

ECO-JOURNAL

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March/April 2003

Report from the Grassy Narrows blockade Treaties, trees and sharing

By Will Braun

It was past midnight as we stood around the bonfire beside a logging road in Northwestern Ontario. I'd never been to a blockade before. It was a one night "roving blockade", part of a high stakes game of cat and mouse between the people of Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows) and Montreal-based logging giant Abitibi Consolidated.

As we awaited the loggers—who haul at night on various roads leading to the pulp and paper mill 80 km south in Kenora—there was a heightened energy in the air. But instead of the Oka-esque militancy that stereotypes might conjure, it was the quiet Davidian confidence of a people prepared for the corporate Goliath.

Boreal homeland

As we stood in the night forest, one could imagine sections of the daily paper scattered on a coffee table somewhere in suburbia, the product of trees taken earlier from clearcuts near the blockade; and an investor in New York or Montreal checking the price of his Abitibi shares, oblivious to the fire burning beside that remote road and in the hearts of the people there.

Tired of watching logging trucks haul away the bounty of their 2,500 square mile Traditional Land Use Area, the people of Grassy Narrows are inserting themselves into decision-making in their boreal homeland.

Joe Fobister is one of those around the fire. "I can't describe the feeling," he says, "it's like my heart being pulled out of my chest every time I drive into a clearcut."

The next day I join Fobister as he drives past the main blockade to a large clearcut in an area where his parents took him for months at a time when he was young. He surveys the scene

silently as his grandson Jeremy climbs a pile of freshly cut logs. "When they look at the forest," he says of Abitibi, "all they see is money." In 2002, Abitibi revenues topped \$5.1 billion.

A menacing machine, with claws, blades and an evident appetite for trees sits on the naked hillside that was once home to birds, animals and a proud family. Empty oil pails litter the site.

Referring to logging activity in the area, Abitibi spokesperson Marc Osborne says "this is not clearcutting to me." The

company operates under "self-regulated" licenses granted by the province, and replants harvested areas. "Sustainability" is the saving watchword; the same one seemingly used to describe most all industrial resource extraction.

"We're not shying away from our responsibility," Osborne says, noting ongoing communication with Grassy Narrows.

In a June 1998 letter, Abitibi wrote to Grassy Narrows: "We realize the way we manage the forest may be considered catastrophic, but we also believe that in the long run it is best for the forest. If the forest

were left with no cutting or with no large scale catastrophe, it would become old and would not renew itself."

"They act like they own the forest," local trapper Don Billard says of Abitibi. He pulls out a map with coloured blotches marking areas targeted for cutting. Pointing to a purple blotch where he has a cabin, he says "If they cut here, we'll have to pretend we're living in a forest."

"The fact of the matter," he states with simple passion, "is that what they're doing is wrong."

Treaties and trees

The ultimate goal of the blockaders is Asubpeeschoseewagong jurisdiction over their customary lands; something that could give them the ability to both protect their boreal homeland and access its wealth and opportunity.

Provincial spokesperson Shawn Stevenson says there is extensive "consultation" with Grassy Narrows on forestry planning, but when pushed on how much say Aboriginal people

see "Grassy Narrows ..." on page 6 ►



Joe Fobister and his grandson in front of a typical boreal clearcut harvest. Photo by Jennifer deGroot.

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are their own and do not represent the
views of the Manitoba Eco-Network or its
member groups.

Remembering Carl Ridd

This issue of the Eco-Journal is dedi-
cated to the memory of Carl Ridd, a
much-loved and respected Winnipeg ac-
tivist who passed away March 29.

Carl is known for many, many things
in the city, not the least of which was his
distinguished teaching career at the Uni-
versity of Winnipeg where he inspired
countless students. He was a long-time
supporter of the Manitoba Eco-Network,
and a founder of at least one member
group, Project Peacemakers.

Carl was a colleague and mentor for
many activists in this city, and never hesi-

tated to lend enthusiastic and generous
support for campaigns aiming for a more
just, peaceful and healthy world. Many
of us will remember him most recently
leading us in a profound minute of si-
lence on the Legislature steps as we called
for a peaceful solution to George Bush's
Iraq crisis.

Carl Ridd was a person whose analy-
sis of wrong was uncompromising, but
also who could see good in the world.
Carl could inspire faith that the world
might be a better place. He will be sorely
missed by us all.

ECO

Nomination Deadline for MEN Environment Awards Extended

The deadline for nominations to the
Manitoba Eco-Network 2003 Environ-
mental Awards has been extended to
Thursday, April 17.

Established over a decade ago, the MEN
Environmental Awards were created to
"recognize significant contributions to
the awareness and protection of Manito-
ba's environment", particularly in the
non-governmental community.

A selection committee will consider
nominations in the following categories:
Individual female; Individual male;
Group; and "Special". Please submit your
nomination in writing by April 17 to MEN
Awards Committee, 2-70 Albert Street,
R3B 1E7; by fax to 989-8476; or email to
mbeconet@mts.net. Be sure to include
information as to why your nominee de-
serves recognition.

ECO

Eco-Erratum

The editor of the January/February
2003 Eco-Journal was mis-identified as
Anne Lindsey. While Anne continues
to be the Executive Director of Eco-Net-

work, the Editor of that issue was in
fact Heather Laird. Heather has been
Editor since the September 2002 issue.

ECO

Eco-Network Steering Committee, 2002-2003

Larissa Ashdown, Eco-MAFIA

Amanda Aziz, University of Manitoba Recycling and Environment Group

Amy Hawkins-Bowman, Organic Food Council of Manitoba

Scott Kidd, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Manitoba Chapter

Glen Koroluk, Winnipeg Water Watch

Joseph Prymak, Consumers for Responsible Energy

John Sinclair, Resource Conservation Manitoba

One Step Closer To Saving the Manigotagan!

By Ron Thiessen, Western Canada Wilderness Committee

The Manitoba government has issued a new park proposal for the Manigotagan River park reserve. It includes two major changes the Wilderness Committee has been calling for—real protection and larger boundaries.

The new Manigotagan River provincial park proposal includes a tripling of the original boundaries, from 250 meters to 750 meters on each side of the river's banks, as well as a much-needed change in Land Use Category (LUC) from Recreational Development to Backcountry. Backcountry protects an area from industrial activities such as logging and mining while Recreational Development, a very misleading term, allows these industrial uses. A small section by Turtle Lake will be kept under a Recreational Development banner due to mining tenure.

Even though the triple boundary expansion is considerably less than the Wilderness Committee recommendation, and what many concerned citizens asked for (2.5 km on each side of the river), it is a good sign that the Manitoba government may be willing to leap a little further to do what it takes to protect the Manigotagan River.

Ecological paradise

The Manigotagan River park reserve is a 55 km stretch of scenic waterway that flows northwesterly from Nopiming Provincial Park emptying into Lake Winnipeg across from Hecla Island. It's an ecological paradise that provides a valuable home for flora and fauna such as towering pines, tamarack, white spruce, bears, moose, eagles, river otters, and the threatened woodland caribou. It is also Manitoba's most accessible premier backwoods canoe route. In order to successfully create a conservation vision of fully protected rivers on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, the Manitoba government must take the next steps necessary to make full protection a reality for the Manigotagan River and its surrounding area.

It's important at this point to keep a couple of facts in mind. First, the new provincial park proposal for the Manigotagan River park reserve is only that, just a proposal. Second, even with this new proposal in place, the existing regulation main-

tains its original boundaries and a Land Use Category that allows logging and mining activities that are destructive to wildlife habitat and backcountry recreation.

The park reserve process is a government-led consultation and review process with First Nations, industry, and the public, with a goal of determining the chosen area's future. This can range from a fully protected park to handing the entire area over to the mining and logging industries. Options also exist for the establishment of multi-use parks that allow for combinations of wilderness preservation, industrial, heritage, and recreational uses.

The Wilderness Committee has campaigned vigorously for the last three years to save the Manigotagan River and its surrounding area from detrimental logging and mining activities. We have produced and distributed postcard and digital mailers, spoken with thousands of Winnipeggers on their doorsteps, met with former and present Ministers of Conservation, highlighted the area in a presentation to the Legislative Caucus about land use planning on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, and have assertively participated in the Parks Branch - Manigotagan River park reserve consultation process.

Over a thousand postcard submissions and hundreds of emails have been sent from the public to government asking for full protection and expanded boundaries—necessary requirements to protect the area's wildlife populations and provide for backcountry recreation.

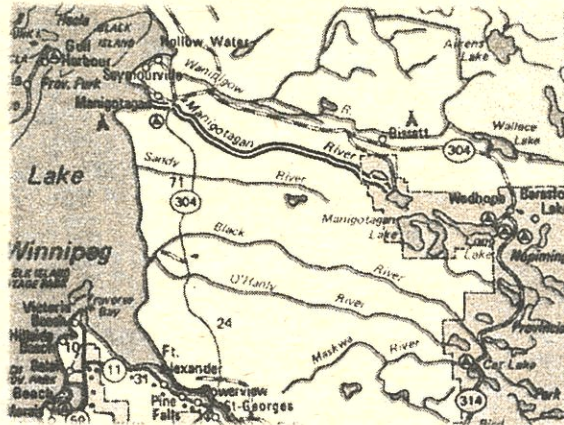
In September of last year, premier Gary Doer committed to protect the Manigotagan River and promised to consult with local communities and stakeholders to work towards tripling the boundaries. Doer also stated to the Winnipeg Free Press that he would have this done within the next six months.

Time Is Up!

Six months have gone by and consultation with First Nations in the area has not yet been completed. This isn't the first delay. The original decision deadline was September 11, 2002. A new regulation was put in place that extended the park reserve status in order to allow for completion of the consultation process.

The Wilderness Committee will continue its campaign until we see a fully and permanently protected provincial park that's large enough to ensure the future of the river and surrounding area for wildlife, backcountry recreation, education, and future generations. We invite you to join us in our efforts by expressing your view to the Manitoba government on the future of the Manigotagan River park reserve. Connect to www.wildernesscommittee.mb.ca/manigotagan.htm#ballot to conveniently and quickly fill in your on-line ballots. Help bring us One Step Closer to Saving the Manigotagan!

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What's Happening

Friday, April 11—Brandon United Nations Youth Seminar (BUNYS). This year's theme is the Environment, with speakers on the topics of the Kyoto Protocol, and a variety of international and local issues. Workshops on papermaking, a global economics trading game and Green Living 101. Youth leaders from El Salvador and folksinger Hugo Torres will be sharing their experiences as well. For more info contact Caitlyn (204) 727-5675 or marquisp@mb.sympatico.ca

Saturday, April 12—No War Against Iraq Coalition demonstration Against Illegal and Racist War. Starts 1:00pm at the Legislature. March down Broadway and up Main Street to Old Market Square, where we will sing and dance to music provided by a variety of local artists. Bring games, musical instruments and picnic lunches. E-mail info@projectpeacemakers.org or call 775-8178 ext.2 for more information

Tuesday, April 22—Faith & the Common Good (Manitoba) is hosting an evening of story telling in celebration of Earth Day. Stories from a variety of faith and spiritual perspectives will be presented in spoken word and through song from 7:00 - 8:30 P.M. at Circle of Life Thunderbird House 715 Main Street (at Higgins). Also an opportunity to find out more about the David Suzuki Foundation Nature Challenge.

Tuesday, April 22—Book launch of Alternative Budgets: Budgetting as if People Mattered by John Loxley 7:00 P.M. at Mondragon Book Store and Coffee House. Brought to you by Fernwood Books and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba.

Sunday, April 27—Crocus Day 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. at the Living Prairie Museum. Welcome spring to the prairie with a celebration of our provincial flower; the prairie crocus. Contests, tours and crafts. Free admission. For more info call 832-0167.

April 27-30—"Turning Green to Gold" Waste Reduction Conference in Brandon. Put on by the Manitoba Association of Regional Recyclers (MARR) and the Solid Waste Association of N. America (SWANA) Prairie Chapter. Panels, training, tours, workshops, and trade show. See www.swanacpc.org or call Morag Puteran at (204) 729-2290 to register.

Sunday, April 27—Fort Whyte Centre 4th Annual EcoAdventure 8:30 am 300 competitors will begin their 44 km journey through lakes, forests and streets using non-polluting transportation methods in Fort Whyte's urban adventure race. Interested in taking the Adventure? Call 989-8364

Sunday, April 27—Fort Whyte Centre Earth Day Family Entertainment and Activities 1-4 pm Enjoy a day filled with great entertainment and educational activities all within the natural beauty of Fort Whyte Centre

Saturday, May 3—Manitoba Naturalists Society Spring Garage Sale. Westminster United Church.

Saturday, May 3—(or May 10 in case of rain.) West Broadway Spring Clean-up. Planning meetings for the Spring Cleanup will take place every Wednesday until the 3rd at 6pm in the

Housing Resource Centre office at the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, 185 Young St. To get involved, or for more information, contact Jeneva at 774-3534 or jenevastorme@yahoo.ca.

Friday, May 9—A Gathering of Manitoba CED Practitioners. The Canadian CED Network and The Manitoba Research Alliance on CED in the New Economy are hosting an event to find out what's happening in CED research and to give practitioners a chance to influence the research agenda. 9:30 - 2:00 in Room 310, Aboriginal Centre 181 Higgins Avenue. Please RSVP by May 2nd to Harold Shuster by phone at 927-3200 or e-mail: harold@policyalternatives.ca

May 11-18—Land of the Spirits - Spirits of the Land Gathering II. Elders, traditional land users and youth sharing traditional knowledge. Meals are provided and registration is free. Please bring eating utensils, camping and rain gear. To register call 947-0566.

Sunday, May 25—Living Prairie Museum Plant Sale 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Learn about native plants/gardening and see the natural prairie in bloom. Good selection of

native wildflowers and grasses from Prairie Habitats. Free admission. For more information call 832-0167.

Sunday, June 1—CPAWS Run & Walk for Wilderness will happen on Sunday, June 1, at Assiniboine Park. There will be a 10K Timex Series Race, 5K Fun Run and 3K Walk. Collect pledges and earn MEC gift certificates! Mark your calendars to take part in or volunteer at this fundraiser. Registration brochures are available at all Running Room stores or contact CPAWS Manitoba at 949-0782 (info@cpawsmb.org).

Sunday, June 1—Early Bird deadline for the Manitoba Wilderness Experience Summer Program. Enjoy a wilderness cabin vacation including accommodation, food, canoes and guide services for only \$410 (\$35 discount for registration by June 1). Programs include Boreal Forest Birds, Wilderness Education, Astronomy, Botany, Photography and Wilderness Writing. For more information contact the Manitoba Naturalist Society at (204) 943-9029.

June 2-7—Winnipeg Inner-city Research Alliance Summer Institute "Greening the Inner City: Eco-friendly Community Development" A course for community workers, residents and university students exploring issues of environmental sustainability in the inner city. For more information contact Jillian Golby at (204) 982-1140.

June 2-6—The Winnipeg Commuter Challenge, a friendly 5-day competition to encourage individuals to adopt alternative forms of transportation. Prizes this year include \$100 gift certificates from Mountain Equipment Co-op, and new bicycles and accessories from Olympia Cycle and Ski. To take part in the Winnipeg Commuter Challenge 2003, or for more information, visit the Resource Conservation Manitoba website at www.resourceconservation.mb.ca, or contact Serge or Andrea of RCM's Green Commuting Initiatives program at 925-3773.

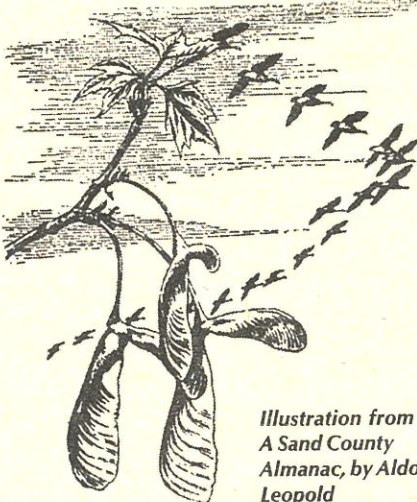


Illustration from
A Sand County
Almanac, by Aldo
Leopold

Monsanto Develops GE Wheat

Information provided by Julie Fine

In December 2002, Monsanto submit an application for the dissemination of Roundup Ready wheat, which is a wheat variety engineered to be resistant to the Roundup herbicide. Government officials expect to make a decision within a year. The introduction of genetically engineered wheat would have severe repercussions for Canadian farmers as well as consumers who oppose the genetic engineering of our food supply.

"Approving GE wheat would be problematic on more than one level," says Julie Fine, Biotech Chair of the Winnipeg Council of Canadians chapter. "A farmer wishing to plant GE wheat will face the fact that planting the seeds saved from the previous year's harvest is no longer possible. Neighbouring farmers, who might wish to keep their crop GE-free will face the very real threat of contamination, and as a result the whole community will risk losing their biodiversity."

Rene Van Acker, Associate Professor of Plant Sciences at the University of Manitoba states that GE crops, more specifically GE wheat, is a threat to free and flexible operations at the farm level.

Ian Mauro and Associate Professor, Stéphane McLachlan, Environmental Science, University of Manitoba echo this concern. "According to our research, 90% of farmers in Manitoba are 'unlikely' or 'definitely not' going to grow Roundup Ready wheat. Producers are concerned about the threats this technology poses to their operations and markets as a whole". The European market will be closed to Canadian wheat farmers, as Europe steadfastly refuses to approve the consumption of GE wheat.

For more information on this issue, you can visit the Council of Canadians website at www.canadians.org. and look under "Biotech". This site provides contact information and ways for citizens to take action.

ECO

Grassy Narrows Blockade Continues

... continued from page 1

actually have, he says "[Aboriginal] input on site-specific issues," is "considered" in forest planning.

The matter of Aboriginal rights to customary lands outside reserves is critical, both in terms of Grassy Narrows' hopes of attaining self-reliance and in terms of the very make-up of the country. The 1000 people of Grassy Narrows cannot survive off a 14 square mile reserve.

Treaty 3, which applies to Grassy Narrows, makes provision for Indians to "pursue their avocations of hunting and fishing" throughout the area they inhabited (not just on reserve), subject to certain limitations. That's hard to do in a clearcut. The view of the treaty among blockaders seems to be that it is intended to ensure equitable sharing of resources.

Indian Affairs official James Cutfeet would provide no clarification, position or policy of Indian Affairs on the fundamental matter of treaty rights outside reserves. He would not say whether logging infringes on treaty rights. "It's a provincial matter," he says. But the province does not formally recognize the Grassy Narrows Traditional Land Use Area. As this game of jurisdictional hot potato goes on, the trees keep falling and the trucks keep hauling.

A human rights observer at the blockade says, as a non-Aboriginal, "All of my treaty rights have been met; sometimes at the expense of Aboriginal treaty rights." Matt Schaaf's com-

ment acknowledges that non-Aboriginal occupation and use of areas covered by treaties is also a treaty right. It goes both ways; but the exchange of rights has worked better for some than others.

"What was supposed to be a two-way relationship," says Schaaf, "has turned into a one-way road leading out of Asubpeeschoseewagong territory to the [pulp] mill."

Who benefits, who pays?

After the US reader puts her newspaper in the recycling, and the New York investor cashes in his dividends, Fobister is left standing on a bald hillside with the hope that he will have more than clearcuts and Abitibi-managed tree farms to pass on to his grandson.

He believes a multi-use approach to the forest would provide more jobs and opportunity. Rather than clearcutting an area once or twice a century, eco-tourism, trapping, wild rice harvesting, fishing, and selective logging could be carried out simultaneously in a region over the long term. This is part of Fobister's vision of what Aboriginal access to resources through treaty rights might look like. The by-product could be greatly reduced dependence on government programming.

The people of Grassy Narrows say they will stay on the road for as long as it takes. This is not surprising given the options they face. And only time will tell how this David and Goliath tale will unfold; whether treaties can be made to work for both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal parties, and whether Joe's grandson will be taking his grandchildren for a stroll through a clearcut or an old-growth forest.

Will Braun is a freelance writer from Winkler, Manitoba.

April, 2003: The Grassy Narrows blockade is continuing. You can get updates on the protest at www.thunderbay.indymedia.org

To support the protesters with donations of cash or supplies, phone Sarah at (204) 510-0693 in Winnipeg for information.

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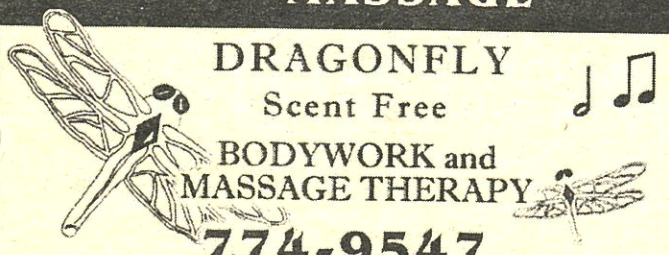
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New Manitoba Eco-Network Member Groups

Seven new Member Groups have recently joined us!

Churchill Northern Studies Centre

The mandate of the CNSC is to undertake and support research and education on subarctic ecology. Current activities include long-term ecological monitoring and research in the areas of winter snow, climate, life sciences and aurora.

Box 610
Churchill, MB R0B 0E0
Contact: Michael Goodyear
Phone: (204) 675-2307
Fax: (204) 675-2139
Email: goodyear@churchillmb.net
Website: www.churchillmb.net/~cnscc

Concerned Citizens of the R.M. of Piney

Seeking more environmentally sound livestock operation methods and alternatives to earthen manure lagoons. Currently this group is organizing public awareness meetings.

Box 73
Middlebro, MB R0A 1B0
Contact: Doug Thomason
Phone: (204) 437-2769
Fax: (204) 437-2797
Email: doughtom@marvin.com

Greening West Broadway

A neighbourhood-based organization working for greening and revitalization in West Broadway. Current activities include the development of Spirit Park, community garden projects and tree banding initiatives.

640 Broadway Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0X3
Contact: Jeneva Storme
Phone: (204) 774-3534
Fax: (204) 779-2203
Email: jenevastorme@yahoo.ca
Website: www.westbroadway.mb.ca

Living Prairie Museum

Promoting awareness and conservation of natural areas, specifically tall grass prairie, through environmental education. Living Prairie Museum conducts programming for children and adults, holds special events and workshops, and undertakes conservation and education projects.

2795 Ness Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3J 3S4
Contact: Lise Smith, Education Coordinator
Phone: (204) 932-0167
Fax: (204) 986-4172
Email: lsmith2@city.winnipeg.mb.ca
Website: www.city.winnipeg.mb.ca/cms/parks/envserv/interp/living.htm

University of Winnipeg Environmental Studies

This interdisciplinary program of study is aimed at educating students in a holistic approach to their environment. Following the general principles of sustainability, the program provides an integrated approach to understanding the environment, acknowledging human impact, and providing a framework to develop future solutions to environmental problems.

515 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2E9
Contact: Alan Diduck
Phone: (204) 786-9461
Email: a.diduck@uwinnipeg.ca
Website: http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/~ahill1/

Water Wisdom

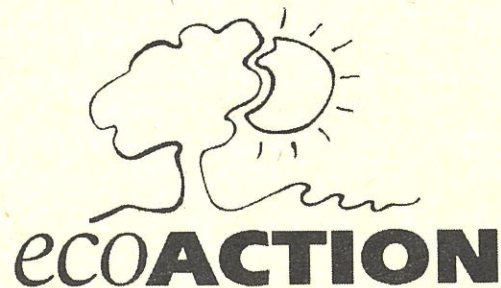
Dedicated to working with people to revive and protect watersheds, lakes and rivers.

737 Home St.
Winnipeg, MB R3E 2C5
Contact: Trish Sellers
Phone: (204) 955-4703
Email: waterwisdom@icenter.net
Website: www.waterwisdom.ca

Winnipeg Humane Society

The mandate of the Wpg Humane Society is to protect animals from suffering and to promote their welfare and dignity. WHS acts as a shelter for over 8000 animals per year and advocates for the humane treatment of all animals.

5 Kent St.
Winnipeg, MB R2L 1X3
Contact: Vicki Burns
Phone: (204) 982-2037
Fax: (204) 663-9401
Email: vickib@humanesociety.mb.ca
Website: www.humanesociety.mb.ca



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Native Plants Nurture Soil and Water

by Lindy Clubb

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has a secret that got out, to everyone's benefit. It's a change from the way companies and businesses used to do things on the ground and around the water. It's the business of restoring tall and short grass prairie plants in disturbed soil and by wetlands. Ducks Unlimited had a biologist working at Oak Hammock Marsh who specialized in (and advocated for) the use of prairie plants instead of weedy exotics. Brent Wark is a veteran biologist and the mastermind behind a new division of Ducks Unlimited, a company called Native Plant Solutions. NPS gathers, buys and installs native plants and seeds, turning degraded sites into seas of color and natural habitat. It's what used to cover the plains of southern Manitoba—original prairie plants—and they produce "amazing patches of color that often establish right away," Wark says.

Restoring or covering ground instead of exposing or moving earth is another side to the corporate face. For instance, when Domtar left their St. Boniface site they were under government orders to clean it up in a way that met with community acceptance. To achieve this target, they asked for the Fort Whyte Centre's help. Fort Whyte developed a proposal acceptable to the community, Domtar drew up a lease for the land and donated it to Fort Whyte, who showed a lot of imagination and conscience in their project development. A lovely urban greenspace 'biosphere' was installed after the contaminated soil was trucked off the land. The plants were provided by NPS.

The Transcona Community Biosphere project is a mix of pathways, installations of natural prairie plants and trees, bird nesting boxes, wetlands, and purple marten houses. Bringing a bit of biodiversity and natural habitat into the sterile landscape of surrounding industrial and commercial lots, the results are as unexpected and appealing as a wildflower garden

in a clear-cut. Native Plant Solutions were hired to manage the natural prairie component of the project. Wark says there are additional plans to "scratch in more flowers, like purple prairie clover, with the goal of reuniting some siblings separated at birth—land and plants," then enjoying the low maintenance results. As Wark explains, "Our clients want suitable plants, ones that were typically found there to begin with, and they get the benefits of both diversity and low maintenance. Forget wa-

tering, mowing and fertilizing, plus these plants are good for gravel and clay bases."

Native Plant Solutions is a for-profit division of Ducks Unlimited Canada that has grown into a terrific alliance. All of the profits from NPS go directly to DUC and support, in turn, the establishment of more wetlands and habitat for wildlife. NPS has planted areas that range from one to one thousand acres with locally purchased or gathered native material, allowing insects and natural plants to colonize and flourish. They have been, at times, overwhelmed by the requests that have poured in for their work. They plan to



Native/indigenous prairie species are well adapted to thrive on marginal (dry and relatively infertile) soils. Photo by Chris Penner

expand their work in the coming years.

This new company is also capable of establishing wetlands for the dual purpose of stormwater control and nutrient removal, helped along by the native grass buffers they use to intercept run-off. Their projects are efficient and have met with success. Past installations include revegetation in Altona and Winnipeg for nature preserves, the LaSalle pipeline crossing, and industrial sites in South Dakota and Saskatchewan. Word is spreading and Wark believes that some companies are "truly trying to do the right thing" in seeking NPS's services. For instance, Ladco has asked for their help in planting a buffer strip of vegetation on the banks of wetlands in their latest development, Royalwood.

Additionally, companies save costs from the use of long lived plants that resist weed intrusion and, once established, pretty much look after themselves. The opposite of most landscaping companies, Native Plant Solutions is "in and out in three years" according to Wark. They staff biologists and botanists, produce seed from their plant stands, and charge less to put in the plants than it costs to excavate and move contaminated dirt.

Native Plant Solutions and Ducks Unlimited Canada are helping and healing the earth and the water with plant life and helping to reconnect our natural systems. Putting plants in place supports the systems that have learned how to function in our climate, on our soil, and without our help.

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Making the Connection: Compost, Soil and Food Security

By Susan Kennedy, Compost Action Project, Resource Conservation Manitoba

From a presentation at the "Making Manitoba Food Secure" conference, March 2003

Uptown, the local Winnipeg entertainment newspaper, recently started to include David Suzuki's syndicated weekly column. In one of his latest installments, Dr. Suzuki writes, "despite our sophistication, we remain biological beings as dependent on clean air, water and soil and energy as any other creature."¹ This echoes his message in other workshops I have attended in recent years. Why does Dr. Suzuki bother to state the obvious?

This might be a new tactic for this increasingly outspoken, iconoclastic environmentalist. During his presentations he urges the audience to consider how their personal actions either reflect their commitment to their natural home, or exploit it. He shows how indigenous peoples around the world honor, celebrate and live within the natural systems in a sustainable way, and compares this to our increasingly consumer-driven, detached western world.

As Suzuki states, "Human activity is now powerfully disrupting the fabric of the natural world." Food security initiatives can be a positive, proactive approach to combating destructive systems, while creating new ones to take their place. Public education is integral to our efforts. People need easy,

step-by-step actions that lead in the direction of concrete solutions. They need to feel that they are "making a difference." Otherwise apathy, indifference and unwillingness will continue. Is growing vegetables in my backyard linked to reducing climate change? Well, of course!

Everyone should strive to support trends in food production and distribution that are acceptable, stable, just, and sustainable. We are questioning the current corporate driven global food system and trying to find means for local reliance and reciprocity.

Home compost education is an integral part of this work. By actively promoting home composting on the personal, neighbourhood and community level, we will be helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of our local food systems. Making compost is a radical act. By working with natural systems, instead of against them, we are more able to fully realize food production possibilities that are a part of real, natural systems, and not dependent on technological solutions that have little grounding in the natural world.

The fertility of the soil can't be taken lightly. As important as clean air and water, thriving soil is the basis for plant and animal life that sustains us. The topsoil where our food is grown needs to be constantly replenished with organic matter,



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and no synthetic fertilizer can adequately restore the balance of the soil ecosystem. The 'new wave' of organic gardeners and farmers are well-versed in soil conservation methods including green manure, mulching and composting. I'm sure many of us compost at home and on the farm, but more of our neighbours, friends and relatives need to be joining us in these efforts.

Save the Whales? How about Save our Soil?

It's not an overstatement. Unfortunately the breadbasket of the prairies is on a bit of a precipice. During the past 40 years, over half the organic matter in our soils has been lost to erosion.² Ever wonder about those brown dust storms that rage on the open prairie and dump soil in town? That's our food security blowin' in the wind. Nationally, it has been predicted that Canada will lose the topsoil it needs to feed itself within 50 years unless current farming, land use and water practices are reformed.³

Worldwide, 25 billion tonnes of agricultural topsoil are swept away every year, accounting for 7% of the globe's good growing land every decade.⁴ Chemical fertilizers, which are increasingly applied to compensate for the growing infertility of the world's topsoil, are depended on heavily, with an estimated 40% of global grain production reliant on them for their success.⁵

Loss of the world's topsoil and heavy reliance on chemical fertilizers are a good recipe for disaster. It is also widely documented that urban gardeners use more chemicals per acre on their property than 'traditional' farmers use on their crops. This is all the more reason for compost education as part of our food security efforts in our communities.

Chemical fertilizers have yet to replicate the main attributes of compost, other than acting like a N-P-K intravenous for plants while polluting the watersheds around which they are used.

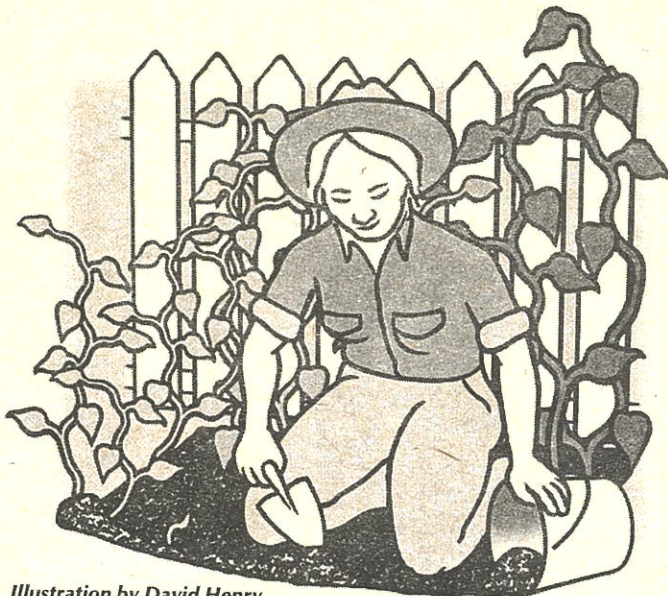


Illustration by David Henry

Per acre, 110 lbs of nitrogen fertilizer require 42 gallons of petroleum to produce. In practice, 35% is washed away. Phosphorus and potassium don't fare much better at a 15-20% leaching rate. Compost combines with the soil to aid in water retention, form aggregates (small soil clumps) that help the soil resist erosion, and has a mother-nature-patented-time-release-multi-vitamin-formula for enhanced plant growth! It's free and easy to make. It helps plants fight disease and drought, while building up damaged soils found in vacant lots used for community gardens. No one owns the rights to its formula just yet.

Funny thing is, it's the oldest and most universally practiced form of soil treatment in the world.⁶

Now for action! Help others learn about how they can reduce their garbage by up to 35%, improve the environment and get growing! The Compost Action Project of Resource Conservation Manitoba is here to help individuals, neighbourhoods and communities start educating each other on the benefits and practices of home composting. We have developed a wide array of tools for anyone who would like to become a home composting advocate. Free how-to-compost publications are available for distribution. Promote our in-

house year round toll-free Compost Infoline with free magnets and/or posters, order a home composting Workshop Kit complete with script and overhead templates, or order a Promotion Kit full of compost clip art, advertisements and fill-in-blank posters. For the real keeners there is the comprehensive toolkit "Practical Strategies for a Home Composting Program" to aid in the design and implementation of a community/neighbourhood driven Home Compost Program. In the future we will be holding training sessions for would-be compost champions. Contact us for more information. Want to be a home compost advocate or know someone who might be interested? Contact us to order your free set of materials any time. Call toll-free: 1-866-394-8880, in Winnipeg: 925-3777, or email rcm@mb.sympatico.ca. Visit us on the web at www.resourceconservation.mb.ca.

Notes:

1. Suzuki, David. "Top of the Food Chain: Loss of Predators a Disturbing Trend." Uptown, Feb. 26, 2003.
2. Recycling Council Of Ontario. Master Composter Manual. 1995.
3. John Wise, former Federal Minister of Agriculture, 1985.
4. Suzuki, David. 1989.
5. Brown, Lester, R. State of the World 1999 "Feeding Nine Billion." WorldWatch Institute, 1999. Authors estimate based on national fertilizer use and grain production data.
6. Rodale Book of Composting

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Winnipeg's First Citizen Environmental Survey

By Rachel Van Caesele

How important is the environment to Winnipeggers? Until recently, the members of the City of Winnipeg's Civic Environmental Committee (CEC) weren't sure. Now they are. In November 2002, the CEC conducted the first-ever Citizen Environmental Survey. It was released in February 2003.

"Before this, there was no comprehensive, focused survey on citizen attitudes towards the environment", admits Andrew Cowan, the City's Environmental Coordinator. "Now we can identify priorities that are important to the people of Winnipeg. We can develop a relevant environmental strategy."

Concern for environmental issues

The survey included questions that examined public knowledge and concern for environmental issues. "We were surprised by the results", said Councillor Gord Steeves, Chair of the CEC. "At first, we were concerned that people just might tell us what we wanted to hear. But we found Winnipeggers to be very well-informed".

According to the survey, Winnipeg's citizens expressed an overwhelming concern for the environment. Why? The poll revealed that Winnipeg residents attach a high level of importance—8.2 on a scale of 10—to the environment, recognizing that a healthy environment impacts overall quality of life. At the top of the list of concerns was reducing vehicle emissions and waste management.

Gauging the level of support and willingness to participate in environmental initiatives was also an important part of the poll. Winnipeggers were most supportive of projects that enhance public transportation, improve home energy efficiency and find alternatives to chemical pesticides.

It's clear that Winnipeggers recognize the connection between sustainable living and economic savings. But results also indicated that 77% of those surveyed felt a greater investment in the environment is necessary.

To this end, a clear preference for tax-shifting to reward sustainable practices was chosen as the most desirable choice for generating funds for environmental programs. The creation and enforcement of by-laws that restrict and prohibit harmful activities was

also identified as important. Not surprisingly, an increase in taxation was the least popular option.

"These results lend credibility to environmental issues. It is a baseline of information from which we can develop solutions that will engage the public. It represents fertile ground for positive change", explains Cowan.

Challenges over the next ten years

Winnipeggers have already identified the greatest environmental challenges to face the city over the next ten years. Reducing individual vehicle emissions and a greater need for transit topped the list of priorities. Fortunately, many residents feel they have what it takes to reduce harmful vehicle emissions: 64% believe they can have a positive impact on limiting their contribution to global climate change.

Although the results clearly reveal a broad environmental concern among residents, some council members are still skeptical. Such a dated attitude towards environmental issues is unwise. According to the poll, a municipal candidate's position on the environment was rated as very important to Winnipeg voters when making a decision at the ballot box.

To examine the Citizen Environment Survey, visit www.winnipegcec.org.

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Manitoba Land Initiative Launched

Information from the Alice Chambers Memorial Library

A geographic information system (GIS) is a computer-based tool for mapping and analyzing geographic phenomena that exist, and events that occur, on Earth. GIS technology integrates common database operations such as query and statistical analysis with the unique visualization and geographic analysis benefits offered by maps. These abilities distinguish GIS from other information systems and make it valuable to a wide range of public and private enterprises for explaining events, predicting outcomes, and planning strategies. Map making and geographic analysis are not new, but a GIS performs these tasks faster and with more sophistication than do traditional manual methods.¹

Data warehouse on the Internet

In mid February, the Manitoba Land Initiative (MLI), an inter-departmental committee of data producing departments within the Provincial Government, placed its GIS digital data warehouse on the Internet. This initiative will enable easy access to this valuable geo-spatial information without restrictive licensing requirements and fees. Members of the public only have to fill out an online registration form that acknowledges the data disclaimer and user agreement, and assigns the user a user-name and password at the end of the registration process.

The MLI website allows the public access to Provincial GIS data including topographic data (scales ranging from 1:20,000 to 1:2,000,000), administrative boundaries, municipal maps, cadastral maps, town and village plans, roads and rail lines, utilities, water maps, geology, soil classification, forestry inventory, land use/cover maps, geographical names and digital imagery.²

Essentially, the MLI website acts as a digital map library that allows patrons, irregardless of their level of GIS experience, the ability to get a sense of the various data themes and their provincial coverage at three general levels. The first level is through a quickly displayed image (.gif) that allows users to get a visual snapshot of what a particular GIS dataset might look like when it is mapped. The second level is contained in downloadable simple text files that include a wealth of information about each GIS dataset. These metadata files (data about the data) serve as an extensive bibliography for a GIS dataset by including information about how the data layer was created, its original scale, projection and spatial coverage. In addition, these files allow the data to be easily brought into common desktop software program such as Excel and Access. The third level of interaction allows the datasets to be downloaded directly into GIS software.

Free program download

It should be emphasized that users can have a unique look at the various GIS datasets without the need for an expensive GIS system. There are programs available online and free for download such as the easy to use GIS data viewer called ArcExplorer (Windows 98/2000/NT/XP).³ Using this free viewer, individuals can examine much of the online data layered together, zoom in and out on the layers, identify features, perform simple queries and use the attribute data associated with the spatial data to create colourful maps.

An example of the power of this application may involve using the land use dataset's attributes, including tree cover (deciduous, conifer and mixed wood), wetland, grassland, and agricultural land, as well as the built-up areas, to show the contrast of the forested island that is Riding Mountain National Park and the surrounding agricultural lands beckoning at its borders. Overlay other layers such as the drainage network, Rural Municipality boundaries, roads, and the all-important First Nations Communities and you have created a useful and interesting look at that area in Manitoba.

While the MLI is a great leap forward in providing valuable spatial data to anyone with an Internet connection, hopefully it will be only the first step of many. Simply stated, the data is not complete since the spatial coverage is mostly for Southern Manitoba. It is the hope of this reviewer that the MLI will continue to grow as a data warehouse and increasingly provide access to data as it is collected by the various government agencies, especially in areas of Manitoba (such as the east side of Lake Winnipeg) currently not covered.

Notes:

1. The GIS Primer: <http://www.innovativegis.com/basis/primer/primer.html>
2. The MLI website is available at: <http://mli.gov.mb.ca>
3. ArcExplorer is available at: <http://www.esri.com/software/arcexplorer/>

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With gardening season right around the corner, why not plan now to Grow-a-Row for Winnipeg Harvest? When the harvest is bountiful, the world becomes a kinder place.

Grow-A-Row was born in 1986, when Winnipeg residents Ron and Eunice O'Donovan produced more potatoes in their backyard garden than they could consume. Their vegetables were so well received by Winnipeg Harvest, the O'Donovans encouraged friends and neighbours to also donate surplus produce. Since then, Grow-A-Row has yielded 1.5 million pound of fresh fruits and vegetables—and its growth continues!

For those who love to garden, Grow-A-Row is an ideal way to share a bountiful crop! Root crops can be conveniently stored, but all produce is welcome, including fruit such as crabapples. Winnipeg Harvest will then redistribute the crop to 15,587 households who need supplementary food each month.

Here are some ways to get growing:

At Home or at Work:

- Grow an extra row (or two) of produce in your own backyard.
- Invite your neighbours, family and associates to do the same (how about a friendly "weigh-in" challenge?)

At School:

- Turn Grow-A-Row into a science class and have students tend a special row of vegetables for Winnipeg Harvest
- A Harvest volunteer will come to your class and give a presentation
- Come harvest season, take the class to Winnipeg Harvest to deliver the crop, and they'll get an on-site tour and a chance to sort food

At the Community Club:

- Plant a Harvest Garden to be tended by club families
- Come Harvest season, have a Harvest Day and invite club and community members to drop in & drop off non-perishable items to supplement your crop

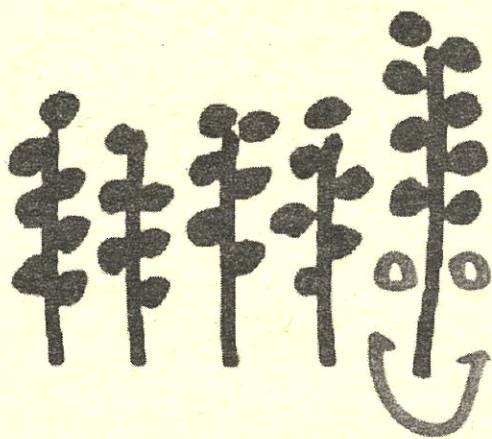
Call Winnipeg Harvest at 982-FOOD

- To register a group warehouse tour and/or work team
- To book a speaker for your class

Visit this Website for more information

about Grow-a-Row: <http://www.compost.org/growarowintro.html>

Information from the Winnipeg Harvest website at www.winnipegharvest.org



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