

# Birds Hill Provincial Park

## Background Information

Manitoba Conservation is developing a management plan to provide long-term management direction for Birds Hill Provincial Park. This newsletter presents a summary of the park's natural, cultural and recreational features - information that will help you provide input into the management planning process.

### Role of the Park

Birds Hill Provincial Park was created in 1967. Its purpose is to preserve an area of aspen/oak parkland, one of Manitoba's natural regions, and to provide a range of recreational opportunities. Located less than 20 kilometres from the city of Winnipeg, Birds Hill is one of Manitoba's busiest parks with hundreds of thousands of visitors per year participating in a variety of activities.

#### Goals of the park:

- to provide nature-orientated recreational opportunities such as hiking, horse-back riding, cross country skiing, mountain biking and wildlife viewing in a largely undisturbed environment
- to provide opportunities for a wide range of high-quality, intensive, recreational activities and permit associated developments such as campgrounds, trails and day-use areas



- to promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural features and cultural heritage, serving as a key, year-round natural setting for introducing visitors to the provincial park system

### History and Heritage

The cultural heritage of the Birds Hill area dates back to its first inhabitants - Aboriginal people who lived and hunted in the area. With the arrival of European settlers, small parcels of land were homesteaded and used for farming. Visitors to the park can see an example of this history by stopping along the Pine Ridge Trail at the Kudlowich homestead, an early 20th century farmhouse. Birds Hill was also a place for people

to flee during the floods of 1826 and 1852. A cemetery from the former community of Pine Ridge is also located in the park.

In 1984, Pope John Paul II visited the park and conducted a multicultural celebration of faith. This took place at a site now commonly referred to as Pope's Hill, a popular spot for tobogganing in the winter. Birds Hill is also well known as the site of the Winnipeg Folk Festival that has taken place annually in July since 1974.

## Natural Features: What to See



### Forest and Prairie Landscapes

Protecting Manitoba's natural heritage is one of the main goals of the provincial park system. Birds Hill is the only natural park in Manitoba's aspen/oak parkland region. The park's 35.1 square kilometres are composed of a variety of landscapes, including esker ridges, dry prairie, wet meadows, bogs, aspen/oak and mixed boreal forest. Birds Hill is unique because it supports many different plant communities in a relatively small area. In the past, many non-native trees and shrubs were planted in the park. Today, park managers focus on maintaining natural features and native species.

### Wildlife

Birds Hill is home to over 40 mammal species, more than 200 bird species, six amphibian species, three fish species and two reptile species. The wildlife includes a large white-tailed deer herd, estimated at 300 animals. If deer living outside of the park boundaries are included, the herd total is approximately 600 animals. The size of the deer population is a concern for motorists in the park and accidents have increased over the past several years. To help address this problem, crops favoured by deer have been removed from around the park.

There are several rare plant species found in the park. These include prairie moonwort, pinweed, sideoats grama and dioecious sedge. Birds Hill also provides habitat for western silvery aster, a wildflower that is threatened in Manitoba and Canada.

## Recreation: What to Do

### Spend a Day

Day-use areas are located throughout the park, in particular at trailheads and near the swimming area. Most sites have a picnic table and fire pit, and some sites also have a shelter. Day-use areas are popular and well used year-round. Interpretive programs are offered for all ages, including school groups, throughout the year. These often involve the amphitheatre and interpretive displays located at the campground.



The main road and lake in Birds Hill Park were upgraded in the 1990s to prepare for the 1999 Pan Am Games. Since then, park use has increased significantly. In 2009, the park attracted approximately 800,000 visitors from Manitoba, Canada and outside of the country.

### **Go Camping**

Birds Hill has a 470-unit campground with sites available between May and October. The campsites offer a range of amenities:

- 254 are unserviced
- 171 have electricity
- 45 have electricity, water and sewer



At the height of summer, the campsites are heavily booked. In 2009, 31,000 camping nights were booked. Two areas are also available for group use. In 2009, 400 group camping nights were booked. Several trails link the campground to other areas of the park, including the beach and riding stable.

### **Traverse the Trails**

Birds Hill Provincial Park contains approximately 100 kilometres of all-season trails used for hiking, horseback riding, and horse-drawn carriages. In summer, the trails are used for cycling, inline skating and running. Winter uses include skiing, horse-drawn sleigh rides and snowmobiling. Park users have also begun using some of the trails for skate-skiing, skijoring and kick-sledding. The shoulder of the main road in the park is also used for some of these activities. The trails pass through the various natural and cultural features of the park.

### **Go for a Swim**

The 23.47-hectare lake in the park was originally created in 1967. It was redeveloped in 1997/98 to improve water quality. It offers a swimming area and a separate fishing area and is a very popular destination for park users. A snack bar is near the swimming area.

### **Attend a Special Event**

Birds Hill regularly hosts a variety of special events such as equestrian festivals and competitions, company picnics, fundraisers, weddings and organized sports. The park averages 140 special events per year.

The largest special event regularly held at Birds Hill is the Winnipeg Folk Festival — one of the biggest outdoor music festivals in North America. This event is held in the southeast corner of the park at a site leased to the festival.

The Manitoba Horse Council leases land in the park near the riding stable for barns, polo fields, riding facilities and equestrian events. There is also a sweat lodge in the park, used by Aboriginal people for traditional ceremonies.

### **Economic Aspects**

Revenue from the park is just under \$500,000 annually and is generated mainly from campsite fees. Revenue is also generated through the lease of park areas for the riding stable, campground store, beach concessions and firewood sales. Economic benefits to surrounding communities can also be attributed to the park.



## Your Input is Welcome

Public feedback will help determine the future of the park. Please provide your comments on how Birds Hill should be managed.

### **Manitoba Conservation**

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The park budget for 2009 was \$1.5 million. This covers maintenance, garbage removal, water and sewer services, campground services and park administration. It also includes security by Manitoba Conservation park patrol officers, natural resource officers and the RCMP when necessary. Including park and enforcement staff, Birds Hill employs approximately 15 people in winter and 75 people in summer.

## The Park's Neighbours

Birds Hill Provincial Park is administered separately from its neighbouring rural municipalities of Springfield and St. Clements. An agreement with Springfield provides firefighting services in the park. Emergency medical services and 911 services are also available. The park is surrounded by farmland, some businesses and growing, rural residential communities.