

# Wekusko Falls Provincial Park

Draft Management Plan



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## 1. Introduction

*The Provincial Parks Act (1993)* 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 protection, land use and development. The plans are developed with public input. The process of preparing the management plan and co-ordinating the public involvement process for Wekusko Falls Provincial Park was the responsibility of a team involving staff from Parks and Natural Areas Branch, regional staff of Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, and a consultant contracted to work on the project.

The management plan for Wekusko Falls Provincial Park is based on its role in Manitoba's system of parks and the participation of those who use and care about the park.

The treaty and Aboriginal rights of Aboriginal peoples to pursue traditional uses and activities within Wekusko Falls Provincial Park are acknowledged and respected.

## 2. Park History

The Wekusko Falls area first became a recreation destination for the Snow Lake community when mining began in the area. The first road to Wekusko Falls, which ran between the Hudson Bay railway station at the Wekusko siding and Snow Lake, was completed in 1947. Two years later, the NorAcme gold mine began production at Snow Lake.

The Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company opened the Chisel Lake copper mine in 1960, the same year the Canadian National Railway completed a spur line from the Sherridon subdivision to Snow Lake.

In 1965, the Royal Canadian Engineers constructed two suspension bridges over the falls as a training project at the request of the province. Wekusko Falls was established as a provincial park in 1974, along with many of the provincial parks in the region. Although the first campground loop was developed on the east side of Grass River, more recent development has occurred on the west side where most of the campsites and facilities are today.

## 3. Park Attributes

### 3.1 Location/Access

Wekusko Falls Provincial Park is 88.23 hectares in size, located 16 kilometres south of Snow Lake and 195 kilometres northeast of The Pas. It is accessed from Provincial Road 392.

### 3.2 Natural

The Wekusko Falls, which cascade down nearly 12 metres along the Grass River before emptying into Wekusko Lake, is the central focus of the park. The park is located in the Churchill River Upland portion of the Precambrian Boreal Forest Natural Region, which is characterized by mixed-wood forest stands. Balsam fir is a common understory species within the mature forest, and calypso orchids have been observed in the park. Budworm infestations have resulted in the loss of tree cover in the park in recent years, and aerial spraying to control infestations has been used.

### 3.3 Recreational

The park has been an important recreational resource for the surrounding area used by many residents of nearby Snow Lake. The medium sized campground has well serviced campsites offering nightly and seasonal camping opportunities, as well as a small number of walk-in sites.

Recreational activities in the park include picnicking and swimming at the beach. Walking trails link the two suspension bridges that cross the Grass River over the falls. Other facilities include playgrounds, modern washrooms and showers, and picnic shelters. A boat launch and dock provide access for fishing and boating on the lake. The day-use area also serves as a staging and stopping point for the Grass River canoe route.

### 3.4 Cultural

The park's cultural significance includes use of the land by Aboriginal cultures, the fur trade and the mining industry. Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism's Heritage and Resources Branch has identified two sites in the park near the mouth of the Grass River that were used by Prehistoric and Late Woodland aboriginal cultures. The Grass River was the "upper track" trade route between Cumberland House and York Factory and had a critical role in the fur trade. Gold was first discovered on the east shores of Wekusko Lake in 1913 and was an important factor that eventually led to the designation of the park.

### 3.5 Additional Features

The Wekusko Falls Lodge is located just outside the park on the south side of Provincial Road 392.

## 4. Park Management Framework

### 4.1 Classification

Manitoba's provincial park system is made up of almost 100 different parks and park reserves. Each of these areas plays a role in conserving ecosystems, preserving natural, cultural or heritage resources and providing outdoor recreation or educational experiences. Classification descriptions can be found in Appendix A.

Wekusko Falls Provincial Park is classified as a Recreation Park. The main purpose of a Recreation Park is to provide recreational opportunities in accordance with *The Provincial Parks Act*.

### 4.2 Park Purpose

Manitoba's provincial park system was established 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. Within this larger framework, individual parks contribute towards the overall objective of the provincial park system.

*The System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks* states that the purpose of Wekusko Falls Provincial Park is to provide outdoor recreational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting in northern Manitoba. The park will:

- provide camping, beach, walking and water-based recreation opportunities
- provide water access to Wekusko Lake and the Grass River system
- preserve the scenic beauty and provide opportunities for viewing the falls

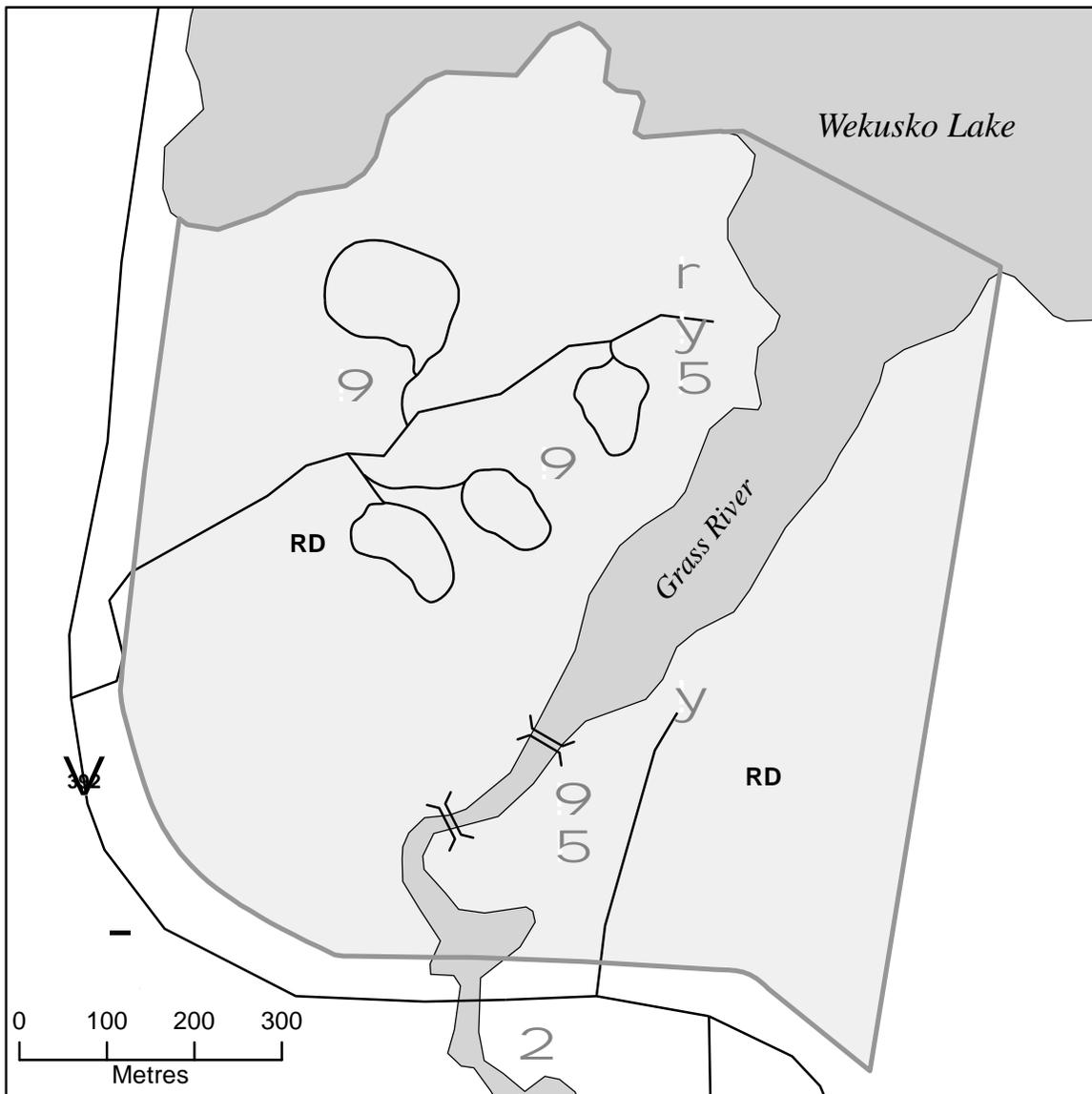
### 4.3 Land Use Categories

Land Use Categories (LUCs) identify the important attributes of broad areas within a provincial park. Land may be categorized in Wilderness, Backcountry, Resource Management, Recreational Development, Heritage or Access LUCs. LUC descriptions can be found in Appendix A.

All of the land comprising Wekusko Falls Provincial Park, or 88.23 hectares, has been categorized as a Recreational Development LUC (RD). The main purpose of this categorization is to accommodate recreational development. *The System Plan for Manitoba’s Provincial Parks* states that within the park’s Recreational Development LUC:

- developments include suspension bridges, walking trails and viewing areas
- facilities include campground, boat launch, beach and day-use area
- Wekusko Lake is a popular angling destination

#### Wekusko Falls Provincial Park



## 5. Management Guidelines

### 5.1 Natural Values

Forest cover is integral to the recreational opportunities provided by the park. Forest cover is vulnerable to certain species of insects including the spruce budworm.

#### **Guidelines**

- Future development will be managed to retain the overall natural character of the park.
- Spruce budworm populations will be monitored and efforts will be made to preserve forest cover as outlined in Parks and Natural Area's pesticide use policy.
- Planting will be undertaken to restore natural forest cover in the park as required.

### 5.2 Recreation

Recreational use focuses on the campground which has a generally low level of use. The walk-in campsites are particularly underutilized and this area may be better allocated for other activities.

#### **Guidelines**

- Camping opportunities will be provided as a medium-sized recreation area offering a range of services.
- Converting the walk-in tent sites into a day-use area will be investigated.
- Strategies to promote use of the park will be explored.

### 5.3 Interpretation

Providing outdoor educational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting is one of the purposes of provincial parks as stated in *The Provincial Parks Act*. Wekusko Falls Provincial Park provides opportunities for interpretation of the natural and cultural history of Grass River area, as well as for self-discovery and exploration of the natural park environment.

#### **Guidelines**

- Interpretive information will be provided through signage and publications such as maps, brochures, and the Parks and Natural Areas website.
- Developing interpretive material for the Grass River and suspension bridges will be investigated.

### 5.4 Commercial Operations

Commercial activity within a park has the ability to enhance or detract from the park experience and must be managed to best suit the park environment and user needs. Commercial operations in Wekusko Provincial Park are limited in order to preserve the park's character.

#### **Guideline**

- Any future commercial operations will be located in the day-use area. They must be consistent with park values and enhance the visitor's experience.

## Appendix A – Park Classification and Land Use Categories

### Park Classifications

In accordance with section 7(2) of *The Provincial Parks Act*, all provincial parks are classified as one of the following types:

- (a) a wilderness park, if the main purpose of the designation is to preserve representative areas of a natural region;
- (b) a natural park, if the main purpose of the designation is both to preserve areas of a natural region and to accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses;
- (c) a recreation park, if the main purpose of the designation is to provide recreational opportunities;
- (d) a heritage park, if the main purpose of the designation is to preserve an area of land containing a resource or resources of cultural or heritage value;
- (e) any other type of provincial park that may be specified in the regulation.

### Land Use Categories

In accordance with section 7(3) of *The Provincial Parks Act*, all provincial parks are categorized into one or more of the following land use categories:

- (a) a wilderness category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to protect representative or unique natural landscapes in an undisturbed state and provide recreational opportunities that depend on a pristine environment;
- (b) a backcountry category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to protect examples of natural landscapes and provide basic facilities and trails for nature-oriented recreation in a largely undisturbed environment;
- (c) a resource management category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to permit commercial resource development or extraction in a manner that does not compromise the main purpose of the park classification;
- (d) a recreational development category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to accommodate recreational development;
- (e) a heritage category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to protect a unique or representative site containing a resource or resources of cultural or heritage value;
- (f) an access category, if the main purpose of the categorization is to provide a point or route of access in a provincial park or a location for a lodge or associated facilities;
- (g) any other category that may be specified in the regulation.