

# Birch River Ecological Reserve

## Backgrounder

### Land Designation

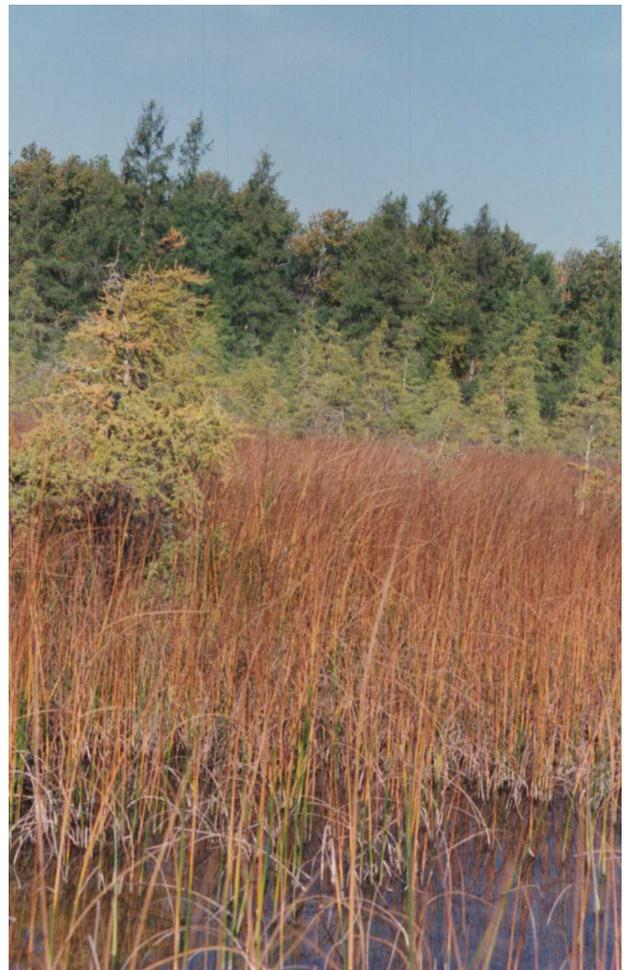
Ecological reserves play a key role in Manitoba's protected areas network by protecting unique, rare and representative examples of plants, animals, geological features and ecosystems. They are the most protected of the provincially designated sites within Manitoba's network of protected areas.

### Landscape Description

The 183 hectare Birch River Ecological Reserve is located within Porcupine Provincial Forest, just two kilometres north of the community of Birch River, Manitoba. Situated on the eastern edge of Manitoba's Western Upland Natural Region, this site contains a great diversity of vegetation, including several forest and wetland communities.

### Outstanding Features

The Birch River Ecological Reserve has had a complex geological and glacial history. Situated near the base of the Porcupine Mountain Escarpment, the ecological reserve reflects this history through its rugged topography. The reserve's complex physical environment enables it to support several diverse plant communities. The site includes parts of three beach lines formed by former Glacial Lake Agassiz. Two of the beach lines mark the eastern and western boundaries of the site. The beach lines support various forest communities: coniferous, deciduous, mixedwood or herb-shrub dominated.





Inter-beach depressions alternate with the beach lines and support distinctive, largely wetland communities, including bog lakes, intermittent lakes, sedge meadows, willow flats, floating bogs, treed muskeg, sparse mixedwood forest and open tamarack/black spruce forest. In some areas melt water from glaciers has created drainage streams. McLure Creek forms the northern boundary of the site and Swede Creek is located below the site's southern boundary. When the site was inventoried in 1994, McLure Creek supported a mature White Elm dominated river-bottom forest, a forest community rarely found this far north. In recent years the elms have been severely affected by Dutch Elm disease. Swede Creek flows through a poorly drained area, with large scattered clumps of willows and a ground cover of sedges, grasses and forbs.

Several rare and uncommon species thrive within the ecological reserve. Seventeen orchid species call this site home, representing over 40 per cent of Manitoba's orchid flora. The site supports at least six plants considered rare in Manitoba: the large-leaved white violet, marsh bedstraw, adder's mouth orchid, bog adder's mouth orchid, moschatel, and slender beak rush.

The Birch River area also supports a diverse and noteworthy small-mammal population. Two significant species include one of the northernmost records for the dusky shrew and a high preponderance of black northern pocket gopher at the northern limit of the mammal's range. Several large mammals are also known to be in the area, including coyotes, moose, elk, black bears and timber wolves. Sandhill cranes have also been observed nesting in the region.

The Birch River Ecological Reserve will be maintained for the preservation and protection of the rich and diverse mixture of vegetation and habitats that reflect the complex geological and glacial history of the Porcupine Mountain escarpment, as well as numerous rare and uncommon species that grow on the site, and have not been previously reported in Manitoba. Passive, non-consumptive visits on foot are permitted. All other activities will require prior ministerial approval.

This area is categorized by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as a protected area under the management category Ia – a protected area managed for strict nature protection available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring. These protected lands are free from logging, mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas development, and any other activities that could harm habitat.