## **EUROPE / NORTH AMERICA**

## **PIMACHIOWIN AKI**

### CANADA



Boreal forest and waterways © IUCN / Bastian Bertzky

# WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION PIMACHIOWIN AKI (CANADA) – ID N° 1415 Rev

**IUCN RECOMMENDATION TO WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE:** To inscribe the property under natural criterion (ix).

#### **Key paragraphs of Operational Guidelines:**

Paragraph 77: Nominated property meets World Heritage criteria.

Paragraph 78: Nominated property meets integrity, protection and management requirements.

Background note: Pimachiowin Aki was nominated as a mixed site under criteria (v) and (ix) in 2012. The ICOMOS and IUCN evaluations considered that Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) had not been demonstrated and the World Heritage Committee deferred the nomination in 2013 to allow the State Party to address issues concerning boundaries and the conceptual framing of the property's OUV (Decision 37 COM 8B.19). A joint ICOMOS and IUCN advisory mission to the property took place in October 2013 following the Committee's recommendation. With respect to natural heritage, the mission concluded that criterion (ix) was the correct natural criterion to be considered for the property. The property was renominated in 2015 under natural criterion (ix), however, with changed cultural criteria (iii and vi). Both Advisory Bodies recommended in 2016 to inscribe to property. The State Party, however, advised of concerns regarding governance and relationships within the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation. The Committee in its Decision 40 COM 8B.18 referred the nomination back to resolve these issues. Subsequently the State Party submitted a new full nomination for Pimachiowin Aki which is the subject of this evaluation.

This property has been the subject of two previous evaluations by IUCN which have comprehensively documented the case for OUV. The Committee's attention is thus drawn to IUCN's 2013 and 2016 evaluations (Document WHC-13/37.COM/INF.8B2 and WHC/16/40.COM/INF.8B2) in order to avoid repeating information.

#### 1. DOCUMENTATION

- **a)** Date nomination received by IUCN: Original nomination received on 25 March 2012.
- b) Additional information officially requested from and provided by the State Party: The State Party's supplementary information subsequent to Decision 37 COM 8B.19 was received on 16 March 2015 and additional information was submitted following Decision 40 COM 8B.18 in March 2017. Both Advisory Bodies sent a joint progress letter to the State Party on 22 January 2018 requesting clarification of several issues including development pressure on the nominated property; governance arrangements and opportunities for future extension of the property. The response was received on 28 February 2018.
- c) Additional literature consulted: An extensive list of references was reviewed in the original nomination, and in the earlier IUCN evaluation reports. Additional references used in this evaluation included: Carlson. M., Wells, J., and Jacobson, M. (2015). Balancing the Relationship between Protection and Sustainable Management in Canada's Boreal Forest. Conservat Soc 13:13-22. Nickerson, M. (2017). Characteristics of a Nation-to-Nation Relationship. Discussion Paper. Institute on Governance. Ottawa, Canada. Pickell P.D., Coops, N.C., Gergel, S.E., Andison, D.W., and Marshall, P.L. (2016). Evolution of Canada's Boreal Forest Spatial Patterns as seen from Space. PLOS 11(7): e0157736. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0157736. Statistics Canada. (2017). Census Profile. 2016

- Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98- 316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released August 2, 2017. http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/censusrecensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E (accessed September 9, 2017). Wells, Jeff. (2016). In Canada's Boreal Forest, 'The Land That Gives Life' Inspires a Push for Protection. National Geographic Water Currents.
- d) Consultations: Previous evaluations have taken into consideration 9 desk reviews including a multi-expert collated review. Extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders has also taken place during past evaluations and site visits in 2012, 2013 and 2015. The mission detailed below also met Pimachiowin Aki Corporation Board members and partners, technical consultants, and Parks Canada representatives.
- e) Field Visit: Original field mission undertaken by David Mihalic (IUCN) and Maunu Häyrynen (ICOMOS), 25 August 1 September 2012. The field mission following re-nomination was undertaken by Bastian Bertzky (IUCN) and Gregory de Vries (ICOMOS), 24-31 August, 2015. No further field mission was considered necessary, however, a meeting with the State Party, nomination proponents and other stakeholders was organized in Winnipeg on 6-7 September 2017 attended by Brent Mitchell (IUCN) and Gregory de Vries (ICOMOS).
- f) Date of IUCN approval of this report: April 2018

#### 2. SUMMARY OF NATURAL VALUES

The property as now nominated encompasses some 2,904,000 ha in the Canadian Boreal Shield and includes the ancestral lands of four First Nations (Poplar River, Pauingassi, Bloodvein River, and Little Grand Rapids) plus three provincial protected areas, namely Woodland Caribou and Atikaki Provincial Parks along with Eagle-Snowshoe Conservation Reserve. A buffer zone of 3,592,000 ha has been defined effectively surrounding the nominated area. Changes to the property's boundaries have reduced the originally nominated area by 436,000 ha (13%) and the buffer zone by 448,000 ha (12%).

The natural values of the nominated property have been well described in previous evaluations and this description is essentially unchanged notwithstanding the reduced size of the nominated area. The property continues to be of a very large scale and supports four large area ecosystems: needleleaf forest, wetland, rockland, and mixed wetland-rockland. Some larger blocks of the property have been excised along with narrow areas which previously comprised the linear waterway features to the east. As a result the area of rockland ecosystem has been reduced but large areas of this ecosystem type remain within the nominated area. Needleleaf forest has been reduced to 10% below the proponent's self-imposed threshold of 300,000 ha. It is noted, however, that other assessments typically use a threshold of 200,000 ha and some of this now-excluded area remains protected within the Whitefeather Dedicated Protected Area, directly adjacent but no longer within the nomination area. In IUCN's view, the revised nominated property continues to protect significant areas of needleleaf forest.

The nominated property continues to support a very large, intact landscape with diverse ecosystems, habitats and hydrological dynamics. Pimachiowin Aki includes extensive lake systems and freshwater wetlands and a myriad of waterways that are also central to the patterns of traditional human use practices in the property. If inscribed, Pimachiowin Aki would become one of the 20 largest World Heritage sites by area.

The landscape reflects a 6,000 year history of the relationship of people with the land. As was noted in IUCN's previous evaluations, the Anishinaabe First Nations continue a tradition of living in, using and maintaining the landscape, and the conservation values of Pimachiowin Aki are shaped by this long history of interaction. For example, the use of fire to open the forest canopy and favour certain natural resources, the manipulation of waterway channels and the effect of human fishing, hunting and gathering practices on the trophic dynamics of the ecosystem have all influenced the nominated property's natural systems and processes. The Anishinaabe First Nations consider their culture to be inseparable from nature and the land: a cultural outlook that has shaped their belief systems.

IUCN concludes that, despite the reduction in area in relation to the earlier nomination, the property remains a very large area and continues to support all attributes of the proposed OUV under criterion (ix).

#### 3. COMPARISONS WITH OTHER AREAS

IUCN's 2016 evaluation concluded very positively on the quality and rigour of the global comparative analysis provided in the 2015 nomination. This analysis was technically underpinned by the original analysis of 2013 but was further strengthened to support the case for the nominated property to meet criterion (ix). The same analysis was adapted in relatively minor ways for the nomination currently under consideration.

In IUCN's view the reduced area of the property by some 13% has not materially affected the conclusion of 2016 concerning its comparative value within the boreal shield. Pimachiowin Aki continues to be the most complete and largest example of the North American boreal shield, including its characteristic biodiversity and ecological processes. This is a large forested area with remarkable ecological integrity, and, importantly, no history of industrial development, including dams or diversions. This is increasingly rare globally, including in the southern boreal. The nominated property boasts its full faunal and floral biodiversity, including species that are strong indicators of primary forest health, such as Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus* - VU<sup>1</sup>), and is also large enough to maintain a full range of ecological processes, for example functional trophic dynamics, evolutionary processes, nutrient flows, hydrological and fire regimes. It is also worth reiterating that as of 2016, all expert reviewers expressed positive support for the nominated property as a World Heritage inscription.

#### 4. INTEGRITY, PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

#### 4.1. Protection

IUCN recalls its 2013 evaluation concluded that the protection status of Pimachiowin Aki as nominated then met the requirements of the Operational Guidelines and this was also the conclusion of the 2016 evaluation.

In law, all of the nominated area is "owned" by the Crown, that is, the State Party of Canada. Parentheses are used here because the First Nations posit that they have the right to make decisions on land use, and do not consider the land owned by anyone (as the nomination dossier notes in Anishinaabemowin [the Ojibwe language], there is no word for ownership.) Provincial governments increasingly defer to local, customary authorities on questions of land use. The exceptions to this tenure are the three provincial

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> These codes reflect the conservation status of each species as recorded in the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* at the time of the evaluation; for more information please visit <a href="http://www.iucnredlist.org">http://www.iucnredlist.org</a>

protected areas, Atikaki Provincial Park, Woodland Caribou Provincial Park, and Eagle-Snowshoe Conservation Reserve.

As the State Party clarified during the 2016 evaluation, "jurisdiction over public lands is in principle shared between the federal government, the provincial governments of Ontario and Manitoba and the [four] First Nations of the Accord. Aboriginal and treaty rights are protected under section 35(1) of Canada's Constitution Act, 1982. Treaty rights of the Pimachiowin Aki First Nations are set out in Treaty 5 (1875). Federal or provincial legislation that affects the exercise of Aboriginal or Treaty rights will be valid only if it meets the test established by the Courts for justifying an interference with a right recognized and affirmed under s. 35(1)." Surrounding areas (buffer zones) are also Crown lands managed by First Nations with similar relationships to the provinces and provide additional protection with complementary governance and management arrangements.

IUCN remains of the view that the protection status of the nominated property meets the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

#### 4.2 Boundaries

IUCN, in its 2016 evaluation, found that the boundaries of the nominated property, as configured at that time, met the requirements of the Operational Guidelines. Some concerns, at that time, related to the high boundary to surface area ratio resulting from long linear boundaries in the eastern part of the earlier nomination that followed the watercourses. Such a design is typically viewed as problematic for nature conservation areas due to the fact that long linear boundaries can expose a protected area to more interface pressures and are traditionally more challenging to manage. The amended boundaries largely remove this concern. Furthermore, the State Party in its supplementary information has provided additional clarifications confirming that there is little concern regarding development pressure in areas that were previously part of the nomination and now outside the nominated area. IUCN notes that forests adjacent to the Whitefeather Dedicated Protected Areas (and in the proposed buffer zone) are identified for forest management activities, including planned harvest operations, road construction, and silviculture, under the Whitefeather Forest Management Plan (2012-2022). The Whitefeather Plan is held up as a model by the Province of Ontario. It will be important that the strong stewardship approach continues to prevail in these areas, thus ensuring no adverse impacts on the nominated property's values.

Whilst the nominated property's buffer zone has been reduced in area relative to that originally nominated, it continues to afford substantial additional protection against external influences and establishes excellent connectivity across what is the largest and most complete mosaic of protected areas in the North American boreal shield. Population density in the buffer zone is low, at 0.23 people / km², similar to that within the nominated area (0.21 people / km²).

The State Party in supplementary information has indicated an openness to consider further expansion of the nominated property. The Pimachiowin Aki Corporation has received and welcomes the support and interest shown by neighbouring First Nations toward the nomination. The Corporation's by-law also enables expansion of the membership consistent with a vision to develop a network of linked protected areas.

IUCN considers that the boundaries of the nominated property meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

#### 4.3 Management

IUCN in its 2016 evaluation concluded that the property as nominated at that time met the management requirements of the Operational Guidelines. Essentially the same management systems prevail for Pimachiowin Aki as renominated. This includes a World Heritage-tailored management plan for the nominated property, adequate staffing, and access to expertise and financial resources. All of the four First Nations communities have developed land management plans for their lands. Provincial protected areas also have individual management plans in place. The management plans are legally binding and all land and resource use decisions must be consistent with the plans.

A key change relates to the governance arrangements for the nominated property, wherein the composition of the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation now comprises the four Anishinaabe First Nations of Bloodvein River, Little Grand Rapids, Pauingassi, and Poplar River, and the governments of Manitoba and Ontario. The governance arrangements for the nominated property are consensual and highly participatory, and represent a participatory governance structure that is considered exemplary. IUCN is of the view that these remain strong and appropriate governance arrangements to protect Pimachiowin Aki. The State Party in its supplementary information has noted the multiple avenues for interested other First Nations to engage in the governance of the property and its buffer zone. The State Party further affirmed its openness to engage with other interested parties. This is fully consistent with the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation's Strategic Plan and goals which include effective outreach with neighbouring communities; support and advocacy for land management planning and land use decisions consistent with the proposed OUV; partnerships that achieve mutual interests and benefits, and; openness to new members.

IUCN considers that the management of the nominated property meets the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

#### 4.4 Community

IUCN in its previous evaluation noted the characteristics of this mixed nomination which result from traditional use patterns of fishing, gathering, hunting and trapping and veneration of specific sites

by the Anishinaabe First Nations. The nominated property is a vast area with, according to the nomination, a resident population of less than 6,000 people. Yet the landscape as a whole exhibits the product of millennia of adaptation by people to the dynamic ecological processes of the boreal forest. Special mention was also made concerning the initiation of this nomination by First Nations wishing to protect through the World Heritage Convention their cultural values and traditions, together with their ancestral homelands.

Crucial to the future is the social cohesion that underpins customary First Nations management of this vast landscape. The integrity of this site has been dependent on the management of First Nations people for millennia, and that management has proven resilient despite tremendous challenges. The future of the site is thus entwined with ensuring broader social issues are addressed in a holistic manner.

#### 4.5 Threats

IUCN previously evaluated the overall threats to this property noting it is highly intact and largely free from the adverse effects of past (and present) development and neglect. It is considered one of the last remaining large ecologically intact portions of the southern boreal forest, which has otherwise been heavily fragmented by industrial forestry and other types of development.

IUCN's 2016 evaluation reported a new all-season East Side Road was under construction in Manitoba on the western side of the property. The road will, for the first time, provide much needed year-round road access to the communities of the Bloodvein, Berens River, Poplar River, Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids First Nations. Over time it is proposed to largely replace the existing winter road network that dissects the property in some areas and to reduce the overall road length inside the property. The First Nations / Provincial Government structure has reportedly been effective in minimizing environmental impacts from construction of the all-weather road, with many changes reportedly effected through community consultation. This same governance system is now proposing a linear wildlife refuge along the road corridor to address incursions for moose hunting. Reportedly, the Province has signalled willingness to take this step, based on details to be proposed by First Nations.

The resubmitted nomination referenced the issue of hydro-electric transmission lines noting that in the event of future demand and/or to strengthen supply reliability there may be the possibility of transmission lines needing to be developed within the nominated area. Despite the environmental and consultative proposed, safeguards both Advisory questioned this as a potential threat to the property. The State Party has provided additional assurances that there is no plan to re-route high voltage power lines to pass within the nominated area following a review of previous decisions and a decision to construct lines 250 kms to the west of the property. Moreover there is no expectation of future high voltage

transmission line development. Furthermore, hydroelectric development (i.e. generation, transmission, water containment and control) is prohibited by law in the nominated area.

In conclusion, IUCN considers that the integrity, protection and management of the nominated property meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

#### 5. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

IUCN has previously commended how this nomination has been conceived and how that concept has evolved through the processes of the World Heritage Committee and dialogue among the State Party, nomination proponents and the Advisory Bodies. The nomination is impressive, well-written and is an exceptional and compelling document, which in IUCN's view presents an excellent model for addressing future nominations that seek to capture the indissoluble links between nature and culture, and in particular between cultural integrity and ecological integrity in large landscapes. Subject to agreement, IUCN is committed to working with all concerned to further this dialogue, and, if inscribed, to share the experiences of practical, integrated mixed World Heritage site management more widely.

#### 6. APPLICATION OF CRITERIA

**Pimachiowin Aki** has been nominated under natural criteria (ix), as well as under cultural criteria (iii) and (vi) which will be evaluated by ICOMOS.

# Criterion (ix): Ecosystems/communities and ecological/biological processes

Pimachiowin Aki is the most complete and largest example of the North American boreal shield, including its characteristic biodiversity and ecological processes. Pimachiowin Aki contains an exceptional diversity of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems and fully supports wildfire, nutrient flow, species movements, and predator-prey relationships, which are essential ecological processes in the boreal forest. Pimachiowin Aki's remarkable size, intactness, and ecosystem diversity support characteristic boreal species such as Woodland Caribou (Rangifer tarandus - VU), Moose (Alces alces - LC), Wolf (Canis lupus - LC), Wolverine (Gulo gulo - LC), Lake Sturgeon (Acipenser fulvescens - LC), Leopard Frog (Lithobates pipiens - LC), Loon (Gavia immer - LC) and Canada Warbler (Cardellina canadensis - LC). Notable predator-prey relationships are sustained among species such as Wolf and Moose and Woodland Caribou, and Lynx (Lynx canadensis -LC) and Snowshoe Hare (Lepus americanus - LC). Traditional use by Anishinaabeg, including sustainable fishing, hunting and trapping, is also an integral part of the boreal ecosystems in Pimachiowin Aki.

<u>IUCN</u> considers that the nominated property meets this <u>criterion</u>.

#### 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopts the following draft decision, noting that this will be harmonised as appropriate with the recommendations of ICOMOS regarding their evaluation of this mixed site nomination under the cultural criteria and included in the working document WHC/18/42.COM/8B:

- 1. <u>Having examined</u> documents WHC-13/37.COM/8B, WHC/16/40.COM/8B, WHC/18/42.COM/8B and WHC/18/42.COM/INF.8B2;
- 2. <u>Recalling</u> decisions WHC-13/37.COM/8B and WHC/16/40.COM/8B;
- 3. <u>Inscribes</u> **Pimachiowin Aki (Canada)** on the World Heritage List under natural criterion (ix);
- 4. <u>Adopts</u> the following Statement of Outstanding Universal Value:

#### **Brief synthesis**

Pimachiowin Aki (the Land that Gives Life) is a 2,904,000-hectare cultural landscape of Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe people). Through the cultural tradition of Jiganawendamang Gidakiiminaan (Keeping the Land), Anishinaabeg have for millennia lived intimately with this special place in the heart of the North American boreal shield. Pimachiowin Aki is a vast area of healthy boreal forest, wetlands, lakes, and free-flowing rivers. Waterways provide ecological connectivity across the entire landscape. Wildfire, nutrient flow, species movements, and predator-prey relationships are key, functionina ecological processes naturally maintain an impressive mosaic of ecosystems. These ecosystems support an outstanding community of boreal plants and animals, including iconic species such as Woodland Caribou, Moose, Wolf, Wolverine, and Loon.

#### Criteria Criterion (ix)

Pimachiowin Aki is the most complete and largest example of the North American boreal shield, including its characteristic biodiversity and ecological processes. Pimachiowin Aki contains an exceptional diversity of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems and fully supports wildfire, nutrient flow, species movements, and predator-prey relationships, which are essential ecological processes in the boreal forest. Pimachiowin Aki's remarkable size, intactness, and ecosystem diversity support characteristic boreal species such as Woodland Caribou, Moose, Wolf, Wolverine, Lake Sturgeon, Leopard Frog, Loon and Canada Warbler. Notable predator-prey relationships are sustained among species such as Wolf and Moose and Woodland Caribou, and Lynx and Snowshoe Hare. Traditional use by Anishinaabeg, including sustainable fishing, hunting and trapping, is also an integral part of the boreal ecosystems in Pimachiowin Aki.

#### Integrity

Pimachiowin Aki contains all the elements necessary to ensure continuity of the key ecological processes of the boreal shield. The robust combination of First Nation and provincial protected areas forms the largest network of contiguous protected areas in the North American boreal shield. The vast size of the property provides for ecological resilience, especially in the context of climate change, and extensive buffer zones further contribute to integrity. The natural values of Pimachiowin Aki are remarkably free from the adverse effects of development and neglect. There is no commercial forestry. mining, or hydroelectric development permitted in the property, and waterways are free of dams and diversions.

Pimachiowin Aki exemplifies the indissoluble bonds between culture and nature. It is therefore vital that the integrity of customary governance and oral traditions be maintained in order to ensure continuity of the cultural tradition across generations and a continuation of the current high levels of stewardship which are evident within the property.

With the free engagement and willing agreement of neighbouring First Nations, ecological integrity could be further enhanced by progressive addition of areas of high conservation value adjacent to the inscribed property.

#### Protection and Management requirements

First Nations have played the leading role in defining the approach to protection and management of Pimachiowin Aki. Protection and management of the property are achieved through Anishinaabe customary governance grounded in Ji-ganawendamang Gidakiiminaan, contemporary provincial government law and policy, and cooperation among the four First Nations and two provincial government partners. Through an accord signed by the four nominating First Nations, Anishinaabeg of Pimachiowin Aki affirmed a sacred trust to care for the land for future generations. A memorandum of agreement between the provincial governments provides assurances about protection and management of the property. The Pimachiowin Aki partners share a commitment to work together to safeguard the Outstanding Universal Value Pimachiowin Aki for present and future generations.

First Nations and provincial partners have created the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation and developed a consensual, participatory governance financial capacity, and management framework for the property. The Pimachiowin Aki Corporation acts as a coordinating management body and enables the partners to work in an integrated manner across the property to ensure the protection and conservation of all natural values. The management framework is designed to meet potential challenges in the protection and conservation of the property, such as monitoring and mitigating the potential impacts of the construction of an all-season road [East Side Road] over the next 20 to 40 years. Climate change is also a challenge that requires adaptive management. A conservation trust fund has been set up to secure long-term sustainable financing for the management of the property.

- 5. <u>Requests</u> the State Party, through collaboration with the agreed governance body for the property, and with the consent of the First Nations to:
  - a) Encourage neighbouring First Nations to freely partner with the Pimachiowin Aki Corporation, and together with provincial authorities consider the possibility of further extensions of the property over time, in order to further improve the ecological connectivity and integrity of the property;
  - Ensure the continued protection of the property, which is founded in an enduring tradition of First Nation stewardship, including protection from future developments associated with hydroelectric power;
- c) Ensure that the construction of the new allseason road does not have adverse effects on the property, notably by carrying out full environmental impact assessments at each phase of the road construction and through effective monitoring of any ongoing impacts.
- 6. Expresses its deep appreciation for the combined efforts of the First Nations, working with provincial governments and the State Party, and for the joint dialogue undertaken with IUCN and ICOMOS, in deepening the understanding of nature-culture connections in the context of the World Heritage Convention, and for presenting a revised nomination which is a landmark for properties nominated to the World Heritage List through the commitment of indigenous peoples.

Map 1: Nominated property and buffer zone

