

Learning to live with nature — and each other



Michelle Kading
COMMUNITY
CORRESPONDENT

ST. VITAL

As more people are forced to share a limited amount public park space, conflicts arise.

Trails are often used by slow-moving walkers and fast-moving cyclists. About a month ago, I received a complaint from someone who had a very unpleasant encounter with a cyclist who swore at her for being in his way. I could relate to her story.

During a stroll with two colleagues, I was almost bowled over by a jogger — twice! She was running laps on the narrow path we inadvertently blocked as we chatted about the “monkey trails” nearby. I jokingly said she needed a bicycle bell.

The “monkey trails” we observed riddled the forest. Paved trails designed for accessibility are boring for kids looking for adventure and woodchip trails slow them down. They crave dirt, puddles, turns, hills, and jumps. So, they create their own trails through the forest — to the dismay of nature-lovers and birders. As we strolled farther, we found make-shift fire pits, forts, and tree houses. The materials used for building or

burning had been stripped from the forest. Perhaps the most disturbing report this year was that of a century-old oak tree that had been cut down with a chainsaw.

One of the biggest threats to natural parks is encroachment.

It starts small. One homeowner begins to mow and trim the adjacent park vegetation. If there are no consequences, other neighbours follow suit. Soon, grass clippings, branches, and Christmas trees are dumped among the natural vegetation — killing the understory and introducing weeds.

“But this is okay, isn’t it? I’m just returning nature back to nature, right?”

Sod comes next — along with garden trees, shrubs, and flowers. Finally, stone is added to create manicured spaces for privately-owned swing sets.

No doubt, park rules discourage these activities. Most people know the rules — even if they are not posted:

Dogs must be on a leash. Cutting trees is a no-no. Fires must be in designated fire pits. Vandalizing public property, littering, and dumping trash are not allowed — even if it’s only yard waste.

When rules are not posted, good sense and common courtesy must prevail.

Cyclists (and perhaps even fast-moving joggers) should warn walkers of their approach, slow down, and give them time to



Supplied photo

A vandalized oak tree in the Bois-des-esprits forest.

move aside. Rules help us live in harmony. But even more important than rules, is respect — for each other, and for the natural parks, forests, and rivers we all share.

Share your photos, wildlife observations, or concerns about human activities in the parks along the Seine River at [www.](http://www.saveourseine.com)

saveourseine.com or on the Save Our Seine Facebook page.

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