



Paint Lake Provincial Park

Draft Management Plan



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1. Introduction

The Provincial Parks Act requires that a management plan be prepared for each provincial park.

Management plans establish long-term direction for parks and address issues pertaining to resource use, development of park land, environmental protection, and the preservation of culturally significant areas.

They are used in conjunction with park regulations, procedures and other departmental and government policies and legislation.

This draft management plan includes proposed guidelines that will inform management of Paint Lake Provincial Park. The final plan will be based on the role of the park in Manitoba's system of parks and will take into account feedback received from the public on the draft management plan. Once finalized, the management plan will guide management of the park over the next 10 to 15 years. Implementation of the plan will occur on a gradual basis, and will be partially dependent on the availability of resources to sustain proposed initiatives.

The rights of Indigenous Peoples to pursue traditional uses and activities within Paint Lake Provincial Park are acknowledged and respected within the context of this draft management plan.

2. Background and Park Attributes

2.1 Park History and Location

The name Paint Lake is derived from the Cree words *manuminan sakahigan*, which have been translated as meaning "red paint lake". That name may have been based on the painted navigation markers that Indigenous Peoples used to guide themselves through the complexity of islands in Paint Lake over thousands of years of occupying the area. The explorer Samuel Hearne travelled the Grass River route in 1774, and the name Paint Lake appears for the first time on his map of 1776. In subsequent years, the Paint Lake area became part of the "upper track"

trade route between York Factory and Cumberland House during the fur trade era.

In 1961, the International Nickel Company of Canada (INCO) created a trail to Paint Lake to facilitate access to the lake by residents of the Thompson area. The area soon became very popular so the province began developing recreational facilities there in 1962. Paint Lake Provincial Park was then designated in 1971.

In 1997, a portion of the park was separated from the rest of the park and designated as East Paint Lake Park Reserve. The purpose of this change was to allow time to evaluate the possibility of establishing the East Paint Lake area as a permanent protected area. At the time, the boundary between Paint Lake Provincial Park and East Paint Lake Park Reserve was the known limit of the Thompson Nickel Belt. A study undertaken to reconfirm the extent of the Thompson Nickel Belt and then subsequent work ultimately confirmed that the Park Reserve contained a mix of high potential rocks and older low potential rocks, which is one of the defining features of the Thompson Nickel Belt. Public consultations conducted at the time suggested that maintaining a natural environment, protecting water quality and



recreational values, and maintaining options for mineral exploration were all highly desired for the area. As a result, in 2007 East Paint Lake Park Reserve was added back in to Paint Lake Provincial Park, with the entire park classified under the recreational development land use category (LUC).

Paint Lake is located only 32 kilometres (km) south of Thompson and roughly 42 km north of Pisew Falls Provincial Park. It is accessed off of PTH 6, with a short drive on PR 375 bringing visitors to the park office and the majority of park facilities.

2.2 Natural Features

Paint Lake Provincial Park is 22,740 hectares (227.4 km²) and falls within the Hayes River Upland Ecoregion, which is typically composed of sandy soils, coniferous forests and boggy wetlands. The area we know today as Paint Lake was once the bottom of glacial Lake Agassiz. At one time, Lake Agassiz was the largest lake in North America, until it gradually drained over a period of thousands of years, leaving behind lakes and rivers as well as the eskers and beach ridges seen on the landscape today.

A significant portion of the park is made up of water, with Paint Lake plus the smaller Mid and Liz lakes constituting approximately 41 per cent of the total park area. Paint Lake is long and relatively narrow, extending approximately 42 km along a northeast-southwest axis and having a maximum

width of nearly 11 km. There are roughly 250 islands scattered throughout the lake and they are oriented in a similar direction. The Grass River enters the lake at its southeast corner and exits out the north end. The majority of the shoreline is exposed bedrock and boulders, but small beaches are also common. Annual water level fluctuations on the lake can be considerable.

The forest cover in the park is composed predominately of black spruce, with tamarack, white spruce, jack pine, balsam poplar, white birch and trembling aspen also occurring. Paint Lake is situated near the southern boundary of the zone of discontinuous permafrost. Permafrost is found in the park, particularly in the boggy, wet areas of the black spruce forest where thick moss and peat conditions and the dense stands of trees help to insulate the ground from the summer heat.

Wildlife typical of the boreal forest can be found in the park. Black bears are common in the area and other species that might be observed include moose, white-tailed deer, timber wolf, lynx and a variety of furbearers and small mammals. Numerous waterfowl and songbirds inhabit the park, as well as bald eagles and other raptors, and several species of gulls and terns, which nest on the lake's rocky shoals. A variety of fish species inhabit the lakes in the park, including walleye, sauger, pike, perch and many others. Mid Lake is stocked with trout, while Paint and Liz lakes are listed as High Quality Management Waters, which means that anglers are limited to specific numbers of certain fish species in order to protect and maintain a high quality fishery.

Paint Lake falls within the Harding range of boreal woodland caribou in Manitoba. This species is listed as Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk Act and the Manitoba Endangered Species and Ecosystems Act. The park is not currently heavily used by woodland caribou but individuals have occasionally been spotted in the park. Another species listed as Threatened under both Acts that is known to occur in the park is the olive-sided flycatcher.



2.3 Cultural Features

Given its location along the Grass River, it is not surprising that Paint Lake is rich in archaeological resources and sites with historical significance. A variety of evidence has been found showing that Indigenous Peoples lived and travelled through the area as far back as 2,000 years ago. Occupation likely occurred even thousands of years earlier than that, but evidence from that time has not been recorded.

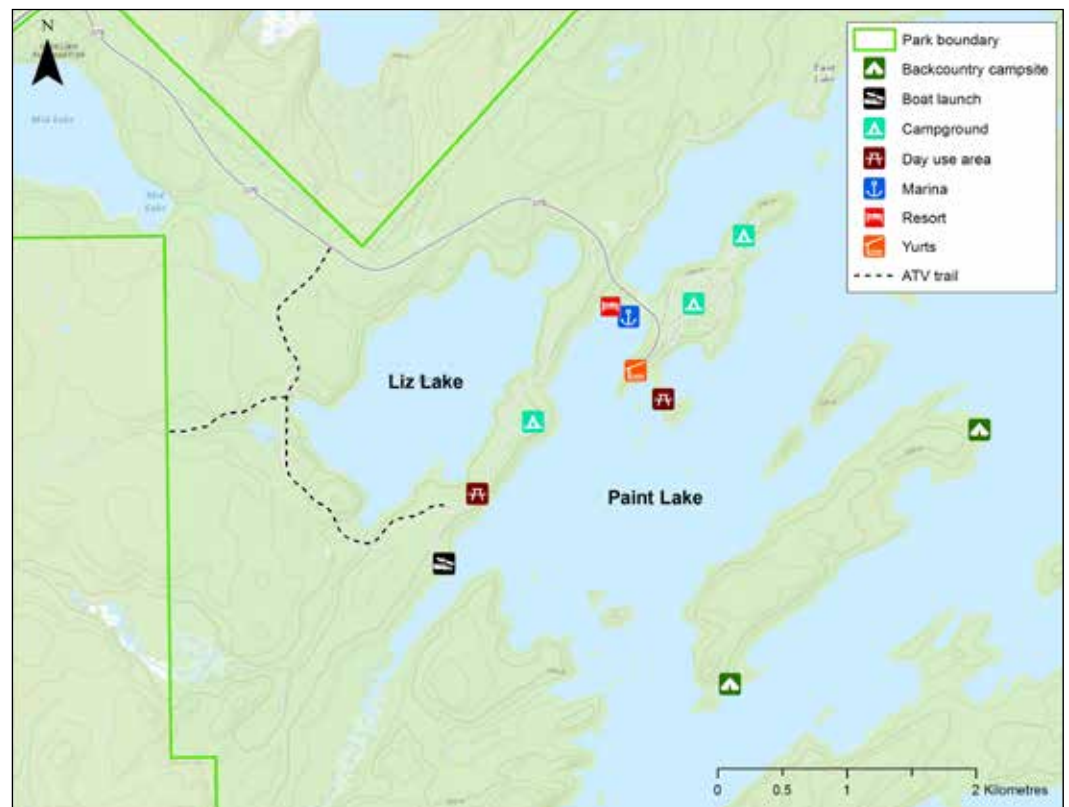
In the late 18th century, European explorers and traders were drawn to the Paint Lake area by the fur trade. A strong rivalry existed between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. The remains of McKay House, a North West Company post established in 1791, on Paint Lake and of Chatham House, the competing Hudson's Bay Company post on nearby Wintering Lake, point to this time in our history.

In the early 1990s, archaeological investigations were conducted at eight sites in the park, with excavations occurring at six of these sites. The sites investigated remnants and artifacts ranging in age from about 2,000 years ago to the relatively recent time of the late fur trade and early mineral exploration. Excavations of the older sites uncovered evidence of Indigenous Peoples' occupation and use of the area including shards of pottery known as Laurel and Blackduck ceramics as well as a variety of stone tools, arrow points, and other items. Artifacts uncovered from the fur trade era included structural remains, lead shot, finger rings, clay pipe fragments, and more.

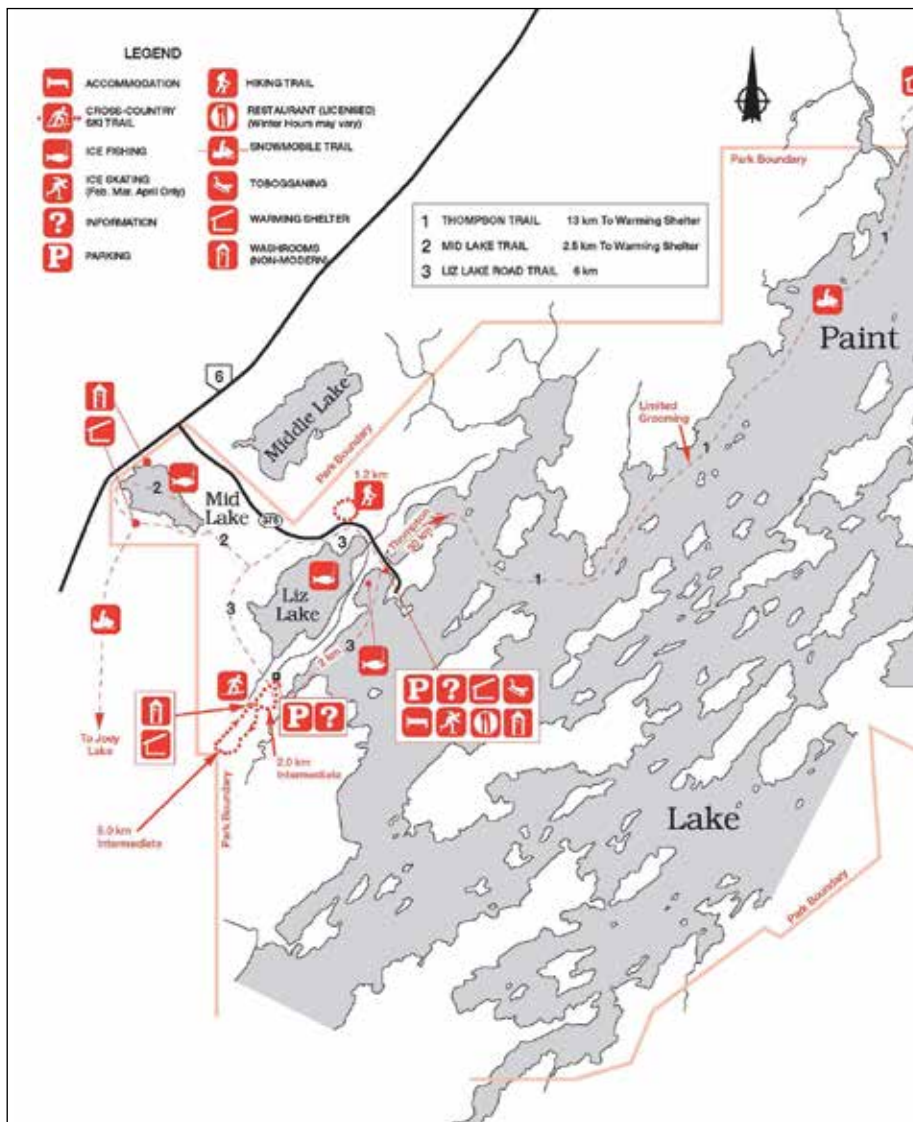


2.4 Recreation and Interpretation

Paint Lake Provincial Park offers a great variety of recreational opportunities, with facilities largely concentrated in a developed area on the west side of Paint Lake. There are two campgrounds in the park containing approximately 190 campsites, roughly half of which are seasonal sites, and a group use area. Campsites offer either basic or electrical services.



Map 1: Paint Lake Recreation Facilities



Map 2: Paint Lake Winter Activities

In 2017, more than 3,500 nightly camping unit nights were sold, while the seasonal sites are typically 100 per cent sold each summer. A small number of backcountry campsites are designated on an island in the lake; these sites provide fire pits and garden throne toilets. In addition, six yurts were constructed in 2016 and opened to the public in 2017.

Facilities offered in the campground and day use areas of the park include multiple beaches, playgrounds, picnic areas and modern washrooms. There is also a volleyball court, a basketball court, a sports field and an amphitheatre. Trails in the park include an 8.8 km trail around Liz Lake, and a scenic

trail that winds throughout the day use area and follows the lakeshore, offering several viewpoints of the lake with names such as Coffee Cove, Cozy Corner, Pickerel Point and Twilight Bay. A short all-terrain vehicle (ATV) access trail is used to provide a route out of the west side of the park. This is a long-standing practice that is non-conforming with The Provincial Parks Act, as, under the Act, any trails for motorized vehicles must be designated. The designation of this particular trail will resolve this issue and enable ATV use of the trail to continue. Off-road vehicle use is prohibited on cottage subdivision roads in the park in accordance with The Off-road Vehicles Act.

Boating and fishing are popular in the park, with walleye and northern pike the most commonly sought species. Several fishing derbies take place on Paint Lake in the summer, while boat motor restrictions are in place on Mid Lake. Boat launch and docking facilities are provided on Mid Lake

and on Paint Lake. A large marina and resort offer a variety of facilities including approximately 180 boat slips, a lodge and rental cabins, a year-round restaurant, a store and boat rentals. A dog beach and swimming area has been designated on the shore across the road from the marina.

Paint Lake is part of the Grass River canoe route, with canoeists requiring the use of navigational aids to find their way through the complexity of the islands that dot the lake. The park remains busy in the wintertime, offering a designated snowmobile trail and a warm-up shack, cross-country ski trails, a toboggan hill, and ice fishing and skating on the lake. The snowmobile trail is run by a Thompson-area snowmobile club.

The park is also very popular for cottaging, with many of the cottagers coming from the Thompson area. There are nearly 280 cottage lots in the park, with just over 200 of those located on the mainland while about 75 are remote, located on islands on the lake. Of these cottages, the official number of declared residences is 120. Factors including the capacity of the park lagoon, the locations of existing mining claims, and the terrain of the area have prevented additional cottage lots from being developed.

2.5 Commercial Operations and Additional Facilities

Facilities in the park operated by Manitoba Sustainable Development include a waste transfer station, a sewage lagoon, a gravel storage area, a maintenance yard, and a Helitac base (for helicopter-delivered firefighting resources). Noise concerns associated with helicopter activity at the Helitac base may lead it to be moved from the Paint Lake shoreline to a different location.

Paint Lake cottage owners run a volunteer fire hall located in the park, supported by annual fees paid by the cottagers. There is a Boy Scouts Camp located on Liz Lake operating in a leased area and the Thompson Boys and Girls Club also have activities in the park. The only commercial development in Paint Lake Provincial Park is the business that operates the marina and lodge on a leased parcel of the park. Any fishing and hunting outfitters operating in the park are licensed under The Resource Tourism Operators Act.

2.6 Resource Use

The park straddles part of the Thompson Nickel Belt, a narrow band of rock trending southwest and northeast of Thompson that is rich in nickel and copper mineral deposits. As a result, the mining industry has a high interest in the area, and there are multiple existing mining claims and mineral leases that overlay parts of the park. For the most part these are concentrated in the northwest portion of the park. Mining activities can occur legally in the park due to its categorization under the recreational development

LUC, which permits mining, but these activities are subject to a permitting and review process that considers a variety of factors including the impact on the park and its users.

Paint Lake is located within the Thicket Portage Registered Trapline (RTL). The RTL System is a commercial furbearer harvest management system through which a lineholder is granted the exclusive opportunity to harvest (trap) furbearing animals in a certain area (the RTL). The system ensures sustainable furbearer populations by controlling the number of trappers in an area and recognizes the lineholder as the steward of the resource.

3. Park Purpose and Role

3.1 Park Classification and Purpose

Manitoba's provincial park system is made up of almost 100 different parks and park reserves. The role of each park within this system is identified by its classification. Parks may be classified as one of five types: wilderness, natural, recreation, heritage or Indigenous traditional use.

Paint Lake Provincial Park is classified as a natural park. The main purpose of a natural park, as defined in The Provincial Parks Act, is to both preserve areas of a natural region and to accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.

The objectives of Manitoba's provincial park system are to conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity; to preserve unique and representative natural, cultural and heritage resources; and to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities in a natural setting. The purpose of each park within the system is to contribute to these overarching objectives while fully recognizing and incorporating local considerations.

The purpose of Paint Lake Provincial Park is to preserve physical features and biological communities representative of the Hayes River Upland Ecoregion and accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses. In doing so, the park will:



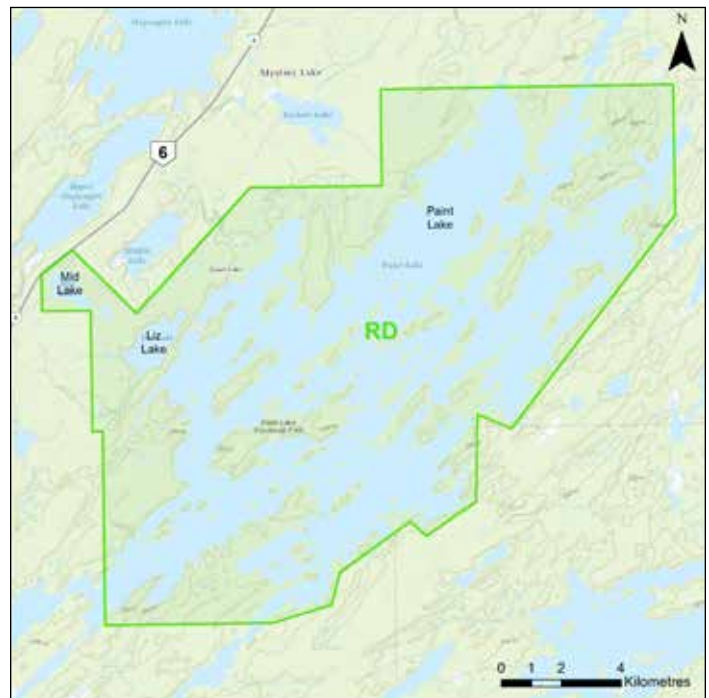
3.2 Land Use Categories

LUCs are used to designate lands within provincial parks for various purposes. There are eight LUCs in which land may be categorized: wilderness, backcountry, resource management, recreational development, heritage, access, winter road access or Indigenous heritage.

Paint Lake Provincial Park is categorized under the recreational development (RD) LUC. The main purpose of this category is to accommodate recreational development. Within Paint Lake Provincial Park, this includes:

- permitting recreational development and use including cottaging, camping, day use areas, boating, fishing and snowmobile and cross-country ski trails
- permitting commercial resource opportunities, such as mining, while recognizing the recreational values of the park

- preserve riparian habitats to maintain water quality and the natural character of the Paint Lake area
- provide high quality cottaging, camping, boating and fishing opportunities and permit related facilities and services
- promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural features
- accommodate mining activities in a manner that does not compromise other park purposes



Map 3: Paint Lake Provincial Park

4. Park Management Objectives and Guidelines

The following objectives and guidelines will direct management decisions in Paint Lake Provincial Park over the life of the management plan.

4.1 Natural Features

Paint Lake Provincial Park is one of only a few easily accessible large provincial parks in northern Manitoba. It provides habitat to a variety of fish and wildlife while also including a portion of the historic Grass River waterway. The park enables the conservation of these natural features, which are an important component of the recreational experience available in the area.

Objectives

- To improve awareness of the use of park habitat by species at risk and avoid impacts on such species.
- To retain Paint Lake and the Grass River system as an unregulated, natural waterway.
- To ensure the health of fish populations in the park and the quality of the fishery.

Guidelines

- 4.1.1 Park-related impacts on known species of conservation concern will be avoided or minimized and any sightings of rare species will be tracked and shared with the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre.
- 4.1.2 Parks and Regional Services will participate with federal, provincial and local partners in the development and implementation of recovery strategies and action plans for species at risk found in the park on an as-needed basis.
- 4.1.3 Parks and Regional Services will continue to work with Wildlife and Fisheries Branch on efforts to monitor and maintain fish populations and water quality in the park. This may include but not be limited to activities such as test netting and fish stock monitoring.

4.1.4 Water levels in the park will be allowed to fluctuate naturally. The installation or use of water level control structures will not be considered.

4.1.5 Parks and Protected Spaces Branch will participate in departmental efforts to prevent aquatic and terrestrial invasive species from spreading within the park. This may include but not be limited to the promotion of proper decontamination procedures for watercraft and water-related equipment, and educating park visitors on how they can stop the spread of invasive species.

4.2 Recreation and Interpretation

A variety of recreational opportunities are provided at Paint Lake Provincial Park, including water-based activities, camping and day use areas, cottaging and interpretive activities. Visitors to the park have come to expect experiences that reflect the character and environment of the area. It is important that these high quality nature-based opportunities continue to be offered and that any potential future activities or developments in the park are appropriate for the setting.

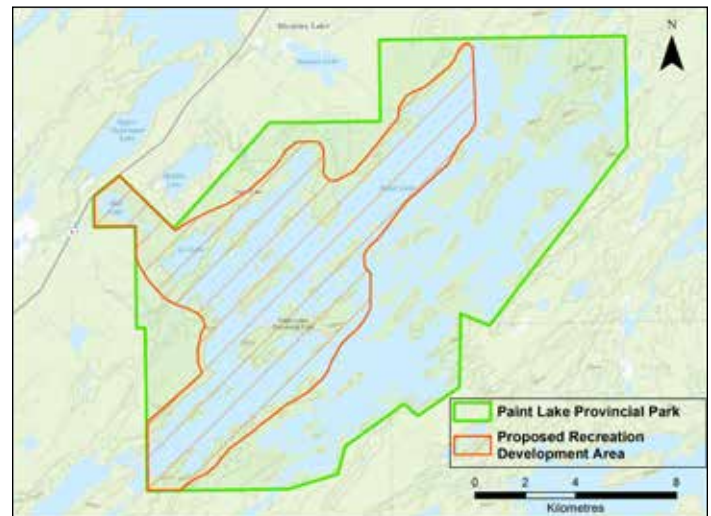
Objectives

- To support, promote and enhance the Grass River canoe route including Paint Lake as a segment of the route.
- To provide high quality cottaging, camping, boating and fishing opportunities while maintaining the remote and pristine nature of the existing Paint Lake experience.
- To provide a high quality interpretation program as a primary component of the services offered to park visitors.

Guidelines

- 4.2.1 Boat motor restrictions on Mid Lake will remain in place.
- 4.2.2 The ATV trail located on the west side of Liz Lake will be designated as an ATV access trail, with a focus on its use as an exit route out of the park. No additional off-road vehicle trails will be developed or approved in the park for spring, summer or fall recreational use.
- 4.2.3 Snowmobile trails will be permitted and promoted as an important winter recreation activity in the park. Manitoba will continue to partner with the local snowmobile club to provide the trails.
- 4.2.4 Opportunities to provide live interpretation programs will be assessed as part of the implementation of the park's interpretation strategy.
- 4.2.5 The addition of more backcountry campsites on islands on Paint Lake will be considered. These sites would be targeted for use by canoeists travelling the Grass River route. All sites must be equipped with a firebox and garden throne toilet or pit privy. The quality of the backcountry experience will be emphasized over the quantity of campsites.
- 4.2.6 The two campgrounds in the park will continue to provide sites with basic or electrical service. Additional seasonal sites will not be added to either campground. A portion of the existing seasonal sites may be upgraded from basic to electrical service depending on program direction for the overall park system.
- 4.2.7 Additional recreational development may be considered in the park, with development kept to the Recreation Development Area in the west-central part of the park illustrated on Map 4. Any proposals will be evaluated based on a number of factors including but not limited to:

- a. Potential impacts on wildlife, habitat, the park's natural features and archaeological sites or resources.
- b. Impacts on park users and existing facilities.
- c. The existence of necessary supporting infrastructure and resources (e.g. docks and parking areas, transfer station, lagoon, etc.).
- d. Maintaining an appropriate buffer distance from existing backcountry campsites.



Map 4: Proposed Recreation Development Area

- 4.2.8 The Liz Lake Sports Field will be considered as a possible location for a future group use area should it be determined that there is demand for such a site.
- 4.2.9 An Interpretation Concept Plan will be developed for the park that will include a resource inventory and identify priority themes to guide development of interpretive products. Opportunities to upgrade and modernize information presented will be explored through the enhancement and addition of a self-guiding trail, onsite signs, the interpretive park map and an interpretive exhibit. Opportunities for partnership on these amenities will be considered where appropriate.

4.3 Culture and Heritage

The Paint Lake area has high cultural and historical significance as a result of thousands of years of occupation by Indigenous Peoples, as well as its role in the fur trade era. Significant sites in the park, and the history of the area in general, should be recognized, celebrated and preserved.

Objective

- To recognize the cultural history and archaeological significance of the Paint Lake area and protect known sites and artifacts in the park from damage as much as possible and practical.

Guidelines

- 4.3.1 Disturbance of culturally and archaeologically significant sites in the park will be avoided. Information on specific archaeological sites will not be made available to the public if there is a significant risk that increased access or visitation could pose a threat to the sites. Prior to public release of any specific site information, Manitoba Sustainable Development will confer with Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Sport, Culture and Heritage, and local area First Nations as appropriate.
- 4.3.2 Where loss of or damage to archaeological values due to natural causes is unavoidable, artifacts will be documented and salvaged wherever possible. Restoration of cultural sites will generally not be undertaken.
- 4.3.3 In cooperation with Historic Resources Branch, an inventory of sites in the park of cultural and archaeological significance will be maintained and updated.

4.4 Commercial Operations

A small amount of commercial development is needed in the park in order to provide visitors with certain recreational opportunities and services. Commercial development should remain limited in order to ensure that the existing environment and

character of the park remain intact and that only those services that benefit the park and its users are offered.

Objective

- To guide potential future commercial development in the park and ensure that any such development would be appropriate for the Paint Lake setting, enhance opportunities for park visitors, and not detract from the remote and pristine nature of the existing Paint Lake experience.

Guidelines

- 4.4.1 Proposals for additional commercial development in the park will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and may require Manitoba to issue a Request for Proposals. Proposals must demonstrate suitability for the Paint Lake setting and a direct benefit to the park and park users, and should not duplicate opportunities provided by the existing commercial operator. Factors that will be considered in the review of proposals will include but not be limited to:
- a) Potential impacts on wildlife, habitat, the park's natural features and archaeological sites or resources.
 - b) Impacts on other users and existing facilities.
 - c) The existence of necessary supporting infrastructure (e.g. docks, transfer station, lagoon, etc.).
- 4.4.2 The possibility of divesting ownership of the docks in the park to a private operator will be explored. Manitoba will retain ownership of the boat launches in the park.
- 4.4.3 Applications for outfitting facilities in the park (e.g. outcamps, commercial boat caches) will be subject to existing permitting processes and the guidelines for recreational development outlined in guideline 4.2.7 of this management plan (see above).

4.5 Resource Development

Mineral exploration and development is a very important component of the economy in northern Manitoba, with the Thompson Nickel Belt being a key resource for this industry. Paint Lake Provincial Park was designated as a natural park with the recreational development LUC in part to maintain options for mineral exploration in the area.

Objective

- To accommodate commercial resource use in the park while maintaining the integrity of the park's natural, cultural and recreational features and avoiding impacts on park users.

Guideline

- 4.5.1 Mineral exploration and development in the park will continue to be managed through the standard permitting process to avoid impacts on critical fish and wildlife habitats, cultural resources and existing or planned recreational facilities and opportunities in the park.



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