There are few places on this planet left untouched by industrialization. In an increasingly populated world, natural areas are becoming ever more valuable, simply because they are still whole. The lands and waters of Hollow Water First Nation territory are on the edge of the greatest intact forest left on Earth – the Heart of the Boreal – and their care will be a legacy for all Manitobans.

Waterways have always defined this region, as rivers acted as both pathways and barriers to travel. Located within the boreal forest region, Hollow Water First Nation territory stretches from the islands of Lake Winnipeg all the way to the Ontario border, around Wallace and Obukwin Lakes. In the north, the territory is bordered by the Sanders Creek drainage watershed and the Bloodvein River, while the Manigotagan and Wanipigow River systems form the southern boundary. Canoeists will recognize the names of these waterways, as Hollow Water territory is the gateway to world-class paddling opportunities. Recreational fishing is also a big draw for tourists in the area.

Some very elusive animals inhabit this land, with the woodland caribou being the most notable resident. Boreal hawk owls, lynx, and pine martens also thrive in the undisturbed lands. Moose populations in the territory, unlike in the rest of Manitoba, are still in decent shape.

When I was growing up, my family spent weekends and vacations in Hollow Water First Nation territory. As a kid, I loved searching the long, sandy beaches for ancient pottery and tool shards. Archaeological research indicates that this land has been in use for six thousand years\(^1\), and traces of that civilization are still visible in Hollow Water territory today.

Everything is not rosy, however. For a hundred years, the demand for minerals and logs has impinged on Hollow Water territory. The scars of abandoned logging roads and toxic mine waste can be found today on the land. Economic development has brought job opportunities, but it comes with a cost.

A dozen years ago, Elders from across the Heart of the Boreal region gathered in Hollow Water and produced a declaration calling for protection of the land from industrial development, and for community-driven land-use initiatives.\(^2\) In the lands to the north, five First Nations have already joined the Manitoba and Ontario governments to protect and care for a humungous 33,400 square kilometre land-use initiative called Pimachiowin Aki: The Land that Gives Life. The road to Pimachiowin Aki runs through Hollow Water territory, and with it there are opportunities to generate tourism income.

A wealth of natural wonder is found in Hollow Water territory, interwoven with a vibrant history and sustaining cultural story. But without careful action, this territory could be pared down and fragmented, and the heart of this land would be lost. Read this educational report to learn how we can keep Hollow Water First Nation territory healthy and whole.
Ecosystem Services

The lands and waters of Hollow Water territory provide globally important ecological services. As a source of fresh water, the boreal forest is unequalled on Earth, and the rivers and streams of Hollow Water territory feed pure, fresh water into Lake Winnipeg.

The lowland areas of Hollow Water territory are made up of vast black spruce and peat bogs, which are invaluable in helping combat climate change. Peatlands are the largest terrestrial storage of carbon on Earth, storing even more than tropical rainforests. 

Logging, one machine can replace the all-weather roads which are difficult to allow development, the key is high ecological services essential.

Development and Resource Extraction

For decades, mining and logging have been trumpeted as job creators, but there is a price to be paid for this employment – mining is always dirty, and logging fragments landscapes. Even recreational development takes a toll on nature. When deciding whether to allow development, the key is a high standard of strict ecological monitoring.

Logging

In just 10 years, explosive growth from industrial logging scarred large parts of Hollow Water territory. As the paper industry collapsed in 2009, industry fled the region, leaving the lands and waters of Hollow Water territory.

In future, logging regulations can be established, it will provide an opportunity to share the experience the land. Photo safaris, guided tours, and workshops can be organized, which tourists out to paddle, hike, bike, and experience the land have always been part of Anishinaabe culture, which corresponds with harvesting blueberries, moose meat is always a sought-after staple for households, and trappers still go out on the land.

The traditional territories of First Nations in the Heart of the Boreal were fluid and overlapped each other, making it difficult to create exact boundary lines on a map. In fact, trappers have played a major role in the region, helping to protect the area from mining operations, both federally and provincially.

Cottage Lots

In Hollow Water territory, cottage lots can be found scattered throughout the region, with prices ranging from a few thousand dollars to millions of dollars. The lots are often purchased by individuals or families looking for a place to build their dream cottage.

The oneness with the land that is central to Anishinaabe culture is now fragmenting the forest. In future, both for youth and adults. Cultural camps for youth have been suggested as ways to support the cultural practices of dance and ceremony, which are central to Anishinaabe culture.

Building a Model of Anishinaabe Community and Economy

Communities around the world have learned that in order to protect your economy, you must respect your environment. First Nation leaders are clear that initiatives on Hollow Water territory must preserve the habitat, where calving occurred.

Traditional uses of Hollow Water territory continue today. Commercial fishermen brave the waters of Lake Winnipeg, and trappers are still on the land. In fact, trapping has been a central role in protecting the intact landscapes from industrial development. Trappers helped craft the 2001 Elders Declaration, which is a legally binding treaty that protects the lands and waters from mining and logging activities.

Anishinaabe way from visitors with around the world.

Community gardening as a way to access control of food security, is growing every year. More people are getting involved as fresh, healthy food is provided. There is increasing interest in bringing wild rice harvesting and processing back to the community. A wild rice festival and a blueberry festival have both been suggested as ways to support culture and responsibly make use of the land.

Anishinaabe is a natural people.

“Anishinaabe are natural people.”

- Anishinaabe Elders at Hollow Water Community Holistic Centre for Healing

To catch and dry fish. Still now, black land islands remain an important event which corresponds with harvesting blueberries. Moose meat is always a sought-after staple for households, and trappers still go out on the land.

The oneness with the land that is central to Anishinaabe culture is still passed on today. It is related to young generations through the stories that parents tell their children, and it is reflected in dance, song, and ceremony. Despite the dark period in Canada’s history when First Nations’ cultural practices and ceremonies were banned, there is now a cultural resurgence in Hollow Water, as there is in First Nations communities across the country.

The traditional teaching of the medicine wheel involves finding balance between the four areas of health: physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual. While the attachment to the land was once critical for food and survival, it is now increasingly recognized as a key to finding balance.

It is no longer a necessity, but is required for cultural strength.

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I vividly recall a meeting I had years ago when I became acquainted with Hollow Water community members. I was explaining the current scientific call for at least 50 per cent of the boreal region to be protected from development. After thinking about this for a while, an Elder quietly asked, “Can we ask for more to be protected?” It is not a simple task to decide which areas should be protected from development, and in which areas industry should be allowed to operate. Ecologically, there is a need for healthy waterways, intact forests for animals like woodland caribou, and undisturbed lowlands for gathering medicines and storing carbon. Permitted industrial activity has specific needs as well – mining needs minerals and logging needs mature forests. Oral histories refer to ceremonial sites and sacred places across these lands and waters, some that have been documented and many that haven’t. The identification of specific sites is frowned upon, as it is culturally preferable to leave these places alone. This means that broad sections of territory must be set aside to preserve these sites.

In Manitoba, the East Side Traditional Lands and Special Protected Areas Act provides a mechanism for First Nations communities like Hollow Water to establish a land-use plan with the provincial government, as has happened in the neighbouring Bloodvein First Nation territory. Elsewhere in Canada, tribal parks have been unilaterally established based on the wishes of local communities, like the Stein Valley Nlaka’pamux Heritage Park in BC. Both a tribal park and a community land-use plan provide new opportunities and require new employment positions. Management and maintenance of protected park areas, trails, and remote campgrounds and lodges will be needed. Cultural Ambassadors on the land should offer greeting and guidance to visitors to the territory, just as the provincial government’s current River Steward position does now. These new positions should be established jointly with Manitoba Conservation, in order to share existing resources and equipment. In areas where industrial activity is allowed, natural resource officers from the community will need to be employed to ensure that ecological protections are enforced. In BC, for example, the Council of the Haida Nation now has conservation officers who work closely with the BC government to ensure logging companies are acting responsibly. Most of these proposed positions, if designated, these protections must happen soon. The continued push by developers into Hollow Water territory will not let up until the land is designated. The future of this vast territory must be based upon ecological and cultural protection of the land, and it must include diverse economic drivers that provide decent incomes for local people. And this must be done with the involvement of the inhabitants of this territory, whose roots stretch back thousands of years.

Hollow Water First Nation territory is a treasure for everyone in Manitoba and around the world. With your support, a healthy community-produced land-use plan will become a reality. Please write to the Manitoba government, and let them know that you:

- want proper resources allocated for a community-produced land-use plan that puts ecology and culture first
- support the permanent protection of at least 50 per cent of the biologically rich and culturally important lands and waters in Hollow Water territory
- only support development that is ecologically sustainable and locally owned, ensuring local First Nations community benefits

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Reference


- IBA Community Toolkit. www.ibacommunitytoolkit.ca


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