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## **MANITOBA SIGNS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH FIRST NATIONS ON EAST SIDE OF LAKE WINNIPEG**

A historic memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Province of Manitoba and eight First Nations located within the East Side of Lake Winnipeg was signed today at the legislative building.

"Because of the significance of the vast boreal forest to First Nation communities of the East Side, it is important that they are involved, first and foremost, in land use decisions to sustain both the forest and communities," said Conservation Minister Stan Struthers. "The MOU is a first step in ensuring that First Nations people on the east side will have a strong say in land use decisions into the future".

"This MOU recognizes a government to government relationship between First Nations on the east side and the Province of Manitoba" added Culture, Heritage and Tourism Minister Eric Robinson. "We are hopeful that the MOU and a protocol to follow will support community economic development opportunities such as eco-tourism."

The MOU—an agreement between East Side First Nations and the province to work together on sustainable land use—is the first step towards establishing a long-term protocol. The protocol will serve as a foundation for First Nations communities on the east side to be involved in decisions that will affect their communities and traditional territories. It is also the result of the East Side Planning Initiative (ESPI) launched in 2002.

The First Nations involved in the signing of the MOU are: Bloodvein First Nation, Bunibonibee Cree Nation (Oxford House), God's Lake First Nation, Little Grand Rapids First Nation, Pauingassi First Nation, Manto Sipi Cree Nation, Norway House Cree Nation and Sagkeeng First Nation.

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Struthers, Robinson and Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Minister Oscar Lathlin attended the signing ceremonies. Chiefs and elders from the First Nation communities also took part in the ceremonies.

In March 2004, several provincial cabinet ministers and the premier travelled to First Nation communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

The ESPI comprises several groups. The East Side Round Table was established in order to submit recommendations for a broad area plan within the East Side of Lake Winnipeg with the support and advice of a First Nations Council that has worked with the province to develop the MOU.

An East Side Advisory Committee, made up of about 50 stakeholders, is also part of the process.

A broad area plan will ensure future land, resource and development decisions address the environmental, social, health, cultural and economic needs of local communities, First Nations and various stakeholders and interest groups within the East Side of Lake Winnipeg.

The broad area plan and MOU honours and respects existing treaties, inherent rights of First Nations and any existing agreements between First Nations and federal and provincial governments.