

# Manitoba's Blue Mosaic



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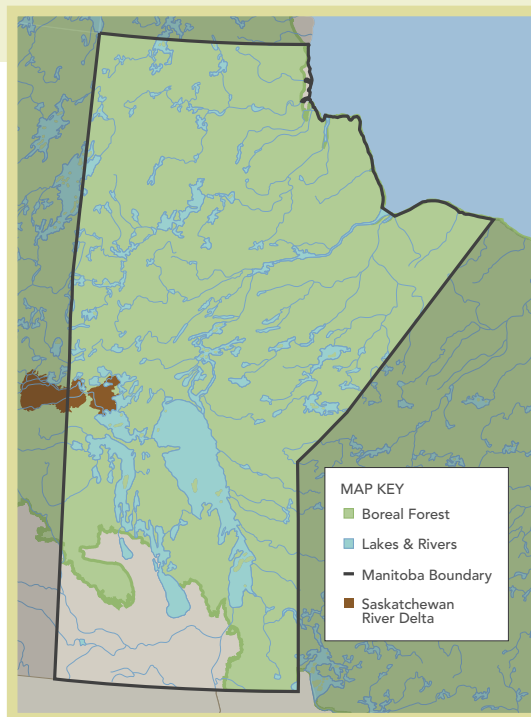
## SASKATCHEWAN RIVER DELTA

When the massive glacial Lake Agassiz retreated over thousands of years following the end of the last ice age, it left behind a remarkable, one-of-its kind dual river delta. The vast wetlands of the upper and lower deltas make the Saskatchewan River Delta one of the largest inland freshwater deltas anywhere in North America.

The region is brimming with wetlands—more than 80 percent of the Saskatchewan River Delta is comprised of either wetlands or open, shallow bodies of water. The interwoven complexes of swamps, marshes, and fens have generated incredibly rich deposits of stored carbon. In fact, Manitoba's portion of the Delta and adjacent wetlands alone store more than 160 million tonnes of carbon—around eight times larger than Manitoba's total annual greenhouse gas emissions. They are also critical in removing pollutants and purifying water from the heavily impacted Saskatchewan River further upstream, helping to reduce nutrient input into Lake Winnipeg.

These flourishing wetlands are a haven for biodiversity. Some of the highest concentrations of plant diversity in the boreal can be found here, with more than 230 types of vascular plants documented in the region. They are joined by more than 40 mammals as well as more than 45 fish species. Moose, although in lower numbers now than they were historically, are still one of the many abundant mammals of the Delta.

Birds are perhaps most emblematic of how important the Delta is for wildlife, marked by its designation as an Important Bird Area. The Saskatchewan River Delta is known as one of the most important breeding and staging grounds for waterfowl in Canada's entire boreal forest region.



Aerial surveys conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service since the 1950s show that an average of nearly 500,000 ducks nest in the Saskatchewan River Delta each year. This includes an astonishing 120,000 Mallards, 84,000 Blue-winged Teal, 66,000 Lesser Scaup, and 34,000 American Wigeon. The Delta supports nearly 5 percent of the continental population of Ring-necked Duck (26,000) and Canvasback (26,000) and nearly 3 percent of Common Goldeneye (14,000) and Redhead (16,000). Its lake shores and islands are home to nesting Red-necked Grebes, American White Pelicans, Black Terns, Common Terns, Franklin's Gulls, Bonaparte's Gulls, Greater Yellowlegs, and Wilson's

Snipe, among others. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of Sandhill Cranes use the Delta as a stop-over feeding site during migration. Threatened species like the seldom-seen Yellow Rail nest in its sedge marshes. During the spring and fall migration hundreds of thousands of migratory waterfowl pass through the Delta. In total, more than 200 bird species breed within or rely on the region during migration.

The Delta is also vitally important to the Cree communities who have called it home for millennia and who continue to harvest fish and wildlife from its forests and waters.



This fact sheet was derived from a subsection in *Manitoba's Blue Mosaic: Six Aquatic Strongholds of Manitoba's Boreal Forest*, a comprehensive report summarizing the vast aquatic values of Manitoba's boreal forest. For more information and literature cited, please refer to the full report.

Wells, J., D. Childs, C. Smith, S.M. Siegers, and P. Badiou. 2014. *Manitoba's Blue Mosaic: Six Aquatic Strongholds of Manitoba's Boreal Forest*. Boreal Songbird Initiative, Seattle, Washington, and Ducks Unlimited Canada, Stonewall, Manitoba.

The report is also viewable online at:  
<http://borealbirds.org/sites/default/files/pubs/mb-report.pdf>

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