

February 20, 2023

City Council

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

**Re: 9.3.1 – Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary Endorsement  
[PDCS2023-0207] Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

On February 17, 2023, SEAC received the report “Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary Endorsement” from the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development & Community Services and resolved, in part, to provide feedback to City Council.

**Summary**

SEAC believes that development adjacent to the Swales and the delineation of the Swale boundaries should be done with great caution given the ecological significance of the area. As such, the maximum inclusion of rare plant habitat, wildlife corridors and buffer zones should be incorporated into the delineation. The value of the Swales should not just be judged against the opportunity cost of limited development, but rather should also consider the quantifiable ecosystem services which the Swales provide. Most importantly, stress on this system through urban development will only increase in the future.

**SEAC thus recommends to City Council to reevaluate the boundary options presented by Administration and consider expanded boundaries as proposed by community stakeholder groups.**

**Introduction**

The Swales are widely recognized as unique sites with great ecological and cultural significance. Few municipalities have the opportunity to ensure the conservation of such a site, and SEAC wishes to stress to City Council the long-lasting effects of the boundary delineation. There is a trade-off between urban development to support Saskatoon’s growth and conserving natural areas within City limits. The question is if in the particular case of the Swales, is it worth to sacrifice significant natural areas in favour of development?

SEAC supports Council’s efforts to clearly delineate preservation areas in advance of further development. Yet it must be considered if the proposed boundaries are not only sufficient to maintain the existing ecosystem services, but also will support the health

and integrity of the Swales in the face of stresses from urban development. Considering the substantial wealth of scientific and traditional knowledge supporting the ecological significance of the Swales, SEAC believes that it is necessary to consider reduced or alternative development options in this sector. The Approval Report states that "Preventing all development in this area would challenge the ability to meet Saskatoon's long-term growth needs and would require a substantial reassessment of how and where Saskatoon is expected to grow". SEAC believes that some reassessment and reallocation of development lands is merited in light of the uniqueness of the Swales.

### **Considerations for Additional Assessment**

- **Natural Capital Asset Valuation:** The Small Swale was evaluated during the Natural Capital Asset Valuation pilot project in 2020. Likewise there have been other valuations of the Northeast Swale, including a recent Master's thesis at the University of Saskatchewan (Read 2020, <https://harvest.usask.ca/handle/10388/12803>). Have the benefits of increased housing capacity to support growth been compared to these losses?
- **New Urban National Park:** As this project develops, the City will again need to allocate land, which could be used for urban development, for conservation purposes. Have the Swales not reached a similar status where the conservation benefits outweigh the need for development? Could the Swales be included as part of this National Park?
- **Human-Wildlife Interactions:** Disruption of natural wildlife corridors through urban development will lead to greater negative interactions without the establishment of sufficient buffer zones and natural corridors.
- **Previous Examples:** There are several other conservation sites in the area which have close borders to urban and residential areas, which have created significant management issues. The Saskatoon Natural Grasslands, although it does provide conservation and educational opportunities, suffers from invasive species and woody plant encroachment. Likewise, the St. Joseph High School demonstration site is highly degraded and invaded due to dramatic increases in traffic along adjacent roadways in the last 25 years. Are the boundaries appropriate to adapt to this likely increase in traffic and densification over time?
- **Saskatoon Perimeter Freeway:** Conservation and development around the Swales must consider how the Freeway and new connecting roadways will impact wildlife movement and habitat integrity.

### **Appropriate Boundaries**

Many stakeholder groups have identified lacking areas in the proposed boundary options, notably the Swale Watchers. SEAC wishes to emphasize the following components:

- Preservation of known rare species habitats, such as the wetlands, bird breeding grounds (i.e. leks) and protected plant species.
- Adequate buffer zones between human development and plant and wildlife habitats, especially considering the likely increased traffic and densification of the area in the coming decades.
- Designated educational and hiking areas to promote support of conservation activities, while maintaining sensitive ecological core areas with limited access.
- Avoiding fragmentation of existing habitat, especially for wildlife movement and corridors.

### **Conclusion**

SEAC recognizes that development in the NE sector of Saskatoon is part of the City's planned expansion. However, City Council has a unique opportunity to prevent irreversible degradation of this ecological gem. In this case, the environmental and cultural value of the Swales exceeds that of the need for additional development. SEAC urges Council to consider broader protections for this site, because we simply cannot know what challenges or stressors the future will hold for the Swales. Such a decision is in line with the City's sustainability goals and the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Sincerely,



**John Paul Wasan**  
Chair, Saskatoon Environmental Advisory Committee