

## **Stark and Marsh Chartered Accountants Receive 2015 SAW Provincial Watershed Stewardship Award**

The Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards (SCCWS) is a non-profit watershed stewardship group with a mandate to enhance water quality and stream health through awareness and understanding of stakeholders. In partnership with various stakeholders we have been working towards this goal since 2001.

Stark & Marsh is one of our dedicated partners. They are an accounting firm in the City of Swift Current that employs 80+ staff and recently completed its 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Go Green Friday program on September 27<sup>th</sup> of 2013. Go Green Friday is an initiative that came out of a discussion within the company to further their Office Mission which is to *“contribute to and help out in their community as much as possible.”* They approached the City of Swift Current to see how they could accomplish that mission in 2009.

There were numerous initiatives in the spring within the City of Swift Current but there was little or no action towards community improvement in the fall. The City Parks Manager suggested they could use some help in the fall with clean-up, laying mulch, and planting trees as well as cleaning up the banks of the Swift Current Creek which runs through the city extensively.

In 2009, the first year of the program, the organizers realized they had an excess of volunteers and they invited the SCCWS in as a partner to help organize a creek bank clean up. In the second year of the program, one of the Stark & Marsh staff workers suggested that they put on chest waders and go into the creek to clean up garbage that had been thrown into the creek. Over the years garbage such as; bicycles, various appliances, brake drums and shopping carts have been thrown into the Swift Current Creek. Go Green Friday gave the SCCWS the opportunity to have volunteers assist us in cleaning garbage out of the creek. We would be unable to accomplish this task without additional volunteers, due to a lack of human energy. Since that time, the leadership shown by Stark & Marsh has stimulated many other businesses within the City to volunteer employee time and energy towards the stewardship initiatives that take place on Go Green Friday. This event, initiated by Stark & Marsh, has evolved into a wonderful community collaboration that participants look forward to every year.

In 2013 when the SCCWS, City of Swift Current and Stark & Marsh got together to complete a work plan, we realized that with the growing popularity of the program, we again had a large number of volunteers (100+) to engage. We set to work to find a worthwhile long term project that the volunteers could take ownership of. The SCC Riparian Forest was a project that the SCCWS initiated with the help of the Stark & Marsh Go Green Friday crew.

The riparian forest is a project that restored a section of the riparian area along the Swift Current Creek that had been heavily infested with the invasive species field bindweed. Twenty-five volunteers from Stark & Marsh, along with SCCWS staff worked collaboratively to clear the area of undesirable vegetation and reintroduce native grasses suitable for this area. Bioengineering techniques were used to keep the banks from eroding in the spring and then coconut mulch was placed and staked over the area to ensure stability. In the spring, native shrubs were planted. Over time, these shrubs will grow into a diverse forest of riparian vegetation, which will work to clean and conserve water as it enters the creek, protect the creek banks and provide habitat for birds and wildlife.

This project is on a very visible location along the extensive Chinook Pathway. Signage will be placed at this site highlighting the good work that has been started and describing the role that riparian vegetation plays in cleaning and conserving water and facilitating a healthy water eco-system. This signage will create awareness of the creek and promote good stewardship practices to the public. By engaging volunteers in a collaborative project where they can see results, a sense of ownership and pride is established. Volunteers were educated about the important roles of riparian vegetation during the project and will be better water stewards moving forward.

Stark & Marsh have facilitated collaboration amongst various partners in the community, government and non-government, as well as individuals that just want to help on Go Green Friday. They initiate and facilitate meetings with all of the partners early in the year. Staff members from Stark & Marsh are keen participants every year, lending their time to a variety of projects. At the end of the day volunteers are treated to a barbecue supper and entertainment in the downtown Market Square supplied by and prepared by staff of Stark & Marsh. In short, Stark & Marsh have demonstrated tremendous leadership by initially creating this worthwhile project and by implementing it on an ongoing basis for the last 6 years.

Go Green Friday has always contributed to water conservation and water stewardship because of the creek clean-up that takes place annually. In 2013, with the initiation of the Swift Current Creek Riparian Forest, this stewardship and conservation has been taken one step further. The project would never have happened without Go Green Friday, and the leadership, encouragement and volunteerism of Stark & Marsh. Stark & Marsh has shown they care about the community and the water that flows through the city via the Swift Current Creek. They have truly assisted the SCCWS in achieving their mandate to enhance water quality and stream health through awareness and understanding of stakeholders. For these reasons, the SCCWS feel Stark & Marsh are a worthy recipient of the 2015 SAW Stewardship Award.

## Project targets invasive species on Swift Current Creek's banks

SCOTT ANDERSON  
SOUTHWEST BOOSTER

An eco action project on the banks of the Swift Current Creek running through Swift Current was completed on Sept. 27 in an attempt to slow erosion caused by an invasive weed creating problems.

Utilizing manpower through Stark & Marsh's Go Green Friday initiative, the Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards project was completed, with the work specifically targeting one bank of the creek that has been heavily infested with Field Bindweed.

"Field Bindweed is an invasive species in Saskatchewan, and its been threatening the health of the riparian vegetation that's along here," said Karlah Rudolph, a AEGP Agrologist with the Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards.

She said native riparian vegetation along the banks of a creek is an indication of the health of the waterway.

"That indicates that a creek is healthy because riparian vegetation, if it's native, does a good job of keeping the banks intact. It's got extensive root system. Invasive species on the other hand, tend not to have the

root systems that are required for bank maintenance."

She explained volunteers in this eco action event removed the Field Bindweed, and they then seeded a selection of native prairie seeds which were donated by Grasslands National Park, and Maple Creek's Ray McDougald who is the chairperson of the Prairie Conservation Action Plan.

A series of erosion control structures, utilizing ecological material, were installed as a natural bio-engineering solution to the erosion issue. The structures will create shelves to trap future erosion and help establish the native riparian plant vegetation.

The project will also benefit from receiving the last trees to leave the PRFA Shelterbelt Program in Indian Head.

"We just happened to get the very last trees to leave the cold room that have been in cold storage."

"These trees are going to be native vegetation. We've got things like Dogwood and other native willows. Some Manitoba Maple. We've got Chokecherry, Cranberry, Hawthorn.

"So the idea is to create a riparian forest that's there for ecological purposes, to pro-



Volunteers lending their support to the Stark & Marsh Go Green Friday initiative assisted in completing a Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards project along the Swift Current Creek in the Elmwood Park area. Booster photo by Scott Anderson

vide habitat and to provide food. A lot of them are berry bearing trees which birds that overwinter here require, that's what they eat during the winter. And it's all native vegetation so it's going to be

doing that job of holding this bank intact and helping the erosion process that's happening here."

Rudolph saluted the volunteers helping provide the manpower for this impor-

tant project.

"It would be absolutely impossible to even tackle a project of this scope without a large number of committed volunteers like what we had here today. So getting a group

of people who are excited just to do community action and come together to provide some ecological benefits to the City of Swift Current is huge. It wouldn't happen without that."

South West TV News Clip

<http://youtu.be/2cCSCZP6VRY>

Front Page Coverage Local Newspaper

# PRAIRIE POST



***A new riparian restoration project on the banks of the Swift Current Creek is helping to control an invasive plant species.***

*The Swift Current Creek Watershed Stewards (SCCWS) initiated the project in association with the City of Swift Current. It is located on a steep portion of the creek bank next to the City's Chinook Pathway at Elmwood Park.*

*SCCWS Best Management Practices agrologist Karlah Rudolph said they suggested the project to the City after SCCWS staff noticed a heavy infestation of field bindweed, an invasive climbing or creeping plant. "They got really excited about it and thought it was a great idea and that it could even go into the future if it's successful," she said.*

*The initial phase of this project got underway Sept. 27 with the help of volunteers who participated in the 5th annual Go Green Friday environmental cleanup in Swift Current.*

*"At this point, it's the first time that we've ever tried to do something like this," she said. "If it is successful and we have the opportunity to have the manpower that we had available to us with the Go*

*Green Friday event and the volunteerism from various organizations in the city, we would look for other places where an invasive species is posing a problem to the existing preferred vegetation.”*

*The volunteers made it possible to make significant progress with the project. Their first task was to remove the field bindweed.*

*“The field bindweed, because it’s a vining plant, was crawling up and over and using the existing preferred vegetation as support and beginning to shade those other things out, such as the wild rose, snowberry and Manitoba maple,” she said.*

*Additional vegetation was also removed to make room for the indigenous tree species that will be planted in the spring. This vegetation was used to create erosion control structures on the site through the application of a bio-engineering technique.*

*“It was stripping the stems or the larger vegetation, stripping the leaves and then laying those perpendicular to the direction of slope,” she explained. “So laying them across the slope so that there was a layer of erosion control about every foot down the slope using the material that we have taken from the site.”*

*According to Rudolph, there is active erosion on that site due to the steep creek bank and it was important to also address that.*

*“That bank is very, very close to the Chinook Parkway,” she said. “It immediately starts sloping down off off the cement. So there’s not a lot of erosion that can take place there before it begins to effect the pathway.”*

*The next step was to seed the area with native grass seed donated by Grasslands National Park and Maple Creek farmer Ray McDougald, who is a supplier of native seeds.*

*“That was essentially just to put something else in the seedbed other than that field bindweed,” Rudolph said.*

*Volunteers then covered the area with a layer of coconut mulch to inhibit the regrowth of the field bindweed. They used biodegradable plastic pins to pin the mulch into place.*

*“The coconut mulch itself is going to degrade, probably I’d give it five years, and the pins themselves are a plastic, but it’s a plant-based plastic and they will bio-degrade,” she said.*

*In the spring a number of indigenous tree species will be planted on the site, including chokecherry, Manitoba maple, shrubby cinquefoil, cranberry, saskatoons, hawthorn, red osier dogwood and other native willows.*

*The Swift Current project received the last shipment of trees from the Indian Head prairie shelterbelt program, which was terminated by the federal government. An association of rural municipalities, called the Western Canada Tree Nursery Coalition, has been created to continue the program on a cost-recovery basis.*

*According to Rudolph, the project has multiple benefits. It is a good opportunity for SCCWS to evaluate the effectiveness of this type of control of invasive plants.*

*“It also partners with the City of Swift Current, which is an important partner for us, to beautify the Chinook Pathway,” she said.*

*The project is a good opportunity to achieve another important stewardship goal of the SCCWS to educate people and to facilitate wider stewardship goals in the community.*

*“We’re hoping to provide signage on the role that healthy riparian vegetation plays in maintaining creek function that helps people understand what some of the plants are that they see and what role those plants have to play in creating healthy creeks,” she said.*

