



Henteleff Park
FOUNDATION
Strong roots. Stronger community.



Caring About and Caring For the Park

The members of the Board of Henteleff Park Foundation hope everyone remains safe and healthy as all of us continue to cope with the challenges of Covid-19.

Peoples' responses to Covid have affected the Park in many ways. We have seen a tremendous increase in Park use. While it is wonderful to see how it has become a place of respite from the pandemic for so many people, this has unfortunately been accompanied by an increase in misuses. While most are not intended, many are thoughtless. In response to both use and misuse, we want to explain why we do what we do to preserve this land that helps so many people to endure and to heal. Here, we will sometimes offer advice, sometimes offer cautions, and occasionally and regrettably be compelled to say "Please don't do that".

But first, we want to clarify what many but not all are aware of: The Henteleff Park Foundation does not own the Park. The land is owned by the City of Winnipeg, and the Foundation and City manage it cooperatively. Last year, the land beyond the row of fence posts at the west end of the Park was acquired by the City and is now part of the Park. The Board has begun to refer to this as "the butterfly meadow." The second important clarification is that Henteleff Park is a passive park. A passive park is defined in the Foundation's Development and Management Agreement with the City, as "*a place for the public to enjoy quiet reflection and low impact recreation in a natural setting.*"

The key words here are "*natural setting*" and the Foundation works hard to preserve this condition. To do so, we must educate Park users about the detrimental effects their actions can have on plants and wildlife.

Tall Grass Prairie & Basswood Forest

Two areas especially affected by overuse in the past year and a half are the tall grass prairie on the north side of the main road bordered by the rail fence, and the basswood forest to the south of the main road near the eastern edge of the butterfly meadow.

The tall grass prairie is the result of many years work of restoration and is a fragile ecosystem. In addition to native grasses, more than 50 flowering species have been carefully selected and planted to re-create the prairie. Some of these species are represented by a single specimen.

Yet we've seen families encourage their children to pick what they believe to be "just" wildflowers. Here we must say our first "Please don't do that". People have also created new paths through the prairie, perhaps thinking "well, it's just grass." We ask people to please stay to the wood-chipped paths instead, because to walk on the prairie itself damages the ecosystem in two ways.

First, many plants will not recover from being trampled. This off-path wandering is like walking through the flowerbeds of a friend's garden. Second, walking off the main paths compacts the earth. Plants take in oxygen from the air spaces in soil, and compacted earth makes it difficult for them to breathe. Plants then become weakened and can die. Although many new paths through the prairie have been created by wanderers in the last year, we implore people to stay to the wood-chipped paths.

We are quite literally asking people to "tread lightly on the earth." We ask the same of those who believe it okay to spread picnic blankets in the tall grass prairie, or those amateur or professional photographers who think it permissible to pose subjects and props in the prairie. Again, "Please don't do that".

In the basswood forest to the south of the main road, many new trails have been created by bicyclists, among other users. In addition to the damage to understory plants and the compression of soil, increased human traffic here disrupts and stresses the animals that shelter in the forest and may eventually force them to move to new locations.

Not just in this area, but throughout the Park, off leash dogs can disrupt, stress, and possibly force wildlife to move on. Although the broad open expanses of the Park are enticing and exciting for free-running dogs, wildlife may not only be stressed but forced to abruptly flee, risking injury. This is not about whether a dog is well-trained; dogs are curious and will want to explore what is new to them. Out of consideration for Park wildlife, all dogs must be kept leashed.

We suggest that a quiet walk through the basswood forest or any forested area of the Park may lead to an encounter that does not stress wildlife and may offer a magical moment of encounter. Perhaps a key to lessening wildlife disruption and stress is to remind oneself that the Park is a place of "*low impact recreation*." The Foundation places the welfare of the plants and wildlife of the Park first, so that the Park and its inhabitants can thrive for future generations to enjoy.

Deadfall is Important

On occasion, we've seen people trying to help the Park thrive by pursuing their own stewardship tasks, typically by clearing or repurposing deadfall in the basswood forest and other wooded areas. While well intended, disturbing deadfall harms the ecology of the Park in a number of ways.

Deadfall carries out several valuable functions in a forest. First, it acts as a mulch that aids the soil to retain moisture that promotes the health of the trees and plants. Second, it creates a diverse habitat for beetles, ants, fungi, amphibians, bumblebees, and other wildlife. Third, decaying deadfall becomes compost, supplying valuable nutrients to the living trees and plants.

Only if a specific deadfall becomes a safety concern will we disturb it. A forest with deadfall may not look tidy, may not look like some people's idea of a park, but it provides habitat for, as an example, the pine martins and barred owls that have been seen in the Park in the last year.

So, if you wish to help the Park, please don't take action on your own, but join us and become a "Park caretaker." This year you might have noticed the presence of a diverse community of volunteers in addition to our summer staff. Please consider getting in touch with our Volunteer Coordinator at terri.ashcroft@henteleffpark.org. We'd love to have you join our community of those who care about and care for the Park.

Spooky Forest

Further to the subject of deadfall, many have asked about the stand of dead poplars that dates from the land's time as a tree nursery. The Board refers to this as "the spooky forest." While careful culling is managed by the Foundation and the City to minimize the risk of injury to passersby, this site has not been cleared for two reasons.

First, it provides another wildlife habitat, and second, a process of "species succession" is taking place here. In the spooky forest, the dead trees provide good resonating towers from which drumming woodpeckers can proclaim their territorial boundaries. Hunting raptors also find these standing dead trees to be useful perches. The dead wood provides a home for ants and other insects that are food for foraging woodpeckers, northern flickers, and other bird species. Because the poplars still shade the ground and slow evaporation, they provide an opportunity for new growth to succeed them. Basswoods (which will not seed in sunny spots), oaks (often from acorns cached by foraging squirrels), and Manitoba maples are all becoming established in the ecological niche the standing dead poplars offer. The spooky forest is a new forest coming into being.

Unfortunately, this extended discussion of deadfall and the Park's forests leads to another "Please don't do that". Both adults and children have been seen carving into or tearing off the papery bark of birch trees. This tearing off of bark can "ring" the tree, prevent nutrients from travelling up its trunk, and kill the tree. In another case, just before Christmas some people were seen cutting live branches from spruce and tamarack in the Park. This is another case where we have to ask people to "Please don't do that".

We have one more caution to make. Many people continue to consider the rail fence adjacent to the tall grass prairie an excellent scenic backdrop for photographs, but their actions have unintentionally damaged the very thing they value. We remind amateur or professional photographers that the fence cannot support the increased weight it has sometimes been expected to bear in the past year and has suffered significant more damage than previously. To anyone who thinks it acceptable to sit on the fence, we must repeat "Please don't do that".

Safety First

The Board concludes this article with a caution to our readers. We are not in any way asking you to take on a role as Park security. First, doing so spoils your enjoyment of the Park by requiring a state of watchfulness. To reiterate, the Park exists for your "*quiet reflection*." Second, we want people to place their own safety first and not become engaged in any kind of confrontation with those whose behavior is at best thoughtless and at worst illegal.

If you have concerns about something you see in the Park, as well as informing us, a call to the City at 311 to register a complaint will help. Should the behaviour appear illegal, a call to the Winnipeg Police Service's non-emergency number (204 986 6222), including a description of the individual(s), the time, and the location in the Park will be helpful. If you choose to capture photo or video evidence of any actions, please again be aware that your personal safety is our first concern and overrides the value that any such evidence might provide.

Caring for Our Park

We hope we've explained why we do what we do to preserve and protect Henteleff Park. We also hope that this article offers guidance in how to walk lightly in this place; how to care about and care for it; and how to join us in that care.