

Former farmland now urban wetland

BY PHIL TANK, THE STARPHOENIX JULY 9, 2014



Elmer Hyde stands beside the sign on the land where his family used to farm in Hyde Park.

Photograph by: Phil Tank, The StarPhoenix

Elmer Hyde stood Wednesday on the land where his family used to farm when it was well outside Saskatoon.

Three-quarters of a century after his parents, Orville and Hermine, started farming, Hyde Park has been transformed into a 123-acre urban wetland in the Rosewood neighbourhood in the city's southeast corner, on land that has been swallowed by urban growth.

"It's a real treasure," Hyde said Wednesday after a public ceremony to unveil a sign explaining his family's history and the land's new role.

"I don't have words for it. It's more than we expected."

The massive park has been rehabilitated from an area where people used to dump old fridges and rusting car parts to a wetlands park that can be a home for ducks and other wildlife while providing a complex filtering system to manage storm water in the area.

The park represents a combined effort by the City of Saskatoon, Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Saskatoon Wildlife Federation and the Rosewood Community Association.

“This was my dream,” said Bob Rogers, the federation’s conservation chairperson, who began his speech Wednesday with a duck call.

“It’s a wonderful example of what you can accomplish when there is co-operation among several bodies. We have never done anything within a city setting.”

Rogers, a former science teacher, said the park will provide a great opportunity for education as the cost of transporting students outside the city to natural habitats for field trips has skyrocketed.

The naturalized park, which also features bike paths and a bridge over one of the five ponds, was built on the former farmland; plants and grasses native to the Prairies were introduced to the area.

Rogers said he still has a few issues, though.

He said the dam separating two ponds is not working properly and the ponds are not retaining enough water to function properly as habitat. The design flaw must be fixed, he said.

“I don’t want to alarm anyone, but we will be watching to see that it’s properly done.”

Rogers said he also would have liked to see a floating walkway to allow a better view of the ponds. He called for a sponsor to step forward to build the structure.

Michael Champion, head of industry and government relations for Ducks Unlimited Canada, said the project was an unusual one for his organization.

“It’s not often we get the chance to work in an urban area,” Champion said.

Saskatchewan is losing 100,000 acres of wetlands every year, making the establishment of areas like Hyde Park very important, he added.

“Recognition of the importance of this area has resulted in its conservation.”

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