



WHAT WE HEARD

FRCN Conservation Areas Initiative – Round 1 Engagement Summary

March 2023



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PHOTO CREDITS

Ron Thiessen – front cover, 6, 12
Trevor Gill – 7, 13, 14
Walter Potrebka – 9
Colleen Mitchell – 10
Phil Hossack – 11, 15
Kelsey Bell – back cover

Acknowledgement

The FRCN Conservation Areas Initiative acknowledges and respects the existing and pending Treaty and traditional land use rights of First Nations, as outlined with respect to FRCN in the 2013 “Protocol Respecting Crown-Aboriginal Consultations” (Appendix H).

This proposal will seek alignment with other neighbouring First Nations in a way that respects their existing or pending Treaty and traditional land use rights, and support a collaborative approach to regional conservation.

We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for everyone who has taken the time to share their thoughts, priorities and visions for conservation with us, including: the elders of Fisher River Cree Nation and Peguis First Nation; communities and councils throughout the region; commercial stakeholders; survey respondents; and those who engage with us on social media. In light of the many challenges our communities have faced during the pandemic, your efforts and care are appreciated all the more. Thank you for valuing the health of our natural environment, and helping us work toward a sustainable future in our region.

Introduction

This initiative is led by Fisher River Cree Nation, in partnership with Peguis First Nation and the Manitoba chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

The Initiative has the support of the provincial and federal governments.

The goal of the initiative is to protect the health of our lands and waters so they can continue to provide us with sustainable economic opportunities and support our cherished lifestyles and cultures.

The purpose of the engagement process is to ensure that the voices and wishes of Manitobans—especially area residents, Indigenous peoples, local communities, and regional stakeholders—are considered when determining which areas should be conserved within the study area.

We are developing a balanced conservation proposal within a study area that stretches from Riverton to Kinnow Bay Provincial Park and includes a section of Lake Winnipeg.

We do not expect every piece of this area to be protected: we are studying the broad needs and diverse interests of the region in order to develop an appropriate and successful conservation proposal.

Preserving the natural landscape will also provide sustainable economic opportunities such as tourism and a healthy fishing industry.

These lands are key to restoring the health of Lake Winnipeg because they act as natural filters against damaging nutrients. They help to prevent floods and provide habitat for an incredible array of wildlife. The forests and wetlands serve as a massive carbon sink, which

helps to mitigate climate change, and the trees clean the air we all breathe.

Round 1 of the process was designed as an open process which aimed to assess the values and preferences of regional residents and organisations with an interest in the area. Round 2 will involve more focused questions and a review of the draft proposal, which will be refined in order to reflect the values, preferences and comments of regional residents and organizations with an interest in the area.

The engagement process began in early 2020 with meetings with Fisher River Cree Nation (FRCN) elders. Plans shifted drastically due to the COVID-19 pandemic which struck in March 2020. Some meetings were held virtually, others were postponed until restrictions eased. We deployed virtual tools like a photo contest and scavenger hunts to engage regional residents we could not meet with in person.

Engagement Process Results

- * 2 meetings with FRCN elders
- * 20 interviews with Indigenous Knowledge keepers from FRCN and Peguis
- * 2 community meetings with FRCN and Peguis band members
- * 2 virtual open houses for regional residents
- * 35 meetings with 28 different groups of: political leaders; residents or cottage owner associations; business groups; organisations with an interest in the region; stakeholders; and rights holders.
- * 455 responses to an online survey of regional residents and people with an interest in the area.

Our Engagement Process

Round 1 of our community and stakeholder engagement process (see **Figure 1 - The Engagement Process**, below) involved a number of methods to build relationships and awareness of the Initiative. Our general goals were to better understand the priorities of regional communities, rights holders and stakeholders related to sustainable development and conservation in the region. The majority of Round 1 work was conducted from early spring of 2021 to the summer of 2022. Round 2 of the engagement process will be conducted in 2023.



Figure 1 - The Engagement Process



Date	Activity	Details
June 2019	Elders Meeting	Guidance was sought from the Fisher River Cree Nation Elders group ahead of the launch of the formal engagement process in 2020.
April 6, 2021	Elders Meeting	Guidance was sought from FRCN Elders in a meeting held virtually because of the pandemic.
July 2020 – September 2021	Indigenous Knowledge Interviews	Interview Summaries are provided in the Knowledge Holder Interview Summary companion document to this report Appendix A .
April 13, 2021 (FRCN) April 15, 2021 (Peguis)	Community Meetings	Community meetings to introduce the initiative to FRCN and Peguis band members were held virtually due to the pandemic.
June 10 2021 to July 25, 2022 (Ongoing)	Community and Stakeholder Meetings	A total of 35 meetings with 28 different groups of: political leaders; residents or cottage owner associations; business groups; organizations with an interest in the region; stakeholders; and rights holders. A full list is provided in Appendix B .
October 7, 2021 & October 13, 2021	Online open houses	Two public open houses to introduce regional residents to the initiative were held virtually due to the pandemic.
FRCN – July 2021 Peguis – August 2021 Bifrost/Riverton – September 2021	Fisher River Scavenger Hunt	Land-based scavenger hunts using the online ‘Turfhunt’ app to promote the initiative and encourage people to explore the landscapes of the region.
December 5, 2021 to January 31, 2022	Community Voices photo contest	Our ‘Community Voices’ photo contest invited Interlake residents to tell us what they love about the southeastern Interlake region, with prizes drawn at random for those who made a submission. Summary attached in Appendix F .
December 5, 2021 to January 31, 2022	Online survey	Four hundred fifty-five (455) responses from across the southeastern Interlake region. Full details of what we heard can be found in the appendices, attached as follows: Appendix A – Survey results summary Appendix B – Verbatim Survey Comments
March 2022 to March 2023	Letters of support from Manitobans in support of the initiative's goal	3725 letters of support gathered

Table 1 – Round 1 Engagement Summary

Who We Heard From

Our initial survey was promoted through our growing network of rightsholders and stakeholders, and through our social media platforms, resulting in 455 people responding primarily from around the Southeastern Interlake region. Figure 2, below, shows a map of self-declared postal code data from those who responded is available in **Appendix C**. You may also view this data as an [online interactive map](#).

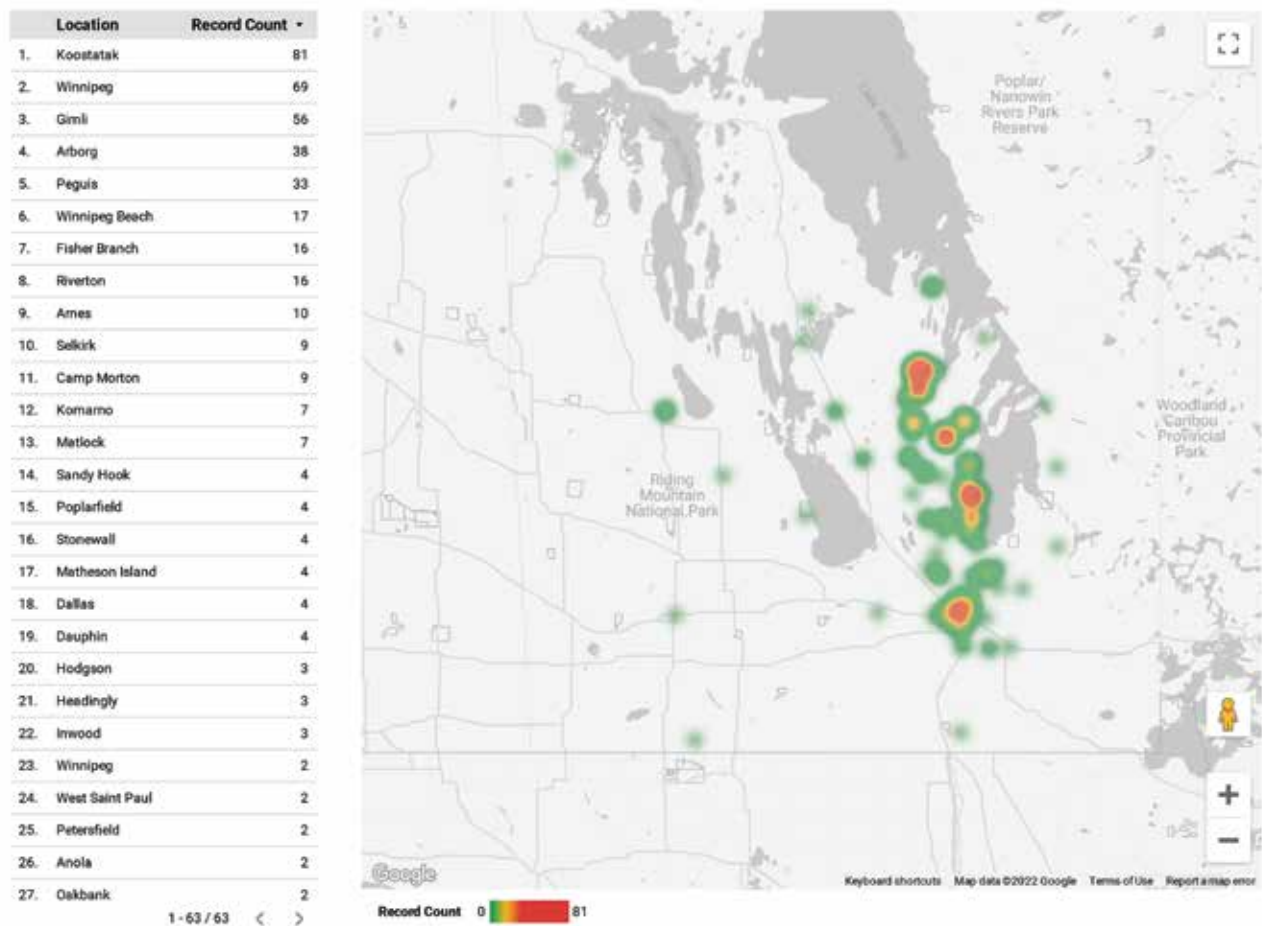


Figure 2 - Survey Respondent Postal Code Data

We also asked survey respondents to share their relationship to the region. A summary of how they identified is provided in **Figure 3**, below.

What is your relationship to the area?

*Choose all that apply**

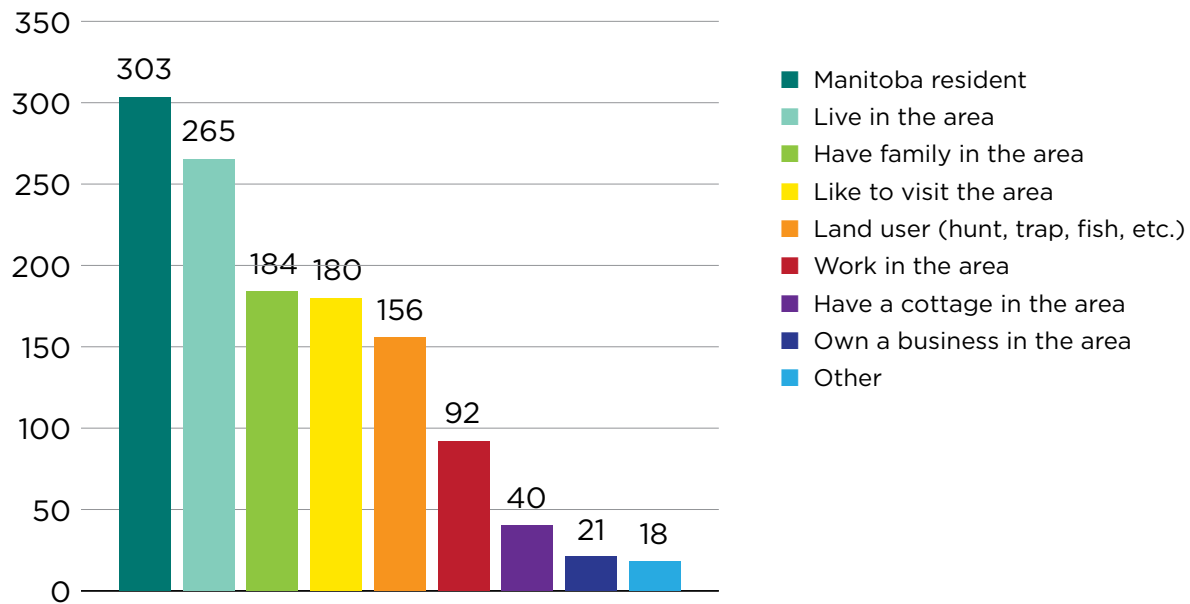


Figure 3 - Survey Respondent Relationships to Study Area

***Please note:** Though respondents were asked to ‘choose all responses that apply,’ over 100 respondents who indicated that they live in the area did not identify themselves as Manitoba residents. As such, **the response rates provided in Figure 3 are under-representative of respondent relationships to the region.**



Survey Results

The Round 1 online survey was open from December 5, 2021 to January 31, 2022. It was promoted through: our email list; the initiative Facebook page; social posts shared by partners, supporters and regional Facebook groups; and paid advertisements on Facebook targeting people in the study area. Four hundred and fifty-five (455) people responded to the survey.

This report outlines some of the sentiments and themes that have emerged during Round 1 of our engagement process. This information will be used to develop our initial proposals for additional conserved lands and waters in the Fisher Bay region.

A significant majority (94%) of survey respondents supported additional protections for our region’s lands and waters, as shown in **Figure 4**, right.

Do you support protecting land and water in this area?

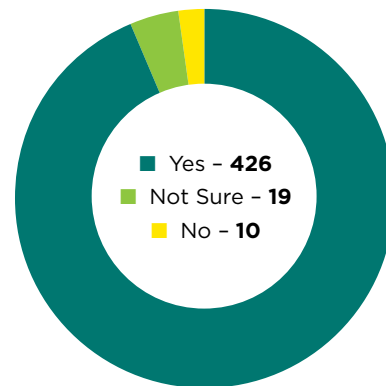


Figure 4 - Level of support for conserving lands and waters in the region

When asked what “What kind of development do you want to see in the region” responses varied. There was strong opposition to mining and logging and strong support for significant expansions to eco tourism and commercial fishing. A common thread was that people were generally satisfied with current levels of development. A summary of how much survey respondents supported each type of proposed development is provided in **Figure 5**, below.

What kind of development do you want to see in the region?

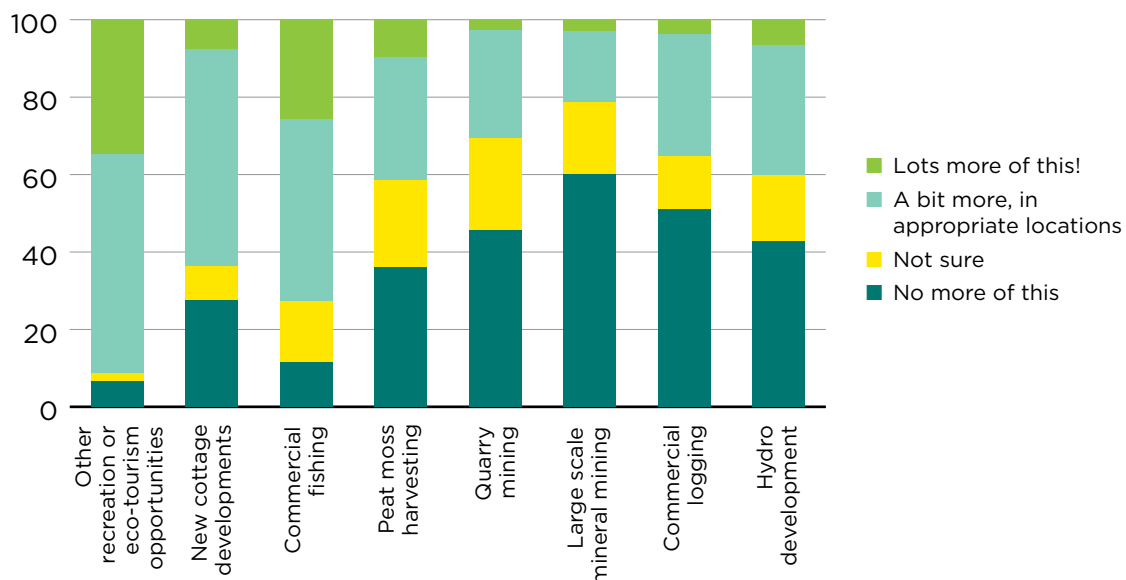


Figure 5 - Levels of support for various types of development

How important are the following activities to you?

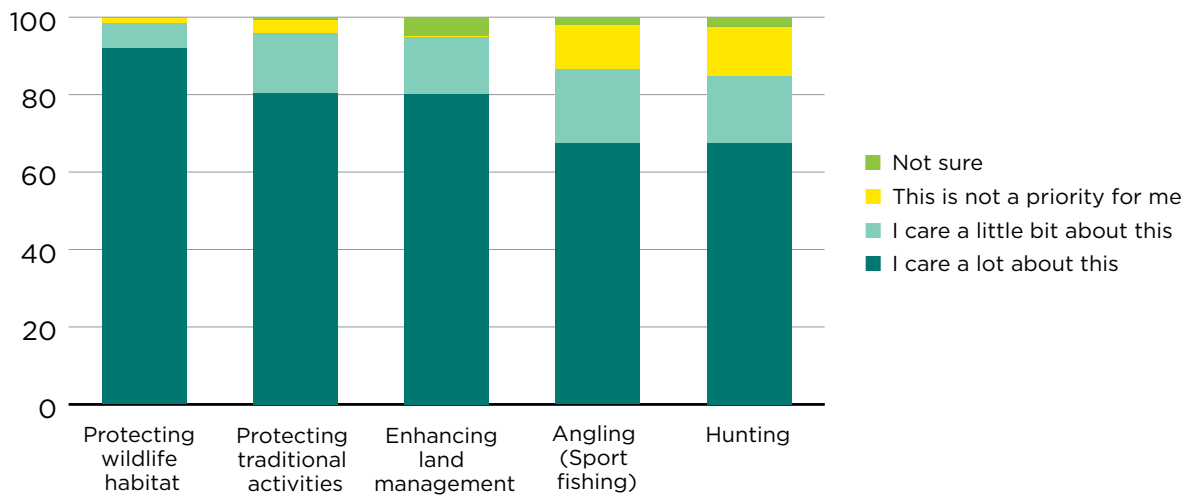


Figure 6 - Importance of land-based activities

Two questions in our survey asked respondents to provide feedback in their own words. These comments were coded and organized based on the themes that emerged, which are shown below for each of the two questions, along with some of the feedback provided to us. A full list of all comments submitted is provided in **Appendix B - Verbatim Survey Comments**. It is available in an extended electronic versions of this report and on the initiative website.





Q1: “If you want this area protected, tell us why. Are there particular activities or places you cherish and want to maintain? If you want to see development in this area, tell us what kind and/or where. Please let us know if these comments refer to a specific zone or area. Detailed maps are available in the map gallery.”

“We need to protect as much as possible because of the life it gives us. Many things can be done as long as the laws of sustainable harvesting are followed. I harvest medicines in many areas on that map. The medicines are abundant but mining, making dams, destroying the peat moss, over harvesting the forest are all so detrimental to the intricate balance of all of this, for fish, animals, medicines. Our people have done it for thousands of years without leaving destruction.”

“Many migrant and non migrant bird species nest in this area. Since the 70’s bird populations for many species has plummeted. They’re essential to nature as are many other animal species in the area. We need to protect natural habitat.”

“Areas used by family have been heavily impacted by peat mining – far less wildlife now. This activity and similar ‘development’ needs to stop. We support traditional Indigenous harvesting but that is it and would be compatible with any new protected areas.”

“Area 6 and 7 are known to be used by endangered bats and caves are in the area. I’m sure many more are unknown and could be threatened by increased quarrying.”

“We need access to the beach toward Fisher Bay. A parking lot should be built and maintained along the beach. There needs to be some brushing/clearing, picnic tables, barbecue sites, bathroom/change rooms.”

Topics mentioned in written responses to Q1

Habitat preservation	59
Species protection	41
Water Health	29
Zone specific comments	27
Hunting & Trapping	21
Future generations	20
Eco-tourism & Outdoor Learning	17
Forests and Lumber	17
Garbage/Pollution	15
Access	15
Protect it all	14
Camping and Hiking	14
Peat	13
Amenities	13
Foraging/Medicine picking	12
Sustainable use	12
Land management	12
Food & Agriculture	10
Sustainable harvesting	9
Motor sports	8
Birding	7
Mining	7
Cottages	7
Promotion	7
Traditional Indigenous Practices	7
Beaches/Swimming	6
Other watersports	6
Hydro	6
Dialogue & Cooperation	5
Habitat remediation	3
Treaty rights	3
Parks	2
Invasive species	2
Other	17



“I think the government needs to appreciate the untouched forests that we have, and instead of taxing landowners based on the fertility of their soil of the entire property (which is why many farmers remove all of the forested areas off farmland) , perhaps the government should give landowners green space credits for NOT removing trees from the land.”

“I enjoy all areas in the Interlake. Love to swim, fish, go boating, hiking etc. It is a pleasure to be able to take the grandkids out on the land and show them nature at its finest. Can not imagine not being surrounded by this natural beauty. We can already see the effects that over hunting and mining has had on this area.”

“We are losing so much wildlife/land and it’s all to do with over development and pollution... we need to save these areas in order to keep some habitats and ways of life alive and not wiped out.”

“We need to be cognizant of the balance between economic activity and protection of a healthy ecosystem. Meaningful consultation and cooperation between the keepers of the land, the environmental scientists and economic developers is essential. All the voices need to be heard – and heeded.”



Q2: “There are lots of different ways that people use the land and waters. Please share any additional issues of importance to you here.”

“My husband is a commercial fisherman keeping our water & land clean means a lot to our family. It’s our way of life fishing.”

“Living in cottage country, I appreciate those lakefront homes that leave the shoreline untouched. Thankfully, manicured lawns are few, but the concept of manicured lawns bothers me a lot: usage of fertilizers, excess water, shoreline manipulation.”

“I am of Indigenous descent, learning that there is nothing more important right now than protecting our land and water for future generations. I just wish more people saw it this way as well and start making a difference to protect our land and waters.”

“Keeping the lake clean from pollution from garbage that is improperly disposed of to proper drainage from fields and ditches. Also to preserve marsh areas.”

“Unnaturally high water levels due to aggressive regulation by Manitoba Hydro is one of the most destructive factors affecting shoreline areas and wetlands in our area. They have not been held accountable for any of the damage and adverse effects to the environment and property, in spite of an acknowledgement in the original study that this would place an unfair burden on residents and property owners along the shores of Lake Winnipeg. A more moderate and circumspect approach to regulation is needed to mitigate the negative impacts.”

Topics mentioned in written responses to Q2

Water Health	52
Habitat preservation	42
Garbage/ Pollution	38
Eco-tourism & Outdoor Learning	34
Species protection	29
Fishing	25
Traditional Indigenous Practices	23
Hunting and Trapping	21
Camping and Hiking	19
Foraging/ Medicine picking	13
Forests and Lumber	13
Land management	13
Food & Agriculture	12
Beaches/ Swimming	9
Access	9
Health and wellness	5
Cottages	5
Zone specific	5
Hydro	5
Motor sports	4
Sustainable harvesting	4
Habitat remediation	4
Treaty rights	4
Future generations	4
Other watersports	3
Mining	3
Sustainable use	3
Dialogue & Cooperation	3
Birding	2
Invasive species	2
Promotion	2
Peat	1
Protect it all	1
Improve knowledge base/ monitoring	1
Affordability	1
Other	5

“We would like to see that the peat moss plants in our area be stopped. More and more keep coming up down highway 234. They are destroying so many homes of wildlife, every year adds up. It’s very concerning with all animals and all human safety and lives.”

“We use water for our ceremonies and these lands belong to the wildlife that live here, if there’s a disruption to the natural laws of the land... there’s an unbalance.”

“Finding more ways to get rid of litter. Additional garbage receptacles or receptacles from kid camps for recycling crafts.”



Important Issues to Note

During our interviews with knowledge holders, a number of people were hesitant to name specific ‘areas to protect,’ and expressed a desire to see the whole region protected. They wondered what it would mean for any areas that did not receive such a designation.

During the engagement process, a number of communities expressed frustration with drainage issues, and identified a need to work collaboratively to manage water flows in the area; too often communities are working in ‘silos.’

Next Steps

Information gathered through our engagement process so far will be used to develop a draft conservation proposal for the study area. The proposal will be based on what we heard from regional leaders, elders and knowledge keepers, commercial operators, local groups, and individuals together with our analysis of scientific data. Round 2 of the engagement process will begin in 2023. We will present the draft proposal to community members, local political leadership and stakeholders and then refine it based upon that feedback. We will then work with the province of Manitoba to implement the conservation proposal.

Appendices

These documents are available in an extended electronic version of this report and on the initiative website: www.FRCNConservation.ca.

Appendix A – Knowledge Holders
Interviews Summary

Appendix B – Round 1 Rightsholder/Stakeholder
Meeting Summary

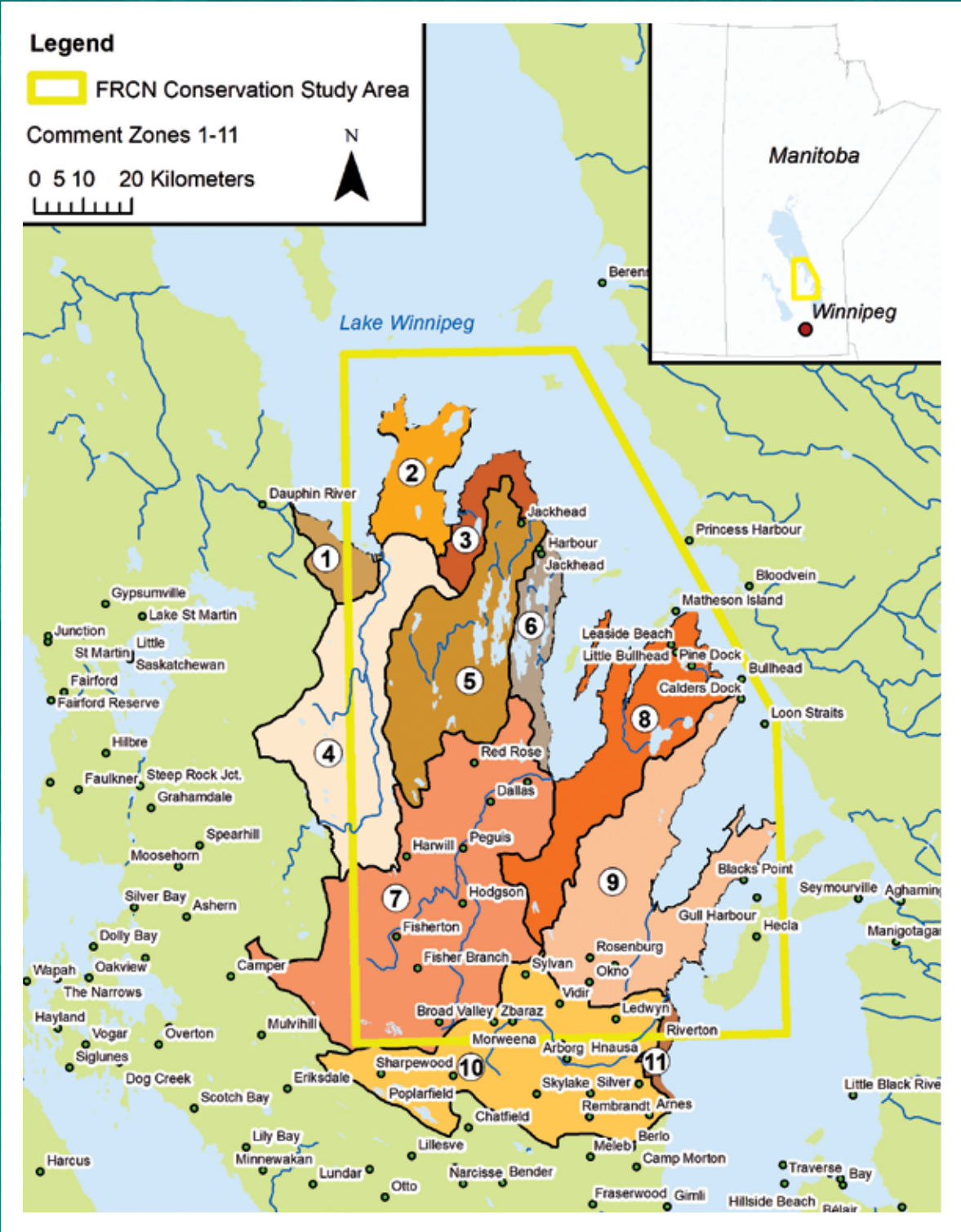
Appendix C – Round 1 Survey Results Summary

Appendix D – Round 1 Verbatim
Survey Comments

Appendix E – FRCN Postcard

Appendix F – Community Voices summary

Comment Zone Map





This initiative is led by Ochekwi-Sipi/Fisher River Cree Nation, in partnership with Peguis First Nation and the Manitoba chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

The Initiative has the support of the provincial and federal governments.



info@FRCNconservation.ca | Phone: (204) 645-2171 | www.FRCNconservation.ca

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