

Wekusko Falls Provincial Park

Management Plan

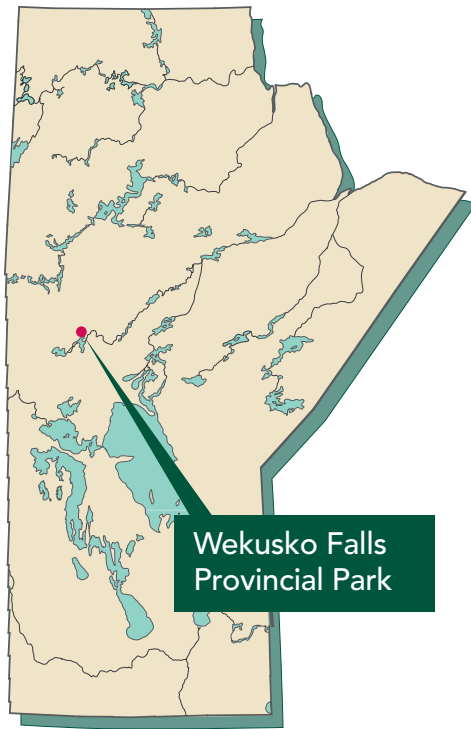


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This management plan for Wekusko Falls Provincial Park was prepared in consultation with park users under the authority of *The Provincial Parks Act*.

Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship
Parks and Natural Areas Branch
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1. Introduction

The Provincial Parks Act (1993) requires that a management plan be prepared for each of Manitoba's provincial parks. Management plans establish long-term direction for parks and address issues pertaining to resource protection, land use and development. 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 plan is to be used in conjunction with park regulations, directives, and other departmental and government policies and legislation.

The process of preparing this management plan and co-ordinating the public involvement process 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.

Preparation of the management plan involved a number of steps. The first step was to review the current operation of the park, its attributes, and history of use. Information collected was then used to prepare a draft plan. Public input on the draft plan was collected primarily through the Manitoba Parks website, at a public drop-in session in Snow Lake in September of 2012, and in meetings and discussions with park users. Once the public consultation process was completed the plan was finalized based on planning objectives and any new information received through the consultation process.

This management plan will guide the work of Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship for a minimum of 10 to 15 years. In this context the plan will be utilized and examined on an ongoing basis. Where an update or new direction on any matters described in this management plan may be needed, a process for publicly reviewing and updating the plan will be undertaken.

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

2. Park History

The Wekusko Falls area first became a recreation destination when mining began in the Snow Lake 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, and in 1974, Wekusko Falls was designated as a provincial park. Although the park's 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 now located.

3. Park Attributes

3.1 Location/Access

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

3.2 Natural

Wekusko Falls is a series of cascades and chutes on the Grass River, where the river drops nearly 12 metres before emptying into Wekusko Lake (Penziwol and Blahut, 2011). 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 a loss of tree cover in the park in recent years, and aerial spraying to control infestations has been used.

3.3 Recreational

The park is an important recreational resource for the surrounding area and is used by many residents of nearby Snow Lake. The medium sized campground has 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. 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 park serves as a staging and stopping point for the Grass River canoe route.

3.4 Cultural

Prior to the creation of a provincial park, the area's cultural significance includes use of the land by aboriginal cultures, the fur trade and the mining industry. Manitoba Historic 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 part of the "upper track" trade route between Cumberland House and York Factory and had a critical role in the fur trade in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1913, the discovery of gold on the eastern shores of Wekusko Lake attracted new settlement to the Snow Lake area. This eventually led to the establishment of Wekusko Falls as a recreation area and later a provincial park.

3.5 Additional Features

Wekusko Falls Lodge is located just outside the park on the south side of Provincial Road 392. The lodge offers cabin and boat rentals, hunting, fishing and outfitting services.

4. Park Management Framework

4.1 Classification

Manitoba's provincial park system is made up of almost 100 different parks and park reserves. The role of an individual park within this system is identified by its classification. 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 (1993)*.

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.

A System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks (1997) 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

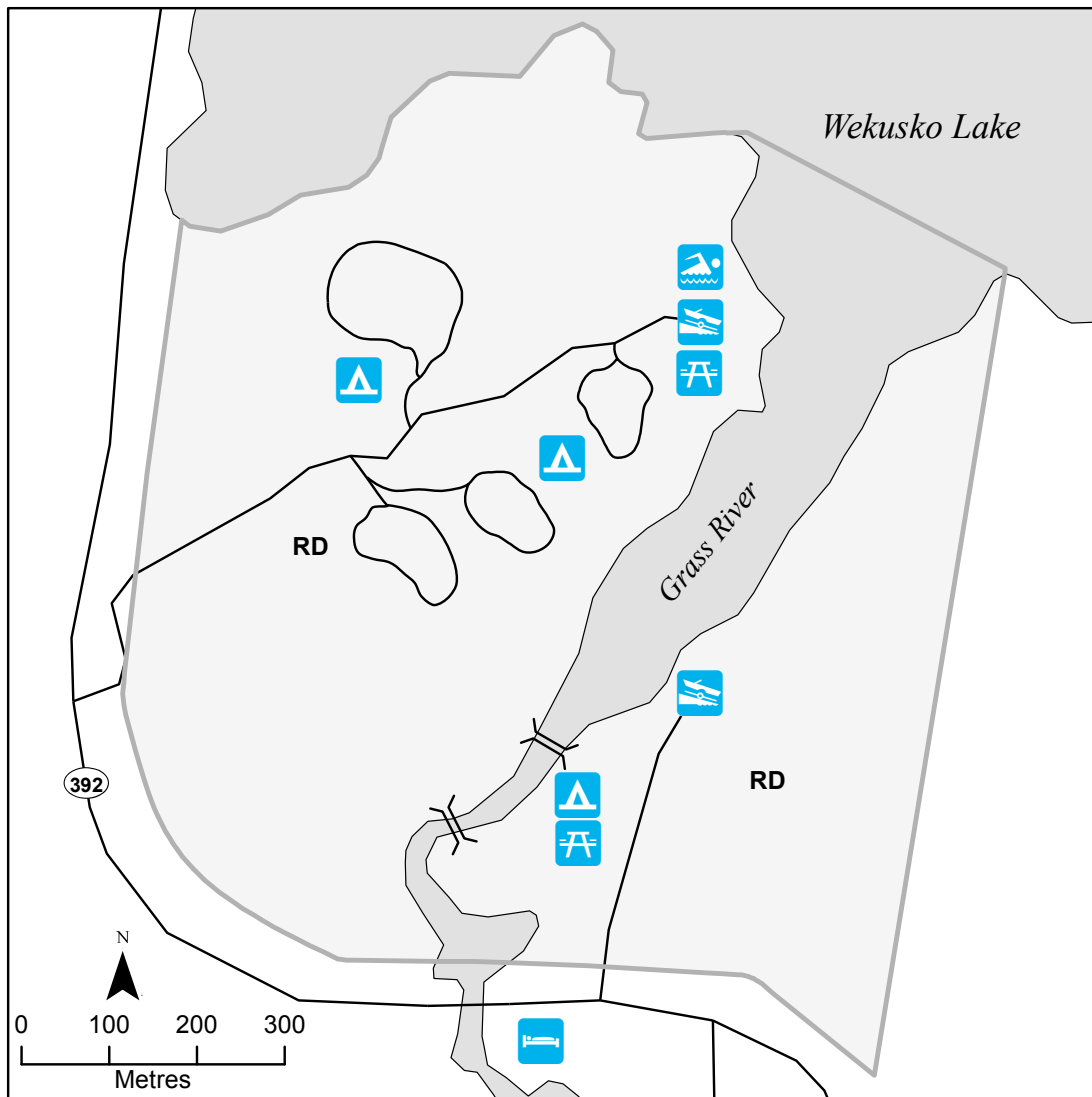
4.3 Land Use Categories

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 88.23 hectares of land comprising Wekusko Falls Provincial Park has been categorized as a Recreational Development LUC (RD). The main purpose of this categorization is to accommodate recreational development. A *System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks* (1997) 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. Park Management Guidelines

5.1 Natural Values

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

Guidelines

1. Future development will be managed to retain the overall natural character of the park.
2. Spruce budworm populations will be monitored and efforts will be made to preserve forest cover in accordance with the Pesticide Use directive for parks.
3. 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

1. Camping opportunities will be provided as a medium sized recreation area offering a range of services.
2. Converting the walk-in tent sites to other uses will be investigated.
3. 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. Wekusko Falls Provincial Park provides opportunities to explore the natural environment and to learn about the natural and cultural history of the Grass River area. Interpretive information is provided through non-personal means.

Guidelines

1. Interpretive information will be provided through signage and publications such as maps, brochures, and the Parks and Natural Areas website.
2. Signs highlighting the natural and cultural history of the Grass River, falls and suspension bridges will be developed.

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 Falls Provincial Park are limited in order to preserve the park's character.

Guidelines

1. Development of commercial facilities within the park will not be permitted.
2. Proposals for mobile commercial operations in the park will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Appendix A – Park Classification and Land Use Categories

Park Classifications

In accordance with section 7(2) of *The Provincial Parks Act* (1993), 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* (1993), 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 and associated facilities;
- (g) any other category that may be specified in the regulation.

Bibliography

Manitoba Natural Resources. "A System Plan for Manitoba's Provincial Parks." 1997.

Penziwol, S. and Blahut, P. "From Asessippi to Zed Lake: A Guide to Manitoba's Provincial Parks." Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications. 2011.

The Provincial Parks Act. C.C.S.M., c. P20. 1993.

