

Provincial Road 304 to Berens River

All-season Road

Environment Act Proposal Notification Document

Submitted by

East Side Road Authority Inc.

January, 2009

Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Purpose of Notification Document.....	1
1.2	Regulatory Framework.....	1
1.3	Public Involvement.....	1
2.0	Project Description.....	4
2.1	Background.....	4
2.2	Alternatives.....	4
2.3	Roadway Design.....	5
2.4	Waterway Crossings Structure.....	6
3.0	Existing Environmental Setting.....	6
3.1	Fish and Fish Habitat.....	7
3.2	Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat.....	7
3.3	Heritage Resources.....	7
3.4	Special and Protected Areas.....	8
3.5	Navigability.....	8
3.6	Cumulative Environmental Effects.....	8
4.0	Environmental Impact Assessment.....	8

APPENDIX A: SITE PLANS

APPENDIX B: TYPICAL DESIGN

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Notification Document

The purpose of this Environment Act Proposal Notification Document is to provide initial information to support the Environment Act Proposal Form submitted on January 30, 2009, for an all-season road (the Project) from Provincial Road 304 (PR304) to Berens River. A detailed project description and environmental statement will be submitted later this summer. This Notification Document is provided to initiate the formal environmental review processes under *The Environment Act* and *The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (CEA Act). Initiating the review process early allows discussions with the federal and provincial authorities for guidance and delineation of the environmental assessment expectations. The East Side Road Authority Inc. (ESRA) is the Proponent for the Project and will also engage the stakeholders and Aboriginal peoples early in the assessment process so that local and traditional knowledge can be incorporated. The ESRA will also consult with the public and stakeholders so that their issues can be considered throughout the design and environmental assessment stages of the planning process.

1.2 Regulatory Framework

A project overview is provided by section 2.0 below. The ESRA understands that the Project is a Class 2 Development as defined by the *Classes of Development Regulation 164/88* under *The Environment Act*. The project will involve crossing several waterways and will likely require authorizations under the *Fisheries Act* and permits under the *Navigable Waters Protection Act*. As such, the all-season road is considered a Project under the CEA Act and will require environmental assessment pursuant to that act. It is the ESRA's further understanding that the Project attributes are described in the *Comprehensive Study List Regulations* and that a Comprehensive Study pursuant to the CEA Act will be required.

The ESRA is aware of the *Canada/Manitoba Agreement on Environmental Assessment Cooperation*. We welcome a cooperative process, and as indicated above, look forward to the advice and guidance that the Project Administration Team could provide.

1.3 Public Involvement

The proposed all-season road has been previously considered as a component of various studies and planning initiatives that have provided various opportunities for public involvement including:

- In response to a Proposal filed pursuant to the Manitoba Environment Act on November 20, 1995 by the Pine Falls Paper Company Manitoba

Conservation gave notice of the Proposal and placed material in the Public Registry for public review and comment.

- Preparation of the *East Side of Lake Winnipeg All-weather Road Justification and Scoping Study* by Dillon Consulting during 2000.
- Phase 2 of the East Side Planning Initiative between 2002 and 2003 involved presentations to and consideration by the Round Table and the First Nations Council.
- Preparation of the Functional Design Rice River Road Upgrading and Extension by UMA Engineering Ltd. submitted to Manitoba Transportation and Government Services during August, 2005, incorporated open houses and key person interviews.
- Preparation of the Rice River Road Upgrade and Extension Environmental Assessment Report by UMA/AECOM submitted to Manitoba Transportation and Government Services dated January 2006 incorporated a stakeholder committee and individual/organizational key person interviews.

A Public Involvement Program and Aboriginal Engagement Program have been included in the work plan for the environmental assessment of the Project.

Community Consultation (and Aboriginal Engagement Program)

Being one of the most critical components of the EIS program, the Public Involvement Program (PIP) and Aboriginal Engagement Program (AEP) will be organized to include all native and non-native communities/residents potentially affected by the road development. Two rounds of community meetings have initially been planned. It is proposed that meetings in the communities will not occur until prior meetings with the Chiefs have been held to receive permission to enter their communities. We anticipate the first round of community meetings will be initiated following the identification of potential all-weather road alignments (April 2009). The first round will entail a visit to each First Nation and Métis community within the study area as well as other non-Aboriginal communities having an interest in the study. The second round of meetings is anticipated for July 2009 after the draft EIS (with preferred road alignment) has been prepared. We propose that the meetings will ensure broad representation from the various communities including the following:

- Chief, Council and Elders
- Community leaders with expert knowledge in hunting, fishing and gathering within the traditional lands

- Youth representatives (selected by community leadership)
- All community members
- Educators, health providers and development officers

Provisions will be made to hold meetings/discussions in the language commonly used at each First Nation/Métis location (Cree, Ojibway and/or Oji-Cree). The timing and location of the meetings will occur in a manner that is suitable to community leadership and will be determined well in advance. Materials will include display maps and story boards as well as handouts and comment sheets. Multiple copies of working maps will be made available for attendees to mark features and resources as applicable. In order to facilitate public comprehension of the large amounts of relevant information, we propose preparing map-type exhibits on an uncontrolled strip photo-mosaic base, which will illustrate the following within the study area:

- "*Opportunities*" such as potential tourism and recreation, renewable and nonrenewable resources, existing inhabited communities with business development potential
- "*Hazard Areas*" such as steep or erosion prone terrain and extensive muskeg or permafrost soils
- "*Environmentally-Sensitive Features*" such as fisheries-sensitive watersheds, streams and rivers and wildlife migratory routes.

A comprehensive listing of the types of opportunities, hazard areas and environmental sensitivities shown on the exhibits will provide a substantial part of the basis for subsequent evaluation of alternative routes and alignments. In addition, PowerPoint presentation materials will be used, where appropriate, as the centre piece of community meetings to supplement the map exhibits to be displayed.

Traditional Knowledge Studies

In addition to the engagement activities described above, the team will also undertake Traditional Knowledge (TK) studies in the potentially affected aboriginal communities. The TK studies will be initiated during the first round of community meetings. A TK Coordinator will be appointed in each participating community to assist with implementation. SNC-Lavalin Inc., the consultant assigned to prepare the environmental impact statement and carry out the PIP and AEP and will, with the assistance of Mr. Dan Highway, coordinate/compile and analyze this work.

As noted above, the Project will require that a Comprehensive Study under the CEA Act be conducted. Accordingly, a separate report will be made to the Minister of Environment relating to the public consultation.

Public and Stakeholder Involvement

The study team will also plan two rounds of meetings with interested members of the public, stakeholder, and interest groups. The meetings will be scheduled at the same milestone times and provide similar information presentation methods as the community meetings.

2.0 Project Description

2.1 Background

An all-season gravel surface road is proposed through Crown Lands to provide access to the communities along the east side of Lake Winnipeg from PR304 to the Community of Berens River. An existing forestry-class logging road, known as the Rice River Road, was constructed in the area by Abitibi Price and the Pine Falls Paper Company (now Tembec) during the 1970's. The existing road begins at PR304, continues northward for approximately 74 km and terminates approximately 2 km. south of the Bloodvein River and approximately 14 km from the Bloodvein First Nation. The Rice River Road forms part of the existing winter road network that services the area north of PR304 to Oxford House and from Lake Winnipeg east to the Ontario border.

In addition to acting as a logging road, the Rice River Road provides limited and uncertain road access to residents from located in the area between PR304 and the Community of Loon Straits during the summer months. Year-round access to the area north of the Rice River Road is only available by air and by boat during the summer months. Community isolation coupled with limited accessibility has resulted in inflated cost of living, high risk to travelling residents, and reduced economic development opportunities.

The Project is the upgrading of the existing Rice River Road and construction of an extension from the terminus of the Rice River Road to the Bloodvein First Nation and onward to the Berens River First Nation. The Project includes the provision of bridges and other water-crossing structures. It is anticipated that the proposed road would provide reliable year-round ground access to the Hollow Water, Bloodvein, and Berens River First Nations and the communities of Seymourville, Aghaming, Loon Straits, Princess Harbour, and Berens River. Site plans are attached as Appendix A.

2.2 Alternatives

A functional design was prepared by UMA Engineering Ltd. in 2005, for the section of the Project from PR304 to the Bloodvein First Nation. The functional design considered the existing Rice River Road alignment, improved horizontal alignments, and water crossings. Additional considerations for the area north of

the existing road included the terrain, environmental setting, First Nation input, and appropriate water crossing locations.

A design for the portion of the Project from Bloodvein to Berens River is being prepared and will be available by May, 2009. The alignment shown in Appendix A is based on available aerial photograph interpretation and information on the terrain, environmental setting, First Nation input, and appropriate water crossing locations available from previous engagement programs described above and from Manitoba's Ecosystem Based Management Pilot Project. The Manitoba Ecosystem Based Management Pilot Project gathered information and provided a scientific description and assessment of the ecological capacity of Ecoregion 90: Lac Seul Upland. The proposed Project is located entirely within Ecoregion 90.

The Project alignment may be subject to adjustments as the result of discussions with provincial and federal technical experts, Aboriginal peoples, and interested stakeholders.

2.3 Roadway Design

The all-season road from PR304 (referred to as kilometer 0) to the terminus of the existing Rice River Road (kilometre 74) will be constructed using the existing roadway alignment for the majority of the length. From kilometre 74 to Bloodvein (km 88), the road will follow the existing winter road alignment or the existing hydro service alignment. From kilometre 88 to Berens River the alignment will require clearing of a new right-of-way.

The functional design describes two 4.7 metre travel lanes providing a total of 9.4 metre roadway surface. The typical grade roadway surface is designed with 4 to 1 side slopes, 3.5 metre ditches bottoms, and 3 to 1 back slopes. In rock excavation areas a minimum of 11.0 metre clearance is provided on each side resulting from overbreak after blasting. Typical roadway cross-sections are shown in Appendix B.

The proposed right-of-way width is 100 metres with 60 metres being cleared for roadway construction. Clearing and grubbing will include the removal of all trees, vegetation, and roots within the 60 construction metres zone. Trees will be salvaged to the maximum extent possible. Typically clearing and grubbing operations will take place during winter periods.

The functional design did not identify sufficient natural aggregate material for construction of the proposed all-season road. It has been assumed that the majority of the construction material will be crushed and screened bedrock. It is anticipated that the supply of construction material will be through third-party local and Aboriginal suppliers.

2.4 Waterway Crossings Structure

The proposed all-season road will pass through localized rock areas, low-lying marsh areas and cross continuously flowing waterways. The crossing structures will be constructed using corrugated steel culverts, box culverts, or clear-span bridges. The corrugated steel culverts will be sized according to hydraulic capacity criteria and where the culverts cross fish habitat the culverts will be sized to accommodate fish passage requirements provided in the *Manitoba Stream Crossing Guidelines for the Protection of Fish and Fish Habitat*.

A number of the waterways that will be crossed are considered navigable and will require appropriately designed structures. The typical design of a box culvert design will provide two 4.2 metre travel lanes, 0.6 metres clearance to guard rails and provision for a walkway. The overall width of a typical box culvert structure would be 13.6 metres. An example of the box culvert design is provided in Appendix B.

There are four existing bridges within the portion of the Project between PR304 and Bloodvein as follows:

- Wanipigow River Bridge
- English Brook Bridge
- Steep Rock Creek Bridge
- Rice River Bridge

All of these bridges will be replaced.

New bridges will also be required to cross the following waterways:

- Bloodvein River
- Longbody Creek
- Bradbury River
- Pigeon River
- Berens River

The typical bridge design will provide two 4.8 metres travel lanes with an overall width including guard rails of 10.83 metres. The bridges will be clear span design. The substructure designs will depend on the geotechnical conditions at the bridge sites. Typical designs are shown in Appendix B.

3.0 Existing Environmental Setting

The following description of the existing environmental setting is based on information from the reports prepared by UMA/AECOM, North/South Consultants, and from the Manitoba Ecosystem Based Management Pilot Project. The Project will be located in the boreal shield ecozone.

3.1 Fish and Fish Habitat

The area potentially affected by the Project consists of many small, unnamed, ephemeral streams that provide fish habitat during spring freshet but depending on the amount of summer precipitation can be expected to have zero flow. These streams are potentially used by fish species during periods when adequate summer water volumes exist.

There are a number of streams that may supply fish habitat during various phases of their life cycle. It is expected that the Wanipigow River, English Brook, Steep Rock Creek, Rice River, Loon Creek, Bloodvein River, Longbody Creek, Bradbury River, Pigeon River, and Berens River will have important fish habitat value. The crossings of the Pakasekan Creek and unnamed creeks along the alignment are considered to be marginal fish habitat. The unnamed streams will be further classified and identified during the environmental assessment process. At least 47 species of fish, representing 18 different families are potentially found within the study area. No species listed as threatened or endangered are known to occur within streams along the Project alignment.

3.2 Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

Impacts on wildlife may occur in the Project area due to habitat loss, fragmentation, and disturbance during construction. Work along the existing 74 kilometres of existing roadway will not create additional habitat loss or fragmentation. The effects of loss of the boreal forest habitat along the additional proposed roadway will be assessed and reported in the Environmental Impact Statement to be filed in August 2009. The forested portions of the right-of-way for the extension portion of the Project is primarily comprised of black spruce, jack pine, and trembling aspen with mixed wood forest stands. The forested areas of ecoregion 90 and in particular the older mixed wood portions support a highly diversified wildlife, and are considered to be important habitat to species such as pine marten, pilated woodpeckers, and barred owls. The trembling aspen forest provides habitat for wildlife species such as Tennessee warblers, white-throated sparrows, ruffed grouse, black bears, and moose. Of particular interest is the Atikaki-Berens Woodland caribou herd. The existing road occurs and the proposed extension will occur at the western most edge of the caribou herd's range. Potential effects on the herd will be assessed and reported on in the Project Environmental Impact Statement.

3.3 Heritage Resources

No heritage resources have been identified along the upgrading portion of the Rice River Road. Traditional Knowledge studies will be focused on cultural and heritage site identification. There is the potential for archaeological resources present at river crossings. These sites will be investigated prior to construction. In the event that archaeological/heritage resources are discovered during

construction activities, work will be halted and the appropriate authorities will be contacted

3.4 Special and Protected Areas

In response to concerns regarding increased access within the existing Rice River Road area, Manitoba Conservation created the George Barker Wildlife Refuge along the existing road.

The proposed alignment for the road extension to Bloodvein will cross into the west edge of the Atikaki Provincial Park and crosses the Bloodvein River, which has been designated a heritage river. A request has been made to Manitoba Conservation to have the park boundary adjusted to remove the area affected. Consultation and public review on that process will be undertaken in conjunction with the environmental review of the Project under *The Environment Act* as provided for under Section 9(2) of the *Provincial Parks Act*. The Bloodvein River Bridge will be designed to be compatible with the Bloodvein Canadian Heritage River's natural, recreational, and cultural heritage characteristics.

3.5 Navigability

As indicated above in Section 2.4 the proposed all-season road will cross nine rivers and streams and a number of minor waterways. Preliminary communications with staff of the Navigable Waters Protection Program indicate that a number of these waterways are considered navigable. Navigability considerations will be incorporated into the Project environmental impact statement and included into the design of the crossing structures as required.

3.6 Cumulative Environmental Effects

In addition to environmental impacts stemming from the Project, potential changes could occur within the region from other projects. The combined effects of these changes could be greater than the impacts arising from the road alone. The most likely impact of the new road construction will be related to expanded use and development in the area resulting from improved access or third-party activities to support the road construction.

The Wabanong Nakaygum Okimawin has been formed with representatives of the First Nations, various stakeholders and interest groups to address planning issues associated with the area east of Lake Winnipeg. The provision of an all-season roadway from PR304 to Berens River has been identified by in the *Promises to Keep* report from the Phase 2 Broad Area Plan.

4.0 Environmental Impact Assessment

As part of the environmental impact assessment process the ESRA is conducting detailed field investigations to describe the existing environmental and socio-

economic conditions in the area. During the spring and summer of 2009 biological studies will be undertaken.

The environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Project will be written with a minimum of technical terminology and will include a glossary of terms. The EIS will utilize maps, charts, diagrams and photographs as appropriate for presentation and understanding of the conditions, effects, and mitigation measures. Traditional knowledge will be an important source of the information used during the environmental assessment process. Deficiencies in the existing scientific knowledge base specific to Manitoba will be identified. It must be noted that the ESRA will implement the Project with follow-up and monitoring programs. An adaptive management approach will be employed to address the lack of ecosystem knowledge.

A preliminary table of contents for the EIS is provided below:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION
 - 1.1. Background and Project Overview
 - 1.1.1. Proponent
 - 1.1.2. Study Area
 - 1.2. Purpose of the Project
 - 1.3. Study Scope
 - 1.3.1. Temporal Scope
 - 1.3.2. Spatial Scope
 - 1.4. Study Team
2. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH
 - 2.1. Effects Assessment Process
 - 2.2. Public Involvement Program
 - 2.3. Aboriginal Engagement Program
 - 2.4. Traditional Knowledge Study
 - 2.5. Scientific Studies
 - 2.6. Valued Ecological Components
 - 2.7. Determination of Significance
 - 2.8. Cumulative Effects Assessment
3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION
 - 3.1. Existing Rice River Road
 - 3.2. Extension to Berens River
 - 3.3. Construction Materials
 - 3.4. Project Schedule
 - 3.5. Operation and Maintenance

3.6. Decommissioning

4. PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

- 4.1. General
- 4.2. Existing Rice River Road
- 4.3. Alternate Alignments

5. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

- 5.1. Aquatic Environment
- 5.2. Terrestrial Environment
 - 5.2.1. Habitat Characteristics
 - 5.2.2. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat
 - 5.2.3. Vegetation
- 5.3. Physiography and Landscape
- 5.4. Hydrology
- 5.5. Atmosphere/Climate
- 5.6. Heritage Resources
- 5.7. Socio-economic Characteristics
 - 5.7.1. Economy
 - 5.7.2. Land Use and Planning
 - 5.7.3. Infrastructure and Services
 - 5.7.4. Personal, Family and Community Life
 - 5.7.5. Aboriginal Traditional Uses
 - 5.7.6. Domestic and Commercial Resource Use
 - 5.7.7. Outdoor Recreation and Tourism
 - 5.7.8. Navigation Uses

6. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

- 6.1. Aquatic Environment
- 6.2. Terrestrial Environment
 - 6.2.1. Habitat Characteristics
 - 6.2.2. Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat
 - 6.2.3. Vegetation
- 6.3. Physiography and Landscape
- 6.4. Hydrology
- 6.5. Atmosphere/Climate
- 6.6. Heritage Resources
- 6.7. Socio-economic Characteristics
 - 6.7.1. Economy
 - 6.7.2. Land Use and Planning
 - 6.7.3. Infrastructure and Services
 - 6.7.4. Personal, Family and Community Life
 - 6.7.5. Aboriginal Traditional Uses
 - 6.7.6. Domestic and Commercial Resource Use

- 6.7.7. Outdoor Recreation and Tourism
- 6.7.8. Navigation Uses

7. RESIDUAL EFFECTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

8. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

- 8.1. Past Projects
- 8.2. Future Projects

9. FOLLOW-UP PROGRAMS

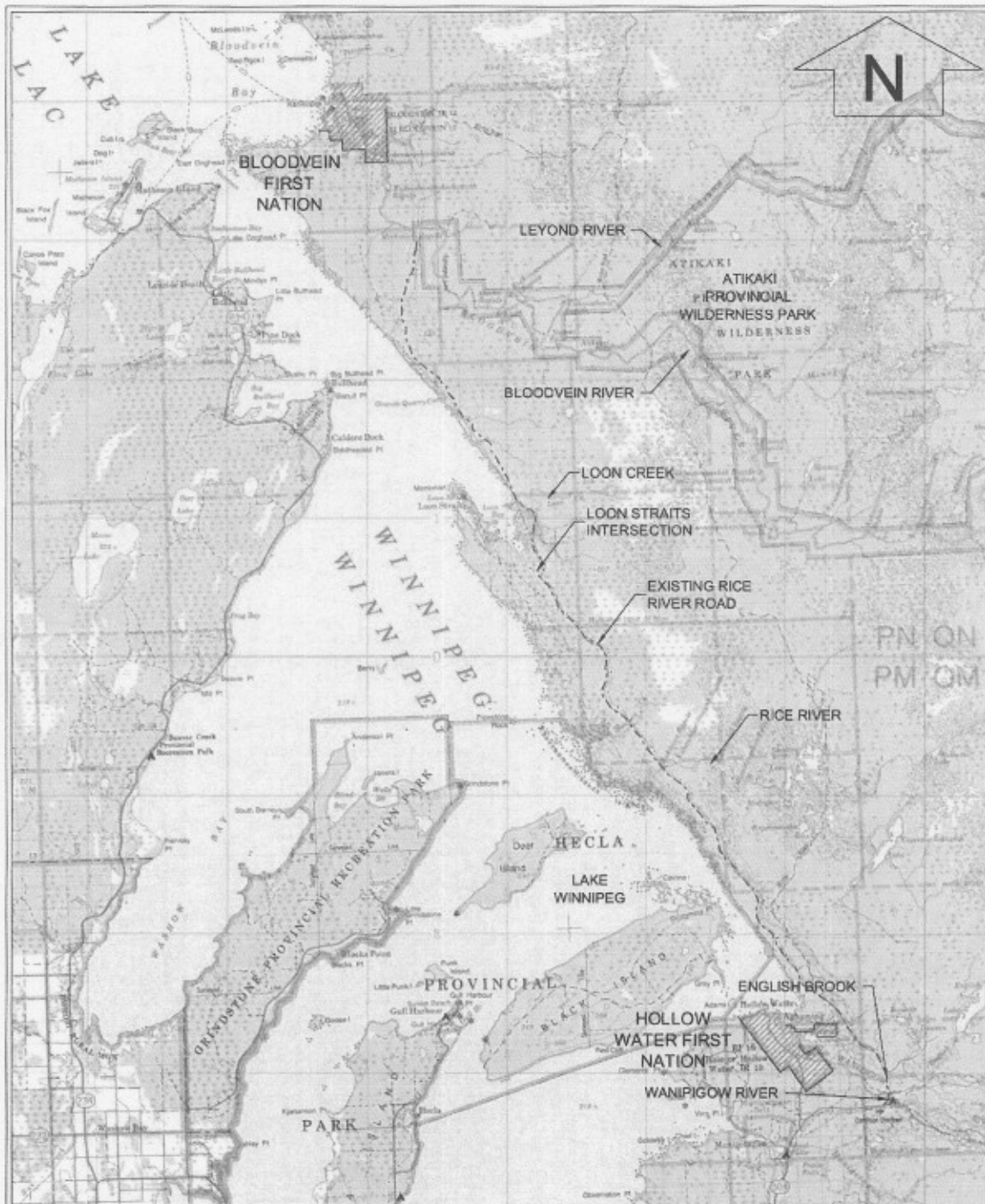
- 9.1. Monitoring
- 9.2. Environmental Management System
- 9.3. Adaptive Management

10. SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

11. REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SITE PLANS

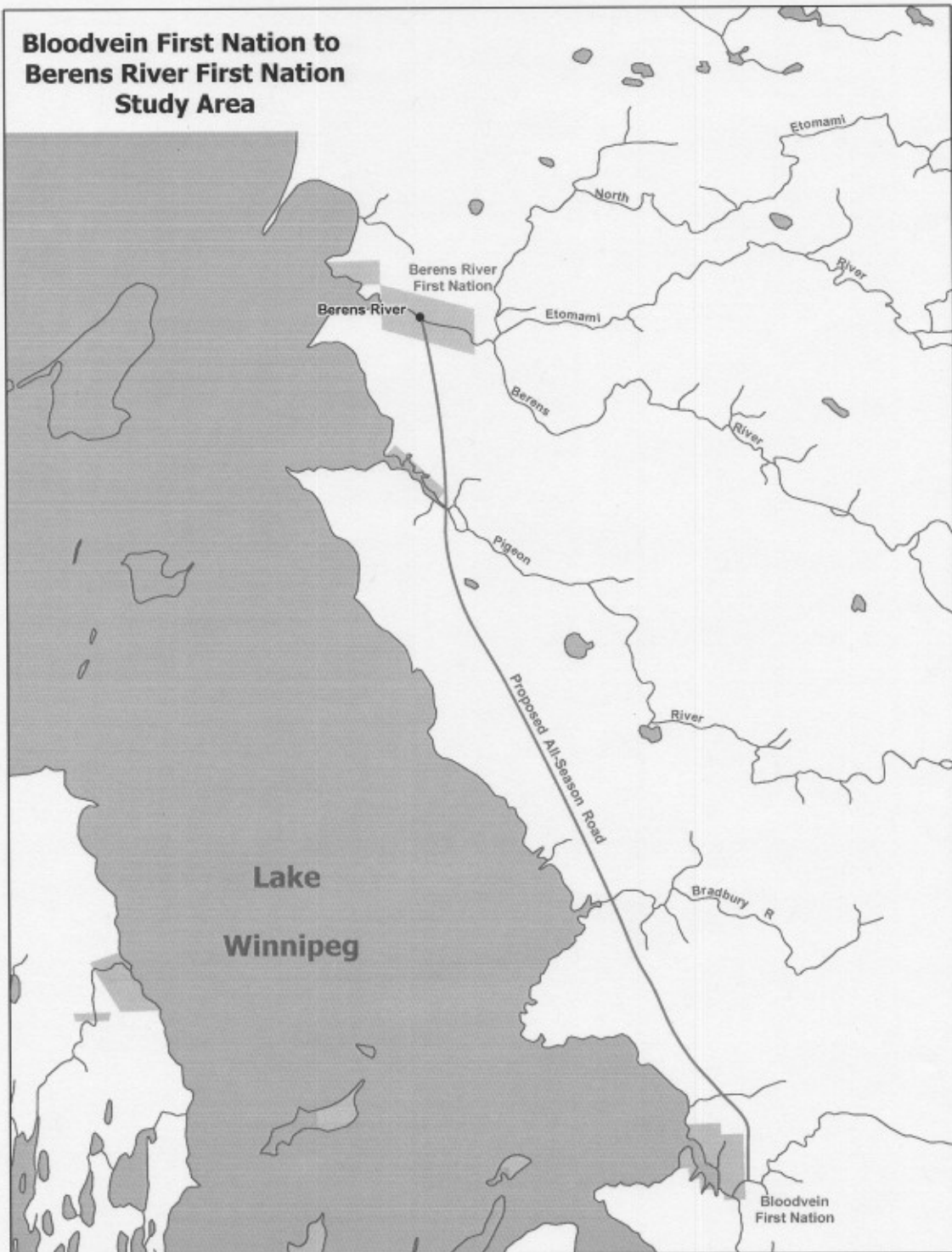


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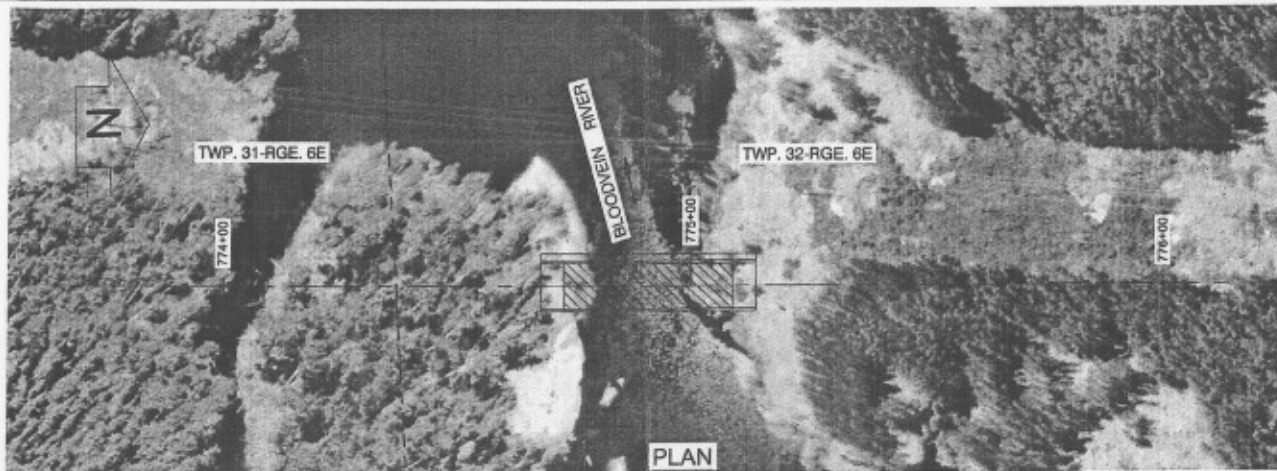
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**Bloodvein First Nation to
Berens River First Nation
Study Area**

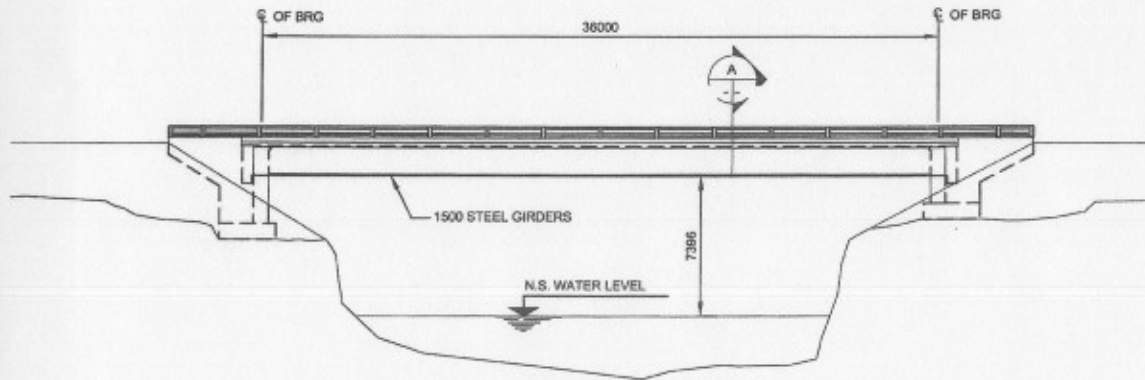
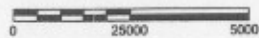


APPENDIX B

TYPICAL DESIGN

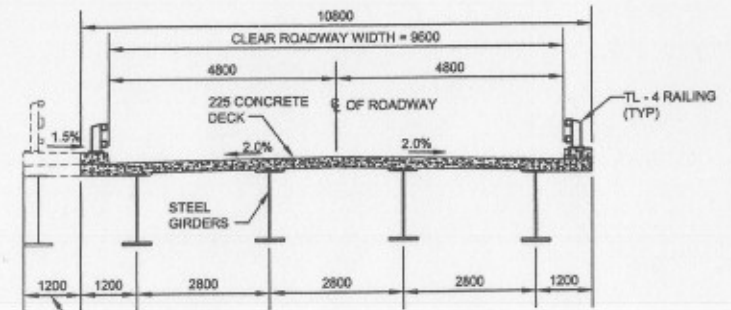
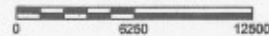


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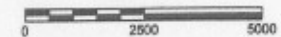
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MANITOBA TRANSPORTATION AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES (M.T.G.S.) PROJECT NO. 0313-093-01, RICE RIVER ROAD UPGRADING AND EXTENSION, ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT, FIGURE 11, 05/03/25

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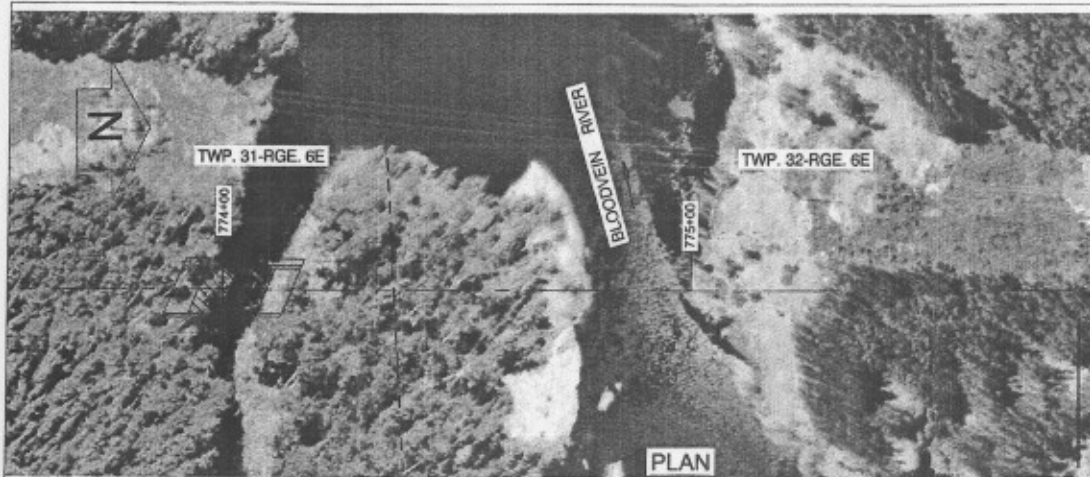
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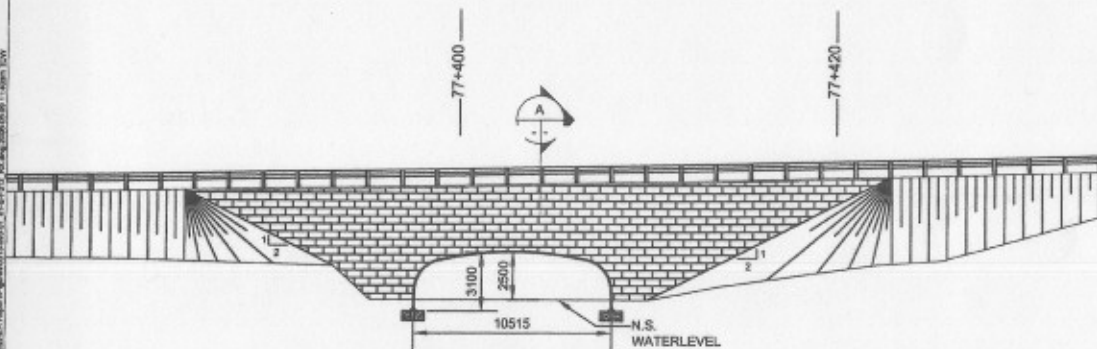
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RICE RIVER ROAD UPGRADING AND EXTENSION

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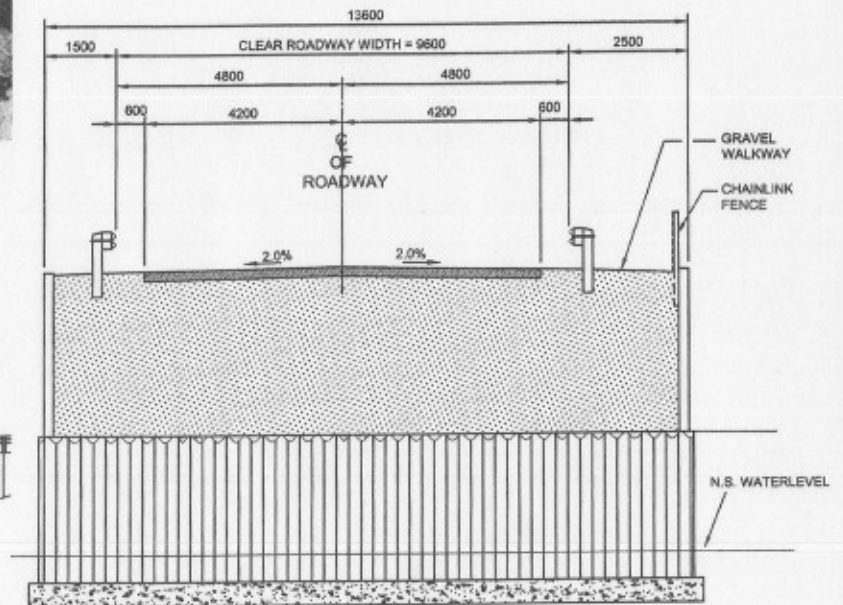
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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT REPORT
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