

National park land being
returned to natives

RIDING MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, Man. (CP) — A pristine parcel of this national park in northwestern Manitoba is being returned to its original owners — the Keeseekoowenin Indian band.

Band lawyer Rhys Langen-Jones said federal officials have admitted a 290-hectare parcel of land along the northwest shore of Clear Lake was wrongfully taken from the band when the park was created 61 years ago.

"Eviction, even at the best of times, is bad but eviction during the Dirty '30s was really awful," Langen-Jones said.

"Band members went from a reserve where they could hunt elk and fish freely to a piece of prairie land with little potential."

Langen-Jones said use of the land will be controlled by band bylaws, which for the time being will mirror present restrictions.

Park officials have agreed to distribute a notice to all visitors when the park opens next weekend, he said, stating that Ottawa has admitted the land, including the shoreline, belongs to the band.

"The band recognizes the many years of public use of that land and is prepared to permit another year of public use under a co-operative administrative agreement," Langen-Jones said.

"The band has gone out of its way to diffuse any concern on the part of the public that there is any risk of their enjoyment" of the park.

Band councillor Richard Bone said members are being asked how they want the land developed, adding that most

believe development should conform with the park setting.

"Everyone is kind of excited about the news," Bone said. "We always knew it was our land. We were just patient."

Langen-Jones said that legal advisors from the departments of Indian Affairs, Justice and Environment have agreed with the band's position that the land was always theirs.