COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN

for the

Riverton Sandy Bar IMPORTANT BIRD AREA

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for
Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation
Manitoba IBA Program

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Preamble. This document is not intended to be static. It is hoped that the community groups involved will use this CCP to guide their conservation efforts and continue to add to sections of this document over time.

Executive Summary

Riverton Sandy Bar Important Bird Area

The Important Bird Area Program

The Canadian Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program was established by the Canadian Birdlife Partners, the Canadian Nature Federation and Bird Studies Canada, as part of an international effort to identify and conserve sites important to all bird species worldwide. In Manitoba, the IBA program is being delivered and administered by the Manitoba Naturalists Society. Community conservation planning began in Manitoba in August of 1999.

Goals of the Canadian IBA Program

The goals of the IBA program are to identify a network of sites that conserve the natural diversity of Canadian bird species and are critical to the long-term viability of naturally occurring bird populations; to determine the type of protection or stewardship required for each site; and to ensure the conservation of each site through partnerships with local stakeholder groups who develop and implement on-the-ground community conservation planning.

Riverton Sandy Bar

The Riverton Sandy Bar is located on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg near the community of Riverton (directly west of Hecla Island). The IBA is comprised of a long peninsula and the two sand islands between the Riverton Marsh to the west and the Hecla Sandy Point to the east. The islands are comprised of sand and gravel that has been partially colonized by grasses, willows and aspen. The closest island is located 50-m from shore and is connected to the mainland by a sandbar during very low water years.

Significant Bird Numbers

The Riverton Sandy Bar is a globally significant Canadian Important Bird Area based upon population numbers of Ring-billed Gulls and Common Terns. About 1% (or 10,000 nests) of the world's estimated Ring-billed Gull population were present in 1991. In addition, a total of 800 Common Tern nests, or about 2% of the estimated North American population were present on the Sand Islands.

Herring Gulls have nested on the sand islands with 153 nests being recorded in 1991. There are also occasional records of nesting Piping Plovers (nationally endangered and globally vulnerable) on the Riverton Sandy Bar and on the adjacent Hecla Island Sandy Point. During the 1991 International Piping Plover census, one pair of Piping Plovers was recorded at each site. During the 1996 International census, only a single pair of Piping Plovers was recorded at the Hecla Island Sand Point.

The islands are also used by several bird species during migration. The area is a major concentration site for migrating Canada Geese and Snow Geese. It has also been reported that hundreds of migrating Sanderlings use

the site along with lesser numbers of Ruddy Turnstones and other shorebirds. The Hecla Sandy Point off Hecla Island is also a major roost site for American White Pelicans, gulls and terns.

Threats

Human disturbance on the peninsula and islands through ATV's and boats represent the greatest threat to the breeding birds. Nesting birds will abandon the islands if they are repeatedly disturbed. The artificially high water levels that are maintained by the provincial government has also led to reduced shoreline habitat for Piping Plovers and increased erosion.

Conservation Goals and Objectives

The lead group in this conservation effort will be the Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation. The intent of this CCP will be to increase awareness of the Riverton Sandy Bar IBA and the associated birding and ecotourism opportunities. This may best be accomplished through education, extension and promotional programs.

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1.0 The IBA Program

The IBA program is an international initiative coordinated by BirdLife International, a global partnership of over 100 countries seeking to identify and protect sites important to the conservation of bird species worldwide. Through the protection of birds and habitats, IBA's also promote the conservation of the world's biodiversity. IBA programs are currently in place in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas.

The Canadian IBA Program was initiated in 1996 by two Canadian environmental non-government organizations - Bird Studies Canada (BSC) and the Canadian Nature Federation (CNF). BSC will focus on data collection, site evaluation, and research of Canadian IBAs. The CNF will work on policy development, advocacy, communications, and development and implementation of IBA conservation plans. The Canadian IBA program forms part of the Americas IBA program which includes the United States, Mexico, and 17 countries in Central and South America.

The goals of the Canadian IBA program are to:

- identify a network of sites that illustrate and conserve the natural diversity of Canadian bird species and are critical to the long-term viability of naturally occurring bird populations;
- determine the type of protection or stewardship required for each site, and ensure the conservation of sites through partnerships between local stakeholder groups who develop and implement appropriate on-the-ground conservation plans; and
- establish ongoing local involvement in site protection and monitoring.

IBA sites are identified by the presence of birds falling under one or more of the following internationally agreed-upon categories:

1) Sites regularly holding significant numbers of an endangered, threatened, or vulnerable species,
2) Sites regularly holding an endemic species, or species with restricted-ranges,
3) Sites regularly holding an assemblage of species largely restricted to biome.
4) Sites where birds congregate in significant numbers when breeding, in winter, or during migration.

Important Bird Areas Funding

In October 1998, the Government of Canada announced funding for the Natural Legacy 2000 project, a major initiative under the Canadian Millennium Partnership Program (CMPP). In total, $10 million CDN were awarded to a consortium of four of Canada's largest nature conservation organizations - Canadian Nature Federation, World Wildlife Fund Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Ducks Unlimited Canada.

A portion of the grant, $1.25 million was awarded to the Canadian Nature Federation for the Canadian Birdlife International Partners to conduct the Important Bird Areas Program in Canada.

For further information on the IBA Program contact:

www.ibacanada.com

1.1 IBA Manitoba

The Manitoba Naturalists Society (MNS) is cooperating with the Canadian Nature Federation and Bird Studies Canada to deliver the conservation planning component of the Manitoba IBA program. The MNS is a non-profit organization made up of individuals who share a common concern for the well-being of Manitoba's nature. It was founded in 1920 for the popular and scientific study of nature. The MNS believes that the chance to experience an undamaged environment in peace and tranquility is a joy and a privilege. It also believes in the importance of sound stewardship, the wise use of our natural resources, fostering an awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and an understanding of humanity's place therein.

The objectives of the MNS include providing an association and a voice for those interested in natural history and the outdoors, to cooperate with individuals and organizations with similar objectives. Also, arranging educational and recreational programs and field trips to promote an understanding of the natural environment, to stimulate research and to record and preserve data and material in natural history and allied subjects. Another objective is to work for the preservation of our natural environment.

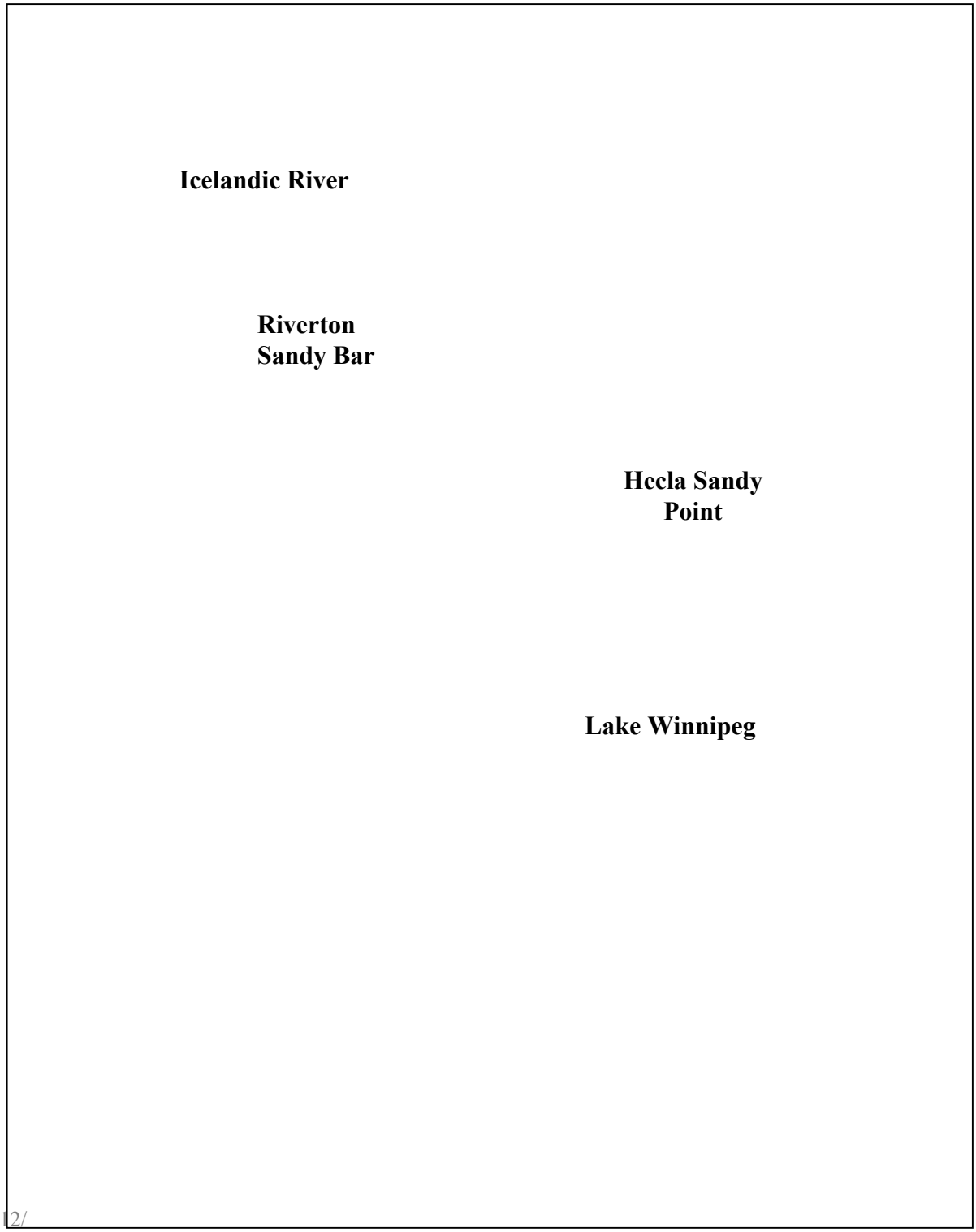
In 1996, a number of Manitoba birders gathered to begin identification of potential Manitoba IBA's. By 1999, over 100 locations were nominated for IBA status in Manitoba. In August of 1999, the MNS began IBA community conservation planning with the hiring of a conservation biologist. Shortly after, strategy meetings were held to further identify Manitoba IBA's with local community interest. Advice was solicited from numerous groups including the Manitoba Naturalists Society (Avian Research Committee), Canadian Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Manitoba Conservation, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and local birders.

2.0 Riverton Sandy Bar

The Riverton Sandy Bar is located off the western shore of Lake Winnipeg near the community of Riverton directly west of Hecla Island. The IBA consists of the peninsula and two sand islands extending between Riverton Marsh eastward toward the Hecla Sandy Point off Hecla Island (see figure opposite page).

The islands off the peninsula are comprised of sand and gravel that has been partially colonized by grasses, willows and aspen. The closest island is located only 50 meters from shore and maybe connected to the mainland by a sandbar in years with very low water.

Map of Riverton Sandy Bar and Hecla Sandy Point



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Riverton Sandy Bar

View looking southwest towards
Riverton, Manitoba.

3.0 IBA Site Information

Site: Riverton Sandy Bar, CAMB091 G
Location: 51º 00 N, 96º 54 W
Elevation: 218 m
Size: 10 km

Photo: Riverton Sandy Bar 2001.

The Riverton Sandy Bar is located east of Riverton and 4.6 km east of the intersection of HWY # 222 and HWY #329. Access to the Sandy Bar is along HWY #329 via the public beach area.

3.1 Riverton

Riverton is situated within the Northeast Region of Manitoba's Interlake. Riverton is a traditional fishing village with approximately six hundred residents. The town of Riverton is along the west shore of Lake Winnipeg and north of Gimli, Manitoba. It is the region of Manitoba known as the eastern Interlake. The town was first known as Icelandic River after the river which is north of town. Many of the earliest settlers were of Icelandic origin. There was a chain of Icelandic settlement along the river. The name was changed to Riverton in 1914 when the Canadian Pacific Railway arrived (Ham 1980).

Formerly Aboriginal hunting grounds, Riverton was established by Icelandic settlers in 1876. Several other ethnic groups, including Ukrainian, German, Hungarian and Polish immigrants, settled here in later years, enriching and expanding Riverton's cultural heritage.

The agricultural and fishing industries have traditionally been the basis of the local economy. However, entrepreneurial spirit and literary accomplishments have also been stalwarts of this community. Riverton continues to hold the culture and tradition of the original pioneers in high regard.

3.2 Lake Winnipeg

Photo: Lake Winnipeg shoreline south of Riverton Sandy Bar 2001.

Lake Winnipeg is the 11th largest fresh water lake (by surface area) in the world. Lake Winnipeg is in south-central Manitoba and at the southwestern

edge of the Canadian Shield. Fed by many rivers, including the Saskatchewan, Red, and Winnipeg, which drain a large part of the Great Plains, the lake is drained to the northeast by the Nelson River into Hudson Bay. Lake Winnipeg, at an altitude of 713 feet (217 m), is 264 miles (425 km) long and up to 68 miles (109 km) wide and has an area of 9,416 square miles (24,387 square km).

Visited in the 1730s by the son of La Vérendrye (the French voyageur) and named from the Cree Indian words for "muddy water," the lake is a remnant of glacial Lake Agassiz. With an average depth of about 50 feet (713 feet at its deepest point), it is important for shipping and commercial fishing (based at Gimli), while its southern shore is a major resort area serving Winnipeg, 40 miles (64 km) south. Major islands include Hecla, Deer, and Black, which form part of Hecla Provincial Park (333 square miles [862 square km]) (Lake Winnipeg 2001)

Photo: Riverton Sandy Bar habitat 2001.

4.0 IBA Species Information

The Riverton Sandy Bar is a globally significant Important Bird Area based upon numbers of nesting Ring-billed Gulls.

4.1 IBA Species

Significant concentrations of Common Terns and Ring-billed Gulls nest on the peninsula and sand islands (Moszynski and Koonz 1988). About 1% (10,000 nests) of the world's estimated Ring-billed Gull population were present in 1991. In addition, 800 Common Tern nests, or about 2% of the estimated North American population were present on Sand Islands. Nesting Herring Gulls were also present, with 153 nests being recorded in 1991.

A number of bird species can be found in the IBA that do not meet IBA population thresholds. The Sand Point on Hecla Island (known as Hecla Sandy Point) is a major roost site for American White Pelicans, gulls and terns. Piping Plovers have also used the Riverton Sandy Bar.

4.2 Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* (Ord)

The Ring-billed Gull is probably the most abundant gull in North America. It is medium sized, white headed gull that frequents garbage dumps, parking lots, and southern beaches in large numbers in the winter (Ryder 1993). The Ring-billed Gull is 15% larger, heavier-bodied, and with thicker, black-ringed bill than the Common Gull (Ryder 1993). Ring-billed Gulls are highly gregarious nesting in colonies from 20- 80,000 pairs

As many as 50,000 nonbreeding individuals can be seen at landfill sites. Colonies such as the Little Gallo Island colony in the U.S. can be as high as 82,000 pairs The biology and ecology of this species has been summarized by Ryder (1993).

Breeding Biology. Ring-billed Gulls are monogamous, 62% of 29 pairs retained the same mate in a subsequent year and they share in incubation and brood rearing duties. Birds pair just prior to arrival on breeding sites. Peak of egg laying occurs in Manitoba in late May. Clutch size is usually 2 to 4 eggs with a mean of 2.8-2.9 (Vermeer 1970). In Ontario, the incubation period ranges from 20-31 days with a mean of 26 days (Ryder 1993; Vermeer 1970). Young are born semiprecocial, eyes closed until dry and stay in the nest until able to walk (nidifugous).

> "Breeds in Manitoba beginning in May. They usually nest in large colonies of thousands of pairs, on islands or along shores of freshwater lakes. The nest is constructed on the ground or on floating mats of vegetation, using weeds, grasses or other debris. They usually lay 3 olive-buff eggs, speckled with brown, and the incubation period is about 21 days. The young are downy and somewhat independent at hatching, able to swim at an early age. Both parents tend to the young until they are able to fly"
>
> (Source: http://www.chin.gc.ca/~anana/MMMN/English/a_pelican.html).

Habitat and Food Habits. This species nests on the ground close to water, mostly on low elevation islands with sparse or wood vegetation (Ryder 1993). In western U.S., there is a strong tendency for colonies to be within 36 km radius of towns. Ryder (1993) reports the Ring-billed Gull is an opportunistic feeder of fish, insects, earthworms, rodents and grain. Vemeer (1970) found Ring-billed gulls diet includes grain, insects, rodents, birds, and bird eggs. It is a common sight in Manitoba to see flocks of Ring-billed Gulls in pastures and ploughed fields foraging for grains, anthropods and earthworms.

Range. The Ring-billed Gull nests across southern Canada and the northern United States. Godfrey (1986) reports the breeding range of the Ring-billed Gull covers most of southern Canada and the majority of southern Manitoba at least as far north as Southern Indian Lake. It winters on the shores and also up to hundreds of kilometers inland. The West Coast portion of its winter range includes coast from southern British Columbia to central Mexico. In addition, the Ring-billed Gull frequents coastlines along the United States and along the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic. It winters inland on the southern Great Plains and the Atlantic shelf. Banding studies indicate two main wintering areas along the Pacific coast of California and Mexico and Florida (Ryder 1993).

Historical Population Changes. Ryder (1993) describes historical changes in Ring-billed Gull distributions. Population numbers declined from 1840s to 1920s from persecution for plumage for the millenery trade, eggs for food, and encroachment of nesting habitat by

human settlers. As a result by the 1920s Ring-billed Gulls had disappeared from many breeding sites. In the Great Lakes region, population increases were attributed to the 1916 Migratory Birds Convention Act, the introduction and spread of Rainbow Smelt (*Osmerus mordax*) in 1922; the introduction of Alewives (*Alosa pseudoharengus*) in 1950; and the creation of nesting islands during low water periods in the early 1970s. Populations continued to grow due to agricultural expansion which provided grain, tilling that exposed other food sources in fields, the creation of islands through reservoir construction, the stocking of reservoirs with fish, and the growth of garbage dumps and wasted food.

Population Trends. The Canadian breeding distribution includes colonies on the prairies, the Great Lakes and along the east coast (Koonz and Rakowski 1985). Ryder (1993) estimated a world population of 3 to 4 million individuals with 70% nesting in Canada and 30% nesting in the U.S. Breeding bird surveys indicate the population numbers are on the rise..

Manitoba Populations. Koonz and Rakowski (1985) found 25 colonies with an estimated 30,000 breeding pairs (or 60,000 individuals) in southern Manitoba in 1984. Colonies in northern Manitoba were not included in their survey so the estimate should be considered conservative. They reported that populations were restricted to islands and larger lakes which as many as 12,000 and as few as 8 nests, and an average of 1,200 nests per colony. Koonz and Rakowski (1985) reported that areas colonized by Ring-billed Gulls are soon after used by other colonial nesting birds. Based on population numbers presented by Ryder (1993), there were an estimated 829,000 pairs in Canada (survey data collected between 1976 and 1988) hence, Manitoba has 3.6% of the Canadian breeding population of Ring-billed Gulls. Populations in Manitoba are considered high by Koonz and Rakowski (1985), and on the rise.

Similar population growth patterns have been reported in Alberta were numbers increased from 20,000 pairs in 1968 to nearly 40,000 pairs in 1977. The continent-wide population explosion has seen the Ring-billed Gull displacing the Common Tern in mixed colonies and is considered a management problem (Blokpoel and Weseloh 1999).

Management. There is no continent-wide management program for Ring-billed Gulls other than the Migratory Birds Convention Act. "In Ontario, recent concerns with gull numbers in urban and suburban areas associated with airline flight safety, human health, agricultural and horticultural damage, nesting on urban roofs and interfering with industrial operations, incompatibility with land use (parks), and encroachment on Common Tern nesting habitat, are dealt with on a case by case basis" (Ryder 1993). Depending on need, special permits have been issued to control gulls using a variety of methods including noise and distress calls, falconry, prevention of nesting by stretching monofilament lines over the nesting area, removal or oiling of eggs, or the destruction of nesting habitat. Killing gulls, other than through falconry, has not been permitted by the Canadian Wildlife Service, but in the

United States kill permits have been issued at airports and orchards.

4.3 Common Tern

Sterna hirundo

The Common Tern is a breeding resident of the Riverton Sandy Bar. It builds a nest in shallow depressions in sand, gravel, turf or rock (Godfrey 1986). Godfrey (1986) describes the Common Tern as similar to the Arctic Tern with a black and crown and nape, grey back and primaries, tail forked with a red bill. Adults have a black patch that extends from in front of the eye around the back of the head. Its diet is comprised of almost exclusively fish and aquatic invertebrates.

Breeding. Usually breeds at age three with clutch sizes usually of three olive or brown eggs laid between late May to early June. The incubation period is 21-28 days and incubation is carried out by both parents. Fledging occurs around 28 days after hatching. The nest is a slight depression in soil lined with grasses, seashells, or bits of seaweeds. Common Terns nest in colonies often with other terns (Godfrey 1986).

Population Status. There are an estimated 100,000 Common Terns in North America. Numbers in Manitoba appear to be in decline (Koonz and Rakowski 1985). In a survey conducted in southern Manitoba by Koonz and Rakowski (1985) in 1979, they found 24 colonies totaling 3,684 nests with colonies ranging in size from 20 to 1,000 nests.

Management. Habitat loss, prolonged inclement weather, nest predation, human disturbance, displacement by gull species, and possibly chemical contaminants are factors affecting nesting terns. Human disturbance near colonies during the

nesting season should be prevented. Preferred nesting sites contain 10-30% vegetative cover. Sites should be managed accordingly to provide sparsely vegetated areas that are free of avian and mammalian predators, such as great horned owls, minks, rats, raccoons, and red foxes.

4.4 Piping Plover

Charadrius melodus

Piping Plovers are migratory shorebirds that inhabit isolated beaches and sandflats (Alberta Environment 2000). Piping Plovers have been observed along the coast of Lake Winnipeg and have used the Riverton Sandy Bar during migration and for nesting. Given that Piping Plovers are listed as an endangered species in

Canada and have used the Riverton Sandy Bar (Dave Roberts, personal communication, March 2001), it is important that the species be discussed within this plan.

There are also occasional records of nesting Piping Plovers (nationally endangered and globally vulnerable) on the Riverton Sandy Bar and on the adjacent Hecla Island Sand Point. During the 1991 International Piping Plover census one pair of Piping Plovers was recorded at each site, The 1996 International census only found a single pair of Piping Plovers on the Hecla Sandy Point. Piping Plover populations at this IBA do not meet IBA population thresholds as IBA population thresholds indicate that at least 17 Piping Plovers are required for a site to be regarded as nationally significant.

Description. The Piping Plover is a small, thrush-sized shorebird that blends well into its setting. It is primarily the color of dry sand, but has distinctive black markings (a black collar or breastband, a black band above the white forehead, and a partially black tail); a white rump and bright orange legs.

Biology. Piping Plovers arrive on their breeding grounds in Canada in late April or May. Males establish a territory and attract a mate with dramatic aerial and ground displays. They scrape a shallow nest-site in sand or gravel, which the female then inspects. Usually lay four creamy to sand colored eggs marked with dark spots, camouflaging them in the sand. Both parents participate in the incubation of eggs and care of nestlings, though the young are able to find their own food within hours of hatching. Females can begin to breed at one year of age and will renest once or twice in a season if the eggs are destroyed, but can only produce one brood per year.

Photo: Typical Piping Plover habitat along Riverton Sandy Bar 2001.

Habitat: Piping Plovers are found on lakeshores, river sand bars and ocean coasts. They nest just above the normal high-water mark on exposed sandy or gravelly beaches in both fresh and salt water environments. On the prairies, nesting occurs on gravel shores of shallow, saline lakes and on sandy shores of larger prairie lakes such as the Riverton Sandy Bar along Lake Winnipeg.

Population and Distribution: The Piping Plover is a North American species that breeds in three areas: along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to South Carolina; on the American shores of the Great Lakes (Michigan); and throughout the Great Plains from the southern Canadian Prairies to Nebraska. In Canada, Piping Plovers breed in central Alberta, southern Saskatchewan, southern Manitoba, southern Ontario, southern Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. The species winters along the Atlantic coast, from South Carolina to Florida, and along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

The numbers of Piping Plovers have been decreasing everywhere; the most dramatic declines have occurred in the Great Lakes region. About 25% of Canada's Piping Plovers (some 450-485 birds) are found in the Atlantic provinces; the remainder are mostly in the Prairie provinces. About 25% of the Canadian Prairie population occurs in the Quill Lakes area of Saskatchewan, where more than 430 Piping Plovers were observed in 1996.

Manitoba Status. Piping plovers have been surveyed annually by the Province of Manitoba since 1986. Numbers vary greatly from year to year due mainly to fluctuations in water levels and availability of nesting beaches, but have been declining considerably from more than 100 pairs in 1986 to 15 pairs in 1999. Piping Plovers are considered rare in Manitoba and was designated as an Endangered Species in Manitoba in 1992 (Manitoba Conservation 2001).

Protection. The Piping Plover is protected in Canada under the federal Migratory Birds Convention Act of 1917, and under the Endangered Species Acts of Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick. The Piping Plover is classified as an Endangered Species in Canada by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and recognized as globally vulnerable. It is a declining breeder with only about 4000 birds are left in North America.

Recovery Plan. The first recovery plan for the Piping Plover was approved in 1989 and an updated plan was submitted for approval in 2000. Plan goals are to maintain a self-sustaining population of at least 1626 adults in the Prairie and 670 adults in the Atlantic portions of its range, and to maintain at least the current range of the species. There are Prairie and Atlantic Piping Plover Recovery Teams that work cooperatively and share a common recovery plan. These teams also work cooperatively with the two U.S. Piping Plover recovery teams.

Long-term Objectives include increasing the Prairie population to at least 1626 adults and maintain this population with no net loss of habitat due to human action; increasing and maintaining average chick fledging rates above 1.13 chicks/pair/year in the Prairies; achieve minimum provincial population targets of 120 in Manitoba.

4.5 Shorebirds and Geese

The peninsula and sand islands are also used by several bird species during migration. The area hosts large concentrations of migrating Canada Geese and Snow Geese, however, numbers have not been documented. It has also been reported that hundreds of migrating Sanderlings use the site along with lesser numbers of Ruddy Turnstones and other shorebirds that use Lake Manitoba during migration.

5.0 Elements of Conservation Interest

5.1 Hecla Sandy Point

The Hecla Sandy Point is the southern most end of Hecla Island on Lake Winnipeg. It is a sandy point used by American White Pelicans, gulls and terns for roosting.

6.0 Land Ownership And Use

The Manitoba Rural Municipality of Bifrost has designated the Sandy Bar Beach a recreational area. The Riverton Sandy Bar and sand islands are crown lands.

The agricultural and fishing industries have traditionally been the basis of the local economy. Riverton functions as an active harbor for commercial fishing industry in this region. The Riverton wharf is located on the Icelandic River in the Village of Riverton. It is primarily used by 43 commercial fishers for off loading their catch and berthing.

Lake Winnipeg is used not only for the purpose of fisheries and recreation but also acts as a reservoir, with an operating range of 216.71 m to 217.93 m, for the operation of Manitoba Hydro's hydroelectric generating stations on the Churchill River. The general result of these hydroelectric projects has been the stabilization of water levels across Lake Manitoba. Stabilization of water levels has had deleterious impacts on Lake Winnipeg marshes mainly through reducing marsh vegetation. Many bird species prefer marshes with a 50:50 split between open water and marsh vegetation. Stablized water levels have resulted in more "open" marshes with declining levels of vegetation.

6.1 Settlement History: The Establishment of New Iceland.

Terrible economic and climatic conditions in mid-19th century Iceland drove many Icelanders from their home in search of a Nyja Island or “new Iceland” where they could use their own language and achieve their cultural and material aspirations. Many looked to North America where the first Icelandic immigrant arrived in 1872. Early destinations in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Wisconsin and Nebraska proved unsuitable so the migrants turned their attention to the Canadian Northwest.

After negotiations with the Canadian government, they moved to an Icelandic reserve along 58 kilometres of the western side of Lake Winnipeg between Boundary Creek and the mouth of the Icelandic River as well as Hecla Island. The reserve was designated “New Iceland.” On October 21, 1875, some 235 settlers from Ontario and Wisconsin finished the last leg of their long journey at Willow Point at the south end of their reserve. Too late in the season to go on to the Icelandic River, they set up tents and built shelters near present-day Gimli, Manitoba. The next year, the second group of 1000 immigrants arrived directly from Iceland and settled at Riverton and Sandy Bar, on the Icelandic River.

The remoteness of the colony gave the Icelanders virtual autonomy over their own affairs. For a year after January 1877, the settlers debated the Constitution of New Iceland, which was ratified by the community in January 1878. The Constitution was a combination of Canadian provincial and municipal law, modified to local conditions. Although never officially

sanctioned by the Canadian Parliament, it was the basis for local government until 1887 when Manitoba municipal government replaced it. The Icelandic Reserve remained exclusive to Icelanders until an 1897 Order-in-Council opened it to non-Icelanders.

7.0 Conservation Management Achieved

The Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation contracted Green Spaces Environmental Consulting (David Hatch) which provided a report entitled "Sandy Bar Beach and Marsh Study to Develop a Tourism Initiative" dated December 14, 1999.

The Sandy Bar is currently zoned as park area by the Rural Municipality of Bifrost.

8.0 IBA Stakeholder Group Activity

8.1 Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation.

The Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation will be the group "championing" this CCP.

8.1 NEICOM

The North-East Interlake Community Futures Development Corporation Inc. (NEICOM Developments) is a volunteer driven non-profit community economic development corporation. Its purpose is to assist communities in their own efforts to identify, develop and undertake measures that will expand permanent employment and help individuals adjust and adapt to a changing economic environment.

9.0 Opportunities

9.1 Ecotourism

Currently, the local communities surrounding Riverton and surrounding towns benefit very little from ecotourism expenditures in the area. Scace et al. (1992) defined ecotourism as:

"Ecotourism is an enlightening nature travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities".

Ecotourism is a significant component of the largest growth industry on Earth - tourism (Scace et al. 1992). Tourism worldwide is a $250 billion dollar per year industry and growing dramatically (Scace et al. 1992), bird watching in Point Pelee National Park in Ontario generates $6 million annually. Ecotourism can provide the economic justification to conserve areas that might otherwise not be protected. Bird watching is a significant component of ecotourism. Bird watching is conservatively estimated to be worth more than $20 billion each year in North America.

There is a need to market and coordinate ecotourism opportunities to benefit the local community of Riverton. Ecotourism can create jobs. The willingness of individuals to "pay substantially" for ecotourism opportunities are high, as evident in the fees charged for 13-day trips from

Winnipeg. Research indicates that the key concepts underlying ecotourist motivations are wilderness, wildlife, parks, learning, nature and physical activity (Eagles 1997).

> *"Ecotourism can generate badly needed revenue for local and regional economies, heightened local awareness of the importance of conservation, and create new incentives for governments and dwellers in and around appealing natural areas to preserve them" Scace et al (1992, p. 11)."*

Efforts to foster greater community awareness and profile Riverton Sandy Bar will result in economic benefits to the surrounding communities.

Betsy Ramsay's Grave and Hecla Grindstone Provincial Park could be packaged with the Sandy Bar IBA as a Manitoba attraction for tourists.

Betsy Ramsay Grave. John Ramsay, a prominent member of the Saulteaux band lived in a small cabin at Sandy Bar when the Icelandic settlers arrived in 1876. Even though there was tension between the natives and the Icelandic settlers, who were entering the native's domain, Ramsay sympathized with the unprepared settlers and helped them through the winter. When the smallpox epidemic hit the colony, Ramsay's wife Betsy and four of his children died. He buried his family near Lake Winnipeg with the sounds that Betsy loved. Devastated by his loss, in 1880 Ramsay traveled by dogsled to trade his furs for a marble headstone to place on Betsy's grave. The engraver misspelled the name on the stone, however, since Ramsay could not read, he did not notice that Betsy Ramsay for an eternity had become "Betsy Rumsay". Betsy Ramsay's grave is located near Sandy Bar Beach and is marked with a white picket fence.

9.2 IBA Website

The Town of Riverton maintains a world wide website (http://www.rivertoncanada.com/). There is opportunity to foster awareness of birding opportunities available at the Sandy Bar IBA on the existing website.

9.4 Traditional Ecological Knowledge

There is opportunity to partner with Icelantic people of the area and compile indigenous knowledge as it relates to birds and wildlife conservation in the area. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) recognizes that indigenous people have their own "scientific" way of thinking which is different than the western philosophy of thought, but equally important and often overlooked. To promote the use of indigenous knowledge in the community, ways of documenting the knowledge of community elders and making it locally available should be encouraged. Work in this area is particularly urgent, since so much knowledge is being lost so rapidly.

Documenting and preserving the use of indigenous knowledge at the community level and using this knowledge to address resource management issues are complex undertakings. A variety of methods

(reports, videos, or photographs to document TEK for the cultural record) should be used to capture TEK. TEK should be documented and, with community approval, made readily accessible to the scientific community so that it may be referenced and properly cited. In this way, the holders of TEK can be given full recognition and the information will not be regarded as anecdotal data or as a "new discovery" when scientists use it. TEK should be considered an important part of the knowledge base and not a token.

TEK could be used to describe the history of the IBA as it relates to the significant bird species, traditional uses of these birds and traditional hunting of the avifauna.

10.0 Threats

10.1 Human Disturbance

Koonz and Rakowski (1985) cited water-level manipulations and human disturbance the major threats to Manitoba's Common Terns.

There is also a desire to further develop the Riverton Sandy Bar for ecotourism which could potentially increase the level of human disturbance. While ecotourists provide economic opportunities, they also can pose a threat to the resource and the birds using the Riverton Sandy Bar by degrading the environment, damaging behaviors, trampling habitat and vegetation, and inappropriate use levels. There would be a need to develop sustainable and ethical ecotourism guidelines, which would protect birds using Riverton Sandy Bar and Sand Islands.

The channel between the islands and the peninsula is deep enough that ATV traffic is unable to reach the islands even under low water conditions. However, ATV traffic on the peninsula and humans accessing the sand islands and the Hecla Sandy Point by boat are threats to the breeding birds (Dave Roberts, personal communication, March 2001). Birds will leave the peninsula or islands if repeatedly disturbed.

10.2 Loss of Habitat

Piping Plovers are in direct competition with people for open sand and gravel beaches (Alberta Environment 2000). Undisturbed beaches such as the Riverton Sandy Bar and sand islands are becoming rare. The most important limiting factor for Piping Plovers is loss of these habitats to humans and the human disturbance around the nesting sites.

The artificially high water levels that are maintained by the Manitoba Provincial Government has also led to less sand shoreline for the Piping Plovers and increased erosion of the peninsula and islands.

Lake Winnipeg acts as a reservoir with an operating range of 216.71 m to 217.93 m, for the operation of Manitoba Hydro's hydroelectric generating stations on the Churchill River. The general result of these hydroelectric projects has been the stabilization of water levels across Lake Manitoba. Stabilization of water levels has had deleterious impacts on Lake Winnipeg marshes mainly through reducing marsh vegetation. Many bird species prefer marshes with a 50:50 split between open water and

marsh vegetation. Stablized water levels have resulted in more "open" marshes with declining levels of vegetation.

10.3 Pesticides

Pesticides are recognized as a threat to many birds. Ring-billed Gulls have been impacted by poly-chlorinated biphenyl pesticides as were many other birds. Agriculture is a primary landuse in the eastern Interlake region of Manitoba. Birds foraging on nearby agricultural fields are exposed to chemical contaminates.

10.4 Aspen/Willow Encroachment

Aspen and Willows have established on the peninsula and islands. It could become a significant threat to the beach habitat unless some sort of natural or human intervention occurs (Dave Roberts, personal communication, March 2001). Encroachment by woody vegetation should be considered the highest ranking threat to avian nesting habitat along the Sandy Bar.

10.5 Other Threats

Common Tern populations on the Canadian Great Lakes are declining with the main stress on populations being invasion of colonies by Ring-billed Gulls and/or vegetation (Blokpoel and Weseloh 1999). The interaction between these two species on the Riverton Sandy Bar and sand islands should be studied.

In years when the islands are connected to the main land mammalian predators, such as minks, rats, raccoons, and red foxes may become a threat to breeding birds.

Photo: Riverton Beach Area 2001

11.0 Conservation Goals and Objectives

Overall Objective: The intent of this CCP will be to increase awareness of and the associated birding and ecotourism opportunities. This may best be accomplished through education, extension and promotional objectives. Vision: The Riverton Sandy Bar Important Bird Area will be conserved in perpetuity for its importance to the conservation of Ring-billed gulls, Common Terns and other bird species that provide economic, ecological and educational benefits to the residents of Riverton and Manitoba.

Threats such as water levels, pesticides, and predators are not addressed in this section as the stakeholder groups primary interests are ecotourism and awareness. It is suggested that bird surveys be conducted in an effort to document which bird species and how many are using the IBA and to monitor population trends. These could be accomplished by the local stakeholder groups in cooperation with Manitoba Conservation.

Research should also be considered and may focus on the interactions between nesting gulls and Common Terns.

The following conservation goals are not ranked in order of highest priority. However, if project funding is limited encroachment by woody vegetation should be considered the highest ranking threat to avian nesting habitat along the Sandy Bar.

Conservation Goals

Objective	*Key Partners*	*Action Required*
Protection of primary bird use areas from human intrusion.	• Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation	**Lead Agency: Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation. Timeline: Fall 2001**
Create Ecotourism Guidelines for birders/tourists to follow that visit Riverton Sandy Bar. Limit ATV and boat disturbance. Create areas that can sustain the traffic of humans through trails and viewing mounds.	• North East Interlake Ducks Unlimited Committee • Ducks Unlimited Canada • MB Conservation • Riverton and Area Chamber of Commerce • Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation	May be accomplished through brochures or interpretative signage. Production of an education brochure on birds and birding at Riverton Sandy Bar. **Lead Agency: Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation. Timeline: Fall 2001**

Control/Manage encroachment of woody vegetation on Sandy Bar	• Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation • Manitoba Conservation	**Lead Agency: Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation.** **Timeline: Fall 2001**
Further promote Riverton Sandy Bar and town of Riverton	• Riverton Economic Development Offices. • Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation	Create Website to promote area and birding. This may be accomplished by adding IBA and bird information website. Sightings of rare bird species may be added monthly. The website can be monitored in an attempt to detect trends in visitors/hits. **Lead Agency: Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation. Timeline: Fall 2001**

12.0 Evaluating Success

The Riverton Sandy Bar IBA conservation plan will be reviewed on an annual basis at the meetings of the Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation. The objectives in the above table should be reviewed at the meetings and progress towards these goals measured.

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Appendix I: Riverton Sandy Bar IBA Contacts

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Dave Roberts Wildlife Technician MB Conservation	Gimli, Manitoba, R0C 1B0	Ph: (204) 642-2261
Irwin Schellenberg MB Conservation Winnipeg Beach	Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation Box 250, Riverton, Manitoba, R0C 2R0	Ph: (204) 389-2752 Fax: (204) 389-5422
Keith Eliasson Chairmen Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation	Riverton-Bifrost Community Development Corporation Box 250, Riverton, Manitoba, R0C 2R0 NEICOM Developments	Ph: (204) 378-2793 Home Ph: (204) 378-2206 Fax: (204) 378-5649 Ph: (204) 378-5106 1-800-378-5106 No Charge
Randy Woroniuk	Manitoba Conservation Riverton District Supervisor	Ph: (204) 378-2261
Jim Leduchowski Chairmen North East Interlake Ducks	Arborg, Manitoba R0C 0A0	Ph: (204) 376-2220

Appendix II: Bird Species and Population Data

Species	Season	No. of birds Peak Day	References
Piping Plover	Breeding	June 12 1988	Moszynski and Koonz (1988)
Forester's Tern	B	27 nests July 28 1970	David Hatch (1972)
Common Terns	B		Moszynski & Koonz (1988)
Ring-billed Gulls	B		Moszynski & Koonz (1988)
Bald Eagles	B	4-5 Nests	
Red-Necked Grebe	B		

Appendix III: IBA Canada Partners

BirdLife International

A pioneer in its field, BirdLife International (BL) is the first non-government organization dedicated to promoting world-wide interest in and concern for the conservation of all birds and the special contribution they make to global biodiversity. BirdLife operates as a partnership of non-governmental conservation organizations, grouped together within geographic regions (e.g. Europe, Africa, Americas) for the purpose of planning and implementing regional programs. These organizations provide a link to on-the-ground conservation projects that involve local people with local expertise and knowledge. There are currently 20 countries involved in the Americas program throughout North, Central and South America.

For further information about BirdLife International, check the following web site: <http://www.birdlife.net/.

The Canadian Important Bird Areas Program has been undertaken by a partnership of two lead agencies. The Canadian Nature Federation and Bird Studies Canada are the Canadian BirdLife International partners.

The Canadian Nature Federation (CNF)

The Canadian Nature Federation is a national conservation organization with a mission to be Canada's voice for the protection of nature, its diversity, and the processes that sustain it. The CNF represents the naturalist community and works closely with our provincial, territorial and local affiliated naturalists organizations to directly reach 100,000 Canadians. The strength of our grassroots naturalists' network allows us to work effectively and knowledgeably on national conservation issues that affect a diversity of ecosystems and human populations in Canada. The CNF also works in partnership with other environmental organizations, government and industry, wherever possible.

Our approach is open and cooperative while remaining firm in our goal of developing ecologically-sound solutions to conservation problems. CNF's web site is <http://www.cnf.ca.

Bird Studies Canada (BSC)

The mission of Bird Studies Canada is to advance the understanding, appreciation and conservation of wild birds and their habitats, in Canada and elsewhere, through studies that engage the skills, enthusiasm and support of its members, volunteers, staff and the interested public. Bird Studies Canada believes that thousands of volunteers working together, with the guidance of a small group of professionals, can accomplish much more than could the two groups working independently. Current programs collectively involve over 10,000 volunteer participants from across Canada. Bird Studies Canada is recognized nation-wide as a leading and respected not-for-profit conservation organization dedicated to the study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats. Bird Studies Canada's web site is <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/

Appendix IV: Funding Opportunities

The following funding opportunities are available to assist with delivery of project objectives:

- **Important Bird Areas Community Action Fund.** Contact the Canadian Nature Federation. (www.ibacanada.ca)

- **Manitoba Government Special Conservation Fund.** Set up to promote sustainable development at the community level. Finances conservation projects that local groups and organizations support and need in their communities, that sustain and enhance resource productivity and improve the quality of life of all Manitobans. Eligibility includes non-government conservation organizations capable of administering the funding such as: community groups and associations; school and youth groups; conservation groups; environmental groups. Funding is limited to $25,000 per project per organization, per year. Cover only direct spending on projects, not administrative costs. Examples of projects include: conserving wetlands; tree planting and enhancement of woodlands; fish and wildlife habitat restoration and protection.

- **Manitoba Government Sustainable Development Fund.**

Conservation of resources, preservation and maintenance of urban forests and ecosystems, initiatives to rehabilitate and revitalize degraded areas. Projects that help Manitobans make educated decisions and take action regarding the environment, such as education and awareness activities, training, research, seminars and forums. A project-funding cap of $50,000 has been set, however, projects that require funding in excess of this amount may be considered. Applicants are encouraged to investigate alternative funding arrangements with other agencies for cash contributions or in-kind support. In-kind support can include donations of equipment, materials, office space, volunteer time and professional service. The SDIF will normally support one-time only grants. For further information:Sustainable Development Innovations Fund- c/o Manitoba Conservation - Pollution Prevention Branch - 123 Main Street,Suite 160 - Winnipeg MB R3C 1A5. Phone: (204) 945-8443 - Toll Free: 1-800-282-8069 ext 8443 - Fax: (204) 945-1211.

- **Ducks Unlimited Canada. Institute for Wetlands and Waterfowl Research.** 204-467-3000

- **Wildlife Habitat Canada.** 7 Hinton Avenue North, Suite 200. Ottawa, ON K1Y 4P1 . Telephone: (613) 722-2090. Fax: (613) 722-3318 . Email: reception@whc.org

- **Murphy Foundation (Winnipeg).**

- **Environment Canada EcoAction 2000.** The EcoAction Community Funding Program is an Environment Canada program that provides financial support to community groups for projects that have measurable, positive impacts on the environment. Non-profit groups and

organizations are eligible to apply to the Funding Program. This includes, but is not limited to: community groups, environmental groups, aboriginal groups and First Nations councils, service clubs, associations and youth and seniors' organizations. Public awareness and capacity-building activities can only be funded if they are part of a project that produces measurable environmental results. Project examples - restoring a wetland, • restoring and conserving habitat through a variety of enhancement techniques, and persuading community members to protect environmentally sensitive areas. Funding is available up to a maximum of $100 000; however, the average amount is $25 000. Application deadlines - February 1st and October 1st

- **Mountain Equipment Co-op.** To provide financial assistance to Canadian environmental groups involved in activities concerned with environmental conservation and wilderness protection. The aim of the Environmental Project Grants is to help preserve the environment and educate the public about environmentally responsible use of the outdoors. Land acquisition grants will be up to an aggregate of $100,000 annually. The grant range for projects is generally from $2,000 to $10,000. **A**pplication deadline - January 31, May 31 and September 30, annually. Approval notification usually takes up to 6 weeks.

- **Friends of the Environment Foundation Canada Fund.** Canada Trust. To fund projects that make a positive difference to the environment. Projects may be local, regional or national in scope. Not-for profit organizations. Projects that: help protect and preserve the Canadian environment; address a local, regional, or national environmental issue; have measurable results; involve and benefit the community, region, and country; and make a sustainable difference to the well-being of our environment. Funding ranges from $10,000 to $100,000. Projects are approved as a one-time grant and should not expect ongoing funding. Applications are reviewed on an annual basis. The deadline for 1998 applications was October 2, 1998. The Friends of the Environment Canada Fund Advisory Board will announce its decision by April 1998. A new deadline is set each year. Application forms are available by writing to the address below or from the website below. Contact Friends of the Environment Foundation Canada Fund. Canada Trust, 161 Bay Street, 33rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5J 2T2. Tel.: 1-800-361-5333, Website: http://www.fef.ca/index.html

- **Manitoba Hydro (Winnipeg).** Brendan Carruthers 204-474-4934

- **Shell Environmental Fund.** Shell Canada. A national program to provide financial support for innovative, community-based, action-oriented projects that improve and protect the Canadian environment. $5,000. Deadlines for applications are February 28 and September 15. Applicants must complete the Shell Environmental Fund application form, which can be obtained by writing to the address

below. Contact: Nicole Belval, Shell Environmental Fund, 7101 Jean-Talon Street East, Suite 900 Anjou, Quebec Tel.: (514) 356-7036 Fax.: (514) 356-1662. Website: http://www.shellcan.com

- **Manitoba Rural Green Team.**

- **ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERS FUND.** The Environmental Partners Fund provides up to 50% of eligible project cost, on a matching basis, to a maximum of $200,000 over three years for new community-based activities that protect, preserve or restore the environment, or provide knowledge on environmental issues that enable people to take direct action. Canadian non-profit, non-governmental groups working at the community level are eligible. Applications must be submitted by June 1 and December 1 each year. Applications for projects with a total value not exceeding $20,000 may be submitted throughout the year. Information and applications may be obtained from Environment Canada regional offices, or: Sonya Strasbourg Environment Canada Hull, Quebec (819) 994-4939; Fax 994-1245.

- **Friends of the Environment Foundation Community Fund.** The Friends of the Environment Foundation Community Fund considers projects that meet the following criteria: protects and preserves the Canadian environment; assists young Canadians in understanding and participating in environmental activities in local communities; enhances partnership among environmental organizations. Applications to the Community Fund are reviewed throughout the year. http://www.canadatrust.com/

- **Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council (MRAC) Environmental Stewardship Initiative (Habitat and Biodiversity)**

508-800 Portage Ave
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G ON4
Ph: 204-982-4792 Mya Sellgren
www.mrac.mb.ca

Priority to proposals with significant level of partnering with other funding agencies. Support for regionally specific wildlife habitat issues and the application of habitat-friendly practices. Fund up to 1.3 of total project cost or $100,000. Deadline August 31st.