

## State of the Watershed Report – Icelandic River Watershed – Wildlife Status

The Icelandic River Watershed contains a diversity of wildlife species and habitats in the Aspen Parkland – Boreal Forest transition zone. The narrow riparian zone along Lake Winnipeg and the Icelandic River and tributaries adds significantly to both wildlife and vegetative species diversity in the watershed.

Vegetative cover varies from mixed wood forest and bogs in the north to hardwood forest, marshes and wet meadows along the shore of Lake Winnipeg to smaller woodlots and pastures in the southern portion of the watershed. Interspersed throughout the southern portion of the watershed are expanses of aspen forest ranging in size from one to five square kilometers. These areas are typically underlain by poor quality soils or limestone bedrock, which significantly limits their value for intensive agricultural development.

All or portions of four Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are located in the Icelandic River Watershed. These are areas of Crown land that have been designated by Order-in-Council. Moose Creek WMA was established to provide secure habitat for a wide variety of ungulates, birds and furbearers. Lee Lake WMA was designated to help restore the Eastern Prairie population of Canada Geese. Washow Bay WMA was established to protect waterfowl staging habitat for waterfowl migrating through the eastern part of the Interlake. Rembrandt WMA was designated to protect white-tailed deer winter range and maintain habitat for ruffed grouse.

Moose are the largest ungulate species found in the aspen and mixed wood ridges and bogs of the northeast portion of the watershed. The highest concentrations of moose occur on Grindstone Point and the riparian zone along Fisher Bay. Access development, timber harvest and peat extraction are activities occurring in these areas. The impacts of these forms of development are addressed through the Provincial Crown Land Use Planning process.

An important elk wintering area exists in the extreme west portion of the watershed. The large contiguous block of aspen forest in the Sharpewood area provides security and winter forage that attracts significant numbers of elk, especially bulls. The sustainability of this forest cover type is important for the overall management of this wildlife species.

High quality waterfowl staging and summer molting marshes are located in the Washow Bay and Riverton areas. These wetland areas have significant fall flights of waterfowl, especially Canada geese. Waterfowl staging numbers are highly dependent on water conditions on adjacent agricultural areas. Depredation problems caused by waterfowl originating from these marshes have occurred in the past. It is extremely important that these marshes are managed in a manner that ensures this habitat is sustained for waterfowl.

Riparian habitat can be found along Lake Winnipeg and the Icelandic River and its tributaries. Riparian areas are transitional habitats between the aquatic zone and surrounding terrestrial areas. They provide a complex habitat that is important to bird breeding and migration. Neo-tropical birds and various raptor species use the hardwood forests and willow fringed lowlands in these areas for nesting and rest stops during their spring and fall migrations. Wildlife uses these areas as travel corridors for moving from one habitat to another. These riparian areas should be managed to ensure that activities

that have the potential to impact riparian habitat through the clearing and development of remaining hardwood forest or the drainage of marshes is prevented, managed or mitigated. Clearing of riparian habitat should be discouraged.

The Piping Plover, a nationally and provincially endangered shorebird, breeds and nests on the pebbly beaches of Riverton Sandy Bar peninsula, east of Riverton. Piping Plover breeding and nesting at Riverton Sandy Bar has been intermittent in recent years due to high water on Lake Winnipeg, as well as disturbance from All Terrain Vehicle traffic. This is a critical habitat for an endangered species and uses that have an adverse impact on this habitat should be restricted.

The southern portion of the watershed contains isolated bog and fen complexes located at Silver (southwest of Arborg) and Washow Bay. Bogs and fens contain habitat for a variety of furbearing animals, such as muskrats, mink, and red fox, as well as suitable nesting and foraging habitat for great grey owls and boreal owls.

Of particular importance are the varieties of orchids, such as the Swamp-pink, Ram's Head Lady's-slipper, Round-leaved Bog Orchid and Fringed Orchid, that thrive in the moist to excessively moist conditions of the bog and fen complexes at Silver and Washow Bay. While they are not rare nationally or provincially, Showy Lady's-slippers are also very abundant in these locations. Impacts to these bog and fen complexes could include peripheral drainage to improve land for agriculture and the excessive withdrawal of groundwater from the local aquifer. Land use planning around these bog and fen complexes should incorporate acceptable buffers to intensive agricultural development and the operation of high capacity wells.

# Conservation Status Ranks for Species found within the Icelandic River Watershed

SCIENTIFIC NAME (COMMON NAME)	Number of occurrences <sup>1</sup>	Manitoba Status Rank <sup>2</sup>
<b>Plants<sup>3</sup></b>		
<i>Eleocharis engelmannii</i> (Engelmann's Spike-rush)	1	Very Rare (S1)
<i>Stipa richardsonii</i> (Richardson Needle Grass)	1	Very Rare (S1S2)
<i>Platanthera lacera</i> (Fringed Orchid)	1	Rare (S2)
<i>Calopogon pulchellus</i> (Swamp-pink)	1	Rare (S2)
<i>Carex tetanica</i> (Rigid Sedge)	3	Rare (S2)
<i>Pyrola rotundifolia</i> (Round-leaved Pyrola)	1	Rare (S2)
<i>Cypripedium arietinum</i> (Ram's Head Lady's-slipper)	1	Rare (S2?)
<i>Carex projecta</i> (Necklace Sedge)	1	Rare (S2?)
<i>Botrychium multifidum</i> (Leathery Grape-fern)	1	Uncommon (S3)
<i>Platanthera orbiculata</i> (Round-leaved Bog Orchid)	3	Uncommon (S3)
<i>Taxus canadensis</i> (Canada Yew)	3	Uncommon (S3)
<i>Chamaesaracha grandiflora</i> (Large White-flowered Ground-cherry)	1	Uncommon (S3)
<i>Carex vulpinoidea</i> (Fox Sedge)	1	Uncommon (S3?)
<i>Carex pedunculata</i> (Stalked Sedge)	1	Uncommon (S3?)
<i>Viola conspersa</i> (Dog Violet)	2	Uncommon (S3?)
<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i> (Sensitive Fern)	2	Uncommon (S3S4)
<i>Bromus pubescens</i> (Canada Brome Grass)	1	SNA
<b>Animals<sup>4</sup></b>		
<i>Macrhybopsis storeriana</i> (Silver Chub)	2	Uncommon (S3)
<i>Coregonus zenithicus</i> (Shortjaw Cisco)	1	Uncommon (S3)
<i>Ichthyomyzon castaneus</i> (Chestnut Lamprey)	1	Uncommon (S3S4)
<i>Charadrius melodus</i> (Piping Plover)	1	Rare (S2B)
<i>Coturnicops noveboracensis</i> (Yellow Rail)	1	Apparently Secure (S4B)
<b>Animal Assemblages</b>		
<i>Snake Hibernacula</i>	3	SNR
<i>Tern Colony</i>	5	SNR
<i>Gull Colony</i>	3	SNR
<i>Heron Colony</i>	2	SNR
<i>Double-crested Cormorant Colony</i>	6	SNR

1: The number of times a specific example of a plant, animal or animal assemblage occurs at a specific geographic location within the Icelandic River Watershed.

2: Please refer to Conservation Status Rank Definitions

3: Vascular and Non-Vascular plants

4: Vertebrate animals

The Manitoba Conservation Data Centre (CDC) is a storehouse of information on Manitoba's biodiversity – its plant and animal species, as well as its natural plant communities. Housed within the Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch of Manitoba Conservation, the CDC is Manitoba's authoritative source of information on rare species, including Species at Risk. The information has many uses, including conservation and development planning, and is made available to government agencies, the private sector, and the public.

The Manitoba CDC is a member of NatureServe, a network of over 80 similar organizations throughout Canada, the United States and Latin America. NatureServe and its member programs use a scientifically and empirically defined methodology and rigorous standards common to all CDC's throughout the network. The CDC exchanges its biodiversity data annually with NatureServe, thereby gaining access to the expertise of a team of biodiversity scientists from throughout the western hemisphere.

The CDC has developed lists of plant and animal species and plant communities, also known as elements of biodiversity, found in Manitoba. It assigns each of these elements a conservation status rank, based on how rare the species or community is in Manitoba, and then collects detailed information on where the provincially rare elements have been found. These locations, known as element occurrences, are mapped using specialized geographic information system (GIS) and database software known as Biotics.

The following information on species occurring within the Icelandic River Watershed is based on existing data known to the Manitoba CDC at the time of the request. These data are dependent on the research and observations of CDC staff and others who have shared their data, and reflects our current state of knowledge. An absence of a data in any particular geographic area does not necessarily mean that species or ecological communities of concern are not present; in many areas, comprehensive surveys have never been completed.

Therefore, this information should be regarded neither as a final statement on the occurrence of any species of concern, nor as a substitute for on-site surveys for species as part of environmental assessments. Also, because the Manitoba CDC's Biotics database is continually updated and because information requests are evaluated by type of action, any given response is only appropriate for its respective request.

The Manitoba CDC should be contacted for an update on this natural heritage information if more than six months passes before it is utilized.