

Jennifer and Tom Shay Ecological Reserve

Backgrounder

Land Designation

Ecological reserves play a key role in Manitoba's Protected Areas Initiative by protecting unique, rare and representative examples of plants, animals, geological features and ecosystems. They are the most protected of the provincially designated sites within Manitoba's network of protected area.

Landscape Description

The Jennifer and Tom Shay Ecological Reserve, approximately seven hectare in size, is located south of Winnipeg near the town of St. Adolphe. The reserve is situated along the eastern bank of the Red River and supports a river-bottom forest ecosystem.



Outstanding Features

Forests growing along Manitoba's Red River provide essential corridors for the movement and dispersal of wildlife in a region with large tracks of land used for agriculture. Relatively undisturbed river-bottom forest, such as the one located within and around the Jennifer and Tom Shay Ecological Reserve, is a rare occurrence in the Red River valley. Subject to annual flooding, this type of habitat and the organisms that reside within it are unique in that they must tolerate periodic flooding.

Biological surveys conducted within the reserve have recorded a large diversity of animals and plants. Included in the list of over 150 plant species distributed throughout the reserve is the very rare False Indigo and several other plant species uncommon to this region of Manitoba such as Assiniboia sedge, smooth-fruited sedge, moonseed, and riverbank grape. Bird monitoring in the area has produced sightings of almost 180 species consisting of an exceptional variety of both resident and migrant birds including the red-headed woodpecker, a species listed as Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).



Research conducted on the ecological reserve has also led to better understanding of the origins, historical climate, flood patterns and geological history of the Red River valley through analysis of tree rings and radiocarbon dating of charcoal obtained from the site. An archaeological site is known from the area of this ecological reserve. The site contains artefacts indicating human occupation up to 2000 years ago, with a potentially older cultural stratum below. The exact location, extent and significance of this site would require further archaeological investigation.

The Jennifer and Tom Shay Ecological Reserve is located on property previously owned by Dr. Jennifer and Dr. Tom Shay. An Officer of the Order of Canada, Dr. Jennifer Shay is a former professor of Botany at the University of Manitoba and a noted Canadian ecologist. She helped found Manitoba's ecological reserves program in 1973 and sat on the Ecological Reserves Advisory Committee for 18 years until 1991. Dr. Tom Shay is a retired professor of Anthropology from St. Paul's College at the University of Manitoba. He has been active in heritage conservation for many years, serving on the Manitoba Historic Sites Advisory Board for a decade. He was the recipient of the Prix Manitoba for Heritage in 1997. As a result of flood damages to their home following the 1997 flood, the couple decided against rebuilding on the property to minimize disturbance to the forest and agreed to turn over the property to the Province of Manitoba for some compensation.

As an ecological reserve, the Jennifer and Tom Shay site will be maintained for preservation and protection of rare river-bottom forest habitat. Passive visits on foot will be allowed without a permit. All other activities will require prior approval.

This area is categorized by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as a protected area under the management category Ia – a protected area managed for strict nature protection available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring. These protected lands are free from logging, mining, hydroelectric development, oil and gas development, and any other activities that could harm habitat.