

## Protected Areas Initiative – Technical Submission

- 1) Are there regions of special concern in this watershed (biologically significant, regions that may be particularly sensitive or unique)? Should any of these regions be protected?

AND

- 2) Are you aware of certain types of species or habitat that should be protected within the Carrot-Saskatchewan watershed? Why should they be protected?

Saskatchewan River Delta (SRD):

- The SRD is one of Manitoba's most important wetlands and approximately 48% of the SRD complex is in Manitoba. It is the largest freshwater inland delta in North America, and one of only two active deltas in the Boreal Plains Ecozone of the western boreal forest.
- The SRD is rich in biodiversity. Dirschl and Dabbs (1969) documented 231 species of vascular plants and 14 species of bryophytes in the upper SRD. Specific to wetlands, Scoggan (1957) identified over 50 species of aquatic (emergent and submerged) plant species.
- Vertebrate biodiversity is significant and includes over 200 species of breeding birds (Godfrey, 1986), 43 species of mammals (Banfield, 1981), 48 species of fish (Scott and Crossman, 1973) and 6 species of amphibians and reptiles (Preston, 1982).
- The Saskatchewan River provides important spawning habitat for lake sturgeon. Saskatchewan River lake sturgeon populations have been assessed as endangered by the *Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada* (COSEWIC) and are currently being considered for listing under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Sturgeon migrate up to 100 kilometres (between breeding and non-breeding grounds) so they are threatened by habitat fragmentation. The sturgeon fishery is of great importance to the local Aboriginal community.
- The SRD area also provides breeding habitat for the yellow rail which is listed as a species of special concern under SARA and COSEWIC.
- The SRD is used extensively by the Bog Range boreal woodland caribou herd. The number of woodland caribou in Manitoba has steadily declined over the years. They are listed as Threatened under *The Endangered Species Act* of Manitoba. They are also listed under SARA and COSEWIC. Woodland caribou are sensitive to disturbance and are particularly vulnerable to the direct and indirect effects of development such as forestry, hydroelectric development, increased road access, and mining.
- The SRD has been identified as a Canadian Important Bird Area of global significance, in part because of the large concentrations of waterfowl.
- Recent analysis of long-term US Fish and Wildlife Service waterfowl survey data confirms this importance documenting that the SRD has some of the highest densities of breeding waterfowl in the western boreal forest.
- Further, an analysis of waterfowl banding undertaken in the SRD and associated band recovery records demonstrate that waterfowl from the SRD contribute to all flyways in North America and the Mississippi Flyway in particular <http://www.birdnature.com/flyways.html>
- In addition to its importance as a flyway the SRD is an important spring staging area for waterfowl and other waterbirds traveling to the northern boreal and arctic regions including tundra swan, snow and Canada geese. Further it has long been understood that the SRD functions as an important refuge for waterfowl displaced during periods of prairie drought due to the abundance of water and associated wetlands.

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- The SRD has long been recognized as an important fall staging area for waterfowl and other waterbirds. Data collected by DU Canada clearly demonstrated this importance with fall waterbird use days (waterfowl and other waterbirds) in 2002 and 2003 estimated at 13.7 and 21.8 million respectively.
- Much of the SRD area is wetland and wetlands have a biodiversity second only to the world's rainforests, supporting some of the highest populations and diversity of plant and animal species.
- Wetlands provide significant ecological goods and services by contributing to water availability through capturing and storing water, improving water quality by filtering and purifying water, reducing nutrient loading in lakes, storing freshwater and moderating flood events, protecting shorelines from erosion, recharging groundwater, and providing habitat for a myriad of wildlife species.
- Wetlands in the SRD indirectly support numerous economic activities including hunting, fishing, trapping, tourism, recreation, and traditional Rights-based pursuits. The water supply for several communities is also sourced from the SRD, including The Pas and Opaskwayak Cree Nation (from the Saskatchewan River).
- Wetlands store and remove greenhouse gases. Preliminary carbon store analyses undertaken for a significant portion of the SRD and the immediate surrounding areas in Manitoba indicates approximately 161,230,623 Mg (tonnes) of carbon are stored by the wetlands (DU Canada Unpublished data, for internal use only. If you would like to use the data please contact DUC).

### **3) Are there any plans for establishing new protected areas within the watershed?**

- The 2007 *Bipole III Transmission Routing Study*, prepared for Manitoba Hydro, suggested that there was greater urgency to protect lands in the Boreal Plains Ecozone on the west side of the province than on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, as less than 15% of intact forest is left in this Ecozone. A number of environmental NGOs have drawn attention to the need to protect lands on the west side, due in part to the routing of Bipole III and risks that may accrue to local boreal woodland caribou populations.
- There are two existing Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) designated in the Carrot-Saskatchewan River watershed, Saskeram WMA and Tom Lamb WMA. These sites have been identified as areas of special interest for protection by the Protected Areas Initiative for many years.
- The Protected Areas Initiative has been working in the Saskatchewan River Delta (SRD) Planning Area since 2007. The PAI is continuing its work in the SRD Planning Area and it is being reviewed in two phases. The Phase 1 review is nearing completion, and is centred on lands extending from the west shore of Lake Winnipegosis to the Manitoba – Saskatchewan border, and south of Highway 60 to Red Deer Lake. The coming Phase 2 review will cover the core of the SRD, which extends north from the junction of Highways 10 and 60 to Clearwater Lake Provincial Park. A new review process for proposed protected areas in Phase 2 will be designed with input from First Nations and stakeholders.
- Information on the proposed protected areas being targeted in the SRD Planning Area:
  - The proposals target rare and under-represented (not adequately protected) landscape features.
  - 90% of the total area of the proposals are wetland and open water. The wetlands are important for traditional medicines.

- The proposals were designed to minimize the impact to existing forestry commitments, to balance future forest resource needs, and to protect ecologically meaningful areas.
- This region of the province is unique in that many species hit the northern limit of their ranges here, therefore they're robust populations and are important to protect.
- There are several listed species that occur here and/or the area provides suitable habitat for many species. For example, the area contains good whooping crane habitat and moose habitat (moose numbers are down in areas of the province and this is a provincial concern). Also see question #1 and #2 for some more specific species information.