

Selection of Sites for Natural Area Management Plan Pilots

Sites Considered for Management Plans

To identify priority locations for management plan pilots, the list of natural areas identified in the 2019 [Natural Areas Inventory](#) was reviewed. The inventory identifies natural assets in the City's green network such as wetlands, grasslands, and forest ecosystems. The list of sites in the inventory is shown on Figure 1, and site names are provided in the subsequent table. In some cases, natural assets in the inventory do not have a formal boundary or name. In Figure 1, the Small Swale is site #32, and RSBBA is site #27.

Figure 1 – Natural Assets in Saskatoon's Green Network

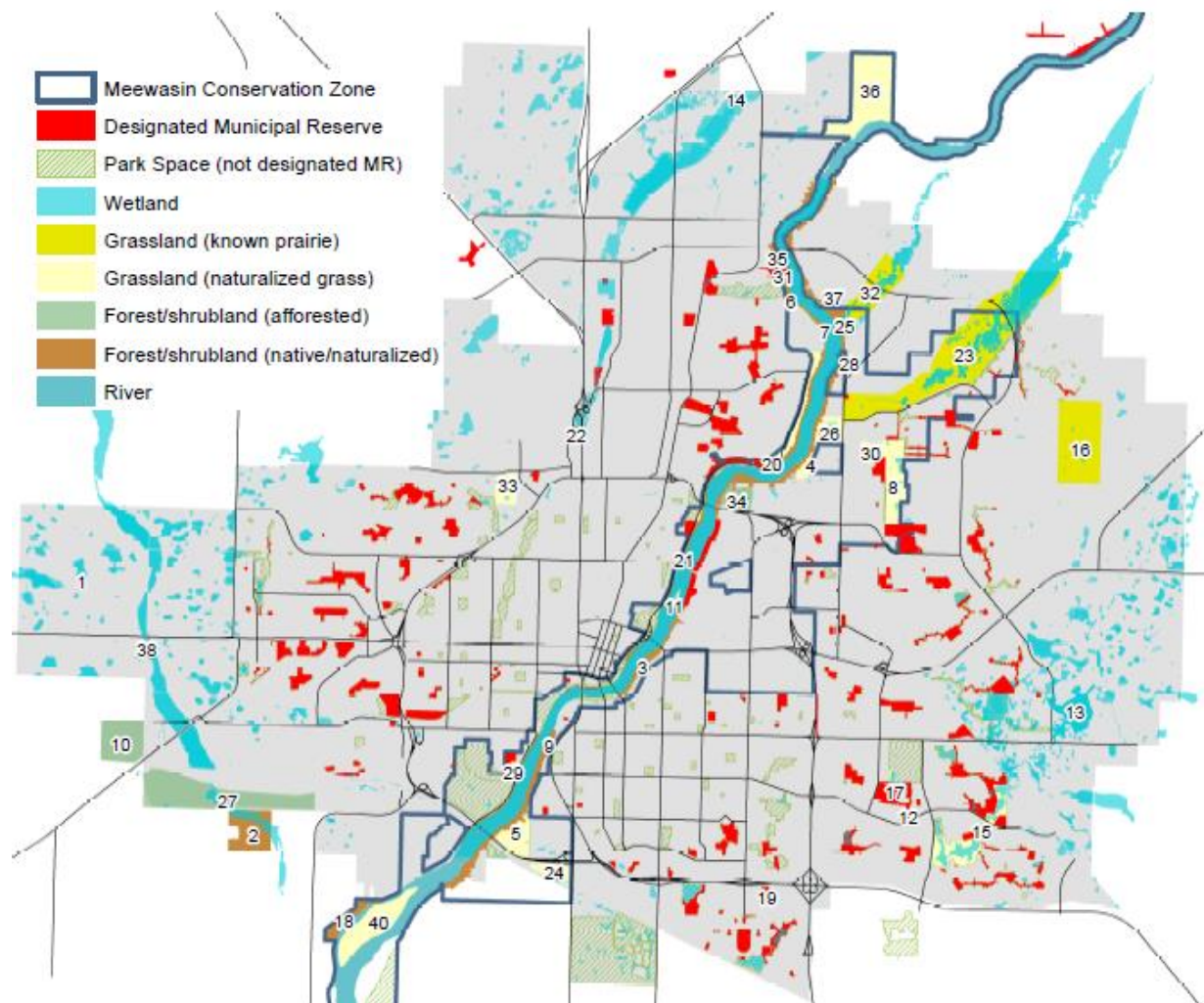


Table 1 – Natural Asset Site Names

Map #	Site Name (listed in alphabetical order)
1	Blairmore Wetland Complex
2	Chappell Marsh
3	Cosmopolitan Park
4	Crocus Prairie
5	Diefenbaker Park
6	Factoria
7	Floodplain Flats
8	Forestry Farm Park and Zoo
9	Gabriel Dumont Park
10	George Genereux Urban Regional Park
11	Goose Island
12	Heritage Park
13	Holmwood Wetland Complex
14	Hudson Bay Swale
15	Hyde Park/Donna Birkmaier Park
16	Kernen Prairie
17	Lakewood Park
18	Maple Grove
19	Mark Thompson and Patricia Roe Parks
20	Meewasin Park
21	Meewasin Trail System/Riverbank/Urban River Channel
22	North Industrial West of Highway 12 – Marquis Industrial
23	Northeast Swale
24	Open space between the Saskatoon Golf & Country Club and Prairieland
25	Peggy McKercher Conservation Area
26	Peturrson's Ravine
27	Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area
28	Riddell Paleontological Site
29	Sanatorium Site
30	Saskatoon Natural Grasslands
31	Silverwood Off Leash Dog Park
32	Small Swale Wetland Complex
33	South of Claypool Drive
34	Sutherland Off Leash Dog Park
35	Unnamed Riparian Area
36	Wanuskewin buffer lands and bison fields
37	Sites west of Small Swale
38	West Swale Wetland Complex
39	Wilson Island
40	Yorath Island

Site Selection Criteria

From the list of natural assets, sites considered for the management plan pilots fulfill the following criteria:

1. The site is city-owned and within city limits;
2. The City has access to ecosystem data about the site, such as a Natural Area Screening;
3. The site has a management gap identified;
4. The site delivers or could deliver high ecosystem services;
5. Ecosystem services of the site are at risk or under threat; and
6. The site has demonstrated interest from the community to increase management.

Using these criteria, the Small Swale and RSBBA were identified as top candidates, and a detailed rationale for selecting each site is provided below. Sites that do not fulfill these criteria will be considered for management plans in future stages of the Natural Areas Program.

The Small Swale

Overview of the Small Swale

The Small Swale is a major ecosystem complex comprising mainly wetlands and grassland habitats. It is similar ecologically to the Northeast Swale and contains several wetlands with a diversity of species and wetland permanency classes. The Small Swale is a major wetland complex and as such is protected by the Wetland Policy (C09-041).

The [University Heights Neighbourhood No. 3 Natural Areas Screening Report](#) describes the habitat features found at the Small Swale, and includes the following recommendations:

Natural areas were assessed and deemed important to be retained and incorporated into the proposed Ecological Zones (e.g., grasslands within the Small Swale and Northeast Swale).

Current Site Activities

Currently, a portion of the site is used for the Central Avenue Snow Storage facility where snow storage occurs in winter and materials storage and handling occurs in summer.

Environmental groups including the Northeast Swale Watchers have shown an interest in protecting and managing the Small Swale.

Previous Reports

At its regular business meeting on May 25, 2015, City Council endorsed the Northeast Policy submitted by the Meewasin Valley Authority (Meewasin). The intent of the Northeast Policy is to provide direction and guidelines for the continued balance of development and conservation in the northeast quadrant of the Meewasin Valley. Specific policy language regarding the Small Swale in the Northeast Policy includes:

Primary Objectives: To protect and restore the swale's biodiversity, unique landscape characteristics, and heritage features and to provide opportunities for education, recreation.

11.1. The extent of the Small Swale, including appropriate setbacks shall be delineated utilizing a similar methodology to that used to delineate the Northeast Swale including consideration of geology, hydrology, topography and ecology.

11.2. The portion of the Small Swale within the City of Saskatoon corporate limits should be public land and part of the Meewasin Valley.

11.3. Only improvements that conserve and/or restore the natural and cultural heritage resources, or enhance the recreation and educational use of the Meewasin Valley will be allowed within the Small Swale.

At its regular business meeting on December 17, 2018, City Council received the [Green Infrastructure Strategy Update - December 2018](#) report as information. Appendix 4 of that report provides a summary of the Small Swale.

At its meeting on March 1, 2021, the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services received the [Inquiry on Swale Education, Communications and Partnerships](#) report as information, and resolved in part:

That the reporting on implementation plan for the Green Infrastructure Strategy include specific consideration of the collaborative work of administrative departments to protect the Swale and Small Swale as important and valued natural assets in our city.

At its meeting on September 13, 2021, the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services received the [Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary Delineation Process](#) report as information, and resolved in part:

That Administration review the Natural Area Screening (NAS) provided by the developer and bring forward a recommendation to formally endorse the north boundary of the Northeast Swale and both boundaries of the Small Swale in advance of the University Heights 3 Concept Plan based on the recommendations of the NAS and pursue dedication as Environmental Reserve through the process outlined in the September 13, 2021 report of the General Manager, Community Services.

Rationale for Selection of the Small Swale for Management Plan Pilots

A summary of the rationale for selecting the Small Swale for a management plan is provided in the table below.

Criteria	Rationale
City-owned	Yes
Within City limits	Yes
Baseline Ecosystem Data Available	Yes. The University Heights Neighbourhood No. 3 Natural Area Screening Report was completed in 2021 and includes baseline data for the Small Swale.
Management gap identified	Yes. The Small Swale is not included in the City’s park inventory, nor is it currently managed by Meewasin.
Ecosystem service potential	The NCAV report estimates that the Small Swale provides \$731,000 per year in ecosystem services, and that the wetlands and grasslands in the area store approximately 89,200 tonnes of CO ₂ e.
Ecosystem services at risk	Yes. Some of the threats identified in the Natural Area Screening Report include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat loss due to fragmentation and degradation pose a threat to species of concern such as Sharp-Tailed Grouse and Northern Leopard Frog, which are found in and adjacent to the Small Swale. • Encroachment of noxious and nuisance weeds and invasive species such as European Buckthorn • Degradation of the riparian area and wetland margins • Incompatible land uses such as snow storage and garbage dumping
Demonstrated interest from the community	<p>Yes. Administration has heard interest from local conservation groups and the community in protecting, restoring, and managing the Small Swale.</p> <p>The Final Engagement Report for Green Pathways indicate an interest in protecting the Small Swale. Many respondents stressed the need to implement the changes represented within the Strategy to save the natural areas that are currently at risk. Numerous respondents expressed their concern specifically for the Small Swale and called for the need to protect and conserve this and similar spaces. Examples of comments received include:</p> <p><i>“My concern is with the swales and the sheer amount of development. Those areas are crucial for the watershed, biodiversity, temperature regulation (green space as a mitigation of warming), and wellness. This is the most crucial area of the larger plan: once this land is gone, it can’t come back.”</i></p> <p><i>“I urge the city to see the importance of the Swales, and to not build neighbourhoods close to them. Scrap the UH3, restore the land, and keep the Swales healthy and vibrant.”</i></p> <p>On June 21, 2021, a public information session was held to provide information about the University Heights Neighbourhood No. 3 Natural Area Screening Report. At that event, public feedback was received indicating an interest in protecting and managing the Small Swale. This feedback is summarized in the subsequent Engagement Report.</p>

Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area

Overview of RSBBA

The Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (RSBBAA) and adjacent parcels are owned by the City and comprise mixed vegetation of both planted and naturally established trees, grasses, and shrubs.

The [City of Saskatoon Blairmore Natural Areas Screening Final Report](#) describes the habitat features at RSBBA, and includes the following recommendations:

That the City focus conservation and enhancement planning on two important natural assets within the Study Area:

- *West Swale and associated wetland complexes; and,*
- *The Afforestation Areas*

Current Site Activities

Although RSBBA was officially named an urban regional park by City Council on October 26, 1978, it is not included within the City's park inventory, nor is it designated as Municipal Reserve. As the Blairmore Sector Plan is being developed, no long-term user agreements have been formalized.

In the absence of formalized management, some short-term uses have been approved through temporary user agreements with community groups including the Saskatoon Friends of the Afforestation Areas, Cedar Villa Bicycle Trails, and Flatlander Fat Tire Brigade. In 2013, the first formal recreation area was established within RSBBA with the creation of the Southwest Off-Leash Recreation Area, which is managed through the City's Animal Services.

Previous Reports

At its meeting on September 8, 2020, the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services heard a [request to speak](#) from the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc. regarding illegal trespassing at the George Genereux Urban Regional Park and resolved, in part:

That this communication be forwarded to the Administration with endorsement from the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities & Corporate Services to continue the partnership established with the Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc. including George Genereux Urban Regional Park in order to prevent illegal dumping, thereby helping to maintain an area of future interest with respect to the City's long range plans and Green Infrastructure Strategy recognizing that a resource management plan is not yet in place.

At its regular business meeting on September 28, 2020, City Council received the [Business Case for Heritage Designation - Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area](#) report as information and resolved that the information be received.

At its meeting on December 7, 2021, the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development, and Community Services received the [Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area – Information on Work Plan and Funding Source for Management Plan](#) report as information and resolved that the information be received. The report identifies a management plan for RSBBA as a potential part of the Natural Areas Program work plan.

Rationale for Selection of RSBBA for Management Plan Pilots

A summary of the rationale for selecting RSBBA for a management plan is provided in the table below.

Criteria	Rationale
City-owned	Yes
Within City limits	Yes
Baseline Ecosystem Data Available	Yes. The City of Saskatoon Blairmore Natural Areas Screening Final Report includes baseline data for RSBBA.
Management gap identified	Yes. Except for the Southwest Off-Leash Recreation Area, the site is not included in the park inventory or designated as municipal reserve.
Ecosystem service potential	The NCAV report estimates that RSBBA provides \$347,000 per year in ecosystem services. The wetlands, grasslands, and forest in the area are estimated to store about 54,081 tonnes of CO ₂ e.
Ecosystem services at risk	Yes. Some of the risks to the site identified in the Natural Area Screening Report include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encroachment of invasive species such as common caragana and European buckthorn • Degradation of the riparian area and wetland margins • Incompatible land uses such as motorized vehicles and garbage dumping
Demonstrated interest from the community	<p>Yes. Administration has heard interest from the community to formalize a management plan for the site.</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement on the Blairmore Sector Plan held during the summer of 2022 indicates significant interest in having the afforestation areas be conserved.</p> <p>As summarized in the Business Case for Heritage Designation - Richard St Barbe Baker Afforestation Area information report, a stakeholder engagement session about RSBBA was held on February 1, 2018. A summary of the engagement session included in the report specifically highlighted the significance of the site as an important animal habitat with desirable ecological features and heritage value as related to the vision of Richard St. Barbe Baker. It was further noted that this area is popular for walking and cycling activities.</p> <p>At its regular business meeting on November 19, 2018, City Council adopted the Montgomery Place Local Area Plan, which was the result of input from more than 200 neighbourhood residents and stakeholders. During that engagement, residents of Montgomery Place identified RSBBA as a valuable natural resource that residents feel is part of the neighbourhood and take pride in, despite it being outside the official neighbourhood boundaries.</p>