

### Preferred Candidate Study Area - the North Saskatchewan River Valley

#### Candidate Site Options

Throughout 2022 and 2023, the Partner Table has explored potential site options for a National Urban Park (NUP) in the Edmonton area. This began with an examination of three site options - the North Saskatchewan River Valley; the Big Lake area, in northwest Edmonton; and the Emerald Crescent, in southeast Edmonton.

The partners have identified the River Valley as the preferred study area for a potential National Urban Park. There is interest in working towards a long-term vision that includes designation of the majority of the River Valley in Edmonton. However, given the extensive scale and complexity of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System, the City of Edmonton and the Partner Table are considering which areas within the system present the greatest opportunity under Parks Canada's NUP Program, and could therefore be prioritized as a potential first phase of a NUP.

The exploration of candidate site options and a recommendation of the River Valley reflects a synthesis of a number of ideas and inputs including initial technical analysis and discussions with partners, the Stakeholder Committee, and City of Edmonton leadership. Guiding principles such as those proposed in the draft National Urban Parks Policy<sup>1</sup> (under development) and various City of Edmonton open space policies and plans were also used to inform these options. While initial public and GBA+ engagement focused on priorities, opportunities and concerns toward a National Urban Park in the Edmonton area, many important considerations emerged and these results were also considered.



<sup>1</sup><https://parks.canada.ca/pun-nup/politique-policy>

High level technical analysis was completed and included the review of the existing ecological network and ecological features, current land uses, recreational uses, cultural connections, access considerations and corresponding opportunities for regional connections.

### Preferred Study Area

The River Valley has the highest potential to simultaneously advance the goals of the NUP program and the vision and implementation of key City of Edmonton open space strategies and plans, including *Breathe*: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy, Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan, and site-level master plans. Some of the main opportunities to meet these goals are outlined below.

- Meet local, federal and municipal conservation targets by providing the opportunity to protect and connect a continuous network of open spaces and/or significant natural areas across the city, with the river serving as the main anchor point. This could include exploring opportunities for land acquisition, conservation or agricultural easements with private landowners and/or the designation of formal protected areas.
- Support the River Valley as a hub of activity for people to gather, learn about nature and enjoy a diversity of recreation activities and access options for people of all ages and abilities in all seasons.
- Provide connections to regionally significant areas that support tourism, recreational planning and conservation planning. In particular, working with adjacent municipalities to connect areas of the River Valley to other ecologically significant natural areas within the region.
- Establish a long-term, coordinated, consistent system-wide approach to management, operations, use and nature/cultural interpretation driven by local needs and context.
- Recent planning work has identified a strong level of interest from the public and stakeholder that supports both increased protection and preservation of Edmonton's valued spaces in the River Valley and careful management of the multitude of uses and activities through the development of management plans and monitoring programs, community stewardship, visitor management, nature interpretation and public education.

## Attachment 3

- Partnership opportunities with local organizations, regional partners and other levels of government. Key projects include:
  - Parks Canada's National Program for Ecological Corridors
  - Canadian Heritage Rivers System Designation
  - Provincial Protected Areas / Provincial Parks (e.g. Big Island Provincial Park)
- Advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through Indigenous leadership and stewardship, connection to land and water opportunities, and the promotion of Indigenous voices and stories.
  - Indigenous governments and communities have significant historical and cultural connections to the River Valley and it is important that the establishment of a NUP honour and strengthen the City of Edmonton's existing relationships and agreements such as the City of Edmonton Urban Indigenous Accord, Indigenous Framework, and the Memorandums of Understanding with the Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations and the Metis Nation of Alberta.

### Alternative Options Explored

Two other potential candidate site options were explored: Big Lake area, in northwest Edmonton, and the Emerald Crescent, in southeast Edmonton. While they were found to provide unique opportunities to protect critical wetland habitat, to re-establish regional ecological connections and provide unique educational and recreational opportunities, it was determined they were not a strong fit for a National Urban Park, and did not meet NUP program goals. This is in part due to their remote geographic location, relatively limited transportation options, timing and progress of development and population growth, and potential future land ownership negotiation and land assembly needs.