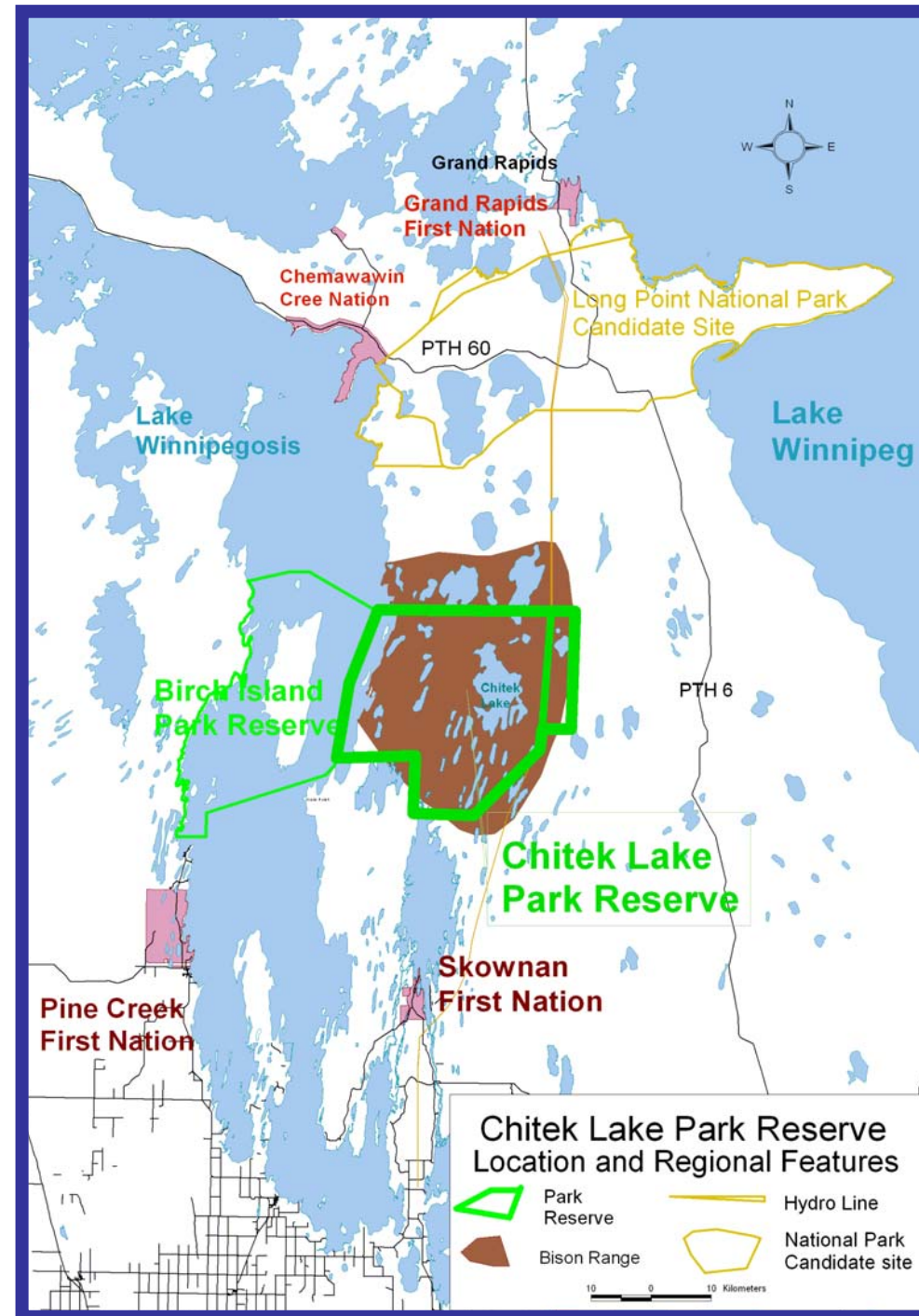


Chitek Lake Park Reserve and Surrounding Area Some Key Uses and Values



Background

The Chitek Lake Park Reserve is roughly centered on Chitek Lake, which is part of the traditional area of use for Skownan First Nation. The area continues to be used on a year-round basis by Skownan First Nation residents for hunting, trapping, fishing and root and berry harvest, both for income and for food.

Commercial fishing activity began with the first stocking of Chitek Lake in 1976. Twenty-two licenses are involved. The majority of the license holders are residents of Skownan First Nation and neighbouring communities, at an average harvest of about 40,000 kg. of stocked walleye are each year.

The Park Reserve area is utilized by several hunting outfitting operations.

There are presently no all-weather roads in the Park Reserve area. Skownan First Nation supports the maintaining of this roadless state so that the area can continue to provide peace and freedom, and maintain livelihoods and wildlife.

Cultural Values

The Chitek Lake Park Reserve includes locations that are sacred and special to Skownan First Nation. A strong involvement with use and the cultural significance of the Chitek Lake area continues today in the community.

The roadless peace and quiet of the Park Reserve area, the area's intact natural condition, and the role of the area as home to the Wood Bison herd, are highly significant to the unique sense of community being developed by Skownan residents.

More than twenty archaeological sites, documenting early use of this area by aboriginal peoples, are known to exist within the Chitek Lake Park Reserve.

Recreational Values

Little recreational use of this roadless area occurs at present. The importance of the intact natural condition of the area, and the need to maintain undisturbed habitat for the sustained support of the Wood Bison herd and the present range of native species of value to the community suggests the addition of recreational use be focused on ecotourism - related activities that do not require all-weather road access. Skownan First Nation has expressed an interest in developing an ecotourism lodge opportunity on Chitek Lake that could also include cultural tourism and a hunting outfitting components.

Natural Values

The Chitek Lake area has been identified by the Manitoba Protected Areas Initiative program as having the potential to represent several Enduring Features (unique combinations of soils, landforms and climate) that are presently not adequately represented in the provincial network of Protected Areas, in their intact natural condition.

The hundreds of Enduring Features in the province combine to form 18 Natural Regions, areas whose climate and physiography differentiate them from the other landscapes in the province. The Chitek Lake site overlaps two provincial Natural Regions, the Boreal Forest and the Aspen Parkland, thereby enhancing its natural significance. The Park Reserve encompasses a complex intermingling of glacial till and organic deposits, resulting in multiple soil types in a ridge and swale setting. This combination of soils and topography results in a rich and diverse range of plant and animal habitats.

The Chitek Lake region is unique in Manitoba. A significant new addition to the fauna of the area has been the introduction of a nationally threatened species, the Wood Bison. An agreement sanctioned by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs between Canada, Manitoba and Skownan First Nation resulted in the establishment of a captive herd in 1984. Releases to the wild beginning in 1988 have produced a free-ranging herd of Wood Bison that winters in the Chitek Lake area. This location is the only site in the province where five major ungulate species – White tailed Deer, Moose, Elk, Woodland Caribou and Wood Bison - are found in the same area.

History of the Park Reserve

In 1997, the Manitoba Protected Areas Initiative program identified a region including Chitek Lake as an Area of Special Interest due to its natural values. This work paralleled long-standing interests of Skownan First Nation in this area, the heart of the Skownan Fur Block. At this point Skownan had been working with the Province for about two decades to reestablish Wood Bison in the Chitek Lake area.

After discussions with representatives of provincial industry interests such as mining, forestry, and Hydro on a preliminary boundary, the matter was again reviewed with Skownan First Nation.

As a result of this review, Skownan First Nation supported establishment of an interim protected designation for the area with the understanding that Manitoba and the First Nation would work together to explore the establishment of a protected provincial park on this site. As a result, the Chitek Lake Park Reserve was established in 1998 and renewed for five years on October 1, 1999 as a protected area – a Provincial Park Reserve with a Backcountry Land Use Category. This designation prohibits logging, mining and hydro-electric development. The Provincial Parks Act requires that all Provincial Park Reserves be reviewed by the public within a specified time period in order to determine the most appropriate permanent boundaries, park type and land use classification for the area and its associated values and uses. The Chitek Lake Park Reserve designation remains in force until September, 2004, at which time a decision on the status of the park reserve must be made.