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**BLUE THUNDERBIRD**  
Land-based Teachings  
Learning Centre

Spring/Summer

September 2019

## Ozhaawashkwaa Animikii-Bineshi Aki Onji Kinimaagae' Inun

*Celebrating the Seven Oaks Division's connections to land*



### The Update

What a busy season it has been! **The doors are open!** We have had **1,764** visitors to the Aki Centre since the doors opened on **April 23<sup>rd</sup>**.

The last 7 months have been filled with construction, giggles, weed control, buzzing bees, and prairie beauty.

In this season's newsletter you will find:

- Who is "Aki"?
- Summer camps
- Prairie restoration
- Compost program
- Get involved



### Who is "Aki"?

Ozhaawashkwaa Animikii-Bineshi Aki Onji Kinimaagae' Inun has been coined the "Aki Centre", or "Land Centre" for short. Aki means "Land" in Ojibwe, however each sound carries a meaning, too.

**A** is fully visible

**K** a separating and regrouping action occurs

**I** is seen (perceived) in action

"So the world is fully visible. The land is separated from the sky. You see water separating from lakes and rivers (by evaporation) then regrouping as clouds, separating as rain, regrouping as rivers and lakes. Birds separate from trees, from water and fly. They are seen in action. Grass is growing, the elements from the earth are visibly seen separating and regrouping as stems and leaves. The sun is visible as it separates from the eastern horizon and travels across the sky to regroup with the earth in the west as it sets. Everything is alive and is seen in action. This is who Aki is."

~Elder Dan Thomas



## Summer Programs

Students in the BEEP program had the opportunity to visit the Aki Centre, please ask them about it! Some highlights included rolling down the “mountain”, cooking s’mores and apple pies over the fire, helping with the prairie restoration by planting Indigenous seedlings, painting signs, going for walks, and (of course) water games.

Indigenous Language Camp also visited the Aki Centre and participated in the raising of the tipi, received teachings from Elders, made talking sticks, and helped plant sage and sweet grass - sacred medicines. They also had a lot of fun playing water games and painting rocks.

All groups were able to use food from the garden, cook in the kitchen, build fires and cook over the fire! Our motto: Let’s care for the land and each other, and let’s do this together.



### Timeline:

- **October 2017:** Phase 1 Construction begins (Service Centre, Pond excavation)
- **May 2018:** Oat Cover crop sown (30 acres)
- **June 2018:** 3 km trails constructed, swales dug and form
- **July – Sept. 2018:** Remnant prairie surveyed for biodiversity. Seeds collected.
- **August 2018:** Service Centre complete
- **August 2018:** Circle Garden relocated to 1985 Grassmere Road
- **September 2018:** Naming Ceremony
- **October 2018:** Learning Center construction begins, Tree Nursery installed
- **October 2018:** Partnership with TDFEF supporting prairie restoration, Soil testing
- **January 2019:** Partnership with The Winnipeg Foundation Reconciliation Grant connecting Land, Language & Culture
- **February 2019:** Planning location of tipi, sweat lodge, outdoor learning spaces
- **April 2019:** Partnership with The Conservation Trust: Ecological Restoration Wildlife and Habitat project
- **April 23, 2019:** Doors open! Also, prescribed burn along the south side of the 49-acres to conserve prairie species
- **May 9, 2019:** Unite to Change Conference at Aki Centre (120 students), first school groups visit in May and throughout June!
- **May 17, 2019:** Divisional composting!
- **May 23, 2019:** 4-acre Cover Crop planted
- **June 4, 2019:** Indigenous Plants and Medicines are planted in the Circle Garden by students, teachers and administrators
- **July 2019:** Vegetable garden planted
- **July- August 2019:** Summer camps
- **August 2019:** Model prairie restoration



*Model prairie restoration in progress*

## Tallgrass Prairie Restoration

Though the realities of climate change are sobering, we do have the incredible opportunity to be part of a project that will not only sequester carbon and restore habitat, but is also restoring our connection to our natural and cultural heritage on the land we all now call home. With the help of BEEP and Indigenous Language Camp, a model prairie restoration was planted beside the Aki Centre. This model will connect us to the 30-acre tallgrass restoration on this land.

What does it take to encourage land that has been farmed for generations to return to its ecosystem of the past 10,000 years? Patience, love, perseverance, and observation. This summer, the focus has been on eliminating perennial, invasive weeds like Canada Thistle. Through mowing and spot trimming, we have cut these species back so that they do not set seed and compete with the Indigenous species that will be seeded this fall.

This spring, the ditch was burned. Why? Over 60 species of Indigenous grasses, flowers and medicines live here. We call it a “remnant prairie”. Fire and grazing help prairies to retain diverse species and habitats! A video is coming soon!



## Feed the Biovator

**The biovator is hungry** for your compost! Compost pick-up is on Friday mornings. We collected 242lbs on the first pick up! Can we get to 500lbs?

**What does the biovator like to eat?** Anything that came from a plant – fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, grass clippings. Egg shells are ok too! Please avoid meat, dairy, oils and garbage. These can contaminate garden soil and vegetables.

**Get involved** by creating a composting club, helping wash out your schools' bins, emptying the coffee grounds, setting up a compost collecting container in your classroom, or bringing compost from home! Visit us at the Aki Centre for compost 101 and activities!

**Together we can reduce material going into the landfill AND greenhouse gas emissions WHILE growing more awesome plants!**

## Get Involved

**Come visit** – book the Aki Centre through the portal (Instruction >7 Oaks Grows) and come see us! Arrange your own bus/other transportation.

**Compost** – get your people excited about feeding the biovator! Contact Alex for resources, information and incentives.

**Garden Produce** – if you have a school program involving cooking or healthy eating, let us know and we will put you on our garden produce mailing list. Produce is delivered on Fridays.

**Seed Collection** – do you have Indigenous plants on your school yard or at home? We would love to add more seeds to the prairie restoration effort. And, come here to collect with us!

**Feeder Watch** – put up a bird feeder at your school and be part of a citizen science project! Sign up at [feederwatch.org](https://feederwatch.org) and share with us what you see.



## Questions? Ideas? Be in touch!

We want your help developing ways to connect students to projects.

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Thankful for our Partnerships!



**TD Friends of the  
Environment  
Foundation**

We are grateful for the generous support and partnership of TD Friends of the Environment. With their support, we can achieve a major stewardship goal of procuring local ecotype seed for our 30-acre prairie restoration, while supporting student engagement with field guides, binoculars and stewardship tools.



We are grateful for the inspiration and partnership of The Winnipeg Foundation Reconciliation Grants. With their support we continue to deepen our community building through land-based education and land stewardship that values, informs and infuses Indigenous pedagogies and recognized the links between Land, Language and Culture as a path toward Reconciliation.



**THE  
CONSERVATION  
TRUST**

A Manitoba Climate and Green Plan Initiative  
delivered by The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

Support for this project has been provided by the Conservation Trust, a Manitoba Climate and Green Plan Initiative delivered by the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation. The activities funded by the Conservation Trust will conserve biodiversity, increase production of harvestable wildlife, mitigate floods and droughts, improve water quality by decreasing nutrients and other pollutants entering waterways, improve climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration and reduction of other greenhouse gases, improve soil health and decrease soil erosion. Projects will also provide other values to Manitobans, such as improving recreational opportunities.