

Protected and Conserved Areas

FACT SHEET

Manitobans love nature, whether it is paddling or fishing on a remote lake deep in the boreal forest, hiking, birding or hunting in a grassland pasture, or even recharging in the park in town.

The Manitoba government is working to conserve and protect areas across the province to ensure they stay natural for future generations of Manitobans to enjoy.

Protected and conserved areas are critical for biodiversity, give us clean air and water, store carbon, protect our communities during extreme weather events like storms, floods and wildfire, and support our well-being and mental health.

What are protected and conserved areas?

Protected areas are defined land and water areas managed over the long term, through legal or other effective means, to conserve biodiversity, ecosystems and cultural values. The focus is on protecting a sample of all habitats found in Manitoba and by extension, the species that call them home. From arctic tundra to boreal forests, wetlands to grasslands and everything in between.

In Manitoba, examples of these areas include provincial parks, ecological reserves, wildlife management areas, provincially significant peatlands, and other designated Crown lands, municipal lands, national parks, and private lands owned by land trusts including Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and Manitoba Habitat Conservancy.

Biodiversity is the variety of living species on Earth including plants, animals and bacteria.

In protected areas, activities such as ecotourism, licensed hunting, fishing, and trapping, lodge operations and outfitting, haying and grazing, winter roads, and other compatible activities are generally allowed if they are not harmful to the habitats being protected. Industrial resource extraction and land conversion are prohibited.

Indigenous rights are respected in protected areas, and areas continue to be available for hunting, trapping, fishing, and other traditional practices.

While protected areas are purposely dedicated to conserving lands and waters, ecosystems, and cultural values, conserved areas (also called other effective area-based conservation measures, or OECMs) are created for a purpose other than conservation but are managed in ways that conserve biodiversity. The one OECM in Manitoba is at the Canadian Forces Base Shilo.

Building Manitoba's network of protected and conserved areas to protect nature and increase biodiversity

Currently, 11.1 per cent of Manitoba is part of the network of protected and conserved areas. But the science is clear: nature is in trouble and biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history. We need to do more to protect areas of Manitoba so nature and all Manitobans can benefit, now and in the future.

Protected and conserved areas are natural solutions to changing climates, are essential for maintaining healthy ecosystems and natural resources, and are a foundation for a thriving economy. Plus, spending time in them makes us feel good!

What is the 30x30 commitment?

Aligning with international and national commitments, Manitoba has committed to work with Indigenous governments, conservation organizations, and the business community on the goal to protect and conserve 30 per cent of Manitoba by 2030. This includes land, freshwater and marine areas supporting the tremendous biological diversity and unique natural features found across the province.

Canada has also set a goal of conserving 30 per cent of Canada's land and water by 2030 because science shows that nature needs help to reverse the decline in biodiversity, better fight climate change, and maintain a strong, sustainable economy. Canada's and Manitoba's commitments follow international biodiversity conservation commitments set through the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This historic agreement negotiated a path to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050 with 23 targets for 2030.

How does Manitoba establish new protected areas?

When making new protected areas on Crown land, Manitoba uses mechanisms that are already in place under provincial legislation such as The Provincial Parks Act or The Wildlife Act. There are established processes to ensure that the public and interested parties have a chance to provide input. Local and Indigenous knowledge, western scientific knowledge, and information on potential developments and economic opportunities are all considered. People influence the environment and cannot be separated from it. Public input is an important part of the protected areas planning process. Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative focuses on Crown lands not private lands.

To learn more about Manitoba's protected and conserved areas program, visit: https://www.gov.mb.ca/sd/environment_and_biodiversity/protected_areas/index.html

What are Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs)?

An Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) is an area where the purpose, development, establishment, and ongoing management reflect and enable Indigenous culture, interests and leadership. IPCAs vary by the place, jurisdictional landscape, the goals and values of the communities leading their development, and the partners involved.

Manitoba has worked positively with Indigenous nations on protected areas, and the Manitoba government is committed to working with Indigenous communities and the federal government to explore how IPCAs can help support management of traditional territories in Manitoba and build Manitoba's network of protected and conserved areas for the benefit of all Manitobans.

In other areas of Canada, IPCAs are supported and implemented with provincial, territorial and national mechanisms on Crown lands (such as provincial parks and national park reserves) to protect lands and waters. As Manitoba works with the federal government and Indigenous partners to explore IPCAs, Manitoba's existing mechanisms for protecting land and water may be used. These existing mechanisms are focused on protection of Crown land and include Indigenous, stakeholder and public engagement so that all voices are heard and reflected in the decision-making process. Existing developments, claims, and commitments on the land would be considered through this review. Existing cottage subdivisions in provincial parks are not being considered for IPCAs or protected areas.

Although no Indigenous communities have identified existing protected areas as IPCAs in Manitoba, the four Traditional Use Planning Areas in the Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Site are examples of what IPCAs could look like, where Indigenous partners and the Manitoba government have worked together to protect lands and waters and to collaborate on their ongoing management.

The four Traditional Use Planning Areas are designated under The East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Areas Act. Each planning area has an approved plan for the management, use and sustainable development of provincial Crown land and resources in that planning area. The plans outline zones that permit, restrict, or prohibit various activities. Zones that prohibit industrial development and land conversion are protected areas. Licensed hunting and fishing can generally continue in these planning areas according to the individual management plans.

All decisions being contemplated by the provincial government in the Traditional Use Planning Areas must be generally consistent with the approved plan. The plans were jointly developed by the First Nations and government and included an opportunity for public review.

The Manitoba government is currently working with Parks Canada and the Seal River Watershed Alliance, a partnership of four First Nations, to gather feedback regarding the feasibility of establishing an Indigenous protected area in the Seal River Watershed. For more information, visit: <https://www.sealriverwatershed.ca/>

Should the Seal River Watershed Alliance, Parks Canada and Manitoba determine that it is feasible to establish a protected area, the next steps would include further engagement with Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, and the public.

What about national parks? How do they fit into Manitoba's protected areas work?

National parks in Manitoba, such as Riding Mountain, are part of Manitoba's network of protected and conserved areas. If Parks Canada proposes a new national park on Manitoba Crown land, there is a process for engaging Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, and the public. Canada would require Manitoba's support to establish a new national park or national park reserve and legally transfer those lands to Canada. While each proposed project is unique and reflects local circumstances, they all include public engagement. Learn more at www.parkscanada.ca

What about agricultural Crown forage lands?

Manitoba recognizes that in addition to contributing to a sustainable agricultural economy, agricultural Crown forage lands play an important role in maintaining grassland biodiversity. Haying and grazing activities can mimic natural disturbances and have historically kept grasslands healthy and prevented forest encroachment.

Manitoba has not designated any agricultural Crown lands as protected or conserved areas. Any efforts to designate agricultural Crown lands as protected or conserved areas in the future would be considered through the established Crown land review process that would include agricultural producers and a public review period. Implications for agriculture would also be explored further to ensure beneficial agricultural management activities like haying and grazing can continue permanently to maintain important grasslands.