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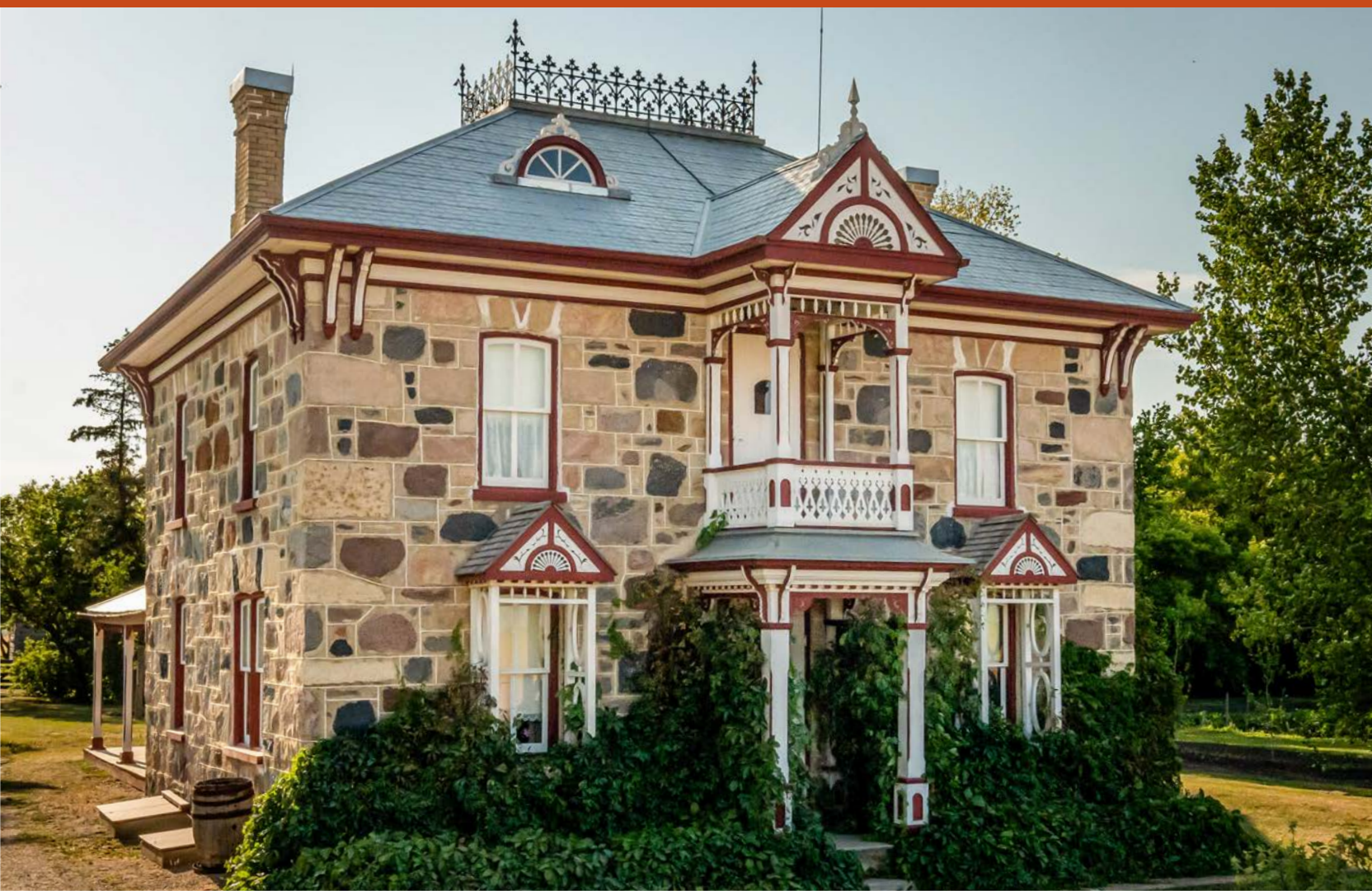


Motherwell Homestead

National Historic Site of Canada

Management Plan

2026



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Management Plan

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MOTHERWELL HOMESTEAD NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2026.

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Foreword



In Canada, the national historic sites, national parks, national marine conservation areas and national urban park administered by Parks Canada showcase and protect significant chapters of our history. They are places that unite Canadians. They weave connections between who we are, our attachment to the environment and our Canadian values.

From coast to coast to coast, Parks Canada manages a network of 225 sites. These places can be found in every province and territory in Canada—on land, on ice and at sea. As a result, Parks Canada plays a vital role in supporting local economies by boosting tourism, creating jobs and strengthening community well-being.

To the Government of Canada, the network managed by Parks Canada provides essential benefits to Canadians in support of climate action, such as conserving biodiversity, enhancing resilience to climate change and contributing to clean air and safe drinking water. Parks Canada knows that nature contributes to the health and safety of communities. For all those reasons, the federal government is committed to protecting these natural and cultural places, expanding the network of protected areas, advancing Indigenous stewardship and contributing to the recovery of species at risk.

To achieve this, Parks Canada works with Indigenous communities and key partners. Together, we protect and restore heritage places, help people connect with history and nature, and maintain the economic and social value of these places for local and regional communities. Together, we are creating a healthier, more resilient Canada for all Canadians while supporting a strong and sustainable economy.

This new management plan for Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site of Canada translates this vision into action. It reflects the tangible results of extensive consultation and a shared commitment to stewardship. As Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, I am pleased to support this collective effort and to approve the management plan for Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site of Canada.

The Honourable Julie Dabrusin
Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature

Recommendations

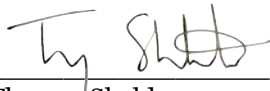
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Executive summary

Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site tells the story of settler homesteading and agriculture, rural life, and the politics associated with the settlement of western Canada in the late 19th century and is beginning to tell broader stories of life and inequities on the prairies for all, including for Indigenous peoples and newcomers to Canada.

Located just outside the village of Abernethy in southeastern Saskatchewan, 115 kilometres northeast of Regina, the site also falls within the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council area where Treaty 4 was originally negotiated, and within the traditional homeland of the Métis people.

The site was commemorated as a national historic site because of its architectural interest and its historic associations with the career of W.R. Motherwell, and as illustration of a prairie homestead of western Canada's settlement period. The wooded shelterbelts that bound much of the site are considered landscape features of national historic significance, and the "Shelter Belts on the Prairies" are commemorated on site as part of the Prairie Settlement Patterns National Historic Event designation.

Motherwell Homestead is currently open for visitation from May to September. Visitors experience life on a homestead with heritage breed animals and a garden portraying life in the 1800s through a variety of visitor experience opportunities, for example self-guided tours, and special events.

The management plan presents a long-term vision and outlines two key strategies to guide Parks Canada's decision making:

Key Strategy 1: Expanding partnerships to support diversified experiences at Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site

The first key strategy of the Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site management plan focuses on expanding partnerships to increase the diversity of stories presented. Improved accessibility will ensure visitors and locals continue to connect with Motherwell Homestead through a range of visitor experiences. Collaborations with Indigenous groups and local organizations will inform programs, products and events that will increase understanding of a wider scope of the Indigenous history and culture of land use and agricultural science and technology on the prairies over time.

Key Strategy 2: Supporting an authentic setting for visitor experience through assets and infrastructure

The second key strategy of the Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site management plan focuses on ensuring the assets and infrastructure authentically support the experiences of visitors to the site, within the means of Parks Canada. Assessing the condition of heritage and contemporary assets and rationalizing where feasible will allow site managers to focus on maintaining assets of national significance and those more critical for visitor experience. The site will continue to focus on operational efficiency and reducing the site's carbon footprint.

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1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada administers one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. Parks Canada's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national historic site, national park, national marine conservation area and heritage canal administered by Parks Canada supports its vision:

Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.

The *Parks Canada Agency Act* requires Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for national historic sites administered by Parks Canada. The *Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how historic site management will achieve measurable results in support of its mandate.

Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, partners and the Canadian public were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national historic site. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement and, where appropriate, consultation, on the management of Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site in years to come.

2.0 Significance of Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site

Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site is located just outside the village of Abernethy in southeastern Saskatchewan, 115 kilometre northeast of Regina (Maps 1 & 2). The site is located in the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council area where Treaty 4 was originally negotiated and within the traditional homeland of the Métis people. The File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council area represents 11 First Nations of the Treaty 4 territory, including over 15,000 First Nations on and off reserve citizens.

The site was formally recognized as a National Historic Site in 1966 because of its architectural interest and its historic associations with the career of W.R. Motherwell, and as illustration of a prairie homestead of western Canada's settlement period. The buildings, structures and landscaping of the place represents a homestead of the early western Canada settlement period, and the application of scientific principles to prairie agriculture and historic concepts of settler homestead design. W.R. Motherwell was among the first settlers to homestead in the Pheasant Hills district north of the Qu'Appelle Valley in 1882, as part of a large wave of homesteaders from central Canada capitalizing on the federal government's offer of land grants to settle the West. W.R. Motherwell's political and personal farming efforts contributed the implementation of scientific agriculture approaches to farmstead design and to ongoing innovations in agricultural practices on the Canadian Prairies.

In addition to the reasons for formal recognition, Catherine Motherwell, W.R. Motherwell's second wife, is noted for her connection to the difficult history of the Canadian residential school system in her role as a missionary teacher and principal at the File Hills Indian Residential School.

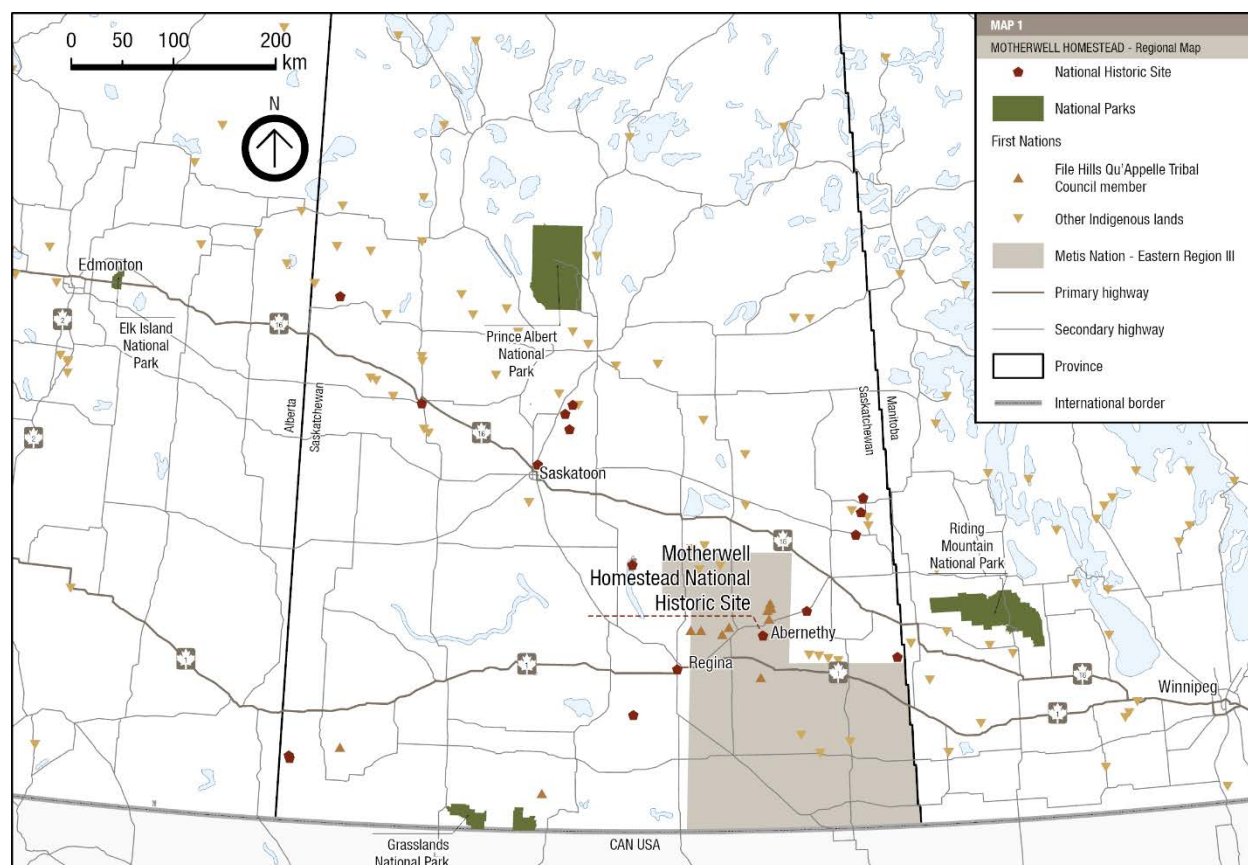
The designated place (Map 3) consists of an 8.3-acre farmstead including archaeological sites and resources related to the original homestead, and a variety of built heritage and contemporary structures. A

number of buildings on-site are cultural resources related to the reasons for designation. The location of the shelter belts that bound the property to the south and north and the fence lines to the west are considered archaeological resources that commemorate the site. The farm is organized into quadrants edged by shrubs, hedges and ornamental trees, and include heritage flower and vegetable gardens. Historical and archaeological objects associated with the site are housed at the site and at a Parks Canada collections site. A newly renovated (2020) visitor reception centre, play structure, electric vehicle chargers and day use picnic shelter round out the contemporary features. Twenty acres of active farmland adjacent to the site was part of Motherwell's original homestead and are owned by Parks Canada.

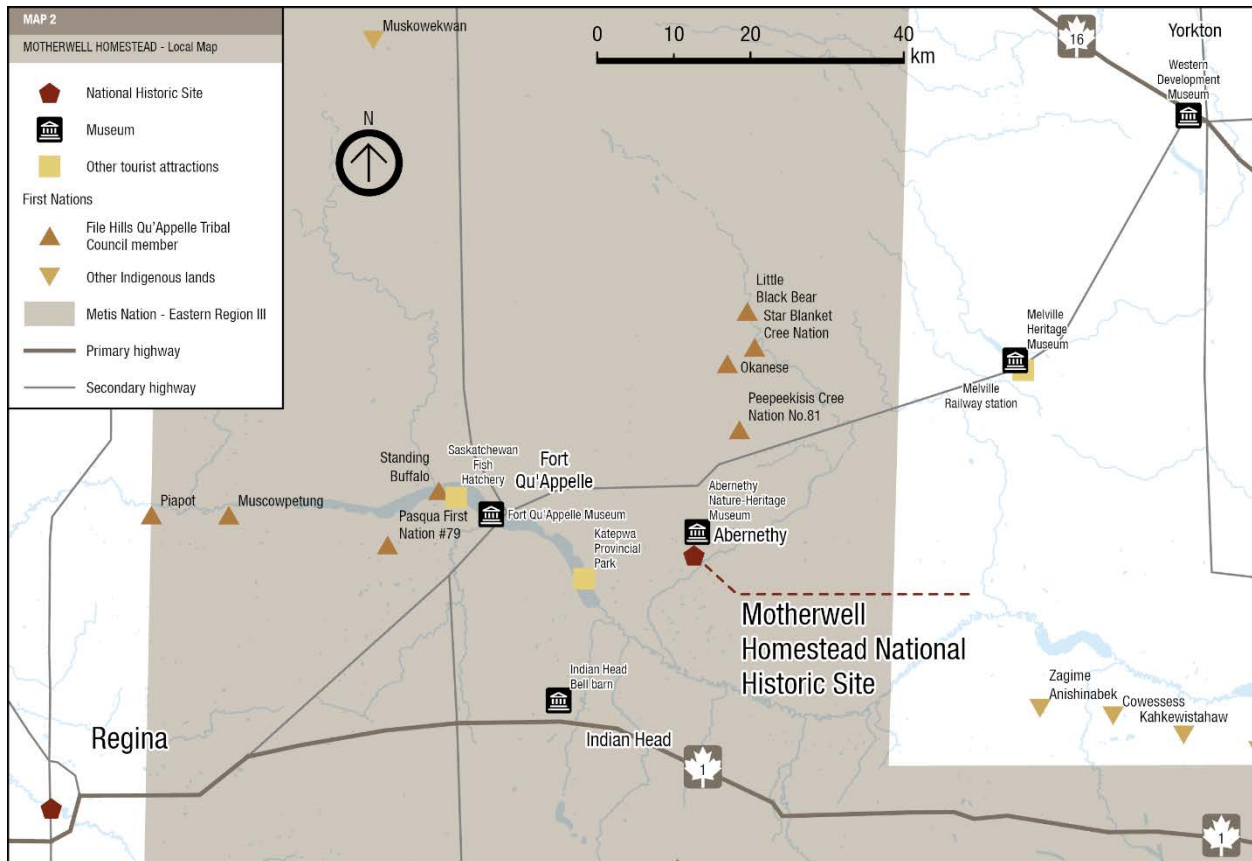
The wooded shelterbelts are considered a landscape feature of national historic significance, and the "Shelter Belts on the Prairies" are commemorated on site as part of the Prairie Settlement Patterns National Historic Event designation.

Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site tells the story of settler homesteading and agriculture, rural life, and the politics associated with the settlement of western Canada in the late 19th century and is beginning to tell broader stories of life and inequities on the prairies for all, including for Indigenous peoples and newcomers to Canada.

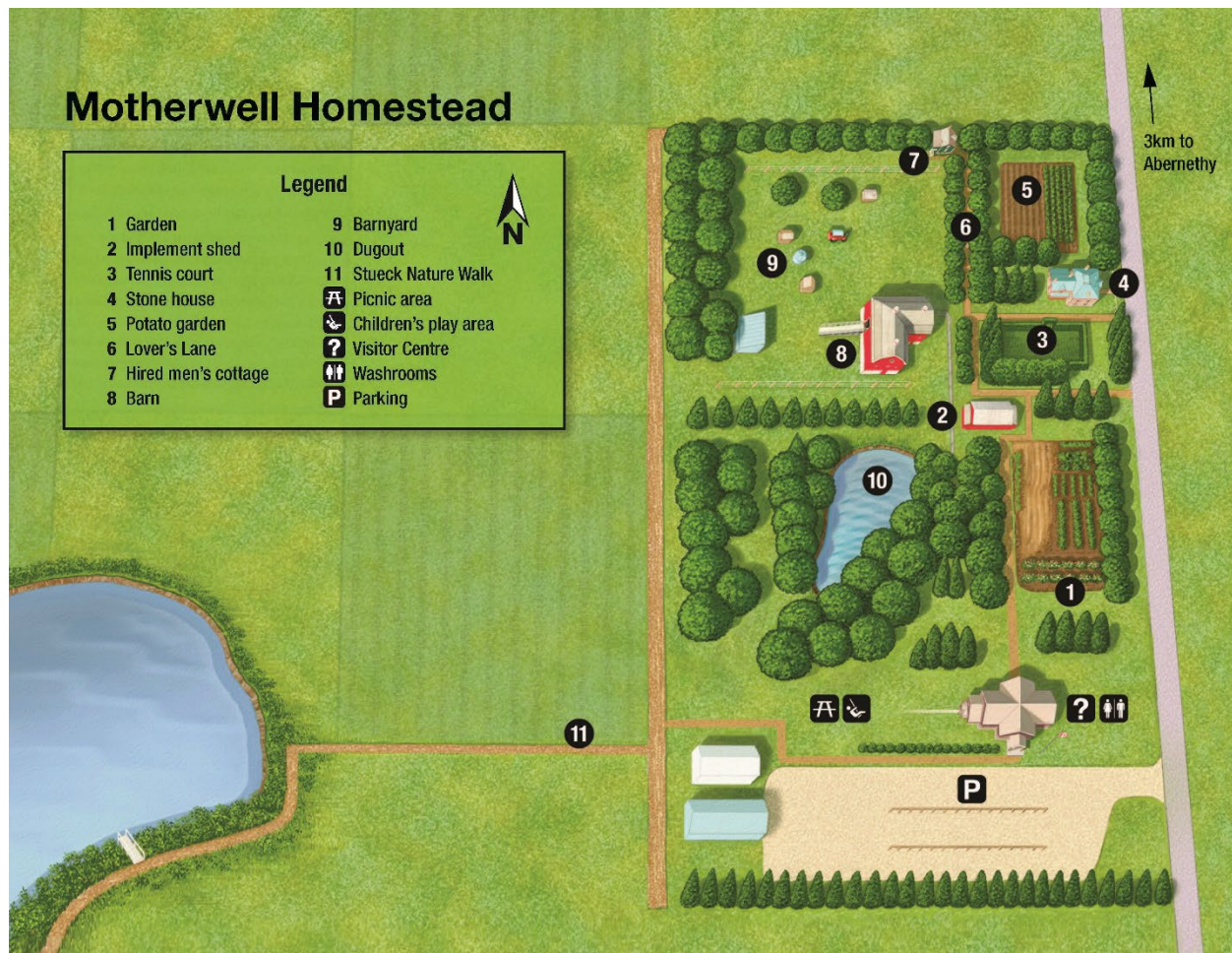
Map 1: Regional setting of Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site



Map 2: Local setting of Motherwell Homestead NHS



Map 3: Site Map of Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site



3.0 Planning context

Visitor Experience and Visitation

Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site is currently open for visitation from May to September. The current visitor offer includes a homestead experience with heritage breed animals and a garden portraying life in the 1800s. Current visitor experiences are generally self-guided, supplemented by stationed guides who provide information, demonstration and interpretation. School group programming occurs in May and June. Special events are often hosted with the support of partner groups in July and August.

Most visitors to the site are Canadians, with many visiting the site for the first time. Visitors tend to be a mix of families and mature audiences.

In 2012 (one year after the 2011 Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site management plan was tabled), the site experienced a major reduction in staff and hours of operation, yielding a drop in attendance to an average of 7600 person-visits per year. Although a Symphony event in partnership with the Regina Symphony Orchestra led to higher visitation numbers from 2015 to 2019, it was not financially feasible for either partner to continue offering the event annually. Due to COVID-19 pandemic

precautions and restrictions, attendance was greatly reduced in 2020 and 2021, to 1200 and 2600 person-visits per year, respectively, which increased to almost 4000 person-visits in 2023-2024.

The Friends of the Motherwell Homestead Association enhance visitation through operating a restaurant and gift shop in the Visitor Reception Centre, contributing many volunteer hours per year.

Expanding partnerships, including with Indigenous communities as outlined below, will be important to the sustainability of Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site and authenticity of its visitor experience offer.

Indigenous Partnerships

The site is located within Treaty 4 Lands and the traditional homeland of the Métis people. The File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council represents eleven First Nations in the Treaty Four Territory, including many of the First Nations communities near the site. Relationships with local Indigenous communities, the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan Eastern Region III, Tourism Saskatchewan, and local arts organizations have led to several successful special events and partnerships. Recent (since 2020) initiatives to incorporate a broader story of the prairies and western settlement, including Indigenous history:

- Annual pumpkin harvest event with File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council Youth Wellness Team and File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council Health Services Nutrition Team (since 2020)
- Winterfest Celebration with File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council Youth Wellness Team (2022)
- Métis hooked and braided rugs Exhibit with Gabriel Dumont Institute (2022)
- Story map of Métis traditional land use in the area (2021)
- Métis land-based education program with Métis Nation Saskatchewan (since 2021)
- An agreement with Métis Nation Saskatchewan, as part of Parks Canada's Indigenous Peoples Open Doors Program (since 2020)

Cultural Resources, Built Assets and Recent Investments

Cultural resources at the site (including archaeological sites, buildings, landscape features and historical objects) were rated "Fair" to "Good" condition in the latest State of Site Assessment (2022).¹

The archaeological sites, including original fence lines, the location of the original clothesline, hot house and barn ramp, location of original shelterbelts, vestiges of the drainage ditches, farmstead roads, and the farm's quadrant system are features of the site that remain in good condition.

Ongoing maintenance and repair work on the Stone House and Hired Men's cottage from 2020 to 2023 (\$53,000) has improved the condition of these buildings. The barn is currently rated in "Good" condition. Future work to these structures is guided by the *Long-Term Maintenance Plan for Motherwell Homestead* (2017) and direction from a 2023 Restoration Workshop.

The shelterbelts are significant character defining features of the site, dividing the landscape into functional quadrants, and providing protection from wind and soil erosion. The trees that make up the current shelterbelts were planted during landscape restoration in the 1980s and many species are nearing the end of their life cycle. A *Shelterbelt Maintenance Plan* was completed in 2019 and work is underway to improve the condition of the shelterbelts.

Multiple projects have contributed to a "Good, increasing trend" condition of buildings and grounds in the latest State of Site Assessment (2022). The visitor reception centre facility was recently renewed (completed 2020 with an investment of \$930,000), a new play structure was added in 2017, electric vehicle chargers were installed in the parking lot and the day-use picnic shelter were completed in 2020 (\$179,000 total).

¹ The "State of Site Assessment" is prepared in advance of a new management plan and rates prescribed indicators as "Good," "Fair" or "Poor" based on internal data collection and assessment.

The utilities indicator in the latest State of Site Assessment (2022) was rated “Poor, declining trend” due to a dated fire protection system around the barn and house.

With the challenges of rising operating costs, the priority and future viability of all operations and infrastructure are considered when developing action plans. Action plans to increase the sustainability of core mandate operations are critical to improve the quality of service, value, and experience for all visitors and may include modernizing or upgrading some operations and decommissioning or scaling down others. Action plans are not included in this management plan and will be developed as required during implementation of this plan. Sustainable operations are essential to ensure viability and good stewardship of the site over the long-term.

Climate Change

The Canadian Prairies are projected to warm much faster than the global average, a product of the region’s northern latitude and continental geography. Climate change projections for the site are similar to those throughout the southern Canadian Prairies. More frequent and intense extreme weather events such as drought, heat waves, intense summer storms, and heavy rainfall events, will likely be some of the most challenging consequence of climate change in the region. Summers are getting longer and hotter, and this presents both opportunities and challenges such as extended visitor seasons and the need for careful planning for outdoor activities during heat waves.

Shelterbelts, like the one surrounding Motherwell Homestead, are an adaptive farming practice used to reduce erosion during dry periods. Improving the condition of this conservation target and incorporating climate-smart principles into this work both preserve the commemorative integrity of the site and increase the resiliency of the site to extreme weather.

4.0 Development of the management plan

The management plan was prepared following an initial period of key stakeholder engagement and Indigenous consultation on early concepts of the plan in the spring of 2023, followed by public and Indigenous consultation on a draft plan in the winter of 2025. The results of this engagement and consultation were considered in the development of the management plan.

5.0 Vision

The vision presented below expresses the future desired state of Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site in 15 to 20 years.

Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site remains an interactive, engaging site that immerses visitors in homesteading and settlement history, agriculture, and experiencing rural life of all peoples in western Canada in the 19th century.

Visitors to the site experience broad perspectives about past, present and future prairie life, including the stories, histories, and cultures of local Indigenous groups. Events and activities cater to a diverse audience. The interpretive offer is informed by emerging trends in visitor experience and enhanced by existing, new, and blossoming relationships with partners.

Supported by expanded partnerships, the site operates efficiently and is well aligned with the sustainability initiatives of the day. Key visitor infrastructure is well maintained, and accessible for those with diverse needs.

6.0 Key strategies

As a long-term strategic plan, consistent with the Government of Canada approach for results-based planning, the management plan focuses on the results that Parks Canada wants to achieve.

The components of results-based planning work together as follows:

- Key strategies present major themes and introduce broad management approaches working toward achieving the vision as presented.
- Objectives present management priorities and identify desired results.
- Targets measure success in achieving objectives over the implementation period.

Parks Canada will make decisions with respect to how to reach the targets identified in this plan, working in collaboration with Indigenous partners, community partners, stakeholders, and the public. Over the ten-year time frame, this approach allows for flexibility to account for available resources, evolving priorities and emerging opportunities.

Two key strategies frame the management direction for the Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site for the next ten years. Objectives and targets in the key strategies consider available resources, expertise, and existing capacity in Parks Canada and that of its partners.

Key Strategy 1: Expanding partnerships to support diversified experiences at Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site

The first key strategy of the Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site management plan focuses on increasing the diversity of stories presented. Current expansions in visitor experience beyond the history of European settlement and homesteading are supported by the *Framework for History and Commemoration: National Historic Sites System Plan (2019)* as well as partnerships with local Indigenous communities and the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. Interest from visitors has been promising and has helped rebuild visitation to the site post-COVID-19 pandemic precautions and restrictions.

Expanding partnerships and the visitor experiences to appeal to broader audiences through sharing more diverse stories (past and present Indigenous life on the prairies, past and present green technology in agriculture) will help increase the diversity of visitors at the site while still offering traditional users of the site improved opportunities to experience rural prairie life. Striving for universal access and inclusion will enhance the visitor experience for all. Accessibility and diverse storytelling (through mini-events and activities offered in collaboration with new and existing partners with diverse perspectives) will be the priority for investment and effort in this key strategy, as resources allow.

Objective 1.1: Visitor experiences that are accessible and meaningful to visitors with a wide range of abilities, identities and interests are maintained or enhanced.

Targets

- Universal access² and inclusion (including social inclusivity such as addressing neurodiverse needs, facilities that are gender-neutral and welcoming to newcomers to Canada) is incorporated in programs, services, equipment, and communications at Motherwell Homestead by 2035.
- While continuing to offer a range of self-discovery, virtual and in-person programs where possible, some visitor experience effort is shifted to mini-events and activities hosted at Motherwell Homestead, leading to an increasing trend in the diversity of visitors by 2035.
- Visitor experiences that increase the connection of various audiences (schoolchildren, Indigenous visitors) to the site continue to be explored and implemented, where feasible, over the life of the plan.

² Universal accessibility is defined as the character of a product, process, service, information or environment that, with equity and inclusiveness in mind, enables any person to perform activities independently and achieve equivalent results.

Objective 1.2: The visitor offer at the site continues to be enhanced by working collaboratively with local partners to include new perspectives.

Targets

- Annual efforts to recruit more diverse staff result in a more diverse staff complement.
- Indigenous partnerships are strengthened, over the life of this plan, through collaborations at Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site.
- Over the life of this plan, new mutually beneficial local partnerships are explored.
- The relative percentage of volunteer hours supporting the site is maintained or increased over the life of this plan.

Objective 1.3: Visitors have a greater understanding of and connection to a wider scope of the Indigenous history and culture of land use and agricultural science and technology on the prairies over time.

Targets

- Broader Indigenous stories and perspectives continue to be shared in interpretive programs and products over the life of this plan.
- By 2035, the visitor offer includes a range of self-discovery, virtual and in-person programs delivered either with or by partners that are scalable to respond to varying visitation, with an emphasis on agriculture, historic green technology, food appreciation and Indigenous history and culture.
- The Commemorative Intent Statement for the site is updated by 2035.

Key Strategy 2: Supporting an authentic setting for visitor experience through assets and infrastructure.

The second key strategy of the Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site management plan focuses on ensuring the assets and infrastructure authentically support the experiences of visitors to the site, within the means of Parks Canada.

Maintaining historic buildings and grounds can be an expensive endeavour, and this key strategy focuses on optimizing the size, health, and composition of both the heritage and contemporary asset portfolio to support efficient and sustainable resource use. A realistic conservation approach that focuses on the most vulnerable infrastructure and cultural resources is required. Plans such as the *Long-Term Maintenance Plan* (2017) and the *Shelterbelt Maintenance Plan* (2019), will guide this work.

Finally, reducing the carbon footprint of the site will benefit both the operational budget of the site and help meet current government-wide sustainability goals.

Objective 2.1: Heritage assets are safeguarded and support visitor experience.

Targets

- The condition of heritage assets are assessed and those that are not of national significance and are underutilized, not critical for visitor experience, or redundant, are identified for rationalization³ by 2030.
- Following the *Shelterbelt Maintenance Plan* (2019), the historic shelterbelt maintains or improves in condition by the next State of Assessment.

³ Asset rationalization is the process of identification of assets that are candidates for decommissioning, demolition or disposal due to low operational value, poor physical condition, low financial performance, underutilization, deficient functionality, capacity issues or environmental pressures. Additional review will be applied to any proposal to rationalize designated heritage assets.

Objective 2.2: Contemporary assets are welcoming to all and support current visitor experience.

Targets

- Modern infrastructure projects incorporate designs, as feasible, to improve barrier-free accessibility to align with the goals of the *Accessible Canada Act* (S.C. 2019, c.10), from 2025 onward.
- Contemporary assets that are underutilized, not critical for visitor experience, or redundant, are identified for rationalization by 2030.

Objective 2.3: Operational efficiency contributes to a reduced carbon footprint at the site.

Targets

- By 2035, the majority of fleet vehicles and utility terrain vehicles for the site meet Government of Canada commitments to reduce emissions.
- Over the life of this plan, operations at Motherwell Homestead will strive to align with new and emerging sustainability initiatives.
- By 2035, following a feasibility assessment, greener sources of electricity are used to power and heat the site.
- Historic green technology practices are shared with visitors by 2035.