

I urge the Councillors to think to the future and prioritize natural areas in and around our city, especially those areas in and around the Northeast Swale. The Northeast Swale and Small Swale provide Saskatoon residents with a unique prairie experience that is disappearing in our province (and country) at a rapid rate. Native prairie is the world's most endangered habitat, and we need to stop building on them, through them, and leave appropriately sized buffers around them. The fragmentation of these habitats directly contributes to the loss of biodiversity in animals and plants.

I am especially concerned about the impacts of roads and suburban development in and around the swales. Roads change animal behaviour in ways we might not be able to understand just by collaring a deer. Animals interacting with, and react to, each other in many ways, especially when in danger. So while the local population of deer might be changing how they cross the road, that change in route selection and behaviour can—and does—directly affect another animal species.

It is very important to recognize that much of the initial documentation on the Saskatoon Freeway was done over a decade ago. The city is a very different place now (having expanded its boundaries further into the roadway corridor), and so too is the province. We need to recognize that many species habitats have changed, and many species populations have declined. We cannot base decisions on old research.

Even though the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure are charged with conducting the Saskatoon Freeway public sessions, the City is not hapless when it comes to the final location of the Freeway. While the Swale Watchers may be represented on a working group, we don't know much else about the process. Where is the balance of decision-making power? How are the working groups divided, and in what way do they influence final decisions? This roadway will impact a key piece of regional ecology, and the City has an immediate interest in the protection of its Green Infrastructure. Prior planning work on this project was completed without sufficient investigation by the Province; public understanding of and concern for the Swale has also increased since then. A formal environmental assessment will provide only a partial understanding of the true impacts of this Freeway. A regional, strategic environmental assessment would be preferable to continued piecemeal surveys, and is something that the P4G should be tasked with completing.

The City can and should push back against the province, rather than defer its responsibility to address environmental concerns to the Swale Watchers. Even if the City stands to benefit from the roadway, it can still influence where it goes. I am still very disappointed that the city built McOrmond road. It's time to take the environment seriously and radically halt suburban sprawl.

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