



The Little Forks / La Petite Fourche*
National Urban Park Proposal

Complete Proposal

May 2024

The material presented in this document is reproduced and adapted from a research study led by Professor Jean Trottier, from the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Manitoba. Except where noted, all photographs were taken by Jean Trottier and all illustrations were produced by the research team.

** Indigenous naming of the proposed park will be established through a consultative process led in collaboration with Welcoming Winnipeg.*



A bold idea: the barren fields of Assiniboine Park, Winnipeg's first metropolitan urban park, c. 1905. Source: Winnipeg Parks and Recreation Department.

Preamble

In July of 2022, a group of Winnipeg citizens began exploring the creation of a national urban park at the “Petite Fourche”, or “Little Forks”, as the confluence of the Red and Seine Rivers was known in *voyageurs* days. This community-led initiative responded to the federal governments’ decision to establish at least one new national urban park in every province and territory and to the subsequent signing of a *Statement of Collaboration* between Parks Canada and the City of Winnipeg.

Since then, both the scope of the proposed park and the diversity of its proponents have increased significantly. The resulting proposal presented here is ambitious but with determination, creativity, and long-term commitment, remains within our reach.

Our proposal is simple: now is the time to protect Winnipeg’s rivers in perpetuity.

Winnipeg will get only one national urban park. We must make the most of this historic opportunity and ask ourselves: what’s the most impactful use of a national park in Winnipeg? And what can we achieve with federal involvement that we would not be able to achieve otherwise?

Like our forebears, who created the Winnipeg park system, the Floodway, and The Forks, let us be visionary, bold, and optimistic, so that future generations can look back and say: “This was the right idea, at the right time”.



Executive Summary

The present community-led proposal includes two distinct, complementary components: a **national urban park** in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and a metropolitan-wide **waterways conservation framework**.

The national urban park would be located at the **confluence of the Red and Seine Rivers**, in the heart of Winnipeg. As envisioned here, the park's core area would extend roughly from the Provencher Bridge to the Louise Bridge on the Red River, and to Provencher Boulevard on the Seine River. From there, the park would reach outward along three river branches: northward along the Red River, to St. John's Park, by the Redwood Bridge; southward along the Seine River, to the Fermor Avenue Bridge; and westward along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, to the Norwood Bridge, the Osborne Bridge, and the Manitoba Legislature.

Each park branch would end at prominent green spaces or public infrastructure, such as bridges, community centres, or recreational facilities, thus allowing access from neighbourhoods on all sides of the three rivers. Additional park gateways are proposed at The Forks, the Louise Bridge, and Happyland Park.

The full extent of the park would comprise **430 hectares of land and water areas**. This includes most natural lands inventoried in Winnipeg's urban centre. It also incorporates many municipal parks, community centres, institutional facilities, private green spaces, and vacant or underused industrial lands.

The park's core area is built around a **nature preserve** that would protect existing high-quality natural habitats by the mouth of the Seine River -- one of Winnipeg's most ecologically significant locations. This conservation area would include the Lagimodière - Gaboury Park, parts of Whittier Park, as well as the tip of Point Douglas. It would also initiate the site remediation and restoration of almost fourteen hectares of former industrial lands and provide habitat continuity between the Red, Seine, and Assiniboine river corridors.

An **interpretive centre** is proposed at the tip of Point Douglas, near the Louise Bridge. This location would facilitate operational and management activities as well as interpretive programming and research. The area already includes a mix of existing parkland, spontaneous reforestation, and barren post-industrial sites that provide both short-term and long-term conditions for the implementation of main park facilities. The existing Buchanan Marine Boat Launch is one of the best river access in the city and would offer a convenient base for water recreation and programming.

The interpretive centre would be readily accessible via main roads or bus routes and would be adjacent to one of the few bridges connecting to the northeast quadrant of the city. The future eastern bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor is expected to run along Sutherland Avenue, with a station located at Higgins Avenue. This would make the interpretive centre directly accessible from the regional BRT system and create synergies with the expected station-area mixed-use development planned for the adjacent Brown and Rutherford property.

Besides environmental conservation and restoration, the intent of the proposal is to create a pleasant, safe, and functional continuous **river trails network** to connect inner city recreational and cultural facilities. This network would, in turn, link with the rest of the municipal trails and parkways system.

To complement existing ceremonial places such as the Forks' Oodeena Circle, Fort Gibraltar, and the Kapabamayak Achaak healing forest in St. John's Park, we also propose to distribute smaller **gathering and ceremonial places** across the entire extent of the national park. These would support organized or informal community gatherings and complement existing neighbourhood facilities. The creation of these places could find inspiration in the "forest groves" or stands of large cottonwood trees that were cultivated by Indigenous people to provide favourable conditions for their seasonal encampments in the area.

To ensure **equitable access to nature**, the proposed park would be near many of Winnipeg's higher needs neighbourhoods, where residents typically have lower access to parks and natural spaces than those in the rest of the city. The park would be within a 10-minute walk of 38 of Winnipeg's 230 neighbourhoods, 89,565 people (12% of Winnipeg's population) and 48,617 households (15.4% of Winnipeg's). All residents of the greater Winnipeg area would be within a 30-minute drive of the park.

The park's location at the centre of Winnipeg would also provide **optimal public transit accessibility**. Forty-three bus routes are within the park's 10-minute walking catchment, including those that use the southwest rapid transitway. Two other planned metropolitan BRT lines would intersect the park area, including the proposed main network station at the Canadian National Railway's Union Station.

Reconciliation with Indigenous communities would be advanced through the park's proximity to neighbourhoods with significant Indigenous population, by preserving places and features of value to First Nations and Métis people, by supporting the mandates of local Indigenous organizations, and by including Indigenous partners in the park's long-term management agreement. The location of the interpretive centre would also facilitate coordination with nearby Indigenous organizations hoping to conduct land-based education programming and recreational activities in the national park.

The proposed park is well-positioned to **support the City of Winnipeg's urban development goal** of enhancing and maximizing the use of existing infrastructure and assets while conserving natural heritage features such as rivers, urban forests, and parks. Two *Major Redevelopment Sites* are adjacent to the proposed park: South Point Douglas and the Public Markets (in the Old Stock Yards Industrial Park). Amongst joint initiatives to be explored are environmental remediation and restoration; infrastructure upgrades and improvements; the linkage of parks, natural areas, and green corridors into a cohesive habitat network; the extension and integration of the active transportation and recreational

trails network; the creation of additional park gateways and public access to the Red and Seine Rivers; and generally, an increase in the provision of green space and recreational amenities for existing inner-city residents.

Many considerations affecting the implementation of the *Little Forks National Urban Park* are not specific to Winnipeg's city centre. Indeed, private ownership of the riverbanks and riparian zones, habitat and recreational trail discontinuity, inadequate and sporadic funding, and overly fragmented legislation and management practices affect all Winnipeg-area waterways. It seems probable, then, that the conservation and management policies required to support the national urban park could equally apply to the full extent of Winnipeg's metropolitan rivers and creeks.

Accordingly, the creation of a national urban park could provide the impetus for implementing a **Greater Winnipeg Waterways Conservation Framework**. This framework would include four components: a designated waterways conservation area; consistent legislative and administrative provisions; standardized management, maintenance, and monitoring practices; and public education.

The national urban parks program comes to Winnipeg at a time when the convergence of industrial retreat from Point Douglas, conservation efforts in the Seine River corridor, demographic changes in inner-city neighbourhoods, and municipal intensification policies finally allows for a reversal of environmental degradation in the heart of the city. Let us make the most of this historical opportunity.

About this Proposal

The proposal presented in this document is a citizen-led initiative and, as such, does not reflect or imply any official position from Parks Canada, the City of Winnipeg, or any organization or person consulted in its development.

In contrast to other national parks, Winnipeg's National Urban Park will be owned and managed by a partnership of public, Indigenous, institutional, non-profit, and private landowners. The park boundaries and features described in this document should thus be considered as a starting point for future land ownership and management agreements, feasibility studies, technical investigations, and public consultations to be undertaken by Parks Canada and its partners.¹

¹ For more details about the National Urban Parks program see: <https://parks.canada.ca/pun-nup/politique-policy/information#section-3>

Acknowledgements

The present national urban park proposal is located on Treaty One Territory, on the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Ininew (Cree), Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota people, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

This proposal benefitted from the knowledge, support, and contribution of many organizations and individuals. To all of you: thank you, merci, miigwech.

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The 1950 flood, roughly delineating the core area of the proposed national urban park. Source: Archives of Manitoba.

Introduction

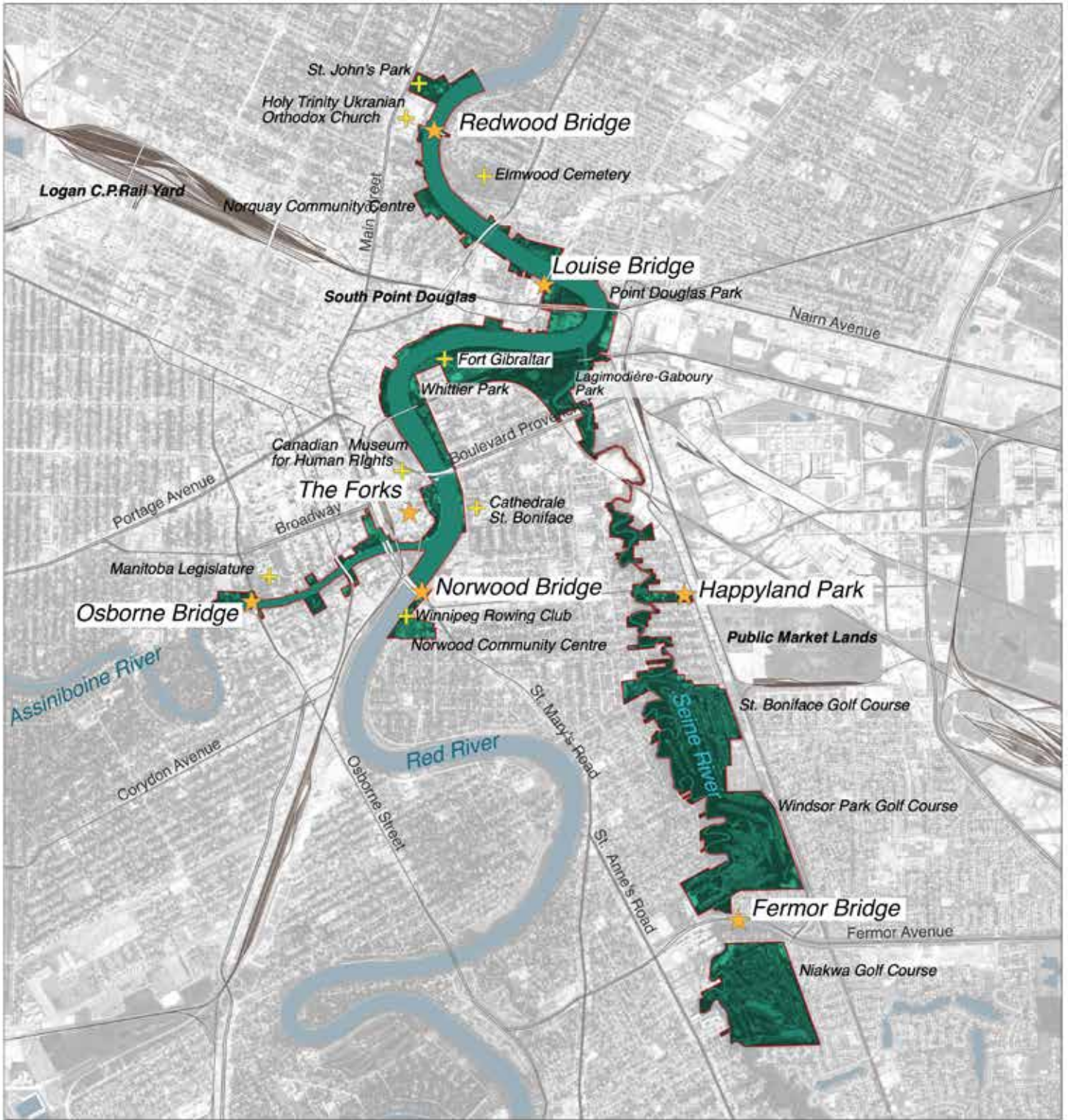
Rivers are where our collective needs, desires, and imagination meet. So, it is fitting that the present national urban park proposal began at the “*Petite Fourche*” -- or *Little Forks* -- as the confluence of the Red and Seine Rivers was known in *voyageurs* days.

Yet looking at today’s damaged landscape one may wonder: why here? Because, we argue, a national urban park is an opportunity to heal the land; places that did not fare so well as our cities grew but that have lost none of their ecological significance.

In the present document, we will review the two components of this “bringing back” agenda. First is the creation of a national urban park at the confluence of the Red and Seine Rivers. Second is the implementation of a Greater

Winnipeg Waterways Conservation Framework that extends conservation protection to all rivers and creeks in the Winnipeg metropolitan area.

Winnipeg, we believe, finds itself in a historically unique position to consolidate the patchwork of parks, trails, and nature remnants left by more than a century of park planning and development efforts – a chance to create a true civic park at the heart of the continent.



Little Forks National Urban Park Extent

- Proposed Park Extent
- ★ Park Gateways
- + Landmarks



Park Extent

Our proposal is, first and foremost, a river park. Its strategic centre is located at the confluence of the Red and Seine Rivers, from where the park then radiates outward along Winnipeg’s three main river corridors.

The park’s **core area** would extend from the Provencher Bridge to the Louise Bridge on the Red River, and to Provencher Boulevard on the Seine River. It would include the tip of Point Douglas; the mouth of the Seine River; Whittier Park and Lagimodière - Gaboury Park in Saint Boniface; Fort Douglas Park and Stephen Juba Park in the East Exchange District; and Ernie O’ Dowda Park on the east bank of the Red River

The park would then extend along **three river branches**. Each branch would end at prominent green spaces or public infrastructure, such as bridges, community centres, or recreational facilities, thus allowing access from neighbourhoods on both sides of the rivers.

Northward, along the west bank of the Red River, a proposed trail would connect Point Douglas to **St. John’s Park**, just north of the **Redwood Bridge**. As one of Winnipeg’s first three public parks, St. John’s Park is an historically significant landmark, and its proximity to North End neighbourhoods would give it a particularly important role as the northern entrance to the national park.

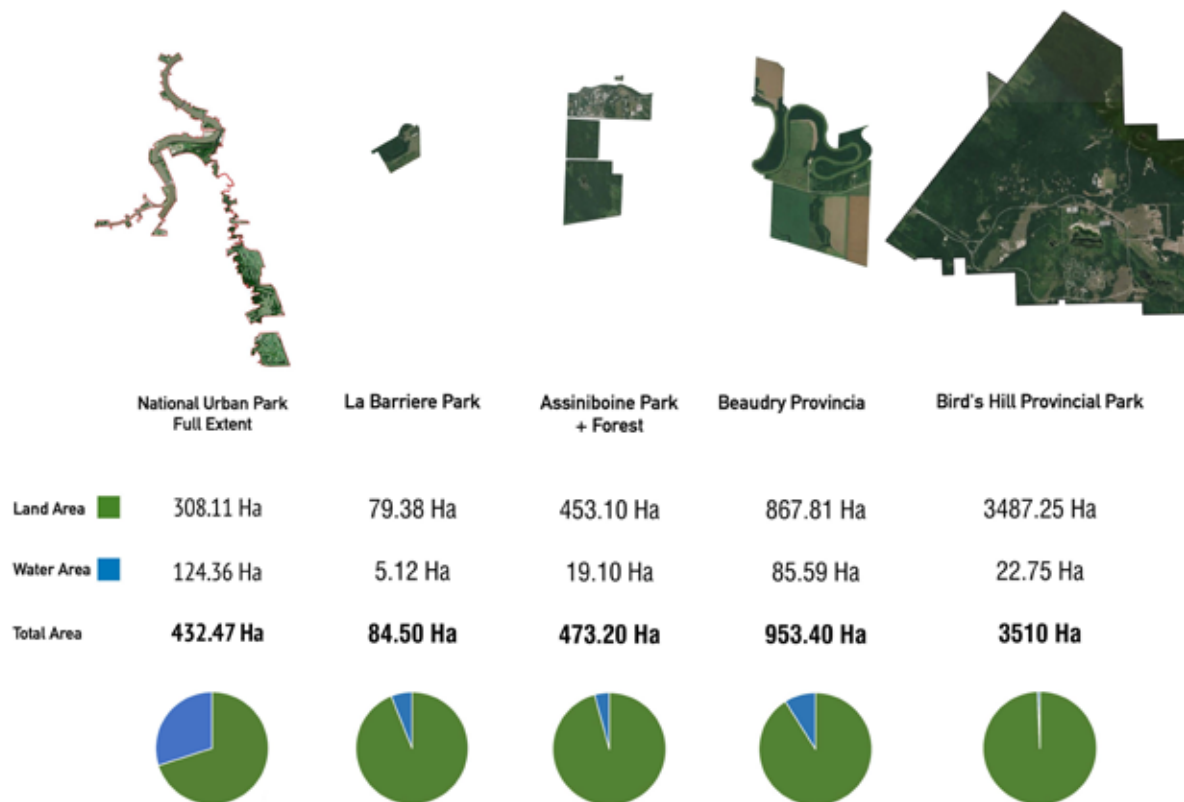
Southward, along the Seine River, the park would extend to the **Fermor Avenue Bridge**, on the Trans-Canada Highway.

This park branch would incorporate all natural areas currently owned by the City of Winnipeg, as well as Happyland Park, which reaches eastward into the Public Markets, Stock Yards, and Mission industrial areas. At the south end, the **Windsor Park Golf Course**, the **Saint Boniface Golf Course**, and the privately-owned **Niakwa Golf Course** would combine to create an extensive recreational area.

Westward, the park would extend along the Red River to the **Norwood Bridge**, where the Forks, the Saint Boniface Hospital, the Winnipeg Rowing Club, the Norwood Community Centre, and Lyndale Drive Park would create an institutional and recreational node. From there, the park would continue along the Assiniboine River, to the **Osborne Bridge** and the **Manitoba Legislature**, which would offer a symbolic and memorable western entrance to the park.

As described here, the full extent of the park would comprise **430 hectares of land and water areas** - three times the size of Assiniboine Park. Relative to other large Winnipeg area parks, Little Forks would be five times the size of La Barrière Provincial Park, half the size of Beaudry Provincial Park, and one-eighth the size of Birds’ Hill Provincial Park. To give a national perspective, Montreal’s Mont Royal Park extends over 200 hectares and Vancouver’s Stanley Park, 404 hectares.

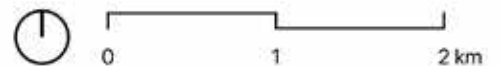
Note that land owned by strategic partners, such as The Forks, could further increase the effective park area. Relocating the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) yards outside of Winnipeg’s city centre could also provide opportunities for extending the park further west into downtown and the North End.





Little Forks National Urban Park Features

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Existing Natural Areas | Nature Preserve Area | Ceremonial Gathering Places |
| Naturalization Areas | Existing Trails | Interpretation Centre |
| Site Remediation | Proposed Trails | River Access |
| | | Park Gateways |
| | | Landmarks |



Park Features

The park's core area would include a **nature preserve**, environmental restoration areas, and key park facilities such as the **interpretive centre**. The river branches would be primarily dedicated to **recreational trails and river access** connecting existing or future neighbourhood parks, community centres, and recreational facilities into an integrated network. These river branches would terminate at **park gateways**, where secondary park facilities would be provided. We also recommend the implementation of **ceremonial and gathering places** throughout the full extent of the park.

Nature Preserve

The confluence of the Red and Seine Rivers constitutes one of Winnipeg's most valuable ecosystems. However, centuries of settlement and urbanization have left a patchwork of natural and disturbed areas of varying sizes and ecological value. The most significant legacy the national urban park program can leave Winnipeg's future generations is to protect, restore, and ensure the long-term stewardship of this natural asset.

The first step in the implementation of the national park should be the designation of the two rivers' confluence as a nature preserve. This preserve would extend from just south of Provencher Boulevard, along the Seine River, to Fort Gibraltar on the west, and to Higgins Avenue and the Louise Bridge on the north. Most importantly from an ecological and habitat perspective, this nature preserve would encompass both banks of the two rivers and, wherever feasible, allow for a wide riparian buffer.

The nature preserve would maintain existing light recreational uses (such as walking, cycling, and nordic skiing) but otherwise be dedicated exclusively to habitat protection, interpretation activities, and land-based education. Existing uses incompatible with these functions, such as remaining industrial uses and off-trail cycling, would need to be relocated or carefully managed. In addition, the environmental impacts of the two railways – the Canadian National on the south bank of the Red River and the Canadian Pacific in Point Douglas – would need to be assessed and mitigated.

To reach its full conservation potential and ensure its long-term ecological resilience, the nature preserve will require a sustained program of environmental enhancements. This includes water quality and habitat improvements, such as riffles and spawning shoals, which have already been introduced in sections of the Seine River corridor, as well as riverbank stabilization and naturalization. Other best management practices, such as the removal of invasive or non-indigenous species, should also be implemented.



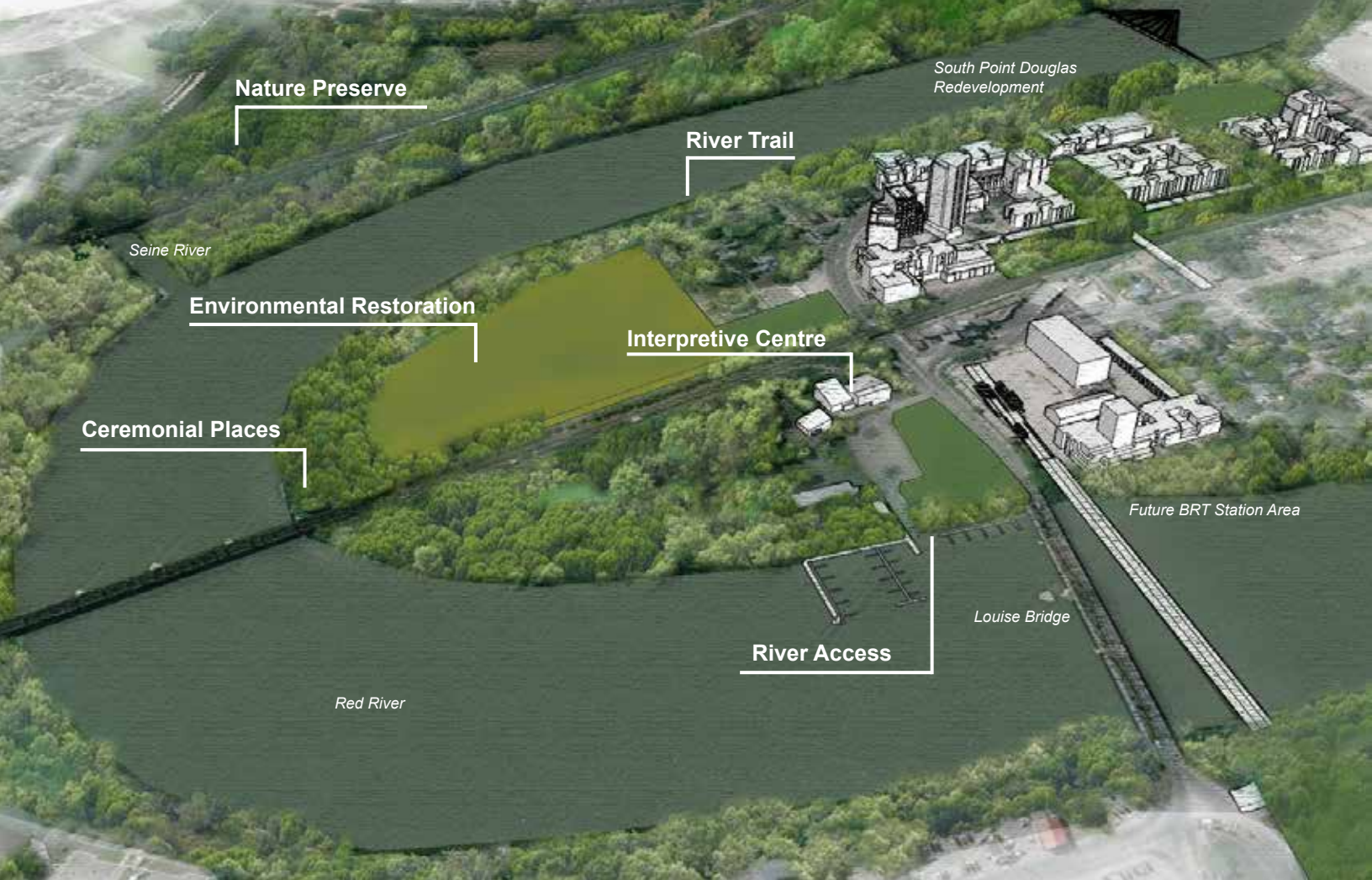
Seine River habitat corridor. (Denis DePape)



Point Douglas sandy shoreline.



Spontaneous naturalization on a vacant Point Douglas industrial site.



Core area of the park at the tip of Point Douglas, with the interpretive centre in the foreground.

Environmental Restoration Areas

The decline of industrial uses in Point Douglas, and the presence of currently vacant or underused sites, present an opportunity to complement the conservation of existing natural areas with the site remediation and environmental restoration of ecologically strategic but degraded sites. This, we argue, should distinguish the national urban park program from its wilderness counterpart: to help heal the land by creating new natural areas where none currently exist but are badly needed.

Within the proposed nature preserve we can identify three main environmental restoration opportunities. The first is on the industrial properties located at the tip of Point Douglas, east of Higgins Avenue. The second is on the triangular piece of parkland at the eastern tip of Whittier Park (up to Fort Gibraltar). The third is along the eastern bank of the Red River, between the mouth of the Seine River and the Louise Bridge. Localized site remediation and naturalization should also be undertaken throughout the Seine River corridor and along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers.

Admittedly, such an undertaking involves significant legal, administrative, technical, and financial considerations. But it is not without precedents. Nationally, examples include the inter-governmental initiatives undertaken in the 1970s and



Remediation work at the IKO site, 2009. Source: Save Our Seine Newsletter. Fall Winter 2009.



The Transcona Bio Reserve after 25 years. Source: Economic Development Winnipeg.



Point Douglas Park, by the Louise Bridge, is the best location for interpretive and operational facilities.

1980s on large post-industrial sites such as Montreal's Old Port, Vancouver's Granville Island, or Winnipeg's own Forks. One can also think of the Fort Whyte Alive Nature Centre, which, for decades now, has overseen the environmental restoration of abandoned quarries. On the Seine River, the 2009 provincial restoration of the IKO property processed 48,000 tons of contaminated soil, making it one of "the largest decontamination effort ever undertaken in Manitoba"¹

The Transcona Bioreserve, 7km east of the proposed park, is especially relevant to the environmental remediation of Point Douglas. Occupied since the early 1900s by a wood treatment plant, the 47-hectare site was heavily contaminated by creosote and pentachlorophenol. In the late 1990s, Domtar proceeded with the remediation of the site by implementing a combination of geo-engineering and naturalization techniques adapted to these specific contaminants and Winnipeg's predominant soil conditions. Twenty-five years later, the project offers a credible local case study and useful lessons for similar efforts in the proposed national park.

Interpretive Centre

We recommend Point Douglas Park, by the Louise Bridge, as the preferred location for the national park's operational and interpretive facilities. This location already offers a mix of landscape conditions and is near large vacant industrial sites, which would facilitate restoration management, research, and interpretive programming. An existing boat launch, a legacy of the Buchanan Marina previously operating on the site, offers one of the most convenient river access in the city and would be expanded with a small marina catering to self-propelled watercrafts, motor crafts for river interpretation programming, and possibly the water taxi.

This location is readily accessible via main roads or bus routes and is adjacent to one of the few bridges connecting



The Buchanan Boat Launch, by the Louise Bridge. One of the best Red River access locations in Winnipeg.



The Brown and Rutherford site, with possible location of the future BRT station in the foreground.

¹ Save Our Seine Newsletter. Fall Winter 2009.

to the northeast quadrant of the city. The future Eastern Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor is expected to run along Sutherland Avenue, with a station located at the intersection with Higgins Avenue. This would make the interpretive centre directly accessible from the regional BRT system. Many established Indigenous organizations would be within a 10-minute walk or bike ride, which would facilitate the conduct of land-based education programming and recreation in the national park.

The planned redevelopment of the historic Brown and Rutherford site, across Higgins Avenue, offers an opportunity to coordinate shared facilities. This could include stormwater, sanitary, road, and transit infrastructure improvements; visitors parking management; river access; food services; and outdoor visitor facilities. Riverbank trail development could also be implemented as part of this joint transit area redevelopment.

Park Gateways

Besides the interpretive centre, we propose five other main gateways to the park. Four of these would be located at the end of the river branches. The Forks would serve as a fifth gateway at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. An additional gateway could be implemented at the eastern end of Happyland Park when redevelopment of the Public Markets site occurs. Any park extension into the CPR Yards would provide an opportunity for implementing a similar gateway in the Downtown and the North End.

The intent here is to enlist major parks and mobility infrastructure, such as bridges, to maximise access to the national park and mark its presence within the city fabric. Important identity and signage efforts would be made here, along with improvements to access-related facilities such as bus stops, bike lockers, short- and medium-term parking, recreational watercraft river access, and the water taxi.

Complementary park facilities and programming could also occur at these gateway locations in partnership with adjacent organizations, agencies, or landowners. One thinks of the golf courses and the Windsor Park Nordic Centre at the end of the Seine River branch of the park, the Winnipeg Rowing Club and the Norwood Community Centre at the Norwood Bridge, the Legislature at the Assiniboine gateway, and The Forks at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers.

The Trans-Canada Highway (Fermor Avenue) would cross the national urban park at the Seine River gateway. This offers an opportunity to promote the park on the national highway, through signage and possibly a new rest area.

Trails and River Access

The intent of the proposal is to create a pleasant, safe, and functional continuous river trail network between



Recreational activities in the Seine River corridor. (Denis DePape)



Trans-Canada Trail, South Point Douglas.

recreational and cultural facilities that remain somewhat disconnected. This network would, in turn, connect to the rest of the municipal trails and parkways system.

Recreational trails are already well established along Waterfront Drive and the north bank of the Assiniboine River. Similar progress has been made on the Taché Promenade, in Saint Boniface, although connectivity between Whittier Park



The Nestaweya River Trail, Assiniboine River.



Informal winter trails on the Seine River.

and the Norwood Bridge remains unsatisfactory. New trails or trail improvements are needed around the tip of Point Douglas, along the western riverbank of the Red River to St. John's Park, on many sections of the eastern bank of the Red River, and along the Seine river corridor.

Notable linkage opportunities with the municipal parkway system include the Scotia Street Heritage Trail in the North End; the Pioneers Greenway that extends northeast to East Saint Paul (and Birds Hill Provincial Park via the Red River Floodway trail); the Red River southern trails to the Riverview and Norwood neighbourhoods; the Broadway bike trail; the Armstrong's Point Heritage Neighbourhood; the West End Trail in Wolseley; and to Assiniboine Park via Wellington Crescent and the Assiniboine River trail.

The area between the Louise Bridge and the mouth of the Seine River is an amalgam of vehicular infrastructure, industrial properties, and municipal parks – the Montcalm Playground and Chalmers Park -- and constitutes an important missing link between the Red River trail system and the Northeast Pioneers Greenway. This entire area would benefit from concerted efforts to acquire properties and increase recreational infrastructure connectivity. A similar need exists at the Midtown Bridge, on the Assiniboine River, by the Mayfair Recreation Centre and Park, the Harkness BRT station, The Forks, and the active recreation trail on the southwest bank of the Red River.

Current winter trails include the Forks'-managed Nestaweya River Trail as well as informal walking and nordic ski trails further west along the Assiniboine River; from Whittier Park to the mouth of the Seine River; along the banks of the Red River north of the Redwood Bridge; and further south by the Windsor Golf Course. Many sections of the Seine River offer informal or groomed walking and nordic ski trails on the river itself. Informal winter river crossings are present between the Forks and the Taché Promenade, behind the Saint Boniface Hospital, and between Whittier Park and the Alexander dock in the East Exchange District. While all these depend on river freeze / thaw conditions we expect that there remains room for expanding the winter trail network and its associated recreational uses.

While public river access is well-established along the north bank of the Assiniboine River, the East Exchange waterfront and, to a lesser degree, on the Saint Boniface side of the Red River, there is need for more river access locations in the northern branch of the Red River and along the southern bank of the Assiniboine River. New river access can be provided where parks or public right of ways currently exist or where urban redevelopment is planned, such as in South Point Douglas. This should be supplemented with land acquisitions when opportunities arise.



Water taxi dock on the Red River.

A summer water taxi service currently connects five municipal docks along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. As the redevelopment of South Point Douglas proceeds, one may expect that this service could be extended northward along the Red River, with new docks at Annabella Street (near a future community park), the mouth of the Seine River, the national park's interpretive centre at the Louise Bridge, and in St. John's Park.

Besides the existing Buchanan Boat Launch, by the Louise Bridge, a universal access dock for small paddling crafts was recently built in Bruce Park, further up the Seine River. An additional one is planned for Whittier Park, next to Fort Gibraltar. Similar recreation docks could be introduced throughout the park, notably in gateway locations, as well

as at the sites of the commercial marinas that once operated at the end of Pritchard Avenue and the Redwood Bridge. Plans to reinvigorate the Alexander Dock could also be incorporated into the national park's implementation.

Ceremonial and Gathering Places

To complement existing ceremonial places, such as The Forks' Oodeena Circle and Fort Gibraltar, we propose that smaller gathering places be implemented across the entire extent of the national park. These would support organized or informal community gatherings and complement existing neighbourhood facilities.

This park feature could help fulfill the Indigenous reconciliation goal of the national urban park program by introducing places of community engagement, ceremony, and commemoration. Local precedents include the recent dedication of the Kapabamayak Achaak Healing Forest, in St. John's Park, and Niihoziibean, the Indigenous heritage celebration and drum ceremonial space in the southwest corner of The Forks. Another Healing Forest for the Bois-des-esprit Park is currently being planned by Save Our Seine and the Manitoba Métis Federation.

These gathering places could be modeled on the stands of large cottonwood trees that were historically cultivated by Indigenous people to provide favourable conditions for their seasonal encampments in the area.² Such "forest groves" as they were later called, would have punctuated the riverbanks, and offer a striking illustration of Indigenous landscape-forming and inhabitation practices. Photographs from the 1850s show remnants of these forest groves and some, such as Fraser's Grove, downstream from the proposed national park, remain to this day. By the 1900s, these groves were actively sought by Winnipeggers as out-of-town recreational camping or cottage sites.

Large cottonwood stands remain in a dozen locations within the proposed park area, though many are under threat from riverbank erosion or aging. We propose that these remaining stands be given cultural heritage status under Winnipeg's Heritage By-Law. In addition, we recommend that the creation and husbanding of cottonwood groves become an integral component of the park's forest management plan, as a way of re-enacting ancestral Indigenous practices and producing a culturally appropriate riverine landscape.

² For a related discussion see Oetelaar, Gerald. (2008). *Indigenous stewardship: Lessons from Yesterday for Parks of Tomorrow*. in *Proceedings, Canadian Parks for Tomorrow*. University of Calgary. May 8-11.





Park Benefits

The park's proposed location and configuration would deliver significant benefits to residents of Winnipeg-area municipalities while meeting the objectives of the National Urban Park program.

Parks Canada's *National Urban Parks Draft Policy Framework*³ identifies three **Contribution Areas** for national urban parks:

- 1) Conserving nature
- 2) Connecting people with nature, and
- 3) Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

To these, we elected to add a fourth contribution area related to the unique opportunities arising from the national parks' urban settings:

- 4) Support urban redevelopment policies and initiatives.

The remaining section of this document will review how each of these four contribution areas is met by the Little Forks proposal.

³ See Parks Canada's latest draft policy framework at: <https://parks.canada.ca/pun-nup/politique-policy/information>

Nature Conservation and Restoration

Our park proposal distinguishes itself from other national parks by adopting a two-pronged approach to meet national, provincial, and municipal conservation goals. The first is the **conservation and enhancement** of already established natural areas and habitats. These are notably found in the Seine River corridor and along sections of the Red River. The second is the **environmental restoration of disturbed sites** to create new natural areas where none currently exist. This is notably the case at the tip of Point Douglas, along various sections of the Red River, and in localized areas in the Seine River corridor.

We also considered how existing and restored natural areas could **improve the resilience of the metropolitan ecological matrix** by connecting municipal habitat corridors and patches. We then looked at three other environmental concerns of relevance in Winnipeg's context: the **protection of riverbanks and riparian areas**, the **integration of stormwater management and green infrastructure**, and **carbon capture potential**.

Nature Conservation and Restoration

GOALS

- Protection of natural areas
- Environmental restoration of disturbed sites
- Ecological resilience
- Protection of endangered species and habitats
- Floodplain and riverbank protection
- Green infrastructure
- Climate regulation and carbon capture
- Heat island reduction

Connection to Nature, History, and Culture

GOALS

- Access to nature
- Social equity
- Access to recreational opportunities
- Heritage preservation
- Cultural and tourism enhancement
- Protection of cultural landmarks and features

Reconciliation with Indigenous People

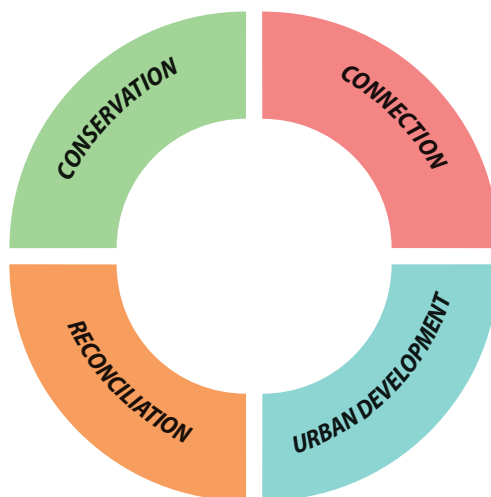
GOALS

- Indigenous access to nature
- Indigenous empowerment
- Indigenous heritage and cultural preservation

Urban Development

GOALS

- Support of municipal policies and initiatives
- Support of provincial policies and initiatives
- Support of community initiatives



The framework developed to assess the benefits of the Little Forks proposal. Park benefits can be related to twenty goals grouped under four contribution areas.

Protection of Natural Areas

Winnipeg adopted an *Ecologically Significant Natural Lands Strategy and Policy* in 2007. Sites with grades of A or B were “considered to have a plant community reflecting the natural heritage of the area around Winnipeg” and deemed “worthy of preservation”. Sites with grades of B or C were deemed to present good natural characteristics and “should be considered for preservation and possibly naturalization”.⁴ The City’s recent *Parks Strategy* considers any natural areas with a quality grade of C or higher as worthy of protection and preservation.

The proposed national park includes one of the city’s largest clusters of A/C graded sites. The Seine River corridor is the most continuous high grade natural lands corridor in Winnipeg, with a large patch of A-graded river-bottom forest at its mouth and multiple smaller patches of river bottom, aspen, and bur oak forests distributed along the rest of the corridor. East of the river’s mouth and towards the CPR Bridge, high grade natural patches are also found on private industrial and commercial properties. These should be incorporated into the national park.

With the proposed environmental restoration areas, a total habitat patch of about 40 hectares could be constituted at this ecologically strategic river confluent location.

On the Red River banks, west of the mouth of the Seine river and on the opposite bank of the Red River in Point Douglas, one finds some of the largest cottonwood stands in the city. These should be protected and given “natural heritage” status under the City of Winnipeg *Heritage Bylaw 55/2014*.

Natural Areas Protected

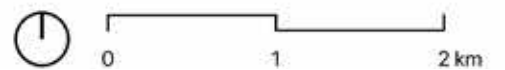
Aquatic natural areas:	5.93 ha
Riverbottom forest:	59.24 ha
Oak forest:	19.83 ha
Aspen forest:	6.50 ha
Grassland:	7.29 ha
Wetland:	5.72 ha
Stream bed:	0.21 ha
Total Aquatic Area (incl. riverbeds):	124.36 Ha
Total Land Area:	290.78 Ha
Total Protected Area:	415.14 Ha
Total waterways length protected:	10.2 km

⁴ Winnipeg, City of. (2007). *Winnipeg Ecologically Significant Natural Lands Strategy and Policy*, page 11.



Inventoried Natural Areas (By Habitat Quality)

- A,A/B
- Natural Areas Adjacent to Proposed Park Boundary
- B,B/C
- Proposed Park Extent
- C,C/D
- Winnipeg Road Network
- D





Riverbottom Forest (Denis DePape)



Bur oak Forest



Aspen Forest (Denis DePape)



Wetland (Denis DePape)



The park (outlined in red) effectively fills the gap between four important habitat corridors. Forest canopy data taken from the Winnipeg Urban Forest Strategy Draft, 2022.



Grassland / Prairie Aspen Forest (Denis DePape)

Protection of Endangered Species and Habitats

A wildlife inventory of the 27-hectare Bois-des-esprits Park, just south of the proposed park boundary on the Seine River, identified some of the most biologically diverse conditions in the Winnipeg region, with 24 mammal species, 149 bird species, 25 fish species, plus amphibians and reptiles, as well as 180 different plants⁵. The Seine River corridor is also an important habitat for migratory birds.

The confluents of the Seine and Assiniboine Rivers has been identified as one of the richest fish habitats in Manitoba. In the Seine River itself, fish species include the tadpole matdoms (*Noturus gyrinus*), brook sticklebacks (*Culaea inconstans*), and quillbacks (*Carpoides cyrinus*).

While no endangered species are known to be present in the area considered for the national urban park, proper habitat restoration and management could help reintroduce some at-risk species, including the monarch butterfly and the burrowing owl.

⁵ Save Our Seine website.



Ecological Matrix Improvements

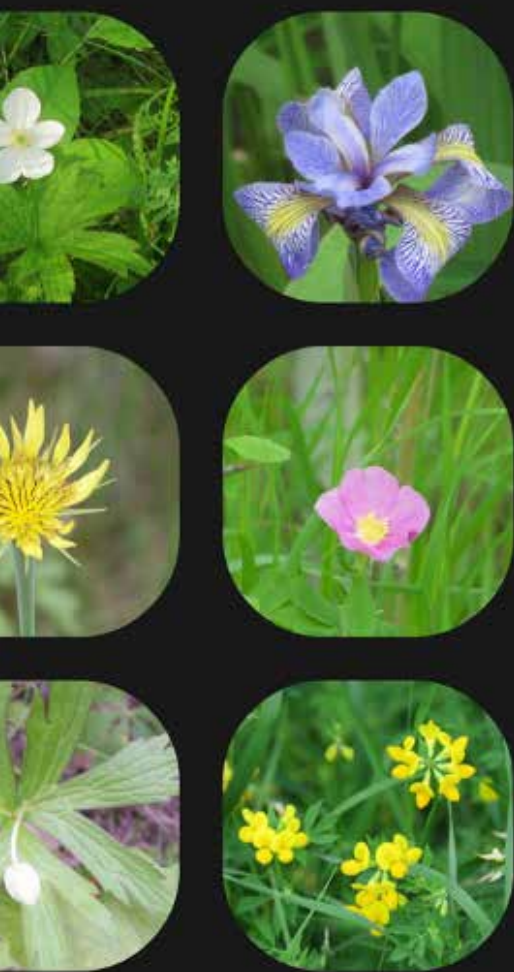
Number of habitat corridors connected:	4
Number of significant habitat patches connected:	12
Habitat patch area added (park core):	22.6 ha
Corridor length added (gap sections):	3.5 km

Waterways Protection

Number of waterways protected:	4
Length of waterways protected:	10.2 km
100-yr floodplain area protected:	308.11 ha
River confluence areas protected:	2
Historical creeks (covered):	5



Sample of Seine River corridor wildlife, birds, and plant species.
(Denis DePape)





5 years



25 years



Proposed environmental restoration in the park's core area, with four distinct plant associations. Note that the simulation (above) does not include existing vegetation.

Site Remediation and Environmental Restoration

Because of their industrial past, many sites considered for the proposed national park will require some degree of remediation and naturalization. Soil sampling of inner-city neighbourhoods conducted in 2019 and 2022 indicate relatively high levels of lead concentrations in many community sites⁶. Other public health concerns affecting neighbourhoods adjacent to the proposed park include air pollution from industrial uses, fires, and explosions; volatile

organic compounds (VOCs); riverbank water contamination from combined sewers; and high ambient noise levels.⁷

By adopting a site remediation and restoration mandate, we believe that the national urban parks program can convert this liability into an asset. It can improve community health while augmenting natural areas in ecologically strategic urban locations. This approach is consistent with governmental initiatives such as the United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, the Bonn Challenge of restoring 350 million hectares of damaged land by 2030; Canada's 2 billion trees by 2030 initiative; and Winnipeg's goal of

⁶ Parsons & Intrinsik Corp. (2022). Lead in Soil Testing Program for Winnipeg, MB.

⁷ Caporale, Alexandra and Fast, Heather. (2023). The Burden of Concern: The Healthy Environment, Healthy Neighbourhood Project. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.



50 years



75 years



Typical mixed quaking aspen, bur oak, and white spruce forest, at about 25 years of maturity.

planting 1,000,000 trees by 2040 while increasing municipal canopy coverage to 24% by 2065.

The restoration of industrial sites can also make a meaningful contribution to Winnipeg's ecological resilience by increasing urban forest canopy coverage and improving habitat patch size and connectivity in the city centre.

Restored Area (Park Core)

Site Remediation Area:	3.26 Ha
Naturalization Area:	19.31 Ha
Total Restored Area:	22.57 Ha
Total number of trees planted:	84,742
Total number of trees after 25 years:	73,689

Carbon Sequestration and Capture

Estimated gross annual carbon sequestration (tons / year)	
by year 10:	381.43
by year 25:	959.01
by year 50:	1558.71
by year 75:	1467.81

Environmental restoration would be most beneficial at the tip of Point Douglas, along adjacent and opposite riverbanks, at the mouth of the Seine River, and on properties upstream of St. John's Park, by the Redwood Bridge. Further naturalization should also occur in various locations throughout the Seine River corridor.

A legacy from one generation to the next

Creating a park from scratch, here at the tip of Point Douglas, using a mix of eastern cottonwoods and willows in the riverbanks; quaking aspens, American elms, Manitoba maples, and basswoods in the riparian terraces; bur oaks and white spruces in the parkland; and tallgrass prairies over remaining contaminated soil areas (in the foreground). For reference, the containment cell for holding heavily contaminated soils (below) is about 5m tall.





25 years



75 years

Connection to Nature, History, and Culture

The park would **increase equitable access to nature** by its proximity to currently underserved neighbourhoods. It would **improve connectivity between recreational trails, river access locations, and existing parks and community facilities**. It would also **preserve and enhance some of the most significant cultural and historical features** in Canada.

Access to Nature

Parkland is not distributed evenly across Winnipeg. While post-1970s communities offer 79 m² of parkland by capita, residents of the downtown and mature neighbourhoods must contend with 30 m² to 41 m² – one third to half of their suburban counterparts and much less than the 50 m² Canadian average.⁸

While most of the core area neighbourhoods adjacent to the proposed park meet the City’s “base level of service” their projected increase in population will require an equivalent increase in parkland provision to maintain that threshold. In areas already identified as having service gap – in downtown and South Point Douglas – new parks will be needed as urban infill and revitalization proceed.⁹

10-Minute Walking Catchment Demographics

Number of residents: 89,565
 Indigenous population: 17,920 (19.7% of city)
 Immigrant population: 17,955 (9% of city)
 Higher rates of transit use and active transportation
 Park space per capita: (30 m² to 41 m² vs 79 m² for city)
 Median household income: \$64,000 (vs \$80,000 city)

Administrative and Political Context

Neighbourhoods	38
Municipal wards	6
Provincial ridings	10
Federal ridings	5

A similar discrepancy exists when it comes to access to natural features. While some areas adjacent to the Seine River have an above average level of service those in Point Douglas and especially in the northern quadrant of the city exhibit significant potential service gaps. Residents of higher needs areas are also the most remote from major municipal parks such as Assiniboine, St-Vital or Kildonan. A large park in the city’s urban core would go a long way

towards municipal green space equity.

Because of its location and branching configuration the proposed park would be near 38 of Winnipeg’s 236 neighbourhoods. We estimate that 89,565 people (12% of Winnipeg’s population) and 48,617 households (15.4% of Winnipeg’s) would be within a 10-minute walk of the park. All residents of the Winnipeg metropolitan area would be within a 30-minute drive of the park.

The park would also provide optimal public transit accessibility. Forty-three bus routes are within the park’s 10-minute walking catchment, including those using the southwest rapid transitway. Two other planned metropolitan rapid bus transit lines will intersect the park area, with a main transit network station at the Canadian National Railway’s Union Station and a new Eastern Corridor station in Point Douglas, next to the Louise Bridge.

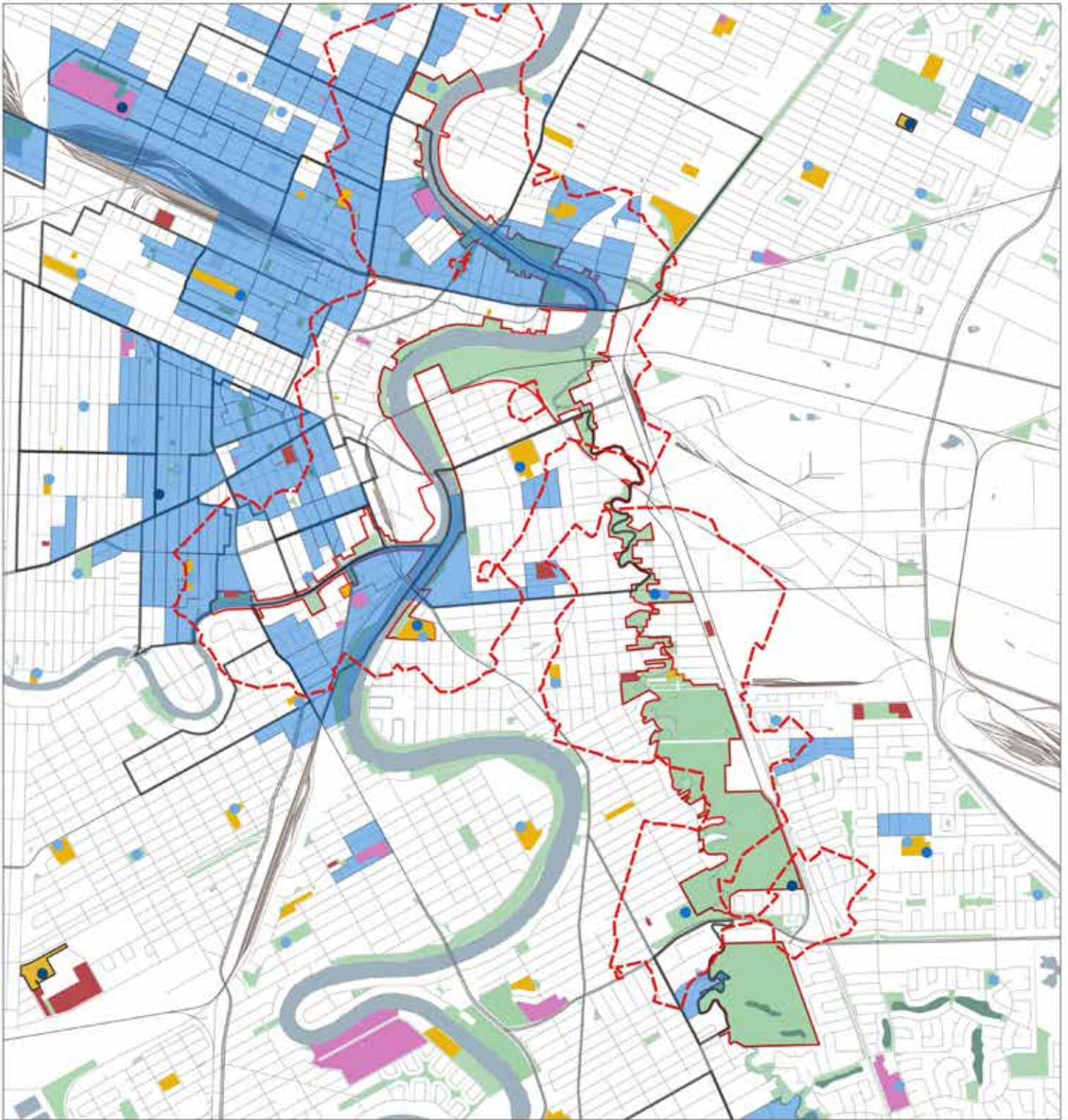
Access to Recreational Facilities

The proposed park would occupy a central position within the Winnipeg Trails and Parkway System. This includes the North Winnipeg and Kildonan Parkways on the northern portion of the Red River (between The Forks, Lagimodière / Gaboury Park, and Kildonan Park), the North and South Assiniboine Parkways on the Assiniboine River, and the South Winnipeg and Boni-Vital Parkways on the southern portion of the Red River. Indeed, many of the riverbank trails of this parkway system would now fall within the proposed national park.

Many recreational facilities and municipal parks would also be located within the park’s 10-minute walking catchment. This includes eight community centres, three recreation centres, a dozen pools and wading pools, a nordic ski centre, a rowing club, a curling club, and three golf courses. The park itself would incorporate one regional park (Whittier / Lagimodière - Gaboury Parks), a dozen community parks, eight neighbourhood parks, and several nature parks.

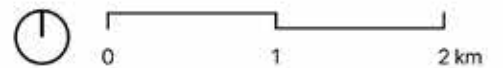
⁸ Winnipeg, City of. (2021). Parks Strategy, December 2021.

⁹ Idem.



Parks, Recreation & Higher Needs Areas

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Higher Needs Areas | ● Indoor Pool |
| Focus Neighbourhoods | ● Outdoor Pool |
| ■ Parks & Recreation Areas | ● Spray Pad or Wading Pool |
| ■ Community Centres | 10 minute / 800m Walkshed |
| ■ Recreation Centre | Proposed Park Extent |
| ■ Arenas & Rinks | |



Data source: City of Winnipeg, 2020.



Upper Fort Garry Gate. Credit: Gordon Goldsborough, Manitoba Historical Society, 2017.



Ross House. Credit: Gordon Goldsborough. Manitoba Historical Society. 2006.



Entrance to the Lagimodière - Gaboury Park. Credit: Tristan Osler.

Heritage Preservation

The proposed national urban park would help preserve and commemorate some of Canada's most historically significant sites.

Archeological finds throughout the Red, Assiniboine, and Seine Rivers corridors indicate that, along with six thousand years of seasonal occupation, some form of Indigenous agricultural practice would have taken place in the area as early as the 1400s. During the Red River Settlement, river lots on the east side of the Red River were under continuous use by Indigenous peoples. Well into the 1800s, three public commons – in Point Douglas, Saint Boniface, and the Fort Garry Reserve -- were also used by Indigenous people for encampments, gatherings, ceremonies, and treaty meetings. The last "Dog Feast" in the Winnipeg area would have been held on the Point Douglas Common circa 1870.¹⁰

Five different fur-trading forts were built on this stretch of the Red River: Fort Rouge (est. 1738), Fort Gibraltar (est. 1907), Fort Douglas (est. 1812), and Fort Garry (1821, relocated 1836). Fort Douglas, at the western end of today's Point Douglas, served as the first seat of government for the Red River Settlement. Only one gate from the second Fort Garry remains from this period (in the Upper Fort Garry Provincial Park, est. 2014). A replica of Fort Gibraltar was built in Whittier Park in the 1970s. The other forts are commemorated at the Forks and in Fort Douglas Park. In Point Douglas, period features include Ross House (now a museum in a new location, est. 1854), and Barber House, a fine example of Red River homestead (est. 1868).

Across the Red River, in what was then the Catholic parishes of Saint Boniface and St-Vital, French-speaking and Métis fur traders began the transition from *voyageur* and nomadic

lifestyle to permanent agricultural settlement. The area's first homestead, owned by Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière and Marie-Anne Gaboury, would have been located where the CNR railway bridge currently crosses the Seine River¹¹. That property would have included the original survey post that served for the subdivision of the area into river lots. This location is also believed to be the birthplace of Métis leader and Manitoba founder Louis Riel, whose parents lived on the homestead next door. A commemorative park with a national historic plaque was established in 2000, but much more could be done to acknowledge this important period of Canadian history.

The Riel Mill, the first in the area, would have been located further upstream on the Seine River. Louis Riel's House stands just further south on the Red River and is a recognized Federal Heritage Building (est. 1880-81). Other notable historical features include the Saint-Boniface Cathedral, the Soeurs Grises (Grey Nuns) headquarters (1846), the Belgian Club and Tissot neighbourhood (associated with the Belgian brigade), the site of the St. Boniface Industrial School (est. 1890), the Université de Saint Boniface, and the maison

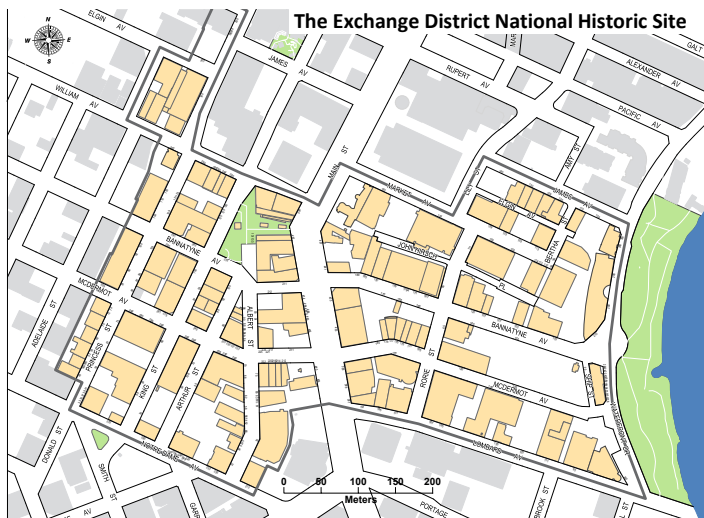
¹⁰ See Lindsay, Anne. (2023). *Indigenous Histories Relating to Select City of Winnipeg-Owned Greenspaces* (draft, March 2023). City of Winnipeg.

¹¹ See Northern Lights Heritage Services Inc., *The Lagimodière-Gaboury Homestead Site*, for archeological testing sites.

Gabrielle Roy, amongst others.

Up until the Winnipeg Unicity amalgamation of 1972, the two sides of the Red River evolved under distinct administrative regimes. Consequently, the core area of the park also marks the historical interface between the predominantly English, Scottish, and Irish settlers of the Selkirk Settlement and the French, Métis, and Belgian homesteads between the Red and Seine Rivers. To this day, these two sides of the Red River exhibit significant physical, demographic, and cultural differences symbolically expressed by the pedestrian Esplanade Riel that marks the southern edge of the proposed park's core area and connects Provencher Boulevard, in Saint Boniface, with the ceremonial Broadway Avenue that leads to the Manitoba Legislature.

With the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Point Douglas in 1881 (railway and bridge completed 1885) the area rapidly transitioned from an upscale residential neighbourhood to Western Canada's first industrial district. Workers quarters began emerging on the northern portion of Point Douglas and in the North End, which has traditionally welcomed first generation immigrants, notably from Eastern Europe. Winnipeg's railway-based industrial period is still represented by the Brown and Rutherford Sawmill warehouse (est. 1882), the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) Station (now the Neeginan Learning and Literacy Centre, est. 1905), and the J.R. Watkins Company Factory and Warehouse (est. 1921).



Exchange District National Historic Site with Stephen Juba Park on the Red River.
Source: City of Winnipeg.

West of the proposed park core area, the East Exchange District acquired a National Historic Site designation in 1997 for its remarkably intact ensemble of late 1800s and early 1900s Art Deco buildings.

The park's area also has a rich naval heritage with the Red River historically serving as a main north-south continental riverway. In 1859, riverboats began navigating the Red River from the United States. The opening of the St. Andrews Lock and Dam in 1910 allowed larger commercial and recreational

ships to reach Lake Winnipeg. Several bridges still retain the mechanical systems that would have allowed ship passage. Redwood Bridge, the last of its kind, ceased operations in 1978.



Redwood Bridge, 1958. Source: Archives of Manitoba.

A portion of the Red River became a bustling hub of industry and shipping, with a shipbuilding yard operating just north of the current Human Rights Museum. To meet the ever-growing shipping demand, the Rover Docks were built along the banks of Point Douglas in 1915. These would later be replaced by the Alexander Docks, in today's East Exchange District. Other notable river-related historical facilities include the previously mentioned Buchanan Marina, the Pritchard Boat Yard and Ron's Marina (by the Redwood Bridge), and the James Avenue Pumphouse and its associated riverbank outlet.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing the significance of non-anthropocentric heritage features, including four creeks and two fluvial landforms, long disappeared, as well as the cottonwood groves previously discussed in the context of ceremonial and gathering places.



Survey of Winnipeg surface waters, 1874. Source: Graham, Robert Michael W. (1984). *The Surface Waters of Winnipeg: Rivers, Streams, Ponds, and Wetlands 1874-1984, The Cyclical history of Urban Land Drainage*, Master of Landscape Architecture Thesis, University of Manitoba.

Cultural and Tourism Enhancement

Some of Winnipeg's most significant cultural institutions and tourism amenities are located within the 10-minute walkshed of the park, and could be linked by the national park's river trails network. These include, amongst others:

- The Forks
- Museum of Human Rights
- Winnipeg's cultural districts: Osborne Village, Exchange District, Saint Boniface, North End
- Winnipeg Art Gallery
- Manitoba Legislature and grounds
- Centennial Hall / Manitoba Museum / City Hall district
- Old Market Square (Fringe Fest & various cultural events)
- Fort Gibraltar & Festival du Voyageur
- Saint Boniface Museum
- Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre
- Neeginan Centre, Thunderbird House, and the Manitoba Indigenous Cultural Education Centre
- Art Galleries district (Graffiti, Urban Shaman, etc.)

Protection of Cultural Landmarks and Features

Many Canadian cities have implemented view protection legislation to preserve landscape attributes that underly their sense of place and identity. The park would help maintain the visual character of the city's rivers and related features, including:

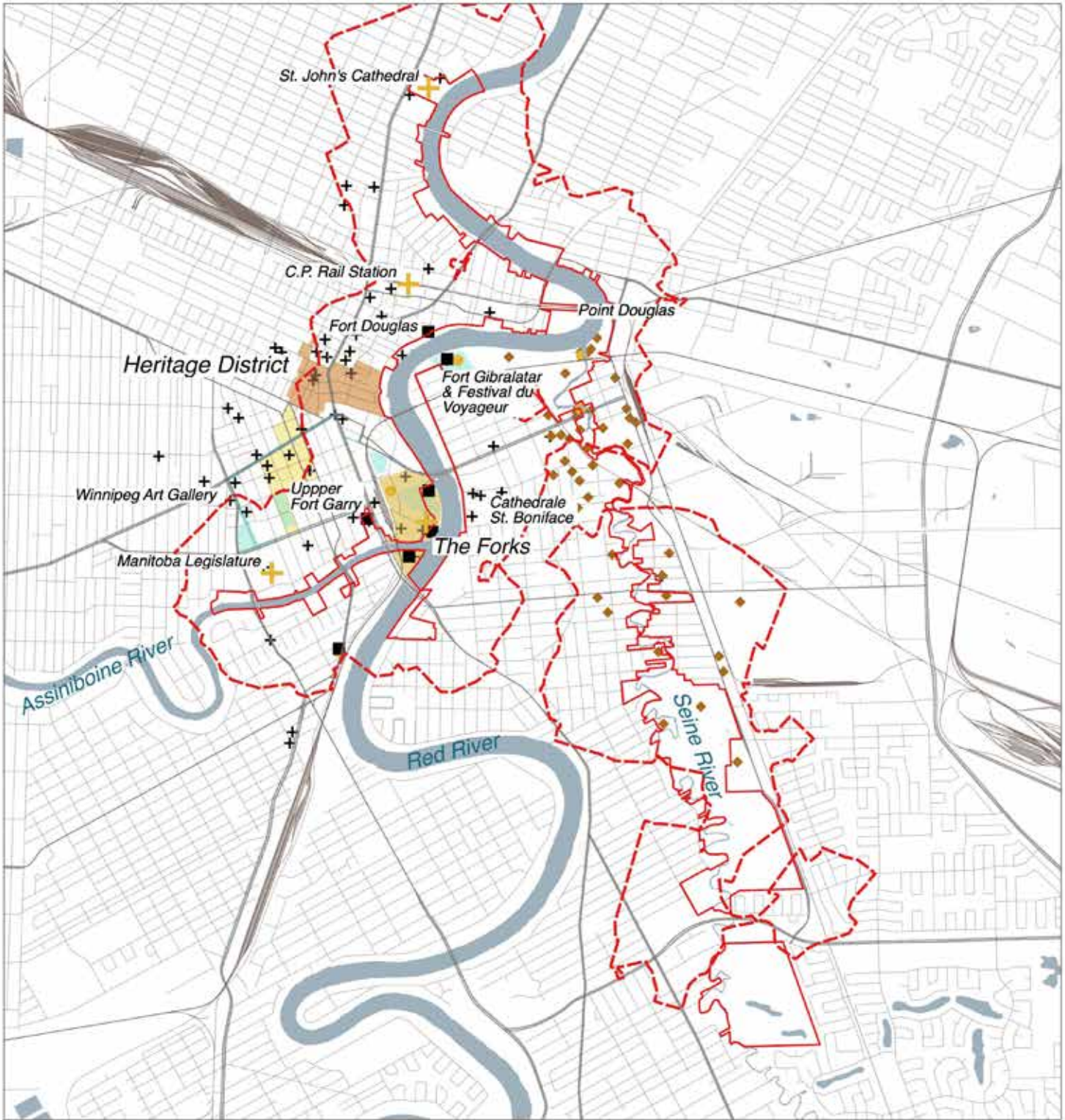
- The natural character of the confluence of the Seine and Red Rivers
- The view of the Provencher Bridge and the Museum of Human Rights, from both banks
- The view of the Manitoba Legislature and the Golden Boy
- The CNR and CPR Bridges
- The Louise and Redwood Bridges
- The view of the Saint-Boniface Cathedral, from The Forks
- St. John's Anglican Cathedral and Cemetery and the Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in St. John's Park



St-Boniface Cathedral, facing the Red River.



The Provencher Bridge and Museum of Human Rights, viewed from Saint Boniface..



Heritage Features and Cultural Sites

- ◆ Seine River - Historic Points of Interest
- Archeological Sites
- Historic Fort Locations
- + Culturally Significant Sites
- Festival Locations
- Major Tourism Destinations and Venues
- Major Tourism Districts
- ▭ 10 minute / 800m Walkshed
- ▭ Proposed Park Extent
- Winnipeg Road Network



Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

Parts of the proposed national park would occur on lands included in the 1817 treaty between Chief Peguis, his people, and Lord Selkirk. The park would also be situated on lands subjected to the provisions of the 1871 Treaty 1 between the British Crown and the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) and Nehiyaw (Cree) people (today's Brokenhead Ojibway, Long Plain, Peguis, Roseau River Anishinabe, Sagkeeng, Sandy Bay Ojibway, and Swan Lake First Nations). Finally, the park would sit within the homeland of the Red River Métis nation.

Many federal acts and policies acknowledge the need for nation-to-nation engagement of Indigenous communities as well as the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems. Parks Canada has adopted an *Indigenous Stewardship Framework* to support implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* within its areas of jurisdictional authority.

The City of Winnipeg also acknowledges “the unique relationship with the land and constitutionally protected rights of Indigenous Peoples” and commits to “[support] the experiential aspects of the land and natural environment

that reflect Indigenous and natural heritage, improve mental and physical health, and garner long-term appreciation of identity and place¹².

Our park proposal would advance reconciliation with Indigenous communities through its **proximity to neighbourhoods with high Indigenous population**, by **supporting the mandates of local Indigenous organizations**, by **including Indigenous park management and ownership**, and by **preserving places and features** of significant value to First Nations and Métis people.

¹² OurWinnipeg 2045, page 14.



Fishing at the "Petite fourche". Note the grove of preserved trees on the riverbank and its counterpart at the mouth of today's Seine River, left.
Rindisbacher print (1822). "Summer View in the environs of the Company Fort Douglas on the Red River." Drawn in July 1822. Source: Library and Archives Canada.



Indigenous Access to Nature

The proposed park would be near neighbourhoods with some of the greatest Indigenous population in Winnipeg. About 18,000 residents with Indigenous identity and 9,340 households with Indigenous ancestry¹³ would be located within the park's 10-minute walkshed. This represent 20% and 22% respectively of Winnipeg's Indigenous residents and households.

Indigenous Empowerment

Many Indigenous organizations are also located within walking distance of the proposed park, notably along the northern Red River branch, in the North End, and near the mouth of the Seine River. These organizations are well integrated within their urban communities. But this means that access to natural areas, where much of land-based education and the teaching of traditional practices are ideally conducted, remains challenging. From this perspective, the national urban park can increase the institutional capacity of existing Indigenous organizations while benefitting from their established engagement of local Indigenous residents.

While these are early days in the national urban park planning process, we explored park development and management with many Indigenous organizations that already have a vested interest in the area under consideration.

The Manitoba Indigenous Cultural Education Centre and Shawenim Abinoojii both indicated a desire to use the proposed national park to conduct in-town cultural and land-based education programming. The Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph du Manitoba, in partnership with the Saint Boniface Historical Society, already supervises interpretive tours on Métis history and culture in the lower Seine River area, which could serve as the foundation for future interpretive programming.

In regard to recreational programming, the Red River Brigades already operate canoeing activities from Whittier Park. Other Indigenous organizations offer recreation-based programming, such as canoeing or wilderness skills, though much of it currently takes place primarily outside Winnipeg. New water access and facilities within the proposed park could help extend such programming within the city proper and in closer proximity to urban youth.

Indigenous Heritage and Cultural Preservation

Ethnographic records indicate that the mouth of the Seine River was a well-established fishing location prior to colonial settlement and that the Seine River corridor served as hunting and foraging grounds to support Indigenous encampments along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. But much like the many creeks and natural features that composed the original landscape of the area, this historical Indigenous presence has been largely obscured by later urban development.

Commemorative places are already being implemented to acknowledge this lost heritage, as well as more recent Indigenous history. At The Forks', Niizhoziibeau serves as a ceremonial and cultural complement to the larger Oodena Celebration Circle. In St. John's Park, the Kapabamayak Achaak healing forest serves as a living memorial honouring Indigenous children lost to the residential school system. In Bois-des-esprits, the Manitoba Metis Federation and Save Our Seine are collaborating to introduce a similar healing forest. These precedents should inform the creation of a network of gathering places throughout the park.

10-Minute Walking Catchment

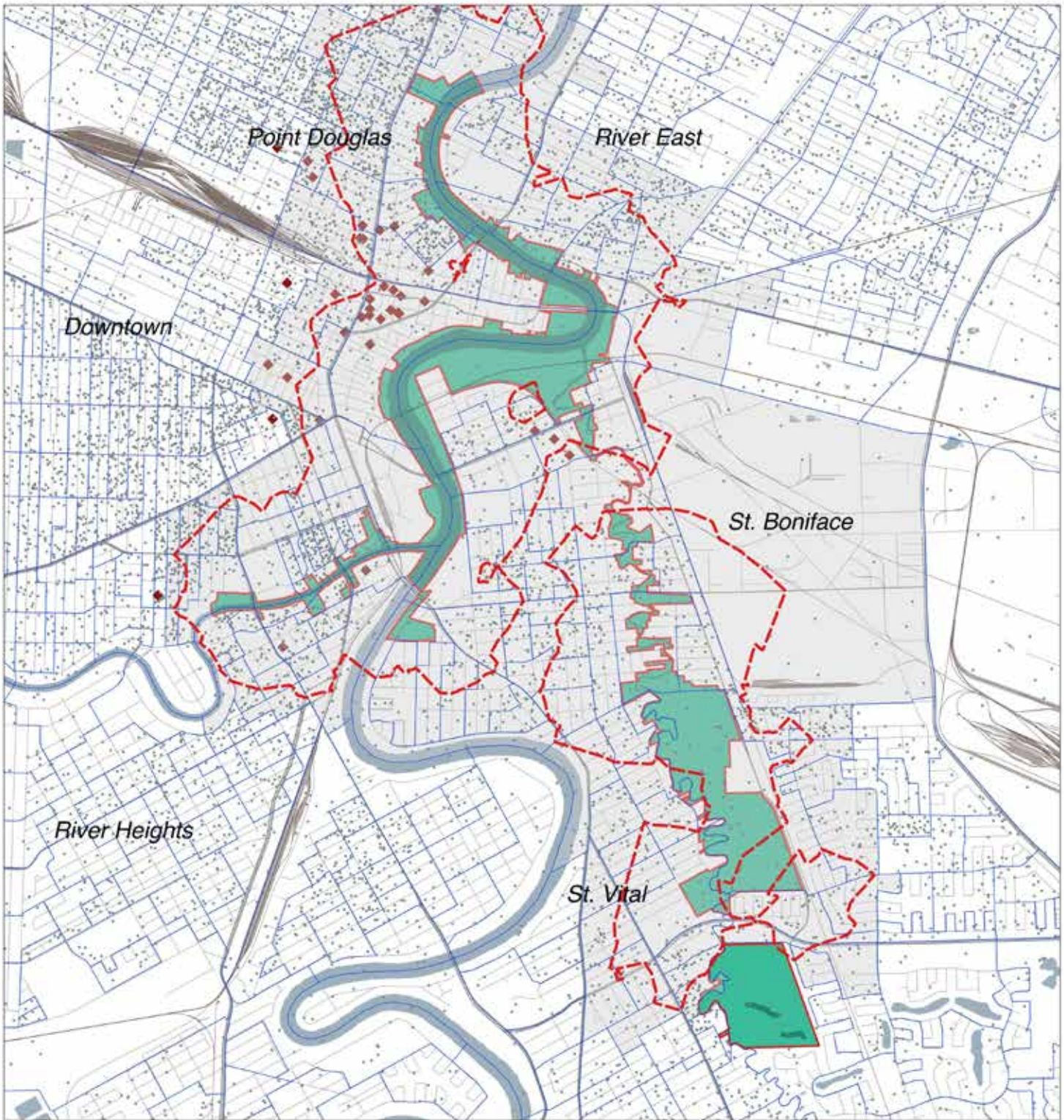
Indigenous population: 17,920 (19.7% of city)
Indigenous households: 9,340 (22% of city)

As previously discussed, we are proposing to use cottonwoods as a touchstone between history, local traditional Indigenous practices, environmental restoration efforts, and park ceremonial places. Cottonwood groves, such as the ones still seen at the mouth of the Seine River, were actively maintained to create favorable conditions for seasonal encampments along the riverbanks. Remaining large cottonwood stands are reminders of this historical cultural landscape feature.

The parks' environmental restoration program could include the creation of new cottonwood groves, which would serve to anchor the network of ceremonial gathering places. Indigenous organizations dedicated to cultural preservation and education could oversee this aspect of the park development, thus creating a tangible bridge between Indigenous empowerment, environmental restoration, and cultural reclamation.

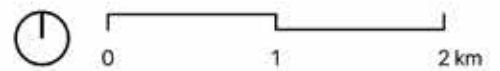
In the Seine River branch, the park would incorporate lands associated with early Métis homesteading, the birthplace of Louis Riel, and subsequent generations of Red River Métis people. Here again, few historical features remain. But the national significance of the area deserves further recognition, especially in Lagimodière-Gaboury Park.

¹³ Source: 2021 federal census.



Indigenous Population and Organizations

- 10 minute / 800m Walkshed
- ◆ Indigenous Organizations
- Census Indigenous Identity Distribution (1 dot = 5 people)
- Dissemination Areas within 800m of Park Access
- Census 2021 Dissemination Areas
- Proposed Park Extent



Census data source: Census Canada, 2023.

Urban Development

The national urban park would **increase the desirability of urban intensification areas** by providing high quality natural and recreational amenities. It could also facilitate urban development by **leveraging federal investments in infrastructure provision, site decontamination, or targeted social housing initiatives** within the park catchment area. Finally, the national park would directly contribute to other municipal development priorities by **increasing connectivity between established communities, consolidating green infrastructure, and promoting transit use and transit-oriented development.**

Urban Intensification and Major Redevelopment Sites

Winnipeg's municipal plan, *OurWinnipeg 2045*, puts much emphasis on infill development within the city's existing urbanized perimeter. This approach is seen as the city's best hope of meeting the goals set in its *Climate Change Action Plan*. Two of the city's *Major Redevelopment Sites* are adjacent to the proposed park: South Point Douglas and the Public Markets industrial area. The proposed park could thus directly support Winnipeg's goal of enhancing and maximizing the use of existing infrastructure and assets, while including natural heritage features such as rivers, urban forests, and parks¹⁴.

Winnipeg recently initiated a secondary planning process for Point Douglas. The aim is to establish a mix-use neighbourhood on brownfield lands south of the CPR railway while improving the established North Point Douglas neighbourhood. The Secondary Plan's implementation would coincide with the planning and creation of Winnipeg's national urban park, which would allow for the coordination of municipal, provincial, and federal investments to create a neighbourhood that truly "[embodies] principles of sustainability within a well-designed, walkable, and active transportation friendly environment."¹⁵

Amongst joint initiatives to explore are environmental remediation and restoration; infrastructure upgrades and improvements; the linkage of parks, natural areas, and green corridors into a cohesive habitat matrix; the extension and integration of the active transportation and recreational trail networks (including a proposed pedestrian bridge connecting Point Douglas to Whittier Park, Lagimodière-Gaboury Park, and the Saint Boniface neighbourhood¹⁶); the creation of public gateways to the national park and public access to the Red River; and generally, an increase in the provision of green space and recreational amenities for the existing inner-city residents.

¹⁴ *Complete Communities 2.0*, page 9.

¹⁵ Goal 3 of *Complete Communities 2.0*, page 79.

¹⁶ *The Forks and the City of Winnipeg*. (2018). *Go... to the Waterfront*.



Urban Structure Plan (From OurWinnipeg 2045 Plan)

OurWinnipeg 2045's Urban Structure Plan. Note that the proposed park area is adjacent to two of the City's nine major redevelopment sites, the majority of its neighborhood mix-use corridors, and at the interface between mature communities and the eastern employment lands (the Mission industrial park and the Canadian National yards). Source: City of Winnipeg, Complete Communities 2.0, page 17

Neighbourhood Mixed-Use Corridors

The proposed national park sits at the nexus of Winnipeg's neighbourhood mix use corridors. As such, its river trail system provides the missing link between several neighbourhood main streets. Beginning eastward, this includes Provencher Street (via the Provencher Bridge park gateway and the Seine River corridor), Marion Street (via the Main Street Bridge park gateway), and Regent Street (via the Louise Bridge park gateway); southwards, St-Mary's Road, Corydon Avenue, and Osborne Street (via the Osborne Bridge park Gateway); westward, Broadway Avenue; and northward, Selkirk Avenue (via St. John's Park and the Redwood Bridge park gateway).

The proposed national park would play a strategic, integrative role within Winnipeg's core area by networking recreational and active transportation trails, public transit routes and stops, and the summer water taxi docks.

Transit-Oriented Development

The proposed national park would promote the use of public transit through its central location within Winnipeg's transit infrastructure. Of particular interest is the bus rapid transit station area envisioned at the intersection of Sutherland and Higgins Avenue, in Point Douglas. As previously indicated, we consider this area an ideal location for the national urban park's interpretation center, as it strategically connects several core area neighbourhoods on both sides of the Red River and would provide easy access to a metropolitan rapid transit station. This location would also support Goal 1 of the City's *Complete Communities 2.0* by "[promoting] Transit Oriented Development (TOD) to accommodate growth and change at stations along rapid transit corridors through integrated land use, transportation, and infrastructure planning."¹⁷

Other significant connections to public transit infrastructure could occur at the Provencher bridge, where a pedestrian path leads through The Forks to the future main BRT internodal station at the CNR Union Station, and at each of the main proposed park gateways where main transit routes and facilities are already located.

Green Infrastructure and Integrated Stormwater Management

The City's development plan proposes to leverage green infrastructure to "achieve highest and best use for

¹⁷ *Complete Communities 2.0*, page 62.

biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, mitigate servicing capacity constraints, and accommodate only park, recreation, open space, or City operations related uses in City-owned land used as parks or under parks jurisdiction." It also recommends to "[conserve], restore, and enhance the urban forest as a key contributor to air quality, erosion control, carbon sequestration, storm water management, efficient energy resource consumption, shade, improved health and well-being, and mitigation of and adaptation to the urban heat island effect."¹⁸

¹⁸ *OurWinnipeg 2045*, page 23.



Naturalized retention pond outflowing into the Seine River. Royal Woods Development.



South Point Douglas: urban and park development linked together by green infrastructure.

In the context of the national park development, three areas present significant green infrastructure opportunities to meet these municipal policies.

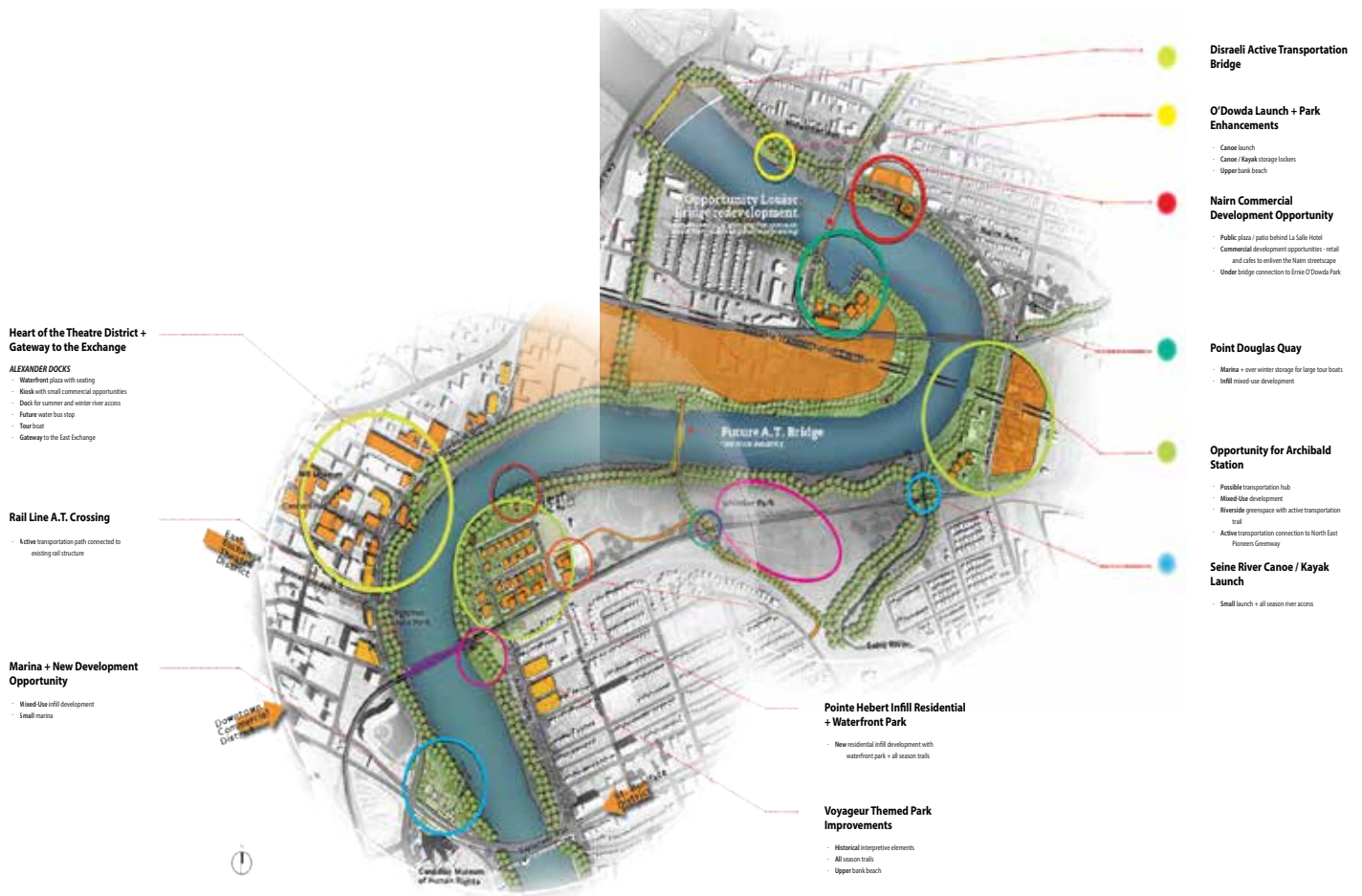
In South Point Douglas, green corridors from the river into the neighbourhood could combine with a re-established riparian corridor to manage some stormwater conveyance and extend habitat and recreational continuity into the urban fabric.

In the Public Market Lands (Old Stock Yards), a green infrastructure corridor could extend from Happyland park to Dugald Road, following the remnant Dugald Creek. Naturalised stormwater retention ponds, like those found in Royal Woods, near Bois-des-esprits, could capture and treat runoff from the Mission and Stock Yards industrial lands prior to its release into the Seine River. Habitat and recreational corridors could also be extended eastward. One could thus envision a 21st century business park, with a focus on environmental sustainability and high-quality amenities for its workers, all within walking distance of Winnipeg's national urban park.

Finally, green infrastructure could be implemented as part of the environmental restoration of the tip of Points Douglas, to help capture contaminants and increase habitat value.

Waterfront Improvements

Many of the park features proposed here echo ideas introduced in a visioning exercise commissioned by The Forks and the City of Winnipeg in 2015. While *Go... to the Waterfront* did not consider the Seine River corridor, or the section of the Red River north of Point Douglas, its themes and suggested interventions are readily transferable to the national urban park initiative. This includes the extension of the river trail network, the creation of a active transportation bridge between Point Douglas and Saint-Boniface, investment in existing and new river access points and crossings, and the integration of waterfront and urban redevelopment. As such, the proposed national urban park is readily compatible with the City's vision for its rivers.



Go... to the Waterfront's vision for part of the area considered for the national urban park. Source: City of Winnipeg / The Forks.



The Greater Winnipeg Waterways Conservation Framework

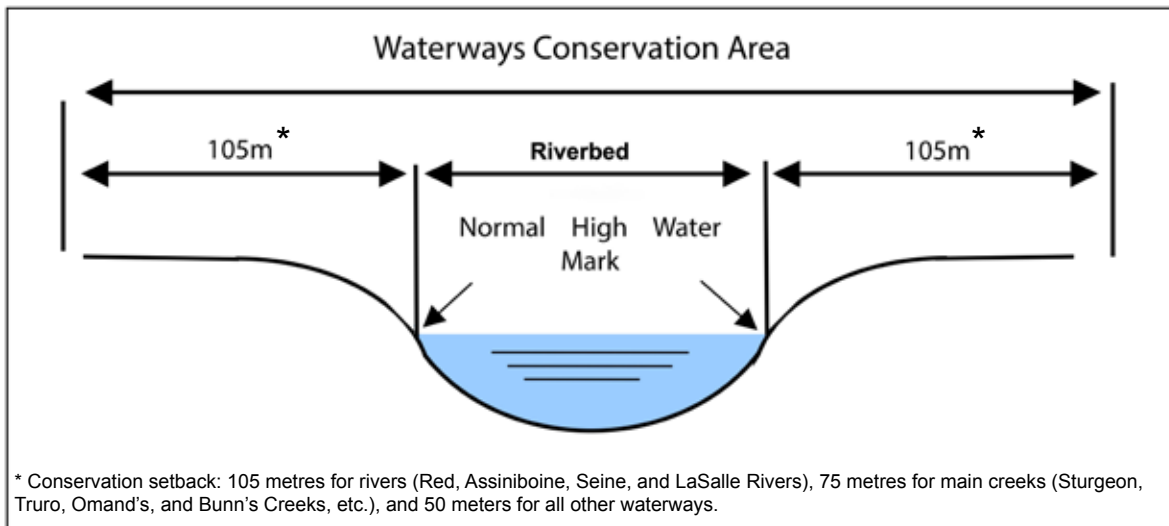
Many considerations affecting the implementation of the *Little Forks National Urban Park* are not specific to Winnipeg's city centre. Indeed, private ownership of the riverbanks and riparian zones, habitat and recreational trail discontinuity, inadequate funding, and an overly fragmented legislative and management framework affect all waterways in the city's metropolitan region. It seems probable, then, that the policies, strategies, and management practices required to support the national urban park can prove equally relevant to the full extent of Winnipeg's metropolitan rivers and creeks. Accordingly, the creation of a national urban park could provide the impetus for implementing a Greater Winnipeg Waterways Conservation Framework.

This framework would include four components: a designated **waterways conservation area**; consistent **legislative and administrative provisions**; standardized **management, maintenance, and monitoring practices**; and **public education**.

The Waterways Conservation Area

To establish the areas within which the Waterways Conservation Framework would apply, we recommend adopting the following practice and modifying existing municipal legislation accordingly:

- 1) The term **waterway** will be meant to refer to a river, stream, creek, canal, drainage ditch, water channel and other watercourses -- whether natural, constructed or altered -- and will include the frozen surface and bed of a waterway.
- 2) The **Normal High Water Mark** will be used to establish the lateral extent of a waterway's public **riverbed**. This is consistent with provincial legislation and guidelines, and matches most precisely the edges of the ecologically-valuable riparian areas.
- 3) The lateral extent of a waterway's **conservation area** will be established by applying a conservation buffer on each side of the riverbed. The width of this conservation buffer would be **105 metres for rivers** (Red, Assiniboine, Seine, and LaSalle), **75 metres for main creeks** (Sturgeon, Truro, Omand's, and Bunn's), and **50 meters for all other waterways**.
- 4) All properties within the Waterways Conservation Area, or portion thereof, will be subject to the terms of the **Waterways Conservation Framework**.



Adapted from: Winnipeg, City of. (2005). *Best Practices Handbook for Activities In and Around the City's Waterways and Watercourses*.

Key Legislative and Administrative Provisions

Riparian Protection and Development Controls

Existing land use planning guides such as the provincial *Municipal Planning Guide to Zoning Bylaws in Manitoba* and the *Planning for the Protection of Riparian Areas Guide*, as well as Winnipeg's *Best Practices Handbook for Activities In and Around the City's Waterways and Watercourses*, already describe practices that should be mandatory for all riparian properties.

The creation of a designated Waterways Conservation Area would move these from the realm of "should" to one of "must". It would also reinforce municipal oversight on private riparian properties and specify non-compliance penalties and remedy. Legislated provisions within the Waterways Conservation Framework would address the following:

- Acceptable land uses and land use restrictions
- Development setbacks
- Riparian area conservation requirements, including the preservation of established vegetation, admissible plant species, and maintenance specifications
- Flood hazard and protection (using the 100-year flood elevation)
- Shoreline stability and erosion
- Water flow & use, and
- Water quality and nutrient buffer zones

Existing provisions of the *Manitoba Planning Regulation*

should be strictly enforced, including waterways development setbacks:

*"According to provincial policies, development must be prohibited within 100 feet (30 metres) of all natural water bodies and waterways, except for development that creates only minor disturbances, like docks, pathways, and boathouses. Development must also be prohibited within at least 50 feet (15 metres) of artificial retention ponds and first and second order drains"*¹⁹ (our emphasis).

Land Transfer and Acquisition

The Waterways Conservation Framework should include a long-term mechanism for increasing public ownership of riparian lands within the designated Waterways Conservation Area. This could include a dedicated riparian acquisition fund independent of municipal operating and capital budgets, or a land-holding trust funded through public and private contributions. Municipalities should also adopt riparian land dedication requirements for new real-estate developments and have a right of "first-offer" on riparian properties coming up for sale.

The Seine River Greenway demonstrates how municipal legislation and opportunistic land acquisitions can achieve a comprehensive protected river corridor. Since the 1980s, a municipal land dedication requirement has helped the City implement riparian setbacks and recreational trails along many sections of the Seine River. In 2008, a seven-year advocacy and fundraising campaign led by Save Our Seine concluded with the preservation of the 27 hectares Bois-des-esprits property, one of the most biologically diverse

¹⁹ Manitoba, Province of. (2011). *Planning Resource guide. Planning for the Protection of Riparian Areas*. Government of Manitoba.

sites in Winnipeg²⁰. Save our Seine, the Riel Parks and Rivers Common (RPARC), and the Union nationale métisse Saint-Joseph are currently advocating for the purchase of the Sumka lands, adjacent to Vermette Park, which includes over 24 hectares of high-grade riverbottom forest. Forty years onward, these combined initiatives may result in a continuous river and trail corridor between the southern end of the proposed national urban park and the Winnipeg Floodway.

²⁰ Save Our Seine website.



Buckthorn removal. (Denis DePape)



Riffles at Bois-des-esprits. (Denis DePape)



Universal watercraft dock on the Seine River. (Denis DePape)

Management, Maintenance, and Monitoring

Rivers and creeks, just like parks, require constant maintenance and improvements to preserve their ecological resilience and recreational value. Decades of interventions by the City of Winnipeg, non-profit organizations, and residents associations -- notably on the Seine River, Bunn's Creek, and Oman's Creek -- illustrate some of the activities that would need to be implemented across the entire Waterways Conservation Area. These include:

- Water quality improvement works such as riffles, bank stabilization, and sediments capture
- Habitat improvements such as shallow fish spawning areas
- The removal of invasive species such as buckthorn
- Naturalization and riparian plantation, and
- Seasonal clean-ups

As an example, Save Our Seine maintains a "River Keepers" initiative funded through the provincial Urban Green Team program and promotes biodiversity through the removal of noxious plants, the enhancement of pollinator habitat, reforestation, and annual summer clean-up programs.

To help assess municipal environmental sustainability performance, *OurWinnipeg 2045* exhorts the City to track the status of municipal green and natural spaces, with regular reporting to City Council and the public. The inventory of existing waterways and associated riparian areas, and the monitoring of maintenance works and operations within the Waterways Conservation Area, would be a fundamental component of this tracking mechanism.

Save Our Seine is in the process of conducting an extensive geo-mapping of the Seine River corridor to identify areas of concern and monitor ongoing conservation activities. A similar tool should be implemented for the entire Waterways Conservation Area.

Public Education

The Seine River Greenway also demonstrates that environmental improvements and public education can go hand in hand. Many of Save Our Seine's improvement initiatives include a public education component, with public tours, school programming, interpretive signage, and demonstration projects such as the Niakwa Trail Rain Garden developed in collaboration with the Manitoba Eco-Network. Since 2015, a "Landcare" initiative also engages residents in corridor re-wilding and ecological restoration projects. Best practices outreach programs have also been targeting riparian property owners.

A Conservation Framework 120 Years in the Making

The significance of municipal waterways was acknowledged early on by the original Winnipeg Parks Board. Its superintendent, George Champion, sought to emulate North American park planning precedents, particularly the city-wide integrated park systems being then implemented in Boston, Chicago, and Minneapolis. The idea of a connected park system was formally endorsed with the 1947 *Metropolitan Proposed Parkways Plan* jointly developed by the Metropolitan Planning Committee and the Winnipeg Town Planning Commission.

But the real impetus for an integrated metropolitan park system came with the creation of the Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg in 1960 and the subsequent amalgamation of its nineteen municipalities into the Winnipeg Unicity of 1971. This led to a significant increase in public park spaces but also to a recalibration of the relationship between urban development and the city's rivers and creeks. Acquisition of river land for park use and the preservation of natural waterways became explicit municipal policies. Under pressure from residents, the Manitoba Naturalist Society, and other environmental groups, Winnipeg began implementing linear naturalized parks along Sturgeon Creek, Beaver Dam Creek, Bunn's Creek, and the northern section of Omand's Creek. An 18-kilometer-long Seine River parkway was also planned but never implemented.

A Riverbank Parkway System had been a long-standing priority of Plan Winnipeg, the amalgamated municipal development plan. In 1993, the City of Winnipeg finally initiated a program that combined residential streets, trails, and parks into sixteen comprehensive riverbank parkways. While the program succeeded in formalizing aspects of the 1968 *Plan Winnipeg Park Framework*, funding for land acquisition and parkway implementation proved challenging and the program's scope and parkway routing was modified accordingly²¹. To this day, parkway continuity remains incomplete, and the bulk of the system follows local residential streets, with often limited river access.

Winnipeg's latest development plan, *OurWinnipeg 2045*, maintains the City's desire to improve public access to the river corridors while ensuring their environmental conservation. Under its environmental resilience goal, for example, the plan recommends to leverage green infrastructure by

"[creating] a master green space and natural corridor plan by-law that enables conservation, management, restoration, and enhancement of the inherent value and ecological functioning of parks, waterways, natural areas and systems year-round, to support the environment, advance climate change adaptation

and mitigation, and increase quantity of such lands by 1,000 acres that can be accessed for recreation, social interaction, active living and connection of people and nature with nature, as population growth occurs" (our emphasis).²²

Related municipal policies, including increased land acquisition for park dedication, are further emphasized in many sections of the *Complete Communities 2.0 Direction Strategy*, which exhorts the City to:

"4.8 Develop a green space and natural corridor plan by-law that includes:

a. Consideration of municipal golf courses as major nature preserves and green space;

b. A biodiversity policy for Winnipeg that will detail, among other things, an ecological network that is interdependent, reciprocal, healthy, connected, and integrated with the built environment and life on the land; one rooted in Indigenous traditional knowledge of land, community, and ecology. This should include a requirement for an annual report to Council structured in line with the Durban Commitment: Local Governments for Biodiversity;

c. A Corridor Plan to protect and enhance Winnipeg's forests, green spaces, natural environment, and natural area corridors including Winnipeg's connecting riverbank corridors; and

d. Tracking the status of green space and regular reporting to the public and Council"²³ (our emphasis).

In addition, *Complete Communities* recommends that the City "acquires lands where possible to add to the linear parkway network and riverbank areas²⁴" (our emphasis).

Here we find clear municipal policy justification for our proposed Waterways Conservation Framework. Both *OurWinnipeg 2045* and *Complete Communities 2.0* advocate for stronger legislative and management conservation tools such as a "natural corridor plan by-law", a "bio-diversity policy", as well as "tracking and reporting" mechanisms.

Two other national urban parks candidates – the Meewasin Valley in Saskatoon and the North Saskatchewan River Valley in Edmonton -- are also river parks. These will likely share many park planning and implementation considerations with their Winnipeg counterpart. As such, a coordinated effort between these three projects may help advance waterways conservation across prairie cities.

²² *OurWinnipeg 2045*, pages 23.

²³ *Complete Communities 2.0*, page 141.

²⁴ *Complete Communities 2.0*, page 101.

²¹ *Winnipeg City Council Minutes of April 26, 2006, Item No. 21, Winnipeg Parkway System Review, File PR-4.*



Conclusion

The National Urban Parks Program comes to Winnipeg at a time when the convergence of industrial retreat from Point Douglas, conservation efforts in the Seine River corridor, demographic changes in inner-city neighbourhoods, and municipal intensification policies finally allows for a reversal of environmental degradation in the heart of the city. The *Little Forks / Petite Fourche* Park aims to serve as a catalyst for making it happen.

We believe that the present proposal best meets the goals of the National Urban Parks Program by protecting and expanding high-quality natural areas in one of Winnipeg's most ecologically strategic locations, by increasing access to nature for disadvantaged citizens, by promoting Indigenous empowerment, and by complementing municipal urban development priorities. The creation of a river-based national park is also an opportunity to clarify and strengthen our commitment to waterways conservation, both within and outside park boundaries.

Together, the *Little Forks / Petite Fourche National Urban Park* and the *Greater Winnipeg Waterways Conservation Framework* provide a comprehensive approach to the protection, management, and public use of Winnipeg's metropolitan rivers and creeks.



Produced by the Little Forks Advisory Committee, Winnipeg, Manitoba