

# The case of the disappearing watershed



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July 19, 2018: A group of planners from across Canada enjoyed an afternoon canoe tour on the urban Seine River.

The tour organizer had successfully overcome the challenges of paddling on the Seine River. Where can we park close to the river? Is there a place along the shore to easily launch our canoes? Will there be enough water in the river?

The following day: Despite an overnight rain, the SOS River Keepers retired their rowboat for the season. The river had virtually stopped flowing. The channel was a river of mud.

The Seine River needs a minimum of 280 litres (3.5 bathtubs) of water per second to maintain its ecological health. It needs even more water to float a canoe or rowboat.

Precipitation records for Winnipeg show

severe summer droughts since 2008. But the lack of summer rain is only a part of the story. What else affects the amount of water in the urban Seine River?

Size matters. Other things being equal, a large land area (watershed) will collect more water than a small land area. Historically, the watershed delivering water to the Urban Seine River was 2,150 square-kilometers in size (100 per cent). It is no longer this big.

Over time, water from large portions of the watershed has been diverted away from the Seine River.

- 1906 to 1908: The Manning Canal was built to drain three large wetlands that formerly fed the Seine River. Subtract 500 square-kilometres (23 per cent).
  - 1958: The Seine River Diversion (SRD) was dug to divert water west around Ste. Anne to the Red River. Subtract 214 square-kilometres (10 per cent).
  - 1968: The floodway was built around the southeast side of Winnipeg. This giant ditch intercepts surface flow and groundwater from land east of Winnipeg. Subtract 188 square-kilometres (nine per cent).
- So how much land still contributes water to the urban Seine River?
- Let's assume that all of the water from



Photo by Michele Kading

SOS River Keepers were not able to use the rowboat after July 20, 2018 due to low river levels — the earliest date ever.

the lower Seine River watershed (north of Ste. Anne) flows into Winnipeg through the siphon under the floodway. Keep 434 square-kilometres (20 per cent).

- The Urban Seine River collects water between the Winnipeg floodway and the Red River. Keep 109 square-kilometres (five per cent).
- If no water from the upper Seine River is diverted into the SRD, keep 705 square-

kilometres (up to 33 per cent).

Today, the watershed is only 25 to 58 per cent of its former size. This makes the urban Seine River extremely vulnerable to summer drought.

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