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community forum

What does the Seine need in the future?



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ST. VITAL

When I was young, I read an engaging fantasy story called *The Stream That Stood Still*. It had nothing to do with drought but it came to mind when I looked at the urban Seine River this summer.

The water levels were normal this spring. By early August, they were dropping — fast. The river shrank to mid-channel, exposing wide mud flats.

Reports flooded in.

Between John Bruce Park and Creek Bend Road, the channel was so dry the river stopped flowing in places. Canoeing was impossible. Isolated pools turned green with algae. Riffles at the Royalwood Bridge and Creek Bend Road sat high and dry.

Questions soon followed.

Why is the river so low this year? Is enough water flowing under the floodway? Is the river upstream blocked by debris or a beaver dam? Or, did trapping beavers in 2016 reduce back-flooding behind downstream dams? Are golf courses removing too much water?

The lower Seine is strongly influenced by the Red River. When the water is high in the Red, it backs up the Seine — sometimes past Fermor Avenue.

The upper Seine between Fermor and the floodway is much more vulnerable to drought. Its water level depends entirely on local rainfall, beaver activity, the location of storm water pipes, debris blocking narrow spots, and changes in the larger watershed south of the floodway.

The urban Seine River experienced a similar drought in 2012. What happens to the aquatic ecosystem when the river literally stands still?

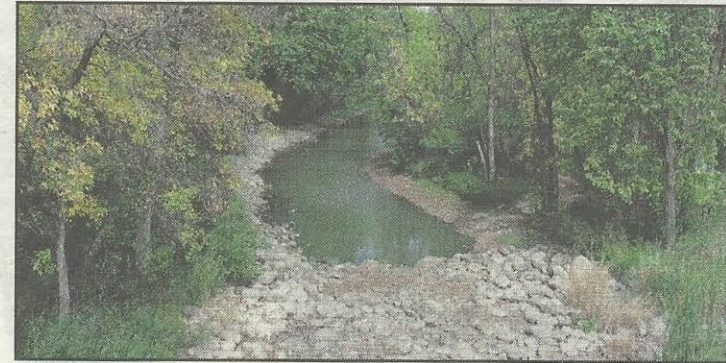


Photo by Michele Kading

Riffle structures at the Royalwood Bridge that are normally submerged were high and dry during summer droughts in 2017 and 2012.

Water is the lifeblood of every river. They need enough water to support a healthy underwater ecosystem. This is called environmental flow. Historically, Manitobans spent little time or money worrying about drought or environmental flow. We had too much water.

We focused on building infrastructure to prevent flooding. Are the Winnipeg floodway or the St. Anne diversion ditch contributing to the low water levels in the urban Seine River today? Does the urban Seine need more riffles, wetlands, or dams to prevent drought?

If I have whet your appetite to learn more about conserving the Seine River, please join us at SOS's AGM at 7 p.m. on Mon., Oct. 23 at Morrow Gospel Church. A panel of speakers will address these topics. An engineer will explain how the siphon under the floodway affects river levels. A city planner will explore how land use planning affects the Seine. We may even talk about beavers and riffles.

Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine — www.saveourseine.com