

Birds Hill Provincial Park Management Planning Program

Report on Public Comments

Overview

This newsletter is the second in the management planning program for Birds Hill Provincial Park. The first introduced Manitoba Conservation's park management planning process and presented information about Birds Hill. The newsletter included a summary of the park's history, natural features and recreational opportunities. This information was made available by mail, online and at public drop-in sessions. A questionnaire gathered comments on specific issues, as well as general information on what people felt should be considered in the management plan. This newsletter summarizes the comments received about the Birds Hill management planning process. It includes written submissions and notes recorded at public drop-ins and meetings.

Meeting Dates and Locations

Public drop-in sessions were held at the Overlook in Birds Hill Provincial Park on June 19 and 20, and July 17 and 18, 2010. Contact was also made with local First Nation communities, stakeholder groups and representatives from recreational organizations. Approximately 215 people attended the public drop-in sessions and nearly 200 comment sheets and letters were submitted.



Summary of Comments

A wide range of opinions reflecting the views of park users were collected through the first phase of public consultation. These comments are presented on the following pages and will be used to develop a draft management plan. Scientific data, academic resources and current park management policies and principles will also be considered in the draft management plan.

Park Environment Comments

"Do you feel that it is important to protect the park environment? Why or why not?"

Nearly all respondents indicated that it is important to protect the park environment. Many

remarked on the uniqueness of Birds Hill and suggested its natural environment should be protected for future generations to enjoy. Several respondents noted the significant value of having a natural park such as Birds Hill located so close to an urban centre (Winnipeg). Some people felt the most important reason for protecting the park environment was to preserve the habitat and wildlife it contains. Some participants suggested that protecting the park environment would allow people to continue to observe and learn about nature in a natural setting. It was noted that Manitoba Conservation is obligated to protect the park environment under *The Provincial Parks Act*.

A few respondents felt that, while it is somewhat important to protect the park environment, it is more important to ensure that the park is accessible to the public and provides opportunities for recreation and wildlife viewing.

Several comments about wildlife and vegetation in the park were recorded. Questions were raised about management of the wild turkey, deer and other large mammal populations in the park, as well as vegetation/forest issues such as prairie management, aspen encroachment, leafy spurge and the black knot fungus seen in the park. Some participants expressed concern about the impact of beaver activity in the southeast corner of the park. Several people commented on the car and deer collisions that occur on the highway around the park. Suggestions for managing the deer population included reduced speed limits in affected areas, particularly during large events such as the Folk Festival, and introduction of a limited archery hunting season in the park.

Some respondents suggested there was a need to provide users with more information about wildlife, such as how to be “bear smart” and how to behave around wildlife.

Varying concerns were expressed about the possibility of sand and gravel extraction in the park, disposal of horse manure, and potential for horses to be a source for the introduction of invasive species within the park by dispersing seeds through their droppings.

Comments about plants and insects in the park included a suggestion that there should be more weed control to prevent weeds from spreading to neighbouring landowners’ properties. It was also suggested that plant species in the park should be mapped, and that the management plan should include information about these species and management goals for them. Another suggestion was to collect climate change data and information on the park’s carbon sequestration potential. One person commented that Birds Hill should develop a monarch butterfly way station.



Recreational Activities Comments

“Does the growing number of park visitors at Birds Hill influence how you use the park? What activities should take precedence when conflicts occur?”

Many participants indicated that they have experienced minor issues of crowding or otherwise felt an impact related to the large number of visitors to Birds Hill. However, a similar number of respondents had no concerns with other visitors or the number of special events in the park. Some commented that they avoided the park at certain times or during special events. A few respondents indicated that they have experienced significant conflicts or issues with other park users or with

special events. Some people felt that the growing number of park visitors was a good thing.

It was frequently suggested that park use and special event management needs to incorporate scheduling, safety and/or a notification system to alert park users of upcoming events. Several respondents commented that booking and scheduling of special events should be viewable online. It was suggested that some conflicts could be avoided if special event permits were more widely understood and publicized.

Opinions ranged regarding what activities should take precedence in the park. The most frequently supported activities were those that focus on the natural environment, promote physical activity or are non-motorized. Several participants did not support roads, or other areas, being closed for events. It was suggested that the amount of space allowed for a special event should be proportional to the number of people participating in or benefitting from it. Some people felt that the most important activities were those that are open to the public.

A number of respondents suggested that events and uses should be scheduled using a first come, first served type of process. Several comments indicated that the number of events and/or event attendance should be limited. Some people suggested that annual events and previously approved activities should continue to be allowed in the



park. A few participants felt that priority should be given to events and activities which provide the most revenue to the park. One person noted that the park management plan should allow Birds Hill to adapt to new activities in the future.

Development Comments

“How much and what kind of development should be allowed in the park?”

Numerous respondents indicated that no additional development should be allowed in Birds Hill and that the park should be left as is. Several people indicated that they do not support development in the park unless it is to improve existing services or facilities. A comment was

made that any future developments should undergo an environmental assessment and public input process. One person suggested that part of the park should be closed to people.

Several participants suggested that if there is development in the park, it should only be for recreation or nature-based activities. Others would limit development to new infrastructure facilities such as washrooms or parking areas only. Many felt it was important that any development in the park be small-scale with a balance between the environment and the park's needs. Several respondents felt that development should not be commercial-based, and expressed a general concern about commercialization of the park.

In contrast, some respondents stated that more development is needed in a number of areas. It was suggested that this development could be accommodated in the north part of the park. A few participants commented that the park should be expanded.

Many participants commented that they would support development in specific areas or for specific activities. A variety of suggestions were made, including requests for:

- campground development (more bays, more electrically-serviced sites, tent-friendly sites, the option for drive-up camping, yurts, a longer season, backcountry camping)
- improvements to the equestrian facilities (electrical supply, a camping area, a staging area)
- more trails (multi-use and specific use trails, both paved and unpaved) and distance markers
- more washrooms (multi-season use), showers, shelters and parking
- improved/more restaurant and concessions facilities
- beach expansion
- an ice-skating rink
- a Nordic Centre
- a water park
- an off-leash dog area and a dog agility yard
- more areas for children and families (playgrounds, a splash pad, picnic sites)
- a golf course

- an orienteering course
- a summer camp
- a toboggan run and snowboard hill

Park Interpretation Comments

“How can Birds Hill best inform people about parks and encourage an appreciation for parks?”

Those who responded to this issue generally supported either additional interpretive programming in the park, or increased advertising of such programs. Different types of media were suggested as the best advertising method. Respondents felt it was important to have advance notice of interpretive activities. In particular, many participants commented that more information related to Birds Hill should be available online and that the park website could be enhanced. A few people suggested that the park should communicate with the public and visitors to Manitoba through Travel Manitoba and local television stations.

Many participants thought the park should have enhanced trail and interpretive signage. One suggestion was for an information booth with digital technology such as touch screens and other interactive displays. The value of maps and brochures was commented on, with some people suggesting there should be more of these available within the park, as well as at locations outside of the park such as in outdoor and sports stores.

Respondents who supported more interpretive programming thought it was important the park offer activities and events such as guided walks and other educational sessions. Some participants were not aware that such activities currently take place in the park. Some also thought the park should have a more centrally located interpretive centre. A few respondents suggested Birds Hill staff should visit schools to provide environmental education programming in the classroom. One person thought that a park environmental monitoring program could be used to inform park users and encourage appreciation for the park. Another participant suggested the park should not be encouraging more visitors, and

people should be left to discover things for themselves.

Several comments were made suggesting that the staff presence in the park should be increased, and that staff and interpretive materials should be available at the park entrance. Improvements and repairs to the building at the West Gate were suggested to facilitate this. One person felt park staff should travel throughout the park on foot or by bicycle, rather than in vehicles.

Respect for the park and for other park users was important to many respondents. A few participants suggested Birds Hill should have a code of ethics or conduct, and some people felt there should be more volunteer opportunities in the park for activities like trail clearing and litter removal.

Other Comments

Respondents provided many general comments, concerns and suggestions about Birds Hill and the management planning process. For the most part, participants appreciated the opportunity to share their opinions on the park. A few respondents felt the public consultation process should be more widely publicized.

Camping:

Apart from the requests for additional or modified development of the campground, many comments were received about camping at Birds Hill. Some were from people who were very happy with the camping experience they have had in the park over the years. Other participants expressed concerns with noisy campers, and barking or off-leash dogs in the campground. One person felt there was a need for foot patrols in the campground.

Maintenance:

Many people commented that they were happy with the maintenance and trail grooming in the park. Some people felt the park trails should be better groomed, particularly in winter. One person suggested that the roadside areas of the park should be better maintained and more manicured. Concerns were expressed about the condition

of the equestrian site in the Pope's Hill area. A few people raised questions about the state of the stables.

Garbage and Recycling:

Many participants were troubled by the amount of litter they see around the park. Several people stated they pick up garbage while using the park. There were many requests for more garbage cans, including those with lids or cages that are resistant to wildlife. There also were requests for more recycling bins in the park.

Safety:

A variety of safety concerns were expressed by respondents. Some people were concerned with the amount of traffic and the width of the shoulder of the main road in the park. They felt there was a high risk of collision between drivers and those using the shoulder for recreation. Several people felt the speed limit of this road should be lowered and a suggestion was made to close the East Gate at times to reduce through-traffic in the park. Other safety concerns were raised regarding the perceived level of crowding at the beach. Some respondents were also concerned with increased burglaries and car break-ins in the park. Better lighting and more emergency signs and information were requested for the park. One respondent expressed a desire for more directional signs in the park. One person suggested that there were too many signs along the road.

Many people commented on the trail system in the park, suggesting that confusion over trail designations was a safety concern. It was frequently suggested that trails should be better marked and their proper uses more enforced. Respondents felt this would prevent mishaps between park users enjoying conflicting activities, and reduce trail damage caused by improper use. Many participants indicated that they were unaware of the designated uses for the trails they regularly used.

Funding and Entry Fees:

Participants often commented they felt the park needed more funding to meet the needs of its variety of users. Many respondents expressed concern about the removal of park vehicle permits. They assumed there was a link

between the permits and financial support for park improvements.

Many people suggested that if park visitors were required to pay an entry fee, it would increase their level of respect and appreciation, encourage carpooling and lead to a decrease in the amount of undesirable behaviour such as vandalism and speeding traffic. A few people supported not having an entry fee. Some people indicated they would prefer not to have to pay for firewood or showers.

Recreational Vehicles:

Positive comments were received from many snowmobile enthusiasts who expressed their appreciation and love of riding in the park. Some respondents expressed concerns about the use of recreational off-road vehicles in Birds Hill. Some people reported unauthorized ATV and dirt bike use was taking place in the park, and stated that these activities should not be permitted in the park at any time. Many participants were also opposed to snowmobile use in the park. They felt that snowmobile noise negatively affected non-motorized park users' enjoyment of the park. One person also complained about the noise caused by motorized model boats and airplanes. Many of the participants who commented on this issue felt that recreational motorized activity in the park should either be limited or banned.

Access:

A variety of comments were received about access to and within the park. It was suggested that increased bike and transit access from Winnipeg to the park should be available and promoted. One suggestion for reducing vehicle use in the park was to provide a parking and staging area for cyclists just inside the park entrance. Questions were raised about access from the floodway into the park. One participant noted s/he would like to be able to enter the park from the floodway on horseback. The amount of traffic congestion resulting from the Folk Festival was a concern for some respondents. It was suggested that there should be more park entrance and exit options during the festival.

What Happens Next?

Step 1: Public consultation and review of management issues (Phase 1).

Step 2: Distribute report on public comments.

Step 3: Prepare draft management plan.

Step 4: Public consultation and review of draft management plan (Phase 2).

Step 5: Revise and finalize management plan.

The next step in the management planning process is the development of a draft management plan for Birds Hill Provincial Park. The draft plan will consider the comments summarized in this newsletter. It will be prepared by a team of local park managers, resource officers and park planners. When the draft plan is complete, a second phase of public review will begin. At this time, the public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan. The public will be informed about the dates and times for this review. After the review of the draft plan, the management plan will be finalized. It is anticipated that the plan will be completed in 2012.

Thank you to those who participated in the drop-in sessions, and to those who provided written comments and suggestions. Your feedback is appreciated.

For more information about the Birds Hill Provincial Park management planning process, or to be added to the mailing list please contact:

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