



Growing Nopiming Park After the Fire

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Nature analysis and
recommendations

May 2026

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About the report

The catastrophic wildfires that burnt Manitoba in 2025 were the impetus for this publication. The whole-of-province impact these fires had is almost impossible to isolate and analyze. Health, businesses, jobs, homes, recreation, vacations and the very nature that supports the province were all affected.

This report focuses specifically on caring for nature in Nopiming Provincial Park, a unique and cherished region of Manitoba. Provincial park lands and water should be areas of the province we care for the best. The policies that are implemented to safeguard nature in Nopiming Provincial Park can be a model for public land care in the rest of the province.

The Wilderness Committee has been working in the Nopiming region since the Manitoba office opened more than 25 years ago, and the staff much longer still. This long-running, in-depth knowledge of the park informs the analysis and recommendations presented here. While the list of concerns brought forward in this report is comprehensive, it doesn't represent the entirety of issues the Wilderness Committee and others have regarding the management of Nopiming Provincial Park.

Acknowledgements

The Nopiming Provincial Park region is in Treaty 3 and Treaty 5 territory. It overlays the traditional territory of Sagkeeng Anicinabe Nation, Black River First Nation and Hollow Water First Nation and is utilized by other First Nations and Métis peoples. Decision-making on these lands must include free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples.

Our Manitoba office is located in Winnipeg: Treaty 1 Territory, the ancestral and traditional lands of the Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Dakota, Inineew (Cree), Lakota, and Anisiniwew Peoples, and heart of the Métis Nation Homeland. We would like to acknowledge that this report was produced on the unceded ᓄᓐᓄᓐᓄᓐᓄᓐᓄᓐ, Sᓄᓐᓄᓐᓄᓐᓄᓐᓄᓐ and səlilwətał territories.

We value wilderness with all its natural biodiversity, as absolutely vital to the health of people, communities and the planet. The Wilderness Committee is Canada's largest people powered wilderness preservation organization. Founded in 1980, the Wilderness Committee is based in Vancouver and operates nationally with offices in Victoria, Winnipeg and Toronto.

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Front Cover: Black bear cub; pink lady's-slipper orchid; common nighthawk nesting; tiger lily; moose cow; Seagrim Lake chain, all in Nopiming.

Back Cover: Cat Lake area. **All photos:** Eric Reder

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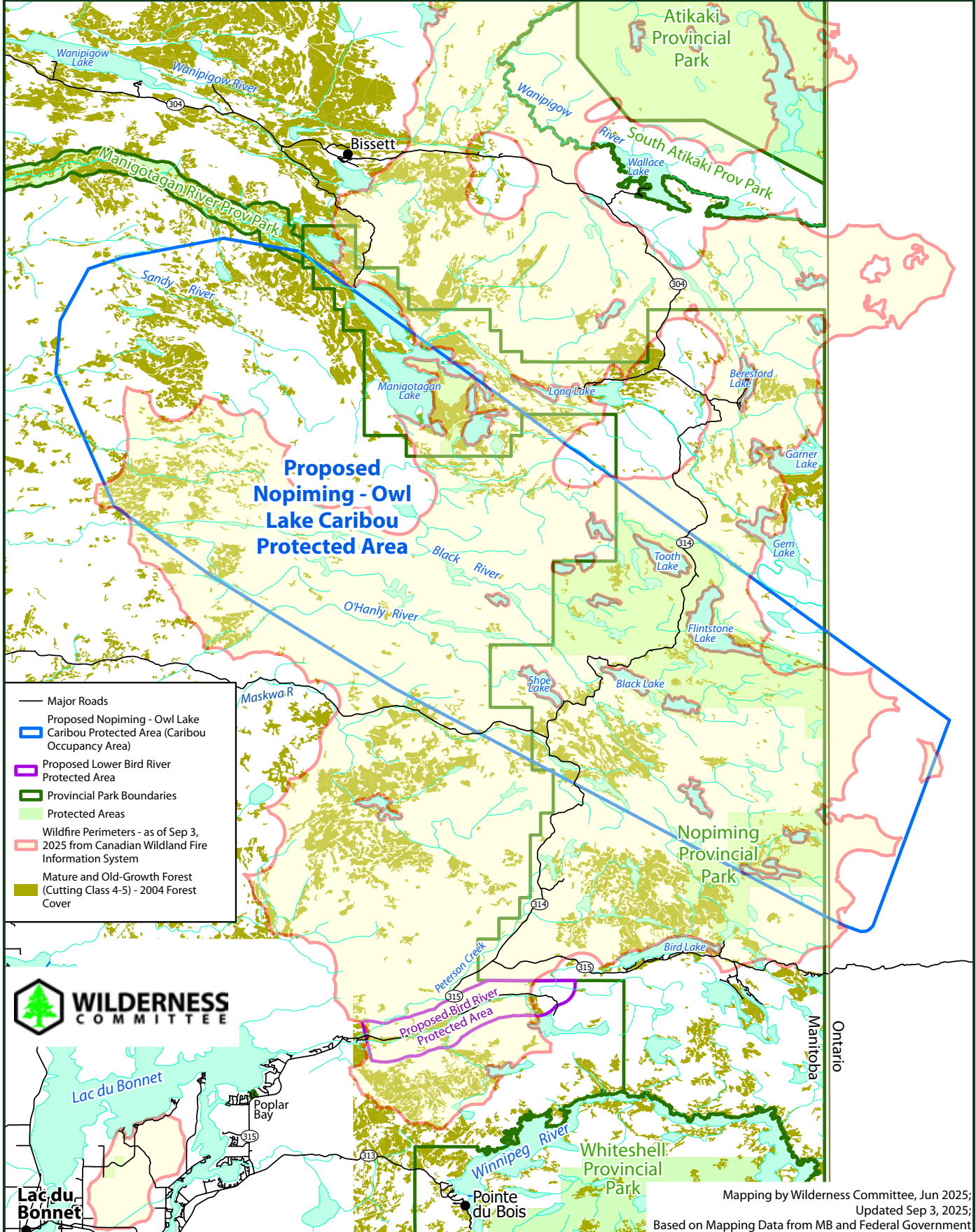
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Nopiming Fire outline map



Executive summary



Backcountry lake in Nopiming.

In 2025, unprecedented early May wildfires demonstrated that Manitoba is not prepared for the fire threat that is brought on by climate change. Nopiming Provincial Park suffered extensive damage, but the need to recover nature – which parks are designated to protect – has been all but ignored.

The report examines the forests that burnt and the myths that we are clinging to in mismanaging forests in the province. It discusses the lack of care for nature in general and boreal caribou in particular, a protected species under the federal Species At Risk Act. It looks at the public firefighting resources required to preserve private industrial operations like mines as well as private cottage developments.

The actions undertaken in Jasper National Park in response to the 2024 wildfires are highlighted as an example of how we can care for parks.

The key recommendation is that unless we eliminate the burning of fossil fuels, we will lose the outdoor activities in nature that are a way of life in Manitoba.

Further recommendations in the report include:

- limit disturbances from mineral exploration
- eliminate disruptive military training exercises in the park
- decolonize the park by bringing Indigenous communities into decision-making on their traditional territories, as an effort towards education and reconciliation
- prioritize people-powered opportunities in nature, and engage volunteer organizations and First Nations in growing destinations
- establish a robust FireSmart program in forest areas and in provincial park cottage areas

The Manitoba wildfires in 2025 were devastating, tragic and costly. As a province, we have to learn lessons from the summer 2025 burn, to safeguard society and nature for tomorrow. Provincial parks are a place where we protect our future.

“the purposes of a provincial park system include the following:

(a) to conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity;

(b) to preserve unique and representative natural, cultural and heritage resources;

(c) to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting.”

– The Provincial Parks Act, Manitoba, 1993¹

What Nopiming means to Manitobans



Tulabi Lake and Bird Lake.

Nopiming Provincial Park offers an unparalleled experience for Manitobans: a taste of true wilderness accessible to all. Nopiming is one of only a handful of parks in the province with an Indigenous name. Most folks may not know the meaning – the glorified definition published in the government’s park maps is “entrance to the wilderness.”² Anishinaabe speakers may tell you that it just means the bush, referring to the area that isn’t in the community.

The lone gravel road snaking up from the lower Bird River through Nopiming Park connects to Bisett in the north before curling down to rejoin the paved highway at Hollow Water First Nation. Venturing off the east or north sides of this road puts you into the largest intact forest left on Earth.³ Whether the translation has been aggrandized or not, Nopiming is the beginning of the big wild.

Nopiming has been the home of the southernmost boreal caribou left in Manitoba since it was designated in 1976.⁴ The secretive gray ghosts of the boreal forest shy away from disturbances as part of their natural defence. The fact they thrived in Nopiming shows the wild soul of this park.

The most popular canoe route in the province is in Nopiming, on the upper Bird River. High schools and friend groups develop a lifelong love of nature by paddling up from Tulabi Falls into this forest, often their first true wilderness experience.

Comparatively, Whiteshell Provincial Park’s popularity as a destination undoubtedly has to do with paved roads and extensive comfortable cottage developments. These two attributes are the obvious difference between the parks and indicate what Nopiming gives to Manitobans. This is a sanctuary of wildness for the people who visit, for the species here and for the folks who get joy from knowing we have intact wild spaces left.

1. The 2025 burn

1.01 Ignition



Mink Lake area.

On May 12, 2025, a lightning strike near the Bird River in eastern Manitoba started a terrible wildfire experience.⁵ The fire was labelled EA61 by the Manitoba government, but it very quickly became known as the Nopiming Fire, engulfing Nopiming Provincial Park over the subsequent months.⁶

On May 13, about 25 kilometres away, a fire started near cottage country east of the town of Lac du Bonnet.⁷ Labelled EA62, this one would cause the loss of human life.⁸

Also in early May a fire started 70 kilometres to the south near Ingolf, Ontario, a cottage development directly adjacent to Whiteshell Provincial Park and accessible only from Manitoba. The fire travelled from Ontario into Manitoba and was labelled EA63.⁹ Within a few days this fire was up to 4,000 hectares and threatened cottage developments in Whiteshell at Caddy Lake and the Big Whiteshell Lake area.

The weather conditions in eastern Manitoba created fast moving fires that were difficult to fight. Hot, dry and windy conditions continued for weeks, which allowed these fires to expand in many directions. The combination of three destructive fires within the eastern forest all at once in early May was an impossible task for existing fire crews to handle.

Fires EA62 and EA63 were smaller and much closer to population centres. Firefighting efforts held these two fires by early June.¹⁰ But massive fires in northern Manitoba started up and threatened many communities, adding to the workload. An estimated 33,000 people were evacuated from their homes, many from northern First Nations communities.¹¹

On June 18, some folks were allowed back into southern Nopiming.¹² A month later on July 25, local residents were able to access northern Nopiming again, more than two months after the Nopiming Fire started.¹³

In late August, more than three months after ignition, the Wilderness Committee saw hotspots still burning from the Nopiming Fire. By late fall the fire was out, with 373,127 hectares burnt.¹⁴

Manitoba was at the heart of what became the second-worst wildfire year in Canadian history. At least \$500 million was spent directly on the fires in Manitoba.¹⁵ It caused immeasurable loss to nature, and to the health and well-being of Manitobans.

1.02 The cause

The direct cause of the 2025 wildfires in eastern Manitoba was lightning strikes.¹⁶ The primary conditions that allowed the fast spread of the devastating fires were record temperatures coupled with strong winds.¹⁷

In 2025, abnormally low spring precipitation was recorded in eastern Manitoba.¹⁸ Subsequently, extraordinarily low soil moisture levels created favorable conditions for fire. Early spring fires have a greater opportunity to ignite and spread because seasonal vegetation growth has not occurred. This “greening up” brings moisture from the soil to the surface as moist new plant growth to counter the dry and dead vegetation left from the previous year.¹⁹ The timing of fire ignition ahead of “green up” was a contributing factor to the severity of the 2025 fires.

Comparatively, the 2021 drought, which caused forest fires across the province, occurred in mid-summer.²⁰ There was already moisture in the new vegetation growth from that season, which tempered the size of fires.

According to a University of Ottawa study, disparate temperatures in spring — caused by climate change — seem to be causing year-over-year stressors to vegetation growth.²¹ In 2026, Manitoba experienced slow and strained vegetation growth due to unexpected low temperatures and low moisture. What this spring vegetation stress means for plants is not yet well understood. In a 2025 paper, cumulative climate stressors in rainforests in British Columbia (Wells Gray Provincial Park) showed a mass die-off of older trees.²²



Lightning over the Winnipeg River in 2025.

“These indicators suggest that the fire outbreak in May 2025 occurred within a broader climatic context marked by recurring spring drought, declining snow cover and vegetation stress — factors that collectively predispose the region to increasingly severe and earlier fire seasons.”

— A Lens on Fire Risk Drivers: The Role of Climate and Vegetation Index Anomalies in the May 2025 Manitoba Wildfires²³

The stressed and slow-growing vegetation in spring, plus the irregular moisture from snow and rain, are caused by climate change.²⁴ In the coming decades it has been estimated we’ll see a 41 per cent increase in lightning strikes due to climate change.²⁵ The effects of climate change are already far-reaching in Manitoba.

1.03 The human infrastructure loss

There was a direct loss of human life early in the 2025 Manitoba wildfires. Sue and Richard Nowell were trapped by the rapidly moving fire EA62 near Lac du Bonnet, Manitoba and perished on May 13, 2025.²⁶ At least 28 properties were damaged in this fire, which was burning under the same conditions and at the same time as the Nopiming Fire. The Wilderness Committee explored the damage from the Nopiming Fire later that summer.

The Nopiming Fire:

At least 20 properties at the Beresford Lake cottage development in northern Nopiming were damaged later in May.²⁷

A military training camp on Springer Lake that runs invasive training exercises inside the provincial park was largely burnt.

Mineral exploration buildings at Cat Lake burnt, likely leaving a toxic fingerprint on the area.

The campground area and trail infrastructure at Tulabi Falls burnt.²⁸

The campground at Black Lake, which is a beloved destination for many Manitobans, burnt.²⁹

Cottages at Bird Lake, Booster Lake, Flanders Lake, Davidson Lake and Long Lake were all threatened for many weeks.³⁰

Hunting guide businesses and lodge owners lost customers as fire closures and visits to the park disappeared.³¹

1.04 The nature experiences lost

Every single trail and backcountry camp site burnt in Nopiming, making the loss of nature experiences complete and devastating. These included:

- the Ancient Mountains Trail, Black Lake Trail and Fire of '83 Trail
- the wayside park at Shoe Lake
- the backcountry camp sites at Shoe Lake and Tulabi Falls
- the canoe routes on the Bird River, Black River, Rabbit River, Seagrim Lake Chain and Manigotagan River

Hiking trails and water routes in Nopiming Park remain closed as of May 2026.³²



Black Lake campground sign after the fire.



High school paddling trip on the Bird River.

2. Analysis: examining the ashes

2.01 The forests that burnt

The critical signal that Manitobans need to recognize from the fires of 2025 is that all forests are at risk, young and old. Forests that had been extensively clearcut only 20 years ago were completely destroyed by fire. Young forests that were under 40 years old and still recovering from fires were also completely burnt.

In the 2000s, the Manitoba government allowed logging company Tembec to cut two logging roads into the heart of Nopiming Provincial Park: the Springer Lake Road and the Rocky Ridge Road. Running roughly 14 kilometres west to east, each road opened up core forest areas to be clearcut. Logging occurred yearly there until it was banned in 2008. Much of this forest area was less than 20 years old, yet it all burnt in 2025.³³



Beresford Lake area.

The last time Nopiming Provincial Park experienced major fires was in the 1980s. Three separate areas of this forest were burnt in these years: an area east and west from Cat Lake, an area east and west from Tooth Lake and the forest north of Wallace Lake, up into Atikaki Provincial Park. In 2025, roughly one-third of Nopiming Park forest was less than 40 years old. Virtually all of the forests that burnt in the 1980s burnt again in 2025.³⁴

Older boreal forests are cooler and wetter than younger forests. They provide more shade and dry out less in hot winds. The slow growing lichen that covers old boreal forest ground is a key component of this moderated climate. However, older trees are susceptible to insect damage and heart rot as they age. Older and weaker trees as well as large trees with shallow root systems can cause blowdowns, which increase potential fuel for fires.³⁵ Eventually all boreal forest rejuvenates through fire, often between the ages of 75 to 100 years.³⁶

The older boreal forest in Nopiming is home to the threatened boreal caribou. This is the southernmost herd left in Manitoba. What is disruptive about the 2025 fire is that the young forest adjacent to older forests did not survive. This young forest is referred to as “recovery habitat” in species management and is discussed further in Section 2.4.

2.02 Myth-managing forests and fire

Much of what we're told about forests is based on logging interests. From the term "mature" trees to the effects of clearcutting, we're being deceived about what forests need and how to care for them. Often enough, forest management "solutions" proposed coincide with the most profitable actions for logging companies. While these myths have always misled us, the effects of climate catastrophe on our forests are a greater truth often unspoken.

Myth #1: Logging mimics fires

During the 2000s, governments across Canada often stated that clearcut logging mimicked forest fires.³⁷ This claim was made in part to frame logging as a solution to reduce fire risk. The reality is clearcutting does not change forests like fire does. Instead it removes nutrients, making regrowth more difficult.³⁸ Clearcutting most resembles a physical landslide, not a chemical reaction.



Rocky Ridge Road area.

Myth #2: Logging reduces forest fires

Governments and logging companies often say that forest management — that is, logging — will protect our forests from fires.³⁹ In 2025 we got unequivocal proof that this is wrong. Young forests that had been clearcut were just as damaged as old-growth forests that had survived 80 years.

Myth #3: Fires suppression can save forests

Fire suppression is a short-term solution to control potential damages to human or natural infrastructure. The long-term reality is that fire suppression creates hotter, more intense fires in the future.⁴⁰ Rejuvenation by fire is an essential phase of the boreal forest.

Myth #4: Lowering fuel load can manage forest fires

Lowering fuel load by spacing and removing understory vegetation is a tactic from arid western regions for fire control that does not work in the boreal forest.⁴¹ Trees here are susceptible to fire damage, unlike trees in western drier areas that survive as ground grass fires rage through. This tactic might work in regions like the Okanagan in B.C.⁴²

Myth #5: Forests are "over mature" and need to burn

Trees don't get "over mature." Mature is a term used by logging companies to grade how much more a tree will grow.⁴³ At a certain height trees stop getting taller and also slow how much wider they're getting every year. However older trees are still healthy, providing us with ecosystem services and taking part in the web of biological diversity we need to survive. Trees that have blown down or developed insect infestation are more susceptible to burn, regardless of their age.

Myth #6: Establishing protected areas will make it harder to fight fires

The Manitoba government is currently discussing this myth as they examine their promise to grow parks and protect at least 30 per cent of the lands and waters in the next few years. Industrial activities in forest areas have not contributed to our ability to fight fires, as evidenced by the logging and mineral exploration roads in Nopiming that did not stop the 2025 fires.

Solution: Prescribed burns

The only boreal forest fire solution is prescribed burns. Prescribed burns allow controlled fires that lessen the risk of large future fires, without putting human infrastructure at risk.⁴⁴

2.03 Biodiversity and the size of the fire

A year after the fires, we've heard almost nothing from the Manitoba government regarding nature, which parks like Nopiming are designated to protect. Reports on animal populations, vegetation regeneration or waterways are simply not on the Manitoba government's agenda.

The scale of the burn — nearly the length and width of Nopiming Provincial Park — creates greater uncertainty for the rehabilitation of park ecology after the fire. In comparison, the three large fires in this region in the 1980s here were all about one-quarter the size.⁴⁵



Trumpeter swans on Finger Lake.

For large animals, a greater distance to travel back into this forested region may mean a slower recovery for these populations. In August 2025, the Wilderness Committee observed moose and bear populations had already moved back into the burn area. In March 2026, wolf and moose populations were evident near the Moose River close to the centre of the burn area. Small mammal populations would have sought cover underground and in water as fires progressed. It's unclear how successful this defense was until research is conducted.

Bird populations fly ahead of fires and return to fire areas, provided there is still appropriate food and habitat. The fires during breeding bird season have definitely caused the loss of a generation of birds. An estimated one billion birds fly into the boreal forest to nest each year.⁴⁶

Some plant species, particularly balsam fir, propagate predominantly from seed trees.⁴⁷ The seeds also don't survive long after being released from the tree in a seed bank, as happens with black spruce. Seeds typically don't travel far from the seed tree, which becomes problematic for fire areas as large as the Nopiming Fire.⁴⁸ Stands of balsam fir will likely be replaced by other species.

One unusual aspect of fires burning in May is that plants have not expanded their seasonal energy on growth yet. This energy is still in the root systems underground. By September 2025 in Nopiming, young poplars had already shot up several feet. As a result, fast-growing poplars will replace some of the coniferous-dominated forests in the next several years.

Ash and heat from fires change waterways.⁴⁹ Water quality research after the fire would help determine changes to water health through water chemistry and invertebrate populations analysis. Baseline study data from prior to the fire would be necessary to provide fulsome comparisons.

All of the stressors already put on animals, vegetation and water should lead the Manitoba government to recognize the additional disruptive effects of motorized and industrial activity will be harmful for the ecology of a park.

2.04 Indicator species: boreal caribou habitat burnt

The southernmost boreal caribou left in Manitoba made their home in Nopiming, and the entry sign to the park was an image of a caribou. After the fire of 2025, the future of these caribou is, at best, uncertain.

Boreal caribou are an indicator species, meaning that the presence of caribou and their health as a population indicate the health of the forest. To lose caribou in this region demonstrates that Manitoba is not caring for forests nor species properly. Boreal caribou are protected under the federal Species At Risk Act and listed as threatened under Manitoba's Endangered Species and Ecosystems Act.



Flintstone Lake.

The Owl-Flintstone range of boreal caribou is one of nine management units in the province. There are an estimated 40 to 60 animals in this herd.⁵⁰ These Caribou make their home around Black, Flintstone and Seagrim Lakes in the park.

Caribou are only found in forested areas with specific attributes. Caribou utilize older forests, as their preferred food is the lichen that accumulates on the ground among shady old trees. Caribou have a specific and unique defense during calving season. Rather than group together, pregnant females spread out a couple of kilometres from each other to give birth by themselves. They choose islands in lakes or peat bogs which make it harder for predators to get to them.⁵¹

Caribou have large hooves which spread out like snowshoes to give them flotation in peat bogs and in deep snow. In spring, when caribou are at their weakest, they used old-growth forests for survival. The shady forest canopy prevents a hard snowcrust from forming, making it harder for predators to hunt them.

These behaviors and evolution mean boreal caribou require very large expanses of old forest – and they must be undisturbed. The roadless regions of Nopiming Provincial Park served as an ideal home.

Research on boreal caribou has shown that they move up to five kilometres away from clearcuts or other human disturbances. As such, the federal recovery strategy for boreal caribou requires at least 65 per cent of their habitat to be undisturbed, from either fire or human-caused (anthropomorphic) disruption.⁵² Right now the Owl-Flintstone range does not have enough intact forest.

During the 1980 fire, boreal caribou near Wallace Lake just north of Nopiming were pushed out of their home forest. There was an active research station in place at the time. Researchers found caribou had left the area because the forest attributes had changed after the fire. They have not returned.⁵³

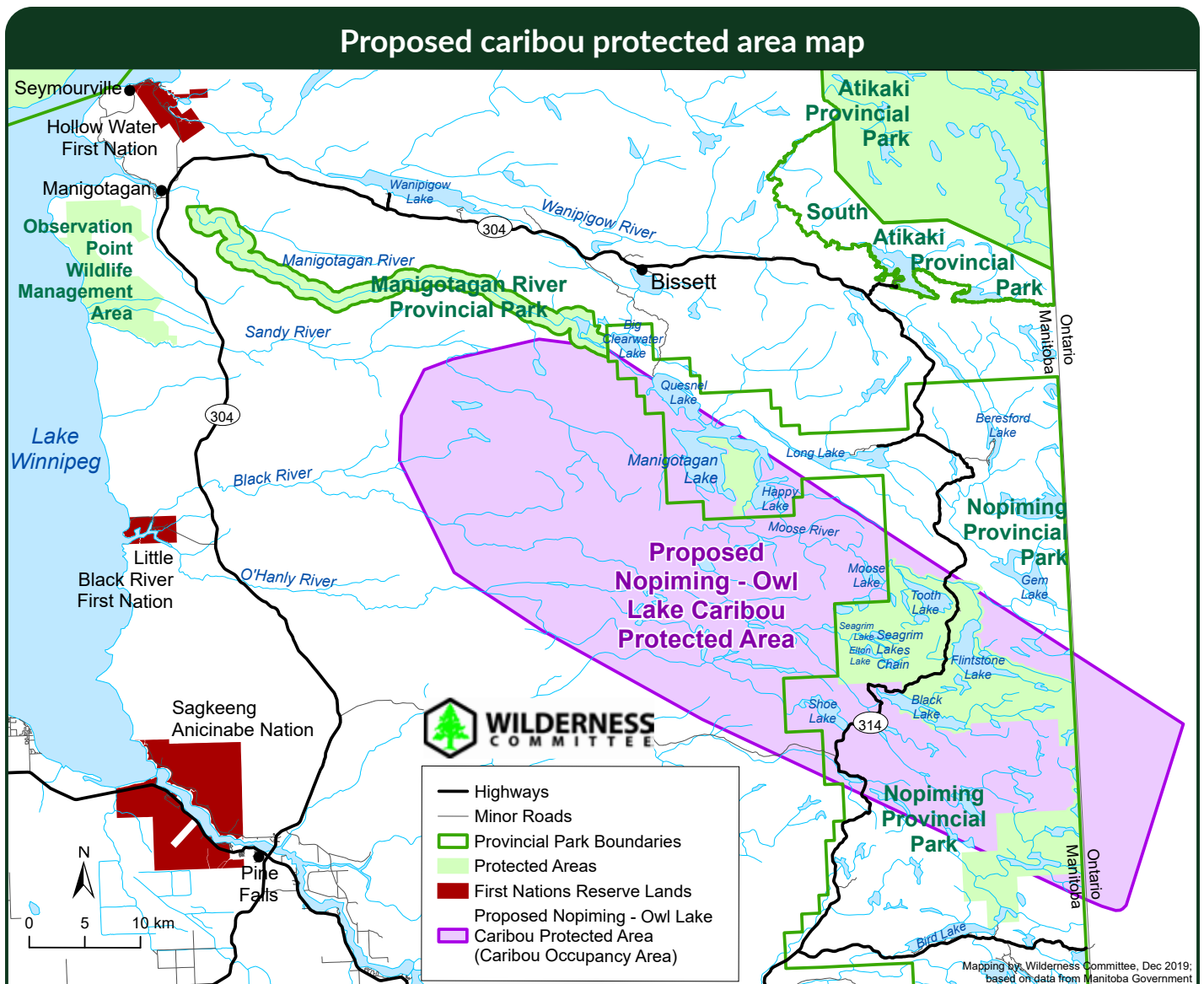
The Manitoba government authorized experimental clearcut logging in the Owl-Flintstone caribou habitat in 2007.⁵⁴ The industry-captured Eastern Manitoba Woodland Caribou Advisory Committee decided logging company Tembec should log the old forest caribou were utilizing – in order to make future caribou habitat. This baffling idea resulted in clearcutting of forests along Manigotagan Lake that would have provided Owl-Flintstone caribou a place to recover after the fire of 2025. Unfortunately, that forest is now barely 20 years old and does not support the lichen population caribou need to survive. It's possible some of the forest surrounding the clearcuts may offer habitat caribou can use.

The Wilderness Committee's aerial surveys indicate some portions of the forest north and east of Flintstone Lake in central Nopiming escaped the fire and remain intact. This is likely the last and best hope to retain boreal caribou in Nopiming Provincial Park.

Currently, the Manitoba government is years behind the targets and timelines for boreal caribou population monitoring and action plans agreed to with the federal government.⁵⁵ This means the province is not adhering to federal species law.



Clearcut near Manigotagan Lake.



2.05 The decisions and limits of our firefighting

The fires of 2025 show we cannot control wildfires in the climatic age we're in. No jurisdiction will be able to marshal the amount of resources needed to keep fires from damaging forests or harming human infrastructure.

In May in eastern Manitoba alone, the following large human infrastructure was at direct risk from fire, almost all at the same time:

- residential developments of 1,100 people outside the town of Lac du Bonnet
- cottage development at Bird Lake in Nopiming
- cottage development at Booster Lake in Nopiming
- cottage development at Flanders Lake in Nopiming
- cottage development at Davidson Lake in Nopiming
- cottage development at Beresford Lake in Nopiming
- cottage development at Long Lake in Nopiming
- Black Lake campground in Nopiming
- Tulabi Falls campground in Nopiming
- Bird Lake campground in Nopiming
- Beresford Lake campground in Nopiming
- Nopiming Lodge at Bird Lake in Nopiming
- Windsock Lodge at Long Lake in Nopiming
- cottage development at Ingold, Ontario
- cottage development at Caddy Lake and surrounding developments in Whiteshell Park
- cottage development at Big Whiteshell Lake and surrounding developments in Whiteshell Park
- Tanco mine site on Bernic Lake
- Point du Bois hydroelectric generating station and town
- military training base at Springer Lake in Nopiming
- the town of Bissett
- San Gold mine site outside of Bissett
- Global Nickel mineral exploration operation, owned by Grid Metals, at the Bird River

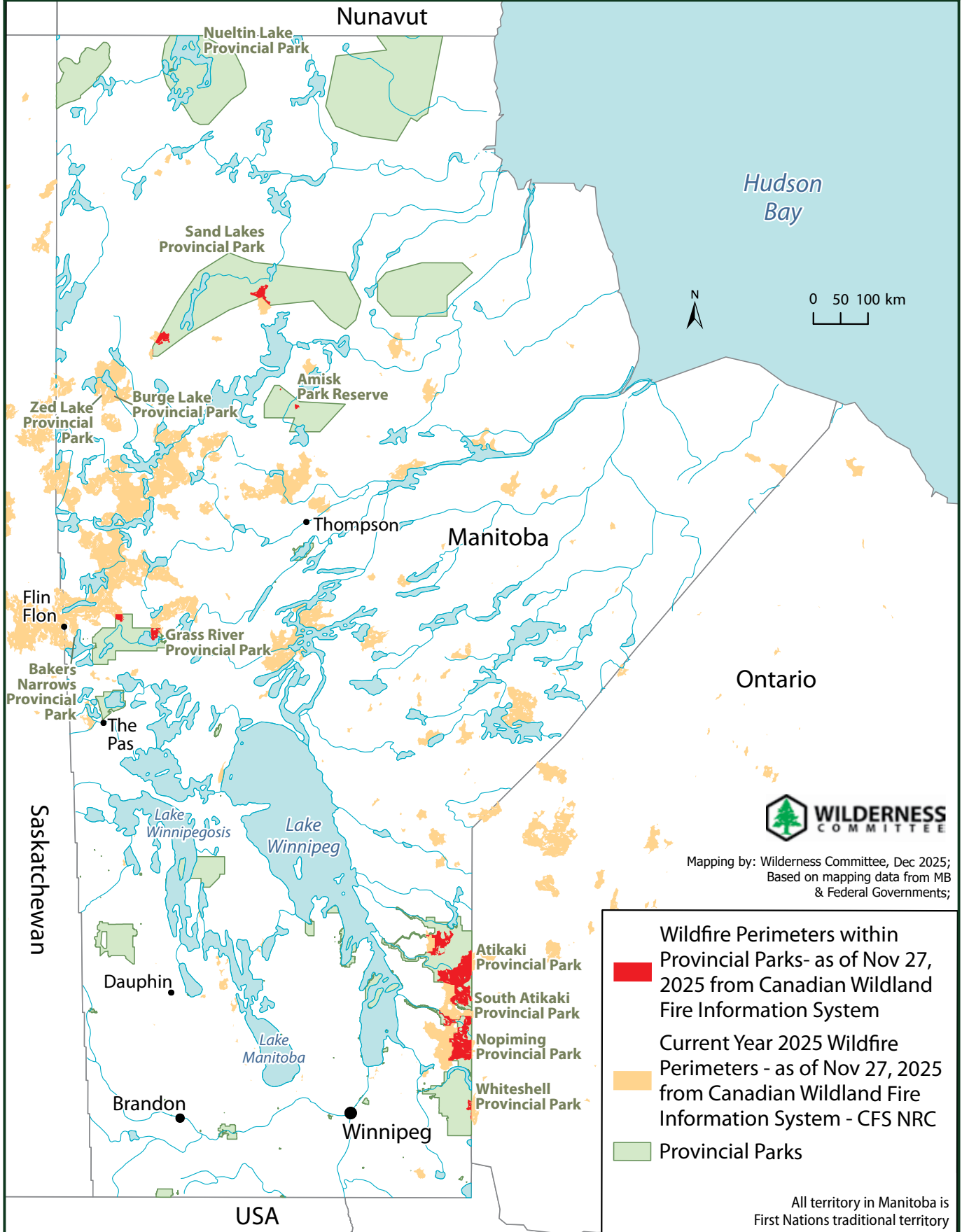
Some of the human infrastructure was lost despite firefighting efforts.

What wasn't saved was wilderness and nature. The scale of fires and the human infrastructure at risk did not allow the distribution of firefighting resources to control the blaze before it burnt the entire Bird River canoe route, or all of the old forest boreal caribou live in.

As the fires in eastern Manitoba were straining all of the wildfire resources, fires ignited in northwestern Manitoba.⁵⁶ The largest air evacuation in Canada's history took place.⁵⁷ Fires threatened communities and human infrastructure. The spread and scale of the fires resulted in eight per cent of forests in Manitoba burning in 2025.

When companies open up industrial operations in natural lands, they do so with the expectation of a massive public expense in firefighting. The monetary gain we supposedly make by allowing business to pull profits from the provincial territory is completely wiped out by the costs of fire fighting in 2025. But worse than that, we used the resources we could have used to control fires on natural lands to instead protect private profits. We lost money and we lost nature, the very blood and breath that sustains us.

Manitoba wildfires of 2025 and provincial parks map



Case study: Jasper after the 2024 fires

“After a wildfire, a park needs time and space to recover.”

– Jasper National Park Visitor Guide⁵⁸

Lightning strikes in July 2024 sparked fast-moving forest fires in Jasper National Park.⁵⁹ Hot, dry conditions coupled with strong winds made the fires impossible to contain. Within a few days, fires had traveled 30 kilometres up the Athabasca River valley and eventually into the town of Jasper itself. Human infrastructure loss included the iconic Jasper Park Lodge and one of the only fuel stations in town. Whistlers and Wapiti campgrounds in the valley outside Jasper were both burnt. Firefighting efforts were able to save a majority of the town after a stressful few days. Eventually 32,722 hectares burnt.



Whistlers campground in 2025.

Jasper National Park, along with Banff, Kootenay and Yoho National Parks, are known internationally as top tourism destinations in Canada. Grief from the fire loss in Jasper was felt in mountain towns nearby, across the country and around the world.

National parks are places where we care for wild biodiversity the best and offer people a chance to experience intact nature. The national park response from the devastating 2024 forest fire offers a model for what provincial park responses can look like.

The cover of the 2025 visitors guide to Jasper National Park is a picture of the burn. At the start of the brochure there is a simple directive: “Help Jasper heal and rebuild.” Key points mentioned at the start of the visitor guide include “respect all closures, give wild animals space, protect fragile vegetation and habitat regrowth” and “understand that recovery takes time.”

Several areas of the park are closed to human travel, including hiking and biking. Signage explains that the forest and the animals need peace to recover.

Comparatively, Manitoba has closed backcountry travel in Nopiming Provincial Park. But their rationale is not wildlife or nature care. Instead, the province claims safety concerns are the reason for ongoing closures.

New interpretive installations in Jasper townsite are bringing attention to the Indigenous communities whose territories were occupied by the establishment of Jasper National Park. These decolonial efforts will continue to bring parks into harmony with Indigenous Peoples and should be replicated in all parks.

3. Action for nature: a better path in the aftermath

3.01 The only recovery solution: act on climate



Springer Lake - Peterson Creek Proposed Ecological Reserve.

The Nopiming Provincial Park that existed prior to 2025 is gone. Only an all-of-society recovery solution can bring back what we've lost. We must eliminate the burning of fossil fuels, stop the release of greenhouse gases and roll out programs to draw down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Anything less than that will cause us immense pain. And anything less will cause the next generations to lose the joy and wonder that provincial parks offer.

“Provincial parks are dedicated to the people of Manitoba and visitors to Manitoba, and shall be maintained for the benefit of future generations”

– The Provincial Parks Act, Manitoba, 1993

3.02 Growing forward: nature care in Nopiming

The recovery of the natural boreal forest ecosystem in Nopiming Provincial Park will take decades under ideal conditions. Industrial activity as well as human recreation will both inhibit wilderness in this park, unless we plan for nature first. Now is the time to curtail longstanding destructive and nonconformist activities in the park. Doing so will allow the park to serve both nature and people. Manitoba's outdoor way of life is at stake.

“Provincial parks are special places that play an important role in the protection of natural lands and the quality of life of Manitobans;”

– The Provincial Parks Act, Manitoba, 1993



Old forest along Shoe Lake.

3.03 Limit disturbance from mineral exploration

Mineral exploration is the only industrial activity still occurring in Nopiming. Since the new NDP government election in 2023, the number of mining claims inside Nopiming has increased.⁶⁰

Mineral exploration involves heavy machinery and bulldozing new roads into intact forest areas. It's disruptive to wildlife and nature everywhere it happens. Noise disturbance alone causes distress for animals like moose and caribou. The linear paths created by mineral exploration also change the predator-prey relationships in the forest. In a forest area recovering from wildfire, industrial activity will have an even greater impact.

In March 2026, the mineral exploration trails in Nopiming – at Cat Lake and elsewhere – were cleared of snow for mineral exploration activities. The government hasn't paused destructive industrial activities in the park, but they have banned Manitobans from backcountry travel and paddling.⁶¹

Forest cover offers shelter and camouflage as security for animals like moose. The lack of shelter will increase stress on animals. The addition of noisy industrial activity and machinery is in no way good for wildlife in Nopiming.

Recommendations:

All mineral exploration activities in Nopiming Provincial Park must cease. A moratorium on all new industrial activity permits must be maintained until the ecological integrity of the park is improved and as vegetation recovers.



Burnt mineral exploration operation at Cat Lake.



Mining claim post near Flintstone Lake.

3.04 Eliminate disturbance from military training base

In the 1990s, a military training base was established in an old kids camp on Springer Lake in Nopiming. Since then, the base has expanded to run disruptive and destructive exercises over hundreds of square kilometres of park lands. All-night exercises firing blanks and destroying vegetation happen all year long. There has never been public consultation about this development, nor any environmental permits issued for this massive disturbance in a public provincial park.



Machine gun military exercises on the main provincial road 314 through Nopiming.

The Wilderness Committee found hundreds of spent rifle and pistol cartridges and casings in the area surrounding the military training base. The existence of pistol casings demonstrates illegal activity, as pistols are only legal to use at licensed gun ranges.⁶²

Much of the base was destroyed during the fire of 2025, with only one training hall remaining. The park will not be suitable for survival training or the war games that this secret military operation runs every year, as the forest has no cover now. As the burnt dead-standing trees topple over the next several years, the region will become impassable for people.



Pistol casing and dummy shell on Rocky Ridge Road.

Recommendations:

The military and survival training base should not be rebuilt in this sensitive spot inside a provincial park. Only 11 per cent of the province is designated as protected park.⁶³ There are many other places where military training can occur.

An investigation into the toxic impact of the military base that remains should be undertaken to determine the appropriate remediation measures.

The Springer Lake region was proposed as an ecological reserve in 2001 due to the populations of rare frogs and ongoing ornithological research.⁶⁴ Manitoba Parks staff say this nature protection proposal was quietly shelved prior to 2015 due to the military operation. The Springer Lake proposal should be publicly reviewed and the Springer Lake region added to the protected area of Nopiming.

3.05 Real care for caribou habitat



Proposed Nopiming-Owl Lake Caribou Protected Area.

Boreal woodland caribou is the most recognized endangered species found in Nopiming Provincial Park. They are also one of the most vulnerable animals in the park. The attributes of the forest here are what caribou need for their home. Within a few years after the fire caribou will not be able to utilize large portions of their previous range.

Sensory disruption from motorized travel including all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and outboard motors will add stress to boreal caribou right now, while they're still recovering from the fire.

Recommendations:

Because caribou are so susceptible to disturbance, motorized activity in their range should be curtailed. The illegal operation of ATVs into Flintstone Lake should be stopped.

A ban on motorized boat travel on Flintstone Lake should be instituted until more research on new caribou habitat usage is gathered.

The Manitoba government published a draft action plan for the Owl-Flintstone boreal caribou range in 2011.⁶⁵ It recommended expanding the protected area in the Nopiming region for the Owl-Flintstone caribou. The proposed Nopiming-Owl Lake Caribou Protected Area should be established immediately.

3.06 Enforce existing ATV prohibition

Off-road vehicles, or ATVs, are used in several places in Nopiming despite being prohibited in parks. The aggressive, knobby tire pattern on an ATV creates a 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.⁶⁶ Today's ATV designs incorporate taller tires and more ground clearance, allowing ATVs to travel greater distances into the wilderness unhindered, which leaves a larger impact.

Further, the loud engines create sensory disturbance for great distances. Stress from engines can disturb animals trying to recover from the fire.

With the vegetation now burnt, it's easier to see routes across the landscape, which increases the risk of ATV operators disrupting more wilderness.

Recommendations:

In a fragile park recovering from fire, no additional pressure from destructive tires and loud engines should be allowed. The existing ban on ATVs must be enforced across the park.

3.07 Decolonize Nopiming

All land in Manitoba is the traditional territory of Indigenous communities. Sagkeeng Anicinabe Nation, Black River First Nation and Hollow Water First Nation have traditional territory overlapped by Nopiming Provincial Park.

Nopiming is one of only a handful of the 93 parks in Manitoba with an Indigenous name. But that is where the involvement of First Nations seems to end.

Recommendations:

As park signage is replaced because of fire damage, new signage should incorporate the identification of the First Nations whose territory Nopiming is on.

The establishment of new and rebuilding of existing infrastructure supporting people-powered trails should be done in conjunction with First Nations. Some of this work can be accomplished and funded through the federal Indigenous Guardians program.

Park interpretation signage and programming – produced with First Nations – that discusses the traditional use of these lands can become a tool for reconciliation efforts.

3.08 Prioritize people-powered recreation

People-powered recreation is an underappreciated and underfunded human health component.

Canoeing is the premier outdoor activity in Nopiming Park. The combination of small connected lakes and rivers with level shorelines to stop and camp on provide ideal conditions for backcountry tripping. Parks staff, who know this is the best utilization of Nopiming, quietly built a paddling guide in the 2010s. The work was all done off the side of their desk, but resulted in a Nopiming Recreation Water Routes map for Nopiming.⁶⁷



Bird Lake paddling.

In January 2026 it was announced that backcountry water routes would remain closed all year, a shocking decision by the Manitoba government. Governments claiming they don't have the resources to care for nature and people's health are misguidedly sidestepping their responsibility. Parks, paddling and backcountry travel are important for society and must be funded.

Back in 2012, after many years of pushing, the Manitoba government was finally convinced to let the Wilderness Committee bring in a volunteer work crew to rebuild the first two portages on the Bird River canoe route.⁶⁸ The volunteer labour component of this partnership can be replicated across Nopiming.

The establishment of recreation destinations in Nopiming has been haphazard at best. In the early 2020s, the Wilderness Committee found the previous Manitoba government allowed a mineral exploration company to cut down old trees, haul in gravel and establish a new driveway and parking spot at Mink Lake, so they could do mineral exploration drilling in the lake. None of this should be allowed inside a provincial park, but the lasting danger this plan caused is due to the turnoff location.

Roughly 50 metres south of the new driveway there's a blind corner and 50 metres north there's a blind hill. No Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure staff would ever allow such an intersection in this location because it is dangerous. It's an example of damages done by industrial activity shaping the park, instead of thoughtful, systemic establishment of recreation destinations and infrastructure.

Another reason to move forward on recreation destinations right now is that the fire has made it much easier to visualize the landscape of Nopiming, simplifying trail routing.

Recommendations:

As part of the new Nopiming Park management plan, the province – in conjunction with First Nations – should establish locations for discrete wayside destinations and people-powered trails to lakes. This project should include a timeline of development work, along with an appropriate budget.

The government should engage people and trail users in park rehabilitation. This will build community advocates who care for the park in the long run. A public-public partnership of government and users will build a transformational trail system, instead of the capitalist, predatory private-public partnership models floated by profiteers in governments.

Case study: Mantario Trail rebuild shows willpower problem



Early season Mantario Trail hiking.

The 63 kilometre Mantario Trail backpacking route in eastern Whiteshell Provincial Park was partially burnt by fire EA63 in 2025.⁶⁹ This beloved trail is one of the most popular backcountry destinations in the province. In January 2026, the government announced the trail would be closed for the year.⁷⁰

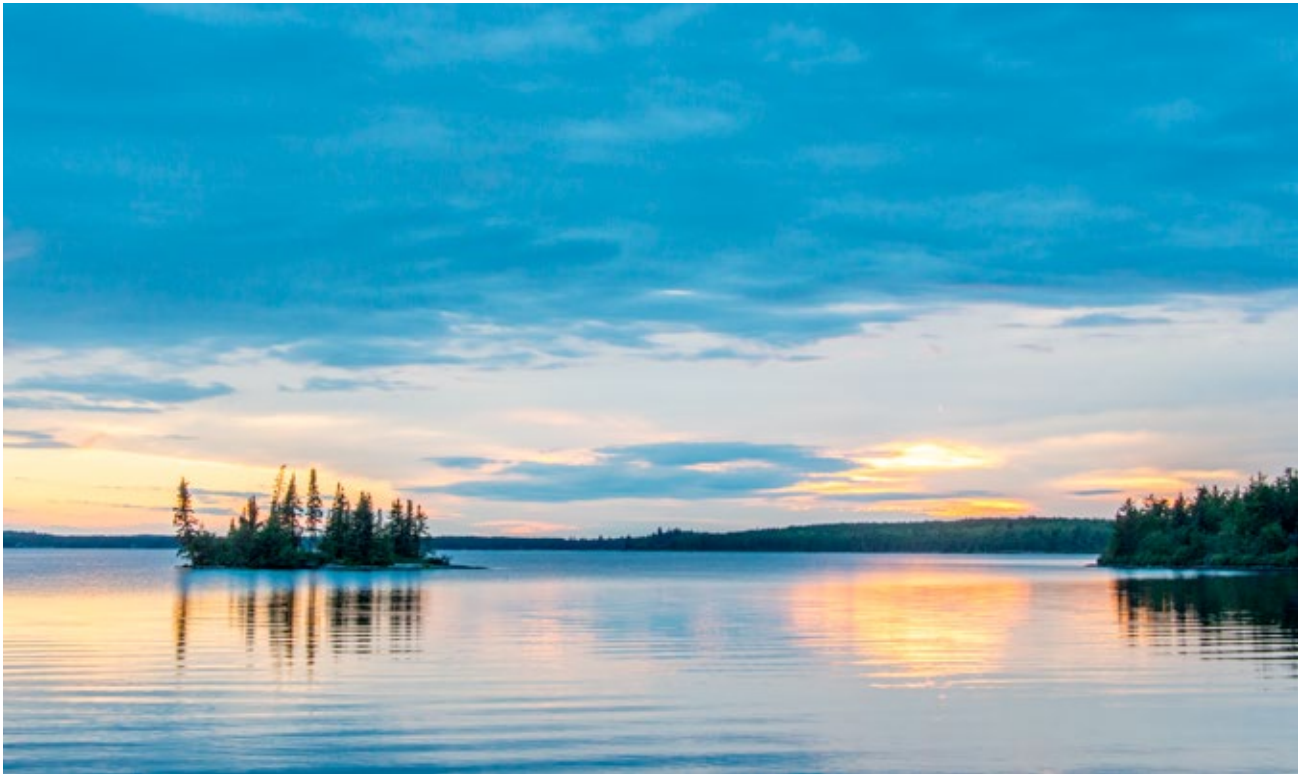
There was public outcry over the government's decision not to put effort into restoring recreation and the loss of opportunities to visit nature resulting from fires. By April, the government realized their error and said they would begin opening the trail in the summer of 2026.⁷¹



Morning view on a backpacking trip.

There was greater public communication and effort for the Mantario Trail alone than there was for the entirety of Nopiming Park, which points to a lack of will and resources from this government. Both of those problems can be corrected.

3.09 Park management plans for climate



Tooth Lake.

The Provincial Parks Act states that every park should have a management plan.⁷² Yet only about three-quarters of the 93 provincial parks in Manitoba have one.⁷³ Nopiming's last management plan was completed in 1988 and was only an interim plan.⁷⁴ A draft plan was proposed and publicized in 2015 but never finalized.⁷⁵

Since the establishment of the modern Provincial Parks Act in 1993, fires and climate change have become far greater influences on our parks. Current management plans do not address climate change mitigation or fires to the extent they must.

Recommendations:

The Provincial Parks Act needs to be strengthened so it mandates modern park management plans that are regularly reviewed and updated. Management plans must include:

- policy to provide climate-safe recreation
- plans to reduce emissions in park visitations and operations
- plans to defend against fires

A new draft management plan for Nopiming Provincial Park should be produced within the year.

3.10 Manitoba cottages need FireSmart

Living in the boreal forest has always involved a fire risk, but the fire of 2025 demonstrated the risk is far greater than currently recognized. Property owners simply do not have enough resources and guidance on how to preserve their belongings and make their lots fire resistant. Comparatively, British Columbia has a larger and broader FireSmart program, and it is well advertised. As an example, at a visitor centre in the Slocan Valley in the summer of 2025, one-third of the displays in the brochure rack were government FireSmart information.

Recommendations:

The government must invest in the FireSmart program, and ensure information is distributed throughout parks.



BC FireSmart pamphlets.

3.11 Limit human infrastructure and potential fire loss

Decisions had to be made on where to fight fires during the 2025 season, as there wasn't enough equipment or people to defend all areas at risk, nor control all dangerous fires. Extensive efforts went into preserving cottages and industrial development in and around Nopiming. Public resources were expended to try and save private property in many cottage developments.

The fire risks to all forest areas are rapidly increasing due to climate change. As witnessed in 2025, it's not possible to save everything from fire.

Recommendations:

We should limit the human infrastructure inside parks, and therefore the potential losses from fire.

In 2025, the Manitoba government brought in size restrictions for cottages inside parks for the first time.⁷⁶ The maximum size of a cottage is now 1,800 square feet. However, multiple additional buildings like guest houses, garages and boat houses are also allowed. The amount of development allowed on a park cottage lot should be smaller to lessen the potential loss and the need of public resources during fires.

While some folks in provincial park cottage lots may object to decreasing the size of the infrastructure on their leased lots, from a public policy perspective it makes sense to control parks as the best managed wild regions in our province. There are extensive opportunities to buy and build cottages outside of provincial parks, where these controls are not in place.

The Manitoba government should mandate fire-safe building sheathing and roofing in all park construction, both public and private.

The government should also mandate sprinkler system installation in cottages in parks. This will lessen the public costs and efforts of fire crews setting up sprinklers to save private property.

4. Learning from the loss



Cat Lake area.

Eight per cent of forests in Manitoba burnt in one year including 63 per cent of Nopiming Park and the devastation will scar at least a generation of people. The fires were a result of human-caused climate change, which is making our future unstable. We know reflecting on accidents and past ecological destruction is how we got all of our current environmental laws. Learning from these fires is an essential piece of growing the society our future requires.

Nopiming Park has provided a unique service in the province for 50 years, giving us access to wilderness. While much of the forest is gone now, Nopiming is again offering us entrance, this time to an understanding of proper ecological care for parks and wilderness.

Nature in Nopiming cannot come back the same in a warming world. Without acting on climate in all ways possible — including an end to burning of fossil fuels — we'll forfeit the park as we knew it. Immediate action on climate change is required to save this park and ourselves from further devastation.

The steps required to recover Nopiming Park to a healthy ecological and recreation destination can be applied to other parks that haven't yet suffered the same level of fire disturbance. Parks should be an endless learning experience for us, and continually growing.

The entirety of society must grasp that we have to live within the bounds of nature. Rebuilding regulations so we operate in harmony with nature should absolutely begin with how we care for the lands, waters and human infrastructure in provincial parks. If we can't model our best care for nature inside a park, how do we expect to care for our life-support systems elsewhere?

A personal note from the author



Springer Lake sunset.

This document is an essential examination of wilderness management by an expert public voice in nature policy. But it's also a personal, mournful reflection for a Nopiming I'll never see again.

I first paddled the Manigotagan River here in 1976, the year Nopiming was established. Driving into a clearcut in the park in 1986 is my origin story as an environmental advocate. I've lived in big wilderness, from Lake Louise to the Yukon, but came back to Nopiming. For decades I guided visitors up into the bush here, showing off magical wilderness. In 2006, when I became a public watchdog for nature, I began working towards a better Nopiming, confronting logging and mining destruction that I'd watched unfold firsthand.

A wilderness that folks can access, that they can learn from and where they can find peace is what Nopiming provided in my youth. My son grew up feeling this wild place and seeing me fight to keep the wild here. Unfortunately, it will be decades before people again experience the marvel of big trees like we did.

From May 12 on, 2025 had a brutal emotional weight as I watched fires burn the park I love, and then so much more of the province. In reality, the loss of Nopiming hit hardest while I assembled a photo montage for my son's 18th birthday party in April 2026, as every fourth photo was a picture of him growing up in the park.

Stories from folks in the Jasper, Alberta area – of rebirth and rebuilding after the fire of 2024 – gave me the inspiration to produce this report. People grieve wilderness loss, seemingly more so than buildings, because they know the nature of Jasper is special. This is the government making decisions to care for nature first. I want Manitobans to recognize Nopiming is sacred land. It has special value far greater than governments recognize. It's irreplaceable as an entry point for wild appreciation, which is our salvation as a society.

Wilderness needs to be quietly experienced to retain its value and for us to accept its benefits. It's my hope that we put Nopiming back on a path to the peaceful, marvelous wildness I felt growing up. Although the threat of climate change looms over my vision of what this park might become, I believe enough Manitobans support the concepts laid out in this report, and will preserve this natural jewel.

May 17, 2026

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