

Grand Beach Provincial Park

Management Plan



Protecting
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our Future

Manitoba
Conservation





Grand Beach Provincial Park Management Plan

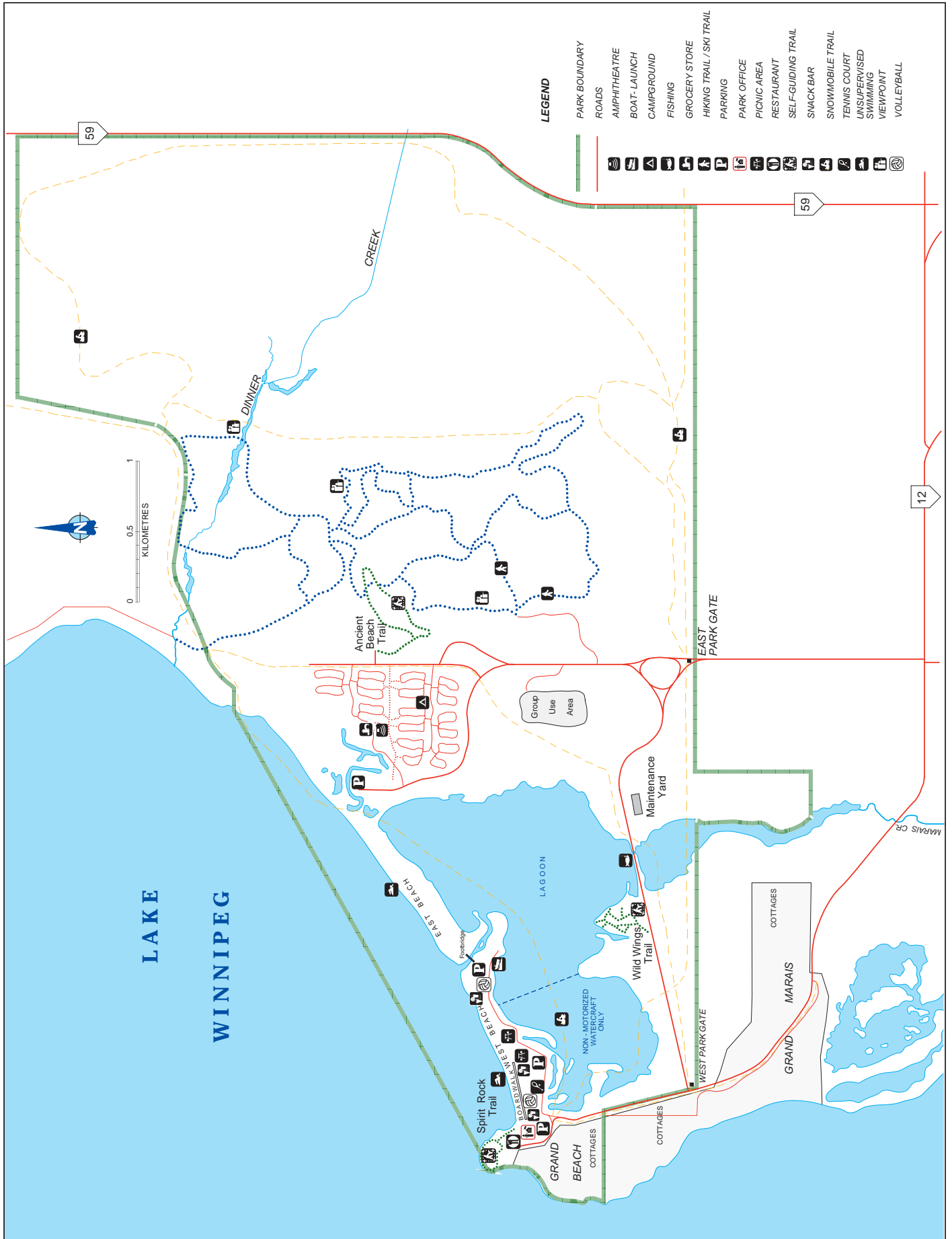


*This Management Plan for Grand Beach Provincial Park
was prepared in consultation with park users under the authority of
The Provincial Parks Act.*

Manitoba Conservation
Parks and Natural Areas Branch
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2 | Map 1 - General Park Map

1.1 Park Description

Grand Beach Provincial Park was officially established in 1961. Its roots as a recreation area, however, go back to the early 1900s when Grand Beach became a resort destination for employees of the Canadian Northern Railway. Over the years, the railway brought scores of visitors to enjoy the beach and attractions such as a hotel, dance hall, boardwalk and carousel. The advent of mass road travel signaled the end of the railway era, and on Labour Day, 1961, the last train left Grand Marais. Today, the rail line, original hotel, dance hall and carousel are gone, but tales of the "Grand Old Days" live on.

True to its name, the most outstanding feature of this 24.9 km² park is a three-kilometre stretch of natural, white sand beach. Only an hour and a half drive from Winnipeg, Grand Beach is the most popular beach in Manitoba, attracting over 500,000 visitors annually. The park supports plants and animals typical of open water, ponds, bogs, marshes, sand dune, deciduous and boreal forest habitats. These diverse habitats provide examples of some of Manitoba's many natural landscapes and make the park suitable for a variety of outdoor recreation activities. Grand Beach is located in the Lake of the Woods portion of the Manitoba Lowlands Natural Region.

The beach at Grand Beach Provincial Park is composed of finely textured sand derived from sandstone. As the lake level rises and falls, prevailing northwest winds pile the sand into dunes more than 12 metres high. These dunes are "active" because they are constantly shifting. Immediately behind the beach, currents have washed the sands into a sheltered bay that has become a lagoon bordered by marshland. A channel running between the lagoon and Lake Winnipeg separates the beach into two main sections, east and west beach.

The eastern portion of the park is a forested area, where the vegetation blends into a mosaic of mixed forest, aspen groves, white spruce and jack pine. Most of the park's underlying soils range from coarse to fine sands. Red pine and Scots pine plantations are scattered throughout, and there is a large black spruce/cedar bog in the northeastern portion of the park along Dinner Creek. Several provincially rare and uncommon plant species such as Dwarf Bilberry, Tesselated Rattlesnake Plantain and Houghton's Umbrella-sedge have been recorded in the park.

Associated with Grand Beach's wetland and forest landscapes is a wide range of animal species. Birds are the park's most visible wildlife. Songbirds, grouse, pelicans, great blue herons, cormorants and a variety of waterfowl are common. In addition, osprey, bald eagles and endangered piping plovers have been observed in each of the past several years. Other animals present include white-tailed deer, black bear, muskrats and rabbits, and fish in the lagoon such as perch, walleye, northern pike, silver bass and bullhead.

Main areas of recreational use in the park are described below:

- a) Beach: The west beach area is the traditional centre of recreation and development. During the summer months this area can be very busy with visitor numbers ranging from less than 1,000 during cool and wet periods to over 15,000 on hot sunny days. The east beach is generally a quieter, family-oriented beach, but visitors may also encounter large numbers of people on some days.
- b) Day Use: Facilities include picnic areas, tennis and beach volleyball courts, playgrounds, group use area and parking lots. High visitation can result in crowding and congestion in the parking lots; this situation is not easily remedied due to the limited land base in the park and the relative infrequency of this occurrence.
- c) Lagoon: The lagoon provides a sheltered environment for water-based recreation, particularly boating, water-skiing, fishing, windsurfing, canoeing and kayaking during the summer months. Visitors can expect to find many people recreating in the motorized area of the lagoon. The non-motorized area provides more of an opportunity for solitude and closeness to nature.
- d) Backcountry: The forested areas east of the campground and East Beach Road provide opportunities for trail-based recreation in a largely undisturbed environment. Visitors to this area can expect to find relatively few other park users.
- e) Interpretive Trails: Several interpretive trails, including the Spirit Rock, Wild Wings and Ancient Beach trails provide visitors with opportunities to discover the natural and cultural history of the park. These trails are located in a predominantly natural environment, and interpretation is primarily through guided and self-guided hikes. On-site development is limited to interpretive displays and rest stations.



- f) Cottage Sub-Division: The 517-cottage subdivision is the park's most intensely developed area. As a result of its gradual evolution from railway campground to cottage area, lots in the cottage subdivision are smaller than in most provincial parks and are subject to more stringent cottage development guidelines.

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- g) Campground: The campground provides family-oriented camping in a natural setting. In 2001, there were 356 transient campsites in the park and 48 seasonal sites.
 - h) Commercial Developments: The main developments in the park are the Surf Club restaurant and lounge, the beach pavilion and concessions, and the campground store and laundromat. These facilities are managed by Grand Beach Management Services under the terms of a 21-year lease issued in 1990.
 - i) Special Events: The park hosts a variety of special events ranging from volleyball tournaments to foot and cycling races. Special events are accommodated where possible, based on the existing Special Events procedures.

1.2 Park Purpose

Grand Beach is part of Manitoba's provincial park system. This system is a network of natural areas, recreation areas and historic sites. Provincial parks are dedicated to the people of Manitoba and visitors to Manitoba, and are maintained for the benefit of future generations. Conservation of ecosystems, preservation of resources, and provision of outdoor recreational activities are the primary purposes of these areas.

While all provincial parks share similar overall objectives, factors such as location, size, history, natural features, and recreational opportunities make each provincial park unique.

The main purpose of Grand Beach Provincial Park, as outlined in A System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks (1998) is to preserve areas that are representative of the Lake of the Woods portion of the Manitoba Lowlands Natural Region and to accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities. The park will:

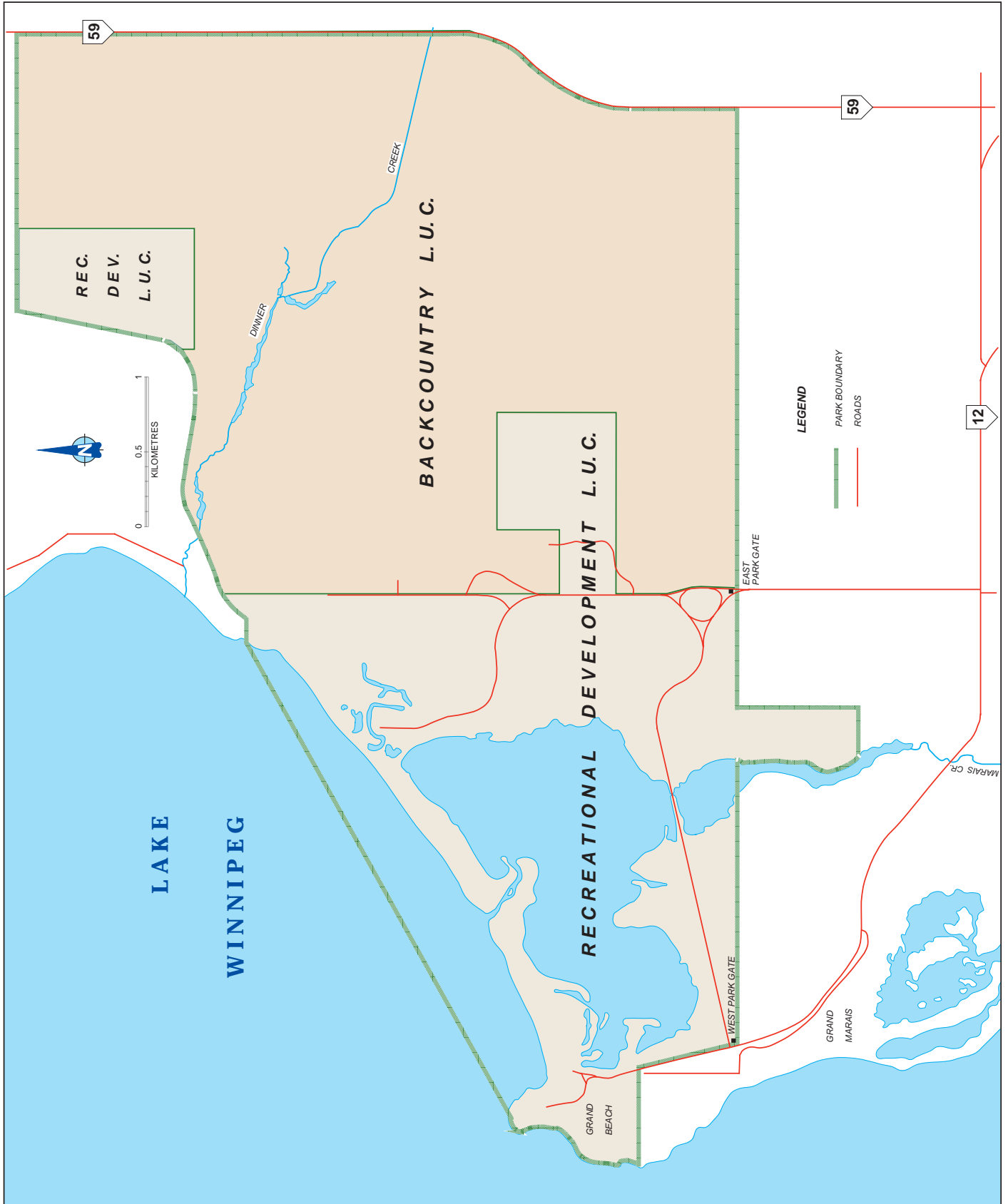
- Protect unique and outstanding features such as beach sand dunes and habitat for the endangered piping plover;
- Provide high quality recreation opportunities such as swimming, camping, cottaging, hiking and cross-country skiing; and
- Promote public appreciation and understanding of the unique natural features and recreational history of Grand Beach.

Purposes of provincial parks

In accordance with park classifications and land use categories, the purposes of a provincial park system include the following:

- (a) to conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity;
- (b) to preserve unique and representative natural, cultural and heritage resources;
- (c) to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting.

(Source: The Provincial Parks Act, 1993)



6 | Map 2 - Land Use Categories

1.3 Classification

Under The Provincial Parks Act, all parks are classified to identify their role in the provincial park system. Grand Beach is classified as a Natural Park. The main purpose of a Natural Park is to both preserve areas of a natural region and to accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.

1.4 Land Use Categories

The Provincial Parks Act also requires that parks be categorized into Land Use Categories (LUCs) to identify the main purpose of major areas within the park. Grand Beach is divided into a Backcountry LUC and a Recreational Development LUC, as shown on Map 2.

1.4.1 Backcountry LUC

Backcountry LUCs protect examples of natural landscapes and provide basic facilities and trails for nature oriented recreation in a largely undisturbed environment. They are managed as protected areas (see 1.5 - Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative).

Over 56% (1,405 hectares) of Grand Beach Provincial Park has been categorized as Backcountry LUC. This area, as defined in A System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks (1998):

- Protects ancient beach ridges; and
- Provides opportunity for nature-oriented activities such as hiking, mountain biking and cross-country skiing.

1.4.2 Recreational Development LUC

The main purpose of a Recreational Development LUC is to accommodate recreational development. Approximately 44% (1,085 hectares) of Grand Beach is categorized as Recreational Development LUC. This area, as defined in A System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks (1998):

- Provides recreational opportunities such as swimming, hiking, biking and cross-country skiing;
- Accommodates intensive recreational development including a campground, cottages, day use areas, road and trail network and park administration areas;
- Promotes public appreciation of the park's natural and cultural history, and provides public education about piping plover habitat; and
- Accommodates existing gravel extraction activities.

1.5 Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative

Protected areas are critical in the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. In protected areas, logging, mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas exploration and development and other activities that significantly and adversely affect habitat are prohibited.

Manitoba has adopted an enduring features or landscape unit approach to its Protected Areas Initiative. This involves the protection of representative portions of each natural region and sub-region found in the province. Each natural region has been broken into smaller landscape units, which are unique combinations of climate, physiography, surficial geology and soil types. Grand Beach is located in the Lake of the Woods portion of the Manitoba Lowlands Natural Region, designated as Natural Region 5C in A System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks (1998).

The protected area at Grand Beach includes the entire Backcountry Land Use Category. Two landscape units are represented. The forested uplands are representative of a moraine deposit, which is part of an ancient beach ridge formed by glacial Lake Agassiz. The bog in the eastern portion of the park provides representation of deep basin deposits, which are sediments that were once the basin of the glacial lake.



2.1 Natural Features

Grand Beach has a history and tradition of being a people place. As one of Manitoba's premier beach destinations, Grand Beach evokes an image of sun-drenched crowds, blue skies and fine white sand. Less well known, but equally significant, are its varied natural landscapes, its importance to endangered wildlife, and its many kilometres of backcountry trails.

The future of Grand Beach as a natural park and recreation area is vitally dependent on the continued health of its beach, sand dunes, forest, lagoon and marsh. Safeguarding the park's natural attributes, while managing the park's many high-use recreational areas, is integral to the management of Grand Beach.

Specific issues identified during the management planning process are addressed below:

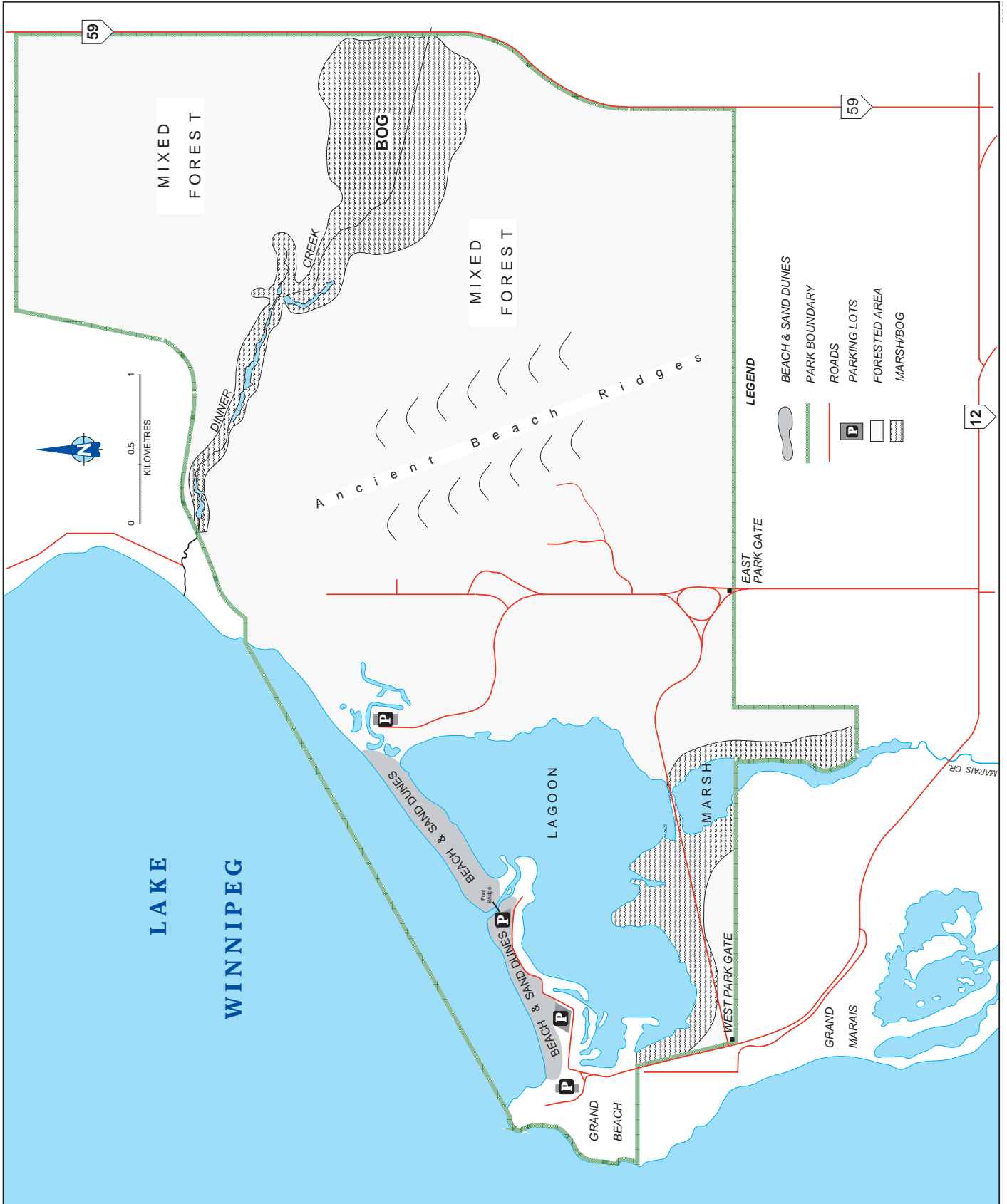
2.1.1 Natural Landscape

Human activity in and around the park can have a direct effect on the park environment, and recreational use of the park must be managed to protect the park landscape. Management efforts will focus on maintaining an environment where natural processes can continue to occur, and on protecting the key ecological components of the park: the forest and bog in the Backcountry LUC, and the beach, sand dunes and marsh in the Recreational Development LUC.

Intent: To minimize the impact of human activities on Grand Beach's natural areas.

Guidelines:

1. Proposed developments and new activities will be evaluated to determine their impact on natural processes, landscape composition, plant and animal populations, and habitat.
2. Assessments and studies may be conducted as required to manage natural areas of the park and to assist in the evaluation of new developments or activities.
3. Paved surfaces and permanent buildings will not be permitted in the Backcountry LUC; temporary structures such as warm-up shelters or signage will be minimal in design and easily removed.



2.1.2 Beach and Sand Dunes

The beach/dune/lagoon complex is an example of a landscape formation known as a barrier inlet, which is a type of barrier beach. It is the product of a complex array of forces including lake level change, waves, storm surges, and floods and wind. The beach extends like two arms from the mainland, separating the lake from the lagoon. Sand is derived and transported along the beach by wind action and wave movement. The channel connecting Lake Winnipeg to the lagoon serves as a route for sand movement under water into the regions behind the barrier beach and back out. Water and winds also carry sand from the beach face to the backshore and cause the dunes to shift and move.

Buildings, offshore barriers and pedestrian traffic all have the potential to disrupt the natural processes that replenish and maintain Grand Beach. For example, heavy pedestrian traffic can destroy the vegetation that holds the dunes together, resulting in “blow outs” where excessive erosion causes the dune to collapse. Buildings can alter wind patterns, and offshore barriers can disrupt water currents and the natural transport of sand along the beach.

In addition to existing federal and provincial legislation and regulations regarding waters and shorelines, the following park guidelines will help to ensure the long-term stability of the beach, sand dunes and lagoon.

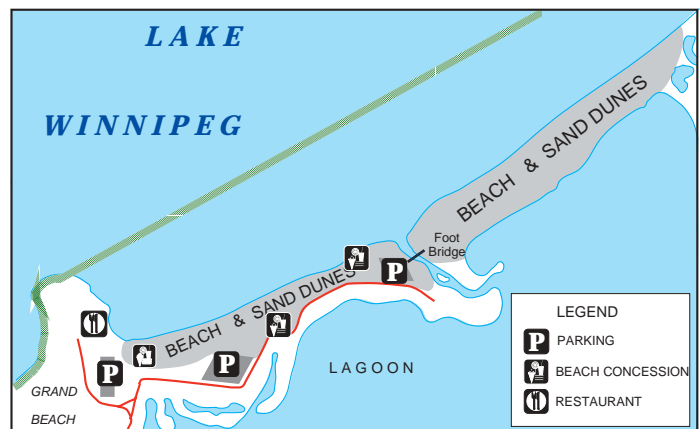
Intent: To preserve the beach and active sand-dune formations in the park by identifying and safeguarding the natural processes that maintain the beach/dune/lagoon environment.

Guidelines:

1. A study will be conducted to document the natural processes that maintain and replenish the beach and sand dunes at Grand Beach. The report will include recommendations for monitoring and managing the area. New management guidelines for the beach, sand dunes or lagoon may be adopted based on study findings.

2. Pending completion of the study, the following will be implemented:

a) No new permanent facilities will be permitted in the area identified as beach and sand dunes; except in the three designated beach concession areas. Necessary improvements such as benches and beach safety structures will be minimal and easily removed.



b) Construction of offshore structures such as jetties, groynes and sea walls, and the dredging of man-made channels between the lagoon and lake will not be permitted.

c) The flow of water through the channel to the lagoon shall remain unobstructed by the construction of docks, structures or other impediments.

d) The removal of sand from the beach and dunes will not be permitted, except to clear sand from existing developed areas such as parking lots, boardwalks, buildings and roads.

e) Public access to the sand dunes will be managed to protect natural dune processes and vegetation, and the following procedures will be adopted as required:

i) Public education programs and signage will be used to explain the sensitivity of sand dunes and the effects of human traffic on vegetation.

ii) In areas of visible erosion, trails will be marked clearly and, where possible, native shrubs used to create borders to contain people within designated pathways.

iii) To protect sensitive dune vegetation in high-use areas, temporary walkways will be considered. In elevated areas, platforms and access steps may be used.

f) Erosion control techniques, such as planting local native vegetation or using brush piles and snow fences, will be used to prevent "blow-outs" and protect areas where sand movement has become excessive.



2.1.3 Endangered Wildlife – Piping Plovers

The piping plover is one of North America’s most endangered birds. It depends on gently sloping, non-vegetated or sparsely vegetated beaches with sand and gravel or pebble substrates for its nesting habitat. Grand Beach Provincial Park is fortunate to have a small breeding population of this species.

A Prairie Piping Plover Recovery Team oversees the management of plovers in western Canada. The Canadian Wildlife Service in Edmonton chairs this western team, with the province’s Wildlife Branch acting as provincial coordinator for the program.

Intent: To promote the continued nesting success of piping plovers at Grand Beach Provincial Park.

Guidelines:

1. Grand Beach staff will work in cooperation with the Prairie Piping Plover Recovery Team to deliver an ongoing management and monitoring program for piping plover in the park.
2. Amendments to beach maintenance and park operations will be implemented as required to minimize disturbance to plovers during their nesting and fledging season.



2.2 Cultural Resources

The modern history of Grand Beach is closely linked to the coming of the railway. Before the arrival of the first train, waterways and a rough ox-trail provided the only access to the area. The road was plagued with floodwaters from the marsh in spring, and it is said that travel was measured in the number of potholes from one settlement to another. A Métis community had established itself back of the beach and a handful of homesteaders had settled along the shore.

With the completion of the railway in 1916, Grand Beach entered a new era. Spurred by a post-war construction boom, Grand Beach quickly rose from a private railway resort to a very popular public beach. For several decades, Grand Beach enjoyed great prosperity as visitors came by train to enjoy the sand, boardwalk, dance hall, hotel and carousel. The destruction of the Dancing Pavilion by fire in 1950 and the rising popularity of automobile travel marked the end of the rail era.

The resort history of Grand Beach is one of several themes addressed by staff interpreters through the park's Interpretive Program. Interpretive themes for Grand Beach include the social and cultural history of the Grand Beach area, as well as natural history themes such as geomorphology, vegetation, wildlife and park management.

Specific issues identified during the management planning process are addressed below:

2.2.1 Railway Resort Theme

With most of the original railway-era buildings no longer in existence, preservation of the old railway resort is not possible. Instead, efforts will centre on the development of a unifying theme to celebrate the character and ambiance of the "Grand Old Days" in Grand Beach's resort history.

Intent: To promote public appreciation and understanding of the resort history of Grand Beach.

Guidelines:

1. The park's resort history will be celebrated through the incorporation of railway and "Grand Old Days" themes in future architectural design concepts, particularly in the west beach area.

2.2.2 Visitor Centre

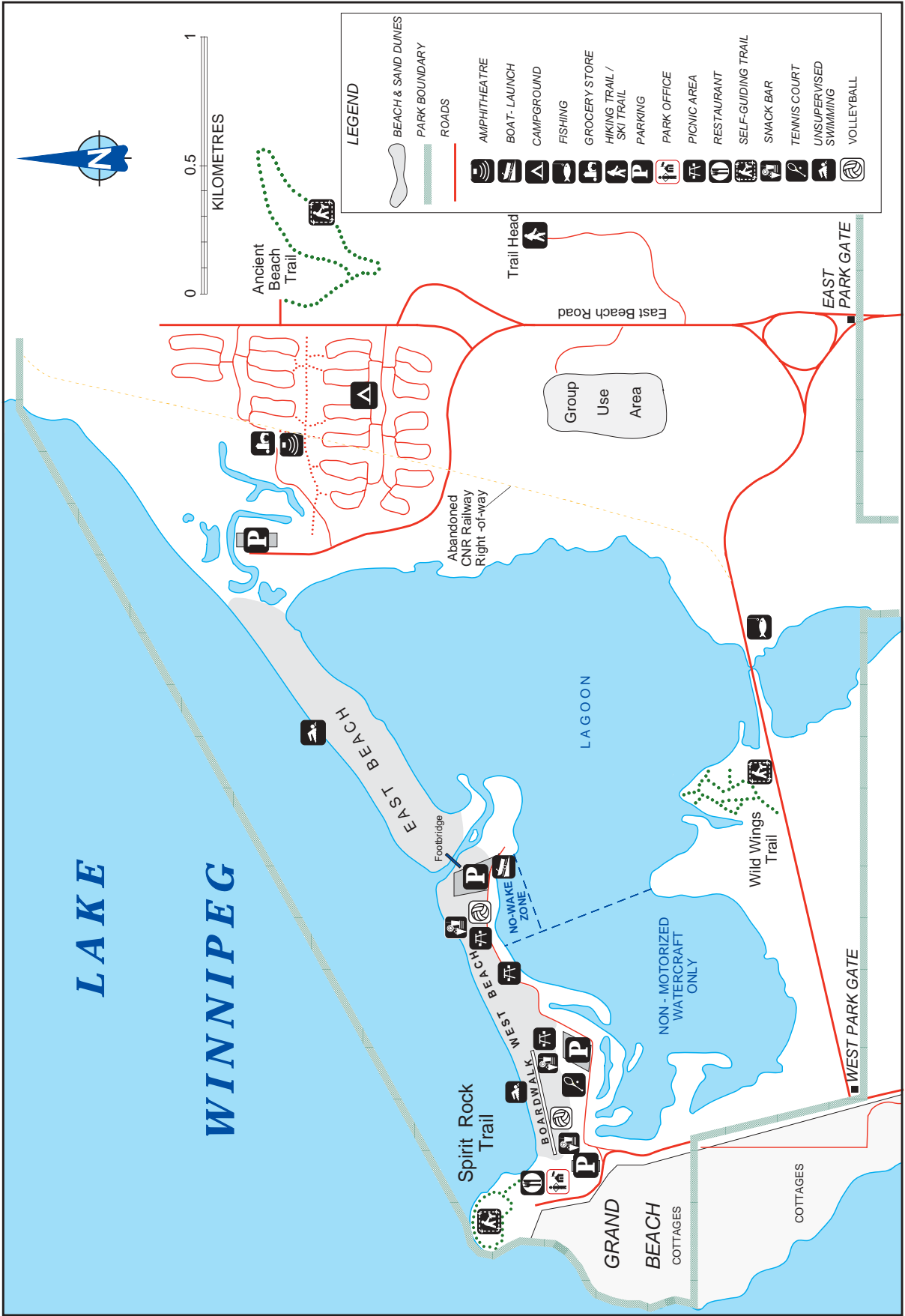
For many years, Manitoba Conservation has considered the need for a visitor centre at Grand Beach. A visitor centre would centralize park information, interpretive programming and other services. Public response to this concept has been generally favourable.

Intent: To celebrate the natural and cultural history of Grand Beach through the future development of a park visitor centre or interpretive facility.

Guidelines:

1. A site to accommodate a visitor/interpretive centre will be identified on any future redevelopment plans for the west beach area, should construction become a viable option in the future.
2. The preferred location for the visitor/interpretive centre is at or near the site of the original railway station at Grand Beach. A centre on this site would incorporate a railway theme and could be designed to replicate the old train station.





2.3 Recreation

One of the greatest challenges faced by park managers has been, and will continue to be, accommodating large numbers of park visitors while protecting the park's natural features. Park managers must ensure that future management decisions, particularly those dealing with development and new activities, will enhance the recreational use of the natural park environment. With any new proposal, they will need to consider potential benefit to the park, the park's limited land base, and whether the proposal would be more feasible in adjacent developed areas.

Specific issues related to recreation that were identified during the management planning process are addressed below:

2.3.1 New Development

Over the past number of years, new development at Grand Beach has been limited. The short summer season, park visitation rates that fluctuate greatly depending on the weather, and seasonal population changes in surrounding communities are thought to be contributing factors. In 1999 and 2000, management plan consultations indicated general public support for the development of new commercial opportunities in the Grand Beach area, particularly overnight rental accommodation.

Guidelines are needed to determine what facilities are appropriate in the park, and what could be accommodated elsewhere, in adjacent communities. Within the park, development proposals will be considered for appropriate sites within the Recreational Development LUC only. In accordance with The Provincial Parks Act, development or activities that would significantly and adversely affect habitat are prohibited in the Backcountry LUC.

The following guidelines are directed at developments and opportunities that would require a permanent site and tenure to that site for more than one year. Small business vending opportunities are discussed in section 2.3.2.

Intent: To establish parameters for future development proposals at Grand Beach Provincial Park.

Guidelines:

1. Manitoba Conservation will work in cooperation with the R.M.s of St. Clements and Alexander, business associations, community groups and stakeholders to review appropriate development opportunities for the Grand Beach/Grand Marais area.

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2. Development proposals for sites within the park will be subject to the following principles:
 - a) Development proposals must be presented as part of an integrated, overall development plan for the site and must demonstrate suitability for a park setting.
 - b) Proposals should be consistent with the natural and cultural values of the park.
 - c) Proposals must demonstrate a direct benefit to the park and park users, and be compatible with existing and adjacent site use.
 - d) Proposals must demonstrate economic viability, and will be subject to appropriate review and applicable environmental assessment.



3. The campground area is of adequate size and future expansion to new areas of the park will not be required. Management will focus on providing services within the existing campground boundaries.
4. The area allocated for cottaging will not be increased or expanded to new areas of the park. Development will continue to be governed by guidelines outlined in *The Cottager's Handbook for Manitoba Provincial Parks*. Subdivision of privately owned land within the park is not permitted.

2.3.2 Small Businesses

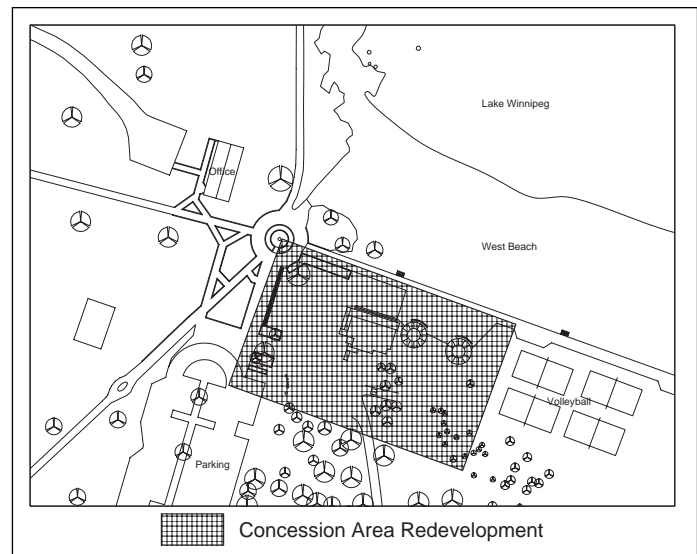
The management plan distinguishes between small businesses that are temporary in nature, and large-scale commercial developments that require a permanent site in the park. Many of these smaller operations could be accommodated as seasonal or satellite sales outlets that would require only temporary facilities. In this context, a small business is one that requires no significant infrastructure development, other than the provision of a weatherproof booth or sales area. Electrical service may be provided, depending on the nature of the business.

Under the terms of the existing agreement, food, beverage and all merchandise sales on the beach and adjacent area are currently under lease to Grand Beach Management Services. Proposals will continue to be directed to Grand Beach Management Services in accordance with this agreement.

Intent: To provide opportunities for vendors to sell goods and services that will enhance existing recreational use of the park.

Guidelines:

1. Three beach concession areas have been designated as shown on Map 4. Vendors will be required to operate on specified sites within these designated areas. Vendors will not be permitted on the beach, sand dunes or boardwalk.
2. Maximum number of vendors will be determined by Manitoba Conservation; vendors will be subject to Departmental approval. Proposals for sales of food, non-alcoholic beverages, merchandise and beach-related rentals will be considered.
3. The existing beach concession area at the west end of the West Beach area will be reviewed with the intent to accommodate beach-related services including vendors, washrooms and food concessions. Area design and construction will be determined by Manitoba Conservation, in consultation with Grand Beach Management Services.



2.3.3 Boating in the Lagoon

The size of the lagoon, coupled with an increase in boat traffic, has led to concerns about boater congestion and disturbances to wildlife. To address this situation, Manitoba Conservation has encouraged qualified organizations and individuals to deliver boater awareness and training programs at Grand Beach. Motorized and non-motorized areas have also been designated to help manage the variety of recreational uses that occur.

Intent: To maintain a safe and enjoyable recreational environment in the Grand Beach lagoon.

Guidelines:

1. A non-motorized zone shall be maintained in the Grand Beach lagoon to protect habitat and ensure public safety.

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2. A no-wake zone will be maintained adjacent to the lagoon beach and boat launch to reduce boat speed and increase public safety in the designated area (see Map 4).
 3. The rental of personal watercraft and motorboats will not be permitted in the park.
 4. Manitoba Conservation will monitor and record levels of use in the lagoon. If warranted for reasons of public safety, additional measures will be considered such as: closing the current boat launch, establishing a new launch site in another part of the lagoon, limiting the number of motorized watercraft permitted, or closing the lagoon to motorized watercraft.

2.3.4 Recreation Trails

Trails are an important recreational component of Grand Beach Provincial Park. Trails promote healthful activity and allow people to move about the park with less reliance on motorized vehicles. The trail system provides routes for hiking, cycling, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Respondents to management plan consultations and park visitor surveys have expressed desire for new cycling and walking trails.

Intent: To improve non-motorized trail corridors between developed areas of Grand Beach Provincial Park.

Guidelines:

1. A new cycling and walking trails plan will be prepared for Grand Beach Provincial Park. The plan will incorporate, as feasible:
 - a) multi-use trails adjacent to existing main roads
 - b) a trail to Grand Marais
 - c) trails linking to the existing hiking/skiing/snowmobile trail system inside the park
2. The old CNR railway bed will be used for the routing of trails where possible, to provide a scenic route with opportunities for cultural interpretation of the railway era.
3. Snowmobiles and ATVs will be permitted on designated snowmobile trails during the winter season only. A provincial review of ATV use in provincial parks is pending and directives governing their use may change.

3.1 Introduction

Most of the guidelines outlined in this document will be implemented on an immediate and on-going basis. Others require additional study or examination be carried out to enable implementation.

The following items will be identified for implementation in Manitoba Conservation's Operational Work Plan. The Operational Work Plan is an annual work program developed by Parks and Natural Areas Branch in conjunction with the Interlake Region. The plan outlines the key projects and programs that will be completed in any given year.

3.1.1 Beach and Sand Dune Monitoring (see section 2.1.2)

A study will be undertaken to examine and describe the natural processes that maintain the beach and sand dune system at Grand Beach and to recommend a monitoring program that will measure physical changes in the beach/sand dune/lagoon area.

3.1.2 Visitor Centre (see section 2.2.2)

A site for a future visitor centre will be identified in conjunction with the West Beach Concession Area redevelopment.

3.1.3 West Beach Concession Area (see section 2.3.2)

A design and schedule will be prepared to direct redevelopment of the concession area.

3.1.4 Recreation Trails (see section 2.3.4)

A trails plan will be developed for Grand Beach.

Progress on the above items will be monitored on an annual basis, as part of the department's annual Operational Work Plan review.

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