

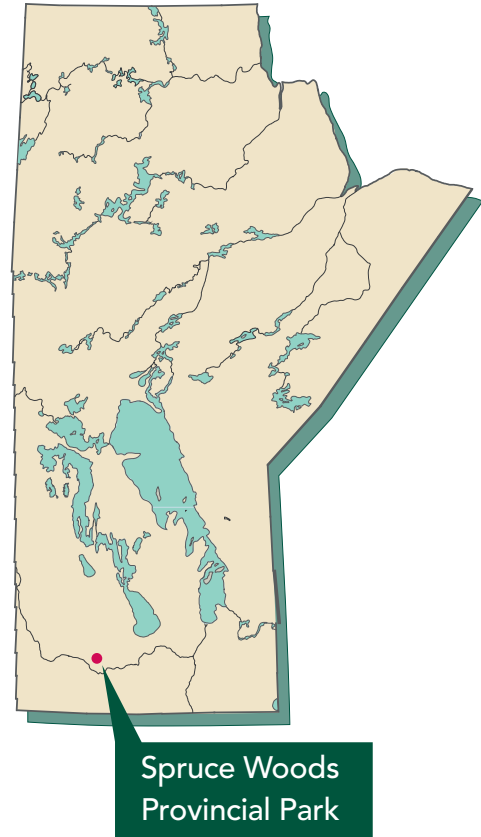
Spruce Woods Provincial Park

Management Plan



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This management plan for Spruce Woods Provincial Park was prepared in consultation with park users under the authority of *The Provincial Parks Act*.

Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship
Parks and Natural Areas Branch
November, 2012

1. Introduction

The Provincial Parks Act (1993) requires that a management plan be prepared for each provincial park. Management plans establish long term direction for parks and address issues pertaining to resource protection, use and development of park lands. They are used in conjunction with park regulations, directives and other departmental and government policies and legislation.

This management planning process began following the flood of 2011 when it was determined that the extent of reconstruction required in Spruce Woods necessitated the type of direction provided by a park management plan. Information from an assessment of flood damages and in-depth reviews of all management aspects of the park were used to produce a draft management plan. The public consultation process to review the draft management plan began in the summer of 2012 with meetings with specific interest groups and stakeholders. A public drop-in was then held at the park so park users and local citizens could review and discuss the plan with Department staff. The draft plan was posted on the Manitoba Parks website so all Manitobans could have the opportunity to provide comments. Over 100 people participated by attending the drop-in or providing comments. The comments received helped in revising the draft to a final management plan. Involving park users was a key part of preparing the management plan for Spruce Woods. This plan reflects their aspirations of the future of the park.

This management plan is to guide the work of Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, particularly in the reconstruction of flood damaged areas, over the next 10 to 15 years. In this context, the plan will be utilized and examined on an ongoing basis. A formal review of this plan should be undertaken every five years. Where an update or new direction on any matters described in this management plan may be needed, an appropriate process for publicly reviewing and updating the plan should be undertaken.

2. Background Information

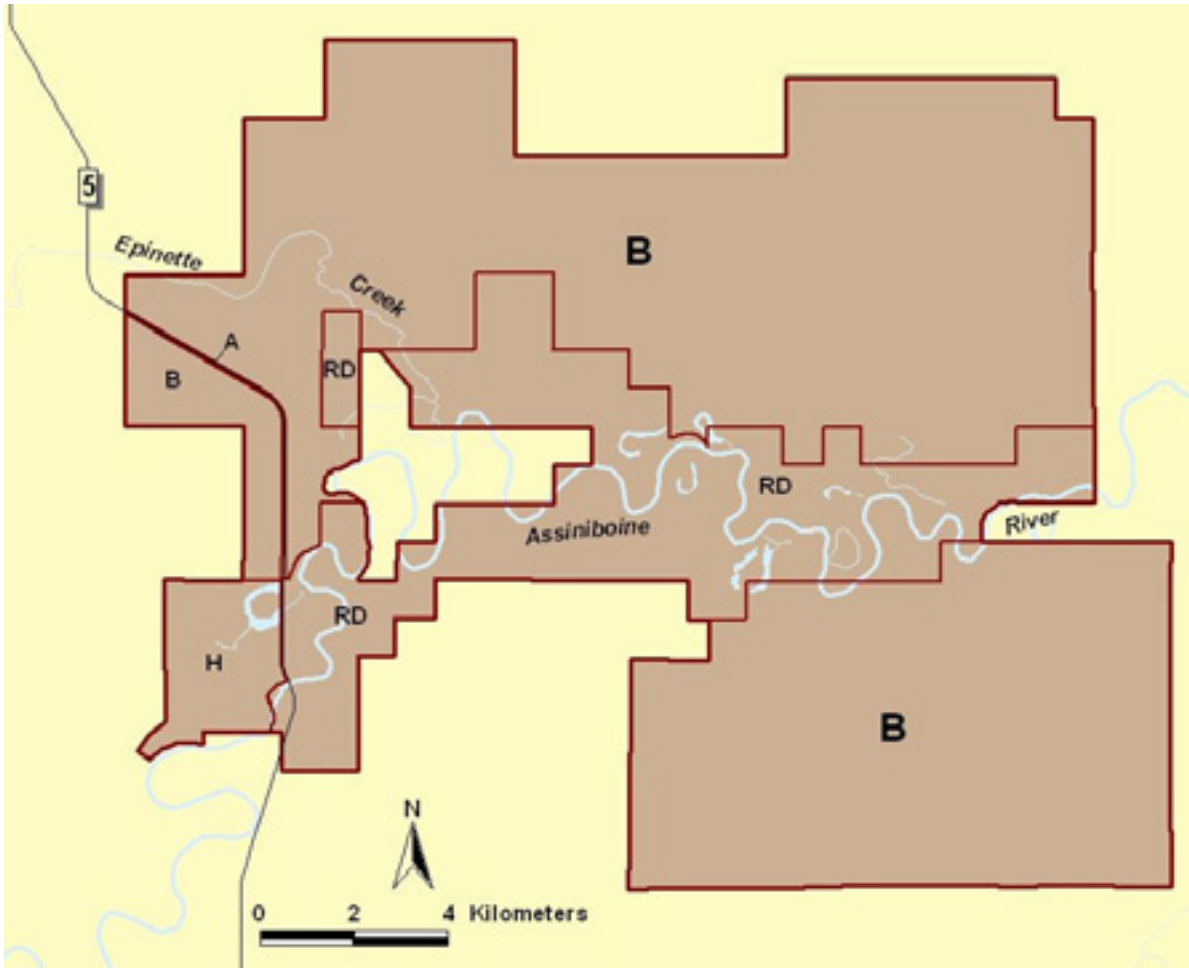
Spruce Woods Provincial Park was established in 1964 in response to requests by local communities to create a provincial park to protect the Carberry Sand Hills and to develop public recreation facilities there. After several years of construction the park was officially opened in 1970. It was expanded in 1975 to include what is now known as the Spirit Sands. The park boundaries were further modified in 1997 to exclude certain private lands from the park and to include areas such as the Epinette Trailhead. These changes resulted in the area of the park increasing to its current size of 269 square kilometres.

2.1 Park Purpose and Role

Under the authority of *The Provincial Parks Act (1993)* Spruce Woods is classified as a Natural Park and, as such, is intended to both preserve areas of a natural region and accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses. *A System Plan for Manitoba Parks (1997)* describes the purpose and role of each provincial park in Manitoba. The purpose of Spruce Woods Provincial Park is to preserve areas representative of the Assiniboine Delta Natural Region and accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.

In addition, the park will:

- provide nature-oriented recreational opportunities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding and wildlife viewing in a largely undisturbed environment
- provide opportunities for high-quality intensive recreational developments such as trails, campgrounds, day-use areas and picnic sites
- protect and profile Aboriginal heritage in the Spirit Sands area and the early settlement along the Assiniboine River Valley
- promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural features



Map 1. Land use categories of Spruce Woods Provincial Park

Spruce Woods Provincial Park is divided into four land use categories (LUC) as shown on Map 1. These land use categories further define the purposes of specific areas of the park.

The Backcountry LUC (B) protects natural areas including colonized sand dunes, native prairie areas, hognose snake and skink habitat, and relic boreal forest communities. It also protects archaeological sites including the Pine Fort site. It provides nature-oriented recreational trails for hiking, cycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling, with the associated hike-in camping areas and cross-country skiing warming shelters. Limited vehicle access occurs in this area. The Backcountry LUC comprises 20,270 hectares or 75 per cent of the park.

The Heritage LUC (H) protects culturally significant sites and provides information about Aboriginal use of the Spirit Sands and early rural settlement along the Assiniboine River valley. It also protects open and colonized sand dunes. The Heritage LUC comprises 825 hectares or 3 per cent of the park.

The Recreational Development LUC (RD) accommodates developed recreational facilities including campgrounds, day-use areas, equestrian and canoe-in campgrounds, and a visitor reception centre. It preserves special sites including river-bottom forest and contains the *S.S. Alpha* wreckage and former homesteads. This LUC comprises 5,795 hectares or 22 per cent of the park.

The Access LUC (A) accommodates PTH 5 through the Backcountry LUC, and consists of 60 hectares or less than 1 per cent of the park.

2.2 Spruce Woods and Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative

Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative (PAI) is a government program dedicated to building a network of protected areas designed to protect biodiversity, conserve ecosystems, and ensure their future viability. Protected areas are land, freshwater, or marine areas where logging, mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas exploration or development, and other activities that significantly and adversely affect habitat are prohibited through legal means.

The goal of the PAI is to protect enough of the province to adequately represent the biodiversity in each of its 18 natural regions and sub-regions. Enduring features - unique combinations of climate, physiography, surficial geology and soils - are used to identify broad areas of differing biodiversity throughout the province.

Spruce Woods Provincial Park lies in the Assiniboine Delta Natural Region. This Natural Region supports some of the last remaining intact habitats found in southwestern Manitoba including mixed grass prairie, river-bottom forests, wetlands, and sandhills habitats. These lands have high ecological significance as they provide habitat for a high concentration of federally and provincially listed threatened and endangered species. It is important that a sample of the biodiversity found here be completely protected from development. As such, greater representation of the enduring features and critical habitats found in this natural region is desirable, and over time Crown lands near the park or elsewhere in the region may be considered for designation as protected areas.

2.3 Natural Features

Spruce Woods Provincial Park has many exceptional natural features including sand dunes, mixed grass prairie, spruce parkland, and river-bottom forest. It is home to several species at risk including the northern prairie skink, hognose snake, and several invertebrate species. The prominent natural feature of the park is the Spirit Sands. Nowhere else in Manitoba, and in only a few places in Canada, can one find an expanse of open sand similar to the Spirit Sands. It is the only remaining un-vegetated area of the Assiniboine Delta. The sands of the Assiniboine Delta give the area the special quality of being an aquifer storing huge amounts of groundwater. Although the area looks very dry, moisture can often be found at shallow depths under the surface of the ground.

Much of the park is characterized by spruce and aspen parkland, and river-bottom forest. The spruce and aspen parkland is a transitional community between prairie and either boreal or oak forest. Pine and spruce plantations can be found at several locations in the park, often on old agricultural fields. Interspersed in the parklands are tracts of mixed grass prairie. This particular prairie is a transition between the tall grass prairie of the Red River valley and the short grass prairie further west. It features species of both such as big bluestem of the tall grass prairie and blue grama of the short grass prairie. Many areas in the park feature unique prairie species that collectively make up a "sandhills complex" of mixed grass prairie.

The Assiniboine River is the dominant controlling feature of the natural region and the park. Its flooding and eroding meanders continually reshape the lower portion of the river valley.

Spruce Woods Provincial Park, along with neighbouring Crown lands, Spruce Woods Provincial Forest, Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Shilo, and portions of the Swan Lake Indian Reserve 7a constitutes one of the largest tracts of natural lands in southwestern Manitoba making it very important habitat for many species of wildlife. Common species such as elk, deer,

and occasionally bears and wolves can be found in the park or migrating in and out of the park to private or Crown lands and to CFB Shilo. The park is home to a unique array of plants and smaller animals. Of the small animals, several are species at risk such as the northern prairie skink, plains spadefoot toad, western hognose snake, blackchin shiner, gold-edged gem and white flower moth. Each of these species exists in the park because of the unique habitats found within. The gold-edged gem and white flower moth, for example, require open sand habitats and occur no-where else in Manitoba. Similarly, the blackchin shiner is a small fish that is found exclusively in the small oxbow lakes along the Assiniboine River.



Northern prairie skink

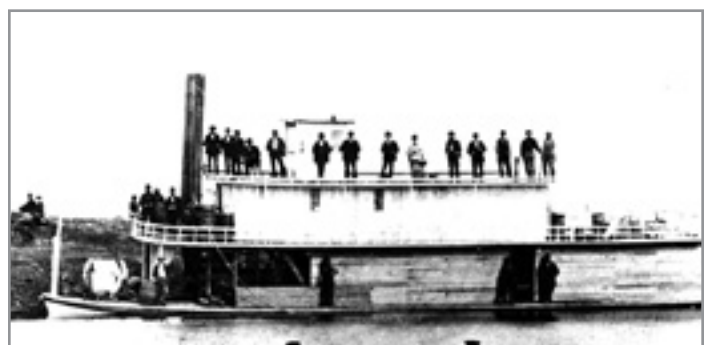
2.4 Cultural Features

The area that is now Spruce Woods Provincial Park has been used by people for thousands of years. Spear tips from the Clovis Culture dating back 11,000 years have been found in the park and provide evidence of this occupation. Such archaeological artefacts are the only physical evidence of prehistoric First Nations in the area. Modern First Nations cultural use of the park is expressed in the two sites used for Sundance ceremonies.

Evidence of western cultural history also includes archaeological sites - the Pine Fort fur trade post, the wreck of the steamship *SS Alpha*, and a number of old homesteads. Only a few of the homesteads now have ruins of buildings or buildings that are still standing. Some of these early homesteading families are commemorated by the naming of local features after them, such as Marshs Lake and Thornboroughs Flats. Other sites from that era, like the Fair Valley School site, are commemorated by plaques or monuments.

The cultural history of the area, though not specifically the park, includes the stories of Ernest Thompson Seton and the Criddle/Vane family. Information in the park centre and in local museums describes and celebrates these early naturalists. Seton is also commemorated in the naming of the bridge over the Assiniboine River on PTH 5.

The cultural values of Spruce Woods Provincial Park are commemorated primarily through interpretive programming and products, most of which occurs or is located at the park centre.



The *SS Alpha* steamship



Kiche Manitou beach

2.5 Recreational Use

Spruce Woods Provincial Park provides a wide range of recreational activities including camping, picnicking, swimming, cycling, hiking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling. The park's main Kiche Manitou campground has been expanded over the years to create distinctive upper and lower sections. As of 2010 it provided 164 nightly campsites, of which 21 were family group sites. There were also 11 group use sites, 20 overflow sites and 13 yurts. The park offers two equestrian campgrounds and five backcountry campgrounds. It has a winter recreation area with skating, tobogganing and jam pail curling facilities. Commercial operations in the park consist of a horse drawn wagon ride to the Spirit Sands and concession in the day-use area offering food services, a convenience store, equipment rental and mini-golf. The nearby communities of Glenboro and Carberry derive significant economic benefits from visitors coming to the park.

Spruce Woods is an extremely popular park that is used extensively by residents of southwestern Manitoba, Winnipeg and more distant points of origin. The campground at Kiche Manitou and the day-use area with its beach, picnic facilities, concession and park centre are the most common destinations for visitors. Each year traffic counts show some 40,000 to 50,000 vehicles entering the Kiche Manitou area. This represents approximately 140,000 to 175,000 people visiting the site. Visits to other areas of the park such as the Spirit Sands and Epinette Trails are in addition to this figure.

On an annual basis the Kiche Manitou campground hosts about 11,000 unit-nights of camping and family group camping. Like most parks in Manitoba, use is highest on weekends and during July and August. Many of the most popular campsites at Spruce Woods – electrical sites or sites near the beach – are occupied almost continuously through July and August. The occupancy rate for the entire campground for the full camping season is 52 per cent with a considerable amount of use in the shoulder seasons of May - June,

and September - October. Camping by youth and other groups can contribute about another thousand unit-nights per year. This is considerably higher than the provincial average of about 33 per cent and attests to the park's popularity.

In 2011, the campground and other facilities experienced severe damage due to flooding of the Assiniboine River, with parts of the campground, day-use area and maintenance area under water for four months. Flooding has been a recurring issue for the park, with some parts of the campground having flooded five times in the last 40 years. At least two of these floods have had very severe consequences on park infrastructure. There continues to be a high likelihood of flooding in the future.



Flooded campground office - 2011

2.6 Interpretive Programming

Providing outdoor educational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting is one of the purposes of provincial parks as stated in *The Provincial Parks Act. A Strategy for Interpretation* (Manitoba Natural Resources, 1994) outlines the following specific goals for interpretation in Manitoba's provincial parks:

- i. to assist the visitor in developing a keener understanding and appreciation of our natural and cultural resources
- ii. to help make visits rich and enjoyable experiences
- iii. to encourage thoughtful use of recreational resources thereby minimizing negative human impacts
- iv. to encourage respect for, and protection of, the natural and cultural resources in parks
- v. to promote public understanding and support of the goals and programs of Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship
- vi. to encourage and promote the concept of sustainable development

The interpretive program at Spruce Woods is an integral part of visiting the park for many people. Interpretation staff in the park provide high quality, live programming, reaching about 15,000 people each year, informing them about the natural and cultural values of the park and helping them enjoy their time in the park. Much of the interpretive programming occurs during the summer when the park is busiest, however Spruce Woods also offers year-round interpretive programming with school programs and some public programming in the winter. Some of the programming is done in partnership with other organizations, such as stargazing events with the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.



Spirit Sands guided hike

The interpretive program at Spruce Woods benefits from having high quality facilities. The park centre (interpretive centre), constructed as a co-operative project with the Friends of Spruce Woods (FOSW) in 1999, is one of the largest and most modern centres in the provincial park system. There are several interpretive exhibits throughout the park, such as at the Spirit Sands trailhead, Steels Ferry Overlook and Hogsback. The five interpretive trails in the park are also key components of the interpretive program. The Quiet Voices interpretive trail was created in co-operation with the Seton Centre – a community based organization in Carberry.

2.7 First Nations' Use of the Park

Spruce Woods Provincial Park is used for rights-based activities by members of several different First Nations. Rights-based hunting and gathering are common and occur in many areas of the park at different times throughout the year. Unlike much of southwestern Manitoba, the park has extensive natural lands where traditional medicines and foods can still be found.

Swan Lake First Nation has reserve land to the northwest and immediately adjacent the park. This proximity helps staff from the park to cooperate with the First Nation on issues of mutual concern and on projects of mutual benefit.

There are also two sites in the northwest corner of the park that are used for traditional Sundance ceremonies. Each site is typically used once per year.

This management plan acknowledges and respects the exercising of Treaty and Aboriginal rights in the park.

2.8 Other Land Uses in the Park

Portions of what is now Spruce Woods Provincial Park were used for farming before the park was established in 1964. After the park was established some of that agricultural use, particularly haying, was allowed to continue. Several of the hay fields have since been abandoned due to poor access, low production, or deterioration of the fields. There are now 31 fields in the park permitted for haying by 11 farmers who, in some cases, are the original landowners (Map 2). Haying allows farmers to obtain hay for their agricultural operations and at the same time helps to control weed problems that may otherwise arise. Hay fields are cultivated and reseeded every five to eight years to rejuvenate the hay crops.

There are two areas in the park where the grazing of livestock is permitted. These two areas were previously owned by the families currently holding

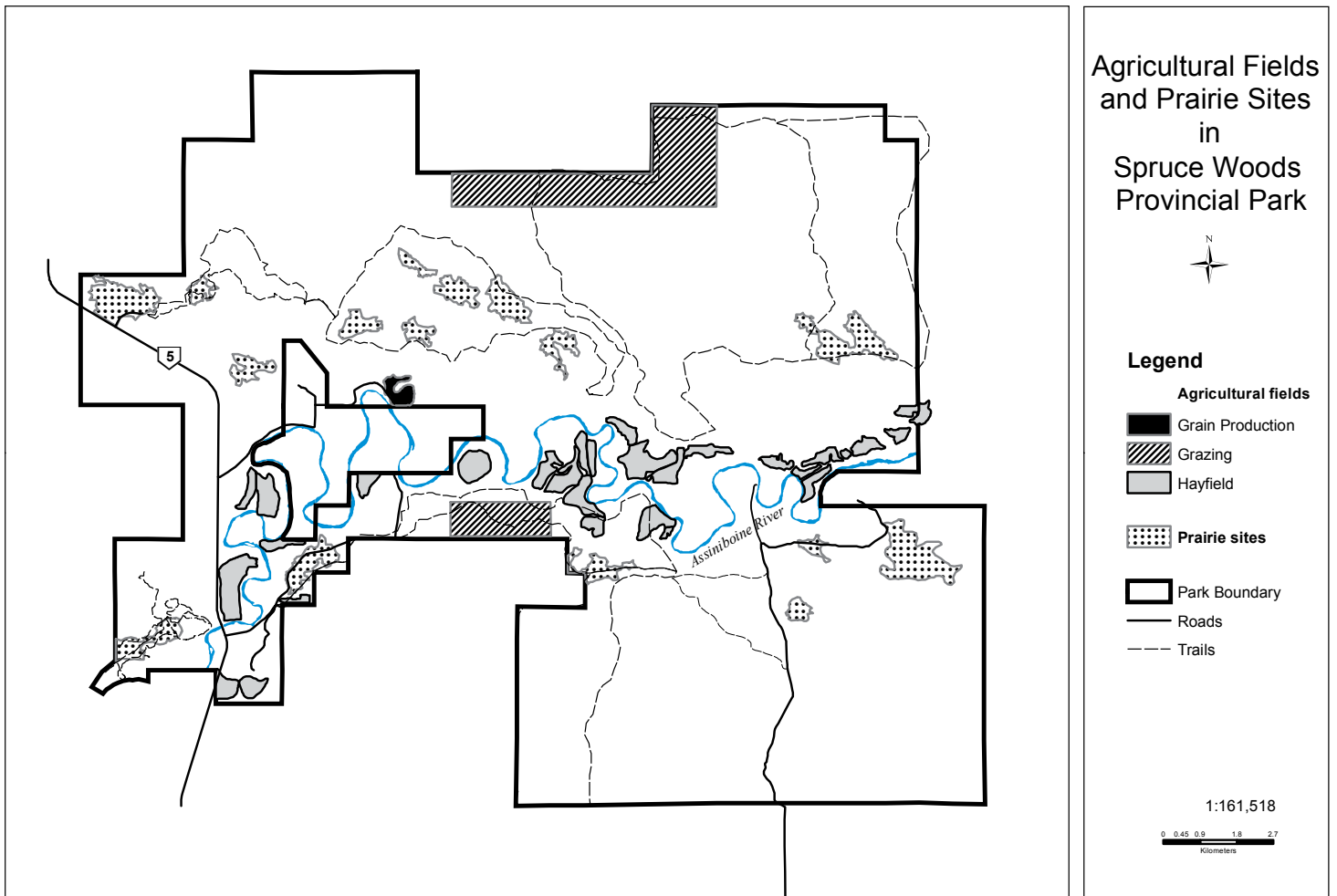
the grazing permits. Both areas are to be grazed on a twice-over rotational basis, in part, as a management tool to improve the health of the native prairie. This rotational grazing system also yields greater weight gain in the cattle, which benefits the farmers. These grazing programs are part of the prairie management plan for the park.

One permit is issued each year for agricultural cropping where a portion of an existing field that follows natural features straddles the park boundary. There has also been one permit issued annually to maintain bee hives in the park.

In the southeast part of the park there is one quarter section of private land. There are no developments on this land and it remains in its natural state.



Grazing area



Map 2. Agricultural Fields and Prairie Sites in Spruce Woods Provincial Park

3. Park Management Objectives and Guidelines

3.1 Natural Features

WILDLIFE

Spruce Woods Provincial Park, along with adjacent Crown lands, Spruce Woods Provincial Forest, CFB Shilo, and Swan Lake Indian Reserve lands constitutes one of the largest tracts of natural land in southwestern Manitoba. Over 80 per cent of the land area of the park is in its natural state. Throughout the park there are many different habitat types including wetlands, sand dunes, oxbow lakes, mixed grass prairies and river-bottom forest. The extent and diversity of natural habitats makes Spruce Woods home to many species of wildlife. Large animals such as elk and deer are common in the area while bears and wolves can be found in the park occasionally. There is also a great diversity of smaller animals and plants.



Gold-edged gem
J. Paul Goossen, Environment Canada

There are seven species listed as endangered under *The Species at Risk Act* (SARA) that are found in the park or that have the potential to be found in the park. In addition there are several species listed as threatened that may be migratory through the park or have the potential to be found in the park. Some of the endangered species are small moths – white flower moth, ottoe skipper, gold-edged gem and dusky dune moth - that are dependent on the open dunes of the Spirit Sands. The endangered northern prairie skink, on the other hand, can be found in many areas of the park but relies upon the prairie vegetation and sandy soils for its survival. As required by SARA each species will have a recovery strategy and recovery action plan prepared by a team of experts on that species. A significant focus of these plans is protecting critical habitat from disturbances that could affect the survival of the species.

Strategic Objectives:

To provide a large, contiguous and intact tract of habitat for wildlife typical, as well as unique, to the Assiniboine Delta natural region.

To ensure Spruce Woods continues to provide suitable habitat for species at risk and contributes to the maintenance of self-sustaining populations.

Guidelines:

- Maintain large tracts of natural habitat in as undisturbed a state as possible by minimizing developments that may fragment habitat and disturb wildlife.
- Participate with federal, provincial and local partners in the development and implementation of recovery strategies and recovery action plans for species at risk found in the park.
- Co-operate with CFB Shilo, Swan Lake First Nation and adjacent landowners on wildlife management issues and on the maintenance of important habitat for species at risk.

FORESTS

The forested areas of Spruce Woods Provincial Park are important wildlife habitat and help give the park much of its visual appeal for recreation. As isolated spruce forests, they may also have biological and genetic significance in terms of their response to a changing climate. The most common threats to the integrity of the forest are infestations of spruce budworm and dwarf mistletoe. At times these infestations can be extremely high and have the potential to devastate large areas of forest in the park to a point where recovery may be uncertain and the resulting fire hazards may be extreme.

There are two large plantations in the park and several small sites where trees have been planted. The earliest plantations of Scots pine, jack pine and red pine may date back to the 1930s. Some of these plantations represent an interesting example of the resource use history of the area. They may also have research value for the adaptations of these species to a relatively hot, dry climate. The more recent white spruce plantations from the 1950s to 1970s are generally on former agricultural fields or former native pasture. In some instances pine seedlings are spreading from the plantations. While not an aggressive invasive species, pine is not native to the park and over time can change the characteristics of the native habitat.

Strategic Objective:

To maintain healthy, native forest ecosystems in the park.

Guideline:

- Prepare a forest management strategy to help maintain forest structure, composition and landscape patterns, habitat for wildlife and settings for recreational activities. The strategy should:
 - direct the monitoring of forest health and fire hazard conditions
 - identify a control program for forest pests such as spruce budworm
 - direct efforts to control the spread of non-native trees from plantations
 - specify the conditions for the possible harvesting of plantations as may be needed for park purposes, such as, firewood supply, or as part of habitat management or fire hazard reduction programs

PRAIRIE

Spruce Woods Provincial Park has some of Manitoba's best examples of intact mixed grass prairie. A prairie management plan has been in place since 1996 to guide management of the largest and best prairie sites in the park (Schykulski and Moore, 1996).

Through this plan, 16 prairie sites have been regularly burned, aspen encroachment has been controlled at several sites, and regular monitoring of prairie health has been undertaken. Interpretation programs have informed thousands of park visitors of the importance of prairie habitats and prairie conservation.

Strategic objective:

To ensure the long term sustainability of prairie habitats in Spruce Woods.

Guideline:

- Continue to employ the Spruce Woods Prairie Management Plan as a tool for directing specific prairie management work.



Burning for prairie management



Collecting beetles for leafy spurge control

INVASIVE SPECIES

Leafy spurge is an invasive, non-native plant that is found throughout most of the park. There are no natural controls of leafy spurge in North America and it frequently chokes out all native vegetation where it grows. Since 1983, control of leafy spurge has utilized both chemical and biological methods on a more or less regular basis. The use of chemicals was terminated in 2009. Biological control consists of beetles, and in one location goats were used for three years. These methods have shown good success in some areas but leafy spurge continues to spread through many areas of the park.

Other invasive species such as purple loosestrife and agricultural plants such as smooth brome are found in the park and can negatively impact native species.

Strategic objective:

To control the spread of invasive species in the park to help maintain the integrity of the natural ecosystems.

Guidelines:

- Continue to monitor the spread of leafy spurge and use various methods to control the spread of leafy spurge. Sustainable control programs will be expanded where possible.
- Monitor other invasive species and take appropriate action to control or halt their spread.

SAND DUNES

Since the Spirit Sands area was added to the park in 1975, it has been developed and promoted as one of the principle visitor attractions in the park. There exists a smaller dune feature in the southeast quarter of the park, though it is much more difficult to access than the Spirit Sands. In addition to being one of the major attractions in the park, the Spirit Sands is important habitat for a number of species at risk (particularly insects such as moths and beetles). Both sand dune areas are diminishing in size as the dunes become stabilized and covered with vegetation. There is evidence that the entire Spruce Woods area has been completely vegetated and completely barren several times over the past 15,000 years (Wolfe et al., 2000). Maintaining open sand habitat in the park is

important for the persistence of the species dependent upon them and for the area's unique appeal to visitors.

Strategic objective:

To maintain open sand dune habitat for species at risk in accordance with recovery plans for those species.

Guideline:

- Investigate possible methods of maintaining open sand areas and assess those methods in relation to habitat requirements for species at risk dependent upon the dunes.



Spirit Sands - sand dunes

WATER

Spruce Woods Provincial Park overlies a portion of the Assiniboine Delta Aquifer which is an important water resource in the area. The aquifer is the water source for domestic and industrial uses in the area, and notably for the irrigation of cropland. This near surface groundwater is critical to the ecological functioning of the various plant communities in the park. It accounts for the presence of many wetland areas and species in what otherwise appears to be very dry habitat.

The “Assiniboine Delta Aquifer Management Plan” was prepared in 2005 to aid in protecting water quality and quantity in the aquifer. It describes the park, CFB Shilo and the Spruce Woods Provincial Forest as being unavailable for development but does note that there may be areas from which groundwater could be extracted without compromising the environment. The extent of these areas and the feasibility of extracting groundwater from them are unknown. The Assiniboine Delta Aquifer Management Plan recommends that a study be done to determine if and where these areas may exist within Spruce Woods Provincial Park, Spruce Woods Provincial Forest and CFB Shilo and to determine the access conditions and infrastructure requirements for developing water resources under these areas.

Strategic objective:

To minimize impacts on the natural environment of the park as a result of potential water extraction from the aquifer.

Guidelines:

- Extraction of groundwater for industrial, agricultural or irrigation purposes will not be permitted in the park.
- Extraction of groundwater for uses other than park uses will not be permitted in the Backcountry or Heritage LUCs.
- Should domestic or municipal extraction of groundwater be proposed, the proposal will be subject to a public review and to an assessment to ensure that environmental impacts and impacts on the park’s primary recreational activities will be minimized.

3.2 Cultural features

Although the Spruce Woods Provincial Park area has been used by people for thousands of years there is relatively little physical evidence of that occupation. The archaeological sites in the park range from small sites where a spear tip has been found to the remains of some early homesteads. Knowledge of these sites and recording what exists at each of them is important in preserving the history of the area. It is also important that any significant archaeological sites be protected from disturbances that could destroy that historical record.

At Spruce Woods preserving and retelling the cultural history of the area is most effectively done through interpretation. Interpretive programming and displays, and commemorative naming currently give visitors an understanding of some of the area's history and significance. Such programming can link to other sites that can provide visitors with more information such as the Seton Centre in Carberry, the Sipisweske Museum in Wawanesa, and Criddle/Vane Provincial Park.

Strategic objective:

To commemorate the cultural history of Spruce Woods Provincial Park primarily through interpretive programming with the intent of informing park visitors and preserving the history of the area.

Guideline:

- In co-operation with Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, an inventory of cultural sites in the park will be maintained and updated. On-site artefacts will be documented and preserved where possible. Restoration of cultural sites will generally not be undertaken.



Interpretive display

3.3 Recreational Activities

TRAILS

The trails of Spruce Woods are the park's main attraction for many visitors. There is a wide variety of trails from long distance hiking, biking and cross-country skiing trails to short interpretive trails. There are also over 150 kilometres of groomed snowmobile trails. The park boasts an extensive network of horseback riding trails which are a nationally recognized attraction for horseback riders. Some trails in the park have been developed in partnership with local interest groups and some are part of the Trans Canada Trail.

All of the major trails, such as Isputinaw, Spirit Sands, Epinette Creek, Springridge, Quiet Voices, and Marshs Lake represent different landscapes within the park. It is important that visitors can experience these different landscapes through the use of the trails. The Hogsback, in the southeast corner of the park, is the only main landscape feature of the park not connected to the hiking/biking trail system.

Horseback riding is a very popular activity in Spruce Woods Provincial Park. The park offers a network of trails for horseback riding as well as two campgrounds specifically for equestrian users. The Friends of Spruce Woods (FOSW) is an important co-operating partner in delivering the horseback riding opportunity in the park. The partnership is established through a co-operative agreement that describes the relationship and associated responsibilities. The FOSW operates a reservation service for the two equestrian campgrounds, collects fees and contributes to the operation of the campgrounds. Every year there are several special events like long distance rides which can be significant attractions for many equestrian visitors to the park.

A series of vehicle trails wind through the backcountry of the park. These trails are important access routes upon which hunters rely. To help manage the harvest of animals and to reduce the impact of vehicle use on the landscape, regulatory limits were placed on the use of vehicles for licensed hunting in Spruce Woods in 1996. Many park users are not entirely familiar with these limits leading to confusion and inappropriate use of vehicles from time to time.

Use of some of the trails has evolved over time, as evidenced by the growing popularity of mountain biking on the Epinette Creek Trail and by requests for snowshoe trails, beginner cross-country ski trails and cross-country skate skiing trails. Some trails face maintenance challenges such as erosion along the Epinette Creek Trail and the often uncertain ice conditions at the crossing of the Assiniboine River on the snowmobile trails.

Strategic objectives:

- To maintain a system of trails at Spruce Woods that will make it one of Manitoba's premier trail destinations for hiking, biking, horseback riding and snowmobiling. The trail system will:
 - > provide a range of recreational opportunities from short, accessible developed trails to long distance, overnight trails for summer and winter use
 - > help visitors explore and learn about the major landscape areas of the park
 - > connect all the major facilities and attractions in the park for hiking and biking
 - > support healthy outdoor living for park visitors
- To work with the FOSW and other partners to provide high quality horseback riding opportunities in the park.
- To provide basic opportunities for motor vehicle travel through the backcountry of Spruce Woods on unimproved motor vehicle trails.

Guidelines:

- Prepare a trails plan for Spruce Woods that will:
 - direct monitoring of trail use and trail conditions to ensure trails continue to meet objectives for the park
 - assess the need for additional trails in the park in relation to management plan objectives and park operational constraints
 - ensure that all the main trails and trail systems in the park provide an interpretive message to help visitors better understand and appreciate the natural, cultural and recreational values of the park
 - review the network of vehicle routes in the backcountry and ensure that all prescribed routes are appropriately mapped and signed to indicate where vehicle travel is permitted
- Work with the FOSW on the operation and potential upgrading of the equestrian campgrounds, including possible electrical serviced campsites and other amenities specific for horseback riders.

CAMPING AND DAY-USE

Spruce Woods Provincial Park is one of the major outdoor recreation sites in southwestern Manitoba. The Kiche Manitou area with its beach, campground and day-use facilities is the principle destination for many visitors to the park. The beach is a key component of the recreational facilities at Kiche Manitou. It provides good swimming due to the fact that the lake is spring fed and water quality remains good all summer. The campground has often operated at near capacity for most of July and August. Its natural setting, relatively high level of services and unique offerings such as family group camping contribute to the campground's popularity.

High water levels on the Assiniboine River, compounded by ice jams, resulted in the lower portions of the Kiche Manitou area sustaining extensive flood damage in 2011. Some parts of the campground were under water for four months, from April until August. Only the upper campground was unaffected by flood waters and was able to operate in 2011, although access to it was only via a detour east of the campground. Of the large floods that hit the campground in 1976, 1999, 2005 and 2011, this was the most devastating.

In addition to the flooding in 2011, riverbank erosion raised concern regarding roads and areas of the park where facilities currently exist or may be constructed in the future. The flood of 2011 demonstrated that the area west of PTH 5 where staff housing, the maintenance yard and the sewage lagoon are located is at very high risk of flooding and bank erosion, and has low potential for effective flood protection. Because of the infrastructure located there the potential impact of flood damage in this area can be severe. The lower campground and beach area are also at very high risk of flooding and because of the buildings and infrastructure located there the flood damage was severe. The day-use area proved to be at less risk of flooding and facilities there - the Park Centre and Pine Fort IV - sustained little damage. Plans to minimize impacts to buildings and infrastructure in the event of future flooding need to be incorporated into park redevelopment plans.



Hiking/biking trail

The flood of 2011 also highlighted that road access to and between components of the Kiche Manitou area is at high risk of being compromised by erosion of the main dike road near the Assiniboine River. This road passes through a very narrow point between the river and the valley wall. One area where erosion had been most severe over the past decades was protected by riprap and sheet piling in 2006. Both the riprap and the sheet piling were destroyed in the 2011 flood. Further erosion at this “pinch point” may sever the road connection between the upper and lower campgrounds and PTH 5. It is important to ensure that reasonable access is provided to and within the Kiche Manitou area so it functions as one unified recreational site.

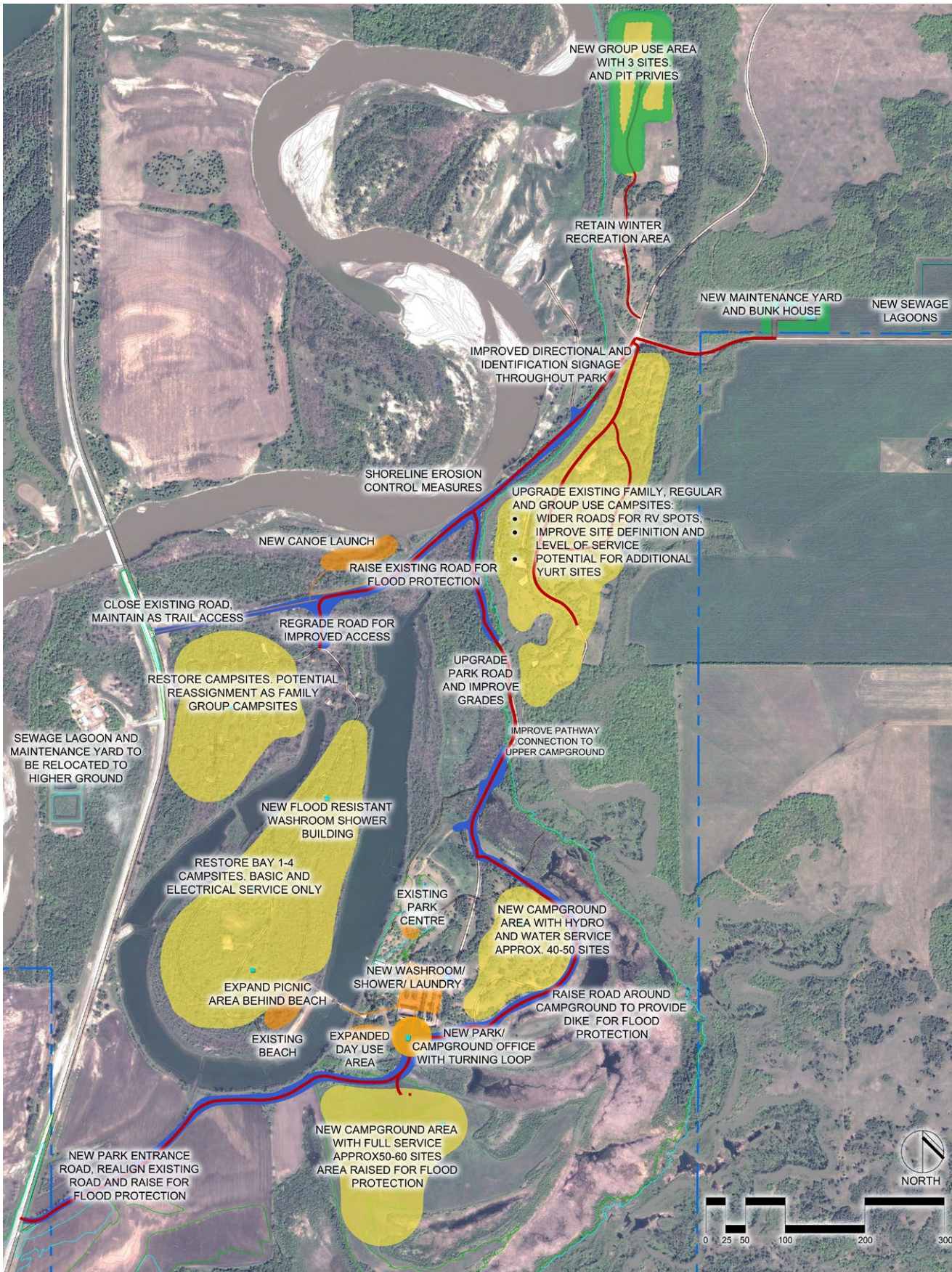
Strategic objective:

To provide high quality campground and day-use facilities in the Kiche Manitou area as the main recreational site in Spruce Woods Provincial Park. Redevelopment of this area will focus on modern and high quality facilities while maintaining a predominantly natural looking environment. Kiche Manitou will support a beach, day-use facilities, campground and associated services, interpretation facilities, winter recreation area, and a limited number of commercial operations. It will serve as a hub for many of the trails and roads leading to other areas of park. The Kiche Manitou area will also contain the maintenance centre for the park. The facilities and services in the Kiche Manitou area will be developed and managed with the intent of providing security of infrastructure in case of future flooding and riverbank erosion.

Guidelines:

- To re-develop the Kiche Manitou area according to the following principles (Map 3):
 - The main road access from PTH 5 to the Kiche Manitou area will be relocated to a location south of Kiche Manitou Lake and will lead into the current day-use area. This routing will be designed to provide a more central entry point to the entire Kiche Manitou area and to provide more secure access during flood events.

- The existing beach will be rehabilitated and upgraded with improved pedestrian access and additional picnic areas.
- The existing day-use area will be the focal point for recreational day-use facilities and visitor services. The area will serve as the primary access to the beach and will offer high quality picnic, interpretation, visitor service facilities including a campground office, and commercial concessions. Flood protection measures such as dikes may be included in the redevelopment of the day-use area.
- Redevelopment of the campground will aim to achieve:
 - > an overall campground size of approximately 225 sites, with potential for expansion
 - > a range of campsite services from basic to full service with a high percentage of sites having electrical, electrical/water, or full service
 - > the continued provision of family group camping sites (2 to 10 camping units/site)
 - > the continued provision of yurts
 - > a limited amount of winter camping capacity
- A minimum of two large group use sites (to accommodate groups of up to 100 people).
- No facilities or infrastructure will be developed in the river valley upstream (west) of PTH 5. The maintenance yard, sewage lagoon and related infrastructure will be relocated to a site east of the campground.



Map 3. Kiche Manitou Campground redevelopment concept

3.4 Interpretation

The interpretation program at Spruce Woods has become a central component of the recreational experience for many visitors to the park and they have high expectations of the program. The live programming done by park interpretive staff is key to fulfilling those expectations. Partnerships with organizations such as FOSW and the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada are also important in programming and facility development. There is enormous potential, with more live programming and partnerships, to expand the program and match visitors' desires for interpretation with the diverse natural and cultural values of the park. The interpretive program is also an important means by which many management messages about the park, endangered habitats, species at risk, or the flood of 2011 and reconstruction of the park can be provided to visitors.

Redevelopment of the Kiche Manitou area following the 2011 flood may change use patterns around the park centre and can create opportunities to make improvements to interpretation facilities there. Expanding the functional scope of the park centre and its immediate surroundings has the potential to provide greater flexibility and additional opportunities for interpretive programming.

For many people, seeing wildlife or signs of wildlife can be the highlight of their visit to Spruce Woods. Many areas of the park lend themselves to good wildlife viewing opportunities though many park users may not be familiar with these areas or the best times to view wildlife. Programming and facilities to enhance people's opportunities to view wildlife can make a significant addition to their visit to the park and their understanding of the natural values of the park.

Spruce Woods is one of relatively few locations in southwestern Manitoba where people have an opportunity to view a dark sky free of light pollution. This opportunity has made it a favourite location for star gazing events, each of which can attract as many as 100 visitors.

Strategic objective:

To provide a high quality interpretation program as a primary component of the services to park visitors. It will include year-round personal and non-personal interpretation that adapts to current trends, opportunities and issues. The park will feature high quality facilities including trails, displays, and the interpretive centre.

Guidelines:

- Investigate the potential for increasing the utility of the park centre for a variety of programming functions and to heighten its profile in the Kiche Manitou area.
- Improve wildlife interpretation and wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Enhance opportunities for dark sky viewing by minimizing light pollution where possible and by working with the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada to investigate the potential for designation of Spruce Woods as a Dark Sky Preserve.



Spruce Woods Park Centre

3.5 First Nations' Use of the Park

Spruce Woods is used for a number of traditional and rights-based activities including hunting and gathering. There are also two sites used for traditional Sundance ceremonies which can attract as many as 300 people for several days. Events of this size require special attention to accommodate the services and safety requirements of participants and to minimize environmental impacts.

Strategic objective:

To accommodate existing First Nations' ceremonies in the park.

Guidelines:

- Continue to work with First Nations organizations on the ongoing use of the ceremonial sites in the park.
- Direct requests for traditional and ceremonial events from other First Nations organizations to the existing ceremonial sites.

3.6 Other Land Uses in the Park**COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS**

Pine Fort IV is the primary commercial service operation in the park and is located in the day-use area where it is convenient to most park visitors. It offers a convenience store, food concession, mini-golf course, and canoe rentals. The buildings of Pine Fort IV are privately owned and the land is leased to the operator. Pine Fort IV provides an important service to park visitors as well as additional recreational opportunities.

The Spirit Sands Wagon Outfitters is a private commercial operation providing transportation to the Spirit Sands and Devil's Punchbowl from the trailhead near PTH 5. This commercial opportunity was purposely designed as a non-motorized means of public access to the sand dunes to provide a unique visitor experience in keeping with the special natural qualities of the area.

There are occasional requests for other commercial operations in the park. However, recognizing that the potential for viable operations is limited due to the short season and relatively small market, proposals that would compete with the existing operations are generally not permitted. The existing commercial operations ordinarily provide the extent of services sought by park visitors.

Strategic objective:

To allow for commercial operations where they will provide direct benefit, convenience or service to park visitors.

Guidelines:

- Development of commercial facilities will be limited to the Kiche Manitou day-use area. Upgrading or expansion of facilities will be considered subject to the following principles:
 - Proposals must be presented as part of an integrated, overall plan for the site and must demonstrate suitability for a park setting.
 - Proposals must demonstrate a direct benefit to the park and park users, and must be compatible with adjacent existing and proposed facilities and land uses.
 - Commercial accommodation facilities will not be permitted
- Commercial operations outside of the Kiche Manitou area must be compatible with existing recreational and commercial activities. Proposals must demonstrate a direct benefit to the park and park users. Proposals would be considered on a case by case basis and would be subject to a public review.
- Continue to provide commercial access to the Spirit Sands by non-motorized means.



Spirit Sands covered wagon ride

AGRICULTURAL USES IN THE PARK

There are 31 areas in the park that are permitted for hay production, two areas permitted for grazing, and one for annual crops. Many of these uses pre-date the establishment of the park and often the current permittee is the original landowner. From time to time some of the hay fields may become unsuitable for haying or the roads to the fields may be affected by erosion. Significant upgrading or re-routing of roads could be required to continue to provide access for farm equipment. Ten of the 31 fields were abandoned in 2012 because access was affected by flooding in 2011.

Producers grazing cattle in the park are required to use a rotational grazing program that helps improve and maintain the health of those prairie areas.

There are two municipal roads that go through the park to access private lands for agricultural purposes. One road leads from PTH 10 east to private land surrounded by, but not within the park. The "Park Road" extends from PTH 2 at Cypress River towards the Assiniboine River. These roads also provide access for some park users going into the backcountry areas of the park.

Strategic objectives:

- To continue to provide opportunities for agricultural use of former agricultural lands in the park.
- To work with the cattle producers to utilize grazing as a prairie management tool in the two areas in the park used for grazing.
- To ensure the road network throughout the park does not compromise park values or management objectives.

Guidelines:

- Permits for agricultural uses will be issued on an annual basis only with provision for five year renewal terms to accommodate renovation of hay fields. No new areas will be allocated for haying or cultivation. Permits for grazing will specify that it must be done on a rotational basis so that the grazing contributes to prairie management efforts in the park.
- Where fields may no longer be feasible for continued hay production, their use will be discontinued; an assessment will be done to determine if any work is needed to facilitate their return to natural conditions, and the access roads may be closed.
- Work with the local municipalities to ensure that the two municipal roads in the park do not negatively impact natural features or recreational activities in the park and continue to serve local needs as well as the needs of park visitors traveling in those areas.



Hay field

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