

Eco-Journal, v.17.5 Nov/Dec 2007

Poplar River is still waiting for protection.

Protected Areas Audit 2007

Trends in Lands and Waters Protection in Manitoba

By Gaile Whelan Enns, Manitoba Wildlands



Manitoba Wildlands released the 2007 Protected Areas Audit on November 14th. This year, several issues cause concern. Is the Manitoba government walking its talk?

Protection standards are entrenched in Manitoba public policy, legislation, regulation and cross-Canada reporting. Several pieces of legislation designate protected areas in Manitoba. The Manitoba Conservation standard for a protected area confirms that “At a minimum, protected areas prohibit, through legal means, logging, mining (including aggregate extraction), and oil, petroleum, natural gas or hydro-electric development.’ To be considered ‘protected’

by Manitoba government standards, two regulations are needed—one for the protection standard, and one to withdraw Crown mineral rights.

The Audit and The Grade

Each year, Manitoba Wildlands releases a statistical audit of government's protected areas steps. The Audit is an unbiased tool to monitor government progress and action on the rate of protected areas establishment, and to 'keep the government honest' with respect to its announcements. The Audit is a companion to the annual Protected Areas Grade, which reports on cumulative protected areas actions, partnerships for protection (private or urban lands), protection standards, technical methods, and action towards completing Manitoba's networks of protected areas across regions. The Audit and Grade are both based on public actions and government regulations and data. To view the 2007 Audit and previous Audits and Grades, visit Manitoba Wildlands' protected areas webpages (http://manitobawildlands.org/pa_grades.htm). The Protected Areas Grade for 2007 should be available by the end of November.

The numbers in the 2007 Protected Areas Audit tell the story. New gains in protected lands in 2007 totalled 6,361 ha—but 13,985 ha of land was removed from protection this year. This represents a net loss of 7,642 ha. The total amount of Manitoba's land base protected to date is 5,329,051 ha. In contrast, the amount of protected land in Manitoba as of the 2000 Audit was 5,579,883 ha. What is going on here?

Despite numerous commitments (2007 was an election year, after all) the 2007 net loss situation is because government took little action to protect lands and waters. The government also committed in December 2005 to act on the requests of Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids First Nations to protect their traditional territories on an interim basis while planning occurs. This promise also remains unfulfilled, even though 2007 election promises commit to protect boreal forest lands. (For details regarding the 2007 election survey and a record of election promises from all parties, visit Manitoba Wildlands' elections webpage, http://manitobawildlands.org/govern_elections.htm)

Boreal Protected Areas

Lots of talk and little action was the overall theme this year for boreal lands on the province's east side. Promises to support community-based land use planning for East Side First Nations have not been acted upon. Land use planning holds the potential for decisions about which lands to protect. Land use plans and formal protection are also a requirement for the east side boreal World Heritage Site nomination process—initiatives the Manitoba government pledged to support, and another instance where little concrete action has occurred and resources have not materialized.

Little Limestone Lake (4,095 ha) is the only new area protected in 2007 within our forested Natural Regions. Based on the Conservation First principle, we need protected areas decisions before forestry companies file licence applications or new hydro developments are decided. With forest protected areas emerging as important in the face of climate change, we cannot afford government inaction on promises for protected lands in forest regions.

Will 2008 be Different?

The Manitoba government made progress in conservation and protection of private lands in 2007. A new memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed with the City of Winnipeg in June, for protection of important waterways and natural areas within the City. The MOU will ensure that some Winnipeg natural areas meet provincial standards. There is also slow, but steady progress being made to acknowledge and protect private lands held by Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy. Habitat for the great grey owl was protected, albeit too small an area.

Protected lands in our province decreased this year. Any loss of protected land must be offset with new protection elsewhere. The government is lagging behind in its commitments to protect our lands and waters, especially in our forest regions—where all three forest companies are preparing for new logging plans and long term licenses.

Manitoba must put real effort and resources into consultation for the more than 100 prospective areas waiting for decisions, and return to a steady pattern of protected areas establishment in 2008.