



Manitoba Protected Areas Initiative Update 2013

Manitoba's network of protected areas includes a variety of Crown lands with different legal designations including ecological reserves, traditional use planning areas, national and provincial parks, wildlife management areas, and provincial forests. Through Memorandums of Agreement, private lands owned by conservation agencies are also recognized as part of Manitoba's network.

Over the past year, Manitoba expanded the Pocock Lake Ecological Reserve and established the new Holmgren Pines Ecological Reserve, both in the Lake of the Woods Ecoregion. Designation of the new ecological reserve supports the implementation of "TomorrowNow – Manitoba's Green Plan" and helps fulfil the province's commitment to designate up to 15 more parks, ecological reserves, wildlife management areas or other protected areas by 2020. In addition, the area of protected Backcountry land use category within two provincial parks was increased. Currently, over 7 million hectares are included in Manitoba's protected areas network, covering 10.8 per cent of the province.

The Endangered Species and Ecosystem Protection Act came into force on December 5, 2013, in Manitoba. The act is the first legislation in North America that allows for designating ecosystems as endangered or threatened and will protect them on provincial Crown land. Once an ecosystem has been designated as endangered or threatened, Manitoba must prepare a recovery strategy that sets out steps to prevent further losses and to promote ecosystem recovery. The act also allows designation of 'ecosystem preservation zones' with instruments to limit access and harmful activity in these zones.

Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, who coined the term 'biological diversity', had this to say when the legislation was first introduced: "This is a splendid, and indeed, visionary step to add rare and endangered ecosystems to the *Manitoba Endangered Species Act*. Doing so will pre-empt the need for much last-minute endangered species action, but it will also conserve ecosystems which underpin humanity's well-being."

Key Achievements

May

- The **Spruce Woods Provincial Park Backcountry Expansion** protects additional areas of native mixed-grass prairie within the park by shifting **324 hectares** of lands from a Recreational Development land use category to a Backcountry land use category. Including these lands in the protected areas network did not affect any of the current land use within the park.

August

- Manitoba designated the new **Holmgren Pines Ecological Reserve**, a **76 hectare** site located 30 kilometres northeast of Sprague in the far southeast corner of the province. It is the only known location in Manitoba where all three native pine species – eastern white pine, red pine, and Jack pine – grow together. The eastern white pine and red pine here are also a valuable seed source.
- The province adjusted the boundaries of the **Pocock Lake Ecological Reserve**, removing 39 hectares of land with cross country ski trails in the southeast corner and adding **81 hectares** of undisturbed wetlands to the site. Pocock Lake Ecological Reserve is located 30 kilometres southeast of Steinbach in the Sandilands Provincial Forest.
- The **Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park Backcountry Expansion** protects valuable peatlands from potential peat mining operations. International research has found peatlands to be the most efficient terrestrial ecosystem for storing carbon and the most important long-term carbon store. A total of **4,015 hectares** were added to the protected areas network through a change from Resource Management to a Backcountry land use category.

In Progress

- Phase 1 of the Saskatchewan River Delta (SRD) Planning Area is complete. Review of Phase 2 proposals will allow for more input from First Nations, local communities, industry, and other interested parties in this ecologically and economically complex area. The SRD is recognized as a globally significant Important Bird Area, the largest freshwater inland delta in North America, and one of only two active deltas in the Boreal Plains Ecozone of the western boreal forest.

Other Related Activities

- In June, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee deferred examination of the Pimachiowin Aki nomination in order to provide sufficient time to “refine and strengthen the boundaries of the property”; and “explore a fuller understanding of the inter-relationship between culture and nature”. The Pimachiowin Aki partners have been working steadily on a new nomination in order to address the issues identified in the World Heritage Committee decision.
- The governments of Manitoba and Ontario ratified a Memorandum of Understanding to co-ordinate and strive for consistency in the transboundary protection and management of Pimachiowin Aki in areas such as wildlife management, fire management, waterway monitoring, provision of expertise and training, land use planning, communications, education, community outreach, and access management.
- Bloodvein First Nation’s land use plan (and its implementing regulation) for the Pimitotah Traditional Use Planning Area was amended to include a prohibition on peat mining in the planning area. As a result, peat mining is prohibited in the entire Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Project nomination area.
- Manitoba announced the start of consultations with First Nations, the Town of Churchill, local industry, and tourism operators about the establishment of a polar bear provincial park to protect existing and newly found polar bear dens along the Hudson Bay Coast, and better promote the area

as an international destination. The study area for the proposed park has been identified as approximately 2.9 million hectares. Research has also begun into natural features of the region, areas of special significance, species at risk, dispositions and encumbrances, existing land uses and other attributes of the study area.

- The Common Carp Exclusion Project in Delta Marsh Wildlife Management Area became operational in the spring of 2013. The project involved installation of structures with removable fish screens designed to prevent large adult common carp from entering the marsh. The marsh freezes to the bottom in winter, so structures were built to prevent common carp from re-entering the marsh in spring. Preliminary results are promising, with submerged aquatic vegetation reappearing on the north side of the marsh in places where it hadn't been seen in decades. The number of staging water birds increased significantly in response to improved habitat conditions. Additional monitoring and mapping of submerged vegetation is planned to document changes in this vast freshwater coastal wetland, recognized as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The structures were built by Ducks Unlimited Canada with additional financial support provided by the Manitoba government, and Wildlife Habitat Canada.
- Manitoba has provided \$5 million in funding as part of the province's commitment of \$7 million to support the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) Natural Areas Conservation Program. Since the beginning of the agreement in 2008, NCC has acquired over 12,000 hectares in conservation agreements and land purchases in the Riding Mountain Aspen Parkland, the Tall Grass Prairie, the Whitemouth River Watershed, the Oak Lake Sandhills and Wetlands, the West Souris Mixed-grass Prairie, and the Pembina/Tiger Hills. Other areas of focus for the program include the Interlake Parkland, and Turtle Mountain Woodland and Wetland.
- As of December 31, 2013, the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) held a total of 669 conservation agreements (CAs) covering 49,773 hectares. Of these, 27 CAs covering 1,686 hectares were acquired since January 1, 2013. All CAs held by MHHC are in perpetuity and were acquired through voluntary agreements with private landowners. These conservation lands contain the range of native habitat in Manitoba's prairie ecozone including wetlands, habitat of species at risk, riparian areas, mixed-grass prairie, and woodland.
- Manitoba is negotiating with Canada to transfer administrative control of Manitoba's 24 community pastures back to the province by 2018, five of which Canada slated for divestment by the end of 2013. Community pastures provide some of the largest ranges of intact mixed-grass habitat in Manitoba, necessary to the survival of a variety of Threatened and Endangered species listed under *The Endangered Species and Ecosystems Act* of Manitoba and the federal *Species at Risk Act*. Manitoba is working to ensure that community pastures are maintained and managed for the benefit of their ecological value and their value to pasture patrons for continued grazing for their cattle.
- As outlined in "TomorrowNow – Manitoba's Green Plan", the province developed *Building the Parks Province: Manitoba's Parks Strategy* and opened it up for public comment. About 83 per cent of provincial park lands in Manitoba are legally protected and the parks strategy commits to reviewing the remaining park area for opportunities to increase protection and to create up to 10 new or expanded parks.