

## Status of Nature at its Best and Remaining Provincial Dollars

### Recommendation:

That the April 12, 2011, Asset Management and Public Works Department report 2011PW8339 be received for information.

### Report Summary

**This report identifies the status and future plans for Nature at its Best, one of seven planning areas of the River Valley Alliance. The Big Island/Woodbend Natural Area, as identified by the North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society, falls within this boundary.**

### Previous Council/Committee Action

At the March 8, 2011, Transportation and Public Works Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration work with the River Valley Alliance and provide a report to Transportation and Public Works Committee, as soon as possible, with:

- a) an update on the status of Area 2: Nature at its Best
- b) a review of the proposal presented by the North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society
- c) an update on the potential allocation of remaining provincial funds of \$17 million

### Report

- Area 2 of the River Valley Alliance's Capital Region River Valley Park

Plan of Action is called Nature at its Best and is the City of Edmonton's most westerly or upstream plan area of the regional park system. With a mandate to preserve, protect and enhance the 88 kilometre stretch of North Saskatchewan River Valley corridor, this particular area's focus is on a "less is more" development strategy.

- The Area 2 plan emphasizes the natural beauty of the area with future trails-based or connective infrastructure amenities to be constructed. Specifically, the plan identifies the development of primary trails, a pedestrian footbridge, a hand launch (canoes/kayaks) and a small interpretive centre with washrooms for future development.
- The recent River Valley Alliance federal funding announcement does not include funding for development in Area 2. As well, land acquisition costs are not eligible for the federal funding.
- The western boundary of Area 2 is in Parkland County north of the river and in Leduc County to the south. The eastern boundary is at the Anthony Henday bridge crossing. The lands that make up the corridor along the south side of the river are private property, two golf courses (one private and the other a crown lease) and future anticipated environmental reserve (after subdivision). Parkland, private property and crown land (Big Island) are the primary landowner types along the north side of the river and the majority of the current zoning is AG, Agriculture.

### North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society

- The North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society (the Society) *“was formed in 2008 to preserve one of Edmonton’s most valuable resources. Their goal is to conserve and protect environmentally, historically and archeologically sensitive areas in and around the North Saskatchewan River Valley for the Enjoyment of all Albertans.”*
- A significant proposal from the Society is to preserve an area that encompasses much of the River Valley corridor area within Nature at its Best, as well as ravine areas outside the corridor extending into Parkland County and to the White Birch table land natural area (NW384) (Map Attachment 1). The Society identifies this 500 hectare area as the Big Island/Woodbend Natural Area. These lands are rich in biodiversity containing old growth forested areas and a very large and significant riparian or wetland area.
- Securement or protection of lands identified within this proposal area on the south side of the river will occur by Environmental Reserve designation with the future subdivision of the Keswick Neighbourhood Area Structure Plan.
- Protecting the lands on the north side of the river is more challenging because much of the area is privately held in an unplanned area of the city, i.e. no approved Area Structure Plan in place. Parks owns small portions of the proposal area and the Province owns Big Island which is also within the proposal boundary.

- The City and the River Valley Alliance’s shared interest within the proposal area would be to secure land or easements ultimately ensuring connectivity of the regional park system and to facilitate the protection, preservation and enhancement of these lands within the valley corridor.

### Remaining Provincial Dollars

- The River Valley Alliance secured a \$50 million provincial grant in 2008. The funding is restricted to securing access to lands and to investing in connecting components of the valley park (trails, river crossings, water access and landscape protection).
- The December 22, 2010, Federal announcement requires one-third funding from each of the three levels of government. The Province’s share (\$29.6 million) will come from its \$50 million grant. Given that the River Valley Alliance has already spent \$3.5 million for the trails component of the Fort Edmonton Footbridge, the unallocated remainder of the Provincial funding is (\$50 million - \$29.6 million - \$3.5 million) approximately \$17 million.
- In order for some of the projects identified in the recent federal funding announcement to proceed, securing land through purchase or some form of access/easement agreement is required. Until such time as the municipal funding commitments to these projects are confirmed by the regional partners in the River Valley Alliance, the requirements or assignment of the unallocated \$17 million remains undetermined by the River Valley Alliance Board of Directors. The majority of the

projects contemplated in the federal funding request that require land fall outside the boundaries of the City of Edmonton.

### Policy

The River Valley Alliance projects and plan, as well as the proposal of the Society, are supported by many current planning and policy documents including:

- The Way Ahead
- Municipal Development Plan (The Way We Grow)
- North Saskatchewan River Valley Bylaw Area Redevelopment Plan - Bylaw 7188
- North Saskatchewan and Ravine System Protection Overlay, Section 811 of the Zoning Bylaw 12800
- Floodplain Protection Overlay, Section 812 of the Zoning Bylaw 12800
- Urban Parks Management Plan
- Parkland Bylaw 2202
- Natural Connections Strategic Plan
- Natural Areas Systems Policy C-531
- Environmental Policy C-512
- Ribbon of Green Master Plan

### Corporate Outcomes

- Transform Edmonton's Urban Form
- Improve Edmonton's Livability
- Preserve and Sustain Edmonton's Environment

### Budget/Financial Implications

The recent federal/River Valley Alliance funding announcement does not include projects in Area 2. Development for access and connectivity is not funded at this time however it remains a future priority for the River Valley Alliance. Should the City of Edmonton wish to secure additional funding for projects or

land, an application to the River Valley Alliance would need to be submitted for consideration.

### Attachments

1. Nature At Its Best Overlay Map

### Others Reviewing this Report

- R. G. Klassen, General Manager, Planning and Development Department
- L. Rosen, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer