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15.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

15.1 Summary

15.1.1 All-Season Road Network

The East Side Road Authority (ESRA) is mandated to manage the East Side Transportation Initiative to provide improved, safe and more reliable transportation service for the remote and isolated communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. As part of the Large Area Transportation Network Study, ESRA must design and construct an all-season road on provincial Crown land to connect Berens River First Nation to Poplar River First Nation (the Project) and ensure that local communities participate in, and benefit from, the Project. Construction and operation of the proposed 94.1 km two-lane gravel all-season road requires federal and provincial regulatory approval.

In 2008, the Province commissioned a multi-disciplinary planning and engineering study to identify a preferred network of all-season roads connecting communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. The study, known as the *Large Area Transportation Network Study*, was completed in 2011 and set out to assess the best route network of all-season roads, the likely scope of social and economic impacts and benefits of the road network on local communities, potential environmental and cultural impacts and construction and operations and maintenance cost estimates. Engagement with Aboriginal peoples on the east side of Lake Winnipeg was a key element of the study and served as the initial formal “round” of engagement with Berens River First Nation and Poplar River First Nation as well as other east side of Lake Winnipeg communities.

Presently an all-season road from PR 304 to Berens River First Nation, also known as P1, is under construction. Community economic development is occurring with over 300 participants receiving construction-related training from ESRA and construction contracts awarded to Aboriginal companies. Advancement of the *Large Area Transportation Network Study* recommendations is currently underway with planning and design activities associated with the Berens River First Nation to Poplar River First Nation all-season road segment that includes this EIS.

15.1.2 Proposed Project

As part of the *Large Area Transportation Network Study* described above, ESRA is proposing to construct and maintain a 94.1 km two-lane gravel all-season road on provincial Crown Land on the east side of Lake Winnipeg between Berens River First Nation and Poplar River First Nation. The main components of the proposed Project are

- Gravel-surface two-lane all-season road (94.1 km);
- 4 major water crossings (bridges) over the Berens, Etomami, North Etomami and Leaf rivers;
- 6 culvert crossings at fish-bearing watercourse crossings;
- 23 culverts at non-fish-bearing watercourse crossings;

- 284 equalization culverts (estimated) to facilitate drainage/prevent flooding;
- Approximately 3.5 km of temporary construction access routes;
- Approximately 57 ha (0.57 km²) of temporary construction staging areas;
- 4 temporary construction camps covering approximately 64 ha (0.64 km²);
- 13 construction quarry sites;
- Construction borrow areas; and
- Facilities for the storage of explosives.

It is expected that this EIS for the proposed Project will be jointly reviewed by the federal and provincial governments. Previously, projects that required a review under both federal and provincial environmental assessment legislation were coordinated under the provisions of the Canada-Manitoba Agreement on Environmental Assessment Cooperation (2007), which has since expired. Federally, the construction and operation and maintenance of an all-season public highway that requires a total of 50 km or more of new right-of-way is considered a Designated Project under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012*. The proposed P4 Project is, therefore, considered a Designated Project which triggers the requirement for a federal environmental impact assessment (EIA) under the *Act*. Provincially, the proposed P4 Project is considered a 'Class 2' development (i.e., a two lane road at a new location with associated facilities and borrow pits) under the Classes of Development regulation of *The Environment Act* of Manitoba and requires an *Environment Act* Licence which triggers the requirement for a provincial environmental assessment. A 433-metre community access road on Poplar River First Nation Reserve lands is proposed and will follow a separate environmental review process conducted by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada per the requirements of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012*. ESRA will also apply for required construction permits under the *Indian Act*.

15.1.3 Environmental Setting

The proposed all-season road Project is located on the east side of Lake Winnipeg in a remote and largely unsettled and undeveloped area of the Province. The proposed Project is located on the east side of Lake Winnipeg within the Lac Seul Upland Ecoregion of the Boreal Shield Ecozone. The landscape is generally characterized by flat, low-lying and poorly-drained land with forest patches of black spruce and tamarack interspersed with bogs and fens. Surface waters flow west to Lake Winnipeg then north to Hudson Bay. Mammal, bird, fish and herptile species, including some of conservation concern such as the boreal woodland caribou, inhabit the area. The communities of Berens River First Nation/Northern Affairs Community and Poplar River First Nation are the only human settlements in the Local Assessment Area and are connected by winter road to the southern road network for a brief period each year. Transportation to and from these communities is otherwise primarily by aircraft. Land use in the Local Assessment Area is mainly traditional activities by local community members such as hunting, trapping, fishing, camping, timber harvest for firewood, recreation activities, sacred/ceremonial uses and food and medicine gathering.

15.1.4 Engagement Program

An Aboriginal and Public Engagement Program (APEP) was undertaken to provide meaningful opportunities to engage in dialogue and exchange information about the proposed Project and other proposed transportation initiatives on the east side of the Lake. Engagement activities were focused on interaction with and feedback from potentially interested and affected communities and community members, as well as the general public. The engagement program comprised face-to-face meetings or discussions with First Nation and Métis leadership, community members, regulators, trappers, outfitters and members of the general public.

15.1.5 Environmental Impact Assessment

An environmental impact assessment of the Project was completed using a values-based framework through the consideration of linkages between Valued Components of the environment and anticipated Project activities. Information provided through the engagement program, workshops, published literature, baseline studies and professional perspective was relied upon for the impact assessment. Mitigation measures and procedures for their effective implementation were identified from regulatory and industry standards, environmental guidance documents and ESRA-developed environmental protection specifications to avoid, minimize or offset potential adverse environmental effects of the Project. The effects of accidents and malfunctions and potential effects of the environment on the Project were also assessed, as were sustainability, climate change and cumulative effects. Follow-up actions, such as construction and post-construction monitoring programs, were identified where required by legislation and/or guidance documents, and to address uncertainty arising in the identification of environmental effects or the ability to mitigate those effects. Residual environmental effects were evaluated based on a significance evaluation framework developed by ESRA. An environmental assessment summary table is provided in **Appendix 15-1**.

15.1.6 Environmental Protection

ESRA is committed to implementing a broad suite of mitigation measures and follow-up actions identified by the environmental impact assessment through ESRA's comprehensive Environmental Program. The Environmental Program incorporates ESRA's environmental protection specifications (GR130s) and identifies Project-specific environmental protection guidelines and requirements directly in construction contract documents. Construction contractors will be responsible for the preparation and implementation of environmental protection plans, health and safety plans, emergency response plan, erosion and sediment control plans, hazardous materials management plans, and the completion of applicable monitoring programs. As the Project proponent, ESRA will be responsible for implementing, inspecting and reporting on this program through the construction and operations and maintenance phases of the Project.

15.2 Conclusion

Based on the information and analysis provided in this Environmental Impact Statement, it is concluded that the proposed all-season road connecting Berens River First Nation and Poplar River First Nation is not likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects. The Environmental Impact Statement also concludes that Project benefits (i.e., positive effects such as training, employment and business opportunities) can be expected.