

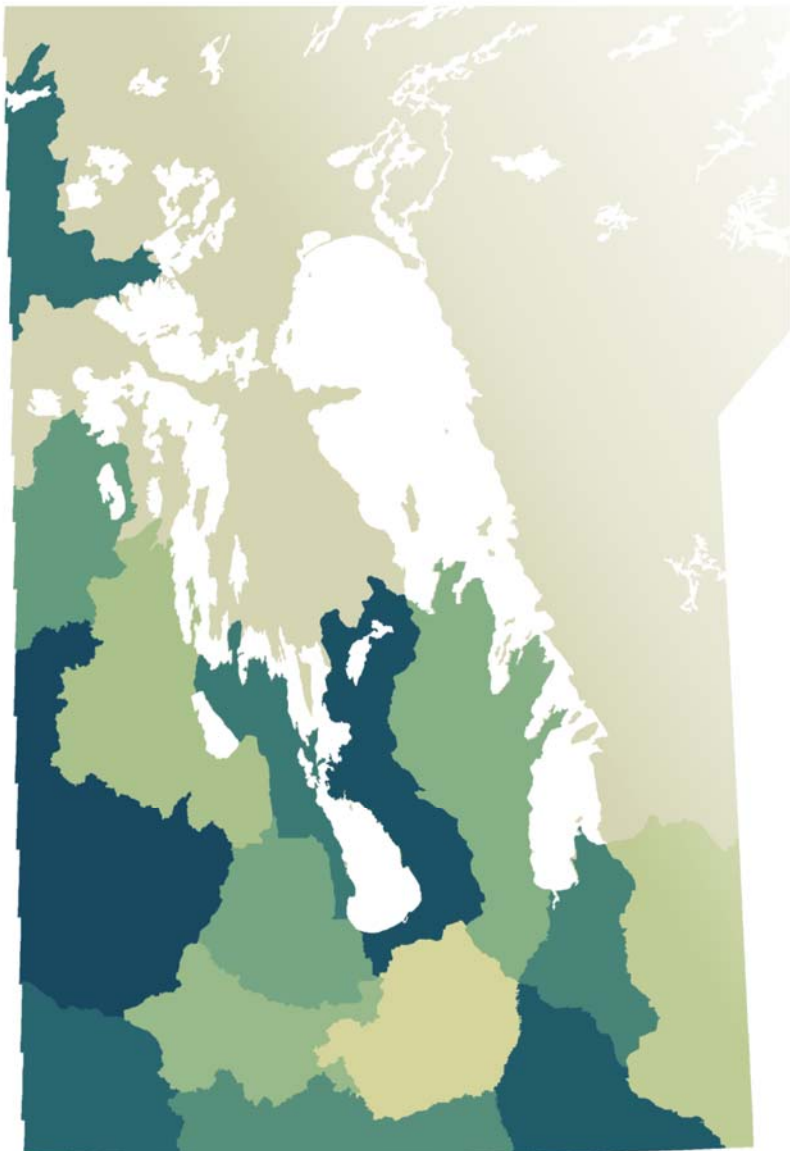
# Why Watersheds?

## Realigning Manitoba's Conservation Districts to Watersheds

### Realigning conservation districts to watershed boundaries

In 2018-2019, Manitoba Sustainable Development met with municipalities and conservation districts to discuss realigning districts to watershed boundaries. This change will see 18 conservation districts evolve to become 14 watershed districts. Input from municipalities and districts from three rounds of meetings was used to develop a proposal for each future watershed districts. Municipalities are asked to review the proposals and provide their sign-off by March 31, 2019.

### Proposed Future Watershed District Boundaries



#### **Watersheds are the most ecologically and administratively appropriate units for managing water**

Water does not follow political boundaries. Floods, droughts and nutrient loading are complex issues that require basin-wide partnerships to ensure upstream activities mitigate downstream impacts. Managing water along federal, provincial or municipal boundaries can lead to ad-hoc or ineffective decision making and the results can be costly to Manitobans and the environment. New watershed districts will improve planning and coordination of surface water management in local watersheds and more broadly within larger basins.

#### **Coordinating integrated watershed management planning with watershed action**

Watershed management plans outline actions to improve land and water protection, conservation and restoration in a watershed. The natural next step in strengthening watershed management in Manitoba is to realign administrative boundaries to correspond with planning boundaries. Coordinating planning and operational boundaries makes it easier for partners to allocate financial resources where they will provide the most benefit to the watershed.

## **Watershed boundaries are more effective and efficient**

Half of Manitoba's conservation district boundaries align with municipalities, while the other align with watersheds. Conservation districts that follow municipal boundaries recognize that they must manage water on a watershed scale and include the perspectives of upstream and downstream watershed residents. These district boards and staff have worked hard to collaborate with neighbouring districts to bridge the water management gaps across municipal boundaries. However, linking multiple conservation districts across a watershed requires additional institutional arrangements that make watershed planning and programming more cumbersome and costly. Watershed boundaries are more functional and facilitate better water management planning and decision-making.

## **Realigning to watersheds supports proactive water management**

Uncoordinated water management often involves responding to flooding and water quality concerns as problems arise. Such decisions are made quickly without foresight and planning, and the results can be costly to Manitobans. Shifting to a more proactive approach for decision-making that considers the needs of the entire watershed can save money and safeguard agricultural and residential lands and infrastructure.

Preventative measures like distributed water storage planning and source water protection are best planned across a watershed and help to address watershed concerns before they become emergencies. Using these approaches, districts work with technical experts and landowners to design locally-relevant solutions that make their watersheds more resilient to environmental stress.



## **Manitobans want better coordination between drainage and water retention**

Scientific evidence confirms poorly planned drainage and wetland loss contributes to nutrient loading and increased downstream flows. Coordinating drainage and water retention on a watershed scale makes it easier to make sound surface water management decisions that support a productive agricultural landscape, healthy rural economy and healthy environment.

## **Watershed boundaries improve basin-level coordination**

In Manitoba, there is an increased desire to manage land and water resources not only at a watershed scale, but also at a larger basin scale. Many watershed challenges—issues such as excess moisture, flooding, drought, changes in water quality, loss of biodiversity and natural areas, and aquatic invasive species—are felt both locally within watersheds and collectively at the basin level.