

# “Leave strips” protect rivers and save money



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If you use the trail from John Bruce Road East to enter the Bois-des-Esprits, you will notice construction work along both riverbank and trail this winter and spring.

Built in 2010, this trail is very popular with walkers, cyclists, and seniors on motorized scooters. The trail skirts around a condo fence and hugs the top of a steep bank, where a rare vista of the Seine River unfolds.

From this vantage point, you can see where the river hits the bank below the trail before making a sharp turn. Downstream the riverbed is constricted by the historic dumping of concrete blocks and other fill now hidden by vegetation. Fast-flowing river currents are eroding the bank which has failed in the past. Continued erosion is putting the public trail and private condos at risk so the city is taking steps to reduce erosion and improve trail safety.

A crew installed “rip-rap” along the river’s edge on Jan. 15. Rip-rap is the term used for large boulders that are placed along river banks to minimize erosion. In the spring, the city plans to install a low wall with a hand rail between the trail and the river. To minimize the length and visual impact of the wall, a small section of the trail will be re-routed upslope. The old trail will be removed and vegetation restored.

Could this expensive work have been prevented? Yes. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Land Development Guidelines (1992) call for permanently-protected “leave strips” between rivers and adjacent developments.

Leave strips protect the riparian zone — which is critical to



Photo by Michele Kading

**A wood spirit carved on a tree trunk (left) oversees the installation of rip-rap while a person leaves the river trail.**

the maintenance of a healthy river. They also protect private properties from flooding and potential loss of land due to stream erosion and instability.

In this location (with a steep bank and dense development), the recommended leave strip would extend 30 metres from the river starting at the top of the bank.

Instead, there is no leave strip at all. If Winnipeg had followed DFO guidelines in the past, there would be ample space for the Seine River to simply be a river — eroding and

depositing material without endangering property. And there would be ample space for safe public trails along the top of banks instead of clinging to steep slopes. In the future, protecting leave strips as permanent public parks along the Seine River will benefit the community and save money in the long-run.

*Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine.*