

AGRI Post

SECTION B

Wetland Classroom Forging Towards Reality for Rivers

By Joan Airey

Mike Klassen Principal Rivers Collegiate and Donna Morken are co-coordinators for the Rivers Wetland Project with Krista Reynolds Principal of the Elementary school assisting with the administration. The wetlands project was initiated when Ducks Unlimited Canada awarded a grant to Klassen.

"There were many people involved in discussions about where to place the Wetland Project including a spot north of Rivers. The decision was made for the local placement of the project because it would add to the already developed Aspen Trail, lake area, and be ideal for reclamation of the old railway gravel pit. The site offers easy access for people to walk from town, for travellers and both the elementary and high school are within walking distant. It's less than a twenty-five minute walk from the west side of Rivers. I'd love to see this facility fully operational by spring 2016 if not by fall 2015," said Klassen.

"The plan at this point is a usable outdoor classroom, three docks, three bridges, a board walk all around the Wetland area itself, an observation tower, washroom area, a parking



Wood Duck Boxes made by Rivers Collegiate Wood Working Classes are placed strategically around the wetland area.

area, and an area for science games to be played outside at this point. The plan is to improve the pathways through Millennium Park to the area as well as Interpretive Signage with QR Codes," said Morken.

"Ninety-three thousand seedlings were planted in the wetlands area by experienced aboriginal tree planters, with Tree Canada and sponsorship by CN. This was through a grant application by the Rivers and Area Community Foundation to Tree Canada," said Morken.

On June 3 through a grant with the Manitoba Hydro

Forest Enhancement Program, The Green Spot Landscaping Division will be planting eight large spruce trees on the northwest side of the Wetland Area to catch the snow that comes down a sloped area. Morken will be volunteering time to coordinate this project.

Rivers students are now working on the Wetland Centre of Excellence website. The students received training in environmental instruction from Eco-Van from Oak Hammock Marsh and an instructor from Fort Whyte.

As part of the project, stu-

dents were given a grant of \$15,000 to for wind and solar calculations to determine what type of environmental power they will use for the classroom. They made a presentation and a video that they delivered to the Riverdale Municipal Council, Rivers Game and Fish as well as the Little Saskatchewan Conservation District.

"We will host school groups wanting to learn about nature and wetlands from across Manitoba. I personally feel there is significant importance to be learned about ecosystems, ecology, nature and biodiversity through the use of a natural setting such as wetland. With approximately seventy per cent of wetlands being lost in Manitoba and nationally over the past several decades our next generations need to understand that health of natural spaces is important to the health of communities water quality, air quality, and quality of life. Not only will school groups learn on the site but use it as a recreation site. This is not a large provincial or national park we are offering but a snapshot of what the natural world has to offer. My vision is a place for youth and adults to form a bond with the wetland area to learn to respect

A maple tree salvaged from a yard in Rivers makes excellent seating for a learning circle for students in the wetland area.



it, care for it, and learn from it thus creating memories they can pass on to the next generation," said Klassen.

The main priorities of the group over the next two years are to complete the boardwalk, docks, and outdoor classroom. They have received a lot of assistance from numerous agencies and groups including the Town of Rivers with developing the trail and creating a parking/ bus loop.

"We currently offer the following that are directly linked to the wetlands, Wetland Management, Wind & Solar Energy, Sustainability, Outdoor Education, Grade 7-12 Sciences, Woodworking by creating our boardwalk,

wood ducks and bat boxes, and docks and Computer Drafting and Design, we would like to offer as dual credit," said Klassen.

"This project is a jewel with wetland and wildlife habitat conservation, a centre for environmental education for youth in all school divisions in Manitoba, secondary research through Assiniboine Community College and Brandon University. It will enrich community health, wellness, and pride while being accessible to all. It will also demonstrate sustainable living practices and design while engaging community development with local businesses, materials, suppliers and partnerships," said Morken.



Students have started building the docks and board walks around the pond and wood duck boxes are located in the area.