

Manitoba Wildlands

2011 Provincial Election Questionnaire #1 – Lake Winnipeg

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http://www.manitobawildlands.org/govern_elections.htm#ES2011

Lake Winnipeg is Canada's sixth Great Lake, covering almost 24,000 square kilometers. It is absolutely central to the economic, social, and physical health of Manitobans. All Manitobans share responsibility for taking care of Lake Winnipeg and other water throughout the province. We all have a role to play.

When the PCs were last in government they ignored water quality, allowed unsustainable livestock production to take place, and developments outside of Winnipeg were allowed to spring up without guarantees that the water and sewage needs of those homes were properly addressed.

The first phase of Manitoba's Water Protection Plan began a decade ago with a ban on the sale of bulk water. In 2000, Manitoba announced the Livestock Stewardship Initiative and appointed a panel to examine the livestock industry. The panel's report, *Finding Common Ground*, provided a blueprint that helped guide the province's early work in developing the province's Water Protection Plan. Key elements included setting nitrogen and phosphorous reduction targets in the Lake Winnipeg Action Plan, requiring more livestock operations to submit annual water-source tests, establishing the Office of Drinking Water to enhance the protection of the province's drinking water, reintroducing subsidized testing for private well owners that the PCs had previously privatized, and investing in upgrades of water systems in rural Manitoba.

The second phase of Manitoba's Water Protection Plan began in 2003 with the creation of Canada's first department entirely devoted to water, Manitoba Water Stewardship. Some key initiatives undertaken during this phase included introducing the Water Protection Act and significant amendments to the Planning Act, expanding the ban on winter spreading to operations of 300 or more animal units and requiring manure management plans, requiring that older manure storage facilities be registered, and reducing the rates of manure application on environmentally-sensitive soils.

Further action was launched in 2006, when cutting-edge regulations to limit the use and application of manure in Manitoba were expanded to include phosphorus, the nutrient linked to algae blooms in lakes and rivers. Manitoba became the first province to regulate synthetic fertilizer. Manitoba completed its review of hog production and moved forward with three regional moratoriums on new or expanded hog operations. We introduced new buffer zones to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen in water by ensuring no new manure-storage facilities, waste-water lagoons, confined livestock areas or septic fields are allowed in sensitive areas. We strengthened fines and put in place new enforcement measures including hiring more water resource officers and launching a pro-active septic system inspection regime starting with a focus on the capital region and along the Red River. And we increased our supports for research into the health of our water.

This Spring, a five-year study of Lake Winnipeg was released, clearly and definitively showing that much more aggressive action to reduce phosphorous levels is needed, and that doing nothing is not an option.

In the days following the release of this report the province unveiled a comprehensive action plan aimed at reducing phosphorous levels by 50 per cent. The plan focuses on three key areas:

1. Keeping hog manure out of the lake by:
 - banning any new hog industry expansion that does not use advanced environmental practices to protect water;
 - enshrining in legislation a permanent ban on winter spreading of manure; and
 - doubling funding for best environmental management practices that protect water and introducing a new tax credit to help farmers acquire new environmental technologies to treat manure responsibly.
2. Modernizing sewage treatment in Winnipeg and throughout Manitoba by:
 - Requiring the City of Winnipeg to replace its North End Sewage Treatment Plant with a full Biological Nutrient Removal (BNR) Plant to keep pollutants out of the lake. Within a year, the city will be required to produce a plan on how it will meet strict limits of pollutant removal. The plan will then have to go to the Clean Environment Commission and may be referred to the Public Utility Board (PUB) to ensure ratepayers are protected.
 - Enshrining in legislation planning rules to ensure no new subdivisions outside city limits are built without an approved wastewater management plan.
3. Protecting Manitoba's wetlands by:
 - restoring natural filters like the Netley-Libau Marsh that keep pollutants from entering the lake by investing in projects like cattail harvesting that reduce nutrient loading to the lake and rebuilding the marsh through innovative pilot projects;
 - putting new powers in place to protect wetlands on Crown land; and
 - banning the rapid expansion of peat extraction from wetlands.

We were surprised to see Hugh McFadyen and the PCs support this legislation because of previous commitments he has made to repeal the regional hog moratorium, gut the Water Protection Act, and cancel the urgently-needed replacement of Winnipeg's new North End sewage treatment plant. However, less than two weeks into the election campaign McFadyen told media he voted for Bill 46 because it eased the moratorium. He mischaracterized the bill as "a lifting of the hog moratorium" and said, "that's why we supported the bill." The fact is that Bill 46 did not change a single word in the definition of prohibited hog barns. It simply expanded the geographic area covered by the moratorium. It is obvious that Hugh McFadyen will cancel the moratorium or refuse to enforce it.

What's more, McFadyen's Economic Strategy has also goes back on his party's commitment to legally require the City of Winnipeg to build a full state-of-the-art biological nutrient removal facility to replace the North End Treatment Plant. Cutting \$350 million from the North End Treatment Plant would mean minimal upgrades that do not meet the legislative requirements that McFadyen voted for just two months ago.

With regard to Manitoba Hydro's Lake Winnipeg regulations, we are looking forward to hearing from the Clean Environment Commission on this topic. As you may know, Manitoba Hydro has used Lake Winnipeg as a reservoir for power generation since the early 1970s under an interim licence. Now that a final licence has been requested, we want to ensure the public has input into the process. To that end we have indicated that participant assistance funding will be considered. The public hearing process will be comprehensive and will include hearings in appropriate locations around the north and south basins of Lake Winnipeg, in the City of Winnipeg and northern Manitoba as determined by the Commission. The CEC review will incorporate, consider and directly reflect, where appropriate, the principles of sustainable development. And we are committed to a thorough Crown-Aboriginal consultation process.

As you may also know, in July the province released a first-of-its-kind scientific assessment of Lake Winnipeg. This State of the Lake report was the result of extensive collaboration by many partners, including researchers from government, universities and non-governmental organizations. The assessment lays out the current and ongoing research on Lake Winnipeg including water quality, water levels, algae growth and climate conditions. It also looks at future issues that are emerging on the lake.

Lastly, Manitoba Hydro has committed to providing over \$1.35 million in multi-year funding to help fund further research into ongoing water quality and biological changes in Lake Winnipeg. This funding represents approximately one-third of the annual operating budget for the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium, and is in addition to the \$4 million the province spends annually on direct efforts to improve water quality including funding to conservation districts.