

whitemouth falls provincial park



Background

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park is located just north of the community of Seven Sisters Falls, about 90 km north-east of Winnipeg. Whitemouth Falls, formed where the waters of the Whitemouth River cascade over Precambrian Shield bedrock to enter the Winnipeg River, is the major feature of this park.

Whitemouth Falls was designated a Provincial Wayside Park in 1974. In 1997, it was expanded from an area of approximately 72 ha. to its present size of about 173 ha. The site is designated as a Recreation Park with a Land Use Category of Recreational Development. The park purpose is to provide outdoor recreational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting.

Cultural Values

There are three known sites of archaeological significance within Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park. Initial analysis of these hearth/activity areas indicates they were used as campsites, and were frequented as much as 4800 years ago. These sites, all associated with and immediately adjacent to the falls, confirm the presence of ancient First Nations groups and demonstrate the utilization of ancient ceramics and tools. Maintaining these sites in an undeveloped state provides an opportunity for further archaeological research and interpretation of site use from prehistory to modern times.

Recreational Values

Currently, recreational use of Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park is mainly local and regional day-use for those wishing an outdoor experience that includes some of the best White Pelican viewing anywhere, picnicking and fishing at the falls. In 1998, Manitoba Conservation entered into a lease agreement with the RM of Whitemouth to operate this site.

Natural Values

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park is located in the Lake of the Woods portion of the Manitoba Lowlands Natural Region 5c. Only one regionally common landscape unit occurs within the present boundaries, the same feature found north of the Winnipeg River throughout the area proposed for park expansion. The park does not include rare or scarce plants or animals, but the falls is a known natural feeding and loafing site for White Pelicans. The park itself is currently divided by four road and hydro severance rights of way into seven separate parcels. Much of the eastern portion of the present park is disturbed by Hydro drainage works.



Background for boundary adjustments to Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park

Whitemouth Falls was designated a Provincial Wayside Park in 1974, ten years after Manitoba Hydro and the Province agreed that the Crown lands at this site could be used for recreational purposes unless needed for Hydro purposes. Based on this agreement all land in the existing park is owned by Manitoba Hydro while being administered through the Provincial Parks Act. Other than the falls, the park has no unique natural values, and much of its area has been used for Hydro transmission lines, drainage works, and access related to the Seven Sisters power plant and townsite.

The present park is located immediately adjacent to the community of Seven Sisters Falls and the Seven Sisters power dam. Recent discussions between the RM of Whitemouth, Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba Conservation have identified local land use options of benefit to all three parties.

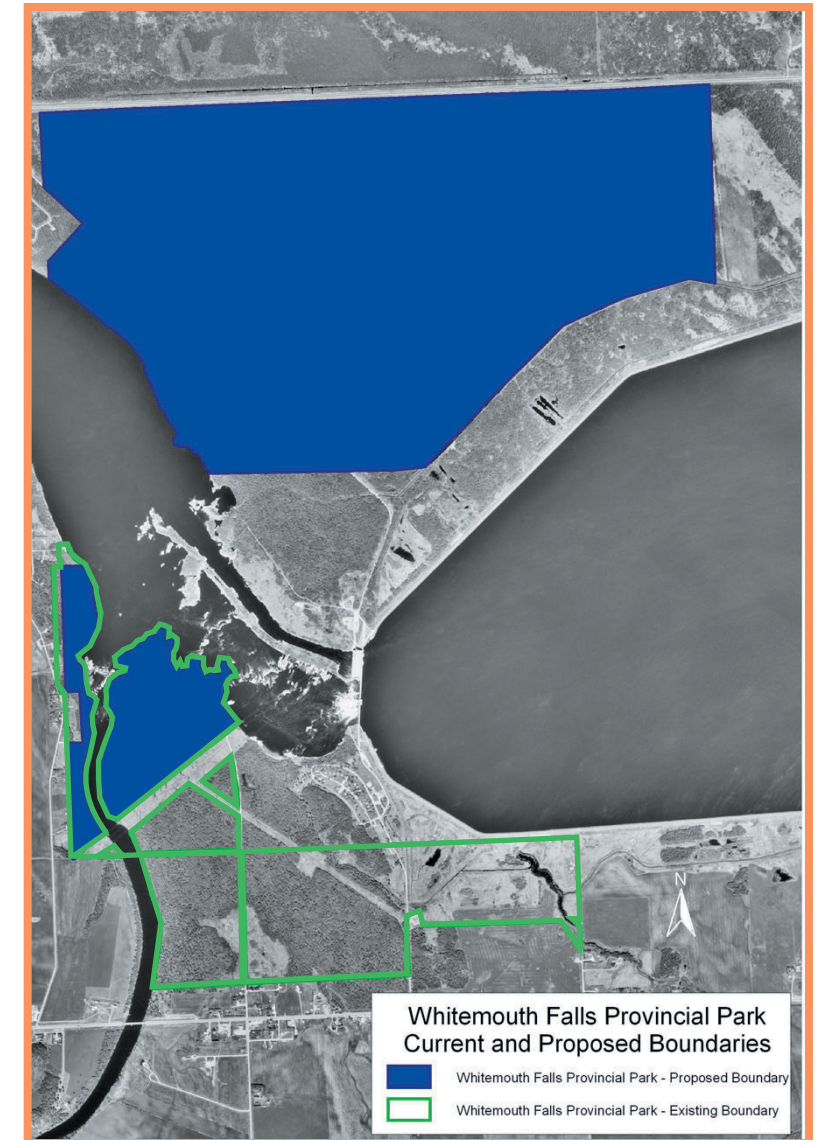
Manitoba Hydro is planning to turn over administrative control of the Seven Sisters hydro townsite (located to the north-east of the park) to the RM of Whitemouth. This process would include providing the RM with additional lands, some currently located within Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park. Some of this park land lies between the Hydro townsite and the RM townsite, while other portions are adjacent to the Seven Sisters Falls community. The RM of Whitemouth has expressed interest in these lands for residential town expansion. The RM has indicated it is willing to exchange lands it owns located within an ecologically significant area known as the Whitemouth Bog for lands now within Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park.

Parks and Natural Areas Branch is proposing to retain the falls, all of the present day use area, the archaeological sites and the forested land adjacent to these areas, remove lands from the park that are adjacent to the community, and make substantial additions to the park and to Manitoba's protected areas network.

The first boundary amendment proposed involves a land exchange of approximately 125 hectares of current park land with low cultural, recreational and natural values for over 500 hectares of municipal land within the ecologically significant Whitemouth Bog. Several noteworthy plants and animals have been reported in the bog, including the Yellow Rail, a rarely-seen bird that has been listed as a national Species of Concern under Canada's Species at Risk Act, and rare plant species such as the Rose Pogonia orchid and the Yellow Twayblade. Such a land exchange, and subsequent protected areas designation, would also increase the representation of an enduring feature landscape unit currently not significantly represented in this region. As part of this exchange the RM would be supportive of an initiative to create a much larger protected area on Crown Lands within the Municipality, having these lands at its core (see attached Whitemouth Bog Background map). Manitoba Hydro has indicated that they would be prepared to assist in the establishment of a larger protected area as part of the overall land exchange agreement, via donation of mineral rights they hold in this larger area.

A second proposed boundary amendment would add an adjacent area of about 430 hectares of open Tamarack forest north of the Winnipeg River to Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park. This area provides excellent habitat for Manitoba's provincial bird, the Great Gray Owl, and is a known and provincially significant staging and migration area for this spectacular bird of prey. This area would be the first in Manitoba

proposed whitemouth falls provincial park



to be conserved and managed to maintain prime Great Gray Owl habitat. It is the only area in Manitoba with signage identifying the site as having high use by owls.

The proposed Great Gray Owl park extension on the north side of the Winnipeg River would be established in cooperation with Manitoba Hydro, ensuring Hydro's requirements are respected and accommodated. The existing park and proposed park expansion are within Hydro's license area. It is important to both Parks and Manitoba Hydro to maintain this area in an undeveloped state, and accommodate Hydro access to transmission lines and the dam itself, as well as access to and within the Hydro severance area for erosion mitigation, etc., as required.

Background: Manitoba Provincial Park Establishment and Classification

Provincial Park System purpose:

- Conserve ecosystems and maintain biodiversity;
- Preserve unique and representative natural, cultural and heritage resources;
- Provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities and experiences in a natural setting.

Classification of Provincial Parks

- Park classifications provide management direction to an overall park area.
- Wilderness Park: Preserves representative areas of a natural region.
 - Natural Park: Preserve areas of a natural region; accommodates a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.
 - Recreation Park: Provides recreational opportunities.
 - Heritage Park: Preserves an area of land containing resources of cultural or heritage value.

Land Use Categories

Land Use Categories provide management direction to specific areas within a park.

- Wilderness: Protect representative or unique natural landscapes in an undisturbed state and provide recreational opportunities that depend on a pristine environment.
- Backcountry: Protect examples of natural landscapes and provide basic facilities and trails for nature-oriented recreation in a largely undisturbed environment.
- Resource Management: Permit commercial resource development or extraction in a manner that does not compromise the main purpose of the park classification.
- Recreational Development: Accommodate recreational development.
- Heritage: Protect a unique or representative site containing a resource of resources of cultural or heritage value.
- Access: Provide a point or route of access in a provincial park or a location for a lodge and associated facilities.

In a Wilderness park, or in any area of a provincial park or park reserve that is categorized Wilderness, Backcountry, or Heritage, no person shall engage in logging, mining or the development of oil, petroleum, natural gas, or hydro-electric power.

What do YOU think??

The purpose of this public consultation is to obtain information and insight into the proposal to amend the current park boundaries, classification, and park land use categories, including the proposed new addition on the north side of the Winnipeg River. Please review the background information and use your own experience of the area to develop your comments respecting these or other issues of importance to you. (You can use the enclosed sheet, and retain this information brochure for future reference).

Examples of type of feedback requested:

Park Role and Purpose:

Are you in agreement with the boundary revision/extension, and its intent? What activities/experiences does your vision for the future of this area include? Please explain.

Boundaries and Classification:

What type of park classification or Land Use Category(ies) best suits the values and commitments found in the Whitemouth Falls area? Do you feel the boundaries for the Provincial Park properly reflect the area values as you see them? Please explain.

What happens after this Consultation?

Manitoba Parks and Natural Areas will collect all information received, and use this information to develop boundaries, primary park purpose(s), a park classification and park Land Use Categories. A summary of public comment – and the resulting proposed actions – will then be sent to all participants, and posted on the Parks website.

Please feel free to pass this brochure on to anyone you feel may also be interested in this area. If you would like to make your comments in person, or wish at any time to contact someone directly involved in the process, see the contact information below:

or email: parksystem@gov.mb.ca
 Questions? Please call Rick Wilson
 (204) 945 – 4365

Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park Boundary Review
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