

# Winnipeg's Seine River Greenway

## A Community Creates Place through Stewardship

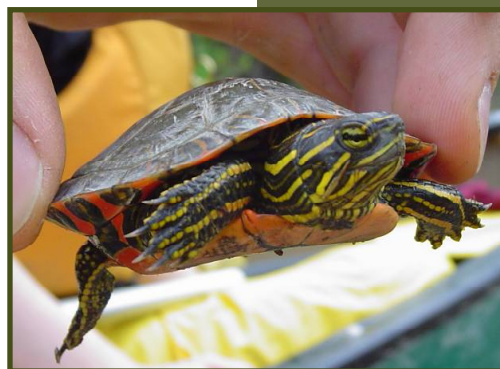
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### Executive Summary

Greenways provide community space for leisure activities, active transportation and allow for connecting with waterways, thereby contributing to an understanding of urban ecology. This can give rise to a greater public sense of stewardship for rivers, riverbanks, and riparian zones. Greenways serve not only to link awareness of landscape ecology with action, but to build community capacity through the cultivation or protection of natural common spaces. Corollary to the common goal of maintaining a healthy landscape is the growth of a healthy community. Winnipeg's Seine River Greenway illustrates the power of a community based stewardship group, Save Our Seine River Environment Inc. (SOS), in creating distinct urban places.

Many urban environmental strategies have been carefully constructed and neatly packed away. This case study proposes that what separates plans from appropriate action is community planning, consultation and involvement. This often begins in the form of small community groups and has grown, in many successful cases, into development authorities, as evidenced in Saskatoon and Calgary. SOS has engaged long term planning through community participation and is currently moving towards the establishment of a Seine River Development Authority.

Community based planning and action is essential to the development of strategic plans for greenways and the successful implementation of greenways. This project examines the Seine River Greenway as a best practice illustrating the importance of a bottom-up approach in linking urban ecology with community places. The purpose of this case study is to provide lessons as to how parks and environmental planners must work collaboratively with stewardship groups, providing planning tools to engender community action.



Images: Mike Grandmaison

### Contents

- Executive Summary
- Background & Context
- Planning & Action
- Lessons Learned
- The View from Here

## Background & Context

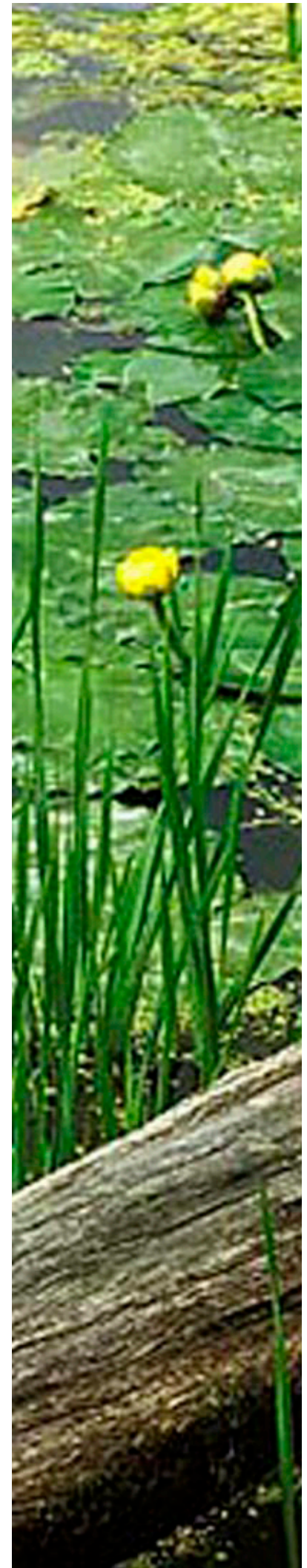
The stewards of the Winnipeg's Seine River formed the 'Save Our Seine Resident's Committee' (SOS) in September 1990. SOS is now an incorporated not for profit body and registered charitable organization composed of over 900 contributing and volunteer members. In addition to routine cleanups and tree planting, the volunteer-based organization is active in encouraging the protection of natural areas and encouraging that development near the Seine is sensitive and appropriate to the riparian environment. SOS works in conjunction with the community, developers and various levels of government to ensure the health of the Seine. Save Our Seine is recognized as an integral voice in any development affecting the Seine River Greenway environment and is therefore involved with planning processes including studies and documents, as well as in consultation processes with developers.

In addition to encouraging conservation through policy, programs and presentations, SOS recognizes that access to natural places in the city is the best form of urban ecological education and ultimately stimulates stewardship. Subsequently, SOS has built trails and continues to collaborate in developing additional trails and natural parks, including the 82-acre Bois-des-esprits. Trails act as connective tissue between parks, contributing to the linear-park concept which characterizes the Seine River Greenway.

The Seine River Greenway weaves together many attractions, rather than a trail punctuated with passive open spaces that are limited in use. While the trail does have a couple of distinct places, each turn can act as a destination by virtue of its natural populations and heritage. Seeing a blue heron glide along the Seine can hardly be nailed down to a specific destination. However, focusing in specific places also allows community vision to root down and better contributes to a community guided process, as community organizations, adjacent residents and businesses begin to define desired characteristics and uses of these destinations.

Creating continuity between these destinations is key, as it allows the greenway to be envisioned as an ecological whole. A continuous corridor combined with access points to the river forms a connective tissue and multiplies the overall experience of the place.

Save Our Seine has collaborated in the development of its greenway, involving its own members, as well as residential and business community members. This is done through cleaning & planting events and calls for limited activism to support or oppose projects along the Greenway. Experts and consultants are engaged as required to undertake or participate in research and studies which provide information or plans required for projects or other decisions.

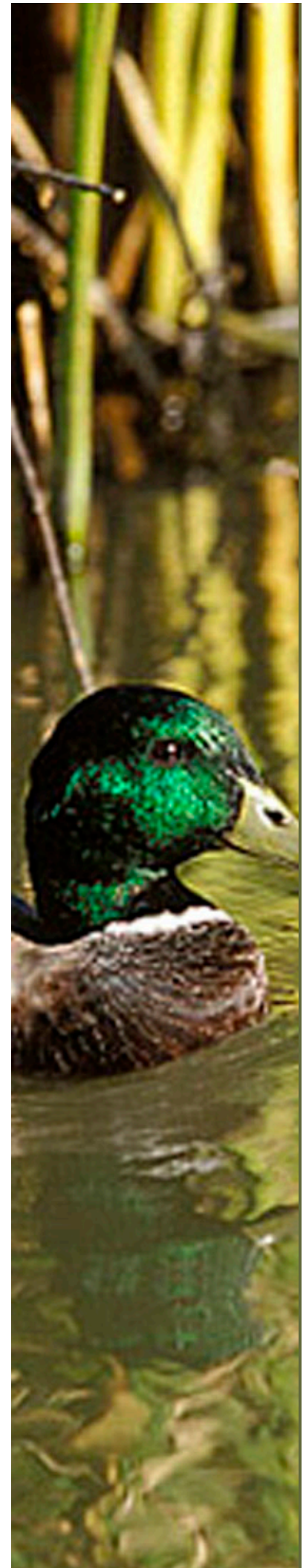


As an example, SOS assisted University of Manitoba Graduate Landscape Architecture student Larissa Panachenko and Environmental Science student Jared Whelan-Enns in developing the Seine River Interpretive Trail/Le Sentier de la Seine: A Feasibility and Design Study. This study sought to design and develop an easily accessible year round low-impact, multi-use trail between Marion and Provencher. It also aimed to promote environmental and historical educational opportunities within the context of sustainability and stewardship. Roughly 300 households in the immediate vicinity were surveyed. SOS also participated as a member of the City of Winnipeg's Seine River Task Force and in support of the extensive Seine River Greenway Study, an award-winning document which was accepted by City Council in 2000, and has since been established as a guideline for SOS endeavors and projects. Other studies have included park plans, species inventories as well as water quantity and engineering studies

Each project or initiative considered or pursued along the Seine River includes further meaningful community participation. In addition to area residents, local community groups (schools, paddle clubs or businesses, etc.) are approached for input and recommendations. By engaging the community, each participant invests in the Seine River Greenway. This individual investment fosters a group of citizens who have a personal interest in the well being of their local environment and community – their place.

## Planning & Action

Due to their longevity, board member retention and active planning Save Our Seine has established itself as an authority on Seine River related issues. SOS has become a planning group in its own right, but must continue to work within an awkward and sometimes inflexible municipal framework. How then can municipal planners assist stewardship groups such as Save Our Seine? A first step is recognizing that communities gather around parks issues and have been the catalyst for getting many cities to look at their connective tissue. Community groups have been responsible for a great deal of foresight and integration. Without a stewardship group to champion a project it is less likely to be implemented, as stewardship projects are inherently local in nature, depending on local leadership and demanding locally brewed solutions that respond to community needs and conditions. Local examples which illustrate results of this collaborative action include the TransCanada Trail, Winnipeg Trails Association and Rivers West. Another key feature of community groups is that they have access to other resources and sources of funding. As a charitable organization focusing in environmental,

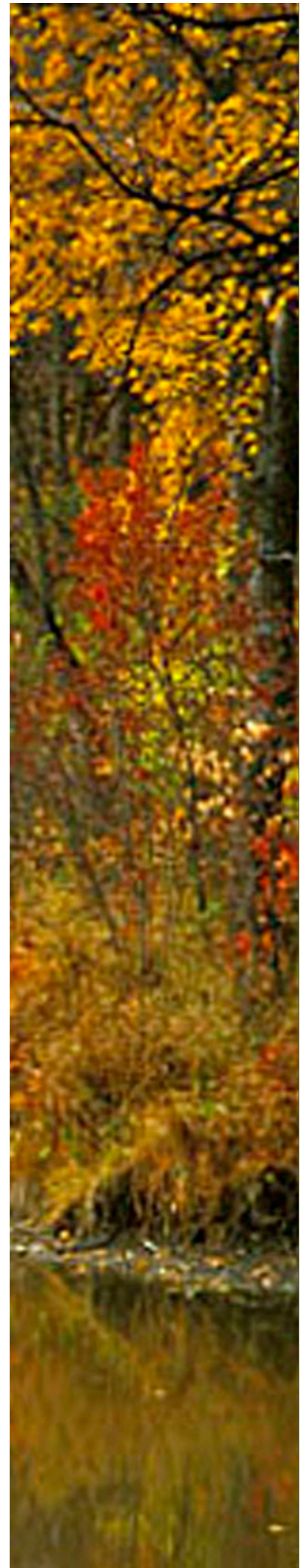


historical, recreational and educational projects, many foundations and other levels of government are able to support joint SOS and City projects.

Another step in ensuring community stewardship and action is to build capacity between planning (as a land use profession) and community members to work towards protecting urban natural landscapes. While many areas of government interact with stewardship groups, as planners our role is to facilitate the successful reincorporation of urban parks and natural landscapes into community life. Our role is to build consensus on the solutions, not to come up with the solutions on our own. Our role is to facilitate the development of feasible and sustainable grassroots desires and solutions. This can be done by adding value and bolstering community projects with instructional resources, streamlined processes such as alternative services delivery, and grants for community initiated projects.

Alternative services delivery is an important means of supporting community groups, as recognized in the City of Winnipeg's Red Tape Commission's recommendation #17. Organizations such as Save Our Seine can then formalize their relationship with the municipal government cross-departmentally, improving their ability to act efficiently and effectively. For organizations with limited resources, maximizing efficiencies and effectiveness in inter-organizational cooperation is critical.

Many of the failures or shortcomings of community stewardship groups are related to the bureaucratic delays associated with their informal status. This requires a restructuring of both the NGO and the relationship. Suggested models include a Community Management Lease model/Special Operating Agency or other hybrid. In the evolution of a growing and expanding organization, institutionally and in programming, this is the correct direction and ambition to fulfill its potential. This outcome stands to be the pinnacle achievement of a group of residents who stepped up as stewards to care for a neglected, natural community resource, and the ideal marriage of community will and expression in formal planning practice and place-making. If successful, such a model will lay the groundwork for other community initiatives to follow.



## Lessons Learned

Seine River Stewardship and the Greenway provide the community a chance to work together on something positive. This was useful for building capacity, building a place for community to use and to rally around. The act of developing greenways combines the capacity built through naturalizing or restoring a natural place and creating public facilities for cultural, recreational and other purposes.

Building this common ground has ecological benefits such as protecting habitat, restoring biodiversity, creating wildlife corridors and acting as natural infrastructure for storm water runoff. A number of social and economic gains result from the collaboration necessary to envision and implement community facilities such as greenways. Save Our Seine points out the dramatic rise in property value and taxes since the river has been cleaned. Communities are given the opportunity to collaborate on something constructive, generating a sense of collective pride and ownership. Individually, citizens develop a sense of stewardship and empowerment from seeing the results of their own actions and investment in their community. This sense of value in turn provokes a greater sense of propriety which cements local environmental stewardship and long-term protection.

Instilling these values in communities generates results which relate to community pride and identity. Economically, collaborative action in the form of stewardship encourages partnerships among community groups, business associations and various levels of government with regard to fundraising and cost sharing. Furthermore, adjacent properties increase in value. Community led stewardship initiatives such as greenways not only confer a community sense of ownership over public space, but create the groundwork for community renewal, both physically and socially. In order to allow for such community capacity to develop, public goals must be the principal objective in creating community places rather than short term or simple fixes. For this, it is important to establish a community vision for the public asset in question. SOS's primary success was in developing a strong and well-articulated vision for its development as a starting point. This vision was not a master plan so much as a reference for goals and potential solutions to be continually reassessed and gradually implemented. SOS has also been a resounding voice in encouraging that proposed developments along the Seine suit the community's vision and that they do not detract from the goals identified by the community.



The role of planners is to enable communities to develop and implement their vision – leave it as much as possible in their hands because it will be best managed by them if they have a sense of ownership. Planners can also be supportive by reviewing and assisting community stewardship groups in forging creative and resourceful strategies for action. Strengthening bonds between community and conventional planners allows for the development of a hybrid model of planning, initiated by communities and integrated into a municipal framework, and therefore a more holistic outlook. Save Our Seine has been a model in creating the conditions to implement an all-season community created greenway which highlights the natural assets of adjoining neighbourhoods along the Seine River Greenway. This invaluable resource that can enrich Winnipeg’s culture and the quality of life for all citizens depends on the local planning community to nurture and foster the growth of SOS.

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