

SPOTLIGHT - Lands and Resources Issues

First Nations Protect Lands and Waters



In the last two decades parks, and protected areas actions by the Crown in Canada have often been based on First Nation expectations. Consultations and accomodation prior to lands designation action by the Crowns are becoming more frequent, with First Nation communities at the table government to government. This has resulted in tens of millions of hectares in Canada's boreal and taiga regions being protected from industry, while being protected for traditional uses.

Economic strategies to benefit the communities, including for tourism, research, healing services, training, lands access and lands management, often emerge at this time.

Climate Changes

I firmly believe that Canada's Aboriginal Peoples will make the biggest difference for the future of our lands, waters, and forest regions. With communities facing natural world changes from climate change, aboriginal knowledge and stewardship of lands and waters are more and more essential.

Climate changes have been noticed and discussed by Elders, and lands users, fishers, for years. Impacts from climate change affects northern regions and communities soonest. This is now true north of sixty across Canada, and rapidly becoming true south of sixty.

These boreal regions also hold the most stored carbon in the world. Think about all that muskeg! Think about forests, soil, waterways and peatlands, which all hold carbon. For the new century our First Peoples are stewards of the carbon throughout traditional territories and boreal regions. The visitors who arrived hundreds of years ago are responsible for the emissions. Today our First Peoples can lead decisions about protecting lands, waters and carbon!



For thousands of years Aboriginal Peoples in our continent have occupied, used, and been stewards of entire lands and water systems. Their knowledge of species, and these systems sustained their communities, trade across the continent, and then sustained the visitors who began to appear on shores and waterways more than 500 years ago.

More recently First Nations and Aboriginal communities have selected or chosen lands and waters which they then require the Crowns to protect from industrial activity. The selections of lands to protect can happen during lands claim negotiations, territorial agreement negotiations, parks negotiations, or when benefits agreements are being finalized. It also can happen in response to projects that are seen as high risk to lands and waters.

This increase in action from First Nations to protect lands and waters has happened since Canada's new constitution.

Aboriginal and treaty rights to hunt, trap, fish, gather, and travel on lands and waters need to be guaranteed in lands protection action by the Crowns.

The need to make sure lands are secure for future generations drives these negotiations, and direction to the Crowns. Making sure traditional and cultural access to lands and waters (beyond reserve lands) continues into the future is important to communities.

Manitoba Situation

Manitoba is mostly forest regions. Before agriculture Manitoba lands were as forested as Ontario lands. Manitoba has thousands of lakes, and dozens of rivers. Most are not protected from pollution, erosion, or the affects of logging. Protecting river corridors across Manitoba would create a cascade of positive benefits for communities, the fisheries, and for lands and waters.

The Manitoba provincial government signed a protected lands Memorandum over ten years ago with the First Nation assemblies. Its principles were approved by MKO and AMC executive committees. The MOU put in place standards and steps for Manitoba First Nations to nominate lands they wished the Crown to safeguard from industrial activity. The MOU made information accessible, and placed requirements on government staff for notification, response, etc. Lately honouring the intent of the MOU has become a problem for Manitoba's government. None of the new protected areas established due to First Nation nominations has moved to permanent protection. Other requests from Manitoba First Nations for protected areas have been ignored. Still, most new protected lands in our province since 1998 happened because of these communities nominating lands in their traditional territories.

With a new Premier and a new conservation minister, it is time to return to appropriate consultations, and discussions about lands and waters Manitoba First Nations wish to see protected from industrial impacts. Manitoba First Nations may also wish to determine steps for protected zones for new treaty or reserve

lands. These new Indian lands often include head waters, significant cultural sites, and combinations of lands and waters important to the communities and the natural world.

Manitoba has stalled in its commitments to create new protected areas in our forest regions. Manitoba Wildlands will soon be issuing an annual protected areas audit and grade – based on same criteria used for 15 years. We are optimistic that Manitoba will return to the table with First Nations to make appropriate decisions together before any significant industrial licenses are issued.

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