



**Protecting the City of Saskatoon's  
Northeast Swale:  
An ACTION UPDATE for City Council**

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*Preamble:* The Northeast Swale is one of the last significant expanses of natural prairie in central Saskatchewan.

An ancient river channel, the Swale follows a twenty-six-kilometer arc that swings away from the South Saskatchewan River valley at Saskatoon before looping back and connecting with the river again near Clark's Crossing.

The ecological significance of the Swale is based on its continuity and its connection with the river valley.

The Swale provides habitat for at least 100 species of birds and 200 species of plants, including several (for example, the Northern Leopard Frog, Short-eared Owl and Crowfoot Violet) that are provincially and nationally at risk of extinction.

A stretch of the Swale lies within the boundaries of the City of Saskatoon, in a sector that is rapidly being urbanized. Serious efforts to protect the City's Swale began only *after* plans for urban expansion were well advanced, and – despite much effort and the best of intentions -- development continues to be given precedence over conservation of this unique and irreplaceable habitat.

The City's Swale has the potential to establish Saskatoon as a global leader in urban conservation. This goal will not be achieved without a number of critical shifts in civic practice and policy.

### **FOUR Decisions City Council Can Take Right Away**

#### **1. Protect the Core Area of the City's Swale by closing Lowe Road**

At present, the City is planning to "upgrade" Lowe Road from gravel to pavement, so that it can carry thousands of cars a day through the heart of the MVA Conservation Zone. With two new thoroughfares across the Swale currently under construction, Lowe Road will no longer be needed for efficient traffic flow. Although a restricted-access roadway could be maintained for emergency use only, Lowe Road must be closed to regular traffic to protect the ecological functioning of the City's Swale.

#### **2. Manage Storm Water from Surrounding Neighbourhoods Outside the Swale.**

At present, the City has expressed an intention to create stormwater treatment ponds (forebays) and other infrastructure within the MVA Conservation Zone, to collect run-off from new neighbourhoods, as has already happened in Aspen Ridge.. This is completely unacceptable. Valuable land should not be taken from the conservation zone to handle storm water.

### **3. Expand Dark-Sky Lighting to Commercial and Residential Areas Near the Swale.**

The City has put considerable time, effort and expense into meeting international standards for dark-sky lighting along the roadways within the Swale. But this gesture will be meaningless if the Swale is lit up by the *commercial* and residential development that surrounds it. The urban zones around the Swale must be governed by bylaws that require dark-sky compliance. The City's proposed incentives would only apply to residential properties. What is required is a Zoning Bylaw Special Designation that identifies the neighbourhoods around the Swale (in both Aspen Ridge and the proposed subdivisions of University Heights 3) as a dark sky buffer zone with regulations that apply to both commercial and residential development.

### **4. Provide for Safe Animal Crossing of the New Freeways at Central Avenue, Fedoruk Drive, and McOrmond Drive.**

The City must monitor the plans for safe wildlife crossings of the new freeways and open the P3 agreement as needed to ensure that adequate provisions are made.

There is a difference between good intentions (cf. the Northeast Swale Development Guidelines and the MVA Northeast Swale Management Plan) and effective action. The stated goals are currently not being met.

*Amphibians and small mammals:* At present, the MVA and Graham Commuter Partners are consulting about the provision of under-the road animal crossings (appropriately designed culverts) along the McOrmond Drive freeway. We will monitor their conclusions with interest. Meanwhile, however, we are very concerned about the inadequate crossings that are planned for Central Avenue and Fedoruk Drive. Currently, one small culvert is planned for reptiles and amphibians.

In addition, Graham Commuter Partners has stated that an under-the-road crossing for small-to-medium sized mammals will NOT be provided for Central Avenue unless the City opens the P3 agreement and agrees to cover the cost – surely a miniscule percent of the project.

*Deer and other large mammals:* At present, the City's Swale is home to two herds of deer. Collisions, with loss of life to animals and humans, are inevitable unless the City acts decisively to reduce the speed of traffic in and around the Swale. Signage will be needed to announce speed limits and to identify the Swale as a special, wild place. In addition, traffic-calming measures and rigorous enforcement will likely be necessary. Again, these are concerns require immediate attention by the City.





## **ONE Action City Council Must Take During This Mandate**

### **1. Establish Conservation of Biodiversity as a Priority for the City of Saskatoon.**

Conservation of the City Swale has been undertaken as an after thought, with all the frustration and half-measures that entails. The City of Saskatoon must now join other major cities in Canada and around the world in making conservation of biodiversity a priority. To meet this goal, the City will need a suite of frameworks (eg. Natural Areas Network), effective policies (eg. a Wetland Policy with effective regulations attached) and a revamped organizational structure (possibly an Office of Biodiversity that is engaged at the highest level in all planning and development decisions.) The City needs to establish long-term protection of key natural areas as a top level priority. Fortunately, many other cities around the world have taken the lead in these areas, allowing the City of Saskatoon to avoid their mistakes and benefit from their success. (See for example: “Cities and Biodiversity: Exploring how Edmonton and Montréal are Mainstreaming the Urban Biodiversity Movement.”<sup>1</sup>) Canada will soon have its first national urban park – Rouge National Urban Park in Ontario.<sup>2</sup> The time is right to ACT.

### **Selected Resources**

<sup>1</sup>“Cities and Biodiversity,” <http://www.biopolis.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Cities-and-Biodiversity-Exploring-how-Edmonton-and-Montreal-are-Mainstreaming-the-Urban-Biodiversity-Movement.pdf>

“Local Governments and Biodiversity Management,” <http://www.icleicanada.org/programs/biodiversity>

“BiodiverCITIES: a handbook for municipal biodiversity planning and management,” <http://www.icleicanada.org/resources/item/221-biodivercities-a-handbook-for-municipal-biodiversity-planning-and-management>

<sup>1</sup> “Rouge National Urban Park, Parks Canada,” <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/on/rouge/index.aspx>

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