

# Addendum to Camp Assiniboia Property Task Force Report – October, 2009

## Task Force Recommendations' Rationale and Implications:

### **A. Recommendation: That MCM commit to the long-term protection and careful environmental management of the Camp Assiniboia Forest.**

#### **Rationale:**

The Bible portrays a God who is delighted with His creation, who then shares the responsibility of its stewardship and care with humankind. Genesis 1 and 2, as well as many passages from the Psalms, speak eloquently to this theme. There are a surprising number of other references in both the Old and New Testaments punctuating the strong triangular connection between God, humanity and the rest of creation. There is both **blessing** when all creation witnesses to God (“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth . . . Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.” [Ps 98:4, 7-9])

And **suffering** when all creation is estranged from God (“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” [Rom 8:19-23]).

See also Ps 19:1-4; 148:1-10, Job 12:7-10, Isa 24:4,5; 55:12-13, Hosea 4:1-3, Rom 1:20, Col 1:20.

Given the past century's assault on the planet's air, water and soil quality with resulting widespread destruction of habitat and unspeakable loss of species inflicted by ceaseless 'development', it seems only fitting that God's people should be the first to recognize the need for repentance – the call to turn and go another way. How can our Manitoba “community of congregations” demonstrate and proclaim this loudly and clearly?

The task force sees the Camp Assiniboia Forest as a marvelous opportunity in this regard. Through the good fortune of the original purchase (thank you Springstein et al), the relative absence of development pressure (thank you God) and generally thoughtful management practices (thank you to current and former managers), we have a pretty special piece of nature in a prime location.

The opportunity is one of intentional, purposeful stewardship, where, going forward, we take special care to minimize/reduce human impact, while enhancing the forest's 'usefulness' in terms of camping ministries, retreat functions and research. Exposure to the natural realm has a powerful way of renewing stressed and disoriented people, healing their spirits and returning them to a primary relationship with their Maker.

We are not saying that all development is bad; God is also manifested in our agricultural and urban environments. However, at a time when natural spaces are becoming more and more scarce, why not seize the opportunity of holding onto this space as a monument to our God and our identity as God's people? Yes, we want to continue 'using' the forest for camping ministries, and, over time, we may wish to use it for other activities; but aside from that, independent of Camps With Meaning or Mennonite Church Manitoba, can we pose the idea that the natural realm has an inherent value beyond mere usefulness? Eventually, how do you put a price on wildlife, whether flora or fauna? Can our conservation of the Camp Assiniboia forest become a counter-cultural symbol which reminds us and our neighbours that fulfillment and salvation do not flow from non-stop development and consumption; rather, that salvation derives from God's creating, redeeming and sustaining Spirit.

Furthermore, in the matter of 'long term', we submit that we should understand this as extending beyond the foreseeable future, as denoted by the phrase 'in perpetuity'. Why would we take special care of this space only to have it, in the end (whether a decade or a century later) sacrificed to the highest bidder? Rather, let us be visionary and disciplined in keeping this as God's “Cottonwood Cathedral”\* . The benefits, we believe, may be less tangible in the immediate, but very powerful over the long haul.

### **Implications:**

1. It is assumed that MCM, in response to a commitment to conserve the forest, would develop an environmental management plan in line with the intent of recommendation #1, and that such plan would in all likelihood be more comprehensive than that required of any third party monitoring agency, should such agency be invoked. (see recommendation #2) This plan would be an extension of current management practices; some details are already alluded to in the environmental study report produced by Harv Sawatzky Consulting.
2. MCM would need some mechanism or designate (person or body) within MCM who/which would be responsible for oversight of long-term, intentional environmental management of the property (forest) at Camp Assiniboia.

\* as expressed by David Hogue, Camp Assiniboia Manager

### **B. Recommendation: That MCM pursue a covenant relationship with Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation in order to optimize the achievement of the goals stated above.**

### **Rationale:**

Our reasoning is thus: if we as a community of congregations accept the principle outlined in recommendation #1, and, furthermore, have full intention of following through on a commitment to participate in this Creation Care venture, we also need to devise an arrangement by which we hold each other accountable over time. We know too well from past experience how a season of financial crisis, a temporary lapse of will, the complications of other issues or the passage of time (collective forgetfulness) can derail us from our best intentions. Sometimes proximity to an issue interferes with one's best judgment.

Historically, without explicit environmental management plans, and in spite of the many responsibilities of our Camp Managers, (past and present) we have managed the forest quite well - missing has been the intentional accountability re: long-term care and practice, where short term practices fit into a larger picture of care for the forest. For that reason we think it wise and necessary that the use and management of the forest from here on be monitored by an arms-length, third party. And, one would want this third party to have the prospect of duration, suggesting that a stable 'institutional' party.

In that vein, it was the discernment of the task force that among the options encountered, the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (M.H.H.C.)\*\* would be a good choice for that 'third party' function. Nature Conservancy of Canada is an expensive option; in any case, they are not interested in such small plots of land. A-Rocha Canada, a faith based environmental education/consulting group, was considered, but they indicate that at this point they are neither funded nor structured to take on such a task.

MHHC, on the other hand, is very interested in the C.A. forest – its conservation fits with their mandate and it is across the river from Beaudry Provincial Park. MHHC's services, as pertaining to the development and implementation of a monitoring agreement, are funded by the provincial government. Mennonite Church Manitoba would be an equal party at the table in terms of designing such a contract, essentially 'in the driver's seat', in that, if suitable terms could not be struck, we simply would not proceed.

Further investigation might uncover an agency more suitable than the MHHC option. In fact, we suggest that MCM would be collectively remiss if we didn't take great care in both the selection of such a monitoring party and the structuring of a contract. In allowing this, however, we wish to stress our firm conviction re: the need for a monitoring mechanism that has clout – one that cannot be so easily set aside because of a momentary pressing need or, worse yet, a path of temporary convenience. This gem of a forest, once lost, would be virtually impossible to reclaim.

\*\* The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation was established in February, 1986, as a non-profit Crown Corporation whose purpose is to “conserve, restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat, by working in partnership with private landowners ..... to ensure a cleaner, greener landscape that benefits all Manitobans”. Its efforts extend to three areas: wildlife habitat, woodlots and riparian (river or lakefront) areas, currently administering 500 agreements. MHHC further characterizes its role as “a deal-maker and facilitator of conservation partnerships”[MHHC website]

### **Implications:**

1. MCM would need to involve the best minds from its constituency (environmental, legal, financial) to:
  - a) ascertain a suitable, arms-length monitoring third party.
  - b) negotiate an agreement/contract with such party that would:
    - i) ensure the conservation of the forest.
    - ii) protect the right-of-use of the forest for current and projected ministries of MCM, inclusive of Camps With Meaning.
    - iii) reserve portions of land within the forest for potential future ministries e.g. retreat center/hermitage, interpretive center, etc.*ie. accepting recommendation #2 would trigger a season of investigation, consultation and negotiation both to confirm an acceptable third party monitor, as well as arriving at an agreement which protects both the forest and long term MCM interests.*
2. future development of all areas within the forest would be governed/restricted by the aforementioned agreement.
3. the monitoring agreement, in order to serve its intent (long-term conservation) would be structured so as to survive any change in ownership ie. should the property be sold, the purchaser would inherit the conditions of the agreement as they pertained to the forest. This would be achieved by way of a caveat attached to the title. Conversely, should MHHC be dissolved or re-configured, responsibility for its side of the agreement would revert to the provincial government or its designate.
4. implication #3 would, in all likelihood, significantly reduce the commercial market value of the forested portion of the Camp Assiniboia property.
5. costs of establishing and maintaining a monitoring function:
  - a partnership with Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation would be funded, in full, by the Manitoba Government (a smaller portion of its funding also comes from the Canadian and U.S. federal governments)
  - costs of other potential third party arrangements are unknown.
6. Violations to or abrogation of the monitoring agreement would trigger penalties or legal action or both.