

ACCESS Manitoba

Manitoba's Lybian Tiger

by Lee Gregg,
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"Red River is like a Lybian tiger," wrote Hudson Bay Company governor Sir George Simpson in the 1830s. "The more I try to tame it, the more savage it becomes; so it is with Red River, for every step I try to bring it forward, disappointments drives it back two."

The 1800s were a difficult time for the Red River settlers as they struggled with severe winters, locusts and floods that would wipe out crops and destroy entire colonies. Two hundred years later we still battle the Red River, but we are also restoring its waterways and celebrating the pivotal role it played in the history, culture and development of Canada's postage stamp province.

Rivers West, known officially as Red River Corridor Inc./L'Association du Corridor Rivière Rouge, was established in June 1999 to develop a long-term tourism and economic development strategy and to promote conservation and sustainable development principles along the Red River corridor from Emerson to Lake Winnipeg. To date, Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) has invested \$389,750 in Rivers West for marketing and greening initiatives through the

Canada-Manitoba Economic Partnership Agreement.

The projects that Rivers West have supported are numerous and varied. Together with the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation and Nature Conservancy of Canada, Rivers West is protecting parcels of land, such as the Shay Property near St. Adolphe. This

ecological reserve, approximately seven hectares in all, is situated along the eastern bank of the Red River and supports the river-bottom forest (a forest that grows along the edges of rivers and streams and stabilizes banks to reduce erosion). With support from Rivers West, the Province of Manitoba has included this property in the Manitoba Network of Protected Areas.



Senkiw bridge was constructed in the 1930s by area residents for children to cross the Roseau River to get to school. The Crow Wing Trail Association in Franklin reconstructed this bridge and, with support from Rivers West, will install an interpretive sign to explain its history.

PHOTO COURTESY OF EILEEN GUNN



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Rivers West has also launched its *Routes on the Red* website, www.routesonthered.ca, to promote existing tourism opportunities through self-directed tours and travel packages. Twenty self-directed tour brochures are currently available and more are planned.

In the summer of 2005, Rivers West nominated the Red River as a Canadian Heritage River. Lorna Hendrickson, executive director of Rivers West, hopes that the designation will come through in time for the Canadian River Heritage Conference that Rivers West will host in 2007.

"The money Rivers West received from WD made it possible to leverage additional dollars from other sources," said Hendrickson. "When communities see that money has been committed to projects, it's much easier for them to move forward and secure funding from other sources."

Linda Morin, municipal counselor for the RM of Ritchot, worked on the Rivers Access Study with Rivers West. The study looked at the feasibility of putting docks and wharfs on the Red River south of Winnipeg to Emerson. Steamships once routinely plied their trade between Winnipeg and St. Paul, Minnesota, but today the river is virtually unused and remains one of the few uncharted navigable waterways in North America.

Morin is also working on the Crow Wing Trail, a historic trade route that was eliminated after the introduction of the CP Rail line to Manitoba in the 1870s. Opened in 1844, this 153-kilometre trail was used by fur traders to move goods between St. Paul and Upper Fort Garry. The Crow Wing Trail Association, made up of representatives from Ritchot, De Salaberry, Franklin, Niverville, St. Pierre, Emerson and Roseau Rapids First Nations, is working to revitalize this historic ox cart trail, part of the Trans Canada Trail that links Winnipeg and

Emerson. The association received funding from Rivers West to develop unique interpretive signage that incorporates an ox cart into its design.

"Without Rivers West, I would not be able to make any progress at all," noted Morin. "Rural municipalities lack the funds to develop the proposals you need to secure financial support for product development. With this study, our communities can now go forward and seek funding."

Working with Rivers West, the Town of Emerson developed the Forgotten Forest Trail. Originating at Fort Dufferin, the two-kilometre trail interprets the river bottom forest as it winds its way along the riverbank and joins the Crow Wing Trail.

Wayne Arseny, president of Historic Emerson Inc., is pleased with the sup-



In a CTV special about the Town of Emerson, Wayne Arseny, playing the part of Fort Dufferin's first commissioner, Sir George French, appears in the original North West Mounted Police red serge. In the background is the fort's original barn.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WAYNE ARSENY

port that Rivers West has provided and has high praise for Hendrickson. “Lorna is the person who steers and anchors us. She’s the go-between with other agencies, knowing who to call and setting us in the right direction.”

Rivers West also gave financial support for a study to look into the feasibility of building a nature/equestrian campground using the Mounties’ red serge as a colour scheme. The Town of Emerson was built up around Fort Dufferin, which was literally thrown together in 1872 to serve as a base and main supply depot for the Boundary Commission and the newly formed North West Mounted Police (better known today as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police). The fort was the first official headquarters for the law enforcement body before it set out on its March West to establish Fort MacLeod in Alberta and solidify Canada’s claim on the West.

“This can be Manitoba’s symbol,” declared Arseny. “Emerson is the birthplace of the RCMP. The federal and provincial governments recognize that the fort is one of the most significant historical sites in the province. Four original wooden buildings still stand, but they are falling apart and need to be restored. We have the study but now need capital to make it happen.”

Rivers West is also working with the St. Norbert Heritage Trail Association to develop the Sentier Cloutier Trail in southern Winnipeg. The St. Norbert Heritage Trail system is part of the Trans Canada Trail, which links into the Crow Wing Trail at the Red River Floodway.

Janice Lukes, community liaison for St. Norbert Heritage Trails, has nothing but praise for the work Hendrickson and Rivers West have done to support the Red River development. “We received \$25,000 from Rivers West, which allowed



Visitors enjoy a stroll along the Sentier Cloutier Drive Trail in St. Norbert.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JANICE LUKES

us to leverage an additional \$157,000. Rivers West was one of the first organizations to recognize the significance of this project and its substantial contribution has served as a catalyst for securing local support and funds. We continue to be grateful for the enthusiastic support Sentier Cloutier Trail receives from the public and the growing number of private resources now participating in the project’s development.”

Lukes is very excited about the projects St. Norbert Heritage Trails is working on. There is a series of walking, biking, cycling, horse and water trails that take visitors through a history that includes the starting point for the annual buffalo hunt and the home of the Red River Floodway gates.

“St. Norbert is the birthplace of Manitoba and is home to many national

and provincial historic sites,” said Lukes. “With assistance from Rivers West, we encouraged the Trans Canada Trail Committee to re-route the national trail through St. Norbert, enabling all users to explore the rich history and culture of this area. It’s been fantastic for our tourism component.”

Kurtiss Krasnesky, president of the Red River North Trail Association, has been working with Rivers West since 2004. “It’s been a wonderful partnership,” said Krasnesky. “To get this level of cooperation and to see the government recognizing this as a priority and backing Rivers West, I’m really proud of this. Hats off to the government for stepping up to the plate.”

The Red River North Trail winds its way north of Winnipeg and through the community of Birds Hill, which has transformed this abandoned gravel pit into a park to enhance the Trans Canada Trail.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
KURTISS KRASNESKY



The Red River North Trail makes up part of the Trans Canada Trail that runs from Lockport to Lower Fort Garry. The association has had some difficulty completing four kilometres of the trail due to a lack of physical space. There is not enough right-of-way in the ditch that runs between the highway and the owners of private property. Rivers West provided funding to develop this section of the trail, and Hendrickson connected the association to an architect. Working closely with an engineering firm and Manitoba Highways, the technical and architectural work is completed and Krasnesky is confident that the trail will be finished by summer 2006.

From Emerson to Lake Winnipeg, the city of Winnipeg and the towns and villages

along the Red River will benefit from this coordinated marketing approach. Initiatives will not only promote communities, but will also support sustainable development along this historical waterway through a new greening program.

The Red River offers natural space, historic sites and recreational activities for Manitobans and visitors. Lower Fort Garry, Twin Oaks, Kennedy House and St. Andrews Church are well known favourites. But the Red River corridor has many other hidden treasures waiting to be discovered: the first log-constructed Customs house in Western Canada, the largest remaining tracts of tall-grass prairie, and many historic museums and buildings that re-create the pioneer past.

Like Governor Simpson, Rivers West is also experiencing difficulties with

Manitoba's Lybian tiger. Flooding and heavy rains during the spring and summer of 2005 put 99 per cent of Emerson's Forgotten Forest Trail under water. The highest summer flood on record delayed construction of the Sentier Cloutier portion of the St. Norbert Heritage Trail, and portions of the Red River North Trail were submerged as well.

But Manitoba's relationship with the Red River has compelled residents to be inventive and resourceful—a legacy of optimism and fortitude handed down by the Red River settlers. Manitoba's landscape may have changed, but not its pioneer spirit.

For information about Rivers West, visit www.riverswest.ca. For information about the Red River corridor trails, visit www.mrta.mb.ca/transcnd.html. ■