

**NEW EDITION**

*November, 2022*

**SUPPORT**

# REWILDING BRANDON

**A CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

ASSINIBOINE



FOOD FOREST

Treesblood Spring, 2005, by Weiming Zhao



## Hello Brandon City Councillor / Friend of the Environment:

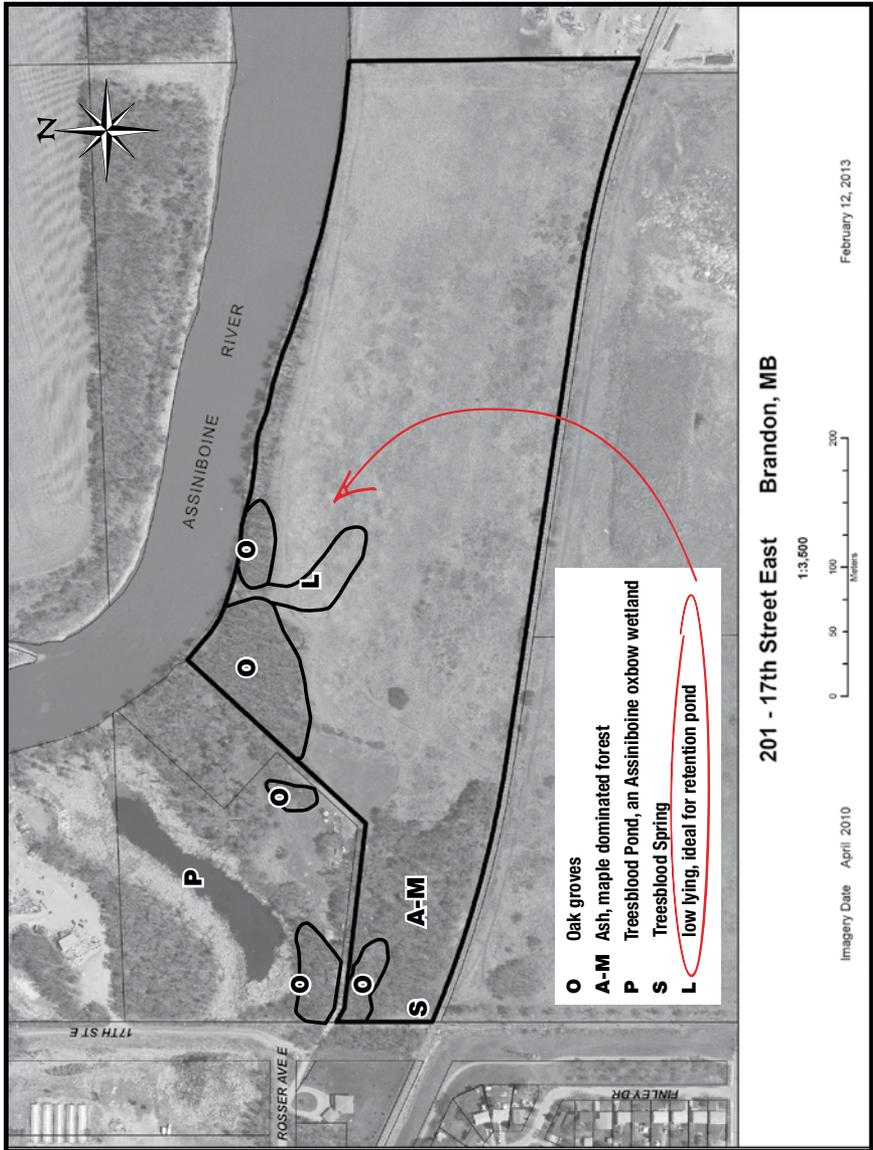
My name is David Barnes and I am writing in regards to the role of the City of Brandon – and your own role – in achieving a quick and tangible change that has been “ready to go” for several years now. The United Nations has labelled the 2020s “The Decade of Ecosystem Restoration” because there is an **urgent** need to restore natural habitat everywhere: **wetland** is one of the easiest ecosystems to restore, and it is the fastest known way to sequester carbon.

You may know about AFFI from our Sunday Nature Walks, the Maple Syrup Tours, or our prairie restoration known as Dana’s Garden. We have also developed a **Climate Action Plan**, called **Rewilding Brandon** – its focus is a wetland restoration at the historic beaver pond site on AFFI’s City-owned property. But first – a short introduction to the role and the history of the **Assiniboine Food Forest Inc (AFFI)** as regards our attempts to work with the City of Brandon to address climate change.

## 2013 | HISTORY OF AFFI’S CREATION

Assiniboine Food Forest Inc began operating as an environmental charity with widespread public support. City Council **unanimously** endorsed our 2013 delegation’s presentation, which asked for two things: 1) the creation of a Protected Spaces Network, where rare native ecosystems could be protected forever, and 2) endorsement of permaculture, the science of growing food sustainably while simultaneously regenerating natural habitat. The presentation showed a map with a pond that is the site of today’s Rewilding Brandon (Figure 1). We proposed healthy community development on land that no one wanted, and where status quo development is impossible because the parcel is on the floodplain. The only concern we heard was that we not ask the City for money: AFFI remains 100% faithful to that request.

**Figure 1** | Map of the AFFI parcel from our 2013 delegation's presentation, showing proposed pond.

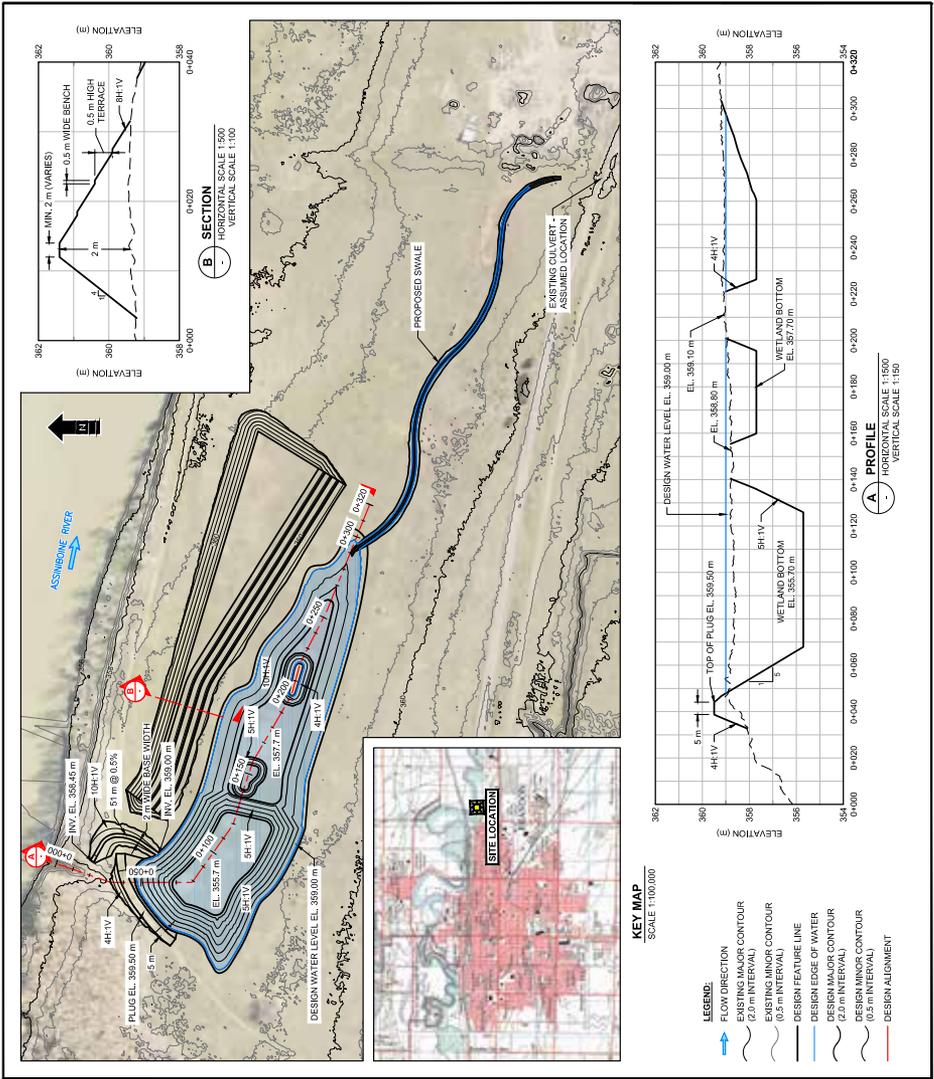


# REWILDING BRANDON | RESTORED ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

The AFFI property in east Brandon consists of roughly 40 acres along the Assiniboine - a magnificent 10-acre remnant of old-growth oak woods, and a 30-acre weedy field, the result of land clearing and cattle grazing in Brandon's early years. There are native plants in the field, but the dominant species are non-native and invasive...thistle, brome, quack, and spurge. Before colonization, a creek wound its way across the landscape from the SE, flowing into the Assiniboine at the Ancient Oaks grove in our NW corner. Soil tests have shown that this creek was regularly dammed by beavers. And an amazing thing still happens here every April: the creek flows again! Snow meltwater from the entire parcel follows the natural drainage, collects in the old pond basin, and then heads down the draw and out onto the Assiniboine ice. It's an impressive sight to see, but also an unhappy reminder of what colonial civilization does to natural habitats everywhere...ecosystem impoverishment and lost water balance. There's a plan to help balance that with an ecosystem restoration dream shared by countries around the world. ([www.decadeonrestoration.org](http://www.decadeonrestoration.org))

Restoring a pond and wetland to its historic location here is a simple and effective method of **increasing biodiversity and sequestering carbon**. With a renewed ground water table, *Rewilding Brandon* would then become the launch point for a comprehensive reforestation program, as well. A small earthen dam placed across the existing creek draw would capture almost 2 metres of water instantly; gently excavating a terraced basin upstream of the dam would add another metre or more of depth. Two small islands would give waterfowl a safe nesting place in the shallower areas of the pond further upstream. The finished basin would be lined with heavy, blue clay found in abundance in the deep soil layers here, producing a permanent pond/wetland complex (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 | Engineering design by Matrix Solutions for Rewilding Brandon.**



With a maximum depth of 10-12 feet, our pond would enjoy a seasonal turnover in spring and fall, recharging dissolved oxygen throughout the water column. This would promote thriving ecosystem health, with a great variety of aquatic insects, crustaceans, and invertebrates, as well as biodiverse vertebrate fauna...frogs, salamanders, turtles, snakes, and birds. What's more, the restoration would benefit from thousands of years of biological sediment laid down in over a metre of rich, black topsoil in the old pond basin. Simply add water, and this wetland ecosystem will spring to life!

AFFI does not intend to ask City Council for monies, but to do the fundraising ourselves. *Rewilding Brandon* is already supported by over \$17,000 of environmental engineering research into feasibility and design - this is a solid, well-designed restoration by Matrix Solutions Inc., a major Canadian environmental corporation.

Here is a partial list of the diverse gifts that *Rewilding Brandon* will bring to our city, at no cost to taxpayers...

- Beautiful new recreational trails, benches, and pond-side picnic areas
- A pristine home for endangered Northern Leopard Frogs and 3 other local frog species
- A sand beach for turtle nesting on the shore of the pond with southern exposure
- Growth in biodiversity of aquatic, wetland and forest species
- Orchard and community garden sites on south-facing terraces overlooking the pond
- Two predator-safe nesting islands for waterfowl
- The ideal topography for a floating wetland interpretive boardwalk
- Enhanced nature education possibilities for school field trips
- Highly-efficient carbon sequestration via forest growth due to water table stabilization
- Water conservation and flood mitigation
- Inspiration to other MB municipalities

## CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

AFFI believes that the City of Brandon has a moral responsibility and duty to pursue what is most pressing and urgent: **action for restoration of our natural habitat**. AFFI also believes that the fundraising environment is favourable today for “green projects.” We are hopeful that we could put shovels in the ground in 12-18 months. But there is no more time to waste; the Climate Crisis is becoming increasingly urgent. And no matter what other climate measures the City of Brandon may take in the future, *Rewilding Brandon* is ready to go **NOW**, and will make a difference in both carbon sequestration and biodiversity gain, not to mention community engagement. This wetland design works with nature, as recharges of pure water occur every Spring and with every big summer storm.

## 2014 | OUR “CONSERVATION AGREEMENT” IS CREATED

AFFI’s wetland restoration dream was put on hold in 2014, when a senior Brandon civic official, acting on Council’s endorsement of our plan, got together with the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC) to create a “Conservation Agreement” (CA) for AFFI. CAs are contracts that allow landowners to permanently protect rare ecosystems on their land...native wetland, prairie, or forest, for example. On Conservation Lands, you cannot dig, fence, cut trees, or build anything, because the entire ecosystem is protected. And a CA creates an easement on the land title, forbidding future owners from damaging the Conservation Lands as well. Conservation Agreements make beautiful, enduring gifts to the environment. But in our opinion, the “CA” made for AFFI embodies neither conservation nor an agreement.

The AFFI “Conservation Agreement” protects our ancient oak woods, but it also unnecessarily, and to our detriment, protects the 30-acre field of weeds, including right where we want to restore the pond and wetland. Conservation Agreements are powerful instruments. Normally they are negotiated with the utmost care, the MHHC officer explaining to the landowners what protection means, and what its drawbacks are. For example, if the landowners want to put up a deer fence to establish an orchard, or conduct earthworks to restore a wetland, then solutions to these apparent CA violations are negotiated...the area to be protected could be refined, or a Land Use Permit (LUP) could give the landowners temporary rights to make healthy or economic modifications on protected land. But Conservation Agreements are supposed to protect an important native Conservation Interest, *not fields of invasive weeds.*

## 2015 - 2022 | IN PURSUIT OF A LAND USE PERMIT

As soon as we learned about the existence of Land Use Permits (LUPs) in 2015, we began asking for LUP negotiations. In 2018, when we finally got a meeting to discuss a Land Use Permit, MHHC didn't want to negotiate our complete vision at one session. So instead, we've been occupied for the last 4 years seeking individual Land Use Permits, one after the other. First, it was a maple syrup Land Use Permit, then we got a Land Use Permit to restore a patch of prairie; Dana's Garden prairie restoration is thriving this summer after work began in 2020.

We have always emphasized that restoring the wetland is our primary concern, but this was discouraged early on by MHHC, which is a remarkable position for them to take, given that wetland restoration forms a principal part of their mandate. They spend over \$5 million annually to support wetland restoration in Manitoba! Nevertheless, since the AFFI land is on floodplain, we were told, flooding will ruin the earthworks. But our engineers disagree, and so do we. We would appreciate the chance to have our Matrix engineering team address Council regarding this question, while keeping in mind that there will be no City money at risk here anyway.

## 2022 | ONE LAST TRY

On December 16, 2021, we proposed our wetland project to the new City Manager, Mr. Ron Bowles, in hopes that he might become a supporter. On January 10, 2022, we received an invitation from Properties & Planning to submit a Land Use Permit application to MHHC for *Rewilding Brandon*. That LUP request was submitted on January 19, 2022. To this day, almost 11 months later, we have received no response ... Nothing ... while the window of opportunity for meaningful climate action continues to close further each day.

## TIME TO MOVE FORWARD

Previous editions of this booklet called for the termination of the AFFI Conservation Agreement, but we will not make that request. In fact, a CA to protect rare native habitats at AFFI was our idea in the first place ... it was a good idea in 2013, and it's a good idea today. MHHC is one of the most important organizations in the province; their work in preserving and restoring ecosystems is priceless. We cannot possibly terminate our association with this leader in the conservation community without first making a serious attempt to address our differences.

But what is this astonishing vacuum in communication? Why has it taken 8 years of AFFI's very successful public presence on the land to finally be allowed to submit a Land Use Permit request for this restoration? In our opinion, *Rewilding Brandon* is a keystone project that will put Brandon on the world permaculture map, bringing unprecedented benefits to this community, all without taxing the City budget. Why is it taking a full year to evaluate this LUP request? Let's be honest ... communication between our two charities is not just poor, it's non-existent. We can do much better. And we must, for the sake of our grandchildren.

AFFI therefore respectfully requests that City Council encourage its City Manager to convene a meeting so that diverse stakeholders can openly examine the *Rewilding Brandon* proposal together. AFFI would bring our engineering team to Brandon to share critical insights with MHHC, City staff, and Councillors, exploring design features and addressing concerns. If a second day were available, we could open the

doors to public participation. Bottom line, restoring ecosystems is not really an option for humanity today ... we must make every possible effort to take action. Hopefully, a Rewilding Brandon meeting could take place soon ... the climate and ecological crises wait for no one. Submitted with respect,

David W. Barnes, Chair  
Assiniboine Food Forest Inc.

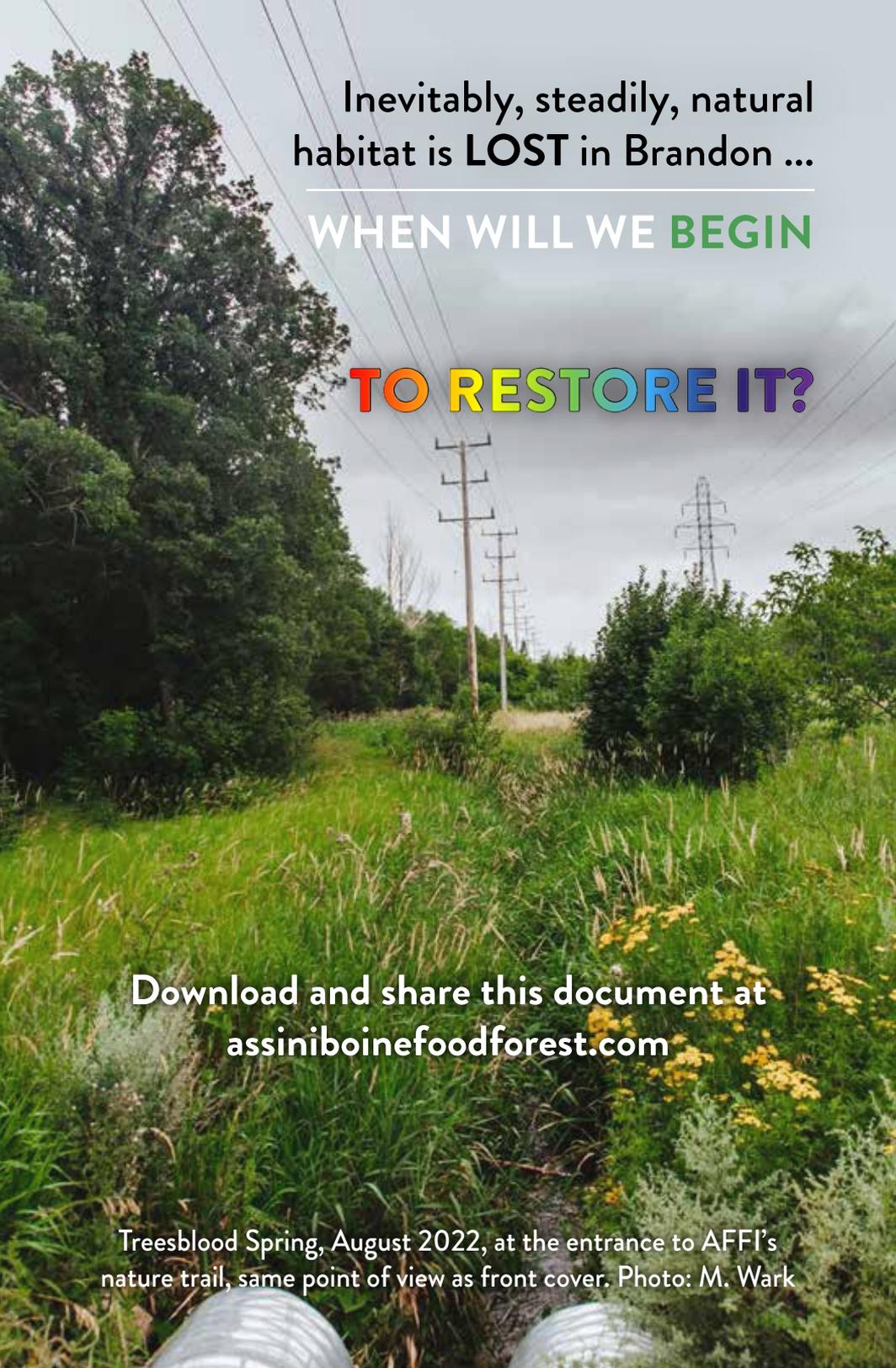
## WATER IS LIFE ... LAND IS SACRED

### CALL TO CITIZENS

Citizens, we encourage you to participate in this community process by corresponding with your City Councillor, either by phone or email, to voice your opinion on the importance of a public meeting for Rewilding Brandon. You may also consider peacefully attending our December 5 delegation, which is open to the public. December 5, 7:00 PM, Council Chamber, City Hall.

#### Brandon City Council - Contact Information

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A photograph of a natural area with tall grasses, trees, and power lines under a cloudy sky. The scene is viewed from a low angle, looking down a path or through a field. The sky is overcast and grey. Power lines and poles stretch across the middle ground. The foreground is filled with green grass and some yellow wildflowers. The background shows a dense line of trees.

Inevitably, steadily, natural  
habitat is **LOST** in Brandon ...

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WHEN WILL WE **BEGIN**

**TO RESTORE IT?**

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Treesblood Spring, August 2022, at the entrance to AFFI's  
nature trail, same point of view as front cover. Photo: M. Wark