

**PROJECT 4
ALL-SEASON ROAD CONNECTING BERENS RIVER TO
POPLAR RIVER FIRST NATION**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
SCOPING DOCUMENT**

PREPARED FOR:

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MANITOBA CONSERVATION AND WATER STEWARDSHIP**

NOVEMBER, 2014

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Scoping Document

The purpose of this Scoping Document is to provide information related to the scoping of the environmental assessment of a proposed all-season road connecting Berens River to Poplar River First Nation (FN) (the Project).

The Scoping Document for the Project has been developed with consideration of:

- requirements under The Environment Act E125 (Manitoba) for transportation developments,
- the importance and need to use Aboriginal and local knowledge and public and stakeholder views in the assessment process.

1.2 Background

Manitoba Floodway and East Side Road Authority (MFESRA) has been tasked with a strategic initiative to provide improved, safe and more reliable transportation services among all of the communities on the East Side of Lake Winnipeg. As a priority project of this initiative, MFESRA is looking to construct an all-season road from Berens River to Poplar River First Nation.

In support of the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Project, the Manitoba Floodway and East Side Road Authority (MFESRA) is proceeding with an environmental assessment including biophysical, socio-economic and traditional knowledge studies and additional stakeholder¹ engagement.

1.3 Regulatory Framework

The Project constitutes a Class 2 development as a two lane road at a new location, and associated facilities and borrow pits, as defined by the Classes of Development Regulation 164/88 under The Environment Act E125 (the Act) of Manitoba.

Because the Project involves the construction and operation of an all season public highway greater than 50 km on new right of way, it is a designated project under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act 2012, and may require an environmental assessment under that legislation.

The EIS will outline other regulatory and legislative approvals required for Project implementation.

¹ When used on its own, the term 'stakeholder' means all interested parties.

2 Scope of Project and Assessment

2.1 Scope of Project

The scope of the project will comprise the physical works and activities associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the components of the all-season road and associated infrastructure. This will also include decommissioning of temporary project components, and providing for the restoration of disturbed areas, such as quarries and borrow areas. The project scope will not include decommissioning of the all-season road itself as it is expected that the road will be operation well into the foreseeable future.

Project components include:

- All-season road (94.1 km) from Berens River to the boundary of Poplar River First Nation on new right of way;
- Four steel girder or concrete bridges at river crossings
- Stream crossings, using corrugated metal culverts,
- Equalization culverts to maintain surficial groundwater movement;
- Temporary construction bridges, access roads and trails, camp facilities and staging areas; and
- Rock quarries and borrow areas.

The effects assessment will describe the Project using appropriate figures, diagrams, maps and/or orthophotos, and will include the following:

- Location of the new road and associated project works, as described above;
- Legal description of land upon which the road will be constructed;
- Land ownership, including ownership of mineral rights;
- Existing land use, and land use designations in place;
- Proposed schedule for stages of the Project, including contractor mobilization and demobilization activities;
- Other federal or provincial approvals, licences, permits, authorizations required for the proposed Project;
- Project funding and sources;
- Results of public engagement undertaken in conjunction with project planning;
- Plans for decommissioning of temporary infrastructure or facilities; and
- Plans for eventual abandonment of the existing winter road between Berens River and Poplar River First Nation

2.2 Scope of Assessment

The scope of the assessment will address the requirements of a Class 2 Development pursuant to *The Environment Act*, including conducting an environmental assessment, carrying out public consultation, and preparing a report.

The definition of 'environment' refers to air, land and water, and plant and animal life, including humans. The definition considers ecological, social and economic components of the environment consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

The following factors will be considered in the environmental assessment:

- Purpose of the proposed Project;
- Alternative means of carrying out the proposed Project that are technically and economically feasible, and the environmental effects of any such alternatives;
- Environmental effects of the proposed Project, including the environmental effects of malfunctions or accidents that may occur;
- Effects of the environment on the proposed Project;
- Cumulative environmental effects that are likely to result from the proposed Road Project in combination with the effects of other projects and activities that have been or will be carried out for the reasonably foreseeable future;
- Change to the proposed Project that may be caused by the environment;
- Comments from the local communities, other aboriginal peoples and the public that are received during the assessment Engagement Program;
- Measures that are technically and economically feasible that would mitigate adverse environmental effects;
- Requirements of a follow-up program; and
- Significance of the residual environmental effects.

The assessment will consider previous studies and activities relating to feasibility, exploration, project siting and prior authorization received from other government agencies.

3 Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is an integral part of the planning and assessment process for the Project. The Aboriginal and Public Engagement Program (Engagement Program) for the Project involves Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, organizations, and municipalities; government departments and agencies and other potentially interested stakeholders.

3.1 Objectives

The overall objective of the Engagement Program is to provide information on the Project to interested and potentially affected parties and to create meaningful opportunities to receive input on the Project. The Engagement Program aims to achieve the following:

- Provide opportunities for the public, and other stakeholders to participate through the environmental assessment process;

- Provide opportunities for involvement throughout the environmental assessment and the various stages of project development by local Aboriginal people and residents who may be directly affected by the Project.
- Receive meaningful input into the Project planning, development and operation and specifically to:
 - Clearly communicate the purpose and scope of the Project;
 - Obtain information on biophysical and related features including the use of the landscape and key features and heritage resources, and cultural and traditional practices in the project area;
 - Identify potential environmental effects and effective mitigation measures, and opportunities to enhance Project benefits;
 - Identify the need for follow-up plans and monitoring programs
- Adopt an adaptive approach to adjust the Engagement Program in response to stakeholder interests; and
- Communicate to stakeholders how input and information provided was used.

3.2 Approach

The Engagement program builds on decades of past studies and ongoing discussions with the communities of Pauingassi First Nation and Little Grand Rapids First Nation as well as the other Aboriginal communities and stakeholders with interest in activities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. MFESRA has had ongoing discussions with Poplar River First Nation, Berens River First Nation, Berens River Northern Affairs Community (NAC) and others since 2009 with respect to the development of an all-season road network on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, traditional knowledge and alignment selection for the road between Berens River and Poplar River FN. Specific to the environmental assessment, MFESRA is conducting three rounds of consultation with these two local First Nation communities and the NAC who are directly affected by the Project, for the purpose of identifying valued environmental components (VECs), obtaining feedback on potential effects and mitigation, and presenting the results of the environmental assessment.

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) will be incorporated within the environmental assessment process providing local information pertaining to traditional land use, economic activity, ceremonial pursuits as well as local ecological knowledge. ATK also facilitates the direct inclusion of local Aboriginal communities in project planning and design. ATK information is obtained through use of existing information (with permission), traditional knowledge studies with the consent of Aboriginal communities, and traditional knowledge workshops.

The Engagement Program extends beyond the local Aboriginal communities; with additional Open Houses in locations such as Winnipeg and presentations to interested stakeholders. Information from previous engagement and Crown Consultation initiatives and/or programs such as the Large Area Network Study will also be referenced. The Engagement Program includes descriptions of the Project and solicits input on issues/concerns relating to the Project and the environmental assessment, prior to submission of the EIA report.

In addition to these efforts the Engagement Program also includes communications on the Project through seasonal newsletters, communication in various media (local radio and newspapers) as well as Project specific information on the MFESRA web site.

4 Environmental Setting

The components of the existing biophysical, socio-economic, and Aboriginal environment will be described within the Study Area to provide context for an understanding of the potential effects of the Project. The following section provides a description of the components of the existing environment to be covered in the EIS.

4.1 Biophysical Environment

4.1.1 General Environment

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- Prevailing climate and meteorological conditions including averages and extremes in monthly temperatures and dates of freeze and thaw; and monthly precipitation and snow cover;
- Local air quality; and
- Parameters related to climate change.

4.1.2 Physiography and Landscape

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- Geology/surficial materials, including geological deposits that may be used for the Project;
- Soils/terrain;
- Surface water/quality;
- Groundwater conditions; and
- Geologic deposits that may be used for the Project.

4.1.3 Aquatic Environment and Habitat

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- The diversity of aquatic habitats in the area to be affected by the project;
- Fish species inhabiting the area to be affected by the Project, including those that are important for commercial, recreational, or aboriginal fisheries, and species of conservation concern;
- Potential utilization by fish of habitats both upstream and downstream of proposed watercourse crossing locations;
- Potential fish habitat value and sensitivity to disturbance or alteration in each watercourse at or near the proposed crossing locations;
- Surface water quality, including concentrations of water and sediment quality parameters that affect the suitability of the environment for aquatic life.

4.1.4 Vegetation and Terrestrial Habitat

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- Relative abundance, diversity and habitats of terrestrial and semi-aquatic vegetation; and
- Species of conservation concern.

4.1.5 Amphibians and Reptiles

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- Relative abundance, diversity and habitats of terrestrial and semi-aquatic vegetation; and
- Species of conservation concern.

4.1.6 Avian Species

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- Relative abundance of migratory and breeding birds, diversity and habitats;
- Nesting sites of colonial nesters and raptors; and
- Species of conservation concern.

4.1.7 Mammals

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- Relative abundance, diversity and habitats of mammal populations including fur bearers, ungulates and predatory species; and
- Species of conservation concern.

4.2 Socio-Economic Environment

The effects assessment will consider the following attributes in the relevant study area:

- Land/resource use;
- Parks/protected areas;
- Tourism/recreation;
- Health/safety; and
- Infrastructure/services.

4.3 Aboriginal Environment

Through ATK, engagement and prior studies the EIA report will provide information on the following, with respect to Aboriginal communities:

- Community;
- Resource use including hunting fishing, trapping and gathering;
- Traditional and cultural activities; and
- Heritage/cultural resources.

5 Proposed Assessment Approach

5.1 Effects Assessment Principles and Objectives

The effects assessment will consider the existing environment without the Project, as the baseline condition against which changes caused by the Project will be assessed and measured. Potential effects of the Project will also be considered in terms of sustainability as outlined in this Scoping Document.

The effects assessment will include consideration of the:

- Existing biophysical and socio-economic environments in the Study Area;
- Project scope and the potential interactions between the Project and the environment;
- Scientific study and analysis, Aboriginal knowledge, local knowledge, and other stakeholder perspectives, issues and concerns;
- Past and potential future human activities have and continue to affect the environment and how these activities may interact with the Project;
- Avoidance or mitigation of adverse effects and maximizing positive effects to the extent practicable; and
- Implementation of follow-up monitoring where beneficial.

The main objectives of the effects assessment for the Project are as follows:

- Assist in the planning and design of the Project by identifying and assessing potential environmental effects and mitigation options to avoid or minimize adverse effects and maximize positive effects to the degree practicable;
- Address concerns and issues identified by Aboriginal peoples, local residents, and other stakeholders with respect to the Project;
- Provide sufficient information to prepare an EIS for consideration by regulators to exercise their legislated mandate; and
- Provide sufficient information about the existing environment, so that follow-up monitoring studies can be planned.

5.2 Effects Assessment Process

The effects assessment will include the following steps:

- The Project and the existing environment will be described;
- Temporal and spatial boundaries will be described;
- Interactions between the Project and environment will be identified and assessed;
- A selected list of appropriate Valued Environmental Components (VECs) will be determined for the Study Area. These VECs will be used to provide a focus to the assessment and an evaluation of the significance of the potential environmental effects of the Project;
- Technically and economically feasible measures to mitigate adverse effects will be identified, as will measures to enhance positive effects; and
- The significance of residual effects will be determined.

5.2.1 Effects Identification

The EIS will describe and assess the potential effects of the Project for the construction, operation and maintenance phases of the Project including those on:

- The biophysical environment, including wildlife, fisheries, surface water, groundwater, and forestry resources, including those caused by the potential release of hazardous materials (diesel fuel, used oil etc) or pollutants (emissions, effluents, solid wastes and hazardous wastes) that may be produced;
- Human health and safety, including, but not necessarily limited to potential effects on human health and safety resulting from the release of pollutants;

- Heritage resources;
- The exercise of Aboriginal and treaty rights, including, but not necessarily limited to:
 - Direct effects on communities in the project area;
 - Resource use, including hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, etc.; and
 - Cultural or traditional activities in the project area.

Potential socio-economic effects stemming from environmental effects will also be identified and potential climate change implications will be discussed.

5.2.2 Mitigation and Residual Effects

The EIS will describe mitigation or effect management measures proposed to be implemented during the phases of the Project, including need for off-setting disruption or loss of fish habitat, fish passage, and navigation rights and safety.

The EIS will identify residual Project effects that are anticipated to remain after mitigation measures have been implemented.

5.2.3 Determination of Significance

The EIS will outline the framework to be used in the evaluation of the significance of residual adverse effects by using the following criteria:

- Context (Ecological, socio-economic) of the effect;
- Magnitude/geographic extent of the effect;
- Duration of the effect;
- Frequency of the effect;
- Reversibility of the effect; and
- Likelihood of Occurrence.

Characterization of the significance of the residual adverse effects will consider scientific study and analysis, Aboriginal knowledge, and local knowledge, and will relate to all phases of the Project.

5.3 Cumulative Effects Assessment

In addition to assessing the direct effects of the Project, the EIS will also include consideration of potential cumulative effects (the potential for Project effects to act in combination with the effects of other past, present and/or reasonably foreseeable future projects in the Study Area). The EIS will outline the approach and methods and will include a description of the spatial and temporal boundaries used in the assessment.

6 Monitoring and Follow-Up

The Project assessment will summarize proposed mitigation measures and follow-up actions where appropriate, including monitoring and inspection to be implemented during construction and operation and maintenance of the proposed Road Project. Monitoring and follow-up will focus on areas of key potential effects and will consider various methods such as the implementation of contract specifications, environmental management plans, and emergency response plans as well as specific biophysical surveys and analysis.

Monitoring measures will be considered to facilitate compliance with mitigation measures, confirm effect predictions related to anticipated effects, to determine whether unexpected effects are occurring, and to allow for adaptive management and appropriate mitigation measures if unexpected effects do occur. Required monitoring will be finalized once regulatory requirements are known, and following the issuance of authorizations and regulatory approvals. Where appropriate, monitoring of the environmental effects on local Aboriginal people and others who may be directly affected by the Project will be conducted.

7 Report Format and Organization

The EIS will contain the following:

- Executive summary;
- Introduction
- Background information on the proposed Road Project
- Scope
 - Project scope
 - Scope of the environmental assessment
 - Valued Environmental Components
 - Temporal and Spatial boundaries
- Project Description
 - Description of proposed development by project stages, components, and activities
 - Project alternatives
- Environment Description
 - Description of the existing environmental setting, including Biophysical and Aboriginal components
- Aboriginal and Public Engagement
 - Description of engagement program
 - Analysis and discussion of engagement results
- Environmental Effects Assessment
 - Environmental assessment approach
 - Description of environmental effects and mitigation
 - Evaluation of residual effects
 - Conclusion on significance of residual effects
- Environmental Protection
 - Summary of mitigation measures and follow-up actions
- Summary and Conclusion
- References
 - Supporting scientific, local and Aboriginal knowledge

The EIS will use maps, charts, diagrams and photographs as appropriate for presentation.