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

Park Description

May 2024

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

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.

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]

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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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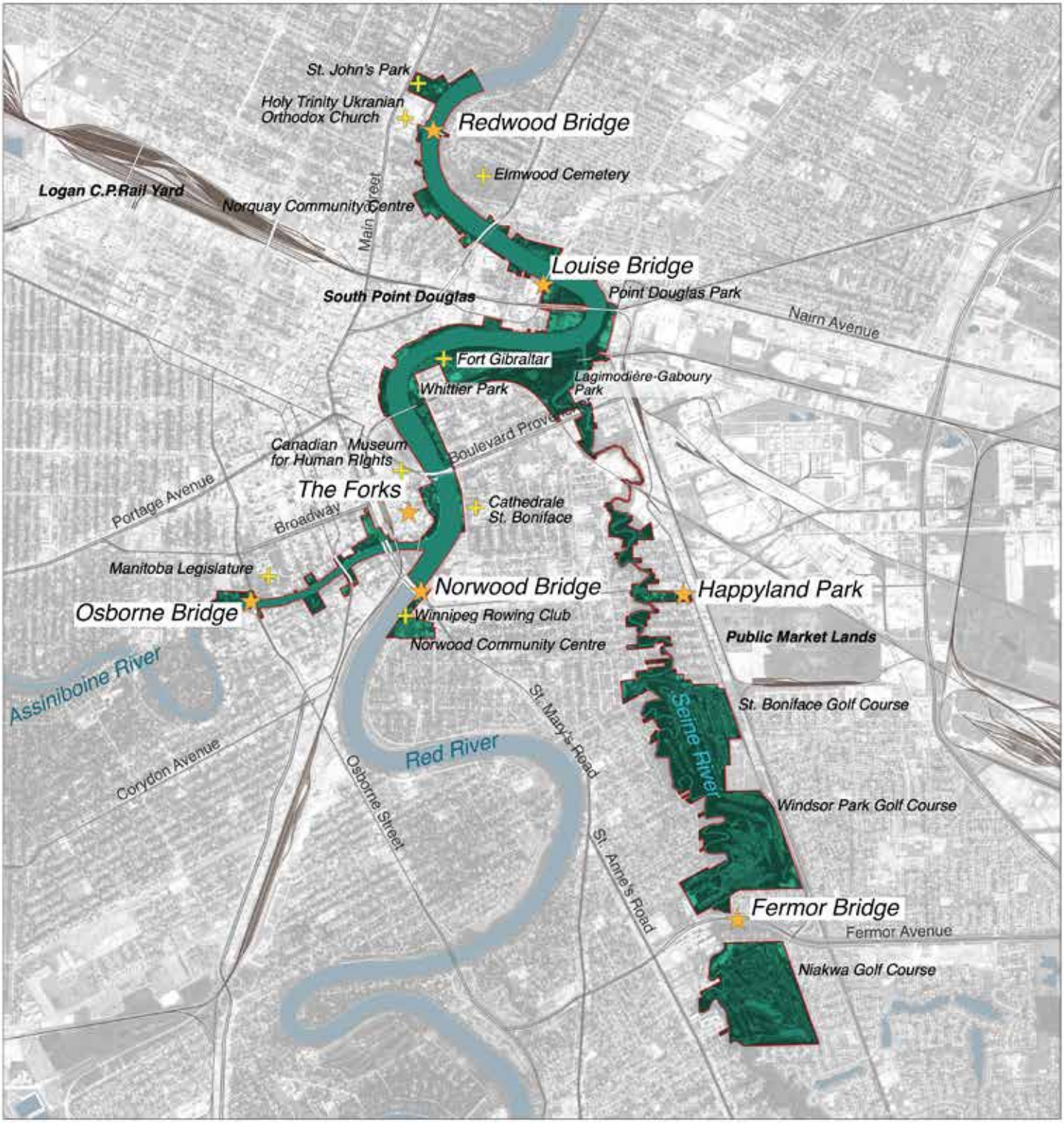


Little Forks National Urban Park Extent

- Proposed Park Extent
- Park Gateways
- Landmarks

0 1 2 km

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** – more than 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-eight 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.

	National Urban Park Full Extent	La Barriere Park	Assiniboine Park + Forest	Beaudry Provincia	Bird's Hill Provincial Park
Land Area	308.11 Ha	79.38 Ha	453.10 Ha	867.81 Ha	3487.25 Ha
Water Area	124.36 Ha	5.12 Ha	19.10 Ha	85.59 Ha	22.75 Ha
Total Area	**432.47 Ha**	**84.50 Ha**	**473.20 Ha**	**953.40 Ha**	**3510 Ha**

Little Forks National Urban Park Features

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

0 1 2 km

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.

Seine River habitat corridor. (Denis DePape)

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.

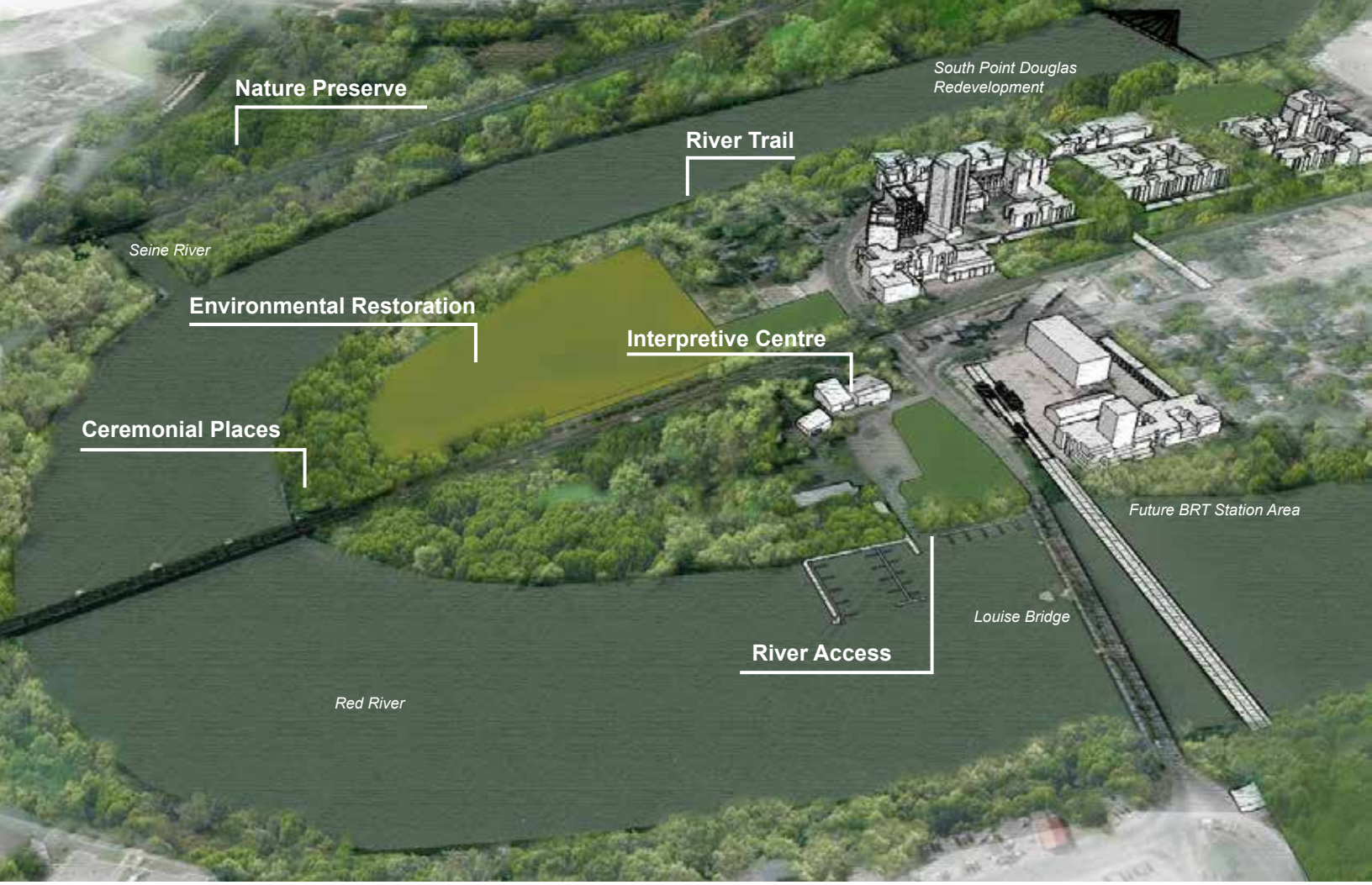
The first step in the implementation of the national park should be the designation of the two rivers' confluence as a nature preserve. This preseve would extend from just south of Provencher Boulevard, along the Seine River, to Fort Gibraltar on the west, and to Higgins Avenue and the Louise Bridge 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.

Point Douglas sandy shoreline.

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.

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.

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

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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

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 Niizhoziibean, 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 treat 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.

Grove of cottonwood trees at the mouth of the Seine River (right).

Produced by the Little Forks Advisory Committee, Winnipeg, Manitoba