

**TWEET**

.@ParksCanada and partners collaborate to create network of national urban parks across the country. #ProtectNature #NatureForAll

**News Release**

For Immediate Release

**Government of Canada invests \$130 million to work with partners to create a network of national urban parks***Network will help ensure that all Canadians have access to green space*

August 4, 2021

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Parks Canada Agency

In Canada and around the world, there is growing awareness of the importance of urban parks as essential places for conservation, recreation, learning, and mental and physical wellbeing. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the key role green space plays in the wellbeing of Canadians and their communities was brought into stark relief. However, most Canadians, nearly 72 percent of the population, live in urban centres – where access to the benefits of nature and wildlife can be limited.

Expanding access to and protection of nature in urban centres pays real dividends. Nature-based climate solutions – increasing protection as we are announcing today, planting trees, protecting and restoring wetlands and grasslands and other carbon pools -- have the potential to provide up to 30 percent of global climate solutions. Nature acts as a buffer against extreme weather events; it absorbs and traps carbon dioxide; protects against flooding; and can prevent the loss of biodiversity.

Today, the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, launched a new program to support the creation of a network of national urban parks. Parks Canada will collaborate with municipalities, provinces, Indigenous partners, and conservation organizations, among others, to identify opportunities for creating or expanding national urban parks in urban and near-urban settings across Canada. The National Urban Park Program is the next step for Parks Canada whose history over 110 years has provided Canadians a system of national parks, including Rouge National Urban Park, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas.

Minister Wilkinson was in Saskatoon today, where Parks Canada has signed a statement of collaboration with the Meewasin Valley Authority to explore the potential for a national urban park in the Meewasin Valley. Both organizations share a common goal to enhance urban green spaces, reflecting both natural and cultural values.

The National Urban Parks Program will contribute to Canada's commitment to protect biodiversity and conserve 25 percent of land and inland waters and 25 percent of marine and coastal areas by 2025, working toward 30 percent by 2030. And beyond the percentage targets, we are committed to addressing the rapid loss of biodiversity globally, and nature in Canada, in our urban centres where it is most at risk. Canada's National Urban Parks Program is part of a broader southern strategy of restoration that includes natural infrastructure, tree planting and regeneration of wetlands, and is vital in the fight to stem the tide of rapid biodiversity loss. This program will be supported by Budget 2021's historic investment of \$2.3 billion in Canada's Nature Legacy to address the biodiversity crisis, protect and conserve nature, and create jobs in nature conservation, with up to \$130.9 million specifically toward this effort.

The network will include areas managed under a range of flexible governance models, including federally administered places, third party administered places, and partnership models.



Parks Canada will also work closely with Indigenous partners to ensure national urban parks provide space for Indigenous stewardship, promote Indigenous voices and stories, and offer opportunities for connections to lands and waters based on Indigenous knowledge and values. These parks will be readily accessible to people in Canada's urban centres and provide opportunities to connect to, and learn about, local nature and culture.

In addition to the Meewasin Valley, Parks Canada has signed statements of collaboration with the municipalities of Winnipeg (MB) and Halifax (NS), and is working with others to identify potential urban park sites at various locations, including the greater Edmonton area (AB), Colwood (BC), Windsor (ON) and Montreal (QC).

## Quotes

"More than a century ago, a system of national parks was envisioned, and today we are taking the next step with the creation of a national urban parks network. Expanding nature access and protection in our urban spaces is also critical in the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change. It also supports better mental wellbeing and equity in urban areas, where the vast majority of Canadians now live. The Government of Canada is proud to work with partners to create a network of national urban parks and ensure all Canadians have access to green spaces wherever they live, work and play."

*The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson*

*Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada*

"Meewasin has provided important leadership in responsible ecosystem management for 42 years. Alongside our regional partners, we are excited to explore even more with the support of the Government of Canada. Meewasin is truly special in this region and we cannot wait to shine a spotlight nationally and internally on the environmental and economic benefits of conserving space."

*Andrea Lafond, Chief Executive Officer of Meewasin*

"The Saskatoon Region, on Treaty 6 Territory and Homeland of the Metis, is defined in many ways by the Meewasin Valley, winding through our neighbourhoods and drawing us together. Today's announcement by the federal government is a testament that the Meewasin Valley Authority model can become a national model for balancing conservation of crucial habitat with public access to natural spaces and carefully managed development. We continue to expand partnerships in the region and with Indigenous partners. A new partnership with the federal government would create an opportunity to strengthen this work."

*Charlie Clark, Mayor of Saskatoon*

"The City of Colwood is pleased to be exploring opportunities with Parks Canada for a potential national urban park in our seaside community. We look forward to engaging respectfully with First Nations partners to understand their interests and priorities related to urban parks. As a City known for its connections to nature, with beautiful beaches, abundant forests and beautiful parks and trails, Colwood is an ideal location for an urban park."

*Rob Martin, Mayor of Colwood*

"City parks have provided a much needed respite to Edmontonians in the last 18 months. Indeed, through winter months, festival organizers pivoted to accommodate public health guidelines and nurture Edmontonians' physical and mental health. As home to North America's largest urban parkland, we are excited by this opportunity to work with the Canadian government."

*Don Iveson, Mayor of Edmonton*

"Over the course of the pandemic, Winnipeg's parks have seen exponential increases in usage as residents have sought ways to safely enjoy the outdoors. When combined with the City of Winnipeg's One Million Tree Challenge, which calls on Winnipeggers to help plant a million new trees by the time our city reaches a million people, the importance of urban parks has become an even greater focal point for residents of Winnipeg. Today's announcement will help ensure Canadians from coast to coast to coast will continue to enjoy the benefits of active lifestyle in the great outdoors for many years to come."



*Brian Bowman, Mayor of Winnipeg*

“More protected green space is always a welcome addition to communities in Halifax, giving residents and their families the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful landscape that we’re very lucky to call home. We look forward to continuing conversations with Parks Canada and keeping the momentum going in protecting our land and allowing it to thrive in its natural state.”

*Mike Savage, Mayor of Halifax*

## Quick Facts

- Parks Canada administers one of the finest and most extensive systems of cultural and natural heritage places in the world.
- The vast network of protected areas administered by Parks Canada is a gateway to nature, history, and 450 000 km<sup>2</sup> of memories from coast to coast to coast.
- With its well-known network of urban cultural heritage sites as well as Rouge National Urban Park, Parks Canada has a strong presence and a long history of conservation in urban areas.

## Related Links

- [National Urban Parks](#)
- [Meewasin Valley Authority](#)
- [Minister’s Round Table on Parks Canada](#)

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