

National Urban Park Exploration Background

BACKGROUND

On August 4, 2021, a joint public announcement was made regarding funding from the Federal Government for Meewasin to lead a regional project to undertake a feasibility study to explore potential models for the formalization of an Urban Park in Saskatoon and region.

City Council, at its Regular Business [meeting](#) on August 30, 2021, approved in part:

- “2. That the City of Saskatoon be an active partner in collaboration with Meewasin on the recently announced feasibility study for an Urban Park model in Saskatoon.”

The Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services at its [meeting](#) on September 12, 2022, received a presentation from Laurel Carlton (Parks Canada) and Mike Velonas (Meewasin) providing an update on the National Urban Park (NUP) Exploration work. The Committee made the following resolution:

“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.”

The Governance and Priorities Committee, at its [meeting](#) on June 12, 2024, received the report titled National Urban Park Exploration – Update, Parks Canada and Meewasin attended the meeting.

The Government of Canada’s [Interim National Urban Parks Policy](#) became effective July 22, 2024. The policy enables Parks Canada to designate NUPs and set parameters for their development. [Supplemental program information](#) on creating new national parks, process, and governance is also available from Parks Canada. [Information specific to the National Urban Park for the Saskatoon Region](#) is also available.

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

National Urban Park Policy Framework

The Government of Canada defines NUP as places of natural or historical significance to the nation, located in or near a major city in Canada, that are managed in ways which contribute to three core objectives: conserving nature; connecting people with nature; and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. They are typically large, predominantly natural areas which may consist of existing natural areas or areas that are being restored to a more natural condition. A NUP may be one large area or a group of smaller areas which do not need to be physically connected to each other.

Parks Canada is studying candidate NUPs in consultation with collaborators, such as Indigenous governments, municipalities, provinces and federal organizations. The core objectives guide the creation and management of a network of NUPs across Canada. The proposed network of NUPs across Canada includes Meewasin, the greater Edmonton area, Halifax, St. John’s, Victoria, Windsor and Winnipeg.

The network of NUPs would include areas managed under a range of flexible governance models, including federally administered places, third party administered places, and partnership models. The Meewasin Valley Authority model of governance and its mandate to balance conservation of habitat with public access to natural spaces and carefully managed development, acts as a precedent for the network.

National Urban Park Exploration Roles

With Parks Canada as the sponsor and Meewasin as the project leader, the NUP Exploration for Saskatoon and Area has also been guided by a broadly representative Steering Committee including:

- City of Saskatoon;
- Government of Saskatchewan;
- Meewasin Valley Authority;
- Metis Nation Saskatchewan, Western Region IIA;
- Parks Canada;
- RM of Corman Park;
- Saskatchewan North Partnership for Growth (P4G);
- Saskatoon Tribal Council;
- University of Saskatchewan; and
- Wanuskewin Heritage Park.

The City of Saskatoon is both a governing partner with Meewasin and is a key stakeholder/steering committee member in this NUP work. City Administration subject matter experts have been supporting the work through involvement from the following departments: Indigenous Initiatives, Sustainability, Parks, Planning and Development, Recreation and Community Development, Transportation, Facilities Management, Communications and Public Engagement, Saskatoon Fire, Finance and Solicitors.

Why Pursue a National Urban Park Designation?

The NUP initiative is significant and could allow Meewasin resources to work with many partners and the public to shape and improve urban open spaces into the future and within the fast-paced growth of the Saskatoon region. An expanded NUP model has potential for positive implications for the environment in and around Saskatoon, for the region, and for Saskatchewan. The NUPs have great promise to:

- Conserve and restore nature in cities;
- Foster economic activity and improve natural capital asset valuation;
- Help cities manage climate change risks and impacts such as floods and heat waves;
- Improve access to nature and connections to the land for people living in cities;
- Conserve and share cultural heritage;
- Improve quality of life and benefit health; and
- Advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The NUP Model could progress Bylaw No. 9700, [Bylaw No. 9700, The Official Community Plan Bylaw, 2020](#) with City Council's [2022-2025 Strategic Plan](#) in the following ways:

- Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion outcome: There is an increased community awareness and understanding of systemic racism and a commitment to redress past harms with a key action being create spaces where all community members feel safe and welcomed to ensure cultural identities and living experiences are reflected in the community;
- Recreation, Sport and Leisure outcome: Recreation, parks, sport, cultural facilities and programs are accessible, inclusive and meet changing community needs;
- Environmental Sustainability outcome, where the green network is integrated, managed and enhanced to protect land, air and water resources; and
- In the Quality of Life and Public Safety outcome: NUP advances welcoming and inclusive public infrastructure, space and natural assets that bring people together.

The Pre-feasibility Report identifies how Saskatoon and area exploration aligns with three core objectives of the NUP Program: conserving nature; connecting people with nature; and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

- Conservation of nature: The Meewasin Valley is an area with high quality biodiversity and considerable areas of native prairie grasslands, one of the most ecologically valuable and threatened ecosystems in the world. Other ecosystems such as wetlands and forest/shrublands are also present. The Meewasin Valley is home to a highly diverse environment with a high variety of plant species, bird species, numerous mammals, amphibians, reptiles and insects.
- Connecting people with nature: More than a third of the population of Saskatchewan resides within 15km of the Meewasin Valley Corridor. Over 325 classrooms are educated annually in the study area and there are over 107km of trails. There are multiple public and active transit routes that connect with the Meewasin Valley, with additional opportunities for enhancements for those that live further away. The study area averages over 2 million visits per year, with usage doubling during the pandemic.
- Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: The Meewasin Valley includes areas of significant historical and cultural value to First Nations and Métis people, including archaeological sites, as well as places that continue to be used for cultural practices today. Culturally significant areas will be explored further as this project continues. Parks Canada and Meewasin Valley Authority are in ongoing dialogue with Saskatoon Tribal Council, Member First Nations, the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Western Region 2A to explore opportunities for First Nations and Métis communities to access and reconnect with the lands and waters in the Meewasin Valley.