

Abstract Submission for 5th Canadian River Heritage Conference

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Red River Operation Clean Up

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Presenter:

Robert Belanger
Box 11 Grp 22 RR1
East Selkirk, Mb
ROE OMO
Phone (home): 1 204 482 3050 Home
Phone (cell): 1 204 754 7209 cell
Email: rbelanger@highspeedcrow.ca

Abstract

Operation Clean Up is a unique one of a kind environmental project which shows how a grass roots initiative can become an overwhelming success when key community players from both the corporate and private sector come together. Having been born and raised in the community of Selkirk I had a clear understanding of the area and in particular the Red River. This river has played a key role in Selkirk's past history and today provides millions in tourism revenues. A portion of the Red River known as the lower Red River watershed which extends from the Lockport Dam North to the end of Main has been plagued with garbage accumulation. The shorelines in this area are frequented by fisherman and tourists who unfortunately leave a large amount of garbage behind. Spring run off and heavy water flow from the south also brings a wide assortment of items that are left behind on shore. Manitoba Conservation was receiving approximately 100 complaints a summer regarding the garbage. Since the inception of this project complaints have been reduced to 0. In June of 1999 I approached the original partner group who consisted of RM. Of St Clements, RM. Of St Andrews, Manitoba Hydro, Public Works Government Services Canada and Manitoba Conservation. They all agreed they had a problem with garbage in their respective areas but no way to deal with it. Operation Clean- Up was introduced to this group who understood that the problem was beyond one person's responsibility, but collectively something could be done. Going into year 8 the partner group has increased substantially including City of Selkirk, Winnipeg Water & Waste Department, BFI Canada, Hazco Environmental Services, Rivers West Red River Corridor and Ducks Unlimited. UAP Napa and Ralston's Canada have also supplied some in kind product. This project is clearly about the coalition of partners who have come together to show their community support for the Red River. Each partner knows that the Red River affects all of them in a unique way; without it, they all loose.

Approximately 80- 45-gallon drums are deployed throughout the lower Red River Watershed and two workers visit each drum daily and physically clean the area. Each area that has been cleaned has gone through a complete transformation. Over 40.000 pounds of garbage was removed from the Red Rivers shorelines and surrounding areas last year alone. Car parts, fridges, stoves, tires and general refuses to name only a few of the things that have been removed. A large amount of monofilament fishing line also has been picked up which, as we all know can be very detrimental to birds.

The areas that are been cleaned have taken on a complete transformation. When the project began in 1999 the garbage was so bad that it was in piles and mounds. Users continued to add to the piles as the assumption was "its here anyway". Specific outcomes the project has achieved has been in advancing citizen stewardship and increasing our understanding of our precious waterways. This initiative promotes education, public outreach, citizen involvement, partnership development and community capacity building. It provides a win-win solution for everyone who has a stake in the future of our waterway called the Mighty Red!

Proactive signage with a positive environmental message has been developed and will be deployed for 2006 in key areas. Informational brochures have also been produced and

will be distributed. Our objectives are to continue picking up thousands of pounds of garbage each year but at the same time trying to change the attitude of those leaving it behind!

The project encourages the community to get involved and throughout each summer boy scouts and local groups help clean a specific problem area in what we call a clean up blitz. The Great Canadian Shoreline Clean Up out of Vancouver will be getting involved for 2006. The project runs from May to October each year and the two workers know what needs to be done and the areas to be cleaned. Both workers report to me weekly. Not only are the drums visited each day, but the surrounding areas themselves are cleaned. Each year we meet our objectives buy exceeding the total pounds of garbage as well as completing what objectives have been set. For example in 2004 we wanted to kick off a media blitz out of Lockport and with the help of Rivers West Red River Corridor we were successful. Local and Winnipeg media attended the press release, as well as, Minister Ashton who spoke very highly of the initiative.