



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

The Greater Winnipeg  
Waterways Conservation Framework

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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Greater Winnipeg Waterways Conservation Framework

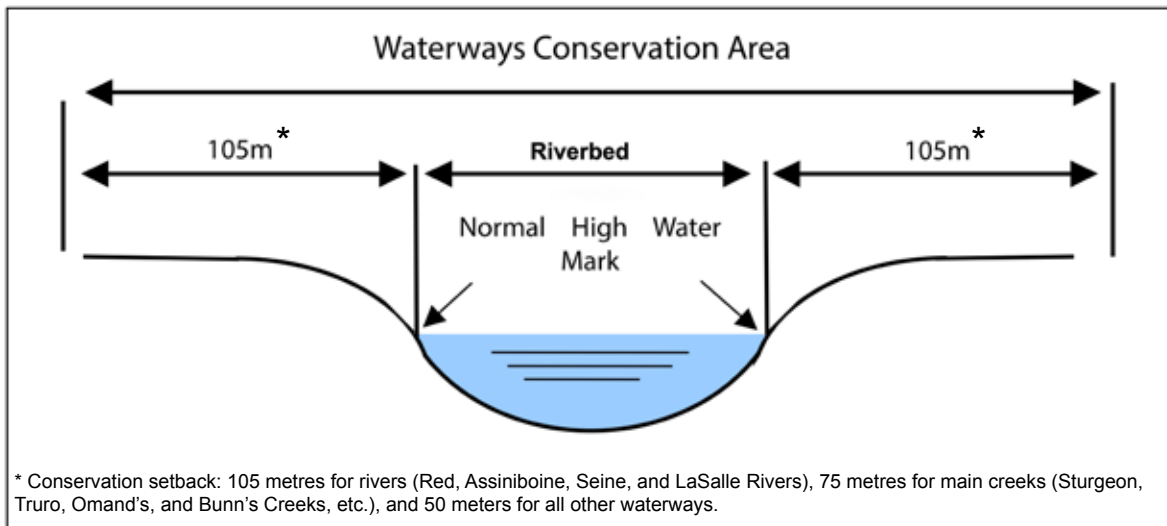
Many considerations affecting the implementation of the *Little Forks National Urban Park* are not specific to Winnipeg's city centre. Indeed, private ownership of the riverbanks and riparian zones, habitat and recreational trail discontinuity, inadequate funding, and an overly fragmented legislative 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"*<sup>1</sup> (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 sites in Winnipeg<sup>2</sup>. Save our Seine, the Riel Parks and Rivers Common

<sup>1</sup> Manitoba, Province of. (2011). *Planning Resource guide. Planning for the Protection of Riparian Areas*. Government of Manitoba.

<sup>2</sup> Save Our Seine website.

(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.

## 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.



*Buckthorn removal. (Denis DePape)*



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



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

## 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 accordingly<sup>3</sup>. 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).<sup>4</sup>*

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"<sup>5</sup> (our emphasis).*

In addition, *Complete Communities* recommends that the City "acquires lands where possible to add to the linear parkway network and riverbank areas<sup>6</sup>" (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.

<sup>4</sup> OurWinnipeg 2045, pages 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Complete Communities 2.0*, page 141.

<sup>6</sup> *Complete Communities 2.0*, page 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Winnipeg City Council Minutes of April 26, 2006, Item No. 21, Winnipeg Parkway System Review, File PR-4.*

