LAKE MANITOBA
LAKE ST. MARTIN
OUTLET CHANNELS PROJECT

WILDLIFE

Includes animals and their habitat, including species at risk and migratory birds

Environmental Impact Statement—Summary by Valued Component (VC)

Why is Wildlife a VC?

Wildlife is an essential component of a functioning ecosystem. It plays a vital role in ecological and biological processes, provides a source of income in the region, and facilitates the continued practice of traditional and recreational resource use.

What is the current state of Wildlife?

The Project area is composed of wetland habitats, natural upland habitats, water, and modified wildlife habitats. The Project area has a diversity of wildlife such as red-headed woodpecker, bobolink, white-tailed deer, elk, and furbearers.

What effects might the Project have on Wildlife?

The Project has the potential to affect wildlife habitat, increase wildlife mortality risk, and alter wildlife movement during construction and operations.

Wildlife habitat will be affected during construction through vegetation clearing, ground disturbance, water development and control activities, and sensory disturbances. Construction will result in the loss or alteration of approximately 2,100 ha of habitat (including potential critical habitat for bird species such as the red-headed woodpecker and eastern whip-poor-will).

Valued components (VCs) are components of the natural and human environment that are considered by the proponent, public, Indigenous Peoples, scientists and other technical specialists and government agencies involved in the assessment process to have scientific, ecological, economic, social, cultural, archaeological, historical, or other importance.

Water level fluctuations during operation may affect shoreline animals but overall reduced flooding and reclamation of the area may benefit wildlife.

Wildlife mortality risk may increase during construction due to encounters with machinery, equipment, and humans. Operation of the channels may cause increased mortality risk for ground-nesting birds or species with decreased mobility if water levels rise suddenly or if they attempt to cross the channel.

Wildlife movement may be affected by construction noise and activity by deterring their movements through active construction areas. The channels create linear features that may alter wildlife movement patterns during operation.

How will the Project mitigate effects on Wildlife?

Water Level and Wildlife Habitat

- Avoid clearing between April 1 and August 31 of any year
- Establish buffers for all important sites to avoid habitat loss and disturbance
- Retain treed habitats where safe and technically feasible to do so. If removal is required, schedule removal activities, to the extent practical, outside the roosting period for bats
- If tree clearing is required during the bird roosting period, a qualified biologist will review the trees to determine the likelihood of occupancy before removal
- Develop an offset plan for red-headed woodpecker and/or eastern whip-poor-will mitigation
- Remove and save snags (dead standing trees) containing or supporting nesting, where feasible. Erect snags saved prior to land clearing or new structures post-construction in areas supporting potential red-headed woodpecker habitat.

Manitoba

Wildlife Mortality

- Install vehicle speed and wildlife warning signs where appropriate
- Nuisance wildlife will be immediately reported to the Natural Resources Officer and the Engineer
- Employees, workers and other staff will not hunt, trap or harass wildlife
- No person will take or be in possession of or willfully destroy the nest or eggs of birds
- No blasting will be permitted close (approximately 1 km) to known sensitive wildlife habitat during critical lifecycle periods (e.g., in the spring, when many species give birth)

Wildlife Movement

- Implement designs for minimizing the use of rip rap and minimizing the side slopes of the channels to the extent feasible, to facilitate wildlife movement
- Add cover plantings (e.g., trees and/or shrubs) along select upland areas of the channels to assist the movement of wildlife

FOLLOW-UP AND MONITORING

A Wildlife Monitoring Plan will be developed to examine wildlife habitat availability and wildlife movement and the effectiveness of mitigation strategies for mammals, birds, and amphibians. Species at risk (SAR) monitoring will focus primarily on bird species such as red-headed woodpecker, and eastern whip-poor-will, and habitat availability/use. For mammals, monitoring may involve a remote camera study to record presence of wide-ranging large bodied species and/or predators. General compliance monitoring during Project construction for sensitive wildlife features and habitats will also be undertaken.

CONCLUSIONS

Change in Habitat

Project construction will remove or alter only a small portion (about 3%) of local habitat used by migratory birds, species of conservation concern, and other wildlife. The mitigation measures will reduce potential habitat loss, but due to the importance of these species, plans are being developed to offset losses for species at risk in consultation with provincial and federal regulators, stakeholders and Indigenous communities.

Construction noise and activity may deter wildlife from using areas close to the active construction areas, with animals returning to the area when disturbance ceases. Positive effects will occur during operation and mainly benefit the Lake St. Martin waterbird colonies through reduced flooding and erosion of habitat and nests. Other wildlife such as muskrats, ducks, grebes, loons, and geese that nest or occupy marshy lake shores will also benefit from reduced flooding on Lake St. Martin.

Change in Mortality Risk

During construction, there is potential for increased mortality risk because of encounters with construction equipment to small mammals, nesting birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Clearing outside of the sensitive breeding period for migratory birds and following mitigation measures is expected to reduce mortality risk for these species.

During operation and maintenance, the outlet channels have the potential to increase predator and hunter/trapper efficiency by providing access along a continuous, linear corridor. Prey species in the outlet channels may be at a greater risk to predators until plantings that allow them to escape or conceal their cover are well established. Although most wildlife species will be able to cross the channels during operation, wildlife mortality risk will increase for all species attempting to cross the channels during high flow periods.

Change in Movement

The outlet channels have the potential to alter wildlife movement in the local area, particularly during construction and during flood events when the channels are filled with floodwater. Areas around the channels will be revegetated and include additional cover plantings in strategic locations to facilitate wildlife movement across the outlet channels. Movement of most wildlife through the local area, including elk, moose, furbearers, migratory birds and species of conservation concern, is not expected to change when the channel gates are closed.

For more information or if you would like to share your concerns:

Visit www.gov.mb.ca/mit/wms/lmblsmoutlets/ or email outletchannel@gov.mb.ca