

Development of a Trails Plan for Duck Mountain Provincial Park

Background Information

The Manitoba government is developing a Trails Plan for Duck Mountain Provincial Park. The purpose of the plan will be to provide long term management direction for future trail use and trail development in the park. This backgrounder has been prepared as part of the first phase of public engagement on the development of the Trails Plan and provides a summary of the natural and recreational features of Duck Mountain Provincial Park as well as a brief overview of some of the challenges associated with managing trails in the park.

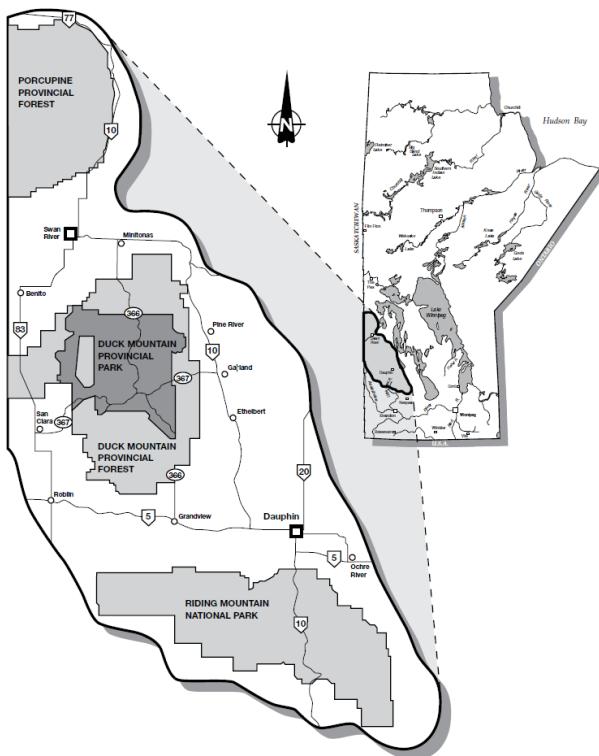
In this first phase of engagement, Manitoba Parks and Trails is seeking input from Indigenous communities, park users and area stakeholders to learn more about:

- How trails in Duck Mountain Provincial Park are used.
- What Manitobans consider priorities for trail maintenance, management and development in the park
- Trails-related issues and opportunities

This input will be used to develop a draft Trails Plan for the park. Phase 2 of engagement, for review of the draft Trails Plan, will be conducted at a later date.

Park Setting and Environment

Duck Mountain Provincial Park is an area of forested hills and interspersed lakes encompassing over 142,430 hectares of western Manitoba. River valleys, wetlands and streams are characteristics of the region's glacial origins. The park is part of a long series of highlands, known collectively as the Mid-Boreal Uplands Ecoregion. The eastern edges of these hills form the Manitoba Escarpment.



Map 1 – Duck Mountain's Location within the Manitoba Escarpment

Duck Mountain's many lakes and ponds are remnant of glacial times when meltwater filled depressions in the land. Some of these lakes have since filled in with vegetation to become black spruce bogs. Other lakes, fed by springs and spring run-off, remain clear.

Due to varying altitudes and soil conditions there are three distinct plant communities in the park: boreal forests, deciduous forests and upland meadows. These ecosystems provide a diversity of habitats for large and small mammals, fish, insects and birds, and have made the park a favorite destination for hunters, sport fishers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Some of the wildlife found in the park include elk, moose, white-tailed deer, black bear, fox, lynx, coyote and timber wolf. A variety of raptors, waterfowl and songbirds nest in the marshes and forests, while the meadows are important elk habitat. Duck Mountain supports a wide range of native and stocked fish species including walleye, northern pike, yellow perch, lake whitefish, lake trout, brown trout, brook trout, tiger trout, rainbow trout, splake, smallmouth bass and Arctic char.

Indigenous Connections to Duck Mountain Provincial Park

Duck Mountain has long been a place of deep significance for many Indigenous Peoples and communities. The lands within Duck Mountain Provincial Park are part of the traditional territories of the Cree, Chippewa, Saulteaux and Red River Métis peoples. The boundary between Treaty 2 (1871) territory and Treaty 4 (1874) territory crosses through the park, underscoring the area's shared heritage and importance to multiple Indigenous Nations.

First Nations with ties to the region include:

- Sapotaweyak Cree Nation
- Wuskwi Sipihk First Nation
- Ebb and Flow First Nation
- O-Chi-Chak-Ko-Sipi First Nation
- Skownan First Nation
- Minegoziibe Anishinabe (Pine Creek)
- Tootinaowaziibeeng Treaty Reserve
- Waywayseecappo First Nation
- Gambler First Nation

The park is also within the Métis Recognized Harvesting Area.

Indigenous Peoples' traditional land use in the park includes spiritual ceremonies, social gatherings and recreational activities, as well as hunting, fishing and gathering practices that have been carried out for generations.

Manitoba Parks and Trails acknowledges and respects the Treaty and Aboriginal rights of Indigenous Peoples to engage in traditional land uses within Duck Mountain Provincial Park. The Trails Plan for the park will be developed in consideration of these rights and with input from Indigenous communities.

Park Purpose and Land Use Categories

Duck Mountain Provincial Park was designated in 1961. Campgrounds, cottage subdivisions, lakes and trails as well as hunting and fishing opportunities are currently popular attractions in the park. Access to backcountry areas provides opportunities for recreation in a pristine environment.

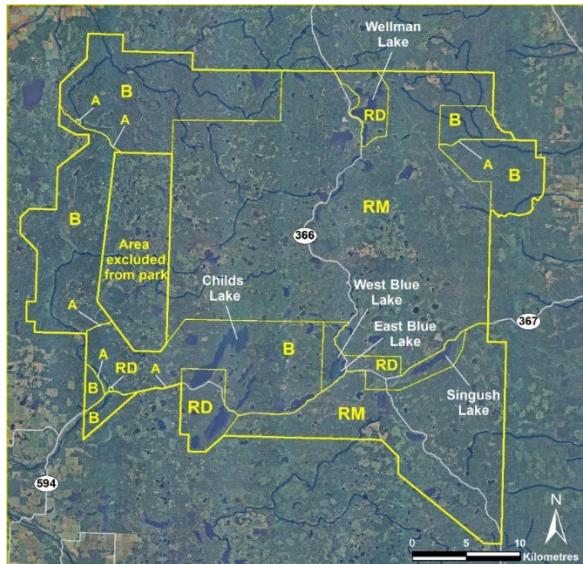
Duck Mountain Provincial Park is classified as a natural park under The Provincial Parks Act. The main purpose of a natural park is both to preserve areas of a natural region and to accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource use. Manitoba's Park System Plan identifies the purpose of Duck Mountain Provincial Park as being to preserve physical features and biological communities representative of the Mid-Boreal Uplands Ecoregion and to accommodate a diversity of recreational opportunities and resource uses.

Additionally, the park is intended to:

- Provide nature-oriented recreational opportunities such as hiking, canoeing and other trail-based activities in a largely undisturbed environment.
- Provide high-quality camping, cottaging, hunting and fishing opportunities and accommodate associated facilities and services.
- Promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural features and cultural heritage.
- Accommodate commercial resource uses where such activities do not compromise other park purposes.

Duck Mountain Provincial Park Land Use Categories

Land use categories (LUC) further define and distinguish the main purpose(s) of broad areas within a provincial park. Duck Mountain Provincial Park contains four LUCs: backcountry, recreational development, resource management and access.



Map 2 – Duck Mountain Provincial Park Land Use Categories

BACKCOUNTRY (B) (34 per cent of the park)

This forested 47,787 hectare area is a protected area in which logging, mining hydroelectric development, oil and gas development, exploring for and harvesting peat as well as other activities that significantly and adversely affect biodiversity are prohibited. It is managed to preserve its natural, undeveloped character and provide a remote recreational experience.

RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (RD) (6 per cent of the park)

The recreational development LUC is represented by several blocks of land totaling 8,750 hectares in the Wellman, Singush, East Blue and Childs Lake areas. This LUC provides a range of activities including camping, swimming, day use, hiking, cottaging and fishing and contains recreational services and facilities such as commercial lodges and concessions.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (RM) (60 per cent of the park)

This 86,768 hectare area accommodates both backcountry recreation and managed forest harvest activities. Recreation trails, interpretive trails and canoe routes are located in road-accessible areas. In more remote areas, fishers, hunters, hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts are the primary users. Duck Mountain Provincial Park is the only park in Manitoba where commercial forestry is permitted.

ACCESS (A) (<1 per cent of the park)

This LUC (125 hectares) allows for road access through the backcountry LUC and access to adjoining gravel pits.

Trails and Other Recreation Activities in Duck Mountain Provincial Park

Duck Mountain offers camping, fishing, hunting, swimming, cottaging and a variety of trail-based activities. The park provides a range of accommodations and services, focused within several development nodes. Recreational use is centered in the Wellman, Singush, Blue and Childs Lake areas. Accommodation options include four campgrounds with approximately 379 campsites and three lodges run by commercial operators. The park also has six designated backcountry campsites. There are approximately 254 cottages within the park.

Trails

Duck Mountain Provincial Park contains 18 formally recognized and maintained trails as well as numerous informal, undesignated trails that have been created by park users over time.

The designated trails are used for a variety of activities, including:

- hiking and running
- snowshoeing
- cycling, canoeing
- cross-country skiing
- equestrian
- all-terrain vehicle (ATV)
- snowmobile riding

Duck Mountain is the only provincial park in Manitoba with a trail that permits recreational ATV riding (the Mossberry Trail).

Designated trails in the park include:

Childs Lake Area

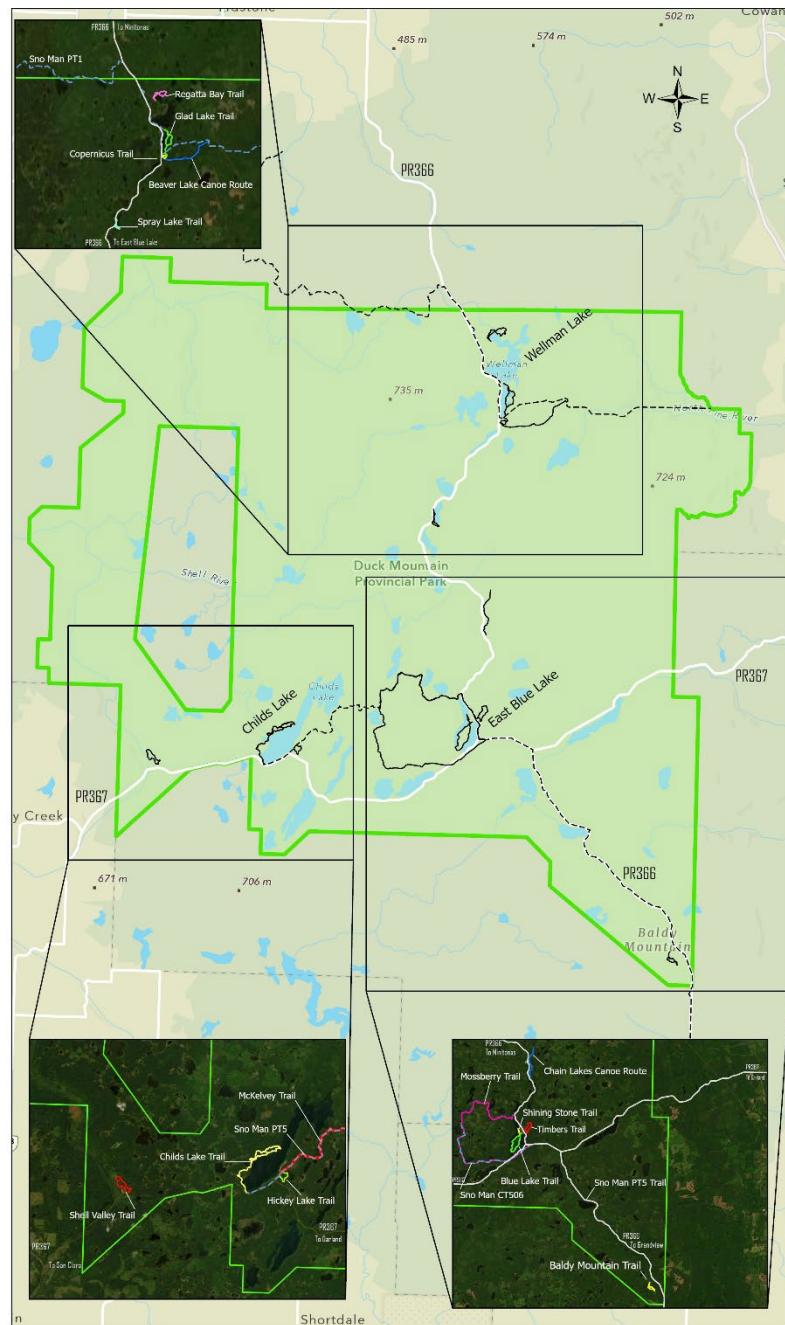
- Shell River Valley Trail – 4.5 km non-motorized multi use
- The Childs Lake Trail – 18.5 km non-motorized multi use
- Hickey Lake Trail – 1.8 km non-motorized multi use
- Mossberry Trail – 26 km both motorized and non-motorized multi use
- McKelvey Trail – 8.7 km both motorized and non-motorized multi use
- Snoman Snowmobile Trail CT506 (Mossberry)
- Snoman Snowmobile Trail PT5 (McKelvey and Mossberry South to Grandview)

Blue Lake Area

- Baldy Mountain Trail – 2.5 km; viewing tower 0.1 km in; non-motorized multi use
- The Blue Lakes Trail – 5.5 km non-motorized multi use
- Shining Stone Self-guiding Trail – 1.1 km non-motorized multi use
- Timbers Trail – 3 km non-motorized multi use
- Chain Lakes Canoe Route – 4.8 km canoe, kayak non-motorized

Wellman Lake Area

- Spray Lake Trail – 5.4 km non-motorized multi use
- Copernicus Trail – 1.2 km non-motorized multi use
- Glad Lake Trail – 3.8 km non-motorized multi use
- Regatta Bay Trail – 4.4 km non-motorized multi use
- Beaver Lake Canoe Route – 6.4 km canoe, kayak non-motorized
- Snoman Snowmobile Trail PT1



Map 3 – Duck Mountain Provincial Park Trails

Hunting Access

Hunting within Duck Mountain Provincial Park is permitted, with the park part of Game Hunting Area (GHA) 18. GHA 18 is one of only four remaining areas in Manitoba where the Designated Route system is used to identify hunting areas that can be accessed utilizing motorized means.

The Designated Route system permits licenced hunters to use motorized vehicles on approved routes to access areas with high game populations. These routes include designated trail accesses and select identified lakes. The Manitoba Wildlife Branch sets specific rules for the use of these routes, outlining how they are to be accessed and used by hunters to ensure responsible and sustainable activity. Designated Routes may not always be passable and are generally unmaintained.

Licensed hunters are prohibited to operate any motorized vehicle off a designated route during their hunt for any reason other than to retrieve big game by the most direct route. It is also illegal to search for wildlife or hunt from a vehicle along a designated route. The designated routes exist only to allow hunters access to an area from which to begin their hunt.

Fishing Access

Recreational fishing is a central activity in Duck Mountain Provincial Park and is often dependent on trail access. While many lakes can be reached by road, numerous remote destinations are accessible only by trail and anglers have established many of these routes to reach secluded fishing opportunities.

Fishing continues to be a major tourism draw for the park, contributing to both local recreation and the broader visitor experience. In support of this activity, Manitoba Fisheries has invested heavily in a long-standing annual stocking program in the Duck Mountains, ensuring healthy fish populations and diverse angling opportunities.

Complementing these efforts, the Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement (SVSFE) organization is an active local partner engaged in fisheries research, enhancement and education.

Current Trails-Related Considerations in the Park

Duck Mountain Provincial Park offers opportunities for recreation and resource utilization to a wide array of users.

The park exists to balance environmental preservation, resource use and recreational offerings. As the pressures from each of these different park uses increase or decrease over time the balance changes.

Currently the park offers multiple provincially supported trails that are signed, maintained, monitored and kept safe for the public to use. Designated hunting routes designed to offer access to game deep within the park during authorized hunting periods exist but are also currently used year-round by hikers, bikers and off-road vehicle users.

There are also additional trails used primarily by the 26 registered trappers operating within the park and surrounding forest. These trappers' trails, although created for the

trappers to access game, see considerable motorized and non-motorized public use as well.

Fishing access trails exist within the park and unpermitted private boat caches exist at certain backcountry lakes.

Additionally, forestry roads are periodically created in various locations within the park for access to commercial timber harvest blocks. These routes are typically used for a time and then closed. These deactivated roads often end up becoming trails used by the public for hunting, hiking or other recreational activities. Some park users' favourite trails may in fact be old forestry roads that were never intended for recreational use and may be required for forestry activities again at some point in the future.

All of these trails-related considerations must be managed by park staff who are also responsible for other critical services such as camping, cottaging and road maintenance. Some of these staff are also responsible for the management of other provincial parks in the Western Region, spread over a very broad geographic area. In this context, trails are one of many high priority recreational facilities that must be balanced alongside others each day.

Some of these factors were addressed in the Duck Mountain Provincial Park Management Plan, which was prepared in 2007. One outcome of the park management planning process was the formation of a Working Group involving local trail users to provide advice on the management of ATV use in Duck Mountain. This resulted in the development of the "Duck Mountain Provincial Park Trails Working Group Report on ATV Trail Use: Recommendations and Actions" (2010).

While some of the recommendations of that report were implemented (particularly those related to the Mossberry Trail), much of the work was not completed. Manitoba Parks and Trails will review the recommendations of that report as part of the process of developing the Trails Plan.

There is considerable potential for revitalizing and expanding the interpretive programming in Duck Mountain Provincial Park. For the past many years, the park has offered educational self-guided pamphlets for select trails such as the Shell Valley and Shining Stone Trails, providing visitors with information about key natural features highlighted at marked trail locations. Similarly, the now-decommissioned Wapiti Trail once delivered important interpretive messaging on elk and other big game species within the park.

These initiatives demonstrate how interpretation can significantly enrich the trail user experience. At present, however, interpretive opportunities in Duck Mountain Provincial Park are outdated and underutilized. There is an opportunity for meaningful enhancement.

Trails that provide a high-quality experience for a wide range of users are essential to the park. Striking a balance among the park's diverse and often overlapping trail user groups is both important and necessary. Doing so helps protect the park's ecological integrity while ensuring that all Manitobans can continue to enjoy the natural beauty and recreational opportunities the park has to offer.

Clarifying the Boundary Between Duck Mountain Provincial Park and Provincial Forest

Duck Mountain Provincial Park is surrounded by the much larger Duck Mountain Provincial Forest which spans approximately 234,600 hectares. This is an important distinction that is often overlooked or unknown by members of the public. While the park and provincial forest are adjacent to each other, they are governed by different regulations and management priorities.

Duck Mountain Provincial Forest is Crown land designated for the perpetual growth of timber, preservation of forest cover and sustainable resource use. Originally established to support timber production, the forest accommodates a wide range of recreational activities such as hunting, fishing and both motorized and non-motorized trail use. In contrast, Duck Mountain Provincial Park is managed with different goals and greater emphasis on biodiversity conservation and managed recreation. Despite these differences, the physical transition from park to forest is not always clearly marked. While some boundary signage exists, there are no consistent physical barriers (e.g. fences or cleared demarcation lines) to signal the change in land designation. As a result, area users often perceive the park and forest as one continuous area.

It is important to recognize that the Trails Plan being prepared is only for the area within Duck Mountain Provincial Park. Issues or opportunities relating to trails crossing the park boundary may be considered, but the Trails Plan is not intended to address general trail use across Duck Mountain Provincial Forest.

Next Steps

This is Phase 1 of engagement on the development of the Duck Mountain Provincial Park Trails Plan. In this phase, Manitoba Parks and Trails is seeking input relating to trail use, development, issues and opportunities through [EngageMB](#). After the engagement closes, Manitoba Parks and Trails will review all comments received and use this input to support the development of a draft Trails Plan for the park. Once it has been prepared, the draft Trails Plan will be made available for public review and comment. If you would like to be notified when the draft plan is released, please email MBTrails@gov.mb.ca.

For more information, contact:

Western Region Trails Coordinator
Manitoba Parks and Trails
Department of Environment and Climate Change
201 4th Avenue South
Swan River, MB
R0L 1Z0
Phone: 204-281-1761
Email: MBTrails@gov.mb.ca