

Major multi-dollar infrastructure plans announced for Jean Louis Legare Project

about 6 hours ago By: Wes Bloom/ Freelance Writer



1 / 6 A news conference was held in Willow Bunch on Sept. 8. | Wes Bloom/ Freelance Writer

WILLOW BUNCH - With the federal government's decision and announcement in December of 2018 to phase out all coal-fired power plants in Canada by the year 2030 came the realization that many small towns and cities in Canada and Saskatchewan were in serious peril of fading into the valley of oblivion. This is an extremely unpleasant prospect for local area residents here in the south country.

Saskatchewan has three coal-fired power plants: the Shand and Boundary Dam power plants near Estevan, and the Poplar River power plant just a few kilometres east of Coronach.

All of the surrounding towns near these three plants face a grim and dismal future if they do nothing but sit back and wait for the year 2030 to come and go. The Poplar River Power Plant and coal mine near Coronach alone employs some 300 people. All of its workers and their families draw their livelihoods and present day existence from this important facility. Their existence and that of many others in the South Central Region is in serious jeopardy when the mine and plant close in 2030.

Fortunately, Saskatchewan people are tough, creative, and resilient, and are not about to simply roll over and give up so quickly and easily. Coronach recently announced major plans for a huge multi-million dollar expansion to

their existing park and water reservoir to help bring tourists into the area. It will be a destination park, not just for tourists, but local and area residents as well.

In a press conference held on Sept. 8, the town of Willow Bunch and local RM #42 unveiled future plans of its own for a major multi-million dollar expansion to its infrastructure, regional park, and Coulee Chappelle.

In an impressive 174-page feasibility study and report that cost \$177,000, the Jean Louis Legare Project Plan's working committee and board, identified a "wide range of destination services and facilities for future potential development."

The group's vision and goal is to "enhance tourism (in the area) and showcase the rich history of the (greater) Willow Bunch community."

These goals will best be accomplished by providing improved and adequate accommodations, entertainment, and destination services for all visitors to Willow Bunch, the park, and surrounding area.

It is proposed that the existing infrastructure of water, sewer, and roads be significantly improved and upgraded at a cost of more than \$6 million. According to Paul Campagne, Executive Group Treasurer, work could begin as early as this fall or next spring at the latest. Other plans include new hiking and biking trails, and a major campground expansion to build more campsites - both seasonal and permanent - and two new cabin developments.

The Working Group and committee also proposes to build an Interpretive Center, an Amphitheatre and Event Center, as well as a zip-line for families and the young at heart to enjoy.

In a serious effort to showcase the rich heritage and history of the area, the RM of Willow Bunch will build a small working village in the Coulee Chappelle, reminiscent of the original Metis settlement dating back to 1870 when the area was first settled. This village will feature an old barn, a replica of Legare's Trading Post, a telegraph office, a blacksmith shop, a school, a church, a cafe, an artisan space, and a NWMP barracks.

Also featured in Coulee Chappelle will be a Sitting Bull/Lakota encampment area. Sitting Bull and his Lakota nation first settled here when they crossed the Medicine Line into Canada in 1876/77 after defeating Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in the United States.

The Working Group for the Willow Bunch project was formed in 2018. Planning began immediately. The group was officially incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2020 as a sub-committee of the Jean Louis Legare Regional Park Authority. It is currently incorporated under the name Jean Louis Legare Project Plan Inc.

Members of this volunteer group include: Real Durand - Chairperson; Jay Druin - Vice Chairperson; Paul Campagne - Treasurer; Lisa Cairns - Recording Secretary; Patrick Therrien - Reeve of RM 42; Virgil Cairns - Communications Coordinator; Raymond Martin - Town of Willow Bunch representative; Kurtis Bonneau; James Gaudry; Mike Cayer; Giles Bissonnette; Brian Kuysten; Gisele Fafard; Danny O'Reilly; and Colin Durand. Ex Officio members include: Wayne Joyal - Mayor of Willow Bunch; Kenny Gaudry - Elder, Metis Local 17; and Les Mielke - South Central Community Futures.

Total cost of the entire RM of 42 project is not yet fully known, but could reach into the tens of millions of dollars.

To date, the committee is totally debt and encumbrance free. Money for each phase of expansion and project development will continue to be raised from existing and available government funding. In this way, it will not be a burden on local area residents. Ambitiously, it is hoped that all phases of the project development can be completed in the next five years.

In a written statement, Communications Coordinator, Virgil Cairns emphasized, "Our project clearly recognizes that tourism is Willow Bunch's path to economic growth and this growth MUST include every community in the South Central Region."

To date, 13 official letters from surrounding Rural Municipalities and towns have been received in support of the Willow Bunch initiative. Positive letters have come from as far away as Glentworth, Shamrock, Lafleche, and Gravelbourg. Everyone appears to be in agreement, affirming the enormous benefit and value of this project to the entire South Central region.

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