

Annual Report 2021-22

Mission

To inspire a community of environmentally active citizens through education, action, and advocacy.

Program Summaries

Community Gardens (Heights, Blow Me Down, Reid and Caribou)

In partnership with the City of Corner Brook we now operate 4 gardens in the city, all of which were full again in 2021. It's great to see the consistent interest in community gardening. Overall it was a positive season, especially because we were able to bring back our work parties after a hiatus in 2020. We had good volunteer turn out at our garden get togethers especially in the spring. We were also grateful to have the Autism Society volunteer in the fall to help out.

Last fall we also started infrastructure work at the new site at Barry Place in Curling. We're working with the City and with Barry Group to develop that garden, and we did some initial work in late 2021 including landscaping and walkways.

Reid Street and Caribou Road gardeners had a fruitful season, although most noticed a decrease in yield – which was a good learning experience for many of them as a reminder to build the soil fertility and add soil amendments each year. We've been able to provide all gardens with compost and fertilizer each year and we encourage all gardeners to use it.

The watering system at Caribou Road created some challenges, but we improved the situation part way through the season. We will assess it again this year to see if we can make it more user friendly. Caribou also received some infrastructure upgrades in the fall which has already greatly contributed to its accessibility and look. We were able to have walkways created around all the beds, as well as a parking area designated with crushed stone. We also had the drainage issue above the garden addressed in order to prevent flooding.

For Reid Street we added five new beds to meet the demand and we also purchased a large water tank that the city fills up for us. This mainly worked well, except for a few times during hot days when the tank was empty and we were waiting for a refill. We also had some minor vandalism at the Reid Garden in the fall, but luckily gardeners seem to have accepted that this will likely regularly happen and is a risk that is inherent to public projects.

The Heights and Blow Me Down Gardens also received walkway upgrades in 2021, and we continued to work on improving the fertility of soil in both gardens. We were able to provide soil amendments and seeds to all gardeners last year. All gardens were supplied with a pile of compost at the end of the season as well, so that they could top up their plots in the fall.

Plans for 2022 include continued upgrades at Caribou Road, potential expansion of the Reid Street garden again, continued work on walkways for Heights and Blow Me Down, and another new garden for Barry Place in Curling.

Food Skills Workshops

We had a fantastic year for workshops in 2021, and overall hosted 37 workshops on various food skills topics. We had funding to support two workshop series: Wild Edible Plants and Greenhouse Gardening for Beginners. We held 10 workshops in the Wild Edibles Series which was very well received by our community as every workshop was filled to capacity. Most workshops were outside in different ecosystems, including coastal, meadow, and woodlands. We received a lot of positive feedback and will continue to do more foraging workshops in future.

Our Greenhouse Series was mainly focused on student sessions at the Immaculate Heart of Mary School Greenhouse. We held about 20 sessions with classes of all ages in spring and fall 2021.

We also held 7 other workshops in our general food skills series including sprouting, kombucha, composting, container gardening, and seed starting.

Plans for 2022 include two more workshop series: Kids & Families Gardening and Traditional Foods. This year is already starting strong and we've held 8 workshops already including a fermenting workshop, microgreens, chaga, seed starting and more.

Community Composting

We expanded our community compost program to Reid Street and Caribou Road in 2021, so we now operate three compost programs in the City. The third program is at the Heights Garden. We were able to put 4 composters at each new site, and set up volunteer teams to maintain the bins. Overall this went really smoothly and we were really happy with the uptake both in compost participants and volunteers. This program was also profiled on CBC's 'From the Ground Up' series.

Each program accommodates 30-40 households, as well as the garden waste from each community garden. Participants simply have to drop off their kitchen scraps to their designated site, and we do the rest.

We have 3-4 volunteers per site that monitor the bins for contaminants, spin the bins, add softwood pellets, sift and harvest the finished compost. The finished compost is available to participants and community gardeners. We had great participation in the first year, and hopefully that will continue in 2022.

Plans for 2022 will be to continue with all three programs and set up a fourth at the new garden site in Curling in late spring. We'll be recruiting participants soon.

Humber Valley Fruit Rescue

The fruit rescue project was set up in 2017 as a community initiative to prevent food waste. Homeowners can contact us if they have fruit they are unable to pick, and we send volunteers to harvest on their property. We provide all the equipment needed and basic training for volunteers. The harvest is divided three ways, between the homeowner, volunteers and charity. WEC will often donate the fruit to various organizations, and in the past have also sold it at local markets.

Over 700lbs of apples, pears, and plums were rescued in our sixth season operating the Fruit Rescue Project. Picks happened in Deer Lake, Humber Village, Little Rapids, Steady Brook and Corner Brook at 11 households. Eight volunteer pickers were involved. Fruit was donated to local food banks, Pasadena Elementary Breakfast Club, Healthy Baby Club, and Pasadena Seniors Village.

Green Drinks Speaker Series

Our Green Drinks Speakers Series features a short talk on a themed environmental question from one academic and one community speaker followed by audience questions in an informal atmosphere at Bootleg Brew Pub on a Wednesday evening.

This speaker series became really popular since we introduced it in the fall of 2018, with a capacity crowd typically in attendance. However, we had to put the series on hold in 2020. Last year in 2021 we contemplated an online event, but the one event we had planned in late April had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.

Early this year we were able to re-schedule that canceled event with the same topic and speakers. The topic was 'How Can NL Plan for a Fossil-Free Future?' with speakers Dr. Angela Carter of the University of Waterloo and Raymond Cusson of the Harris Centre Forecast NL Citizen Forum.

The online event was successful and well attended but we'd really like to do Green Drinks in person again. For 2022, we plan to hire an intern who will organize the series again, hopefully to launch this summer if all goes well!

Membership Program

In 2021 we revamped WEC's membership program as part of our community building and fundraising strategy. Member fees stayed the same (\$15/year), but we brought in more services and member benefits, and improved our member database and communications.

Members continue to access free workshops and voting privileges at our AGM. In addition, they now also get access to:

- all workshop video recordings
- prize draws for eco-friendly products
- input into upcoming WEC projects
- first notification on events, jobs and volunteer opportunities via a monthly update email
- the chance to take part in group buying opportunities for products like seeds, sprouting supplies, and more
- a private members-only Facebook page where resources are posted

The improved member program has been a great success, with member numbers doubling in 2021 over 2020 numbers. We went from 90 members in 2020 to 180 last year. Already in 2022 we've reached the 150 mark, so we're excited we may even beat our numbers from last year.

Public Policy & Consultations

In 2021, we participated in the following ways in public policy:

- **Federal Environment Debate:** We organized an Environment Debate in advance of the federal election in September 2021, as part of the 100 Debates on the Environment Campaign. This was supported by the national organization GreenPAC who helped coordinate events across the country, similarly as they did in 2019 when we also held a local debate.
- **Environment Debate Article:** As a follow up to the debate, one of WEC's board members wrote a comprehensive article for the Indy newspaper with an analysis of each candidate's platforms and performance.
- **Oil and Gas Article:** In September, WEC's executive director was one of the authors of an article calling for a just transition away from the oil and gas industry. The article was featured in local and regional media.
- **People's Recovery NL:** Early in 2021, WEC joined the People's Recovery NL, which was a broad provincial coalition created as an alternative to the Premier's Economic Recovery Team. The People's Recovery NL created its own set of recommendations for economic recovery based on the principles of social, economic and environmental justice which was released as a discussion paper in May 2021.
- **Environmental Policy Innovation Lab:** We are an ongoing partner with the EPI's Policy Innovation Lab. We're assisting as they get this project up and running, and hopefully will see more substantive work happening this year.

Communications

We continued in 2021 with numerous communication tools. We have a website, and a monthly email to subscribers. We are also active on social media, primarily Facebook and Instagram, and produce a print newsletter 2-3 times a year.

In 2021, our main social media platform was Facebook. We have a general WEC Page plus three Facebook Groups – one called Western NL Food Skills where people can share info, questions and resources related to food skills; WEC NL Community Gardens which connects all the gardeners in our 4 gardens; and WECNL Members, which is a private group for members for posting resources and videos.

We increased our Facebook Page Followers by 240 over the past year, and now have over 1200 Page Likes. Our numbers in the Western NL Food Skills Group also jumped from 342 members to 441.

The numbers on our monthly email list continued to grow steadily in 2021. We added about 150 more email subscribers and have now reached 760 subscribers. We also get a great rate of engagement with the monthly email.

In 2021, we also produced two issues of WEC's bi-annual newsletter, containing summaries of projects, our written submissions on various issues, book reviews, sustainability tips, and more. The newsletter was posted on the WEC website, sent to our email list, and distributed at local coffee shops and libraries.