preserving is a Bombardier Snow Bus, previously owned by Alberta Fish and Wildlife. The bus is in not too bad a shape, considering it is from 1965, however, there are many rusty spots and the paint has discoloured over the years.

We would like to bring it back to its former glory and for that I would like to know what the official colours of the department were, back in the days. To be honest, I am not even sure when the vehicle was operational, but the body is turquoise with white doors. Also we are looking for replacement decals on the doors, and I hope there may be some templates available in an archive.



***Unit WBF0143, Fort McMurray, March 2011. Photo by Bruce Mayer.***

The following photos were taken in 2016 as WBF0143 was readied for restoration in Ft McMurray



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*The useful bombis also provided valuable service to forestry and biological staff in Alberta... and in other provinces. They were no doubt put to good use all across the country. These two stories provide additional perspective on these versatile iconic Canadian machines.*

**Rob Galon** [[ AFS – Forestry]]

We have three yellow and brown tracked bombis at the Forestry Museum in Hinton. Two run, one is suspect. All have damage and need parts. No idea on maintenance. I used them timber cruising, loved them when they worked, cursed them when they left me stranded, and always came home with a lump on my forehead, or bruised knees and a sore rear end. To my recollection, phase out started in the late eighties when elans, and twin

tracks were becoming more prevalent. I used a bombi until early 1994, but parts and keeping them running was a challenge.

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**Hugh Wollis** *F&W Biologist, retired*

Lest you think officers were the only ones who got to drive around in cool bombardiers back before ATVs were (sadly) invented. We used this one for work on muskegs in the northern Interlake region of Manitoba. The year was 1968, my first summer working in wildlife, after thankfully extricating myself from the fisheries work I had done the previous year. The long pole I was carrying was used to push into the muskeg through the veg into the water beneath, which scared the pants off me.





|        |           | FWO Badge # |
|--------|-----------|-------------|
| Murray | Bates     | 76          |
| Larry  | Bergeron  | 175         |
| Ron    | Black     |             |
| Danny  | Boyco     | 151         |
| Wayne  | Brown     |             |
| Len    | Butler    |             |
| Don    | English   | 141         |
| Al     | Farrants  | 35          |
| Dennis | Giggs     | 41          |
| Ron    | Hanson    | 92          |
| Gerry  | Labrie    | 29          |
| Kim    | McAdam    | 149         |
| Jim    | Nichols   | 34, 1       |
| Doug   | Nothstein | 90          |
| Dave   | Robertson | 66          |
| Chuck  | Scott     |             |
| Trevor | Sellin    | 254         |
| Doug   | Slatnik   | 59          |
| Jim    | Songhurst | 91          |
| Ian    | Tarr      | 62          |
| Dennis | Weisser   | 86          |
| Joe    | Williams  |             |