

National Urban Park: Vision, Governance and Boundaries

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon (City) has been working with Meewasin Valley Authority, Parks Canada, rightsholders, Indigenous organizations and key stakeholders in the exploration of a potential National Urban Park (NUP) designation. The project has completed Stage 2 Planning and is seeking endorsement from City Council to progress through Stage 3 Designation.

RECOMMENDATION

The Governance and Priorities Committee recommend to City Council:

- 1) That the vision and governance as set out in this report for the National Urban Park led by Meewasin Valley Authority and Parks Canada be endorsed;
- 2) That the provisional boundary for the National Urban Park led by Meewasin Valley Authority and Parks Canada, be endorsed as set out in this report in Appendix 3; and
- 3) That the Administration be directed to provide a letter supporting Meewasin and Parks Canada entering into a Memorandum of Agreement for National Urban Park Designation, subject to Federal funding confirmation and the principles of shared understanding outlined in this report.

BACKGROUND

The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its meeting on June 11, 2025, considered the [National Urban Park Exploration 2024 – 2025 Update](#) report and received the information.

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, at its [meeting](#) on September 12, 2022, resolved:

“That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services request Administration work with the Meewasin Valley Authority and other partners involved in the National Urban Park Exploration on the potential of including a table of elected representatives to be included in the governance process, and report back”.

Further background information is provided in Appendix 1: National Urban Park Exploration Background.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

At the outset of this exploration, Parks Canada established a general process for the designation of NUPs within Canada, with the understanding that the process would be flexible and informed by the local context. The NUP Designation includes four stages:

1. Pre-Feasibility;
2. Planning;
3. Designation; and
4. Implementation.

Appendix 2 provides a diagram of the Parks Canada process. The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its [meeting](#) on June 11, 2025, received a report entitled, National Urban Park Exploration – 2025 Update, and reported that Stage 1 Pre-Feasibility was complete and progress was being made on Stage 2 Planning.

Stage 2 Planning

The status of the Stage 2 Planning activities, outcomes and deliverables are summarized as follows:

2.1 Develop a Park Vision

The status of this activity is complete. Approval by City Council is requested for the NUP Vision as follows:

The Saskatoon region National Urban Park aspires to conserve imperiled prairie grasslands and wetlands and protect vital ecosystems that are critical to urban health and traditional First Nations and Métis ways of life.

Weaving through Saskatchewan’s largest population centre, this space emphasizes the importance of outdoor experiences to our collective well-being and has been designated as a featured Canadian destination to ensure all will be able to know and connect with the natural, cultural and recreational value of this area for generations to come.

2.2 Determine Governance Model with Partners

This report requests approval by City Council for the NUP Governance approach provided in Appendix 3. The Saskatoon region NUP would not be a federally governed or administered park. The Meewasin Valley Authority would be the lead partner and the model under consideration suggests that Meewasin would coordinate park operations with partners, similar to how these areas are managed today. It has been identified that a designated NUP park would be governed under the existing *Meewasin Valley Authority Act*. No changes to any Act or legislation are proposed, and there will be no change in the authority or autonomy of any entities.

Stage 2 of this activity is complete and addresses resolution 4205-1 from SPC-PDCS on September 12, 2022. Further work is planned in the next stages of work to detail the roles of the partners and to prepare for the implementation of the NUP governance structure.

2.3 Refine Study Area to Identify Park Boundary

Stage 2 of this activity is complete. Previous reporting has included a draft boundary for the Saskatoon Area NUP, which has been prepared with some key considerations:

- Boundaries in this context of the NUP for Saskatoon and area would be a policy designation and would not change ownership of the land;
- The boundary needs to be possible for potential designation in early 2026;
- The NUP is to be focused on urban and near-urban areas; and
- Parks Canada expects that certain kinds of land-use will not be permitted or included in NUPs (e.g., residential areas, commercial developments).

For the NUP exploration to date, a staged approach has been taken to first consider the boundary area with the greatest feasibility at the time of the Designation Agreement and then later review refinement opportunities post-designation. For the provisional boundary definition within the initial NUP Designation Agreement, the focus has been on lands within the Meewasin Valley jurisdiction and in accordance with the University Heights Sector Plan and other regulatory approvals. The provisional boundary from the NUP project team is included in Appendix 3 – Annex A.

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, at its [meeting](#) on February 8, 2023, recommended to City Council that the boundaries for the Northeast and Small Swales, as outlined in Option 3, be endorsed. Administration has reviewed the provisional NUP boundary and a detail map is included in Appendix 4, which shows other information related to the proposed NUP in this area, including the municipal boundary, University Heights Sector (2013), Saskatoon Freeway alignment and swale boundaries endorsed in 2023.

This report recommends that the NUP provisional boundary in Appendix 3 – Annex A is endorsed by City Council, subject to future refinements in the University Heights Neighbourhood #3 (UH3) Concept Plan, the Meewasin jurisdiction and other plans. The NUP boundary would not include areas intended for development, in accordance with the key considerations above. Meewasin Administration has confirmed that they are open to further work to refine the NUP provisional boundary, as the City's plans are delivered.

- 2.4 Conduct Stakeholder and Public Engagement – Publish a Summary
From July 9 to September 12, 2025, Meewasin and the NUP Steering Committee representing local governments, Indigenous organizations, and community partners engaged the region to refine the vision, focus areas, and potential key features and investments. The NUP engagement connected with 4,396 individuals across the Saskatoon region including members of the public, First Nation and Métis communities through a blend of online and in-person engagement methods. Refer to Appendix 5 –Engagement Executive Summary or review the [full public engagement report](#).
- 2.5 Prepare a Draft Budget and Identify Priority Investments - Begin Initial Operational Planning
In March 2024, Lord Cultural Resources, duToit Allsopp Hillier and Environmental Dynamics Ltd. began work on a Draft Conceptual Capital and Operating Plan. The draft capital and operating plan has been used to generate content in the planning and development of engagement for the community, stakeholders and rightsholders. Further information on this deliverable can be found in the [National Urban Park Exploration 2024 – 2025 Update](#) report. A summary of investment priorities can be found in Appendix 3. Stage 2 of this activity is complete.

One of the key priorities established by the NUP Steering Committee during the exploration of the potential National Urban Park is the development of a Visitor Centre. The Visitor Centre concept was included in the public engagement conducted during summer 2025 and was supported. Recent exploration of a National Urban Park Visitor Centre has included office space for Meewasin and market analysis to determine the additional highest and best use for the site. Meewasin intends to explore developer interest in the site and evaluate potential partnerships.

2.6 Memorandum Of Understanding – (non-binding) Signed Between Parks Canada and Key Partners

The NUP Process diagram includes execution of a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Parks Canada and Meewasin that expresses the work completed so far on the proposed NUP project and outlines a shared vision and framework to continue to negotiate Designation under the National Urban Parks Policy.

In preparation for the MOU, the NUP project team gathered letters of support from the Steering Committee representatives in Q3 2025 to support continued exploration of a NUP for the Saskatoon Region. The needs of the MOU have been met through the letters of support from the partners, and therefore Parks Canada has determined that the MOU is not required.

Stage 3 Designation

The Project Team is working to prepare the deliverables for Stage 3: Designation and this includes:

- 3.1 Finalize proposal for the NUP:
Through Phases 1-2, Parks Canada has been assembling the information that they require to prepare for Designation. By Stage 3, material required for Designation will be complete, and the internal Federal processes will progress to support funding requests and the preparation of the Designation Agreement;
- 3.2 Confirm roles of partners in governance of the NUP;
- 3.3 Secure operational funding from funding partners – Operational plan complete – Funding is confirmed; essentially this is confirmation of current funding commitments from all partners; and
- 3.4 Memorandum of Agreement (Binding) signed.

Note that the first three deliverables, must be finalized prior to completing the final deliverable, which is the execution of the Memorandum of Agreement.

Letter of Support to Proceed with Designation

The NUP project team has requested letters of support from the NUP Steering Committee Partners for Meewasin and Parks Canada to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (binding). Parks Canada have stated that the letters of support would show backing for the initiative and greatly enhance Saskatoon's state of readiness should future Federal funds become available for the initiative or program.

This report requests approval for the Administration to prepare a letter from the City addressed to Parks Canada and Meewasin, which supports their entering into the Memorandum of Agreement for NUP Designation. Endorsement for the vision and governance framework would be provided. Support for the provisional boundary would be provided in principle, understanding that further approvals and changes in alignment with city plans will occur in due course.

The letter of support would also detail the following shared understanding:

- Designation is subject to Parks Canada securing sustainable long term federal funding;
- Parks Canada and Meewasin have confirmed that current funding partners will not need to contribute any additional money over and above their current funding arrangements to fulfill the steps to get to the Designation Agreement. Costs for future park priorities and enhancements following designation would be discussed and agreed upon;
- The NUP in the Saskatoon region would continue to be administered under the provincial *Meewasin Valley Authority Act*;
- Roles and responsibilities of each partner in the governance model will be discussed and agreed upon prior to completion of the Designation Agreement;
- The Designation Agreement would not impose new or additional Federal regulations;
- All risks and responsibilities associated with managing lands within the proposed park boundary remain with the landowner; and
- The NUP provisional boundary is subject to future refinement in alignment with City Council's direction.

The Indigenous Cultural Spaces Project

The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its [meeting](#) on June 11, 2025, received the National Urban Park Exploration report which included the Indigenous Cultural Spaces Project. The City and partner organizations Meewasin, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Health Authority, Saskatoon Police Service and the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre (Partnership Circle) are working together to create spaces with guidance from Knowledge Keepers that allow for teaching, learning and cultural revitalization while also supporting mental, physical, spiritual and emotional well-being.

The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its meeting on March 11, 2026, will receive a report on the Indigenous Cultural Spaces project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding received from the Government of Canada from September 2023 to March 2025 for research, analysis, communications, Indigenous Cultural Spaces planning and support, as well as administration totaled \$220,899.71. The City will receive approximately \$215,000.00 in additional funding from the Government of Canada for work between April 2025 and March 2026. Parks Canada and Meewasin have confirmed that current funding partners will not need to contribute any additional money over and above their current funding arrangements to fulfill the steps to finalize the Designation Agreement.

A contribution amendment for the City is being discussed with Parks Canada that would continue capacity support for this project and planning activities related to the Indigenous Cultural Spaces Project into 2026 and 2027.

Designation of the NUP for the Saskatoon Region is dependent on Parks Canada securing the necessary long-term federal funding. Federal NUP funding would be confirmed prior to Meewasin and Parks Canada signing the Designation Agreement.

Parks Canada and Meewasin have stated that City costs already associated with the area becoming a NUP would not increase because of the Designation. City costs for future park priorities and enhancements following Designation would be discussed and agreed upon by all parties.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Economic

The Meewasin Valley plays a significant role in attracting and retaining residents and businesses to Saskatoon. The Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority's estimate of the economic value of Meewasin Valley's natural Capital in 2017 is \$182 million. Natural capital assets occupy 14% of the City's current footprint and offer a wide range of benefits to the community in the form of supporting, regulating, cultural and provisioning ecosystem services. A NUP could further support promotion of tourism, contributing to the municipal economy. Furthermore, managed natural areas and park spaces also positively contribute to the land value of areas and neighbourhoods near the amenity.

Environmental

The Designation of the Saskatoon region NUP, along with additional external resources for conservation, maintenance and site interpretation, would support the preservation and ecosystem health of significant natural areas and critical habitat in the city, resulting in environmental benefits. The enhanced protection and restoration of natural areas through the NUP resources would have climate adaptation benefits, such as carbon sequestration and mitigation of climate related risks such as wildfires, droughts and overland flooding.

Social distancing measures related to COVID-19 highlighted the importance of residents' connection to nature for mental and physical health. Designation and NUP resources would advance goals for all residents of Saskatoon have access to natural space and improve overall equity and access to Saskatoon's green infrastructure.

Additionally, the NUP includes preliminary work in partnership with Indigenous rights-holders, both to acknowledge and support their long-term relationship and stewardship of this land and to determine ways that ongoing Indigenous stewardship of natural areas can be fully supported. There are significant opportunities for this work to grow as the NUP advances.

There are no privacy or legal implications with this report.

NEXT STEPS

After March 2026, further work on the NUP Designation depends upon the allocation of additional Federal funds. With funding and approvals in place, the NUP project team would proceed with Phase 3 activities of the project and finalize the Designation Agreement.

Subject to the timing of Phase 3 and Phase 4, Implementation would move forward, including final operational preparations for the NUP and preparing further detail for the governance structure. While Phase 4 would include designing facilities, amenities, programs, and initiating conservation activities, the NUP could launch in advance of these initiatives being fully completed.

To preserve and enhance efficient operations, Administration will update Operating Agreements with its partners during Phase 4 of the NUP project. The purpose of these agreements will be to ensure service levels and roles are well-defined, prevent duplication, and further formalize operational funding responsibilities.

APPENDICES

1. National Urban Park Exploration Background
2. National Urban Park Process Framework
3. Vision and Governance: National Urban Park for the Saskatoon Region
4. Proposed National Urban Park (NUP) Boundary Refinement
5. Engagement Executive Summary

REPORT APPROVAL

Written by: Jeanna South, Director, Sustainability
Approved by: Celene Anger, General Manager, Community Services
Angela Gardiner, General Manager Utilities and Environment

SP/2026/Sustainability/GPC/National Urban Park: Vision, Governance and Boundaries/mt