

# The House



River Keepers

The house in Summer 2009.

A house stood on this site for about 50 years. It was first used as a family dwelling and later as a caretaker's house and a meeting space for River Keepers. The house was removed in the summer of 2009.

### The History of the House

The house was built in the 1960s and served as a single family dwelling. The family used the land extensively, planting countless irises and raising sheep, among other activities. Children were raised here and eventually moved out when they grew up. Later the City of Fargo bought the house and the property.

When River Keepers decided to start a Living Laboratory, the City of Fargo helped the project by leasing the land and the house to River Keepers for the cost of one dollar per year. River Keepers then leased the house for a discounted rent in exchange for the tenants' help maintaining the grounds and the house. The tenants occasionally offered

tours of the grounds, and their presence helped to reduce vandalism. Occasionally the tenants were college students who used the experience as part of their academic studies. River Keepers also used the house as a meeting space.

In 2009, the house sustained water damage from seepage coming through a dike built to protect against the spring flood. This was the first dike built on the property.

### Removal of the House

When the house was originally built, it was thought to be above flood levels. Even the flood of 1997 did not require the construction of a dike. However, current knowledge of flood levels conveys that some houses are built in the wrong places despite what people thought at the time of construction. Since River Keepers advocates allowing the Red River to fulfill its natural functions, the need to remove the house was obvious. The house served its residents and users well over the many years, but with current knowledge about flood levels in the Red

River Valley, it became clear that the house no longer belonged here.

Although removing the house was a sad experience for many, its removal was beneficial for a number of reasons. The absence of the house allows the river to periodically fill its flood plain, which is a function of a healthy river system. The site of the house also provides more open space at the Lab, allowing room for another demonstration garden. These demonstration sites help to restore the land to its original form and provide information on how best to restore riparian areas.



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The house in Autumn.



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A class helping tear out the sidewalk in Spring 2009.

The most important benefit of the house removal is that it serves as a teaching tool to everyone who has ever thought about building in areas subject to flooding. Current day settlement patterns often work against the river rather than with it. Businesses and residential areas continue to be built in flood prone areas. Rather than stopping construction in these areas, methods of controlling the river are used instead. In many cases, working with the river by leaving its floodplain open would provide an easier and more natural means of dealing with the regular floods. The removal of the house is an example of respecting the river's natural functioning rather than fighting it.

It is important to use science regarding flood levels to determine house placement. This science can also be used to determine whether a flood damaged house should continue to be repaired or if a better option would be to relocate it elsewhere. While the house that once stood on this site lived a long life and served its users well, the natural functioning of the river provided ample evidence that it should be removed. River Keepers hopes that this action will serve as an example for other structures in similar situations.

