



# NATURE RULES



## HOW TO PROTECT 30 PER CENT OF MANITOBA THE RIGHT WAY



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Nature in Manitoba is the serenity of a stroll through tall grasses swishing lazily in the wind, or the bright sun lighting our lives while it reflects off clear, clean waters. In June, nature is the uplifting symphony of songbirds calling in their boreal nesting grounds. Nature is also the excited glimpse of a furtive grey beast stepping silently among the peaty shadows of the tall tree trunks...is it a lynx? A caribou?

The wonder we feel in nature is easy to describe. Because nature rules! But how nature works together to make a livable world for us is far more difficult to grasp. Water and insects, trees and animals, fungus and fish...everything has to live in balance on our planet in order for our society to stay stable. **We need to actively care for intact nature...for biodiversity.**

Back in 1992, the world signed its first biodiversity agreement to keep nature healthy. The focus for that original goal — to protect a mere 12 per cent of lands and waters — was almost cosmetic as it referred to enduring features like waterfalls and pretty destinations.<sup>1</sup> Decades on, though, most regions have not even managed to reach this modest goal.<sup>2</sup> And the Earth is suffering.

Nowadays, we have a far greater understanding of how healthy nature supports society. We also know **whole intact ecosystems are disappearing and biological diversity is plummeting.**<sup>3</sup> Both the volume of plants and animals as well as the number of species are dropping, reaching a crisis level.<sup>4</sup> There is reason to be alarmed.

In 2022, 196 countries came together and said yes to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. As part of this historic move, they vowed to protect at least 30 per cent of the

lands and waters on the planet by 2030.<sup>5</sup> **This 30x30 goal is a crucial commitment if we're going to reverse biodiversity loss.**

For some countries, this will be

a daunting task as much of their territory has already been developed. **Manitoba, though, has more intact nature than most countries in the world.** There are many options to preserve at least

30 per cent of the province and in 2023 the newly elected government committed to reach the 30x30 target.

We also know there are rules for preserving lands and waters in the correct way. And that nature preservation not only tackles the biodiversity crisis but also lifts up society in other ways. **With protected areas work, we can solve several problems with one action.** Protecting nature around us benefits our health and education, helps stabilize the

climate and, when done right, takes steps towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Yet logging, mining and other industrial development continue to demand destruction of lands for profit. Even motorized recreation and tourism development disrupt nature. These opposing interests conflict with the greater good of the 30x30 goal and must be regulated.

**Manitobans love their time in nature and have always supported growing protected areas.** Read on to see how we choose which areas to protect and the policy we must put in place to get to 30 per cent the right way.

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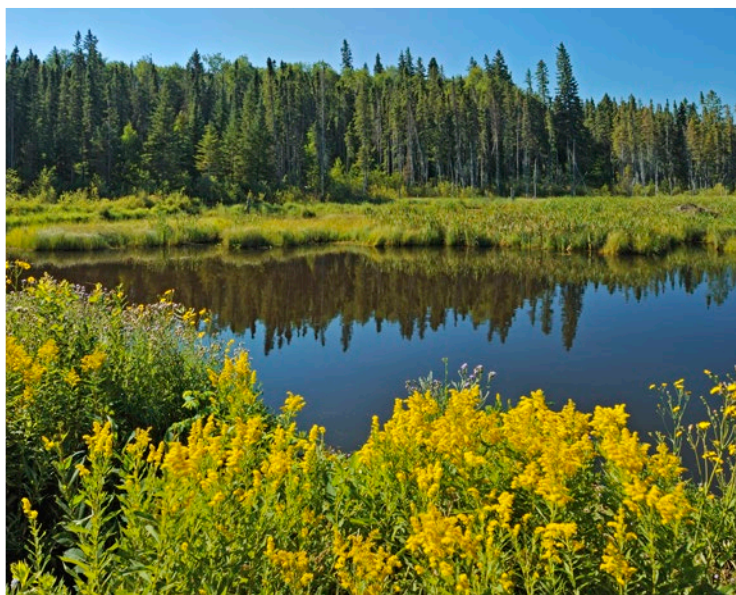


Photo top: Rice River, Hollow Water First Nation Territory (Eric Reder).  
Photo bottom: Duck Mountain Provincial Park (Mike Grandmaison).



Photo: Canada lynx (Robert McCaw).



RULE #1: RECONCILIATION & DECOLONIZATION

Establishing new protected areas must be centered around the vision of Indigenous Peoples, as the lands and waters considered for protection are their traditional territories. As a society, we’re working on reconciliation, which includes decolonizing land-use discussions and putting decision-making back into the hands of these nations.<sup>6</sup>

Each of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba will require the time and resources to articulate a community vision for protected areas on their territory. **Creating a new deputy minister for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas will signal that the 30x30 goal is a priority for this government.**

Fundamentally, engaging in land-use discussions with First Nations and Métis communities

requires a good relationship between governments. When governments come calling to grow the protected areas network, First Nations will rightly ask about underfunding of housing, education and clean water.<sup>7</sup> We need to address these injustices as the protected areas goals are met. This will help solve other societal issues and create a better, more just country.

In an effort to decolonize, existing parks and new protected areas need Indigenous Guardians added to ensure they feature stories from First Nations as well as offer employment potential to community members. Across the country, Indigenous Guardian programs are established and growing, and that work needs to increase in Manitoba.<sup>8</sup>

Hollow Water First Nation community members are proposing new protected regions, including **Rice River**. In western Manitoba, several

First Nations are examining the **proposed Elder Buddy Brass protected area** in the Kettle Hills region. Proposals are being made by First Nations: now the government needs to fulfil the vision.



Photo: Aspen forest, Kettle Hills area (Heather Hinam).

RULE #2: PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY

The biological diversity crisis is the reason countries around the world agreed to preserve nature on at least 30 per cent of the planet. The volume of plants and animals as well as the number of species are in decline — and the disruption of nature is the main cause.<sup>9</sup> While some species can live amongst human development, many more need their undisturbed wilderness homes to survive.

**We need to choose new protected and conserved areas that will give more species a chance to thrive.** From tallgrass prairie preserves across developed land in southern Manitoba to intact forest regions secured for moose population growth, sustaining biodiversity is a major reason to create new protected areas.

Looking after **boreal caribou** will positively impact both species in the forest and society. Federal



Photo: Boreal caribou (John E. Marriott).

and provincial law require identification and care for the caribou’s forest home, yet successive governments have instead allowed industrial activities to disrupt caribou habitat.<sup>10</sup> Logging and mining companies need public lands for their profit but publicly resist the preservation of nature on these lands — and caribou are suffering because of it.<sup>11</sup>

Protecting core habitat in the nine main caribou management units in Manitoba will add to our 30x30 goal. One of the only caribou management units mapped and publicized so far is the Owl-Flintstone caribou range overlapping Nopiming Provincial Park. **The Owl-Nopiming Caribou Protected Area was proposed 13 years ago by the Manitoba government** and should be part of our 30x30 conservation plan.<sup>12</sup> Protected areas for caribou in Grass River Provincial Park near Reed Lake are also needed.



Photo: Proposed Owl-Nopiming Caribou Protected Area (Eric Reder).

RULE #3: TRAILS AND DESTINATIONS

Public health is critical to societal well-being and healthcare spending accounts for a major portion of the government purse.<sup>13</sup> While the clean air and water we get from intact nature benefits our health, access and exposure to nature and outdoor activities also contribute to good health. Getting folks outside and into nature is actually a prescription program that Doctors Manitoba has been promoting.<sup>14</sup>

While establishing new protected areas, we should consider convenient places that will get high visitation so more folks can experience a nature outing. We must build new people-powered trails into new protected areas, as well as accessible sites.

**Kwasitchewan Falls** is the highest waterfall in Manitoba and is the turnaround point of a 29 km hiking loop that starts in Pisew Falls Provincial Park. Despite the popularity of this hiking and backpacking route, most of the trail is unprotected and much of it is already at risk from mining claims.<sup>15</sup>

Inside Whiteshell Provincial Park, **McGillivray Falls** is a very popular destination, with new

accessible paths to see the falls as well as hiking and biking trails. Yet even inside a popular park, this cherished destination is not protected from potential damage by the mining industry.<sup>16</sup>

**Beaudry Provincial Park** near Winnipeg includes large sections of land that are currently used for agriculture. Turning these sections into tallgrass prairie — the native ecosystem that has lost 99 per cent of its range — will be a boost to biodiversity and also allow expanded trail networks for recreation.<sup>17</sup>

We can solve multiple challenges with 30x30. We boost well-being and lower health care costs when creating more protected areas with people-powered trails. We also preserve nature around the trails and destinations we frequent.



Photo: Black River in proposed Owl-Nopiming Caribou Protected Area (Eric Reder).

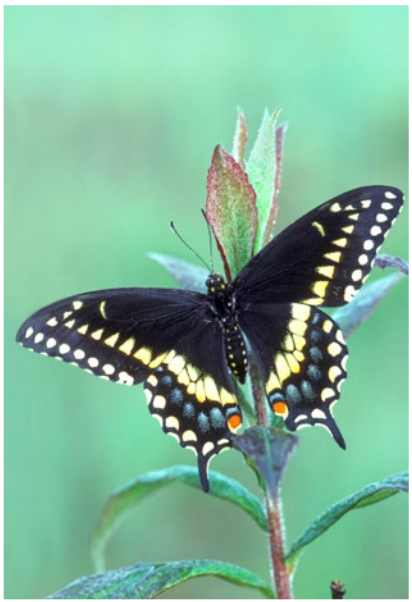


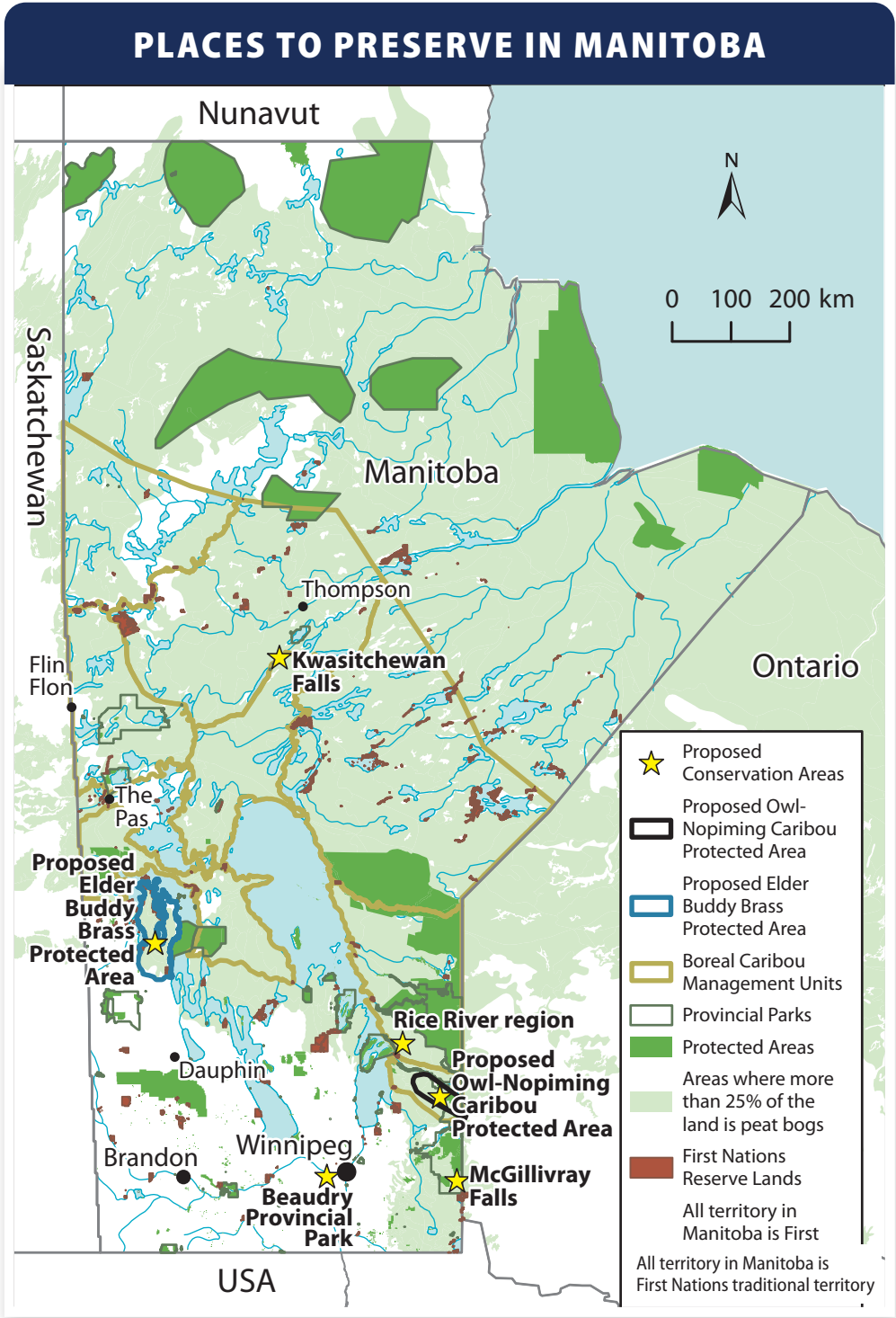
Photo: Black swallowtail (Robert McCaw).



Photo: Whiteshell Provincial Park (Mike Grandmaison).







## RULE #4: CONSERVATION FOR CLIMATE

Climate affects all parts of every person's life. This glib yet terrifying statement reinforces the fact that we must consider climate as we propose new protected areas.

Climate myths must be debunked as we conserve for climate, especially in the boreal forest. It was long believed forests across Canada counter our greenhouse gas emissions as they absorb carbon dioxide.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, a warming world is changing this. The increasing frequency of forest fires has meant more carbon is being released from the boreal forest than is being absorbed.<sup>19</sup>

**Peatlands are the real carbon stores in the boreal region, not forests.**<sup>20</sup>

Covering only three per cent of the world's surface, peatlands contain 30 per cent of the world's terrestrial carbon, making them superstars of carbon storage. Peatlands in Manitoba — which are so extensive they cover one-third of the province — are more vast than nearly any other jurisdiction on the planet.<sup>21</sup>

Both moose and boreal caribou utilize peatlands as protection from predators.<sup>22,23</sup> To protect climate while we solve the biodiversity crisis, we need to preserve vast sections

of Manitoba peatlands. In 2019, the Wilderness Committee was already **calling for the protection of two-thirds of the province's peatlands by the year 2030**, which would eclipse Manitoba's 30x30 goal.<sup>24</sup>

Another climate consideration is limiting fossil fuel use in, and to, our protected areas. There are extensive opportunities for snowmobiles and ATV operation in the 70 per cent of the province that isn't protected. Restricting internal combustion engines in parks and protected areas will also solve the concerns of noise pollution and soil disruption. Ensuring some of the waterways in protected areas have fossil fuel outboard motor restrictions will have similar benefits. And to establish new protected areas in a climate-friendly future, we need to establish public transit options to bring people to nature.



Photo: Moose with calf (Robert McCaw).

## RULE #5: NATURE IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Accessing parks and protected areas should be an easy part of our daily lives. Instead of having to journey to distant wilderness preserves, we need to intersperse protected nature throughout our neighbourhoods. Cities like Oslo and Vienna are making an explicit push to ensure folks can easily access nature, with at least half of each city designated as green space.<sup>25</sup>

Nature around us provides health benefits, but the opportunity to learn about nature in our neighbourhoods grows society for the future too. Experiential education amongst nature allows an increasingly urban population the opportunity to be part of healthy ecosystems. **Caring for nature everywhere can be instilled in the next generation if they have protected nature in their backyards.** However, these green spaces and urban nature reserves must be accessible, well-lit and secure so folks can safely make the most of them.

Nature reserves in cities also assist in cooling, providing an oasis within the heat islands of concrete city structures.<sup>26</sup> This is an important consideration as the climate heats up.

The Lemay Forest in south Winnipeg is an example of grand old nature in city neighbourhoods. However, it's threatened with imminent destruction by the owner



Photo: Lemay Forest (Eric Reder).

and developer.<sup>27</sup> It contains people-powered trails and is used for Indigenous ceremony. Getting community control of this forest satisfies many rules of nature protection.

Nature along the Seine and Red Rivers in central Winnipeg — proposed as the Little Forks Urban National Park — along with the forest near Little Mountain in northwest Winnipeg and the Assiniboine Forest in west Winnipeg are further places that can be designated as protected neighbourhood nature areas under the 30x30 campaign.<sup>28</sup>



Photo: Canada Warbler (Robert McCaw).

## INDUSTRY IN PARKS IS A PROBLEM

The problem with parks in Manitoba is they aren't really protected and wouldn't count as parks in many places in the world. Huge sections of the most popular provincial parks are designated for industrial development, including 37 per cent of Whiteshell, 61 per cent of Duck Mountain, 62 per cent of Nopiming and an incredible 75 per cent of Grass River.<sup>29</sup>

Logging and mining companies have a destructive hold on provincial parks. **Private mining companies are already taking control of parks by placing claims, sometimes right over existing cottages in the parks.**<sup>30</sup>

To get to our protected areas goals and to create places for our own peace, we need to eliminate industrial activity in all parks.



Photo: Mineral exploration drilling in Nopiming Provincial Park (Eric Reder).





GOVERNING FOR NATURE

If healthy nature is critical for our society to function — and it is — then we need to govern for nature. In the 1980s, it was believed sustainable development would be enough to keep our world healthy.<sup>31</sup> Actions that are near the intersection of environment, economic and social concerns would supposedly give us a sweet spot to aim for in policy.

But the reality is the economy doesn't operate parallel to nature and social well-being can't work outside nature. **We can no longer afford to create nature sacrifice zones** — areas providing short-term profit in exchange for the loss of clean air, clean water and biodiversity.

Governing for nature, as the foundation of our world, requires **the most important branch of government be the environment branch**. Right now, the environment and conservation departments are seen as a parallel branch of governments everywhere, similar to finance, healthcare or industry. Rather than the mines branch, which acts outside of nature by creating toxic sites no one knows how to clean up. We need the mines branch to report to the nature branch and get approval for actions that healthy ecosystems are capable of supporting. **A restructure of government is the only way to adequately deal with nature care in the biodiversity and climate crises**.

Unfortunately, in 2024 nature



Photo: Seal River estuary (Frank Baldwin).

care simply wasn't in the budget for Manitoba's government.<sup>32</sup> Funding for parks and wildlife decreased rather than increased, as election promises require and the biodiversity crisis demands. Until we reach our 30x30 goal, the government must **increase the parks and protected areas budget by at least 10 per cent every year**.

The 30x30 initiative is little more than announcement fodder for the government so far, although they have taken steps to protect the Seal River Watershed, an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area in northern Manitoba.<sup>33</sup> After community land-use decisions are made, the Seal River may add

seven per cent to the province's protected area tally — but that doesn't even get us halfway to our goal, which is a mere five years away.

For the 30 per cent by 2030 goal to become a reality, the Manitoba government must **direct significant resources towards the Protected Areas**

**Initiative** program. A strategy with interim targets and timelines has to be produced soon, so Manitobans can be assured the 30x30 nature care promise is kept. We need our government to articulate a vision of nature preservation in the province. **Nature rules! And these rules of nature care will care for us all.**

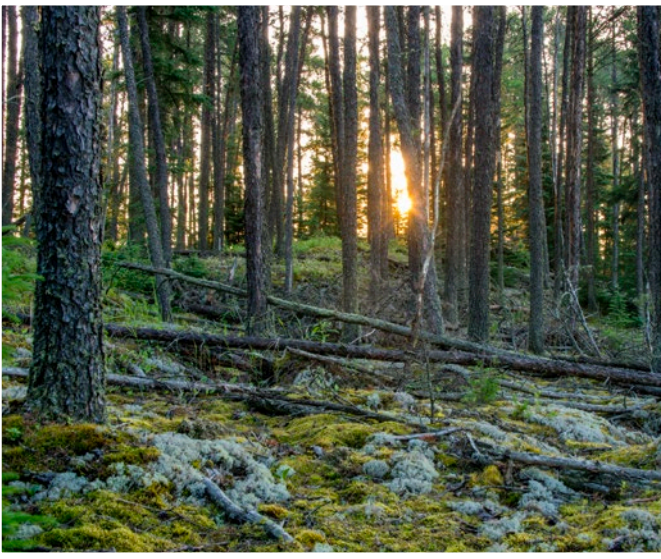


Photo: Proposed Owl-Nopiming Caribou Protected Area (Eric Reder).

TAKE ACTION

**Caring for nature is vital for our society!** The worldwide goal of achieving 30 per cent protected and conserved areas is achievable in Manitoba and will solve multiple societal concerns if we follow these nature rules. All elected officials in Manitoba need to step up to the challenge of preserving lands and waters in the province, according to the wishes of Indigenous Peoples.

Write your letter today at [WildernessCommittee.org/NatureRules](https://WildernessCommittee.org/NatureRules) and ask them to preserve nature by:

- ▶ Decolonizing

▶ Preserving biodiversity

▶ Getting industry out of parks
- ▶ Conserving for climate

▶ Establishing people-powered trails

▶ Preserving nature in our neighbourhoods



Photo: Lemay Forest Women's Walk (Michael Yellowwing Kannon).

[WildernessCommittee.org/NatureRules](https://WildernessCommittee.org/NatureRules)

YES!

Return to:  
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