

Eastern Parks

Whiteshell Provincial Park

Whiteshell River Self-guiding Trail

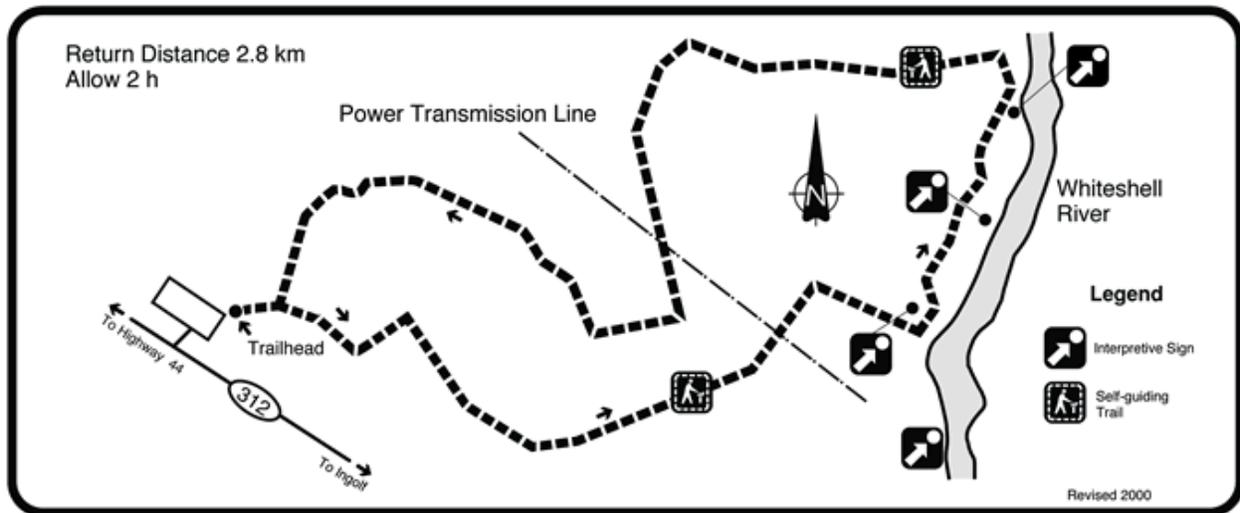


Introduction

It was less than fifty years ago that we first saw planet Earth from space. It appeared like a fragile ball of blue-oceans, clouds and land. In those images you could not see people, buildings, or human structures.

From space, Earth looks like a swirling mass of natural processes: oceans with tides; clouds and weather systems; land masses with growing vegetation and shifting rock, sand and ice. At that distance it is easier to see the planet as one organism, whose health depends on the health of all its parts. Looking from space you cannot see Whiteshell Provincial Park. Still, as small as the park is, it plays a vital role in the health of this organism-our planet.

Read along in the brochure at the numbered stops to find out how you can help to keep our planet healthy. The trail is 2.8 km long, with a few steep climbs up and down. Allow two hours to hike the trail.



1. Bio-What?

Pick a spot and pace off a square metre. How many different living things can you see in that square, from the birds that fly through it, down to the smallest plants and insects? There are even more things you cannot see—microorganisms are living and interacting in your square too.

All those living things and how they interact are a small example of the biodiversity of the Whiteshell and of the planet. Biological diversity is the variety of life in all its forms. Biodiversity is the foundation of a healthy ecosystem and a healthy planet.

The Whiteshell plays a vital role in maintaining biodiversity by protecting the living things that naturally occur in this part of Manitoba and the ecosystems in which they live. This is one of the purposes of Manitoba's provincial parks—to conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity. The Whiteshell is contributing to the health of the planet, and protecting our children's natural heritage.

What can I do? Try using nature as a model for landscaping your yard or cottage lot—use native plants, increase diversity and reduce or eliminate the use of chemicals.

2. Natural Assets

How many different mosses and lichens can you see on this rock? Moss and lichen are valuable parts of the ecosystem. Do you know why? They are slowly breaking this boulder into soil. They are also food for wildlife.

People often take what the Earth provides for granted—soil formation, climate regulation, erosion control, nutrient cycling, waste treatment, raw materials and genetic resources. All the parts of an ecosystem are important, from the moss to the rocks. They provide valuable services we may not

know about. They even provide a spot for us to marvel at the little details in nature. The different parts of an ecosystem-plants, animals, soil, air, water-are natural assets.

Another purpose of Manitoba's provincial parks is to *preserve natural, cultural and heritage resources* or assets. The cultural and heritage resources of the park, like the petroform site near Nutimik Lake, are human legacies. They provide important connections to our past.

What can I do? While walking this trail think about what you see around you and in what different ways things could be "valuable" not just to people but to the ecosystem and the planet.

3. Balancing Act

Listen. Can you hear the hum of insects, the ruffed grouse drumming, the traffic on the road?

More than 1.3 million people visit the park every year. There are 16 campgrounds, 3,302 cottages, and 71 businesses in the park (1999). As more people visit the Whiteshell there is pressure for more roads, sewage lagoons, stores and services.

Recreation takes many forms in the park, from hiking, bird watching, canoeing or attending an interpretive program to camping, cottaging, golfing, downhill or water skiing. Some of these activities require more development than others and have a greater impact on the park's ecosystems.

The final purpose of Manitoba's provincial parks is *to provide outdoor recreation and education opportunities in a natural setting*. It can be a delicate balance to provide people with recreation opportunities while conserving ecosystems, maintaining biodiversity and preserving natural and cultural resources.

4. What Is Our Limit?

You are about to descend into thick mixed forest between two steep rock outcrops. Rain and melted snow run off the rock, giving the forest water and nutrients to grow and stay healthy.

The new millennium is a good time to think about growth and the health of our planet. We now think in terms of a global economy and we must also think about global ecology as over six billion people put pressure on the planet's resources.

Everything we depend on for survival-air, water, food, shelter-comes from the Earth. Just as trees can grow only if there is enough water and nutrients, we can flourish only with clean air and water, shelter and enough food. There are, however, limits to how much we can take from the Earth and the ability of the Earth to renew itself.

5. Connections

Look around you. Can you see any interactions taking place in nature?

One interaction here is between different kinds of trees. The tall tree with the scaly bark is a jack pine. Just past it are large trembling aspen, or white poplar, with a powdery white bark. These sun-loving trees are the first to grow after a fire or clearing. The white spruce and balsam fir growing under them need the shade and protection of the other two in order to grow.

Nature has an infinite number of connections and interactions, many of which we are just beginning to understand. These connections between the plants, animals, soil, air and water are the strands that make up the web of life. When we put too much stress on the strands, we affect the whole web.

We need to have areas on our planet where these connections and interactions can carry on without our interference.

What can I do? Look for the interactions in nature and at how your actions affect them.

6. Power to the Province

These hydroelectric transmission lines are carrying 115 kilovolts from the Seven Sisters generating station, just outside the park, to northwestern Ontario.

Manitoba is a hydroelectric province. We produce most of our electricity by harnessing the energy of our rivers. The power is used in our homes and industries, and is sold to other provinces and the United States. In other locations around the world, energy is provided by burning coal or other fossil fuels, which produce acid rain and air pollution, and use up limited resources.

Although water is not destroyed when it is used to produce energy, hydroelectricity is not without its costs. Large areas are flooded to hold water for generating stations. Communities often have to be moved and ecosystems are affected. A river's natural course can be altered and fish passage blocked. Using more power means more stress on the planet.

What can I do? Try to reduce your energy use. Buy energy-efficient products that save energy, and support companies that are developing these products.



Seven Sisters generating station
Courtesy of Manitoba Hydro

7. Working with Nature

The Whiteshell Fish Hatchery, across the river, was built in 1942. Its design is a good example of both energy conservation and working with nature.

Water is vital to the fish hatchery. It has to be clean and the right temperature for the fish. The water is gravity fed to the hatchery, taking advantage of the natural drop in elevation between West Hawk and Caddy lakes. There is no need for a pump.

Pipes take water from West Hawk, circulate the water through the hatchery, then return it to the river across from where you are standing. There are two intake pipes, one for cold water deep in West Hawk Lake and the other for warmer water on the surface just below the bridge.

In spring or summer you can sign up for a tour of the hatchery at the West Hawk campground office.

What can I do? Encourage a child to take on a science project that works with nature and natural cycles.

8. A Fish Story

Along the river you can catch brown, brook or rainbow trout or even Arctic char. These fish will not be for dinner though. They are catch-and-release only. The Whiteshell River has been modified here to create habitat for the non-native fish. You can read about the changes on the interpretive signs.

While stocking rivers and lakes with non-native fish may mean more recreational fishing, it is not without its problems. Many impacts are not yet fully known or understood, including the effects on native species. The balancing act between providing recreation and conserving ecosystems is delicate.

What can I do? Illustrated field guides on plants, birds, mammals and insects can help you learn more about the plants and animals native to your area.

9. A Place for Wildlife

Look for bald eagles in the tree tops. There is an eagle nest in the area but it is best not to get close to it or the eagles may not return next year.

Eagle populations have declined due to pesticide use. Banning chemicals like DDT and making eagles protected species have increased their numbers. Eagles are migratory birds and, like all wildlife, they know no borders. What would happen to the eagles if the country they travelled to did not protect them, their habitat, the fish they eat or the fish's habitat?

Through our governments, Canadians and Manitobans are committed to creating a network of protected lands that conserve ecosystems and biodiversity. These protected areas are free from logging, mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas development, and other activities that significantly affect habitat.

Parks play an important role in the network of protected areas. One third of the Whiteshell is part of the protected areas network. Canada is one of the few parts of the planet that still has habitat to protect, but every day we lose some.

What can I do? At home try to leave some habitat for the wild things-start your own protected area, like a wildflower garden for the birds and butterflies.



Bald Eagle

10. Parts of the Pie



How would you describe this area? Would you call it protected?

The Whiteshell, like all provincial parks, is divided into areas where different activities are allowed. This is a Recreation Development area where intensive recreation like campgrounds, cottages and golf courses are located. It makes up about a fifth of the park. Recreation Development areas are not part of Manitoba's network of protected areas because of the development that is allowed here.

Resource Management areas, which make up almost half the park, are also not part of the protected areas network. They permit forestry, mining and wild-rice harvesting.

The Wilderness and Backcountry areas do count toward the protected areas network. They make up a third of the park.

The long process of developing management plans for every provincial park in Manitoba is underway. A park's management plan will specify what activities can occur in each area. Your input is welcome in the management planning process.

What can I do? Express your view about protected areas by contacting Manitoba Parks and Protected Spaces at www.manitobaparks.com or call toll-free 1-800-214-6497 (in Winnipeg, 945-6784).

11. People Paths

When you fly over the Earth in an airplane, you can see cleared corridors like this one even in the most remote parts of the world. Roads, railway lines, transmission lines and pipelines, are paths for people and our services. Because of where the Whiteshell is located, it so happens that every major corridor crossing the country goes through the park.

When we pass a pipeline or transmission line on a trail, we might have a momentary disappointment, a loss of the natural setting we want to experience. But do these people paths have other impacts?

From a wildlife point of view, people paths fragment habitat, breaking it into smaller blocks. Some animals, like woodland caribou, need large blocks of habitat. Once common in the Whiteshell, woodland caribou have left the Whiteshell Park for larger blocks of habitat north of the Winnipeg River.



Woodland Caribou

People paths also bring in non-native species of plants or animals that can upset the balance of the ecosystem.

What can I do? Can you think of ways to reduce people paths? Conserving energy might mean one less transmission line.

12. For the Future

As you walked the trail, you have found life, death, renewal and change all around you.

As we understand more about our global ecology, we see that our small planet has limits to what it can give and to its ability to renew itself. All around the world people are making changes and choices to live within limits. They are working to protect biodiversity, the foundation of ecosystems. Through a global network of protected areas, they are trying to keep places where nature's interactions can continue without our interference.

While their own existence might depend on it, people making these changes are doing it for future generations. As the saying goes, "To nurture the land for the generations to come is our obligation to our ancestors who passed the land to us."

What can I do? Take up the challenge to live within limits by making changes to how you use resources and live your daily life.

13. Conclusion

This brochure has been inspired by the work of one person who dedicated much of her life to conservation and to keeping our planet healthy- Alice Chambers. Alice was involved in many environmental organizations, but more important, she tried to live her daily life in ways that are healthy for the Earth.

Alice received a number of awards for her conservation work. In her own words:

We live in a finite world with increasing human populations, pollution, and ecological crises. Manitobans are not immune to these problems. The predicted impacts of climate change on Manitoba are severe. Pesticides not even used in Manitoba can be found in our waters. We are losing species like the burrowing owl, and other wild populations are declining through habitat loss and destruction. Changes in attitudes and actions must occur, but education is needed for all to understand why we have to change and how this might be accomplished.

This trail is dedicated to Alice Chambers, her work and her children. May she be a role model for us all.



Acknowledgement

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