A Brief highly condensed History of Shoal Lake:

Shoal Lake drains eastward into the Lake of the Woods drainage basin. Shoal Lake 40 reserve was set aside in 1873 under Treaty 3. The Manitoba Ontario boarder was later drawn through the reserve, further complicating the politics. The intent of the treaty was an equitable alliance in a shared land.

The Anishinaabeg of Shoal Lake lived sustainably here until 1915 when development of the Winnipeg Water Intake began.

Shortly after the Treaty 3 - a settler community grew quickly to the West and by 1911 Winnipeg’s population was 156,000. The economy was booming and speculators predicted that Winnipeg would become the Chicago of the North. But to keep growing it needed a secure supply of water. In 1907 Engineers report said that Winnipeg had an endless supply of good water available from the Winnipeg River. But by 1913 Winnipeg’s Mayr, businessmen, MP’s and Federal MP’s decided they preferred an aqueduct to Shoal Lake and a railway to their mines there. The Greater Winnipeg Water District Utility gave promises that other’s interests would be protected and gained conditional approval from Ontario and the International Joint Commission to divert water out of SL and Lake of the Woos for “domestic and sanitary purposes”. The Minister of Indian Affairs and the Minister of Public Works were both from Manitoba. The historical record show that the rights and interests of the Anishnaabe were simply ignored: “Shoal Lake is uninhabited, with the exception of a few Indian.” (Winnipeg's Consulting Engineer’s report 1913.)

Expropriation:
• The Minister of Indian Affairs expropriated over 3000 acres of SL 40’s best land and its only gravel supply
• The land taken for the aqueduct, railroad and diversion canal split the remaining reserve into three isolated pieces.

• A 1000 man work camp was set up in the traditional lands of the people necessitating their moving the community for a variety of reasons (social problems caused by the men in the camp, noise, interference with hunting and fishing). The people moved the their current location on what would become parcel 3 of the land. The plans for the diversion canal were not made known to the people prior to their move. They moved to this location to be closer to the residential school where their children had been taken.

So the ‘sharing’ treaty “partners” took the land, the water, the gravel, violated the traditional graves of the ancestors, chopped the land into three pieces and did nothing to correct the harm... for the next 100 years. The harm has therefore deepened leaving Shoal Lake 40 residents without the basic human rights of clean water, sewage, freedom of movement

When the laws were passed to give away the water, the laws also said: “That full compensation be made... to all private parties whose lands or properties may be taken, injuriously affect or in any way interfered with”. But since 1916, nothing has been done to protect the interests of Shoal Lake #40 First Nation from the severe consequent damages arising from the diversion of water from Shoal Lake.

When Shoal Lake water was turned on in 1919, no water treatment was needed resulting in $631,000 net annual savings. Water profits became a lucrative source of income for the city which continued to charge taxes for the water service. In 2012 a Manitoba Commission investigation found surpluses of $41 Million, 25 Million and $21 Million in 2008,9 and 10 respectively.

Meanwhile in Shoal 40 many No Trespassing signs and No Cutting signs are erected to this day. The actions of the people along those No Trespassing zones are monitored by camera.

For 95 years the city did not build a treatment facility but aggressively blocked Shoal 40 from developing any part of the land affecting the watershed. Meanwhile Falcon Lake was allowed to develop unfettered.

Shoal Lake fishery was shut down in 1982 and the band responded by proposing a tourism development that would have included the cost of building an all weather road to the West (then at much lower cost).

Winnipeg responded with political and legal assaults to stop the development. They succeeded. A Tripartite Agreement was struck in 1989 (Manitoba, Winnipeg and Shoal 40) the city and province agreed to help SL40 achieve alternate environmentally sustainable development and to “make every effort to promote economic development beneficial to the band...” and to create direct job opportunities. The agreement provided an orderly process by which all weather road access could be achieved.

In 26 years none of these things has happened. In summer home is an island. In winter, an ice road provides some land access to the outside world. In between seasons there is no secure access to the mainland. 9 lives have been lost in recent years and nearly everyone in the community has fallen through the ice more than once.
The history makes the wrongs clear. The failure to compensate the people of SL40 for the loss of their land, gravel, water, traditional home and freedom of movement on an off their own land, has created worsening impact on their quality of life and human rights. The all weather road called “Freedom Road” is the thing that needs to happen before anything else can happen. The people of SL40 have made it clear that this is what they want and need. It is time to listen to their voices, which until now have been largely ignored.

“To live in this place requires either significant motivation to overcome all of the difficulties associated with living on an “island”, or a lack of viable options. If nothing changes at Shoal Lake 40, it is estimated that the on-reserve population will remain stagnant while the off reserve population grows. .... The significance of this evolution is profound. Shoal Lake 40 is becoming a landless band and its members are being disenfranchised from the many benefits accorded to Aboriginal people living on reserve. More significantly, the young people growing up off reserve are being disenfranchised from the rich history of the Shoal Lake People that is founded on the relationship with the landscape of the reserve and the region. It is this landscape that is bred in their bones and contributes to the continuity of the people. In many respects this sad situation is reminiscent of the days in the early 1900's when aboriginal people were starved off their land and the reserves returned to the crown because no one occupied them. (ie. Lac La Croix IR 24C relocation from Quetico, 1909).”

WESTERN ACCESS ROAD PLAN, Interim Report, May, 2005; Stantec Consulting Ltd. in association with Hilderman Thomas Frank Cram, Planners. Pages 7, 8.