



**DRAFT MBMF Moose Committee Meeting Minutes
Winnipeg River Learning Centre
Powerview-Pine Falls**

March 15, 2012

Present:

Brian Kotak (MBMF)	Kelly Leavesley (MB Conservation)
Ken Rebizant (MB Conservation)	Daniel Dupont (MB Conservation)
Cam Neurenburg (LdB Wildlife Assoc)	John Williams (MB Wildlife Fed)
Gerry Arbez (LdB Wildlife Assoc)	Eugene Bear (Hollow Water FN)
Hilda Bjork (Hollow Water FN)	Alex Bjork (Hollow Water FN)
Jim Hoard (Pinawa Game & Fish Assoc)	Jim Niedermayer (MB Wild Rice Assoc)
Ivan Lavoie (Sagkeeng FN)	Paul Millan (Brokenhead Game & Fish)
Vince Keenan (MBMF)	Bob Austman (MBMF)
Rene Barker (MBMF)	Ron Missyabit (MB Conservation)
Jean Derosiers (MB Métis Fed)	Ken Leforte (MB Métis Fed)
Jackie Leforte (MB Métis Fed)	Jonas Peebles (Black River FN)
Ken MacMaster (MB Wildlife Fed)	Don Ross (LdB Wildlife Assoc)
Ernest McPherson (Black River FN)	Sue Atkin (MB Conservation-Parks)
Morgan Hallett (MB Conservation-Parks)	Ken Schykulski (MB Conservation-Parks)
Rober Mulholland (MB Conservation)	Stu Jansson (MB Trappers Assoc)

1. Introductions

Introductions of the committee members were made

2. Additions to the Agenda

There were no additions to the agenda. However, the MB Métis Federation requested some copies of the wildlife diseases booklet from MB Conservation. Kelly will check on the availability of extra copies.

3. Approval of Minutes from the January 5, 2012 Meeting

There was one correction to be made to the minutes. On page 3, the word “not” should be removed in the sentence “He does not feel that the alternative management options will not help the moose population to rebuild (or rebuild as quickly).”

The revised minutes were approved by the committee.

4. Presentation on Access Restrictions in Atikaki and South Atikaki Parks – Ken Schykulski, Parks Branch

Ken started off by talking about the Management Plan for Atikaki Wilderness Park. It is one of the province's flagship wilderness parks and is the most southern one in Manitoba. Objectives for the park include protection of the landscape/habitat and recreation (wilderness canoeing – especially the Bloodvein River, fly-in fishing/hunting)

To achieve these objectives, a park management plan was developed many years ago. The management plan was approved in 2008. The management plan sets out directions for a park. The development of the park plan for Atikaki included public meetings in the region and in Winnipeg.

The vehicle restrictions for the park have the following purpose:

Minimize impacts on environment

Provide appropriate setting for recreation

Provide best recreational opportunities by separating incompatible park uses

Snowmobile and ATVs use are authorized for lodges and trappers, as well as for hunting and fishing. However, there are no new recreational snowmobile or ATV trails allowed in the park. There is provision for access into the park from Siderock Lake to Obukowin Lake, through a permitting process. This is new.

The government is also putting in place restrictions on major river corridors for power boat and aircraft access. The restriction is for the period of June 1 to Sept 15 each year.

The park management plan also places limitations on developments in the park, including lodges and private boat caches

It has been quite a long time since the management plan was developed. The government is now just implementing parts of the plan. All components and restrictions will be phased in over time.

The maintenance of high quality hunting is one of the important considerations in the management plan. The removal of boat caches contributes to maintaining the high quality experience.

Jim Hoard asked who exactly the high quality hunt is being maintained for? People have used boat caches for 40 years or more. The regulations make it difficult, if not impossible for the regular person (the pork and beaners), who can't afford to use a lodge for their hunting activities, to actually get out and hunt in the park. Several members of the wildlife clubs also echoed this sentiment. The loss of boat caches will eliminate the ability for the average Manitoban to hunt in Atikaki. It will only be for the rich.

The committee also expressed the frustration that there was no information or discussion for many years, and then all of a sudden the restrictions are law, without any prior warning.

There is a question about how many canoeists actually use the Bloodvein River. Some members of the committee expressed concern that the park is becoming an exclusive playground for those that can afford it.

There was a comment that the consultation for the original plan is long out of date. It took a long time for the plan to be developed and approved. How do we go about establishing a process to review the management plan? Ken stated that there should be a review process for each park plan in the province, but that the Parks Branch does not have the staff resources to review management plans on a timely basis for all parks.

Ken McMaster stated that it is a recipe for disaster to sit on things for so long. He stated that we would like the Minister to initiate a review, including more public input, into the management plan. That message should be taken to the Minister. Our committee is committed to the wise management of the resource, and many feel that they had no valuable mechanism for input. The current system is creating hunting opportunities only for lodges and their clients and not for the average Manitoban.

Stu asked if the prohibition for off-road vehicles applies to rights-based people? No, the prohibition does not apply. Stu also asked what is the plan for forest fire suppression and fighting is Atikaki is in the red zone, and is a high priority for suppression. Stu commented that with fire suppression, high quality moose habitat will eventually decline over time without fire. Fire needs to be a part of the natural landscape.

There were several comments that 14 years after the public consultation, the regulations are implemented. This is a very long time. Cam indicated that the MC website advertises that the park provides for high end opportunities. He questions the validity of this statement, as the regulations exclude the majority of Manitobans from even using the park.

Cam asked if Ken would recommend a re-evaluation of the management plan? Ken indicated that he has been tasked with producing management plans for all parks in the province. This will include a review of existing plans. He can look at the program and see where Atikaki fits in the overall schedule.

Cam indicated that he is not happy with how the implementation/notification was done regarding the new regulations. They were “almost slipped under the door at midnight”. The notification was not on the government’s website, and only a few people found out about the regulations through the Long lake Cottagers Association.

John Williams suggested that we write a letter to minister. The partners of committee are not happy with process of implementing the regulations, and the long time period from creating the park plan to implementing it. The plan is also not reviewed on a timely basis. Many changes have occurred in that time (including the moose population decline in GHA26, focusing hunters into GHA17A). The province needs to reconsider the regulations regarding boat caches.

A motion was by John Williams for CCMM to write a letter to the Minister. 2nd by Jim Hoard. The motion passed (noted that MB Conservation staff abstained from voting).

Jim Hoard asked about changes in Nopiming Provincial Park re: ATVs. Ken indicated that a management plan will be developed for the park over the next few years. The process will include public involvement. Stu stated that there needs to be a lot more input from stakeholders, First Nations and all that use the land. It is not sufficient in these days to merely hold open houses, particularly in Winnipeg. Stakeholders have to a real input.

Rene Barker made reference to the consultation process that is starting to occur with First Nations. It is a good process, and consultation for the Nopiming Park plan should follow a similar process. Not just for First Nations, but for all.

5. Brain Worm in Deer

The committee took a short break and Daniel Dupont showed a deer head that was infected with brain worm.

6. Moose Conservation Hunting Closure – Kelley Leavesley

Kelly indicated that the original idea was for a full GHA 26 closure. During First Nation community consultations, several communities expressed concern for a full area closure. A full area closure would help the moose population recover most, but communities did not accept this as it would restrict their ability to hunt too much.

Kelly indicated that if areas are to be protected, we should pick areas with best potential to grow the population. First consideration was where the moose population is greatest, with both bulls and cows (for reproduction). Garner/Gem and Happy Lake were logical choices. Also, road access was a consideration. Pick the areas with high moose densities and little road access. The Black River area was also selected, based on discussions with Black River FN. They are interested in the protection of moose in their area. Maskwa was another potential area.

There is a 300m hunting refuge along roads. This includes the Happy Lake Road and roads in Maskwa area. MB Conservation used distinct boundaries (natural features such as rivers, lakes) and roads to define the moose closure areas. These boundaries made it easier to map.

Areas of recent fires (1999 Black River fire, 2011 Leaf Lake fire) were also evaluated. Also, PR 304 along the Black River fire and Rainy Lake road now have a 300m buffer.

Daniel provided copies of the moose protection zones to the committee.

Kelly indicated that the Happy Lake trial demonstrated the positive influence of a moose hunting closure. It was a total closure (licensed and FN hunters).

There was a question of why there is no 300m buffer on Translicense Road? Kelly said that the communities indicated that it would be too restrictive for them. Too much of an infringement on their Treaty Rights.

The public announcement for the hunting closure was made on January 20. Notification letters were sent out, including to the CCMM. The closure has been reported to Sagkeeng at a meeting, and also to the Black River FN TAAC. MB Conservation is still waiting to contact Hollow Water FN. Rene Barker indicated that he presented the info at the Hollow Water TAAC meeting though. Radio ads have also been used. Signs are now developed and will be installed in the spring. The highways department had input into signs. There is a combination of big and small signs. Maps will also be available at some of the signs. An advertisement was put in the First Nations Drum. A letter will be sent out to BON. All communities that were part of the consultation process will be notified.

The regulation came into force on Feb 18

There has been an increased NRO presence, which began in late Jan to early March. MB Conservation brought officers in from other regions to assist. There are day and night patrols. NROs made 81 contacts with people. Only 1 hunter was encountered. No fresh moose kills (a few old ones) were seen. The NROs are focusing on public education, as the legislation and signs were not in place yet.

7. Update on Moose Survey – Kelly Leavesley

A moose population survey was not done in GHA 26 due to lack of snow. In late January, there was insufficient snow. In early Feb, the snow conditions were re-assessed, and a decision made to start fixed wing flights. After 2 days of flying, the survey was halted. MB Conservation then began to explore the potential use of infrared technology.

Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) results:

It is not possible to use this for a population estimate.

It is much more expensive than a traditional aerial survey approach. MB Conservation conducted a preliminary assessment of FLIR in the Interlake, and then applied what was learned to GHA 26

The pilot assessment was done in Happy Lake, Garner/Gem and Rainy Lake fire area. Just over 700 km² was flown, using FLIR and standard aerial survey.

Standard method results: 262 moose

FLIR: 222 moose

The standard method was as good or better than FLIR at detecting moose

45 calves/100 cows observed (this is a good ratio)

44 bulls/100 cows (good ratio also)

Ken Rebizant– Assessment of FLIR

Ken gave a more detailed overview of the FLIR trial

Key questions: can FLIR aid in sighting animals, aid in determining age and sex? Is it cost effective? Would it help with multispecies surveys?

GHA 26

Species observed: moose, wolves, deer (a few), caribou

Also did an assessment in GHA 15 and 20 (NW of Gypsumville)

Standard approach – Jet Ranger, pilot and observer in front, 2 observers in back
FLIR – Long Ranger, pilot and FLIR tech in front (FLIR technician only looking only at the screen), 2 observers in back, FLIR pod attached to belly of helicopter. Observers responsible to cover 250m out from aircraft

Time difference between the 2 survey types was less than 24 hours (not flown simultaneously, but within 24 hours of each other)

FLIR altitude of 500 feet worked better than higher altitudes. Better images. But at 500 foot altitude, cone of FLIR is only 125 m wide on the ground. For standard approach, human observers can see 250m of ground on each side of helicopter

In more than 25% of the cases, the observers on the FLIR flight saw moose but the FLIR unit did not “see” them.

FLIR was unable to detect animals hidden by coniferous cover and terrain. Also unable to distinguish between species and sex of animal. No reliability in heat signature.

Frequently identified spots which the FLIR thought was animals. But there was nothing there (15% of false targets)

FLIR 2x the cost of standard survey (\$1695 per hour compared to \$740 per hour)

Conclusions

Standard approach provides reliable estimates of big game populations

Standard approach consistently identified more big game animals than FLIR

FLIR could be useful for cow/calf or black bear surveys, particularly in deciduous habitats before leaf out.

Question: Can you compare the recent numbers obtained in the survey area (using the standard approach) with those from the 2010 aerial survey? No, the areas are not exactly the same.

Good news is that there appears to be a good core population in the protection zone.

8. Wolf survey – Daniel Dupont

Alaska trackers came a couple of weeks ago. There was fresh snow. 3 days of flying. Flew entire GHA 26. About 25 packs of wolves. Some larger packs (7-8 wolves in each pack)

Total of 74 wolves. Does not include 7 in the far NE corner of area (those wolves were actually in Ontario). 74 represents a minimum count, and MB Conservation is confident in the number

Northern ½ of the GHA, 29 wolves were observed, 45 in the southern ½

Harvested wolves in northern ½ of GHA26: 19 this winter
31 in southern half (total of 55 wolves harvested this winter by trappers in GHA26)

However, more than the 55 would have been taken out of GHA26 (hunters, people not participating in incentive program)

5 wolves from GHA 17A were trapped. The MBMF paid for these animals.

MB Trappers Association put out a request for trappers to turn in samples. A trapper took wolves into Beausejour but was told program was only for registered trappers. He wasn't expecting to be paid, but was turned away. Some confusion with MB Conservation staff. He is a new officer in the district and perhaps did not know.

Is there a standard acceptable level of wolves for a region, with respect to maintaining a viable/healthy moose population? MB Conservation indicated that more than 9 wolves/1000 km² can have an impact on a moose population.

Action: MB Conservation to provide the maps of wolf distribution in GHA 26 to CCMM

9. Moose collaring project – Kelly

We originally proposed to put collars on 4 cow moose. Actually collared 2 cow moose. GPS location data is being collected every 2 hours by the collars. After 2 years, the collars will drop off the animals. Data sent automatically to MB Conservation by email. 2 collars that were purchased by MB Conservation failed before they went out to the field. Current data from the collars indicate that the 2 moose are in and out of heavy cover. They are spending part of their time in a 5-year old cut over (forest harvest area). The collars that were purchased from ESRA were \$4500 each. We would use other collars in the future, which are only \$2800 each. During the capture work with the moose, blood samples were also taken.

10. Discussion on re-configuring GHA 17

The discussion was deferred to the next meeting

11. Progress on Moose/Wildlife Curriculum

The discussion was deferred to the next meeting

12. Budget – Brian Kotak

Brian indicated that there is a total of \$12,900 remaining in the moose budget for this year. Of that total, \$3,165 needs to be spent by March 31, as this is federal government funding. This will not be a problem, as there are expenses related to the moose collaring that will use this amount.

Brian indicated that the Model Forest is facing a period of large uncertainty. The Model Forest's federal funding from through the Forest Communities Program ends on March 31 (i.e., in 2 weeks). We don't know if our program will be renewed, given the current federal climate of budget cuts. A complicating factor is that the federal government has indicated that it may take several months after the budget is announced before the federal government can even tell us if the program is renewed. We have also not heard from the province regarding our funding from them.

The Manitoba Model Forest is preparing by essentially postponing all projects for April and May. During this time, the Model Forest has committed to not laying off any staff. However, we will be living off our bank savings account, as we have no new funding coming in. The Model Forest has enough money in the bank to keep going until July. If no new funding is available from the federal government or the province, we will be forced to shut down.

13. Next meeting: May 10, 2012