



BLUE THUNDERBIRD LAND-BASED TEACHINGS LEARNING CENTRE

Summer 2021

Newsletter



POND LIFE

In 2017, a pond was dug here on previously flat land which was cultivated with soybeans. In 2018, it filled with water from the snow melt and rain. In the beginning, the pond had few signs of life and no vegetation. Today, it is bursting with life! The pond has been planted with Indigenous grasses. This year our learners and summer staff will have a hand in increasing plant diversity at the pond by planting flowers like Indigenous Mint, Sage, Blue Vervain, Swamp Milkweed, Narrowleaf Sunflower, Coneflower, and Hyssop. We have noticed a HUGE INCREASE in pond insects, bugs, amphibians, and waterfowl. Come dip your net and share what you find!

GREENHOUSE IN ACTION

We were excited to begin growing in the new Passive Solar Greenhouse this spring. We quietly rolled out a pilot program! In June we offered vegetables and herbs, and Indigenous Tall Grass Prairie plants to schools that were shovel-ready to plant and with learners ready to tend and learn.

We grew 2000+ Indigenous plants. We shared 1000 between 16 SOSD schools and daycares. We kept 1000 for biodiversity enhancement at Aki Centre.

We grew 2400 vegetable and herb starts. We distributed them between 11 SOSD schools and daycares, and planted the rest at the Aki Centre. "What we do at Aki does not stay at Aki". We believe in sharing how we care for the land so that you can do it, too.





SUPPORT FOR LAND STEWARDSHIP

We acknowledge the incredible support we have had from Cargill. They believed in our vision to bring land-based and experiential learning to Seven Oaks School Division and generously donated funds toward the Passive Solar Greenhouse build. They share the values of improving food security and nutrition, improving the ways we care for the land, protect water, and advance climate solutions, and how we strengthen community through education and engagement. Thank you for helping our vision come to life, Cargill! And, thank you CVE Building trades students for building this greenhouse!

SUPPORT FOR CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE LAND

We acknowledge The Conservation Trust for an additional year of support! Providing \$50,000 to our efforts this year, this will enhance tall grass prairie establishment and increase diversity across 30-acres, and will conserve 5-acres of remnant prairie. Interpretive signage will be designed to improve self-guided orientation and learning on site and to enrich experiential land-based learning opportunities. THANK YOU, Conservation Trust!

DYK? The \$102 million Conservation Trust was established in 2018 as part of Manitoba's Climate and Green Plan to fund activities that promote the conservation of natural resources by creating, conserving, or enhancing natural infrastructure for the benefit of Manitobans.



ARTISTRY & STORYTELLING

We would like to acknowledge Jordan Stranger, Tootem Doodem, for sharing his brilliant gifts with us. He created this mural for us after taking the time to hear our story, connect to the land himself, and pour into this mural what he felt from this place. This mural warms the building, celebrates our name, and provides the welcome we hoped for. Ozhaawashkwaa Animikii-Bineshi Aki Onji Kinimaagae' Inun feels more complete now!

PS: Remember, this Centre only opened in Spring of 2019...it's still growing!



SUMMER VISITORS

While school is out for the summer, the Aki Centre is open! This year we were happy to see BEEP, Indigenous Language Camp, Wayfinders Summer School, and Indigenous Youth Mentorship enjoy this space and connect with the land.

We had some excellent visitors stop by to connect with our summer learners, as well. Lake Winnipeg Foundation helped us make connections between the our practices on the land and the state of Lake Winnipeg, as well as the roles ponds and wetlands play in keeping water clean. Carl Smith from Brokenhead Wetland Interpretive Trail came to share his knowledge about Balsam Poplar, Trembling Aspen, Sweetgrass, and many other plants we see here. What a blast!



SUMMER STAFF

A HUGE shout out to Kennon Haines, Victoria Gordon, and Daija Torres for rocking the roles of Assistant Land Stewards this summer!

They had heat, they had drought, they had forest fire smoky air...and they put in enormous efforts regardless of the challenges. These staff are responsible for taking care of the land by irrigating gardens, adding biodiversity to the site by planting Indigenous plants, seed harvesting, mowing & trimming, weeding, mulching, and overall contributing to practices that return health to the land, as it once was.

We wish you all an amazing year (in University and High School), and know that you have left your mark here through your stewardship! Thank you!

PRAIRIE RESTORATION: RESTORING THE INDIGENOUS ECOSYSTEM

When Seven Oaks arrived here in 2017, we began restoring the land to the Indigenous ecosystem (Tall Grass Prairie), re-building the soil, restoring biodiversity, and creating habitat. Over the past 4 years we have been working in this way. We have managed the weeds, saved and procured seeds, seeded them, and waited. We've had dry years, yet the emergence is slow and steady. This year, we celebrate as we see the fruits of our labour and vision appear. Much of the 35-acres are showing good signs of growth of Indigenous grasses and some flowers. Most of the land is allowed to grow to knee height before it is mowed down to 6 inches to prevent weeds from setting seed. A few less-weedy plots were left to show their full potential this summer, growing tall plants that produced seeds, provided habitat, and returned the historic landscape's beauty. Wow!



Volunteers are seed harvesting (above) so that we can return seeds to the acres under restoration here, grow plants to share with schools, and share seeds with others!

Special Thanks to:



THE
CONSERVATION
TRUST

A Manitoba Climate and Green Plan Initiative
delivered by The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation



Who am I?



Learners are welcome to submit their answers! 7oaksgrows@connect.7oaks.org