

Wildlife – Fisher River IWMP Technical Submission

- 1) Are there sensitive habitat areas or ecosystems that should be protected?

The protection of Alvar is the most pressing issue, due to the direct conflict with mining. This was well documented during the workshop and should rightfully be a top priority for the plan. In addition, calcareous fens that occur in a few scattered locations in the watershed require protection from drainage impacts. Calcareous fens are areas where groundwater comes to the surface and forms a unique plant community, including rare orchids. Examples occur in the following locations: Sec. 29-22-02W, N1/2 of Sec. 31-23-02W, SW33-23-02W, Sec.21,22,27,28,32 & 33-27-02W and Sec.35-26-01E.

- 2) Are there endangered or species of concern in this watershed?

There are no endangered species that I am aware of. A few of the plant species found in alvars, such as ferns, as well a few of the orchids found in calcareous fen sites are rare.

- 3) How has wildlife been affected by water quality changes in this watershed?

If water quality has deteriorated within the watershed it may have impacts on aquatic environments, which could reduce invertebrate forage for certain bird species or affect the abundance of amphibians. I have no information though to corroborate that this is happening within the watershed.

- 4) How would wildlife and wildlife habitat be impacted by peat mining?

The impacts are unknown on a localized scale. However, given the complete destruction of habitat and lengthy time required to return a site to some semblance of its former condition, the impact on wildlife and wildlife habitat is likely significant. More broadly, it is believed that the impacts of peat development on wildlife and wildlife habitat can be mitigated, but this contention is primarily advanced by the peat companies and their consultants, who clearly have a self-interest. I am not aware of any independent studies that have been undertaken to quantify and qualify the impacts of peat mining in Manitoba so both the localized and broad scale impacts of peat mining on wildlife are unclear.

- 5) Is the moose population at risk from an over-abundance of mature forests and a lack of new forest growth?

Yes. In the absence of wild fire or the ability to effectively use prescribed fire, which is the present day case here in Manitoba, moose populations will naturally decline as forest succession advances. In the absence of fire, the typical management response is to reduce harvest as a population declines, however, reductions in licenced hunting in the GHA 21 portion of the watershed have had little positive affect and there has been no reduction in licenced hunting in GHA 21A. First Nation communities have a significant influence on treaty harvest and therefore population size, but neither the communities or government has any appetite to talk about cooperative moose management or moose conservation in the two game hunting areas involved at this time. Also, improved access and the use of amphibious machines to hunt moose in previously inaccessible parts of the watershed is an added threat to the population that has yet to be addressed.

- 6) Over hunting was a concern raised during public engagement meetings. Is this a valid concern?

Yes. It is likely that reduced access to moose by licenced hunters will be considered if the next population surveys shows a further population decline in GHA 21 and GHA 21A, which include this watershed. In addition, the impact of aboriginal and treaty harvest is something that will have to be recognized and addressed by First Nation communities that use this resource if the moose population within the watershed is going to re-build to former levels.

Conservation and Water Stewardship
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