

Natural Area Management Plans

(Restoring Natural Areas for Community, Reconciliation, and Habitat)

Project Definition

This project will create and implement Management and Restoration Plans for high priority natural areas that are currently degraded, facing incompatible land uses, and lack infrastructure for community use. The Management and Restoration Plans will define site specific management techniques that include land protection, conservation, restoration, interpretation, and education, as well as use the City's asset management framework to define services provided by natural areas and set levels of service.

This project will implement early priority restoration work that will improve ecosystem function and community access. A concurrent Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment will identify cultural and ceremonial features to be incorporated into these sites to provide space for ceremony, community building, access to nature, and traditional foods and medicines.

This project will achieve multiple outcomes and co-benefits, including:

1. **Improving or reinventing outdoor spaces.** The natural areas proposed are currently undesignated, unmanaged, or contaminated. There is significant community interest in restoring these sites as natural areas that the community can access and for improved ecological function.
2. **Reducing environmental impacts.** The natural areas currently are degraded by contamination, lack of management, and incompatible uses such as illegal dumping. Managing these spaces will reduce these environmental impacts and restoration will improve the ability of the sites to sequester carbon and manage storm water.
3. **Increasing accessibility to public spaces.** The natural areas currently have limited public accessibility. Managing these sites and incorporating community and cultural features will formalize community uses and allow a greater number of residents to access these spaces.
4. **Helping communities rebound from the effects of the pandemic.** Community feedback and green spaces usage data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic reflected a need for improved access to natural areas. Improving the conditions of and access to the proposed natural areas will meet these outcomes.
5. **Demonstrating measurable direct or indirect socio-economic benefits.** A Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment that includes engagement with Elders and Knowledge Keepers will provide recommendations for how natural areas management can meaningfully incorporate cultural considerations and remove barriers to accessing natural areas. The outcomes are anticipated to directly contribute to the City's work on the following Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action:

- #47 - Reform laws and policies based on European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, through a new approach to Natural Areas Management Plan development and implementation that removes barriers to access and creates opportunities for stewardship.
- #79 - Participate in a strategy to commemorate Aboriginal peoples' history and contributions to Canada, through interpretation at the sites grounded in the Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment's results.

Local economic benefit will be realized through working with community-based project delivery partners, including Meewasin and an Indigenous-led organization for the Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment.

6. **Encourage the participation of underrepresented groups.** Structurally excluded groups and their community organizations such as wheelchair users, racialized communities, and poverty reduction advocates will be included in management planning and site improvements to reduce barriers to accessing natural spaces, and add cultural features that makes the site feel welcoming to all community members.

Scope and Budget (Program Ask and How City Portion is Funded)

The City's contribution is funded from Capital Project 2263 – Watershed Management and Assessment Program and recommended allocation from the Sustainability Reserve.

Item	Scope	Budget – Ask	Budget – City Contribution
Natural Area Management and Restoration	Complete early restoration and management work at two natural areas based on preliminary results from concurrent management plans.	\$360,000	\$240,000
Traditional Knowledge Implementation	Implementation of early recommendations from a Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment	\$390,000	\$225,000
TOTAL		\$750,000	\$465,000

Evaluation Criteria Alignment

This project demonstrates alignment with the funding application as follows:

Project Rationale Meets One of the Project Priorities (choose one or more)

Revitalize Downtown Core and Main Streets

- No. Project delivery will take place in natural areas.

Reinvent Outdoor Spaces

- Yes. Natural areas that are unmanaged are degrading or contaminated, which can provide a risk to both the community safety and ecosystems. For example, several priority natural areas currently have illegal dumping occurring. Increasing management to these sites will help ensure these risks are reduced or eliminated and begin transforming them into vibrant natural areas that provide amenities to the community while restoring ecosystem functions.

Create Green Infrastructure

- Yes. This project will support the revitalization of high priority natural areas, a significant type of green infrastructure in the City.
- The project also implements Actions in the Green Infrastructure Strategy such as “Action 12: Protect, restore, and manage significant natural areas.”

Increase the Accessibility of Community Spaces

- Yes. This project will allow and formalize community uses of natural areas that are currently inaccessible (either due to contamination/development restrictions, or because the site is currently undesignated). Site design will include accessibility considerations such as universally accessible trails, and cultural considerations such as ceremonial spaces.

Outcomes

Briefly describe the socio-economic benefits associated with this project.

- Managed natural areas are not evenly distributed throughout the City. Increasing management of currently degraded and undesignated natural areas will improve citizen access to natural areas and make these spaces accessible to a larger number of residents.
- This project will be incorporating Indigenous perspectives into Natural Area Management as an important step in respecting our Treaty relationships and acknowledging the relationship between Indigenous people and this land. Concurrent to the management plans, a Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment is planned to start in 2022 and will help the City and community understand the traditional, cultural, historic, and spiritual importance of natural areas. Early results relevant to specific natural areas will be incorporated and implemented, such as development of ceremonial spaces at natural areas.
- Local economic benefit will be realized through working with community-based project delivery partners, including Meewasin and an Indigenous-led organization for the Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment.

Does the project promote environmental benefits?

- Yes. This project supports sustainable land use by reducing development on natural areas, promotes ecosystem health by protecting and enhancing nature and greenspace in our city, preserve the integrity of wetland and watershed as well as the surrounding buffer lands. It will also enhance the carbon sequestration and climate resiliency of the City’s Green Network. The project will also reduce and mitigate ongoing contamination issues at several natural areas.

Does the project allow more people to use the space?

- Yes. The sites proposed are currently undesignated and are not formally accessible to the community. Implementing management plans will allow community members to access and enjoy these spaces and provide a greater number of residents with access to nature. Incorporation of ceremonial spaces and other cultural considerations will help these spaces become safer and welcoming to all community members.

Project Readiness

Provides a responsible budget including clear costing, procurement decisions and equity considerations.

Item	Description	Cost
Salaries for staff in Sustainability and Planning for management plan template development and policy work.	Sustainability staff will provide project management and subject matter expertise (estimated at \$135,000). Planning staff will complete background planning work.	\$ 240,000
Contract with community partner for management plan development and implementation.	Management plan development and implementation through a contracted partner. Implementation work will include site restoration of degraded sites, management activities, trail and amenity development, etc.	\$ 360,000
Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment	Completion of an assessment including engagement and honoraria that focuses on high-priority natural areas (e.g., the Northeast Swale)	\$ 225,000
Implementation of Traditional Land Use recommendations	Development of cultural and ceremonial spaces, and implementation of other recommendations from the Traditional Land Use Assessment, in partnership with the community.	\$ 390,000
TOTAL		\$1,215,000

Procurement Decisions:

- Management Plan development and implementation will be contracted to a community partner in alignment with the City's Purchasing Policy. Meewasin has been identified as a potential candidate, as they have completed similar work at other sites such as the Northeast Swale.
- Implementation of the Traditional Knowledge Assessment will be contracted to Indigenous organizations, as will implementation of recommendations. The Indigenous Procurement Protocol will guide this work.

Equity Considerations:

- The equity toolkit and Triple Bottom Line assessment will be used during design of the project.
- Honorariums for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and marginalized community members to provide meaningful and authentic engagement opportunities will be provided and have been budgeted for.
- Project outcomes will consider additional equity considerations such as communicating results in multiple languages, and opportunities for storytelling and education activities that are developed by and for the community.

Demonstrates the Project Can Be Completed in Realistic Timelines:

The Natural Area Management Plans and Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment will be completed in a two-phase approach to ensure that concurrent work can occur.

- Q4 2021 - Complete Natural Area Management Plan template and Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment scope; initiate procurement with project delivery partners.
- Q1 2022 - Begin management plans Phase 1 for two natural areas and begin Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment Phase 1 (to include recommendations for two natural areas).
- Q2 2022 - Completion of Phase 1 for management plans and Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment, including identification of early priority actions; begin early priority restoration and management work; begin early priority implementation for recommendations for the Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment.
- Q3 2022 - Continue Phase 2 of management plan and Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment; continue implementing early priority actions from Phase 1 work.
- Q4 2022 - Complete Phase 2 management plan and Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment and the early priority actions from Phase 1 work.
- Q1 2023 - Project wrap up; compile results and lessons learned; provide recommendations for ongoing management.

Project Timeline (proposed start date and end date)

- October 1, 2021 to March 31, 2023.

Can the project be completed by March 31, 2023?

- Yes. The components of this project included in this funding request can be designed to wrap up by March 31, 2023. Best practices and recommendations will inform ongoing management work at these sites.

Has there been any community or stakeholder engagement on the project?

- Yes. Community feedback is consistently strongly in favor of managing natural areas and incorporation of Indigenous land use and knowledge into this work. For example, in a Green Infrastructure public survey that is live at the time of this submission, early feedback shows that 98% of respondents are in favor of developing natural area management plans. .