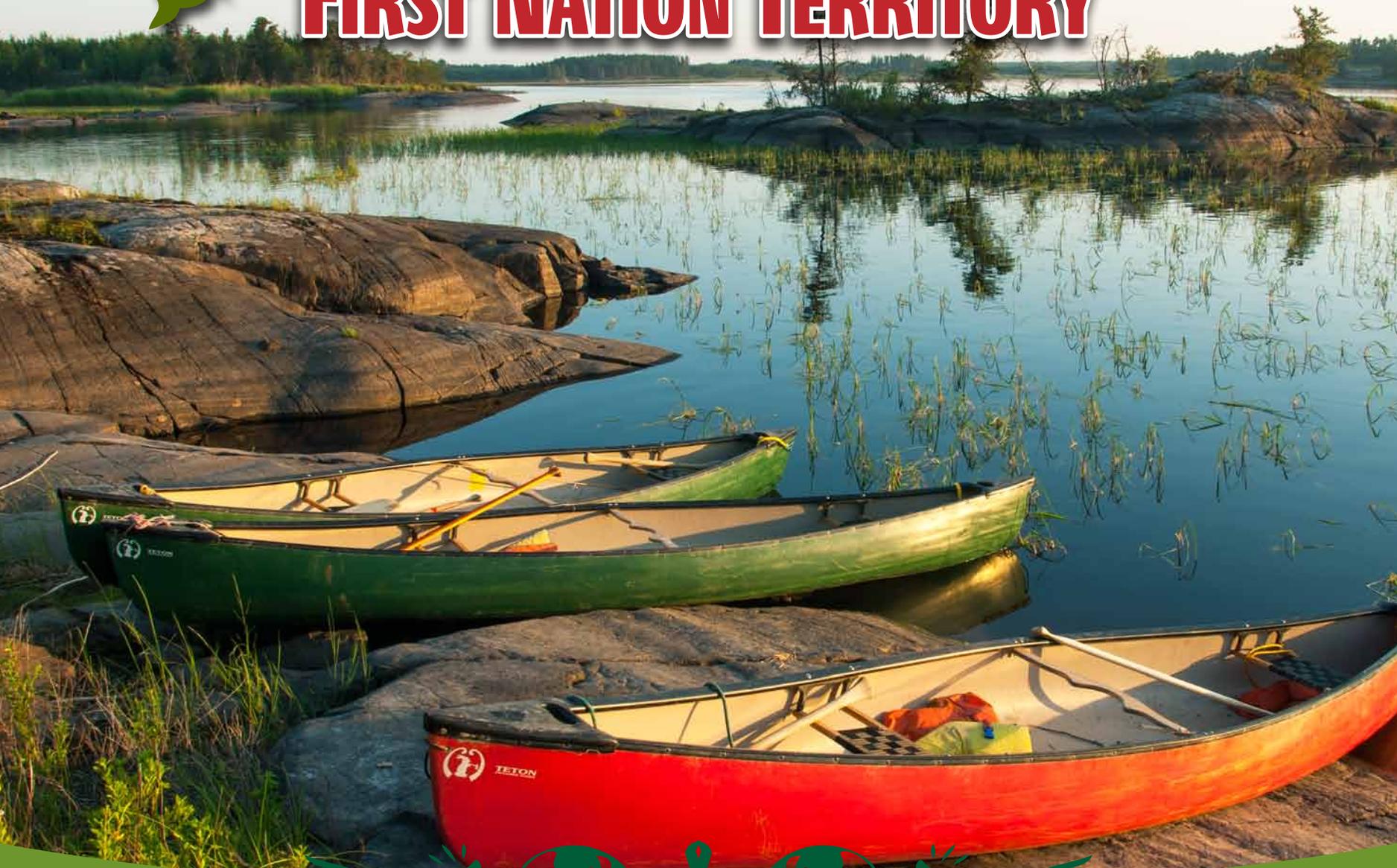




# PROTECT HOLLOW WATER FIRST NATION TERRITORY



## Waanibiigaa Aki: A Legacy for all Manitobans



**Eric Reder**  
Manitoba Campaigner,  
Wilderness Committee

There are few places on this planet left untouched by industrialization. In an increasingly

populated world, natural areas are becoming ever more valuable, simply because they are still whole. The lands and waters of Hollow Water First Nation territory are on the edge of the greatest intact forest left on Earth – the Heart of the Boreal – and their care will be a legacy for all Manitobans.

Waterways have always defined this region, as rivers acted as both pathways and barriers to travel. Located within the boreal forest region, Hollow Water First Nation territory stretches from the islands of Lake Winnipeg all the way to the Ontario border, around Wallace and Obukwin Lakes. In the north, the territory is bordered by the Sanders Creek drainage watershed and the Bloodvein River, while the Manigotagan and Wanipigow River systems form the southern boundary.

Canoeists will recognize the names of those waterways, as Hollow Water

territory is the gateway to world-class paddling opportunities. Recreational fishing is also a big draw for tourists in the area.

Some very elusive animals inhabit this land, with the woodland caribou being the most notable resident. Boreal hawk owls, lynx, and pine martens also thrive in the undisturbed lands. Moose populations in the territory, unlike in the rest of Manitoba, are still in decent shape.

When I was growing up, my family spent weekends and vacations in Hollow Water First Nation territory. As a kid, I loved searching the long, sandy beaches for ancient pottery and tool shards. Archaeological research indicates that this land has been in use for six thousand years<sup>1</sup>, and traces of that civilization are still visible in Hollow Water territory today.

Everything is not rosy, however. **For a hundred years, the demand for minerals and logs has impinged on Hollow Water territory.** The scars of abandoned logging roads and toxic mine waste can be found today on the land. Economic development has brought job opportunities, but it comes with a cost.

A dozen years ago, Elders from across the Heart of the Boreal region gathered in Hollow Water and produced a declaration calling for protection of the land from industrial development, and for community-driven land-use initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

In the lands to the north, five First Nations have already joined the Manitoba and Ontario governments to protect and care for a humungous 33,400 square kilometre land-use initiative called **Pimachiowin Aki: The Land that Gives Life.**

The road to Pimachiowin Aki runs through Hollow Water territory, and with it there are opportunities to generate tourism income.



Photo: Wild blueberries (Creative commons).



Photo top: Sunset over wild rice plants at Shallow Lake, above: Boreal hawk owl, Pottery and flint shards from Hollow Water territory (Eric Reder).

A wealth of natural wonder is found in Hollow Water territory, interwoven with a vibrant history and sustaining cultural story. But without careful action, this territory could be pared down and fragmented, and the heart of this land would be lost.

Read this educational report to learn how we can keep Hollow Water First Nation territory healthy and whole.

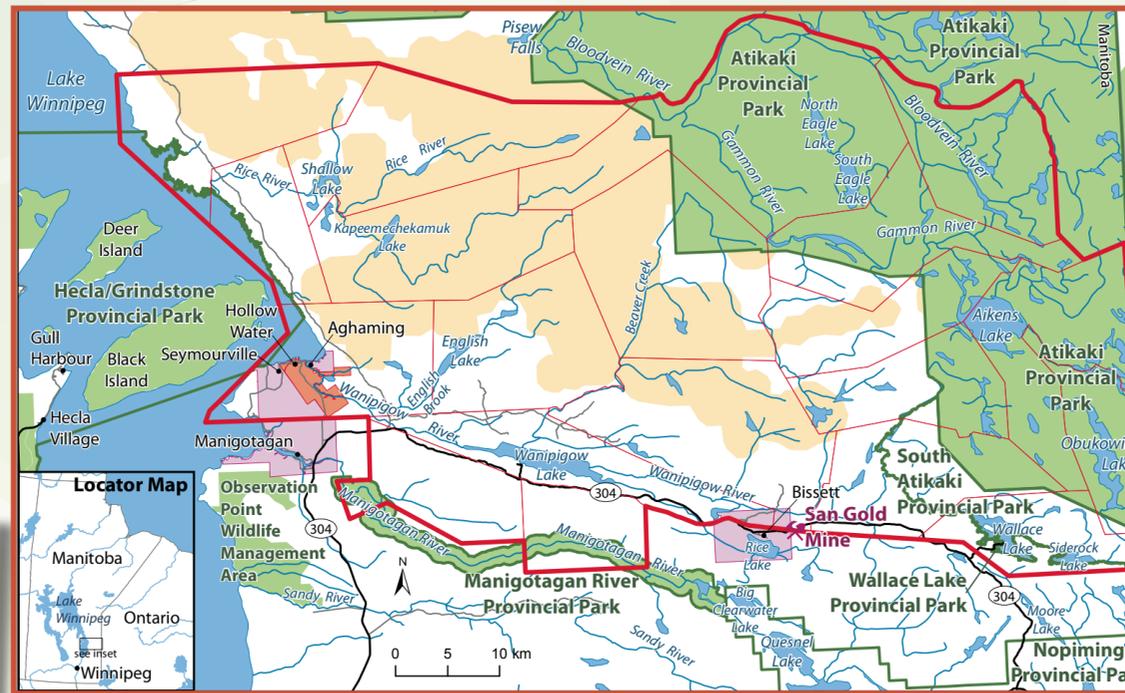
## Ecological Services

The lands and waters of Hollow Water territory provide globally important ecological services. As a source of fresh water, the boreal forest is unequalled on Earth<sup>3</sup>, and the rivers and streams of Hollow Water territory feed pure, fresh water into Lake Winnipeg.

The lowland areas of Hollow Water territory are made up of vast black spruce and peat bogs, which are invaluable in helping combat climate change. Peatlands are the largest terrestrial storehouse of carbon on Earth, storing even more than tropical rainforests.<sup>4</sup> Disruptions in the forest

cause a release of carbon, and contribute to climate change.

Intact natural ecosystems are the greatest tool we have for preserving biological diversity, and the largely undisturbed forest regions are a nursery for thousands of boreal birds, in addition to moose and endangered woodland caribou. As can be seen on the map (right), the Atikaki-Berens woodland caribou range makes use of a great part of Hollow Water territory.<sup>5</sup> Protection of caribou habitat in Hollow Water will contribute to the survival of this iconic species.



The traditional territories of First Nations in the Heart of the Boreal were fluid and overlapped each other, making it difficult to create exact boundary lines on a map. For planning purposes, however, the registered trapline system (RTL) can be used to discuss Hollow Water territory.

There is no "standard" Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe/Ojibwa/Ojibway language) spelling system. Spelling varies regionally and sometimes from one community to the next, depending on local preferences.

NAME	PRONUNCIATION	MEANING
Waanibiigaa Aki	Wah-nib-i-gah Ah-ki	Hollow Water ("Hole in the Water") lands
Anishinaabe	Ah-nish-i-nah-bay	"First People" or "Original People"

## The Culture and Use of the Land

Hollow Water First Nation is an Anishinaabe community, and an attachment to the land has always been part of that community. In the past, existence in these woodlands required close attention to the seasonal bounty, and an ebb and flow of activity across the territory based upon weather and food.

In winter, families were spread out across the woodlands to trap and hunt the sparse game that was available. The community would reassemble in spring near the shores of Lake Winnipeg to harvest fish runs on the rivers. In mid-summer, tribes from all around the lake – the "Big Island Band" as they were referred to in the Treaties – would hold a grand gathering on Black Island. In the fall, people harvested wild rice on the shallow rivers and lakes before dispersing back into the protection of the winter woodlands.

If you spend time in Hollow Water, you'll hear many stories of trips to the land with parents and grandparents to gather blueberries and wild rice, or

**"Anishinaabe are natural people."**

– Anishinaabe Helper at Hollow Water Community Holistic Centre for Healing

to catch and dry fish. Still now, Black Island Days remain an important event which corresponds with harvesting blueberries. Moose meat is always a sought-after staple for households, and trappers still go out on the land.

**The oneness with the land that is central to Anishinaabe culture is still passed on today.** It is related

to young generations through the stories that parents tell their children, and it is reflected in dance, song and ceremony. Despite the dark period in Canada's history when First Nations' cultural practices of dance and ceremony were banned, there is now a cultural resurgence in Hollow Water as there is in First Nations communities across the country.

The traditional teaching of the medicine wheel involves finding balance between the four areas of health: physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual. While the attachment to the land was once critical for food and survival, it is now increasingly recognized as a key to finding balance. It is no longer a necessity, but is required for cultural strength.



Photo above: Pictograph (Rock painting) at Rice River, right: Young forest on Black Island (Eric Reder).

## Development and Resource Extraction

For decades, mining and logging were trumpeted as job creators for rural areas, but there is a price to be paid for this employment – **mining is always dirty, and logging fragments landscapes.** Even recreational development takes a toll on nature. When deciding whether to allow development, the key is high environmental standards and strict ecological monitoring.

### LOGGING

In just 10 years, explosive growth from industrial logging scarred large parts of Hollow Water territory. As the paper industry collapsed in 2009, industry fled the region, leaving hundreds of kilometres of roadways now fragmenting the forest.

Logging can be ecologically sustainable, but today's industry has some serious flaws. With mechanized logging, one machine can replace the work of 12 loggers<sup>6</sup>, so the industry will never be the employer it once was. Additionally, the logged lands will not be as biologically rich for at least a century after logging.

In future, logging regulations should prohibit the construction of all-weather roads – which are difficult to rehabilitate in the boreal region.

Logging rates should be decided based on reducing ecological impact rather than processing mill needs, and precautionary measures must be used to protect sensitive species.

### MINING

For the last hundred years, gold exploration has occurred in this region, and mines have operated on and off during that time. Six thousand years of inhabitation have left little long-term impact on the land, but the one hundred years of mining have left a toxic legacy.

Mining companies offer assurance that new practices will eliminate yesterday's toxic effects, but mines pollute an astonishing amount of water and their tailings still last for generations.<sup>7</sup> Close at hand in Hollow Water territory, mining corporations have deposited toxic tailings which will remain an ecological threat until, at great expense, they are properly cleaned up.

Hollow Water territory is currently facing ecological threats from proposals for peat strip mines and a new silica sand mine that would promote hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") – an environmentally hazardous method of extraction that

injects water and chemicals into the ground to retrieve oil and gas.<sup>8</sup>

If mine operations are considered for Hollow Water territory, comprehensive monitoring and higher water quality standards are essential. **The environmental laws that currently control mining operations, both federally and provincially, are inadequate to protect our lands, our water, and our air.**

Across Canada, to ensure proper care is taken for the communities affected by mining operations, Impacts and Benefits Agreements (IBAs) are the new normal.

Before any industrial activity takes place on the land, an agreement is reached between the community members and the corporation, which lays out community and Council spokespeople, the appropriate ecological

safeguards and monitoring, and potential economic benefits to the community.<sup>9</sup>

### COTTAGE LOTS

In Hollow Water it is often mentioned that the land south of where the Manigotagan meets Lake Winnipeg was prime moose habitat, where calving occurred. Now instead of moose, visitors see only "No Trespassing" signs and private cottages. Selling cottage lots is a popular way to bring money to the community. But unlike an activity such as logging, which will affect

a forest for 100 years, selling off cottage lots means the ecosystems are disrupted forever. Even if cottage lot profits are invested in a trust fund, future generations still lose their lands with the sale of these lots.



Photo above: Industrial clearcut for mining, right: Manigotagan River (Eric Reder).



## Building a Model of Anishinaabe Community and Economy

Communities around the world have learned that in order to protect your economy, you must respect your environment, and it's become clear that initiatives on Hollow Water territory must provide more than just short-term economic benefits. Care for ecology and support for culture must also be considered when deciding on what activities to pursue.

Traditional uses of Hollow Water territory continue today. Commercial fishermen brave the waters of Lake Winnipeg, and trappers are still on the land. In fact, trappers have played a central role in protecting the intact landscapes from destructive industrial development. Trappers helped craft the 2001 Elders Declaration, while Band Council Resolutions obtained by a trapper in 2003 and in 2012 kept destructive industrial development out of important intact landscapes.<sup>10</sup> Although trapping as a lifestyle can only support a certain number of people, bringing others "out on the land" is a lucrative and growing part of experiential tourism in the region.

A commercial guiding course was

run in Hollow Water recently, and the graduates of that program are now establishing their own guide business based upon fishing, hunting, and traditional land experiences. At Raven's Creek, initiatives such as trail-building continue in hopes of bringing visitors out to paddle, hike, bike, and experience the land. Photo safaris, bird-watching trips, and medicine gathering walks have all been proposed as ecologically sustainable economic activities in Hollow Water territory.

Initiatives that support community and culture are growing in Hollow Water. Cultural camps for youth have been held, like the *Find Our Spirit Cultural Camp* or the *Rice River Ojibwa Traditional Teachings Camp*. More camps are being planned for the future, both for youth and adults.

Located on the Wanipigow River just up the road from Hollow Water, the **Wabanong Anishinaabe Interpretive Learning Centre** is slowly taking shape. Once cultural programming is established, it will provide an opportunity to share the

Anishinaabe way with visitors from around the world.

Community gardening, as a way to seize control of food security, is growing every year. More people are getting involved as fresh, healthy food is being provided. There is increasing interest in bringing wild rice harvesting and processing back to the community, too. A wild rice festival and a blueberry festival have both been suggested as ways to support culture and responsibly make use of the land.



Photo top: Community gardening at Raven's Creek (Madeleine Roger).

# Keeping Hollow Water Territory Whole



I vividly recall a meeting I had early on as I became acquainted with Hollow Water community members. I was explaining the current scientific call for at least 50 per cent of the boreal region to be protected from development." After thinking about this for a while, an Elder quietly asked, "Can we ask for more to be protected?"

It is not a simple task to decide which areas should be protected from development, and in which areas industry should be allowed to operate. **Ecologically, there is a need for healthy waterways, intact forests for animals like woodland caribou, and undisturbed lowlands for gathering medicines and storing carbon.** Permitted industrial activity has specific needs as well – mining needs minerals and logging needs mature forests.

Oral histories refer to ceremonial sites and sacred places across these lands and waters, some that

have been documented and many that haven't. The identification of specific sites is frowned upon, as it is culturally preferable to leave these places alone. This means that broad sections of territory must be set aside to preserve these sites.

In Manitoba, the *East Side Traditional Lands and Special Protected Areas Act* provides a mechanism for First Nations communities like Hollow Water to establish a land-use plan with the provincial government, as has happened in the neighbouring Bloodvein First Nation territory. Elsewhere in Canada, tribal parks have been unilaterally established based on the wishes of local communities, like the Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Park in BC.

Both a tribal park and a community land-use plan provide new opportunities and require new employment positions. Management and maintenance of protected park areas, trails, and remote

campgrounds and lodges will be needed. Cultural Ambassadors on the land should offer greeting and guidance to visitors to the territory, just as the provincial government's current River Steward position does now.<sup>12</sup> These new positions should be established jointly with Manitoba Conservation, in order to share existing resources and equipment.

In areas where industrial activity is allowed, natural resource officers from the community will need to be employed to ensure that ecological protections are enforced. In BC, for example, the Council of the Haida Nation now has conservation officers who work closely with the BC government to ensure logging

companies are acting responsibly.

Regardless of how the land is designated, these protections must happen soon. The continued push by developers into Hollow Water territory will not let up until the land is designated. **The future of this vast territory must be based upon ecological and cultural protection of the land, and it must include diverse economic drivers that provide decent incomes for local people.** And this must be done with the involvement of the inhabitants of this territory, whose roots stretch back thousands of years.



Photo top: Canada lynx near Beaver Creek, above: Paddling the Rice River, right: Shallow Lake (Eric Reder).

## TAKE ACTION!

Hollow Water First Nation territory is a treasure for everyone in Manitoba and around the world. With your support, a healthy community-produced land-use plan will become a reality. Please write to the Manitoba government, and let them know that you:

- want proper resources allocated for a community-produced land-use plan that puts ecology and culture first
- support the permanent protection of *at least* 50 per cent of the biologically rich and culturally important lands and waters in Hollow Water territory
- only support development that is ecologically sustainable and locally owned, ensuring local First Nations community benefits



### Manitoba Premier

204 Legislative Building, 450 Broadway Ave.

Winnipeg, MB, R3C 0V8

☎ 204-945-3714

@ premier@leg.gov.mb.ca

### Minister of Conservation and Water Stewardship

330 Legislative Building, 450 Broadway Ave.

Winnipeg, MB, R3C 0V8

☎ 204-945-3730 | @ minconws@leg.gov.mb.ca

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## Credits

**Writing:** Eric Reder.  
**Editing:** Alexis Stoymenoff.  
**Graphic Design and Layout:** Perry Sky Jack.  
**Mapping:** Geoff Senichenko.

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P.O. Box 2205, Station Terminal  
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T: 604-683-8220 or 1-800-661-9453 F: 604-683-8229

**Wilderness Committee — Manitoba Office**  
3rd Floor — 303 Portage Ave., Winnipeg MB, R3B 2B4  
T: 204-942-9292 F: 204-942-8214

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