City of Saskatoon ENGAGE

NATURAL AREA MANAGEMENT AND CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLANS

Engagement Report

April 12, 2024

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ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

From October 2022 to October 2023, the City of Saskatoon (City) and our external consultant, WSP, engaged the community in the development of Natural Areas Management Plans and Conceptual Master Plans (Plans) for the two pilot natural areas: Richard St. Barbe Baker and the Small Swale.

We explored the following in developing the Plans:

- **Important site features, species, and attributes**
- **How the sites are currently being used (ex. recreation)**
- **Targets that represent the site for future management**
- **Threats and mitigations to the sites**

Why Are We Doing This Work?

Natural areas make up approximately 14% of the City of Saskatoon's (City) footprint and provide many benefits to our community, such as connecting to nature, providing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and helping manage stormwater. Many of these important areas are not formally protected or managed; therefore, the City is developing the Plans to work towards protecting, managing, and restoring natural areas, such as RSBBAA and the Small Swale, and assets in the Green Network.

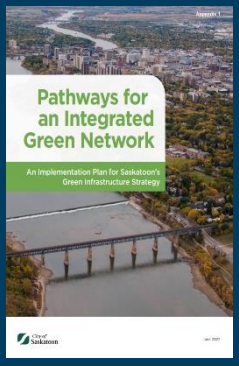
The development of the Plans was supported by the community feedback we received through our *Environmental Awareness Survey (2022)*, the *Saskatoon's Green Infrastructure Strategy* and *Pathways for an Integrated Green Network*, as well as funding support from the Natural Infrastructure Fund.

Using What We Learned

In 2023 the City explored the opportunities, benefits, and challenges of developing Natural Area Management and Conceptual Master Plans for the two pilot sites. Based on what we heard from the community, in addition to best practice research and internal considerations, the City has developed the Plans, which will be presented to City Council in May 2024.

This condensed report outlines the feedback from all activities that informed the engagement goals for the project.

The City of Saskatoon's
Pathways for an Integrated Green Network



Pathways for an Integrated Green Network is the City's implementation plan for the *Green Infrastructure Strategy* and provides the vision for an integrated green network that provides sustainable habitat for people and nature.

WHAT WE DID

The City engaged with various community members through numerous activities.

1.1 Who We Engaged With:

- Communities adjacent to sites
- Educational institutions
- Environmental organizations and groups
- Indigenous organizations, knowledge keepers and Elders
- Land developers and associations
- Utility providers
- Various recreational user groups

1.2 How We Gathered Input:

- Meetings with subject matter experts and key user groups with intimate knowledge of the sites
- Establishing the Natural Areas Working Group (NAWG) from representatives with experience in conservation and land management
- Workshops for community and user groups
- Follow-up information sessions for community and user groups
- Indigenous gathering and knowledge sharing

Questions we asked participants:

- What **features, ecosystems and/or species are important for us to protect**
- How can the City **manage these site attributes** and support their protection?
- **How does the community use the sites** and how can these uses be supported?
- How can we best **balance conservation and public use** at the sites?

WHAT WE HEARD

Management Plan Template

We learned that:

- Members recommended creating a standard management plan template that can generally be applied to any natural area and incorporates adaptive management practises.

- Management plans will have to adapt by reassessing threats and site-specific considerations over time.

- Participants recommended using the Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation due to it being a clear, authenticated processes for evaluating sites, defining conservation targets, and identifying restoration goals.

Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation

Supported by our participants, the Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation are, "a widely adopted set of principles and practices that bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology for conservation project design, management, and monitoring."

Selecting Pilot Sites

Participants helped us to identify:

- The Small Swale was identified as being important, due to the valuable ecosystems services it provides, encroaching developmental pressures, and the availability of baseline biological information about the site.

- RSBBAA was supported as the second pilot site due to the need for balancing the conservation of the site with the variety of user groups and the heightened need for management given the future development within the area

- Future management plans should be developed for Kernen Prairie, the Hudson Bay Swale and the South Saskatchewan River valley

Plans for RSBBAA

We heard that:

- Many participants view the site as a place for both active recreation and enjoying nature, which is celebrated by user groups and the community.

- RSBBAA serves Saskatoon's Southwest-side community as an important destination site, since not many natural areas exist in this area.

- RSBBAA encompasses habitats for many important species and provides many ecosystem services (ex. stormwater management, carbon sequestration, etc.)

- Important conservation targets for the site include forests, wetlands and human health and recreation activities.

Specific Considerations for RSBBAA

Participants provided the following themes for consideration by the project team:

Balance between conservation and site use: many participants stressed the need for balancing conservation with the human-uses for the site

History of the site: the origin and history of the site needs to be shared through education, since it is fundamental to what makes the site important

Off-trail access: it was identified that although most users stay on the trails when visiting the site, users who do not can greatly impact the ecology of the site

Trails: many participants feel that the current trails need to be improved to allow for less maintenance needs and better accessibility; suggestions included making trails that are wider, of a better composition (ex. crusher dust), and more actively maintained

Plans for the Small Swale

We heard that:

- Participants identified the site as having many biological features that are unique to Saskatoon and emphasized the importance of the ecological integrity and diversity of the Small Swale.
- The Small Swale consists primarily of both wetland and grassland habitats, but it also contains micro-habitats that support important species at risk.
- The site faces extreme pressures from current and future development
- Important conservation targets for the site include grasslands, wetlands, and human health.

Specific Considerations

Participants provided the following themes for consideration by the project team:

Buffers: participants identified that having wide buffers between the site and future human development/activities

Connectivity: many participants stressed that connectivity (ex. wildlife movements, hydrology, etc.) is vitally important for the site; this includes the connectivity within the swale, between swales (i.e., Northeast Swale) and to the river valley for wildlife, pollinators and humans

Invasive species: participants stressed the need for onsite invasive species and noxious weed management

Site division: some participants stated that there are large enough ecological differences between the areas North and South of McOrmond Drive to support different management strategies

Other Considerations

From the various comments provided throughout the engagement activities, the following topics were emphasized by participants:

Connectivity: participants emphasized the connectivity of and between natural areas and other green spaces (ex. South Saskatchewan River valley) are vital in allowing for wildlife movements and for the health of the ecosystem

Conservation and development: participants suggested that land development and design are often prioritized over the protection of natural areas; there needs to be a better balance to ensure the protection and needs of the natural area are a priority for the City

Education: educational programming was supported by many participants; suggestions for educational programs included citizen science programs, outdoor classrooms and interpretive programs on the various site features

Information gaps: participants identified that information gaps still exist and need to be addressed when implementing the Plans; some of the information gaps included the local hydrology and water drainage, species composition and diversity, and future development plans

Traditional knowledge: members stressed the need for the Plans to include traditional knowledge and considerations for the site by building relationships with Indigenous advisors;

Support: many participants supported the City's efforts and thanked the City for continuing to engage on this project

NEXT STEPS

The Plans will be presented to City Council in May 2024. For more information about when the program will be presented to City Council, please visit our Engage Page.

We thank all participants who provided their feedback for this and other City of Saskatoon projects.

1 BACKGROUND

Natural areas make up approximately 14% of the City of Saskatoon's (City) footprint and provide many benefits to our community such as connecting to nature, providing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and helping manage stormwater. Many of these important areas are not formally protected or managed; therefore, the City is developing a Natural Areas Program to work towards protecting, managing, and restoring natural areas and assets in the Green Network.

One part of the Natural Areas Program is the development of Natural Areas Management and Conceptual Master Plans (Plans), which define the vision, management objectives, desired service level, and operating and maintenance needs for a natural area. This work was supported by community feedback received through *Saskatoon's Green Infrastructure Strategy* and *Pathways for an Integrated Green Network*, where 96% of participants supported the City in creating natural areas management plans to further protect natural areas within Saskatoon.

From October 2022 to October 2023, the City and its consultant WSP Canada, Inc., engaged site-specific environmental, community and user groups in the development of Plans for two pilot sites: Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (RSBBAA), and the Small Swale. Through meetings, workshops, and information sessions we asked participants:

- What features, ecosystems and/or species are important for us to protect and how can the City support their protection?
- How does the community use the sites and how can these uses be supported?
- How can we best balance conservation and public use at the sites?

Based on the feedback received, in addition to best practice research and internal considerations, WSP and City Administration have developed the Plans for each pilot site, which will be presented to City Council in May 2024.

1.1 Strategic Goals

The Plans align with the *City of Saskatoon 2022-2025 Strategic Plan*; in particular, its goal of ensuring the Green Network is integrated, managed, and enhanced to protect land, air, and water resources. The key actions to achieve this outcome include:

- Implement actions in the *Green Infrastructure Strategy* and *Implementation Plan* within proposed timeframes
- Develop proactive policies, strategies, and practices to ensure the environment is protected from damage and, where possible, ecosystems are enhanced.

1.2 Summary of Engagement Strategy

Participants were provided the opportunity to inform the following engagement goals:

- Identify options for a natural area management plan template, including best practises, impacts, and conservation considerations
- Develop pilot Plans by determining site-specific considerations, including what should be protected and how can the site uses be enhanced while balancing this protection
- Validate the proposed Plans enhance opportunities and limit barriers.

A summary of the participants, level of influence, engagement objectives, engagement goals and engagement activities completed are provided below.

Table 1: Summary of engagement goals

Phase	Participants	Level of Influence	Objective	Engagement Goal	Engagement Activities
1	Natural Areas Working Group (NAWG) Subject Matter Experts	Collaborate	Identify options for management plans and validate the template with conservation experts	Identifying Options	Correspondence Meetings Working Group
2	NAWG Subject Matter Experts User Groups	Collaborate	Develop pilot Plans by determining site-specific considerations	Refining and Piloting	Correspondence Meetings Working Group Workshops
3	NAWG Subject Matter Experts User Groups	Collaborate	Validate the pilot Plans to enhance opportunities and limit barriers	Validating	Correspondence Information Sessions Meetings Working Group

** Correspondence refers to emails, phone calls, and virtual meetings with participants*

A summary of engagement activities, activity dates, intended participants, and number of participants is provided in the table below.

Table 2: Summary of engagement activities

Participants	Activity	Timeframe	Participants
Working Group	Meetings	October 2022 to October 2023	10
User Groups / Subject Matter Experts	Meetings	May to October 2023	47
User Groups / Subject Matter Experts	Workshops	June 2023	51
User Groups / Subject Matter Experts	Information Sessions	September 2023	57
Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers	Gathering	October 2023	45
		Total Participants:	**210**

1.3 Participants

The participants outlined below were identified due to their knowledge, interest in, or their potential to be impacted by the program. Participants are listed below.

1.3.1 User Groups

Those who actively use the siters and/or may be impacted or disproportionately impacted by the Plans, including:

- Activity groups:
  - Cedar Villa Bicycle Trails Inc.
  - Fatlanders Fat Tire Brigade
  - Saskatchewan Orienteering Association
  - Saskatoon Disc Golf
  - Saskatoon Geocaching Association
  - Trail Alliance
- Communities adjacent to the pilot sites
  - Residents of Cedar Villa Estates

- Land developers and associations
  - Saskatoon and Region Home Builders Association
  - Saskatoon Land
- Environmental groups
  - Ducks Unlimited Canada
  - Environment and Climate Change Canada
  - Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation Society
  - Saskatchewan Archeological Society
  - Saskatchewan Environmental Society
  - Saskatchewan Invasive Species Council
  - Saskatoon Heritage Society
  - Saskatoon Nature Society
  - Saskatoon Trail Alliance
  - Saskatoon Wildlife Federation
  - SaskOutdoors
  - SOS Trees
  - Water Security Agency
  - Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Saskatchewan
- Indigenous organizations, knowledge keepers, and Elders
- Utility providers

1.3.2 Subject Matter Experts

Representatives of organizations with experience or knowledge related to natural areas, green spaces and natural areas management plans, including:

- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Saskatchewan Chapter
- Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc.
- Indigenous Leadership Initiative
- Meewasin
- Ministry of the Environment
- Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Parks Canada
- Saskatoon Swalewatchers
- University of Saskatchewan
  - Agriculture and Bioresources
  - Researchers in natural areas and resource management
  - School of Environment and Sustainability
- Wanuskewin Heritage Park Heritage Park
- Wild About Saskatoon

2 ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Participants provided their feedback through meetings, workshops, information sessions, or by contacting the project team directly. All engagement activities are described in detail below.

2.1 Natural Areas Working Group Meetings

In October 2022 the City established the Natural Areas Working Group (NAWG) to provide feedback on the City's Natural Area Program and related initiatives. Consisting of representatives from organizations involved in conservation, environmental advocacy, Indigenous land management, and resource management, the goals of the NAWG are to:

- Review issues brought forward by the community, developers, and City Administration
- Research best practices for addressing issues that have been brought forward
- Propose new processes to address issues that have been brought forward
- Advise the City regarding new development or conservation initiatives that may impact or interface with natural areas.

Three NAWG meetings were held over of the course of the engagement. Also, numerous individual meetings were held with specific members who had more intimate knowledge about the pilot sites.

2.1.1 Intended Audience

Participants included ten representatives from the following organizations:

- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Saskatchewan Chapter
- Indigenous Leadership Initiative
- Meewasin
- Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- University of Saskatchewan
- Wanuskewin Heritage Park
- Wild About Saskatoon

2.1.2 Marketing Techniques

No marketing techniques were employed for these meetings. Representatives were invited to join the NAWG based on their experience in conservation, land management and natural areas around Saskatoon.

2.1.3 Analysis

Comments and results were analyzed using mixed methods. Qualitative methods included a thematic analysis and open coding of responses to identify key themes.

2.1.4 What We Heard

Many of the topics discussed by the NAWG included site-specific and technical information that informed the development of the Plans, as well as best practises for the development of natural areas management plans. General themes discussed during the NAWG meetings included the following topics.

Selection of the Pilot Sites

When presented with the potential pilot sites members identified the Small Swale as being important, due to the valuable ecosystems services it provides, the encroaching development of adjacent neighbourhoods, and the availability of baseline biological information about the site. RSBBAA was supported as the second pilot site due to the need for balancing the conservation of the site with the variety of user groups and the heightened need for management given the future development within the area.

When asked what sites should be considered for future management plans, members suggested that the site selection criteria should include connections to the river, Meewasin lands and Wanuskewin Heritage Park. Other sites proposed for future management plans included Kernen Prairie, the Hudson Bay Swale, and the South Saskatchewan River valley.

Natural Areas Management Plan Template

Members recommended creating a standard management plan template that can generally be applied to any natural area and incorporates adaptive management practises. Since the state of a natural area will change over time, it was identified that the management plans will have to adapt by reassessing threats and site-specific considerations over time. NAWG members suggested that currently available resources for developing management plans, such as the Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation, have clear, authenticated processes of evaluating sites, defining conservation targets and identifying restoration goals with adaptative management built into them. Re-evaluating (i.e., every 5, 10 etc. years) not only allows for more current information about the site to be incorporated into the management plan, but also informs all interested parties of the current and evolving site-specific needs of the natural area.

Other suggestions provided by members included:

Data sources: external data sources, like HABISASK and iNaturalist, can provide valuable information about the biological structure of the site that is vetted by experts

Define goals: set realistic and achievable goals at the onset of a management project; use a degradation scale to determine what is achievable through management, such as restoring a site to its original state or supporting its current ecosystem services

Indicator species: focus on conserving key species and habitat types that represent the site for conservation targets, such as the plains bison for grassland communities

Indigenous collaboration: include Indigenous groups and knowledge at the onset of management, not as an afterthought

Long-term: including long-term monitoring to account for the adaptive nature of the site over time

Partnerships: establish and work with local stewards and site champions throughout the process

Use existing tools and examples: all members supported using proven management plan development tools and resources, such as Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation, for designing the pilot management plans; look to other natural areas as examples, such as Wanuskewin

General Considerations

Other considerations provided by the NAWG throughout the meetings included the following themes:

Broader vision: many members called on the City to include a broader vision when designing a management plan for a site, so that the surrounding landscape and conditions can be incorporated; many ecosystem processes, such as hydrology and nutrient cycling, are impacted by lands outside the site boundaries; one member suggested starting with a management plan to then formulate a common vision for the site

Connectivity: members identified that the City needs to consider the connectivity of natural areas to other green spaces to allow for wildlife movements through habitat corridors; some members suggested the City should consider purchasing land adjacent to natural areas that could be restored and act as green corridors; the City needs to conduct and support further research in locating and protecting active wildlife corridors in Saskatoon

Conservation and development: many members suggested that land development and design are often prioritized over the protection of natural areas; there needs to be a better balance to ensure the protection and needs of the natural area are a priority for the City; a conservation-first lens is needed when planning and developing around natural areas

Define the purpose: some members emphasized that prior to developing a management plan, the City needs to determine why they are protecting a site and what state are they trying to restore it to

Ecological value: some members stressed that the structure and functions of natural areas provide many ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration and stormwater management, which are often overlooked and undervalued

Plan carefully: members emphasized that due to the nature of the development process, if mistakes are made the ecosystem may not have the ability to fully recover or be restored; all current and future development plans should be researched and weighed accordingly when determining how best to manage a natural area

Traditional knowledge: members stressed the need for the Plans to include traditional knowledge and considerations for the site by building relationships with Indigenous advisors; traditional knowledge can provide other ways of thinking for how to protect the land and its inhabitants

2.2 Meetings

Meetings included discussions about the sites, the Plans, and various site-specific considerations. The site-specific and technical information provided during the meetings informed the development of the Plans. Note that a summary of the meetings was not provided in this report due to the information already being captured in other engagement activities or being provided directly to WSP for their consideration.

2.2.1 Intended Audience

Participants included specific Impacted Groups and Subject Matter Experts, including the following:

- Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
- Cedar Villa Bicycle Trails Inc.
- Fatlanders Fat Tire Brigade

- Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc.
- Meewasin
- Meewasin Conservation Advisory Committee
- Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan
- Saskatoon Disc Golf
- Saskatoon Swalewatchers
- Saskatoon Nature Society
- SOS Trees
- University of Saskatchewan
- Wanuskewin Heritage Park
- Wild About Saskatoon

2.2.2 Marketing Techniques

No marketing techniques were employed for these activities. Participants were contacted through an e-invite or emailed directly to organize the meetings.

2.3 Richard St. Barbe Baker Workshop

Select Subject Matter Experts and User Groups with intimate knowledge of the site participated in a full-day workshop to provide their feedback on:

- What is important for the City to consider for the management plan?
- How is the site currently being used, and what are the future opportunities for the site?
- How could the site be enhanced to support people and the species that call it home?

The workshop format and methodology followed the Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation strategic process. Supported by other cities, the NAWG and our Subject Matter Experts, the Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation are, “a widely adopted set of principles and practices that bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology for conservation project design, management, and monitoring.”

Throughout the workshop participants collaborated through table and group discussions to determine the vision for the site, what are the important features/species to protect, the threats to these features/species and how they can be better protected and monitored. Representatives from WSP and the City facilitated the discussions, recorded the feedback from participants and provided additional context when requested.

2.3.1 Intended Audience

A total of 26 representatives of select Subject Matter Experts and User Groups participated, including the following:

- City of Saskatoon
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Fatlanders Fat Tire Brigade
- Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc.
- Meewasin
- Saskatchewan Orienteering Association

- Saskatoon Disc Golf
- Saskatoon Nature Society
- SOS Trees
- Trail Alliance
- University of Saskatchewan

2.3.2 Marketing Techniques

Participants were contacted through an e-invite or emailed directly.

2.3.3 Analysis

The notes and table summaries collected during the workshop were provided to WSP and the City project team in consideration for the development of the Plans. All feedback was analyzed using mixed methods. Qualitative methods included a thematic analysis and open coding of responses to identify key themes.

2.3.4 What We Heard

Both WSP and the City were provided with a wealth of valuable information and feedback from participants during the workshop. Much of this information was technical or detailed in nature, such as the ecology, history and community uses for the site. Although all the information provided was considered and/or included in the development of the Plans, for the purposes of this report the sections below provide an overview of what we heard.

Current State of the Site

Many participants view the site as a place for both active recreation and enjoying nature, which is celebrated by user groups and the community. RSBBAA is an important destination to residents of Saskatoon's southwest, especially since not many natural areas exist in this area. Participants identified that community members visit the site due to it being a short drive away, being easily walkable via the existing trails, and it offering a variety of recreational activities (ex. dog park, bike trails, etc.). The currently known uses for the site that were identified included:

- Citizen science
- Cycling, including fat tire, Skills (BMX), and informal biking
- Disc golfing (informal)
- Dog sledding
- Dog walking and use of the onsite dog park
- Educational programming, supporting place-based education and outdoor learning for all ages
- Geocaching
- Orienteering
- Passive recreation, such as walking/hiking
- Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing
- Training, such as search and rescue

Participants identified the ecological importance of RSBBAA in encompassing habitats (ex. wetlands, forests, riparian areas, etc.) for many important species and in providing many ecosystem services (ex. stormwater management, carbon sequestration, etc.). Up to 36 species at risk have been found onsite and numerous community-led citizen science programs are providing more

information about the site every year. There is a gradient of habitat composition onsite, with the West side consisting of more micro-habitats and the East side being more uniform. The forests, being one of the main reasons to visit the site, separate into two distinct habitat types: 1) scotch pines to the West, and 2) poplar and blue spruce to the East. However, participants also identified that the site is changing, becoming more biologically diverse and naturalized as new trees are being established (ex. boreal forest trees).

Site Opportunities

Opportunities for the site that were identified by participants included:

Balance between conservation and site use: many of the participants stressed the need for balancing conservation with the human-uses for the site; over the last decade there is more support and collaboration between the onsite interested parties; this open communication has been beneficial for the site and needs to continue through strengthening relationships between users

Dark sky potential: due to being outside of the city, the site could be a valuable habitat for nocturnal wildlife and dark sky viewing

Disc golfing: representatives from Saskatoon Disc Golf identified the site as being a good location for a new beginner disc golf course; some participants expressed their concern for the potential impacts disc golfing could have on the surrounding trees and wildlife; however, representatives believed the impacts would be limited and that users would support onsite conservation practises while also deterring more illicit activities

Education: due to the rich history and story of the site, educational programming was supported by many participants; suggestions for educational programs included interpretive signs, citizen science (ex. bioblitzes), outdoor classrooms and using QR codes to tell the history of the site; having a greater presence onsite could also improve passive enforcement

Formal protection: participants encouraged the City to include RSBBAA in their naturalized park programming or the Green Network; another participant called on Meewasin to include it within their conservation zone or future National Urban Park area

Harvesting: some participants identified that numerous native plants can be found onsite that could be harvested for food or traditional uses; incorporating food forests and pollinator gardens onsite could provide opportunities for education and address food security, while also supporting the history of the site

Improving access: participants suggested improvements to the site should be made to increase access to the site via active transportation; this could be done by developing trails out to the site

Parking: some participants identified the need for additional onsite parking, since most visitors need to drive to the site

Site Barriers and Improvements

Participants identified numerous barriers or improvements for the site, which were summarized into the following themes:

Information gaps: participants identified that although much is known about how the site is used, information gaps still exist and need to be addressed when implementing the Plans; some of the information gaps included the local hydrology and water drainage (i.e., from the West Swale to the

South Saskatchewan River), Indigenous traditional knowledge about the site, plant species composition, future development plans (ex. Riel Industrial Sector Plan) and the current state/health of the forest

Invasives species: participants stressed the need for onsite invasive species and noxious weed management; some species identified included European buckthorn, smooth brome and caragana

Maintenance and enforcement: some participants identified that garbage and illegal dumping are a consistent onsite issue; participants suggested that often illicit activities are not followed up on due to confusion surrounding who oversees onsite enforcement; additional resources are needed for garbage removal, maintaining fencing and regular site enforcement

Off-trail access: it was identified that although most users stay on the trails when visiting the site, users who do not can greatly impact the ecology of the site; some examples included onsite motor vehicles (i.e., cars, snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, etc.), BMX bicycles, and off-leash dogs

Trails: many participants feel that the current trails need to be improved to allow for less maintenance needs and better accessibility; suggestions included making trails that are wider, of a better composition (ex. crusher dust), and more actively maintained; some participants noted that cycling can greatly impact the trails, however cycling user groups have made significant improvements to the trails to support their continued use and limit degradation when possible

Utility corridors and railway lines: the SaskPower and SaskEnergy utility lines dissect the property, providing wildlife corridors that need restoration; the Northeast railway line limits access to the site, potentially introduces contaminants and presents the risk of wildfire; participants suggested collaborating with the utilities to inform them of the Plans and partner on solutions

Targets

Following the discussions above and the Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation strategic process, participants were tasked with identifying the targets (i.e., conservation or human well-being) that would build the framework for the site management plan. First participants were provided a list of potential targets that were developed by the project team. Then they were asked to identify any potential targets that were missing. Finally, participants prioritized the targets through discussions and voted on the three key targets to be discussed for the remainder of the workshop. The following table shows the outcome of this exercise:

Table 3: Ranking of RSBBAA targets

Priority	Potential Targets
High	• **Forests** • **Wetlands** • **Human health and recreation** • Education • Grasslands (naturalized or restored)
Medium	• Connectivity, access and accessibility • Canopy preservation • Culture, heritage and history • Ecological diversity • Enforcement • Maintenance • Restoration/remediation • Species at risk (ex. bats, yellow lady slipper, northern leopard frog, etc.)
Low	• Action plan for invasive and unwanted species (ex. wild boar) • Access and connections to other trails • Grasslands • Illicit activities (ex. hunting, vandalism, etc.) and enforcement • Learning from the land and placed-based learning • Safety • Wildlife management

Following the discussions, the participants collectively selected forests, wetlands and human health as the most important targets for the site. This combination of conservation and human well-being targets allowed participants to continue to discuss the balance between conservation and site uses.

Threats and Mitigations

Participants were asked to identify and prioritize the site-specific threats to each of the three targets (i.e., forests, wetlands, and human health) identified earlier. Following this, participants then provided suggestions for mitigation measures for each of the proposed threats. The identified threats and mitigation measures are summarized in the table below (Table 4).

Table 4: RSBBAA threats and mitigations

Target	Importance	Threats	Mitigations
Forests	High	• Climate change and drought • Fires (ex. wildfires, smoking, trains, etc.) • Improper trail use, such as going off trails • No funding • No management nor maintenance of site • Off-leash dogs outside of the dog park	• Include adaptative management strategies within the management plan • Use controlled burns when possible and educate about fire safety • Use bylaws, signage and stewards to explain/enforce staying on trails • Acquire consistent funding for the Plans and their future implementation • Create a management plan that incorporates ongoing maintenance • Use engaging signage the delivers messaging in plain language
	Medium	• Insects and disease • Invasive species • Limiting wildlife movements and connectivity • Overharvesting	• Monitoring program that assess trees on a regular basis (i.e., annually) • Conduct a species distribution assessment to determine the locations and impacts of invasive species • Monitor and assess current wildlife movements to determine corridor enhancements • Test harvesting in experimental/pilot areas first to determine optimal harvesting practices
	Low	• Light and noise pollution • Operations of utilities and railway • Snow management facility impacts • Unclear and uncontrolled site uses	• Address with education, bylaws and enforcement • Enrich right-of-ways and utility corridors with native species and partner with adjacent landowners • More information is needed on the potential impacts • Create community stewards with user groups for passive enforcement
Wetlands	High	• Impacts to the hydrology and natural flow of water • Impacts of humans (ex. ATVs, bikes, off-leash dogs etc.) on riparian areas • Invasive species • Limiting wildlife movements and connectivity	• Study local hydrology to understand the flow and maintain the Chappell Marsh culvert • Create buffers, enforce through bylaws, manage access to wetlands and educate through signage and passive enforcement • Monitor for early detection (ex. citizen science) and have an invasives species plan • Create buffers/fencing for corridors and study their locations (ex. UWIN)
	Medium	• Impacts to water quality from railway, farmland and other sources • Climate change and drought • Ecological succession and impacts to species at risk • Impacts of stormwater management (ex. water levels in the West Swale)	• Test water quality regularly and determine impacts from sources • Determine the impacts of climate change to determine mitigations • Map the species distributions onsite to determine next steps • More information is needed

	Low	• Light and noise pollution • Overharvesting wild and native species	• Determine baseline data on current light and noise pollution • Catalogue species and their distributions across the site to monitor
Human Health	**High**	• Impacts of human access/intrusions and disturbance (ex. vandalism, illicit activities) • Pollution (i.e., garbage, light, noise, dog feces, illegal dumping etc.)	• Engage the community in being stewards for the site • Support passive enforcement through stewardship efforts
	Medium	• Invasive species • Impacts of surrounding land development	• Active monitoring and management • More information is needed
	Low	• Natural system modification	• None identified

Other Considerations

When asked what about the site is important for the project team to consider when development the Plans, participants provided the following themes:

Connectivity: it was identified that the connectivity of the landscape is important to consider, especially from the West Swale to the South Saskatchewan River; this includes accounting and monitoring the connectivity of the local hydrology, seed transfer/pollination and wildlife movements

History of the site: the origin and history of the site needs to be shared through education, since it is fundamental to what makes the site important

Trails: the trails are vitally important to the site, allowing visitors to experience and access the numerous features; regular trail maintenance has greatly improved the area, although secondary dirt trails can still encourage off-trail use

Wildlife: the site is an important habitat for birds, native plants/trees and pollinators; few mammals are found onsite, most likely due to the more active use of the site (ex. dog walking, biking, etc.); numerous species at risk have been found onsite and regular further monitoring

2.4 Small Swale Workshop

Similar to the workshop for RSBBAA, select Subject Matter Experts and User Groups with intimate knowledge of the Small Swale were invited for a full-day workshop to gain their feedback on:

- What is important for the City to consider for the management plan?
- How is the site currently being used, and what are the future opportunities for the site?
- How could the site be enhanced to support people and the species that call it home?

The workshop format and methodology followed the same Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation strategic process and format as described above. Representatives from WSP and the City facilitated the discussions, acted as notetakers and provided additional context when requested.

2.4.1 Intended Audience

A total of 25 representatives of select Subject Matter Experts and User Groups participated, including the following:

- City of Saskatoon
- Ducks Unlimited Canada
- Meewasin
- Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Environmental Society
- Saskatoon Land
- Saskatoon Nature Society
- Saskatoon Swalewatchers
- Saskatoon Wildlife Federation
- University of Saskatchewan
- Wanuskewin Heritage Park

- Wild About Saskatoon

2.4.2 Marketing Techniques

Participants were contacted through an e-invite or emailed directly.

2.4.3 Analysis

The notes and table summaries collected during the workshop were provided to WSP and the City project team in consideration for the development of the Plans. All feedback was analyzed using mixed methods. Qualitative methods included a thematic analysis and open coding of responses to identify key themes.

2.4.4 What We Heard

WSP and the City were provided with a wealth of valuable information and feedback from participants during the workshop. Much of this information was more technical or detailed in nature, such as the ecology and past monitoring efforts at the site. Although all the information provided was considered and/or included in the development of the Plans, for the purposes of this report the sections below provide an overview of what we heard.

Current State of the Site

Participants emphasized the importance of the ecological integrity and diversity of the site, with one participant identifying that the natural asset valuation project noted the Small Swale as being of highest value to the community due to the many ecosystem services it provides, species at risk it includes, and biological diversity it encompasses. Consisting of primarily both wetland and grassland habitats, participants identified that the Small Swale contains many micro-habitats, such as fescue grasslands. There are areas of high-quality native grasslands that are adjacent to highly disturbed, non-native grassland areas; however, both types act as important habitat and provide valuable ecosystem services. Participants noted that areas identified as “unhealthy” could be managed, enhanced and/or restored with active management, time, and proper funding.

Participants identified the site as having biological features that are unique to Saskatoon. The diversity of native plants found onsite, such as sweet grass, hold cultural connections to the community and Indigenous people, as well as provide potential sources for traditional harvesting and knowledge. Rare plants, such as crowfoot violet and marsh felwort, are scattered throughout the site. The Small Swale is actively used by breeding birds (ex. sharp tailed grouse), amphibians (ex. tiger salamanders, northern leopard frogs, etc.), reptiles, and numerous mammals (ex. deer, moose, badger, etc.), with some identified as species at risk. The site also contains many valuable site features, such as bison rubbing stones and archeological sites.

Participants identified that access to the site by the community is currently limited, with most users being naturalists and walkers.

Site Opportunities

Opportunities for the site that were identified by participants included:

Buffers: participants identified that having wide buffers between the site and future human development/activities, such as using native plants in the greenways between the site and residential areas, allow for the site to be more resilient to environmental stressors (ex. invasive species, pollution, etc.); participants stressed the importance of using the pre-defined buffer sizes for species at risk; some participants suggested using wildlife-friendly fencing to limit human disturbance and illicit activities onsite

Connectivity: many participants stressed that connectivity (ex. wildlife movements, hydrology, etc.) is vitally important for the site; this includes the connectivity within the swale, between swales (i.e., Northeast Swale) and to the river valley for wildlife, pollinators and humans; participants emphasized that maintaining a connection to the river and the Northeast Swale (i.e., across McOrmond Road) is essential; it is also important for the project team to consider potential connections to existing trails and public access; some participants provided suggestions for future corridor locations on the maps provided during the workshop

Education: educational programming was supported by participants; suggestions for educational programs included citizen science programs, outdoor classrooms, and interpretive programs on the various site features (i.e., ecological, paleontological, heritage, etc.)

Formal protection: participants encouraged the City to include the Small Swale in their naturalized park inventory and Green Network; participants called on Meewasin to include the site within their conservation zone and future National Urban Park

History of the site: the origin and history of the site needs further research; traditional uses and knowledge of the site are an important piece in better understanding the Indigenous connections to the Small Swale; we also lack an understanding of the history of the site, such as the locations of heritage sites, (ex. the Moosewood trail and campsites), paleontological research and archeological research

Partnerships: some participants suggested that the City should partner with local conservation organizations, such as Ducks Unlimited Canada and Meewasin, in conserving and managing the site; partnering with environmental and community-based organizations to collect data through citizen science was supported by participants

Recreational opportunities: participants identified that the site is currently not being used for recreational purposes, but low-impact passive recreation would be supported in disturbed/designated areas; participants stressed that recreational activities should not occur areas with high-quality habitat; participants emphasized that this site should not include opportunities or centres for active recreation (ex. sports fields)

Traditional harvesting: some participants identified that numerous native plants can be found onsite that could be harvested for traditional use; one participant suggested that site could be used for Indigenous ceremonies

Site Barriers and Improvements

Participants identified numerous barriers or improvements for the site, which were summarized into the following themes:

Development pressures: many participants stressed that the site is under extreme threat from the current and future development plans around the Small Swale; the Saskatoon Freeway project and University Heights 3 Neighbourhood Concept Plan were identified by many as major threats to the ecological integrity of the site; roadways that cut through the site greatly limits the connectivity for the wildlife; participants encouraged the City to apply the lessons learned from the Northeast Swale to the Small Swale

Information gaps: participants identified that numerous information gaps exist and need to be addressed when implementing the Plans; some of the information gaps identified by participants included the local hydrology (both surface and ground water), Indigenous traditional knowledge about the site, future development plans (i.e., University Heights 3 Neighbourhood, the Saskatoon Freeway project), the location of active wildlife corridors, and a full classification of the existing habitats onsite

Invasive species: participants stressed the need for onsite invasive species and noxious weed management; some species identified included European buckthorn and smooth brome

Light and noise pollution: participants identified that due to the site's proximity to the city, both light and noise pollution are already negatively impacting the site (ex. impacting bird calls); future development and construction will only further these negative impacts

Maintenance and enforcement: some participants identified that garbage and illegal dumping are a consistent onsite issue

Parking: onsite parking is currently limited and not monitored, leading to safety concerns

Site division: some participants stated that there are large enough ecological differences between the areas North and South of McOrmond Drive to support different management strategies; both species diversity and habitat quality are much higher in areas North of McOrmond Drive, thus supporting the greater need for conservation in this area; some felt that recreational activities and greater human access should be focused in the South where disturbance is greater

Snow dump: some participants identified the City's snow dump as a gateway for the introduction of contaminants and invasive species within the site; participants suggested there may be opportunities to remediate the snow dump as a more natural stormwater feature, however more research was needed; one participant suggested repurposing the snow dump for another use, such as an off-leash dog park

Targets

Following the discussions above and the Open Standards for the Practise of Conservation strategic process, participants were tasked with identifying the targets (i.e., conservation or human well-being) that would build the framework for the site management plan. First participants were provided a list of potential targets that were developed by the project team. Then they were asked to identify any potential targets that were missing from this list. Finally, participants prioritized the targets through discussions and voted for the three key targets to be discussed for the remainder of the workshop. The following table shows the outcome of this exercise:

Table 5: Ranking of Small Swale targets

Priority	Potential Targets
High	• **Grasslands (both native and modified)** • **Wetlands** • **Human health** • Connectivity • Ecological integrity • Education
Medium	• Connectivity • Culture, heritage and history • Ecological diversity and abundance • Ecosystem services • Northern leopard frog • Species at risk, rare species and culturally significant species
Low	• Access and connections to other trails • Crowfoot violet • Illicit activities (ex. dumping) and enforcement • Marsh felwort • Passive recreation and use • Riparian forests • Rough fescue

Following the discussions, the participants collectively chose grasslands, wetlands and human health as the most important targets for the site.

Threats and Mitigations

Participants were asked to identify and prioritize the site-specific threats to each of the three targets (i.e., grasslands, wetlands and human health) identified earlier. Following this, participants then provided suggestions for mitigation measures for each of the proposed threats. The identified threats and mitigation measures are summarized in the table below (Table 6).

Table 6: Small Swale threats and mitigations

Target	Importance	Threats	Mitigations
Grasslands	**High**	• Human intrusions and disturbance (ex. unwanted activities, off trail access, etc.) • Natural systems modification (ex. lack of grazing and controlled burns) • Invasive and problematic species	• Proper funding for management and education for adjacent landowners • Use appropriately-sized buffers and design neighbourhoods that support active management • Implement and enforce bylaws for planting invasive species
	Medium	• Pollution (ex. stormwater runoff, snow dump, pesticides, etc.) • Residential development • Transportation and service corridors (ex. Saskatoon freeway, Central Avenue)	• More research is needed to determine potential impacts to the site • Educate owners/developers and build in conservation easements and restrictions (ex. dark sky lighting) for adjacent property owners • Change the alignment of the freeway, decommission unneeded roadways and enforce speed limits that support wildlife movements
	Low	• Climate change	• More research is needed
Wetlands	**High**	• Impacts of the snow dump on water quality and contaminants • Runoff from developments • Invasive species	• Contain the contaminants, monitor water quality and find a new site • Update the stormwater plan, create minimum water quality standards and educate property owners • Monitor and actively remove invasive species
	Medium	• Overuse and disturbance • Impacts to local hydrology • Habitat degradation	• Focus human activities and access to south of McOrmond Dr. and expand north • More research is needed on the water quality and local hydrology • Mimic natural disturbances, such as controlled burns and grazing
	Low	• Impacts of utility corridors • Impacts of roadways to air quality	• None identified • None identified
Human Wellbeing	**High**	• Impacts of development and roadways (ex. UH3, Saskatoon freeway) • Pollution (ex. light and noise pollution, contaminants, etc.) • Limiting cultural practises	• Engage the community in stewardship for the site and support visitors • Bylaw enforcement and monitor contaminants • Establishing partnerships and working closely with the community

	Medium	• Lack of information on potential impacts to human health • Invasive species • Limited access and accessibility	• More research is needed • Educating adjacent property owners about what they should not plant • Focus human activities in defined areas and follow accessibility standards
	Low	• Irresponsible and unwanted recreational activities • Safety (ex. animal and human interactions)	• Incorporate appropriate buffers • Educating users through signage on how to respect the site and what to report

2.5 Richard St. Barbe Baker Information Session

A virtual information session was held on September 19, 2023 for Subject Matter Experts and User Groups. During the information session representatives from WSP and the City's project team presented the draft Plans and answer questions from the participants in attendance. The information session was held virtually via Microsoft Teams and consisted of a 30-minute presentation, followed by a 60-minute question and answer period via Pigeonhole Live.

2.5.1 Intended Audience

All applicable Subject Matter Experts and User Groups were invited to the information session. A total of 35 participants attended the event.

2.5.2 Marketing Techniques

The following marketing techniques were used for the event:

1. City Website
    a. Updates to the Engage Page were made to encourage participation
2. E-invites
    a. Personalized emails were sent to participants asking them to share the e-invite with their members and other interested parties
    b. The adjacent community associations were provided the e-invite to be sent to their memberships
3. Printable Poster
    a. An 8.5" x 11" printable poster was sent to the community associations to be posted on the community boards.

2.5.3 Analysis

The results were analyzed using qualitative methods, including the thematic analysis and open coding of responses.

2.5.4 What We Heard

Considerations provided by participants during the event included the following themes:

Connectivity: one participant called on the project team to develop corridors to enhance wildlife movements onsite

Disc Golf: representatives from the disc golf community emphasized that, although not currently included, the addition of a disc golf course could further encourage the use of the site while also promoting active recreation in Saskatoon. Participants identified that they have been looking for a site for many years and felt that RSBBAA would be an ideal location for a disc golf course, since one of the goals of the sport was to work with the land. Other feedback received indicated there was a concern that disc golf would damage trees, and that a formal disc golf course could not be supported by current parking availability.

Fire: a participant from the surrounding community expressed their concern for wildfire within the site and stressed the need for signage and greater enforcement for public fires; another participant expressed their interested in using the site for ceremonies and emphasized the need to educate the surrounding community about ceremonial fires

Forest management: some participants called for better management of the forested areas, especially areas with greater scotch pine, caragana and blue spruce; participants would prefer to see more native species planted onsite

Impacts of dogs onsite: one participant felt that the presence of deer and other wildlife has decreased since the introduction of the off-leash dog park to the area; another participant expressed their concern for the lack of signage around the current dog park, since users should be made aware of the expectations for dogs and their owners; other participants identified that off-leash dogs have been a consistent issue for the site

Mountain biking: one participant suggested that the site has great potential for mountain biking and encouraged the project team to consider some minor modifications to make the site more accessible to these users

Support: many participants stated that they support the Plans and the efforts taken by the City to enhance and better protect the site

"I agree, thanks to the city and to WSP, amazing work."

Trails: the Plans needs to account for how we can discourage users going off the existing trails to limit damage to new seedlings and vegetation; one participant asked how can we better protect sensitive species in high traffic areas/trails

Wetlands: participants thanked the project team for changing the location of the docks to the east side of the wetlands to better support shorebirds in the area; one participant asked if the trails that are close to the wetlands can be moved further away to allow for a large buffer for the riparian area

2.6 Small Swale Information Session

A virtual information session was held on September 21, 2023 for applicable Subject Matter Experts and User Groups. The format and logistics for the information session were the same as the RSBBAA Information Session described above.

2.6.1 Intended Audience

All applicable Subject Matter Experts and User Groups were invited to the information session. A total of 22 participants attended the event.

2.6.2 Marketing Techniques

The following marketing techniques were used for the event:

1. City Website
    a. Updates to the Engage Page were made to encourage participation
2. E-invites
    a. Personalized emails were sent to participants asking them to share the e-invite with their members and other interested parties

2.6.3 Analysis

The results were analyzed using qualitative methods, including the thematic analysis and open coding of responses.

2.6.4 What We Heard

Considerations provided by participants during the event included the following themes:

City limits: one participant called on the City to purchase and plan for incorporating the lands north of the Small Swale into the Plans to allow for future expansion of the site

Connectivity: participants stressed the importance of connectivity between the Small and Northeast Swales; one participant asked whether connectivity could be restored at the portion of McOrmond Drive that intersects the Swales, as well as along Central Avenue; another participant suggested removing the parking lot between the Small Swale and Peggy McKercher Conservation Area to improve the connectivity to the river valley

> *"The small swale management area seem truncated at both ends. The swale is a complete system system that starts on the west end at river and continues well north if you limits. Why?"*

Illicit uses: one participant asked how the Plan will deter illicit uses of the site, such as illegal dumping; another participant suggested that having washrooms available in more isolated areas may encourage unwanted behaviours and the need for increased maintenance, therefore having either temporary washrooms or placing them near the gathering space was preferred

Lighting: participants supported implementing dark sky standards into the Plans, asking whether adjacent property owners could adhere to dark sky standards for outdoor lighting; another participant asked whether artificial lighting was needed onsite, suggesting that the site could be accessed from dawn to dusk like other natural areas (ex. Cranberry Flats) and be dark-sky compliant

Restoration: participants called on the City to prioritize restoring the damaged grasslands at the snow dump, which would require soil testing and treatment measures; another participant suggested that stormwater ponds often require excavation and replanting, so the Plan should account for future restoration in these areas

Support: participants thanked the City for continuing to engage on this project and for the work being done

Trail substrate: many participants stated that they would prefer switching from using hard-surfaced trails to more natural, mowed trails; participants felt that although they preferred the use of crusher dust to asphalt, mowed trails have been proven to work at the Northeast Swale and establish better connections to the land for visitors

> *"The plan calls for hard-surfaced trails. Walking on the Earth helps us feel our connection with the land and the rest of life. Couldn't we please have natural trails?"*

2.7 Elders and Knowledge Keepers Gathering on Land, Culture, and Wellness

In 2023, the City worked with multiple partners including Meewasin to engage with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers on topics related to caring for the land and cultural revitalization. On October 11 and 12, 2023, a gathering of Elders and Knowledge Keepers took place at the Saskatoon Wildlife Foundation. The event was hosted by Meewasin and supported by the City and other community partners.

The gathering included a fire ceremony and discussions on four main themes:

- Urban Cultural Spaces
- Traditional Knowledge and Stories
- Traditional Plants and Uses
- Natural Areas and Green Spaces

This engagement was part of a larger initiative that multiple organizations are undertaking to build relationships with Indigenous organizations and rightsholders, Elders and knowledge keepers, and communities. The gathering was a starting place for further dialogue, but further work is needed to build relationships, engage with communities in a meaningful and authentic way, and thoughtfully incorporate what is heard into applicable projects.

2.7.1 Intended Audience

Over 45 Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and katayak participated in the event, as well as 25 helpers from the Let's Lead Nikanetan program at Westmount Elementary School and numerous staff from Meewasin and the City.

2.7.2 Marketing Techniques

Marketing for the event was led by Meewasin and Medicine Rope Strategies.

2.7.3 Analysis

The results were analyzed by Medicine Rope Strategies and validated by the participants using qualitative methods, including the thematic analysis and open coding of responses.

2.7.4 What We Heard

The final engagement summary for the event is being finalized with Medicine Rope Strategies and Elders who were present at the event. If appropriate, the summary may be shared with a wider audience.

EVALUATION OF ENGAGEMENT

Evaluation is discussed in terms of feedback received during engagement activities and through informal comments, data limitations and opportunities for improvement.

2.8 Informal Feedback

Informal feedback was received through meetings and the workshop, where participants indicated that they appreciated being engaged in the project. Some participants expressed their support for the City collaborating with community and user groups in the decision-making process and for engaging with a diversity of community members on this project.

> *"… I am very encouraged by this draft. You are listening carefully in a way that clarifies and simplifies your proposal. Thank you!"*

2.9 Data Limitations

We recognize that some community members may not have been able to fully participate in the engagement activities conducted; however, the results are considered to provide the best available indication of how the community perceives the Plans and considerations at this time.

2.10 Opportunities for Improvement

Based on participant feedback, the following opportunities for improvement will be considered for future engagement activities:

- Any written or verbal information uses plain language and easy-to-understand terms
- Considerations for engaging with Indigenous knowledge keepers and Elders with intimate knowledge of the sites needs to be incorporated into future engagement opportunities.

3 NEXT STEPS

The Plans will be presented to Committee and City Council in May 2024. We thank all participants who provided their feedback for this and other City of Saskatoon projects.