

Monarch on Common Milkweed at Margaret Park School



August 2018

Celebrating the Seven Oaks SD connections to land



The Update

In the fall of 2017, construction began on the new SOSD Service Centre. This summer, Phase 1 construction wrapped up and the Service Centre is receiving its finishing touches. Three kilometres of walking trails have been laid, the stormwater retention pond has been dug (awaiting naturalization in 2019) and the toboggan hill has been formed. Currently underway is the building of berms, sodding, and placement of trees around the Service Centre. In May, an Oat cover crop was sown on 35 acres to improve soil health and minimize soil erosion. Construction the student's learning facility is slated to begin this fall. For Site and Learning Centre plans, visit <http://www.7oaks.org/Student/7OaksGrows/Pages/default.aspx>

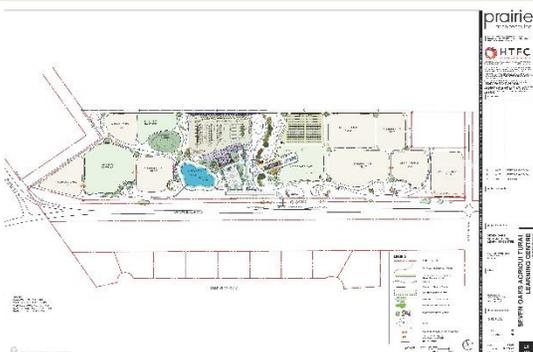


June, 2018

This is Treaty One territory, the traditional territory of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

This is a new place of learning for students and our community. A short time on this project and I'm deep in curiosity and findings about our new site. Curious, too? Reach out and join the discovery.

- Our History: Do you wonder about its unique shape: long, narrow and pointed at one end? The long, narrow parish/river lots of 1812 meet the 1871 dominion land survey at the north end of the property, creating the unique shape. You're invited to dig deeper!
- Grassland Biome: An attentive walk in our ditch and non-agricultural areas close-by is like time travel. We have a remnant prairie in our midst. It is a reminder of the our grassland that existed throughout southern Manitoba only a short 200 years ago. Follow findings at [iNaturalist!](#)
- What's a naturalized retention pond? Uncover the many conservation benefits this pond offers, like clean air and water, habitat, and drought mitigation.
- What is soil health, and how do we help to create and maintain healthy soil? Look into the roles of cover crops, green manures and composting!



What will be happening here?

Prairie Restoration

This 49-acre Parish Lot was previously managed agriculturally with annual crops. These crops (like soybeans, canola, wheat) leave the soil bare after each harvest. As such, when we acquired the land it was bare after its last soybean harvest in 2017.

This spring, we sowed a cover crop of Oats to ~35 acres to reduce soil erosion, catch nutrients, add organic matter back into the soil, shade the soil from the heat (conserving moisture) and to compete with weeds that emerge without an agricultural cropping and herbicides. What will we do with all these acres in the future? A lot of thought and care has gone into that answer. In 2019 we will restore 30 acres to tall grass prairie. Some acres will be set aside for gardening and cultivation, nourished over time by cover crops.

We'll take it in two steps in 2019: seeding half the area in Spring, and half the area in Autumn. We will sow tall grass prairie species of grasses and forbs (flowers) like Big Bluestem, Slough Grass, Canada Wild Rye, Goldenrods, Prairie Clovers, Asters, Sunflowers and Meadow Blazingstar. This fall we will work hard to harvest local ecotype seed so that we include the plant genetics that have evolved in this region over thousands of years. Next year, we will continue to collect seed locally to secure the seed we need. These plants play amazing roles in our ecosystem by improving water quality, drought resilience, biodiversity and habitat, carbon sequestration and they increase soil health. This care and establishment is a conservation commitment. In 3-5 years we will see great changes!

Gardens & Experiencing Sustainable Food Production

It takes a while to establish food gardens, but that is where we are heading! We will keep aside ~4 acres of land for cultivation (gardens) and project expansions in the future. Aside from a small plot to garden within in 2019, these 4 acres will be sown to a perennial cover crop to improve the soil over the coming years. When needed, we can till the cover crop under to expose an area we wish to cultivate. Since growing a healthy garden requires growing healthy soil, we'll start small and mindfully. The healthier the soil, the better our gardens will be!

Land, Language, Culture

The Circle Garden, formerly at the McPhillips Maintenance yard, has been reclaimed and moved, finding its new home adjacent to the pond. It will be planted with indigenous plants in 2019, welcoming back traditional teachings, fireside story-telling and building our shared connections to each other and the land. Because the Circle Garden has been essential for ceremonies, we will create a similar space near the new learning facility that eases access between the sweatlodge and a warm building, and improves accessibility in the gardens' design.

To celebrate the new beginning of our learning centre and shared land stewardship we will host a Naming and Pipe Ceremony with Elder Mary Courchene and Elder Dan Thomas in the fall of 2018. Stay tuned!

Stormwater Retention Pond

The pond has been dug, and the benches (shallow areas) will be sculpted this fall. A cover crop will hold soil in place over the sloped banks. Naturalization, using over 30 indigenous plant species, will take place in 2019, with ongoing establishment care into 2020.

Timeline:

- **October 2017:** Phase 1 Construction begins (Service Centre, Pond excavation)
- **May 2018:** Oat Cover crop sown
- **June 2018:** 3 km trails constructed, swales dug and sculpted
- **July – Sept. 2018:** Remnant prairie surveyed for biodiversity. Seeds collected.
- **August 2018:** Service Centre complete
- **August 2018:** Circle Garden relocated to 1985 Grassmere Road

Coming Soon:

- **October 2018:** Learning Centre Construction, Tree Nursery to be installed, landscaping
- **2019:** Passive Solar Greenhouse construction to support vegetable gardens and growing opportunities

Did you know?

The learning centre is a double classroom (60 person), open-concept design with a mudroom at the west entrance. The classroom features a fireplace as well as a learning kitchen. On the west side of the building are washrooms, an office, and a laundry room. Head out the west door and you'll find a sheltered work area, envisioned for both outdoor teaching space and for working with garden harvests (washing & packing vegetables and herbs).

If you have questions about the project, or wish to develop ways of connecting students to the initiatives and projects here, please be in touch!

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