

DATE: March 2, 2010

TO: Watershed Planning and Programs
Manitoba Water Stewardship
Box 11 – 200 Saulteaux Crescent
Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3

FROM: Sustainable Resource & Policy Management
Manitoba Conservation
200 Saulteaux Crescent, Box 38
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SUBJECT: Westlake Watershed Technical Information Request

Manitoba Conservation has reviewed the Public Consultation Summary for the Westlake Integrated Watershed Management Plan and request for technical information to assist in the development of an integrated watershed management plan. The following comments are offered with regard to the seven questions in your covering memo.

1. Are there regions of special concern in this watershed (biologically significant, regions that may be particularly sensitive or unique)?

Any natural wetland and marsh complexes within the watershed provide the standard ecosystem services (i.e., wetlands store and purify water; water, soils and vegetation provide habitat for all life and natural stream meanders and floodplains dissipate energy and decrease water velocity and soil erosion). In particular, the shoreline and marsh habitat adjacent to and along Lake Manitoba and Winnipegosis are biologically important and sensitive. The other areas of special concern within the watershed include the four large Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) (i.e., Cayer, Westlake, Alonsa and Langruth). These WMA's are set aside to provide areas of biodiversity for wildlife and recreation for Manitobans. For further information you can access the Manitoba Conservation website at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/>

It should be further noted that:

- A portion of Cayer Wildlife Management Area (WMA), a portion of the Alonsa WMA, and Langruth WMA are protected areas.
- There are two Provincial Parks which are not part of the protected areas network but are legally designated and add great conservation value to the watershed, that is, Manipogo Provincial Park and Margaret Bruce Provincial Park.

- There are candidate protected areas in this watershed which include Raykjavik Game Bird Refuge proposed WMA, and two Community Pastures, McCreary Pasture Area of Special Interest (ASI), and Alonsa Pasture ASI. These areas are not protected in any formal manner. The Protected Areas Initiative (PAI) is currently reviewing the community pastures with Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) for potential inclusion in the protected area network.

- There are also several parcels of Crown land that are also being considered as candidate protected areas. The PAI is currently reviewing haying and grazing coded Crown lands with MAFRI for potential inclusion in the protected areas network.

Protected areas are land, freshwater, or marine areas where logging, mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas development, and other activities that significantly and adversely affect habitat are prohibited through legal means. Manitoba's protected areas network is made up of a collection of Crown lands with different land designations including ecological reserves, national and provincial parks, wildlife management areas and provincial forests. Through memorandums of agreement, private lands owned by conservation agencies are also recognized as part of Manitoba's network.

Habitat fragmentation is an ongoing concern in southern Manitoba. The PAI is working to protect a representative sample of all the different landscapes across the province, to maintain Manitoba's biodiversity for the future. The landscapes within the Westlake Watershed are currently underrepresented in Manitoba's protected areas network.

The watershed still has extensive Crown lands, providing the opportunity to establish intact protected areas. Any habitat conservation that can be incorporated into the management plan would be beneficial. Working toward building habitat corridors, linking existing designated Crown lands (WMA, community pastures, protected areas, conservation agency owned or managed lands, etc.) through habitat management programs would also benefit the biodiversity of the watershed, and counteract habitat fragmentation.

For more information on the Protected Areas Initiative, please visit the website at www.manitobaprotectedareas.com . Please visit the Manitoba Land Initiative (MLI) website <https://mli2.gov.mb.ca/> to download electronic versions of the designated Crown lands (i.e., Areas of Special Interest, Wildlife Management Areas, Provincial Parks, Provincial Forests, Community Pastures and Protected Areas).

For information on Crown land use classification in the watershed go to the MLI website or contact

2. *Are there any species of special concern in the watershed? Where is the critical habitat to support these species in the watershed?*

The major commercial fish species within the watershed include northern pike and walleye. Increased drainage without proper planning can generally have severe impacts on fisheries movements, spawning and recruitment. See attached memo from Western Region Fisheries for details.

The piping plover (endangered) and red-headed woodpecker (rare to uncommon) and foxtail muhly (very rare) are species of special concern. See attached CDC memo and Excel spreadsheet from the Conservation Data Centre for more details.

The piping plover critical habitat is generally undisturbed sandy or gravelly shorelines of large lakes and alkali sloughs. The red-headed woodpecker critical habitat is generally mature riparian wooded habitat in large woodlots and along lake shorelines, with an abundance of older large trees for cavity nesting. The

foxtail muhly grass is found along the edges of moist meadows and wooded areas. Foxtail muhly was documented to occur on the north side of “the Narrows” area (see Excel spreadsheet).

3. *Purple loosestrife is present in the Eddystone area. Are there any other concerns about invasive species in the watershed? Which species? Where are these invasive species located? Can you provide recommendations to prevent further spread?*

Please contact the Invasive Species Council of Manitoba at <http://www.invasivespeciesmanitoba.com/site/index.php> for further details on the above questions. Their recent publication “River, Lake and Wetland Invaders” will be particularly relevant for this watershed. If purple loosestrife is found within the watershed, consideration should be given to some biological control through the release of beetles that help to control purple loosestrife. The Invasive Species Council of Manitoba can provide specific advice.

4. *One of the major causes of surface flooding in the watershed is beavers. What is your recommendation for dealing with the beaver population in the watershed?*

Manitoba Conservation provides annual funding to rural municipalities (RM) for problem beaver removal. While there is never enough money to go around, Manitoba Conservation encourage RM to target their efforts to high priority areas. In addition, the department encourage open area trappers to assist RM by trapping beavers in areas where infrastructure flooding occurs as there is no limitation on the number of beavers that trappers can harvest. Manitoba Conservation also conducts problem beaver workshops throughout Manitoba to empower RM workers and landowners in methods to trap beavers or construct and install beaver control pipes in beaver dams to regulate water flows. Unfortunately, there are few trappers willing to trap with current pelt prices being so low. It is recommended that continued encouragement be given to local trappers to harvest beavers and installation of numerous beaver control pipes (according to Department of Fisheries and Oceans standards) by RM in areas where water levels need to be regulated without severely increasing flows.

5. *Is there an inventory of wetland cover in the watershed? How has wetland cover changed over time in the watershed?*

Manitoba Conservation is not in possession of a wetland inventory in the watershed. Therefore, the department cannot definitively answer the question about how wetland cover has changed over time. A recent Canadian Wildlife Service report, (Watmough, M.D. & Scholl, M. J., 2007. Environment Canada’s Prairie & Northern Habitat Monitoring Program: Phase II; Recent habitat trends in the prairie habitat joint venture area, Canadian Wildlife Service, Edmonton, AB) however, estimates there has been an average wetland habitat loss of 5% per year from 1985 to 2001 in the Lake Manitoba Plain eco-zone which is found primarily in your watershed.

6. *What are the relative impacts of septic mounds and septic fields on cottage development lots?*

While not sure what is meant by ‘relative impacts’ it should be noted that both septic mounds and fields are allowable on private land under the appropriate circumstances, although because mounds can take up some room and are not that aesthetically pleasing, many cottage lot holders balk at them.

Some of the area is quite rocky (for example, the Narrows) so the topography may in fact preclude anything below ground, field or tank. Lastly, even though it is not expressly prohibited, Manitoba Conservation considers fields to be inappropriate for lakefront cottage lots.

It should be noted with respect to Provincial Crown land, the *Onsite Wastewater Management Systems Regulation* Section 6.2(1) prohibits disposal fields in a provincial park, on a Crown land lot that is part of a recreational cottage subdivision or in a sensitive area.

7. *Please explain the arrangement that permits Ducks Unlimited to control a portion of Crown land in the watershed?*

Ducks Unlimited has over the years made application to lease Crown land that is associated with a particular water management project. These applications are circulated for comment and provided there are no major objections an appropriate lease, permit, etc. is issued.

Ducks Unlimited is also licenced for water management projects by the Regulatory Services Division of Water Control Works and Drainage Licencing Section of the Department of Water Stewardship. Please contact the Head of that section, for further details.

We will advise at a later date who will be representing Manitoba Conservation at the meeting and watershed tour scheduled for April 21, 2010.