

Manitobans want wetland conservation leadership



Public willing to pay for wetland conservation.

A survey conducted by the University of Alberta and Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has declared that **Manitobans are willing to pay for wetland conservation** and want the provincial government to show leadership and financial responsibility for wetland protection and restoration.

The January 2008 survey by Ipsos Reid was designed to gauge the public's receptiveness to an ecological goods and services (EGS) program in Manitoba.

Wetland loss is significantly deteriorating Manitoba's environment. From an economic perspective, Manitobans lose huge amounts of natural capital through the loss of EGS when wetlands are drained or degraded.

The economic cost of wetland loss in south-west Manitoba in 2005 was valued at \$15 million per year and is increasing annually as we continue to lose wetlands. Economic loss from 1968 to 2005 is estimated to be \$430 million.

DUC's science supports the need for an EGS program that provides financial incentives to landowners to conserve wetlands on their land. This survey confirms that as they learn more about wetland conservation, Manitobans are concerned with their loss and want the government to show leadership by investing in wetland conservation in the province.

The nearly 2,000 Manitobans surveyed were not as familiar with the issues surrounding wetland loss compared to other environmental issues in the province. Lake Winnipeg's issues were better known.



Ninety per cent of respondents showed some level of concern about the issues of wetland loss in Manitoba.

Photo credit: Lori Volkart



What the public doesn't realize is wetland drainage contributes to Lake Winnipeg's deteriorating health.

Once survey respondents learned the impacts of wetland loss, they were quite willing to support investing in wetland protection and restoration.



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What does wetland loss mean for Manitoba?

Wetlands purify our water and air; provide carbon sequestration, biodiversity, groundwater recharge, flood and erosion control, ecotourism opportunities and important social and cultural benefits like hunting and trapping.

Those polled feel that the **government should pay the largest portion of wetland restoration costs**, but landowners and conservation groups should share some financial responsibility.

Those polled said water quality is the most important reason for an EGS program. Respondents also feel that a program offering incentives that protect wetlands is important for investing in the future, that it was little to pay for the benefits received and is the right thing to do.

What the public is willing to pay

According to the survey, there is significant support for wetland conservation in Manitoba. If 100 per cent of wetlands are restored in the province, **the public is willing to pay \$358 per household per year over five years**.

This is even after those polled were told this money would come out of their own pockets. **This level of support would yield a provincial commitment of \$729 million over five years**. This is significant support.



A wetland policy for Manitoba

The survey showed that once people are educated on the benefits of protecting and restoring wetlands, willingness to pay for wetland conservation is high. This sends a strong signal to the Province of Manitoba regarding priorities for environmental protection. Because wetland conservation makes good environmental, economic and political sense, Manitobans must encourage the government to develop a wetland policy for future generations.

CALL YOUR LOCAL MLA TODAY AND EXPRESS YOUR CONCERN.