

A GREENPRINT FOR NOPIMING

Maintaining Nature and Wilderness in the Nopiming Provincial Park Management Plan



A young bull moose in Nopiming.



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ABOUT THE WILDERNESS COMMITTEE

The Wilderness Committee is Canada's largest membership-based, citizen-funded environmental group, with 60,000 members, supporters and volunteers across the country. We value wild lands, wild species, healthy communities and healthy waters. Since our establishment in 1980, the Wilderness Committee has had a hand in protecting over 55 major wilderness areas, including millions of hectares of wildlife habitat.

Since its inception in 1999, the Manitoba office of the Wilderness Committee has been working on the ground in Nopiming Provincial Park. It is on behalf of our 60,000 supporters that we offer this expert analysis for a Nopiming Provincial Park management plan.



The Nopiming Park Protection Ride in 2008.

INTRODUCTION

Caring for the lands, waters, nature and ecology of Manitoba's provincial parks requires careful consideration. Parks are put in place for the preservation of wildlife and wilderness, and to provide us with solace and enjoyment. The next generations of Manitobans, however, will not know the beauty and gifts that Manitoba parks provide unless we reign in activities that degrade provincial parks. The enjoyment of parks today can be affected by the disruptive activities of other park visitors. The increasing number of people using the park, and the variety of activities that they wish to pursue, require regulations.

From on-the-ground expeditions and from documented reports about Nopiming, it is clear that the wilderness and nature that parks are designed to protect is being diminished. While we cannot go back to the seemingly undisturbed areas that existed in the 1960s – when Manitoba created its first provincial park – we can still maintain great swathes of healthy wilderness, as parks should do.

Regulations on impactful activities must be introduced and enforced.

A basic tenet for the preservation of wilderness and nature must be to encourage human-powered activities over motorized and industrial activities. Walking, hiking and canoeing leave far less immediate and long-term impacts than motorboats and all-terrain vehicles, while military exercises and industrial machines cause even greater degradation to the peace of nature. Due to noise, pollution and the impacts of burning fossil fuels in engines, as well as the increased impact that powered vehicles have on trails, limits must be placed on the use of motorized vehicles. This must be done for the enjoyment of others in the park, and for the continued well-being of the park ecosystems.

The introduction of any sort of restrictions will immediately have opponents. The reality, though, is that we are required to make sure public spaces remain peaceful for all to enjoy. We are entrusted to protect natural ecosystems so they exist for the benefit of future generations. Connecting with nature requires peace. The protection of wildlife requires quiet. The preservation of healthy ecosystems requires unfragmented spaces.

In the forthcoming Nopiming Provincial Park management plan, the following concerns need to be formally addressed through regulations and restrictions.



A rare Hooker's rein-orchid in Nopiming.

MINING IN PARKS

Currently, mining is allowed in Nopiming Provincial Park. Destructive industrial activity such as mining is at odds with preservation of nature and wilderness. It is easy to look around Nopiming and find areas where new trails have been bulldozed into the forest for exploratory drilling, and where exploration trenches were dug, uncovering rock and disturbing fragile vegetation. A comprehensive explanation of park mining can be found in the Wilderness Committee's educational report *Ban Mining in Manitoba Parks* [www.wildernesscommittee.org/publication/ban_mining_manitoba_parks].

The first two steps to eliminate the impacts of mining in Nopiming Park are to prohibit new mining claims, and put an expiry date on all existing claims.



Mining exploration trail bulldozed into Euclid Lake in 2011.

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE ACTIVITY

All-terrain vehicles are a source of enjoyment for enthusiasts, as well as a tool for trappers, hunters, fishermen and outfitters. They are also noisy and destructive, and allow nature and wilderness far from roadways to be disturbed. Currently, ATVs are supposedly restricted to certain designated routes, but a tour through Nopiming Park will show extensive trails and off-road ATV activity.

The aggressive, knobby tire pattern on an ATV creates significant impact on the ground. Just a few ATVs travelling over soft soil can churn up the vegetation and leave lasting disruption, which is especially impactful on wetlands. Today's ATV designs incorporate taller tires and more ground clearance, allowing ATVs to travel further and further into the wilderness unhindered, which leaves a larger impact.

In Duck Mountain Provincial Park, officially designated ATV trails were recently established. However, the speed that these trails have eroded has caused many trails to be closed already.



An abandoned logging road near Springer Lake.

For Nopiming Provincial Park, ATV restrictions must be put in place, and must be enforced. Existing trails need to be clearly labeled as designated routes, a ban on new trails must be clearly advertised and unregulated trails must be decommissioned and identified as closed to motorized travel.

Nopiming Provincial Park is littered with trails left behind by old logging and mining operations. While some trails may be suitable for ATV use, all trails must be carefully analyzed and either properly decommissioned, or designated and labeled for recreation use.

MILITARY ACTIVITY

The natural wilderness of Nopiming is currently serving as a playground for military training. From the base camp located on Springer Lake – inside a proposed Ecological Reserve – military training exercises extend into the surrounding wilderness. Some of the disruptive and concerning activities include:

- low-flying military aircraft buzzing across the park
- trees and vegetation cut down at numerous single-use remote training campsites every year, with garbage and ugly mess left at each new site
- tracked military vehicles rumbling through the park forest
- loud, disruptive all-night exercises conducted using flares and tracking dogs
- military exercises with armed personnel conducted right on the main roads of the park

The training has short-term impacts such as loss of vegetation and pollution, and long-term negative effects including disturbing endangered species such as moose. In a province with extensive public lands, a provincial park should not be used for such disruptive activity. The military camp at Springer Lake should be decommissioned and removed.



Ugly mess left by temporary military camp at Rocky Ridge
Military aircraft circling low over an old Nopiming clearcut.

ON THE LAKES

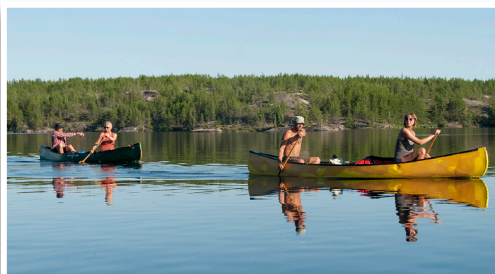
Nopiming is filled with lakes, and this is one of the biggest reasons people visit the park. Access to these lakes varies from remote hike-in or canoe-in only, to full boat launches with docks for large motorboats.

The type of boating occurring on Nopiming's rivers and lakes also varies. Some people operate large boats travelling at high speeds, while others prefer large, slow moving pontoon boats. Large wakeboard boats are used in some regions, and high-speed tubing and water skiing is also practiced. Personal watercraft, often referred to by trademarked brand names like Jet Ski, Waverunner or Sea-Doo, are also used in Nopiming. Still others use large and fast fishing boats to get around and angle, while some fishers prefer to carry a little motor into a boat stashed on a remote lake shore. Finally, kayakers and canoeists make use of virtually all the waterways in Nopiming.

The variety of boating activity affects the wildlife and wilderness in the park, as well as the quality of a visitor's natural experience on lakes and rivers in Nopiming.

To balance out the myriad boating preferences for Nopiming park with the the basic tenet of a peaceful, natural park experience for visitors, different boating regulations need to be applied to each individual lake. Some lakes should remain free of motorized access trails, some lakes must remain free of motorboats, some lakes must have motor size restrictions and some lakes need to have times when loud boats do not operate.

Certain watercraft do not mesh with the criteria of experiencing a natural park. Wakeboard boats, which are designed to create a large wake, are destructive to shorelines and must be banned or restricted. Personal watercraft are banned in parks in many jurisdictions. They should be banned in Nopiming, or restricted to only developed lakes.



Canoeists enjoying a calm, quiet lake.

Excessive noise from motorboats goes against the stated purpose of a natural park. Noise can come from either the motor itself, or from stereos designed to broadcast music loudly. Motorboats with excessively loud motors must be banned from Nopiming provincial park. Stereos must not be allowed to be operated if they can be heard more than a few metres from a boat.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION PLANNING

The stated purpose of a natural park is to preserve natural ecosystems and offer recreation opportunities for visitors. The rapidly changing climate we are experiencing is having an impact on the opportunities available to visitors. Each season sees park roads washed out, campgrounds closed due to flooding and other areas affected by rising water levels. Warming temperatures and changing vegetation will also affect species that depend upon the lands and waters of the park. A management plan for Nopiming Park must include climate change adaptation strategies in order to preserve nature and recreational infrastructure.



Flooding at the Bird Lake campground in May 2014.

NOPIMING PROVINCIAL PARK PROTECTED AREA EXPANSION

A majority of Nopiming Provincial Park is not protected from destructive industrial activity. Right now, 62 per cent of the park is classified under a land use category called Resource Management, which permits mining. Along with Whiteshell, Duck Mountain and Grass River parks, Nopiming is one of the parks that still allows and encourages destructive resource extraction over vast portions of the park.

All portions of Nopiming Provincial Park that don't have existing mining claims should be immediately reclassified as Backcountry, Wilderness, or Recreation Development or Access. As mining claims expire, those sections of the park should also be reclassified until the Resource Management classification is eliminated from Nopiming.

Several ecosystems outside of Nopiming Park are at risk and require protection so that unique and important natural wilderness areas can thrive. The following two areas should be added into Nopiming Provincial Park:

LOWER BIRD RIVER

Running from Ontario and then through Nopiming Provincial Park, the Bird River is protected for much of its run in Manitoba. The lower section of the Bird River, though, is unprotected and at risk. This 17-kilometre long riparian area – from the waterfalls above the Bird River cottage lots to the Nopiming park boundary – should be added to Nopiming Provincial Park. The park, like Manigotagan River Provincial Park, should stretch at least 1.5 kilometres from both banks of the Bird River, creating a 3-kilometre wide protected area.



A rest area at a rapid on the lower Bird River.

NOPIMING - OWL LAKE PROPOSED WOODLAND CARIBOU PROTECTED AREA



Woodland caribou habitat at Hollinsworth lake.

The Owl-Flintstone woodland caribou range is one of the most widely studied woodland caribou ranges in Manitoba. Their range extends from Ontario, east of Nopiming park, to the west outside of Nopiming just north of the Black River. A Manitoba government Draft Action Plan for this caribou range was released in 2012, and called for protection of the habitat of the Owl-Flintstone woodland caribou. So far, two years later, the final Action Plan has not been released and the Owl-Flintstone range habitat has not been protected. The range of the Owl-Flintstone woodland caribou should be added to Nopiming Provincial Park.