



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

May 2024



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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.

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

