

September 2015

## 25 Years of Trials and Triumphs

~ A personal perspective by Jules Legal

Winnipeggers have long had a love-hate relationship with the Seine River. Today everyone loves their little river for the inherent beauty and the plethora of plants and wildlife that proliferate along its meandering way. There was a time however when many feared the river for the devastation it caused when it occasionally spread beyond its normal banks and flooded low-lying homes.

And so, in the late 1960's when The Floodway was completed, it appeared to many like the perfect solution. Modern technology would defy a natural phenomenon that had prevailed for centuries. Never again would floodplain dwellers in Winnipeg be helpless victims of episodic flooding. Concerns that the floodway could also cause harm to fish and the natural environment were given short shrift.

As it dawned upon owners of river property that the Seine no longer posed a flood threat, more and more began to clean and landscape their yards. Residents who had for years used the weedy banks as a convenient dump were moved to

clean up their act. But what about the vacant lots, city owned land, and dozens of kilometers of riparian habitat with new potential? Who would clean up the tons of garbage left by generations of polluters?

Recognizing that the city wasn't about to commit to such a task, a small group of neighbors along Egerton Road had the temerity to take on this monumental challenge. Around 1990 a few visionaries organized a volunteer group they called 'Save Our Seine' or 'SOS' as it became known. Recognizing that the Seine faced a multitude of ongoing challenges, not just garbage, they soon transformed SOS into a more professional, comprehensive organization. They adopted a formal constitution with both short and long-term goals. They secured charitable status, which qualified donors for a tax exemption. Ultimately they registered as a formal corporation. SOS would be known as "Save Our Seine River Environment Inc."

The annual cleaning and tree planting events were always well organized, attracting hundreds of

volunteers, eager to do their bit to improve the environment. I was one of those early enthusiasts. Although I didn't yet live near the Seine, I had paddled various reaches of the river and was appalled at the garbage and the mountains of deadfall that blocked canoe travel in too many places.

When asked to join the SOS board, I committed to what I thought would be a small role for a short period of time. Always the Pollyanna, I remember fantasizing; ah yes, a few more cleanups and the Seine shall be returned to the pristine condition it had enjoyed before civilization visited these environs. Paddlers shall soon be guiding their canoes unimpeded through clean waters from the headwaters in the Sandilands to the muddy waters of the Red River, or so I thought.

It took only one SOS meeting to shatter this naive assumption and a few more to fully appreciate the myriad challenges that lay ahead.

Future newsletters:

*Chapter 2—Protecting Paradise*  
*Chapter 3—Of Trails and Bridges*  
*Chapter 4—Removing Toxins*  
*Chapter 5—Bois-des-Esprits*

If you can't wait, you can read Jules' entire essay on the SOS Web site.

**Save Our Seine**  
 river environment inc.



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## Community Leader—Wilma Sotas



*Wilma S. (left) with her weed-pulling team*

For years, Wilma Sotas has actively encouraged her friends and neighbours to pitch in to maintain the South Trail (from the Royalwood bridge to Creek Bend Road). This year, Wilma organized and hosted three weed-pulling events as part of SOS's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Volunteers removed dozens of bags of thistle, dandelion, stinging nettle, burdock, and leafy spurge—to the benefit of the forest and dozens of people who use the trail every day. Hats off to Wilma and her entire weed-pulling team!

Grassroots efforts like these form the foundation of SOS. In addition to her commitment to improve the forest, Wilma also organized a number of highly successful events for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. It seems that Wilma has a magic touch. When she calls, people have a hard time saying “no.” As a result, SOS held an amazing event on Earth Day featuring Mike Grandmaison and his photography. Wilma hosted a highly successful botany walk with Charles Burchill in July and she is working on a unique and exciting event for Culture Days.

### SOS Awards

**2015** Mayor's Volunteer Award (Denis DePape)

**2004** Canadian Environmental Award for Restoration and Rehabilitation

**2004** Mayor's Volunteer Award for Environmental Stewardship

**2004** Protecting Our Earth Award, MB Eco-Network

**2003** Prairie Crocus Award, Nature Manitoba

**2000** Certificate of Environmental Citizenship, Environment Canada

**1996** Award of Excellence, MB Round Table for Sustainable Development

## SOS Family Fishing Derby

On Saturday, June 13 Save Our Seine held its first-ever Family Fishing Derby. Hosted by avid anglers Liam Mulhall and Kevin Boreskie, the event was a chance for novice and experienced anglers to enjoy a day at the Seine River. Volunteers led a variety of fish-related hands-on activities: water quality

testing, aquatic invertebrate (fish food) identification, and watershed model demonstrations.

Participants pulled in some good-sized fish—including a channel catfish and a freshwater drum. For a list of fish species found in the Seine River, visit the SOS Web site.



*Liam M. with Seine River catfish*

## Rain Garden Legacy Project

Mark Wednesday, September 16<sup>th</sup> on your calendar. SOS has been working with Manitoba Eco-Network, HTFC Planning & Design, and the City of Winnipeg to create a rain garden at the

northeast corner of St. Anne's Road and Fermor Avenue. The rain garden will capture runoff from the adjacent parking lot and clean the water before it enters a storm drain to travel 600 metres to the Seine River. The garden will be planted with over 50 species of native plants—many of

which will attract birds as well as people. For a full list of the sponsors who have contributed to this legacy project, visit the SOS Web site or join us for the unveiling event. Rain dates for the combined planting and unveiling are Thursday, September 17 and/or Monday, September 21.

**Save Our  
Seine  
AGM  
October 27  
7 p.m.**



Like us on: [facebook.com/SaveOurSeineWinnipeg](https://facebook.com/SaveOurSeineWinnipeg)

## Culture Day—September 26

Anyone who has visited the Bois-des-Esprits knows that these truly are “woods where the sprits dwell.” Local artists have brought these spirits to life with their unique carvings using only dead-but-still-standing trees.

On Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, you are invited to meet the talented artists who have found inspiration in this special place and who, in turn, have captivated others with their work.

Artist Murray Watson will lead us on a guided walk to discover the wood spirits that he created to adorn the trails. As we stroll along, Katherena Vermette will share some of her work. Katherena is a Métis writer of poetry, fiction and children’s literature. Her first book,



Carvers with Woody-Mhitik in 2010

*North End Love Songs*, won the 2013 Governor General Literary Award for Poetry. Her most recent project, *The Seven Teachings Stories* is a seven volume children’s picture book series.

The culmination of the walk will be a visit to Woody -Mhitik—an iconic artwork that has come to symbolize this enchanted forest. Carvers Robert Leclair and Walter Mirosh will be on hand to share their stories behind this unique carving.

## The Legend of the Wood Spirit

*As you walk through the forest with trees overhead  
You can feel the presence, or so it's been said  
His eyes are upon you as you stroll through the trees  
He is the Wood spirit who resides in the trees*

*The forest is home to Wood spirits a'plenty  
Their sightings are few, but their numbers are many  
A walk through the forest, a glance at a branch  
A glimpse of a Wood spirit happens by chance*

*From the roots that are anchors to the tips of the leaves  
He is the caretaker of all that he sees  
If you enter the forest with intentions of evil  
A Wood spirit's wrath can cause an upheaval*

*Though his face is hidden beneath the bark,  
A nimble knife can release his true heart  
His life is eternal or so I've been told  
The Spirit of the Woods wears the face of the old*

*Though his numbers are many and his sightings are few  
A Wood spirit's presence will bring luck to you.*



### Save Our Seine Board

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Denis Gautron (President)</b> | <b>Sisters of Our Lady of the Mission (Secretary)</b>    |
| <b>Alain Cenerini (VP)</b>       | <b>Sandra Stewart, Denise Kuyp, &amp; Veronica Dunne</b> |
| <b>David Venema (Treasurer)</b>  |  |
| Kevin Boreskie                   | Chris Pearce   |
| David J. Danyluk                 | Laurie Ringaert  |
| Denis DePape                     | Wilma Sotas  |
| Liam Mulhall                     | Marc St. Laurent   |
| Tari Mvingi                      |  |

### Interested in Volunteering?

- ◇ Action: “Eyes on the River” (observers), riverbank and trail work, tree plantings, European buckthorn/weed removal, water quality testing
- ◇ River education programs (Adopt-a-River and Waterways)
- ◇ Creative communication: Web site (design and updating), newsletter (writers), photo library
- ◇ Organizing: Bookkeeping, membership lists, volunteer management, events
- ◇ Planning: Board member, research, networking, community meetings, fundraising, awareness events and activities
- ◇ Special Projects: Rain garden committee, GIS maps, new ideas

**Circle your interests, clip and mail this slip to the address on the back page or send us an e-mail**



## SAVE OUR SEINE

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**We're on the Web,  
Facebook, & Twitter!  
Saveourseine.com**

## MISSION

Our vision is for a sustainable and protected Seine River Greenway that provides a healthy habitat for vegetation and wildlife and contributes to the quality of life of all citizens.

## GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION

SOS depends on community volunteers and community contributions to help protect, preserve and enhance the Seine River Environment through education, awareness and hands-on participation. Your contribution assists SOS in enabling all citizens to reconnect with their local environment.



*Volunteer-in-Action:  
Wilma Sotas*

*Board Member  
Event Organizer  
Weed-slayer  
SOS Archivist*

## GOALS

1. Preserve, protect and enhance the natural environment & heritage resources of the Seine River.
2. Restore & repair features of the environment that have been degraded.
3. Improve water level, flow & quality of the Seine River.
4. Raise the public's awareness of all aspects of the Seine River.
5. Improve the environmental behavior of private industry, governments and the public.
6. Improve appropriate public access along the Seine River (by low-impact nature trail & by canoe).

**Save Our Seine**  
river environment inc.



### Your Donations Make a Difference!

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