

West Souris River Watershed request for technical information

Manitoba Conservation has reviewed the Public Input Summary for the West Souris River Watershed and request for technical information to assist in the development of an integrated watershed management plan. The following information and comments are offered:

Oak Lake is identified as a Sensitive Area in Schedule H of the Onsite Wastewater Management Systems (OWMS) Regulation. Section 7 of the Regulation contains special restrictions for OWMS in Sensitive Areas. Proposed amendments to the regulation may add additional restrictions.

Under Section 2 of the Summary, Water Quality - Solutions, the document refers to "Feedlot runoff retention ponds". This should be replaced with "Feedlot runoff collection basins". The Livestock Manure and Mortalities Management Regulation under *The Environment Act* defines collection basins and prescribes their design and construction. The regulation defines collection basin as "a structure (a) intended to collect runoff water contaminated with manure in an agricultural operation, and (b) constructed primarily from soil by excavating or forming dikes". Construction collection basins must be in strict accordance with the Section 16.2 of the regulation.

Technical information in the form of GIS shapefiles can be downloaded from the MLI <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/mli/html>, and should include shapefiles for: Protected Areas, Areas of Special Interest, Provincial Parks and Wildlife Management Areas.

For information on Crown land use please reference the "Interdepartmental Operational Crown land Plans 2009" report. This information is also available electronically and can be requested from Dale Sobkowich.

Oilfield boundaries, oil wells and other petroleum data is available for download on the STEM Petroleum GIS map gallery website: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/stem/petroleum/gis/index.html>.

It is recommended that Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC), and Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) be contacted for their lands data. These organizations have vast holdings of private lands, and conservation easements throughout the region. These lands should be maintained for conservation purposes, and may be added to the protected area network in the future.

The following is in answer to the questions raised during public consultations.

1. Are there regions of special concern in this watershed (biologically significant, regions that may be particularly sensitive or unique)?

- o The entire watershed study area is sensitive. Southwest Manitoba retains little Crown land, and supports increasingly threatened grassland, wetland and river bottom forest communities. Development pressure from agriculture and the petroleum industry threaten these biological communities which support a variety of rare species, notably species designated under Manitoba's *Endangered Species Act* and the federal *Species at Risk Act*. Staff of Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch can advise of any known species occurrences that need to be considered.
- o The Ecological Reserves Advisory Committee (ERAC) has identified the Mixed Grass Prairie proposed ecological reserve within this region as an area worthy of protection. This area is outlined on the map provided. There are very few remnant mixed grass prairies in Manitoba and they should be protected in order to preserve that species that inhabit them. Intact lands in the vicinity of Oak Lake are also of interest to ERAC for protection, but no specific lands have been identified to date.



WSIWMP map.JPG
(928 KB)

2. Has oil development or pipeline construction impaired natural areas in this watershed?

- o Yes – the remaining Crown land in this area is being targeted for petroleum exploration and extraction. The Enbridge pipeline (North Star and Alberta Clipper lines) also runs through this area, just north of Oak Lake. The PAI is targeting the Oak Lake area for protection.
- o There are ways to mitigate and minimize these impacts primarily through site selection (avoiding natural areas) and the use of directional boring.

3. Are there any species of special concern in the watershed? Where is the critical habitat to support these species in the watershed?

- o Yes. Contact the Conservation Data Centre of the Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch for records of locations of these species. As well the Habitat Section of the Branch has done considerable habitat inventory in these areas on Crown and private lands. Land use mapping that identifies natural areas with permanent cover (grassland and upland) is available. PFRA has supplied this information to other Conservation Districts in the integrated planning process.

4. What are the priority regions to protect in this watershed to protect biodiversity or species of special concern?

- o The priority areas for protection should include all remnant prairies, mixed-grass prairie, riparian areas and wetlands.

- o Existing protected areas, wildlife management areas, conservation agency lands, and other designated lands in the area should also be buffered from incompatible development in order to maintain their ecological integrity. The region around Oak Lake has been identified as an ecologically important area for protection and a planning exercise is currently under way for this area. Oak Lake is recognized as an Important Bird Area of Canada. The PAI is carrying out an evaluation of Crown lands to identify and protect lands in southern Manitoba, including in the watershed study area. Manitoba Conservation will be coordinating efforts with NCC to target lands for protection in this watershed.

5. Is there information about wetlands in the watershed before 1980?

- o Manitoba Water Stewardship has historic information through aerial photography. DUC may have information on wetland productivity that would be useful in this process. Contact Rick Andrews of DU in the Brandon office.

6. Do we know, and can we map, the change in cover of wetlands, forest, grasslands over the past 20 (30, 40, 50) years?

- o The following information sources are available to chart changes to the landscape:

1982 Forest Inventory for the area available in hardcopy maps and black + white photography
 1991 Ortho photos for the area
 1999-2001 EOSD Broad scale vegetation classification using LandSat
 2007/08 Ortho photo refresh for the area

Note: Forestry Branch is able to provide the 1982 inventory information in hard copy only and are not able to allocate any time towards the actual change in cover mapping project.

7. Is habitat fragmentation an issue in the watershed? If so, can you suggest areas where connectivity should be increased?

- o The landscape in this watershed is highly fragmented and in the majority of areas there is very little, if any, connectivity between native remnants. No more fragmentation of this landscape should be permitted to occur. Connectivity needs to be increased between native prairie remnants throughout the watershed.
- o As little Crown land exists in the watershed study area and given the level of development on both private and Crown lands, the opportunity to establish future protected areas is severely limited. Attempts should be made to conserve any intact habitat found on all remaining Crown land in this watershed. Conservation agencies (noted previously) working with local landowners are one of the few remaining opportunities to create habitat connectivity in the region.
- o The majority of the watershed study area covers landscape units that are either partially or not represented in existing protected areas. Specifically, there is a rare enduring feature that is not captured lying west of Oak Lake. There are also two single occurrence enduring features just south of Oak Lake that are not captured, and one rare enduring feature southeast of Oak Lake that is partially captured. For additional information on these enduring features, please contact Jenny Harms, Protected Areas Initiative, at 945-4363.

- o It should be noted that this is an issue in every watershed in Agro-Manitoba. Protection of riparian areas and undeveloped rights-of-way can help provide connectivity and travel corridors for wildlife. Preservation of native pasture and natural areas other than riparian areas is also important.
- 8. Are there any concerns about invasive species in the watershed? Which species? Where? Can you provide recommendations to prevent further spread?**
- o Yes there are. Leafy Spurge in upland areas, potentially purple loosestrife in wetland areas. Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives can provide specific information on other species. Also refer to the local weed districts which are part of the RM delivery, the Invasive Species Council of Manitoba as well as the Leafy Spurge Stakeholders Group.