



Keep it Wild!



A CONSERVATION VISION FOR MANITOBA



WHY MANITOBIANS WANT PROTECTED LANDS AND WATERS



Eric Reder
Manitoba
Campaign
Director
[@EricReder](#)

Wild and healthy nature is still abundant in Manitoba. Thousands of clear lakes surrounded by forested shorelines, river valleys resplendent with native vegetation and wetlands teeming with birds make the province a wonder for visitors and residents alike.

When plants and animals live in balance, these ecosystems preserve biological diversity, provide us with clean air and fresh water and help mitigate the impacts of a rapidly changing climate. The wilderness of Manitoba is a vast treasure unequalled in many countries in the world.

Manitoba currently protects only 11 per cent of the province from industrial development. But in the fall of 2015 the Manitoba government released a Protected Areas Strategy, which promised the province would meet the internationally agreed upon goal of establishing legislated protection for 17 per cent of lands and waters by the year 2020.¹ This commitment is

welcome news to the Wilderness Committee, as we have been calling for 20 per cent of the province to be protected by 2020.

Why do we want lands and waters protected?

Experience in nature nurtures my soul and feeds me with positive energy to keep defending wilderness. I still cherish the memory of the afternoon I was crouched among the willows holding my camera in Hollow Water First Nation territory, near the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg, when a family of four lynx nonchalantly padded around me, searching for snowshoe hares.

Scientific research shows that a simple walk in the forest, like a stroll along a trail in Whiteshell or Duck Mountain Provincial Park, is good for you. A recent study in Japan on the benefits of forest walking showed that it increases cardiovascular relaxation

which can reduce negative moods, anxiety levels and other psychological symptoms.²

The functioning natural ecosystems of Manitoba's boreal forests are an exceptional source of fresh water and clean air. If left undisturbed, the boreal region stores a tremendous amount of carbon, which helps limit the changes in our climate due to the burning of fossil fuels. Intact boreal forest like the Kipahigan Lake and the Burntwood River areas in northern Manitoba are a benefit to all, as they help maintain our life support system.

The Assiniboine and Souris river valleys in southwestern Manitoba are oases from the developed agricultural land that surrounds them. Riparian areas – the region along the shores of rivers and lakes – contain a highly diverse range of plants and terrain, and as a result provide habitat for a

large diversity of animal species.³

This type of biological diversity is essential for a resilient environment – one that can cope with a changing climate and expanding human population.

The areas mentioned above share two important traits: they represent diverse and valuable ecological communities in Manitoba – and they're not protected. These regions are all currently under threat from mining, logging and agricultural expansion.

Opinion polls have shown that Manitobans value environmental protection. They understand we need to preserve nature for our own benefit and for future generations. Agreeing to meet the global goal of protecting 17% of nature in this province is a step in the right direction, and even a respectable target. But how do we get there? Which areas are we going to protect?

Read on and see how the Wilderness Committee envisions reaching and surpassing Manitoba's protected area commitments, through 2020 and beyond.



Photo top: Whiteshell Provincial Park (Mike Grandmaison),

left: Moose bull (Robert McCaw), Canoeing in Nopiming Provincial Park (Eric Reder).

LET'S ACHIEVE OUR PROTECTED AREA GOALS!

INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL USE PARKS

First Nations, Inuit and Métis community members are at the forefront of the push to protect our shared lands and waters.

Public lands are held in trust by governments, and in Canada they are called "Crown lands," in reference to our British Commonwealth history. The reality, however, is that all of Manitoba lies within the traditional territory of Indigenous communities. As such, decisions on the use of traditional lands in Manitoba require the consent of Indigenous communities.

Poplar River First Nation was the first community in Manitoba to have its traditional territory protected under special legislation, preserving lands on the east side of Lake Winnipeg in the "Heart of the Boreal" region.⁴ Three other communities have also protected at least half their lands this way since then.



Photo: Boreal lowlands near Chitek Lake Anishinaabe Provincial Park (Eric Reder).

would add 0.3 per cent to Manitoba's protected area tally.

For many of the 57 other Indigenous communities in the province, there is interest in protecting a portion of their traditional territory from industrial development – and it's an idea that is well supported by other Manitobans.

In 2014 the provincial government introduced the new Indigenous Traditional Use provincial park classification for other communities across the province. Skownan First Nation used this classification to establish Chitek Lake Anishinaabe Provincial Park with the Manitoba government.⁵

Right now, Hollow Water First Nation is developing a community-based land-use plan. Many community members wish to see at least 50 per cent of the territory protected, which

What is a protected area?

According to the Manitoba government's Protected Areas Strategy, "*Manitoba's protected areas prohibit logging, mining, oil and gas exploration and development, hydroelectric development, exploring for and harvesting peat, and other activities that significantly and adversely affect habitat. Existing rights of Indigenous people are respected in protected areas, which generally remain open to hunting, trapping, fishing, and other traditional uses.*"⁶



Photo: Rice River in Hollow Water First Nation territory (Eric Reder).

RIPARIAN AREAS, WETLANDS & FLOODPLAINS

In western Manitoba, most of the grasslands were sectioned off into square miles and cultivated a century ago. The biological diversity that once thrived in the prairies is not easily found today. But for over 500 kilometres, the upper Assiniboine and Souris Rivers wiggle across the plains, harbouring plants and animals in remnant wetlands and rich, lively wilderness along their banks.

Assiniboine River

The meandering Assiniboine River becomes a torrent during spring melt. Each year, floodwaters put Brandon and Winnipeg at risk, as well as Lake Manitoba communities when water is sent through the Portage Diversion.

In January 2016, the Manitoba government released a report on the devastating flooding of 2011. One of the options for preventing such devastation was to restore wetlands in the Assiniboine River watershed, thereby lowering the flood water flow rate by a substantial 20 to 30 per cent. In addition, the report recommended buying flood-prone lands along the river.⁷

Not only would this reduce the costs and impact of future Assiniboine River flooding, it would provide a rare opportunity to increase the protected lands in

western Manitoba and preserve biologically valuable riparian areas and wetlands.

Souris River

The riparian area along the Souris River is a particularly important haven for wild plants and animals, as some of the last remaining biologically rich habitat of its kind. Huge sections of the river are protected upstream in the United States, but when the Souris flows north into Manitoba, it is not protected.

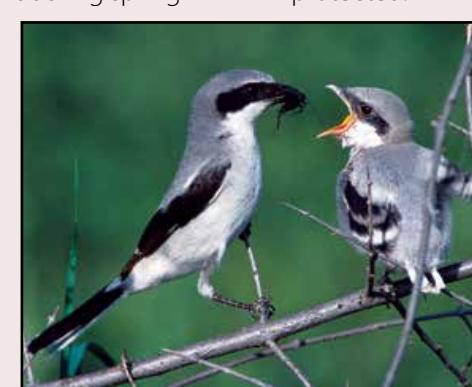


Photo: Loggerhead shrikes (Roberta Olenick).

Endangered birds like the ferruginous hawk, burrowing owl, Baird's sparrow, Sprague's pipit and loggerhead shrike have been found along the

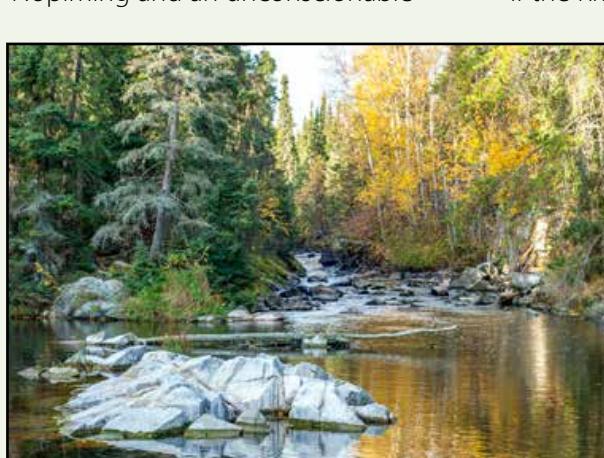
Souris and in these riparian plains, making protection of this region a legal imperative.¹⁰



Photo: Monarch butterfly (Robert McCaw).

Every river in Manitoba – from the Whitemouth and the Bird River in the east, to the Souris and Assiniboine in the west, to the Churchill and Seal Rivers in the north – should be protected

from development with a robust riparian buffer zone. This will only add a small amount to our protected area tally, but these areas are incredibly valuable because water is more than just a resource – water is life.



Photos above: Clearcut logging in Duck Mountain Provincial Park, taken in 2016; Grass River Provincial Park (Eric Reder).



THE OPEN SHORES OF HUDSON BAY

The rugged shores of Hudson Bay support rugged wildlife. The remoteness and inaccessibility of this northern region have helped keep the lands around Hudson Bay in good shape. Polar bears, which are already suffering the negative effects of a warming climate, spend their summer months on this land waiting for sea ice to form. Permanently protecting this region for the future is the right thing to do.

The Manitoba government is in the planning stages of establishing a massive Polar Bear Park along Hudson Bay.¹¹ Even if only three-quarters of the current study area is protected, this plan will still add 3.4 per cent to Manitoba's protected areas tally.



Photos: Polar Bear on tundra; Hudson Bay shoreline (Eric Reder).

MANITOBA'S NORTHERN BOREAL FOREST

A n unparalleled life support system for us – the rugged and expansive boreal forest region – is the greatest source of freshwater on earth and a storehouse for carbon. Manitoba's boreal forest is bigger than entire country of Sweden or Japan. It's home to endangered woodland caribou and Canada warblers.

Nearly one-fifth of Manitoba's boreal forest is under the care and control of Tolko, a logging corporation who has failed in its responsibility when it comes to protecting land. Called Forest Management Licence #2 (FML-2)¹², it is the largest public forest tenure ever granted in Canada.¹³

When the Wilderness Committee approached Tolko in 2009 to support protection of the Saskatchewan River Delta, the company's manager stated that he didn't believe in protected areas. At the time, less than one per cent of Tolko-controlled public forest was protected, even though scientists are calling for the protection of at least 50 per cent of Canada's boreal forest.¹⁴

The Manitoba government's caribou



Photo: Tolko Forest Management Licence area (Eric Reder).

(WMA) – but that isn't nearly enough.

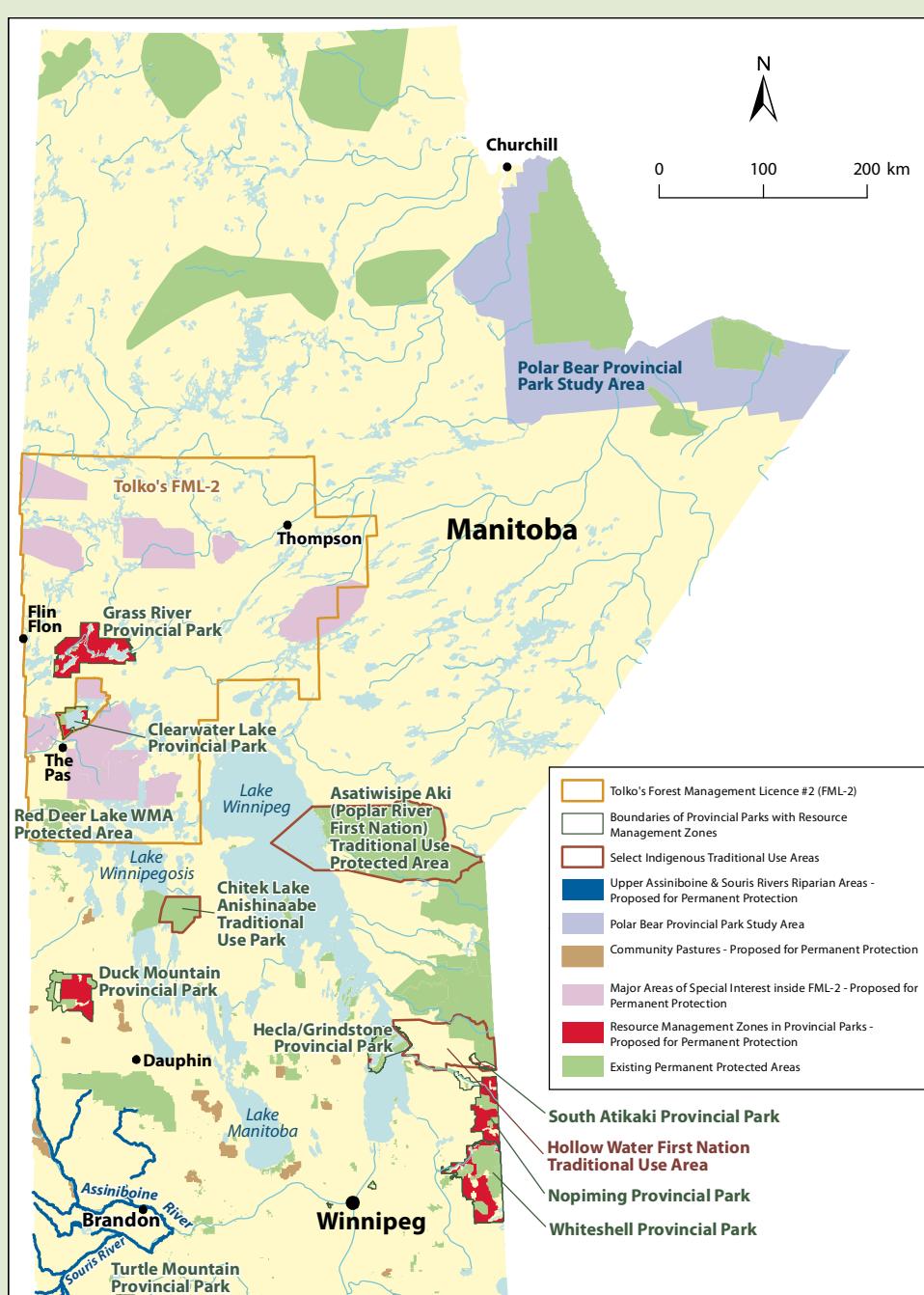
There are 10 major Areas of Special Interest (ASIs) in Tolko's forest management area, including Karst Landscape ASI, Tom Lamb WMA, Saskeram WMA, Kipahigan Lake ASI and Burntwood River ASI. If these areas were protected, we would have a strong foundation of boreal forest preservation

in this northern area of the province, and we would add 2.7 per cent to Manitoba's protected areas tally.



Photo: Canada warbler (Robert McCaw).

HOW WE KEEP MANITOBA WILD



COMMUNITY PASTURES OFFER PROMISE FOR PRAIRIE PRESERVATION

O ur biggest and best chance to preserve disappearing biological diversity in agricultural Manitoba is to protect community pastures, the reclaimed lands eroded by the 1930's drought. There are 24 community pastures in the province covering 400,000 hectares, and 80 per cent of them are on public land.¹⁵ Community pastures provide natural prairie habitat for endangered birds and other wildlife species, including the red-headed woodpecker, burrowing owl, chestnut-collared longspur, Sprague's pipit, ferruginous hawk and Great Plains ladies'-tresses orchids.

In some ways, "protecting" prairie ecosystems is contradictory, in that they need upheaval to remain healthy. Historically, regular and intense disturbances would destroy and rejuvenate the prairie. For

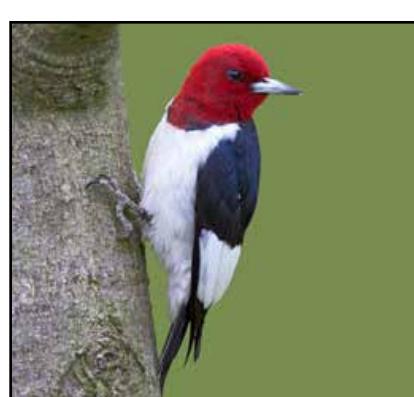


Photo: Red-headed woodpecker (Robert McCaw).

example, intense grazing by massive herds of bison would allow plant regrowth. In addition, wildfires every few years would singe the woody tree growth, allowing faster-growing prairie grasses to remain dominant.

The need for intense grazing affords a unique opportunity for Manitobans: we can use community pastures to carefully manage and restore lost prairie habitat, and still allow the lands to be utilized by local farmers for grazing.¹⁷

Adding all of the public community pastures to the province's protected area tally will increase the total protected area by 0.5 per cent.



Photo: Small white lady's-slippers (Mike Grandmaison).

FIELD EDGE AND CREEK FRONT CONSERVATION

When you look out over the countryside of England, hedgerows – narrow strips of trees, an understory of shrubs and long grass – stand out along the edges of farmers' fields. On the plains of Manitoba, however, barbed wire and drainage ditches are the only features framing stretches of farmland.



Hedgerows can offer a haven for wildlife, and a chance for prairie plants to revive. Additionally, the buffer slows nutrient runoff from fields so it doesn't drain rapidly downstream to cause problems in our great lakes.

The Whitemud Conservation District in central Manitoba has already established such "conservation corridors" along property lines. To facilitate the creation of conservation corridors everywhere, a tax credit for



preserving field edges and the sides of drainage ditches and creeks is a necessary step to better protect biological diversity and our water.

Photos: Fields near Galmpton, Torbay, Devon, England; Conservation corridor in the Whitemud Conservation District (Eric Reder).

NATURE IS THE BEST PRESCRIPTION

In today's society, not nearly as many people are spending time outside; visits in nature are decreasing. Yet studies are increasingly showing that there is science behind feeling better – and healthier – in nature.

A study in Finland showed that just 20 minutes of walking through trees, as opposed to walking on a city street, lowered stress levels.¹⁸ Study after study is finding that stress relief is a huge benefit we draw from nature. At the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital in Oakland, California, one doctor

has begun writing prescriptions for outpatient families to go visit parks as part of their recovery.¹⁹

Taxpayers spend billions of dollars a year on health care. Yet the prevalence of nature, and our exposure to it, could contribute to lowering those costs. While setting aside large areas of wilderness is the best way to protect biodiversity,

local "pocket wilderness" areas that are close at hand and accessible to all should also be a priority as we protect more of Manitoba.



Photo: Eric Reder and son North, Nopiming Provincial Park (Eric Reder).

TAKE ACTION

We Can Protect Manitoba's Lands and Waters!

Manitoba has an opportunity and a duty to preserve our natural heritage and make our province healthier for us – and for future generations. We can easily surpass the global goal of protecting 17 per cent and protect 20 per cent of Manitoba by 2020!

Please write a letter to Manitoba's Premier and ask the government to:

- Protect community pastures
- Protect Manitoba's parks by removing the Resource Management land use classification
- Protect riparian areas and wetlands, especially along the Assiniboine and Souris Rivers
- Create new protected traditional use areas at the request of Indigenous communities
- Preserve polar bear habitat on the Hudson Bay shoreline
- Protect boreal forest in Tolko's logging area
- Protect at least one-third of Manitoba's Areas of Special Interest



Photo: Great gray owlets (Gordon Court).

PREMIER OF MANITOBA

204 Legislative Building ✉ premier@leg.gov.mb.ca
450 Broadway ☎ 250-387-1715
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call

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1-800-661-9453 toll-free
elsewhere in Canada

Moving past 17 per cent

Protecting the areas listed in this publication will bring Manitoba past the global target of protecting 17 per cent of the land base. But why stop there?

To continue on with this essential preservation work, the government of Manitoba already has more than 100 Areas of Special Interest in their Protected Areas Initiative that are nominated and being investigated for protection.

These ASIs cover 2.9 million hectares. If we protect only a third of these areas being researched for preservation, we'll surpass our achievable goal of protecting 20 per cent of Manitoba by 2020.

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CREDITS

- Writing:** Eric Reder.
Editing: Alexis Stoymenoff.
Graphic Design & layout: Perry Sky Jack, Sue Fox.
Mapping: Geoff Senichenko.
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Wilderness Committee — National Office
46 E. 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5T 1J4
☎ 604-683-8220 or 1-800-661-9453 ☎ 604-683-8229
Wilderness Committee — Manitoba Office
3rd Floor — 303 Portage Ave., Winnipeg MB, R3B 2B4
☎ 204-942-9292
/WildernessCommitteeManitoba
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