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BLUE THUNDERBIRD
Land-based Teachings
Learning Centre

Winter

January 2020

Ozhaawashkwaa Animikii-Bineshi Aki Onji Kinimaagae' Inun

Celebrating the Seven Oaks Division's connections to land

The Update

Our doors have been open since **April 23rd**, 2019, and we have seen over **2300** visitors!

What's Inside this Newsletter?

- Bird of the Month
- What do classes do out here?
- Cultural Education: Skaabes
- Podcasts for cozy winter days
- Compost Corner – heat it up!
- Booking Information



Bird of the Month : Western Meadowlark

If you were here in spring, summer or fall, you would have heard [the beautiful song](#) of the male Western Meadowlark. Often *heard before seen*, we now know their favourite spots from which to belt out a tune: the peak of the roof, the tops of fence posts, tree tops, or power lines!

This bird is Indigenous to our area, the grasslands, but only spends its breeding season with us ([April to August](#)), leaving in late September for warmer weather. They [migrate](#) to the central and western USA for winter, and even to the northern parts of Mexico. Listen up for their return spring! The Cornell Lab's Merlin App has a song library and Bird ID Guide that you may find helpful when matching that melodious song to the singer! Meadowlarks nest on the ground and forage for insects. While these birds are best adapted to original prairie, in agricultural areas they prefer pastures and hayland over annual and monocrops. Diverse plants attract diverse wildlife, so we hope to see more as our landscape changes!



What are classes doing out here?

This is a new space to everyone in Seven Oaks School Division. Those who have booked trips here are getting their feet wet, becoming familiar with the land, the facility, and the opportunities first hand. This is an important step in developing ongoing experiences and relationships with this land, our students, and staff. We welcome everyone to dig in!

As the seasons change, our opportunities on the land change. September brought Indigenous seed harvesting in the remnant prairie along the edge of the property, as well as harvesting of root vegetables from the food garden, and migrant bird watching. Busy skies! October brought cooking over the fire, hiking and exploring, and teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers. November brought winter tracking, scavenger hunts, fire building, outdoor cooking, and tobogganing.

We noticed how much students benefitted from their time here in December, in particular, when many are feeling a need to break from the regular routines. Students lit up while exploring and hiking, cooking together, and learning about the land. The outdoors, especially in winter, seems to lift spirits.

Please connect with us if you you are planning a trip, and feel free to request guidance or collaboration. We are happy to help.



Belmont grade 4/5 mulching and pulling carrots!



Riverbend learning about composting!



Maples MET harvesting Indigenous Seeds



West St Paul School, weather champions, rolling with it



Podcasts of the Month

Cozy up with an inspirational story. We feel these stories particularly tap into some of the conversations we have here at the Aki Centre.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada Podcast, [Episode Five: The World's Most Endangered Ecosystem](#)

Think Indigenous Podcast: [Kathy Bird](#) on the importance of land based knowledge and bringing youth to the land.

Phys Ed. AKA: mulching to keep the soil weed-free!



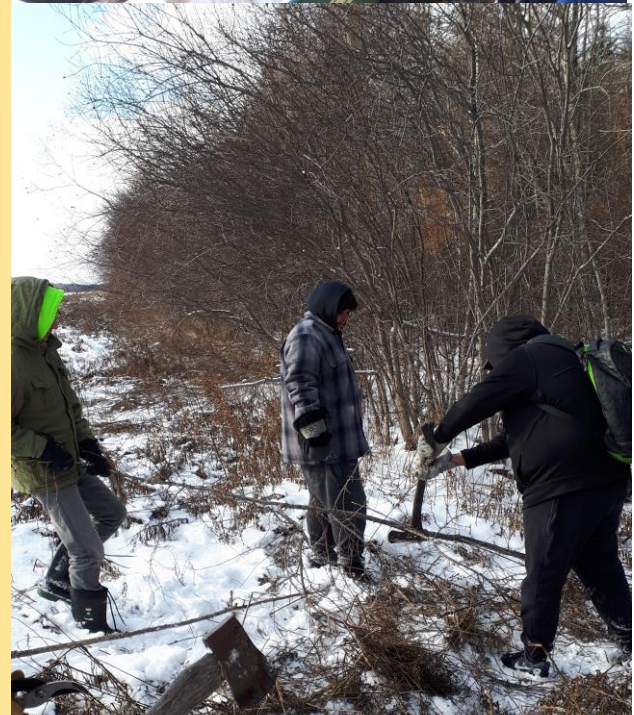
Cultural Education: Skaabes in Training

A group of Indigenous youth from our 3 high schools and MET schools have been steadily working hard since the early Fall in preparation for the building of a sweatlodge that will be located at the Aki Centre.

These high school students have been working closely with our Elder in Residence, Dan Thomas, and are training alongside CATEP student and mentee, Hayden LaRiviere, to be *skaabes* (helpers) for future sweatlodge ceremonies that will be available for staff, student groups, and community people across the division.

During their time together, Elder Dan has been enriching the lives of these young Indigenous men with his teachings and the wisdom of his cultural traditions and land based knowledge that is invaluable particularly in this time of climate crisis. It is our hope that they will one day pass these teachings onto the next generation as is the way of Indigenous people.

The group has spent several days gathering grandfather rocks and traditional medicines for the sweatlodge ceremony and gathering tree branches that will be used to build the lodge itself. Elder Dan and the *skaabes* are now eagerly waiting to begin the process of constructing the lodge and will be the first group to experience a sweat in our divisional lodge. The learning that occurs is multi-dimensional, linking the hands-on experience of a collective effort with the design and construction, together with the mystery of the sweat itself where heat, story and relational support contribute to the wonder of this ceremony. We look forward to supporting and enriching the lives of students and staff across Seven Oaks School Division with the gift of this incredible ceremony.





Compost Corner

Congratulations everyone on the amazing composting efforts this fall! To date we have collected a total of **5094 lbs** and so far the BIOvator is still warm as ever. Our collective greenhouse gas reduction was equivalent to taking **5.25 cars** off the road for a month!

Fall Compost Champion Awards:

HC Avery – Room 118 Mrs. Barber

This class of 8th grade students came up with a brilliant waste diversion plan! They collected pumpkins after Halloween, smashed them so they were more easily biodegraded, and sent them to the BIOvator.

Victory – Educational Assistants & Grade 5 Lunch Helpers

These hardworking staff and students make sure to empty the small compost bins into the larger bin every day! They educate Victory school community on what can be composted and help divert waste.

Most Compost

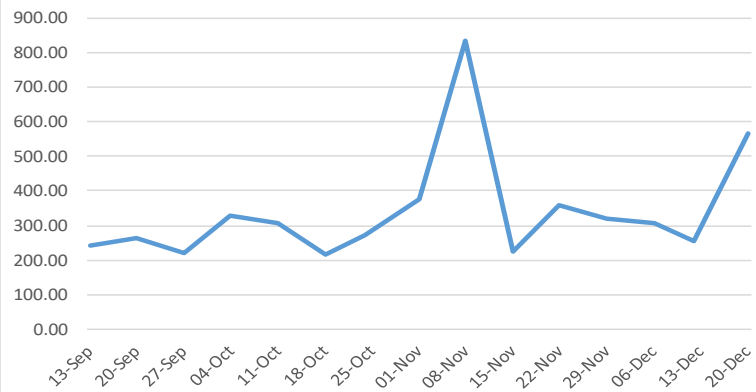
1 st HC Avery	917 lbs
2 nd Board Office/BZERC	432 lbs
3 rd Riverbend	427 lbs

How to Book the Aki Centre

How can you and your students also experience this place?

1. Take a look at the [website](#)
2. Get ideas from the [portal](#)
3. Check availability [here](#)
4. Book a bus
5. Book the Aki Centre [here](#) by filling out the facility usage form
6. More than 60 people coming? Book a conference room [here](#)

Pounds of Compost Collected



Questions? Ideas? Be in touch!

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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.