

Statement of Significance

Northeast Swale

Neighbourhood: -
Designation: -
Original Use: Natural Area
Current Use: Natural Area



Source: City of Saskatoon

Description of the Historic Place

The Northeast Swale is a low-lying, ancient river channel that carves a path adjacent to the South Saskatchewan River. This ecological corridor connects Petursson's Ravine in Saskatoon to the greater swale northeast of the city, forming several connections with the South Saskatchewan River along its path. The Northeast Swale consists of an estimated 2,800 hectare (ha) natural area that contains a variety of environments, including steep rocky ridges, rolling prairie, lush valleys, treed areas, and wetlands.

Heritage Value

Hundreds of years ago, the South Saskatchewan River flowed north and then east from the Saskatoon Forestry Farm Park and Zoo before connecting with the current river valley at Clark's Crossing. The river eventually moved on, leaving behind it a shallow, rock-strewn basin that stretches for 26 kilometers, called the Swale. There are many heritage features still present in the Swale that are easily observed, both within city limits (including limestone quarries, kilns, and the Moose Woods-Batoche Trail), as well as near Clark's Crossing.

The portion of the Swale located closest to the city of Saskatoon is referred to as the Northeast Swale. It is one of the largest pieces of unbroken prairie, riparian forest, and wetland in the Saskatoon region. It has long been regarded as a significant environmental feature having unique ecological, hydrological, and hydrogeological characteristics. The Northeast Swale:

- i) provides a large variety of upland and wetland habitats;
- ii) offers a vast variety of plant species, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and insects. The Northeast Swale is also home to several rare, endangered, or culturally significant species;
- iii) contains wetlands that provide a means of flood control for the surrounding community;

- iv) supports a wide variety of waterfowl, shore-land birds, and amphibian habitats;
- v) contains significant amounts of native prairie, including provincially-ranked rare species, such as *Lilium philadelphicum*, *Viola pedatifida*, and *Alisma gramineum*;
- vi) contains an assemblage of native species; and,
- vii) is dominated by western porcupine grass and northern wheatgrass. This association of mixed-grass prairie tends to transition into the fescue prairie. Fescue prairie once extended over a large portion of Canada, but less than 5% of its original expanse now remains in Saskatchewan.

The glacial rivers that formed the Northeast Swale deposited large limestone boulders, which were very useful for building, both for mortar and for the actual stones, as well as for fertilizer. Within the swale are boulders with splitting pins still intact, as well as boulders with drill holes, evidence of failed limestone quarrying.

The Moose Woods-Batoche Trail played an important role in the settlement of Saskatoon and area in the late 1800s before the railway was extended to Saskatoon. The Moose Woods-Batoche Trail entered Saskatoon from the south, and trail remnants are still visible within the Northeast Swale. The first settlers began to arrive in 1883, many choosing to travel along the trail from Moose Jaw rather than travel by way of the river. The trail was used by Métis and Sioux to travel to Batoche and Cree reserves near Duck Lake. During the North-West Rebellion of 1885, the Whitecap Sioux travelled this trail to join the Métis in Batoche.

The Northeast Swale is under the jurisdiction of the Meewasin Valley Authority (Meewasin). In 2013, Meewasin produced the Northeast Swale Resource Management Plan (Plan). The Plan calls for appropriate passive recreational activities and educational and research opportunities within the Northeast Swale. With native grasslands being one of the most imperilled ecosystems on the planet, the Northeast Swale contains considerable areas of native prairie grasslands and offers high-quality biodiversity, economic benefits for recreation and education, and a natural filter for air and water. As Saskatoon grows and expands, it is imperative that the ecological and historic value of the area continue to be protected and preserved.

Source: City of Saskatoon; Meewasin Valley Authority

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that contribute to the heritage value of this historic resource include:

- i) those features that relate to its natural heritage, including its biodiversity and unique landscape characteristics; and
- ii) those features that relate to its historical value, including the limestone quarries, kilns, and trail remnants.