



Meewasin Strategic Plan

Feasibility Study – Parks Canada

The Saskatoon region would not be the place we know and love without Meewasin. We are asking important organizations, their relevant departments and key individuals to be active partners in this feasibility study, as we see broader benefit in this study for many priorities of both organizations in the area of collaborations, community and innovation.

The Meewasin Story.

For 42 years, Meewasin has maintained a natural corridor through Canada's 17th largest metropolitan area, keeping the Meewasin Valley healthy and vibrant and caring for the environmental and cultural assets of the area. Iconic river valley views are inextricably linked to the city's reputation, and dedicated outreach and collaboration ensures citizens and visitors can connect with this city treasure in meaningful ways.

"Meewasin" is the Cree word for beautiful. Starting in the heart of the city, and stretching out into the RM of Corman Park, this corridor connects people to the land, to the water and to prairie history – from first inhabitants to settlers to contemporary society. Meewasin is a place to discover not only conservation areas, but parks, museums, cultural interpretive centres, galleries, university lands, canoe launches, community links and more than 90 km of Meewasin Trail. Protecting and making this a place both accessible and meaningful is one of Meewasin's main goals.

Meewasin is steward to Canada's largest urban conservation zone, and is governed by the Government of Saskatchewan, City of Saskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan. Their efforts have balanced conservation, development and public access to the river (uncommon in other cities world-wide) attracting visitors, tourists, businesses academics and corporations, along with conservationists and those seeking nature in an urban setting. And the area draws residents to our province. One third of Saskatchewan's population, or 318,500 people, live within 15 km of the Meewasin Valley.

The Meewasin Advantage.

The Trails: The extensive Meewasin Trail system further contributes to the city's quality of life, health, social benefits and reduced air emissions by providing free public access to pedestrian and non-motorized traffic in Saskatchewan's largest city. Today, citizens and visitors make 1.87 million visits per year to the Meewasin Trail network. The Trail stretches from Wanuskewin Heritage Park to Chief Whitecap Park with many loops and sections in between on the east and west sides of the river. The number of visits is projected to nearly double to 2.8 million visits annually within 30 years.

Conservation: Meewasin is recognized world-wide for its leadership in conserving the natural resources of the 67 square kms of the Meewasin Valley and protecting grasslands – the most imperiled ecosystem on the planet. Meewasin sites and areas are home to more than 350 plant species, 150 bird species, and many amphibians, reptiles and animals. Conservation of these lands and ecosystems requires an integrated resource management plan including targeted conservation grazing and restoration for the purpose of eradicating invasive species. Meewasin's greenhouse and seed bank has also gathered and protected native plant varieties that would have otherwise been eradicated.

Research, Education & Experience: Today, Meewasin helps draw academics from around the globe to study water, ecosystems, urban development and history at the University of Saskatchewan. K-12 programming links to over 325 classrooms annually to share the benefits of natural areas for humans, how wetlands filter freshwater, and the amazing amount of biodiversity in the area. Local students can learn virtually or through interpretive hikes and citizen science projects, learning and exploring first-hand at the Northeast Swale, Beaver Creek or one of the many natural areas Saskatoon has to offer.

Economic Development: Meewasin contributes direct economic benefits to Saskatoon through tourism, economy, health, education and research. In 2017, SREDA estimated that the economic value of river valley ecosystem and Meewasin services is \$182.65 million per year. These services include climate and greenhouse gas regulation, water provision, waste treatment, erosion control, recreation services, biodiversity habitat, and other services.

Public Support: Community support of Meewasin's work is consistently high, and in 2021, public opinion polling results showed:

- Over 89% of city residents recognize the Meewasin Valley corridor as Saskatoon's most important attribute;
- 94% agree Meewasin contributes to quality of life in Saskatoon;
- 82% agree Meewasin boosts the local economy;
- 89% agree Meewasin is a good investment of tax dollars; and
- 83% agree Meewasin has become more important to residents during the pandemic.

Canada Sees the Potential.

Significant work has occurred to inform the federal government and we have held to discuss the policy, plan and funding surrounding the recent federal speech from the throne, Minister Wilkinson's mandate letter and how they see Meewasin's strategy, goals and objectives aligning with federal priorities:

This pandemic has reminded Canadians of the importance of nature. The Government will work with municipalities as part of a new commitment to expand urban parks, so that everyone has access to green space. This will be done while protecting a quarter of Canada's land and a quarter of Canada's oceans in five years, and using nature-based solutions to fight climate change, including by planting two billion trees.

Work with the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and with municipalities, provinces and territories and Indigenous Peoples, to expand urban parks to increase Canadians' access to green spaces.

The Government of Canada recognizes Meewasin as a national leader in conserving natural areas in urban settings. They want to explore with Meewasin a new Canadian urban park model, framework and policy for many centres across Canada. They want to partner with Meewasin to conduct a feasibility study around this concept.

Made in Saskatchewan, to benefit all.

We are asking partners to be active in this feasibility study. Meewasin anticipates through this study there will be opportunities to explore, and continue to align and contribute to many goals of organizations in the region. We will continue to keep you updated as we learn more and move through this important process for Saskatchewan.



What are the goals of this study and how will it affect Meewasin?

This feasibility study will not change the governance or mandate of Meewasin. What it will do is allow Meewasin to explore two things:

1. In today's environment, what governance structure and resources are required to appropriately manage the natural and cultural assets within the Saskatoon region in a collaborative way now and into the future; and
2. What model could be successful for a National Urban Park in and around an urban setting to aid in protecting natural assets and ecological corridors while encouraging population growth and development.

Did Meewasin approach the federal government for support?

Meewasin has regular conversations with our local, regional and national partners to ensure we annually secure sufficient resources to meet our mandate. Our efforts around climate change, reconciliation and serving the dramatic increase in demand for access to outdoor spaces during the pandemic have helped raise Meewasin's profile nationally. This feasibility study funding was unprompted, but certainly signals an opportunity for greater federal partnership in the future.

Why is the federal government getting involved?

Federal funding has always been part of Meewasin's financial reality. In most years, funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada, Western Economic Diversification and other ministries has helped cover costs for research, land management and partnerships. This collaboration however, will allow Meewasin to address its interests more proactively and really renew its engagement with the local and provincial community, while drawing national and international attention to our landscape and how we manage it.

What will this mean for the Saskatoon region?

These are exciting times! Saskatoon and its surrounding communities are currently marked as the 17th largest metropolitan area in Canada, with a steadily growing population and economy. Stewardship of the iconic river valley that flows through our communities is vital to our health, our cultural heritage, our ecosystems and infrastructure. Federal collaboration will allow Meewasin to conduct in-depth research and lead a consultative process to determine how to continue this stewardship. This will involve looking at the land management area, as well as appropriate partnerships and governance requirements as the city and surrounding communities grow.

Who will be involved in this study?

We are truly just standing with our toes on the start line. This partnership announcement marks the beginning of a process that Meewasin will map out with the federal government and its governance partners – the City of Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan and Provincial government – as well as the many local, regional, national partners and the public who guide and contribute to our work. The first step will be to reach out to these partners to engage them in creating a working structure for this study.

How will you determine who should be involved?

Our priority for this study will be to remain focused on Meewasin's mandate to "Conserve, Educate and Develop," and exploring the resources needed to continue this work as the region grows and expands. We will be reaching out to the many stakeholder groups who help us accomplish this work today. Additionally, we are receptive to engaging new groups who can help inform this work.