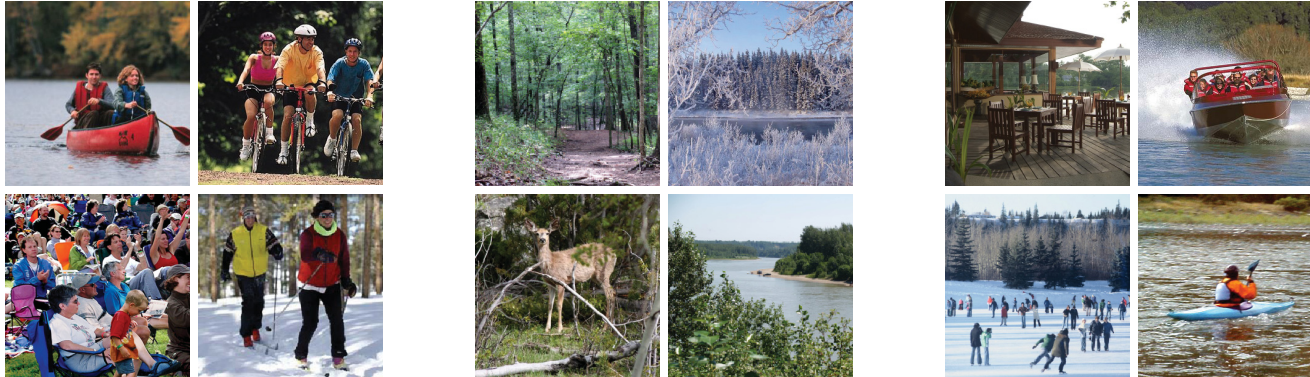


A Plan of Action for the

Capital Region River Valley Park

S U M M A R Y R E P O R T





THE RIVER VALLEY ALLIANCE

This Plan of Action was developed by The River Valley Alliance (RVA). Established in 1996 as a volunteer group, The RVA was incorporated in March 2003. Its founding shareholders include the seven municipalities holding lands in the Capital Region North Saskatchewan River valley – the Town of Devon, Parkland County, Leduc County, City of Edmonton, Strathcona County, City of Fort Saskatchewan, and Sturgeon County.

The RVA partners share a common goal – to protect, preserve and enhance the Capital Region's river valley for year-round access, for the benefit and enjoyment of Albertans and visitors to the province, and for future generations. They share a dream of protecting and enhancing the Capital Region's river valley and turning it into one of the best and largest integrated regional metropolitan parks in North America.

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Chapter 1

Start With A Compelling Vision

Today...

The Capital Region North Saskatchewan River valley is an 88 kilometre, loosely connected strip of land covering 18,000 acres. People marvel at its unspoiled beauty. We drive through the river valley, travel on the many trails already in place, paddle its waters, experience the changing seasons, and catch glimpses of wildlife that live in the river valley. It is a priceless treasure, but its full potential as an internationally recognized major regional metropolitan park has yet to be tapped.

Now imagine this...

The entire river valley is linked and accessible as a single regional metropolitan park. Walk, bike, canoe, run or cross country ski from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan in one of the largest metropolitan parks in the world — a defining symbol of Alberta's Capital Region.

Start a canoe trip from Devon's River Valley West Park. Enjoy a day skiing or mountain biking at Rabbit Hill. Hike one of the adventure trails to Terwilligar Park or take in a seminar

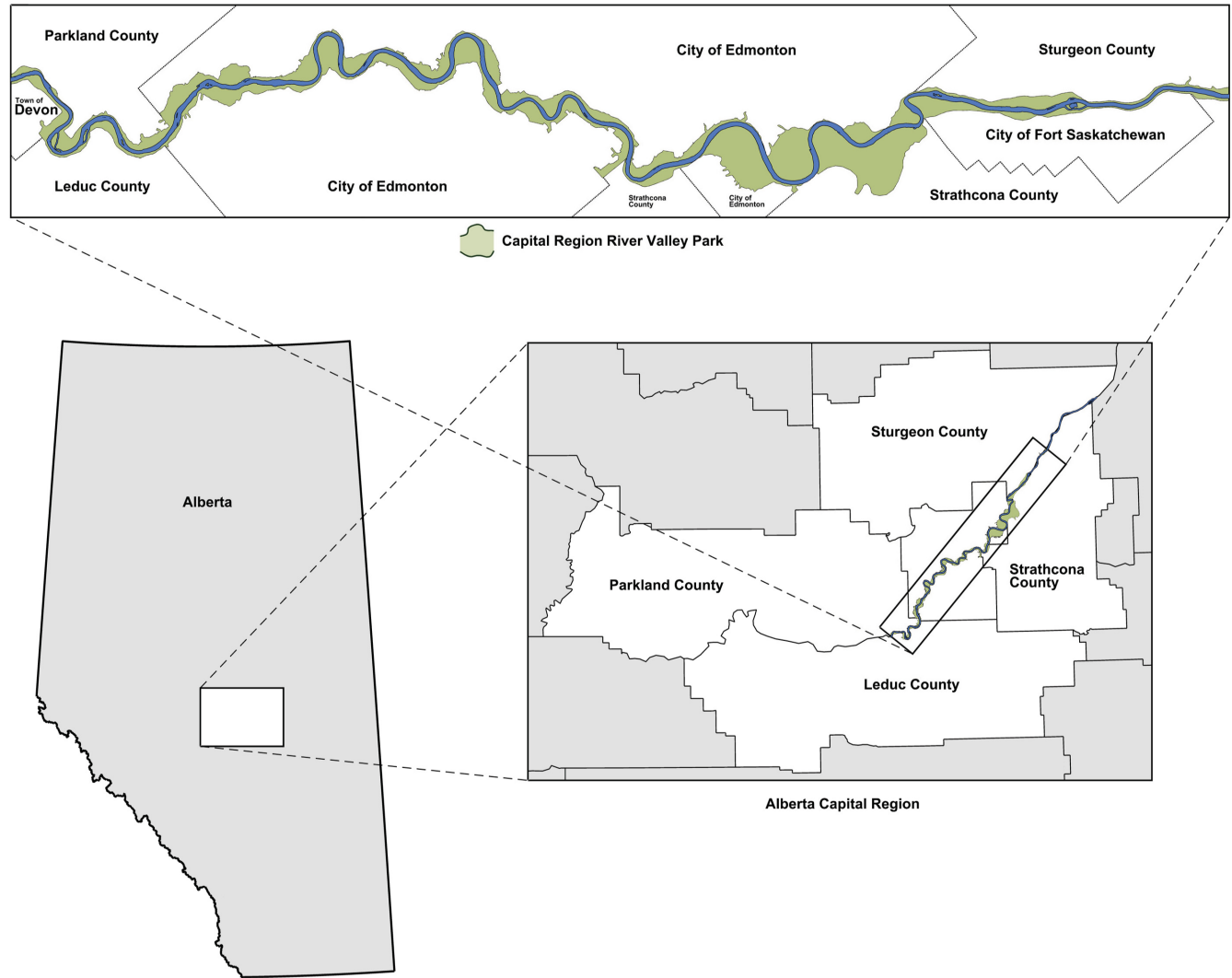


Figure 1.1 – Regional Context of the Capital Region River Valley Park

Capital Region River Valley Park

at a new river valley conference centre. Enjoy nature at its best in natural landscapes that are home to a diverse array of flora and fauna. Go for a horseback ride at the Whitemud Equine Centre then spend an afternoon at the John Janzen Nature Centre. Relive history at Fort Edmonton Park or check out the elephants at the Valley Zoo.

Walk or take a river taxi from downtown Edmonton to the new grounds of the Legislature Buildings or the Royal Alberta Museum and enjoy neighbourhood restaurants and breathtaking views of the river on a warm summer evening. Go for a walk, a run or a bike ride, then catch the action at Telus Field or travel east to tour a new Coal Mine Interpretive Centre, a river marina, and a new River Science Centre and Aquarium.

Take in a concert at the new festival amphitheatre or if you are the adventurous kind, experience a world-class whitewater course, then head to a new recreation-based park in northeast Edmonton where athletes from around the world test their skills.

Learn about topics such wildlife behavior, natural area conservation, and pond ecosystems at the Strathcona Nature Centre.

Then round out the final leg of the Capital Region River Valley Park with a historic tour of the Lamoureux Settlement, Fort Augustus, Edmonton House, and the Fort Saskatchewan Northwest Mounted Police Garrison Barracks.

Natural landscapes, adventure, sports, history, education and family fun. The Capital Region River Valley Park will have it all.

That vision takes us far beyond the river valley we see today. It stretches our imagination and allows us to envision what this unique treasure could become.

If action is taken now, our Capital Region river valley could be:

- ◆ A significant natural corridor with its natural diversity and visual character appropriately managed for the benefit of future generations
- ◆ One of the largest internationally recognized metropolitan parks in the world — rivalling the importance of Stanley Park to Vancouver or Central Park to New York
- ◆ Recognized around the world as one of the truly great metropolitan parks, integrating urban and surrounding rural regions and landscapes

- ◆ A rich blend of preserved natural areas, places for recreation, winding trails, river access, urban life, historical sites, and world-class attractions and events
- ◆ A vibrant and changing place with something for everyone — old and young, families, sports and adventure enthusiasts, history buffs, tourists, and the growing population of the Capital Region
- ◆ A lasting legacy for future generations

These opportunities are possible, but only if we act now ... with a clear vision of what we want to achieve for the river valley and a careful and deliberate plan to attain the goals we set. Without that, we risk seeing development that threatens the river valley's current biodiversity and contributes to the fragmentation and erosion of a river valley that is, in many ways, unique in the world.

We can not be lulled into thinking this invaluable treasure of nature and history will be there for future generations to enjoy. The river valley is under pressure and with a growing population, increasing demands, and fragmented developments, we are already seeing signs that the river valley environment is under significant strain.

The RVA, with the support of its municipal shareholders and the provincial and federal governments, initiated the preparation of a comprehensive plan to integrate the 88 km of North Saskatchewan River valley from Devon through Edmonton to Fort Saskatchewan as the Capital Region River Valley Park.

The Plan challenges us to imagine the future of the Capital Region's river valley and to take action to make that vision a reality. It sets out seven key planning areas. Each unit is unique in its own way, each providing a blend of natural areas, current attractions and exciting opportunities to bring new life and vibrancy into the river valley. The plan sets clear and overriding objectives for protecting and preserving the natural environment of the river valley while also meeting social and economic objectives. It also describes the important steps that need to be taken to achieve the vision and secure the lasting legacy of the river valley. This is a legacy our children and their children so richly deserve.

Implementation of the Plan will substantially increase the environmental, social, and economic capital of the Capital region river valley and generate a wide range of ongoing benefits. The net benefits resulting from

Capital Region River Valley Park

implementation are conservatively estimated at \$89.1 million per year.

We can not let this opportunity slip through our fingers. The time to act is now. The plan is here. With the support of all stakeholders in the RVA and people in the Capital Region, the Plan can and will proceed and succeed.

Why This Vision?

This vision reflects The River Valley Alliance's goal of turning the river valley into one of the largest river valley parks in the world. It also reflects our research into other leading parks in the world, the expectations of residents in the Capital Region, and the views of key partners in this initiative.

The word "park" has a full range of meanings. On the one hand, parks can be manicured, carefully planned horticultural areas such as Central Park in New York. At the other end of the continuum are protected wilderness landscapes such as the Nahanni National Park in Canada's North. Banff National Park has both a backcountry wilderness area and a "front country" with a very busy downtown site. Vancouver's Stanley Park has both man-

made parks, facilities, sea walks, and a very natural core.

Selecting the right mix for the Capital Region River Valley Park involves a blend of a number of objectives. The balanced perspective outlined in this plan of action is based on the definition of "park" outlined by the International Conservation Union. It defines a protected scenic landscape/seascape (Category V) as "an area of land, with water elements as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity." (Phillips 2002)

The Plan also reflects the concept of a regional metropolitan park, involving seven municipalities sharing a common vision and objectives. That vision is complemented by a clear respect for the diversity of the region and the unique features that have been developed and are planned for the river valley. As a result, the Plan for the river valley park connects and integrates the entire valley from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan. It moves beyond a loose collection of individual parks and miscellaneous properties and attractions.

But it also exhibits diversity and the regional identity that reflects local settings, values and sensibilities. The park will be connected with trail ways, water ways and byways, providing access to all. In the face of increasing urban expansion, it will remain as a lasting legacy, a scenic landscape corridor that is protected, conserved and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

With that context in mind, the Plan sets out a vision of a rich natural, cultural and scenic landscape of characteristically natural areas and vistas. Woven into this, are places to experience nature, recreate and celebrate our community successes. Over time, the river valley park will be acknowledged for its vision, leadership, planning and management, where ecological, economic and social benefits are balanced, producing a rich backdrop for urban

and rural community life, and conserving important ecological functions and biodiversity. The result will enhance the quality of life for people in the Capital Region and provide a lasting legacy for future generations of Albertans.

Most important, the Plan is not just about the river valley, but about building a great metropolitan region that includes, at its core, a future that is green, healthy, prosperous, beautiful, sustainable, a source of pride and an example to be emulated by other communities. It extends well past the top of the bank and is integrated in concept and design with both existing developments and new growth areas. In every way, the Capital Region River Valley Park will be a symbol of the strength and vision of the region and a tangible, unifying characteristic of the Capital Region.



Chapter 2 The Time to Act Is Now

This Plan of Action sets out a clear vision for the future of the Capital Region River Valley Park and identifies opportunities to achieve specific environmental, social and economic objectives. But the key question is: Why is it urgent to move ahead now?

The answer is that the river valley is coming under increasing pressure, and unless we put a clear and deliberate plan in place for the river valley — and act on the Plan now in cooperation with landowners, developers,

conservation groups and municipalities — we risk losing opportunities to preserve, protect, enhance and build a real treasure and a legacy, not just for now, but for future generations.

Alberta and the Capital Region are experiencing enormous growth. Perhaps like never before in our history, there is a growing recognition of the importance of planning ahead, anticipating the impact of new developments, preserving our environment, and not compromising the quality of life we value so highly.

That certainly applies to the river valley. Much of the land in the river valley is already being used for a variety of purposes ranging from recreation to industrial developments. The population in the Capital Region is expected to grow significantly in the coming years, putting increasing pressure not only on the environment and the current biodiversity in the river valley but also on existing attractions and facilities. We have an opportunity to build on the work done to date, start with a clear understanding of the nature of the river valley, and learn from the experiences of others to preserve, protect and enhance the value of the river valley and achieve a new vision for its future.

2.1 BUILDING ON WORK DONE TO DATE

Over the past ten years, considerable work was done by seven municipalities to anticipate and plan for the future of the river valley. Communities along the river valley and the provincial government have recognized the importance of the river valley by preserving it as a natural area for certain uses and by investing well over half a billion dollars to develop public facilities in the river valley including public parks, trails, golf courses, campgrounds, and major attractions.

Led by The River Valley Alliance, an Integrated Concept Plan for Alberta's Capital Region River Valley was prepared in 1998 and a Trail Plan was completed in 2000. The Concept Plan was updated in 2003 and several initiatives have proceeded since then. Funding assistance was provided by the provincial and federal governments in 2005 to allow this more detailed plan to be developed.

In 2003, The River Valley Alliance was formally established as a not-for-profit corporation with seven municipal shareholders including the counties of Parkland, Leduc, Sturgeon and

Strathcona, the Town of Devon, and the cities of Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan. Members of the RVA share a common goal — to protect, preserve and enhance the Capital Region’s river valley for year-round access, for the benefit and enjoyment of Albertans and visitors to the province, and for future generations.

The Plan is designed to achieve that goal. It builds on previous work; provides a common base of information; outlines key objectives, a detailed planning framework, and opportunities for developing seven planning areas within the river valley; and it provides a road map for implementing the Plan.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF OUR RIVER VALLEY

Before describing more detailed plans and opportunities for the future of the river valley, it is important to begin with a clear understanding of the nature of the river valley, its history, and its current environment.

The North Saskatchewan River valley today is a significant natural area and an important feature of the parkland natural region of Alberta. It supports a rich geological, historical and natural history, acquired through centuries of natural succession and human development. By studying the way the Capital Region was used by its early inhabitants, we can see how the river valley played a significant role in how our society and economy evolved and developed. The natural functions and ecological features of the river valley provide the foundation on which the Capital Region has grown and matured. That reality, and the historical role the river has played in the Capital Region, should be recognized and reflected in future plans for the river valley.

“The North Saskatchewan River is an essential river. The waterway has been literally life-giving for over a millennium. Pronghorn antelope were once prolific along the south banks of the North Saskatchewan River between Edmonton and the Forks. Trumpeter Swans, now endangered, were harvested in the thousands for their feathers and quills. Grizzly bears were commonly hunted along the river for food and floor covering in the mid-nineteenth century.”
(Kostash, 2005)

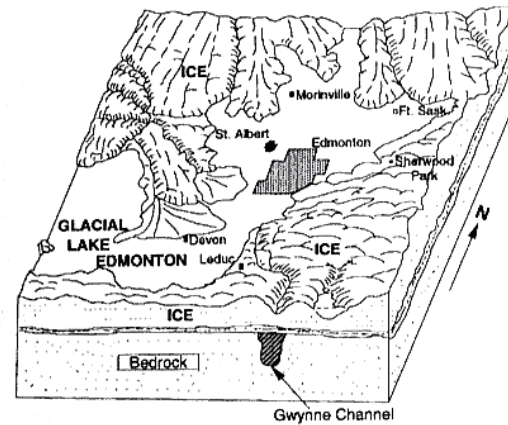


Figure 2.1 – Edmonton Glaciation. After the last major glaciation, the Edmonton area was covered by a large lake. It was during the draining of the lake that the Saskatchewan River was formed (Pyszczyk 1996).

Geology

In geological terms, our river valley is very young; the beginning of the processes to carve it out of the landscape began less than 12,000 years ago (Godfrey 1993). Over time, the river has slowly eroded through layers of sediment that existed before glaciers covered the area as well as material that was deposited when the glaciers melted. The result is valley embankments that, in many places, rise well over 30 m from the river to the top of the

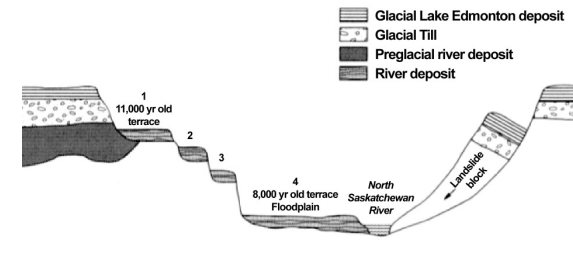


Figure 2.2 – River Profile. This stylized profile of the North Saskatchewan River shows the relative positions of terrace formations (Pyszczyk 1996).

bank. This erosion has also exposed areas of bedrock as old as 65 million years and has yielded a variety of paleontological finds (Godfrey 1993).

As the glaciers melted, a large glacial lake formed in the Capital Region called Glacial Lake Edmonton (Godfrey 1993). Most of the city of Edmonton is located on the old lakebed of this glacial lake. Evidence of this can be found in the fine clay sediments that have been exposed by the carving action of the river. (Alberta Geologic Survey 2004; EPEC 1981, 1982; see Soil texture maps, Technical Report, Volume II, Map Atlas).

These finer clay deposits include slick bentonitic clay layers and a fine layer of volcanic ash which have been exposed at

various locations along the river valley in the Capital Region. These exposed deposits have created distinctive landforms including hoodoo columns of bentonite found in Dawson Park and Rundle Park.

Our river valley has also provided geologists with other examples of geological developments in the river valley, including the Mazama ash layer formed after an eruption of Mount Mazama in Oregon about 6800 years ago (Godfrey 1993).

The Existing Natural Context

Ecologically, the entire length of the Capital Region river valley, from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan, lies within the north extent of the Central Parkland Natural Sub-region (Achuff 1994). Located between the grasslands of the south and boreal forests to the north, this sub-region typically contains elements of both zones. The northern part of the sub-region historically consisted of relatively closed aspen and balsam poplar forest interspersed with areas of fescue grasslands and a variety of wetlands. Over time, undisturbed forests were transformed into spruce stands characteristic

of the boreal zones further north. Today, few continuous tracts of deciduous forest or natural grasslands remain, as much of the sub-region has been converted to urban and agricultural land uses.

In those areas where the river valley has generally remained undisturbed by urban development (mainly steep slopes and areas susceptible to flooding), the river valley continues to support native vegetation and associated wildlife. Given the largely modified context of the adjacent uplands, the river valley is unique for the diversity and extent of intact, native habitat it contains. This is partly due to the valley's terrain. The deeply incised and broad river valley meanders on a northeastern tangent across the Capital Region, and the slopes present a variety of aspects. As a result, a wide range of soil and moisture conditions are present in this section of the river valley, each capable of sustaining different types of vegetation. Cold and wet north-facing slopes are often densely forested with white spruce trees, while dry south-facing slopes support grass and shrub-land. On the broad, moist flood plains, aspen and poplar forests have become established, interspersed with riparian wetlands.

This diversity in habitat can support a variety of wildlife species, particularly in areas where large patches of native vegetation remain. Large mammals, including deer, coyote and moose (in the more rural areas), are often seen in the river valley and its tributary ravines. Songbirds, which typically comprise the bulk of vertebrate diversity in any area, similarly dominate the wildlife of the Capital Region river valley. Given the variety of habitats in the river valley, specialist species can also survive within the valley, and as a result, the overall richness and diversity of species is quite high. Such diversity is not only valuable to residents in the region but also critical to the ecological function of the river valley. Habitat diversity is a key indicator of a sustainable, healthy ecosystem.

In a landscape extensively cleared and modified for agriculture and urban development, the river valley is the largest green space in the Capital Region. Faced with future growth pressures, it seems certain that the river valley will increasingly be surrounded by a developed, urban and suburban landscape. Given this reality, careful management of the river valley's historical and natural resources

will be required in order to achieve the RVA's vision of protecting the essential character of the river valley.

Vegetation¹

The bulk of the Capital Region's river valley is comprised of wide, deeply-incised terrestrial valley slopes. Riparian habitat, including the river, wetlands, islands within the river and in larger water bodies (e.g., Hawrelak ponds) and dug-outs (many of which may now have succeeded to natural vegetation), comprises a relatively small area of the valley (about 3%, Table 2.1).

Surprisingly, however, only about 45% the Capital Region river valley is naturally vegetated and mostly by grassland (Table 2.1). Over the entire 88 km length of the river valley, only about 5% is forested. This is partly due to the variation of slope and aspect along the meandering valley. South and west exposed slopes are drier, which favours grassland or shrub land, while forests establish on the

¹ For more detail on vegetation in the river valley, please refer to Stream Report S4 "Environmental Management" of the Technical Report, Volume I, Main Report.

Capital Region River Valley Park

Vegetation Class		Total Area (ha)	% of Study Area
Forest	Coniferous	1015	1.33
Forest	Deciduous	2141	2.81
Forest	Mixed wood	637	0.84
Grassland	Grassland	24,222	31.79
Shrubland	Shrubland	6141	8.06
Natural Vegetation Subtotal		34,154	45%
Manicured	Manicured Area	12,156	16%
Riparian	Dugout	20	0.03
Riparian	Island	23	0.03
Riparian	River-Stream	1888	2.48
Riparian	Wetland	285	0.37
Riparian Areas Subtotal		14,372	3%
Disturbed	Agricultural Land	15,174	19.92
Disturbed	Built-up Area	8895	11.68
Disturbed	Exposed Soil	17	0.02
Disturbed	Gravel Extraction	3573	4.69
Disturbed Areas Subtotal		27,659	36%
Total		76,185	100%

Table 2.1 – Classes of Vegetation Communities in the Capital Region valley.

moister north and east slopes or river terraces. However, as noted in the previous section, much of the river terrace area throughout the river valley has been converted to agricultural

or urban land uses, removing much of the native vegetation from those sites. As a result, forested lands are now confined mainly to steep slopes and those terraces with limited access

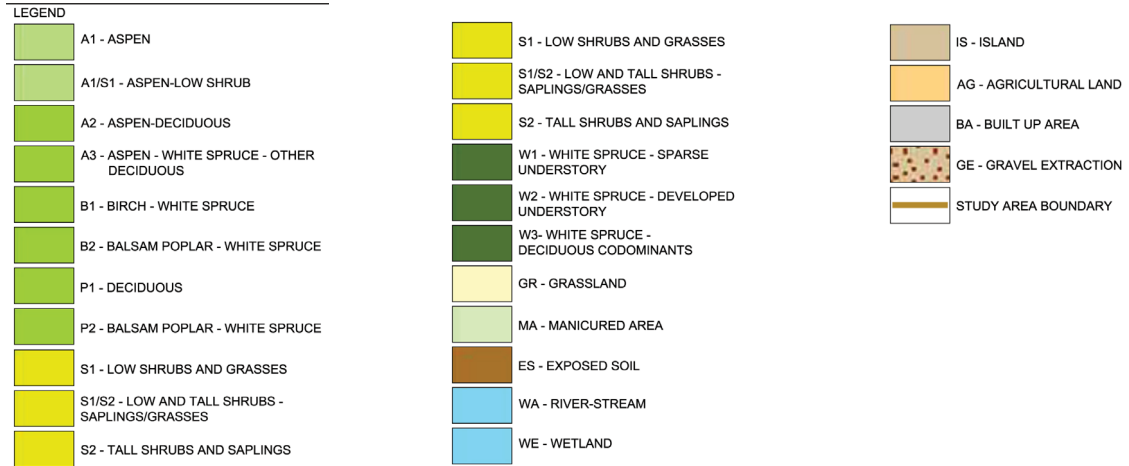
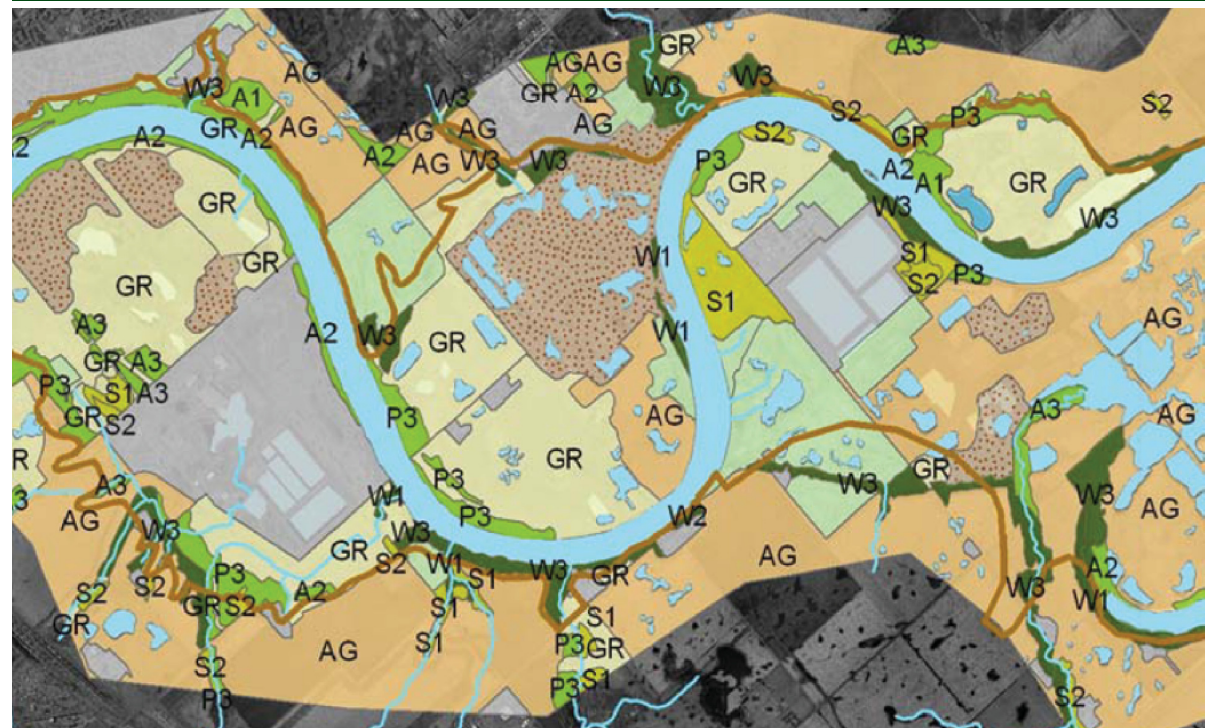


Figure 2.3 – Vegetation Communities in the Capital Region Valley: This image is an excerpt of a larger map depicting the various types and extent of vegetation communities in the river valley. For the full map, please refer to Maps H1-H3 of the Technical Report, Volume II, Map Atlas.

or legal protection. Forested river terraces have been retained as parkland within the City of Edmonton, but the most extensive forests lie between Devon and Edmonton where steep terrain has largely prevented access onto the river floodplain.

The remainder of the Capital Region river valley has been modified to some extent for human use. Disturbed lands, including built-up areas, agricultural lands, exposed soils and gravel extraction areas, comprise about 36% of the Capital Region river valley. Manicured lands, including parkland and road rights-of-way, make up about 16% of the area. Of these modified areas, built-up areas have the most limited capacity to support native species. The others may either provide some habitat or have potential to provide habitat once human use ceases (e.g. gravel extraction areas). Lands that have been modified for human use tend to be concentrated in the urban areas; however, in some cases, industrial facilities (including gravel operations and heavy to medium industry) are located along the rural sections of the river valley. This is particularly true along the south side of the river, between Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan. Still, a few

large natural areas remain through this section of the river valley albeit in a patchy distribution (see Figure 2.3).

Wildlife²

A total of 275 wildlife species can be found in the Capital Region valley. This includes five amphibian species, two reptile species, and 44 mammals that are year-round residents of the area. Birds make up the bulk of the wildlife diversity in the river valley. Of the 214 birds that have been reported in greater Edmonton (Ritchie 2002), the majority are migratory species that travel into the area each year to breed (155 species). Another 20 species of birds migrate through the area as they fly to breeding grounds further north. They may be observed during stop-overs, when they rest or feed in the river valley. Another six species, including the snowy owl and bohemian waxwing, occur only in winter, while four species are typically in the area during winter but sometimes remain throughout the year. The remaining 29 species are year-round

² For more detail on wildlife in the river valley, please refer to Stream Report S4 "Environmental Management" of the Technical Report, Volume I, Main Report.

residents that breed and over-winter within the same general area, or will travel only a short distance within the same region, usually in response to seasonal conditions.

Mammals include many animals tolerant of human activity as well as species that require specific habitats and are more characteristic of less developed forested areas to the north. During public consultation sessions, residents in the Devon area noted that bear and wolves are seen from time to time in that section of the river valley, with sightings as recent as this year. Vegetation in the Capital Region river valley offers a range of habitats and as a result, there is a diversity of wildlife in the river valley including wildlife that are specific to coniferous, wetland and grassland habitats as well as urban-adapted species and species that can survive in a wide range of habitats.

Special Status Species³

Although the habitat in the river valley has experienced some disturbance in the past, there is enough land with sufficient quality to

³ For more detail on special status species in the river valley, please refer to Stream Report S4 “Environmental Management” of the Technical Report, Volume I, Main Report.

support a variety of nationally- or provincially-designated special status wildlife species. Most of these are uncommon or rare species while a few of them are common to fairly common in the Capital Region.

Rare plants are tracked by the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Center (ANHIC) in Alberta Community Development. Their records indicate a total of 62 species have been reported within the Capital Region river valley and the immediately adjacent lands. Many of the species included in the ANHIC records were concentrated in the rural areas around Devon and Fort Saskatchewan where native vegetation is extensive and more diverse, and along stream drainages, notably the Sturgeon River, Point aux Pins Creek and Whitemud Creek.

Special status species have also been observed within the developed areas including Dawson Park, Hawrelak Park and the University Forest Reserve east of Emily Murphy Park. Like the rural areas, these parks support broad areas of coniferous and deciduous forest which often have high diversity. In the case of the Forest Reserve, groundwater springs and seeps on the steep slopes of this park provide an unusual

feature within the river valley. Groundwater features are particularly common along the west end of the river valley on the steep slopes near Wedgewood Ravine and east of Terwillegar Park. Rare species could occur in any area with native vegetation, but are more likely to occur in these unique habitats (e.g. springs, wetlands, streams, extensive areas of native vegetation).

Aquatic (Riverine) Habitat⁴

A meandering river like the North Saskatchewan creates a variety of aquatic and bank habitats that support a diverse community of fish and wildlife species. Faster sections of the river passing over shallows create what is called a “riffle” habitat, and where the depth of the river increases, a “run” habitat is formed. Slower water flowing over shallows in the river provides a flat river habitat, while deeper sections become pools. Where water is slow enough to allow sand and gravel to be deposited, sand bars develop. Tributaries offer access to yet other forms of

⁴ For more detail on aquatic habitat in the river valley, please refer to Stream Report S4 “Environmental Management” of the Technical Report, Volume I, Main Report.

aquatic habitat. These areas are often used by fish for spawning. Although river run habitat is dominant, the other types of habitat are distributed throughout the Capital Region river valley (see Wildlife: Bank and Aquatic Habitat maps: Technical Report, Volume II, Map Atlas).

These habitats support a range of aquatic invertebrates, from those adapted to the fine sediments of pool and flat habitat, to the pelagic communities typical of riffle and run areas. Fish are also specialized to different aquatic habitats, but can move through the river to take advantage of varying conditions to meet daily, seasonal and life-stage requirements. For example, the fine sediments of flats and pools are favoured by sturgeon for feeding, but rocky cobble on the outer bends of the river are key spawning areas. River flats, particularly the shallows along the edge, are important nursery areas for young fish, as these waters are inaccessible to their larger predators. Deeper pools and runs provide key over-wintering habitat for those species that remain in the Capital Region through the winter.

Various river and bank features also provide habitats for riparian wildlife (see wildlife, bank

and aquatic habitat maps). Bank swallows have nested in several locations on the steep banks along the river (e.g. at the southwest edge of Hawrelak Park, on the north side of the river below the Convention Center, and on the south side of the river across from the Edmonton Golf and Country Club). The numerous sandbars and islands along the river are also important waterfowl loafing sites. Canada geese, gulls, terns and other waterbirds use these sites to rest and some may also nest on the larger islands. Beaver have established bank burrows in many locations along the river; their food caches of fresh twigs provide the only sign of habitation. Small wetlands along the valley bottom and tributary streams support populations of breeding boreal chorus frog, wood frog and Canada toad. Merlins are quite abundant in the river valley and key sites were identified by EPEC 1982. These sites provide easily accessible opportunities for the public to view wildlife within the river valley.

2.3 INTEGRATING THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF OUR RIVER VALLEY INTO A REGIONAL METROPOLITAN PARK

A number of key factors need to be considered in order to proceed with the Plan and ensure that its natural beauty is integrated into future plans for the river valley.

An environmental assessment was conducted in support of the Capital Region River Valley Park Plan. GIS analyses, including contour data, trail and facilities sensitivity models, and a wildlife corridor model (see technical compendium) have been prepared to inform planning decisions. The GIS data base, models and supporting data are an important legacy of this project and are available for the municipalities of the Capital Region river valley to use in their future planning initiatives.

The river valley within the Capital Region is a unique feature in the regional landscape, one of the few natural areas remaining in a predominantly urban and agricultural landscape. However, as noted earlier, the river valley has not escaped development impacts and roughly half the Capital Region valley

Capital Region River Valley Park

has experienced some degree of disturbance. Forested lands will require special management attention to retain the green scenic character of the regional river valley park.

Historically, there is a rich record of prehistoric and historic sites through the river valley, concentrated in the three major urban centers of Devon, Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan. Paleontological sites have also been recorded along the river valley.

Large areas of parkland have been protected by municipal actions or have been isolated because their steep terrain makes access difficult. The largest natural areas remain in the rural sections of the river valley outside the cities of Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan. Although significant areas of parkland have a protective designation within the City of Edmonton, urban development on the adjacent uplands and into the river valley itself has fragmented those natural areas. Modelling indicates that movement by large mammals into the central core of Edmonton has been seriously impaired due to the extent and location of human development within those sections of the river valley. Travel by large wildlife species through

the city is effectively blocked. Natural areas in the central core of the city are isolated from the outlying rural river valley and other natural areas in the region. Only sections of the river valley within the suburban fringe remain sufficiently connected to rural natural areas to support regular movements by large animals. Maintaining that access will be critical in order to retain populations of deer, coyote, fox and other large- to medium-sized mammals in these parts of the river valley.

Given current conditions, different management objectives for wildlife corridors and linked habitat will be required for the rural and urban sections of the river valley. Larger wildlife species (i.e., bear, wolves, moose, deer, coyote, and fox) can only be sustained in the rural and suburban fringes of the river valley. The extent to which access is maintained for the species more tolerant of urban land use within the city must be considered carefully. Although large animals are valued by area residents, and indeed will continue to attempt to move through the river valley despite the presence of development, public interests and management capacity of provincial and municipal agencies must also be considered. Development of a

comprehensive wildlife corridor management plan involving government and public stakeholders will be necessary to ensure that the ecological function of the river valley is maintained while minimizing future wildlife-human conflicts.

Generally, the proposed trail alignments have limited potential to impact high sensitivity sites, where several environmentally sensitive resources occur. The environmental assessment completed as part of the Plan identified areas in which the alignment may require adjustments or where mitigation may be required to minimize potential impacts. Similarly, there were a few locations where the trail may impede wildlife movements in the rural sections of the river valley. Potential conflicts can be eliminated or minimized by adjusting the design or mitigating the impact, provided that upland options are available for the trail. In particular, the section of trail below the steep slopes west of Terwilleger Park will cross a narrow river terrace that provides the most permeable connection between the park and rural areas.

The requirements for permits to construct any amenities proposed for the river valley

will depend on the type of development, the specific location and funding sources. Each of the partner municipalities has some form of planning review, although only a few require an environmental assessment. Depending on the project and potential impacts, a variety of provincial legislation could apply. Any project affecting wetlands or other surface waters (particularly the river) will require approval and permits under several provincial Acts before construction can proceed. Surface disturbance triggers the requirement for a historical resource assessment, the only environmental assessment likely to be required by the province. Other Acts regulating disturbance to wildlife and weed control also fall within provincial jurisdiction.

Federally, approvals would be required for any project within the river or larger streams. Requests for those approvals, and also for federal funding, would trigger an environmental assessment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Federal funding for projects with the potential to impact wetlands requires assessment and mitigation under the Federal Policy on Wetland Conservation. Other federal regulations that explicitly prohibit

disturbance to migratory birds, species at risk and deleterious substance release to fish-bearing waters should be considered within the construction and operation plan for any project.

The successful implementation of the Plan will ultimately rest with how well it conforms to a growing public concern with ecological sustainability. The environmental sensitivity of certain areas within the river valley should determine which uses are permitted and the river valley should be zoned accordingly.

The Plan needs to be selective so that recreation and land uses do not impair the river valley setting. The Plan needs to consider restorative initiatives designed to return ecosystem health to damaged sites. Sites prone to erosion, or which contain rare or endangered wildlife (plant and animal) species, breeding and nesting areas, areas of geological interest, or areas of historical significance need to be protected. Environmental education is also needed to increase appreciation and awareness of nature in the river valley.

2.4 ADDRESSING PRESSURES ON THE RIVER VALLEY

Combined with an understanding of the current environment in the river valley, it is important to look ahead and address a number of factors that are affecting the river valley today and could potentially have an even more serious impact in the future. These factors reinforce the urgency of moving ahead with a comprehensive plan.

Urban Growth And Expansion

The population in the Capital Region now exceeds one million people. In the next 25 years, another half a million people are expected to make this region their home. That is more than the populations of Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray combined. Where will all those people live? What kind of pressure will it put on the river valley? Will the public still be able to access the river or will it be overtaken with a hodge-podge of developments? Without a deliberate, dedicated and comprehensive plan in place, we can not assume that the

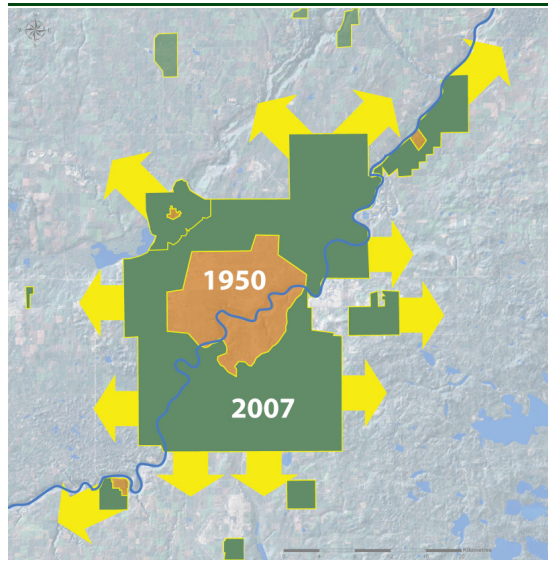


Figure 2.4 – Urban Development in the Capital Region: Past, Present, and Future.

river valley will continue to be accessible to a growing population and retain its natural character while the Capital Region grows around it. There is an urgent need to secure the necessary lands for an integrated river valley park. Otherwise, there is a very real risk that those lands, many of which are now privately owned, may be used for developments that will not fit with a vision for a world-renowned river valley park.

Analysis of the current use of the river valley shows that the use of trails in the North Saskatchewan River valley is already at or above optimal levels. Available information indicates that there are increasing numbers of complaints about congestion and collisions between cyclists, pedestrians and runners. These conditions will worsen substantially. Unless the river trail system is expanded and improved, people will go elsewhere.

Increasing Pressures on the River Valley

Current research indicates that there are almost 10 million visits to the river valley every year. If attendance at special events and projections from groups that use the river valley are included, the actual number increases to over 14 million visits, making this metropolitan regional park the most visited site in Alberta next to West Edmonton Mall. With a growing population, pressures on the river valley are expected to climb dramatically. Participation in unstructured recreation activities involving the use of trails in the river valley (e.g. hiking, running, walking, biking, canoeing, skating and skiing) is also on the rise. Unless we plan

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ahead, demand could quickly exceed the supply of recreation and tourism sites and public infrastructure. Clearly, the river valley can not meet all future demands in all locations. There is also a risk that the character and the environmental quality of the river valley and its riparian areas could be lost forever. To address this, the Plan includes strategies for adding capacity to existing facilities, spreading and diversifying use across the length of the river valley, acquiring new sites, and providing better management of use to safeguard the natural character and resources of the valley.

Preserving Natural Landscapes

The North Saskatchewan River valley is one of the few remaining natural areas in a region that is quickly becoming a predominantly urban and industrial landscape. At the same time, the river valley is certainly not an untouched natural landscape. Roughly half of the river valley area has experienced some degree of disturbance from development and use. The plan for the river valley must include strategies to retain the remaining forested land, protect and maintain the integrity of the ecosystem in the river valley, and maintain its natural green scenic character.



Understanding History

The North Saskatchewan River Valley's history stretches back almost 12,000 years when melt-water from retreating glaciers carved the North Saskatchewan River valley through the central Alberta plains. It is the site of many of the earliest developments in the Capital Region and it provides unique historical perspectives not only for people in the Capital Region but also for Albertans as a whole. The river valley has also been a shared, multi-faceted resource for its early inhabitants — the Cree, the Blackfoot and Sioux, fur traders, missionaries, and settlers.

The concept of a river valley park originated one hundred years ago. In 1907 Canada's first resident Landscape Architect, Frederick Gage Todd, presented the idea to the fledgling City of Edmonton and the neighbouring Town of Strathcona. At that time, the river valley was industrialized, with collieries, quarries, brickyards, and sawmills. Todd envisioned the river valley as a continuous park system with green natural areas and areas for public leisure and recreation. This idea was rooted in the parks movement of the late industrial revolution, when parks were seen as an oasis

from the excesses of the industrial city. Todd's idea of a river valley park gradually took hold. The land for Victoria Park was acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1912 and named Victoria Park in 1914. It quickly became a community attraction.

Today the river and its valley represent a unique scenic landscape, tying the past, present and future of communities in the Capital Region. A number of heritage and cultural sites are located in the river valley. For that reason, preserving and presenting our collective past is an important objective of the Plan for the river valley.



Figure 2.5 – Frederick Gage Todd, 1876–1948. In 1907, Frederick Todd presented Edmonton with the first vision of an attractive valley parks system (Photo: The Canadian Encyclopedia).

2.5 RESPONDING TO EXPECTATIONS

This Plan reflects the expectations and ideas of residents in the Capital Region and includes the outcomes of public consultation. Public input was conducted by the RVA during preparation of the plan. This was combined with public feedback on the completed draft plan. Consultations, surveys, and dialogue with public stakeholders was undertaken in each of the seven RVA municipalities. As a result, the following expectations were outlined for the river valley:

- Protect and preserve existing natural areas
- Maintain and enhance access for residents and visitors
- Manage potential conflicting uses through a combination of planning design, regulations, and enforcement
- Keep the river valley safe and enjoyable
- Promote partnerships to develop facilities and deliver programs and services
- Recognize the rights of private landowners and use dialogue and best efforts to

promote compatible land uses and appropriate public access to the river valley

- Recognize the uniqueness of the people, communities and cultures that are part of the river valley

Lessons also can be learned from other organizations that have embarked on similar plans for landscapes like the river valley park. Those lessons include:

- Importance of a world-class vision
- Need for coordinated bylaws, policies and planning direction
- Importance of securing funding from public and private sources
- Need to involve a broad representation in ongoing planning and decision making
- Importance of predictable, annual funding to ensure that plans are implemented and goals are met

2.6 SECURING THE VALUE

While it is difficult to place a dollar value on the river valley, its existing natural, social and economic value should be secured through a clear and deliberate plan.

- **Existing Natural Capital**

The river valley provides a series of ecological goods and services including: air purification/filtration, water quality purification, storm water management, erosion control, carbon sequestration, and pest control, along with the intrinsic value of its flora and fauna.

- **Existing Social Capital**

The river valley enhances the quality of life for local residents, providing opportunities for active and passive recreation and education. It also contributes to a general improvement in human health by encouraging active lifestyles for our growing and aging population.

- **Existing Economic Capital**

The river valley contributes to the economy of the region by generating employment, attracting business and investment opportunities and by creating wealth.

The economic benefits occur in a number of ways, including capital development, tourism and special events. The river valley also contributes significantly to the quality of life in the Capital Region and this helps attract new employees and a creative class of entrepreneurs to the region.

Taken together, the estimated value of these three components could approach \$630 million per year (Implementation Plan Summary Report, EIDOS/EDA 2007).



2.7 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

The Capital Region River Valley Park, with improved infrastructure and marketing, can become internationally recognized as a nature-based, heritage-based, and adventure/recreation-based destination. Coupled with its proven reputation for hosting festivals, major fairs, and sporting events, the river valley has the potential to host world-class events and become a major economic generator for the region and the province.

At the same time, the risks to the river valley are high as a growing economy and population place increasing demands and pressures on the ecological integrity, biodiversity, historical significance and general enjoyment of the river valley.

The Plan is designed to address those risks and opportunities, to build on the important work done to date under the leadership of the RVA and others, and to present a comprehensive plan for achieving the vision and securing the future of the river valley.

The intent is to establish the Capital Region Valley Park as a centre piece of municipal

cooperation and planning whose influence will extend well beyond the top of the bank and will be integrated, both in concept and design, into existing and new growth areas. The result will be an extraordinary river valley park that becomes the single, unifying and defining characteristic of the Capital Region — just as Stanley Park and Central Park are for Vancouver and New York.



Chapter 3

Establishing an Integrated Plan for the River Valley

With an understanding of the vision, the opportunities we face today, and the risks of not moving ahead on an urgent basis, a Plan of Action for the river valley was developed. The Plan is based on clear objectives and a specific planning framework containing a mix of different features. It includes critical steps that must be taken to implement the Plan and take action, starting immediately.

3.1 MEETING KEY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The action plan is designed to achieve five overall goals:

- **Pride** – Creating a source of unparalleled pride in the Capital Region and throughout Alberta
- **Legacy** – Preserving an outstanding legacy for all Albertans
- **Quality of life** – Improving the quality of life for people in the Capital Region

- **Attraction** – Attracting businesses and residents to the Capital Region as a result of the quality of life we have to offer
- **Tourism** – Enhancing tourism in the Capital Region and for the province as a whole

The vision for the river valley described in the Plan reflects a healthy interaction of three interdependent and interconnected “spheres of sustainability” – environment, society and economy. Specific objectives and principles have been set for each of these three interrelated spheres. The Plan is designed to ensure that all three spheres are carefully integrated and achieve stewardship of the river valley as well as building trust and respect for both the Plan and for those charged with implementing the Plan over the longer term.

Environment Objectives

The river valley should be recognized and conserved as a rich natural landscape and riverscape. The natural environment provides the foundation for the lived-in and working landscape of the Capital Region River Valley Park. Without a healthy and robust

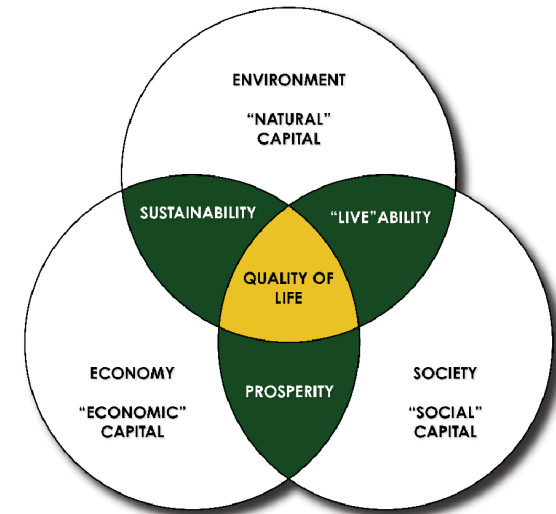


Figure 3.1 – Park Spheres of Benefit

environment, the long-term sustainability of this unique river valley landscape is not possible.

The following specific environmental objectives have been set:

- Preserve natural land in the Capital Region River Valley Park
- Respect important wildlife habitats and movement corridors

Capital Region River Valley Park

- Enhance the public's understanding of the environmental health and importance of the Capital Region River Valley Park
- Protect the diversity and productivity of the valley's ecological communities
- Maintain or enhance the hydrology, fish habitat, and watershed of the North Saskatchewan River within the Capital Region

To achieve those key objectives, the following principles were used to guide the Plan.

- **To maintain the green space in the valley:**

- Protect the diversity and productivity of ecological communities
- Zone the landscape on the basis of the sensitivity of natural features and biophysical units and match intensive or extensive uses accordingly
- Protect important biological habitats and movement corridors
- Buffer and mitigate intensive valley uses
- Leave some areas undisturbed, especially those that are rare or are

representative ecosystems for certain species

- Provide increased management for the most ecologically sensitive sites
 - Restore productivity and functions in some disturbed sites and wetlands
 - Locate more-intensive proposed valley uses at sites that are already disturbed
 - Catalogue and protect species of special concern
 - Match the range of uses to the range of tolerance in the landscape
 - Incorporate native vegetation, natural buffers and wildlife movement corridors in activity areas
- **To protect the river and watershed:**
 - Coordinate planning in the river valley with overall watershed management
 - Respect the unique hydrology of the North Saskatchewan River, including flood plains, stream flow, stream depths, diurnal cycles, bank erosion and deposition, and seasonal ice and ice flows

- Design surface drainage to avoid erosion, trap sediments and purify water before it is released into the river
 - Conserve or restore local wetlands and ponds to slow the rate of release of water into the river
 - Build structures outside the flood plain unless specifically designed to withstand the damage caused by flooding
 - Avoid sensitive fish habitats and areas for fish passage
- **To manage landscape change:**
 - Monitor changes to the river valley ecology and provide feedback to guide ongoing management decisions about land use and activities
 - Assess the effects and determine how to mitigate the impact of new projects to assist in the overall management of the river valley's ecology
 - Establish natural area management guidelines for areas to be maintained in a natural state

- **To assess the impact:**

- Provide environmental performance guidelines for all buildings and sites to ensure sustainable design and operating practices

Social Objectives

Social objectives take into account the social, recreational, leisure, historical, and cultural values of the river valley. Given the anticipated high growth rates in population, we need a proactive plan for determining which activities are most appropriate for the river valley and which should be located elsewhere. The uses chosen for the river valley park should accommodate regional uses that rely on the natural river setting. This, in turn, means that careful decisions need to be made in order to manage the natural setting and, at the same time, provide appropriate access and services to those who want to use the river valley.

Consistent with this direction, the following objectives have been set:

- Use trailways and waterways to connect communities and attractions along the river

Capital Region River Valley Park

valley and from the park to surrounding communities and attractions

- Create new destinations that enhance the quality of life in the region
- Improve access to the river front for shore and water-based activities
- Reflect the cultural and natural heritage of the river valley and expand education opportunities based on the park's natural and cultural history
- Support an active and healthy lifestyle for people in the Capital Region
- Enhance the urban experience in the Capital Region by creating connections to the park and providing venues for cultural, arts, athletic and entertainment-related activities

To achieve those objectives, the following principles have been used to guide the Plan.

- **Accessible**

- Ensure that the river valley is physically accessible to people regardless of their ability, age, or cultural origin
- Provide a variety of programs and activities at different sites to meet a variety of needs

- **Appropriate**

- Choose uses that benefit from the river valley setting and contribute character and financial support to sustain the river valley
- Divert away from the river valley any uses/facilities that degrade the character of the river valley or that could be located on more expendable land
- Work with community groups and/or municipalities to interpret and prioritize needs

- **Diverse**

- Plan a variety of destinations that serve different needs and reflect a variety of themes
- Include major destinations with the opportunity and capacity to hold festivals and events
- Include opportunities to educate users about the unique environment and history of the river valley

- **Linkages**

- Use trails connecting park nodes and community destinations to promote

‘walkable’ communities and healthy lifestyles

- **Safety**

- Design environments to enhance personal security
- Enhance safety features to support people of all ages and physical challenges
- Promote awareness of hazards
- Promote self-management and responsibility in the use of parks and trail facilities
- Ensure mechanisms for prevention, enforcement and incidence response

Economic Objectives

The Capital Region River Valley Park is vitally linked to the success of the economy in the Capital Region. The park has both direct and indirect economic benefits and can contribute substantially to tourism and other economic potential of the Capital Region.

The following objectives have been set:

- Establish and enhance attractions and destinations to attract new visitors

- Take advantage of opportunities for heritage and landscape touring, adventure-based tourism activities, and river-based attractions to increase tourism to the region
- Enhance the quality of life for all people living and working in the Capital Region and help attract and retain skilled labour, new businesses and investment

Consistent with these objectives, the following principles were used to guide key decisions about the specific components of the Plan:

- **Opportunities**

- Identify new opportunities for tourism and marketing which add character and animation to the river valley
- Tailor investment opportunities for both private and public partners

- **Partnerships**

- Create economically and environmentally sustainable partnerships

- **Innovation**

- Create unique attractions and world-class design concepts

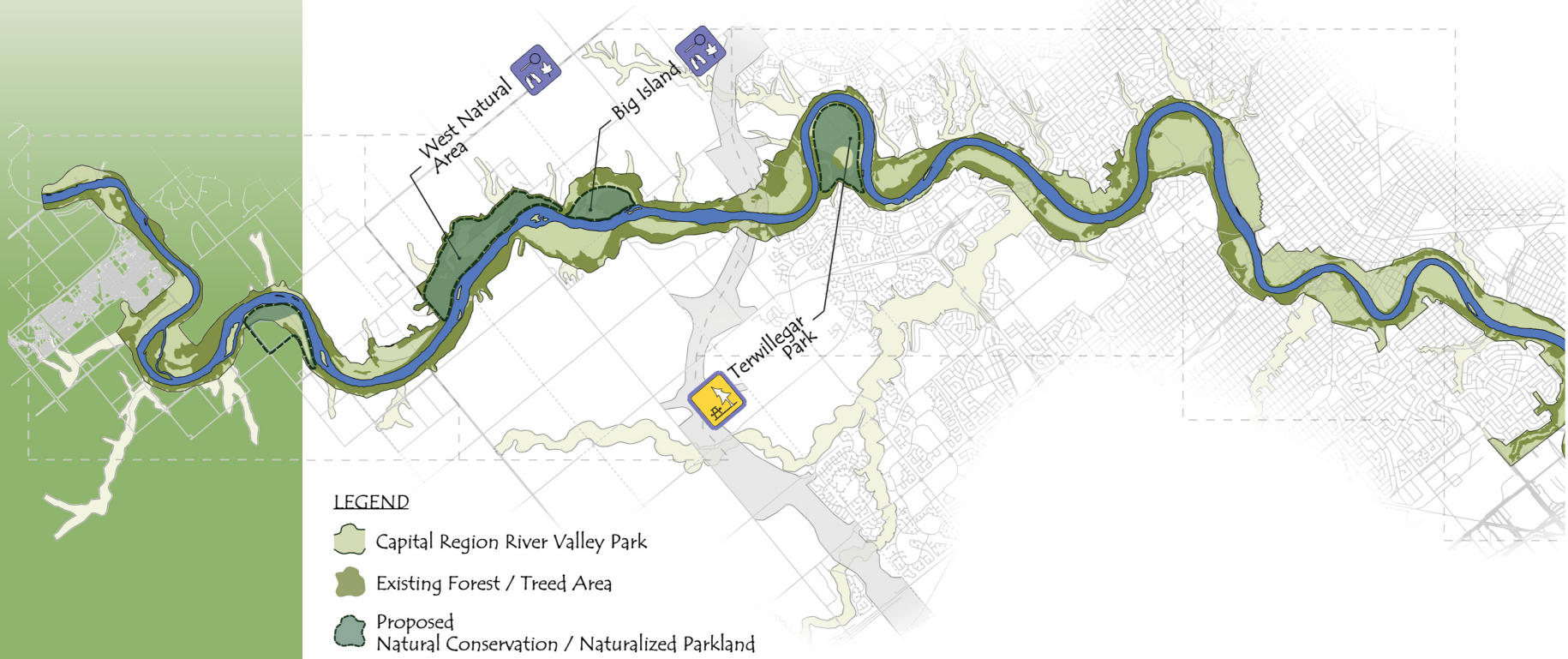
3.2 PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The planning framework is based on a series of key concepts which reflect the potential for developing a showcase river valley park. While previous RVA concept plans have catalogued existing and proposed parks and facilities, the Plan focuses on new opportunities to add strength and vitality to the park and the Capital Region.

As a creative design endeavour, the Plan presents a compelling vision of the river valley and its parts by synthesizing all the data collected and reflecting that in specific plans, perspectives, sketches and imagery for the park. Concepts and ideas that enhance the river valley as well as excite and resonate with the public have been identified, including:

- Regional linkage systems and modes of movement (e.g. water, trail, public transit and conventional road network) that better integrate the river valley and the surrounding communities
- Destinations that introduce an exciting vibrancy and build on the river valley's natural and cultural history
- Methods of giving the river valley a higher profile and more recognized identity
- Looking beyond the built environment to various ways that the river valley can be animated to create a more compelling and exciting future for the river valley as a defining feature of the Capital Region

Nature Conservation and Management



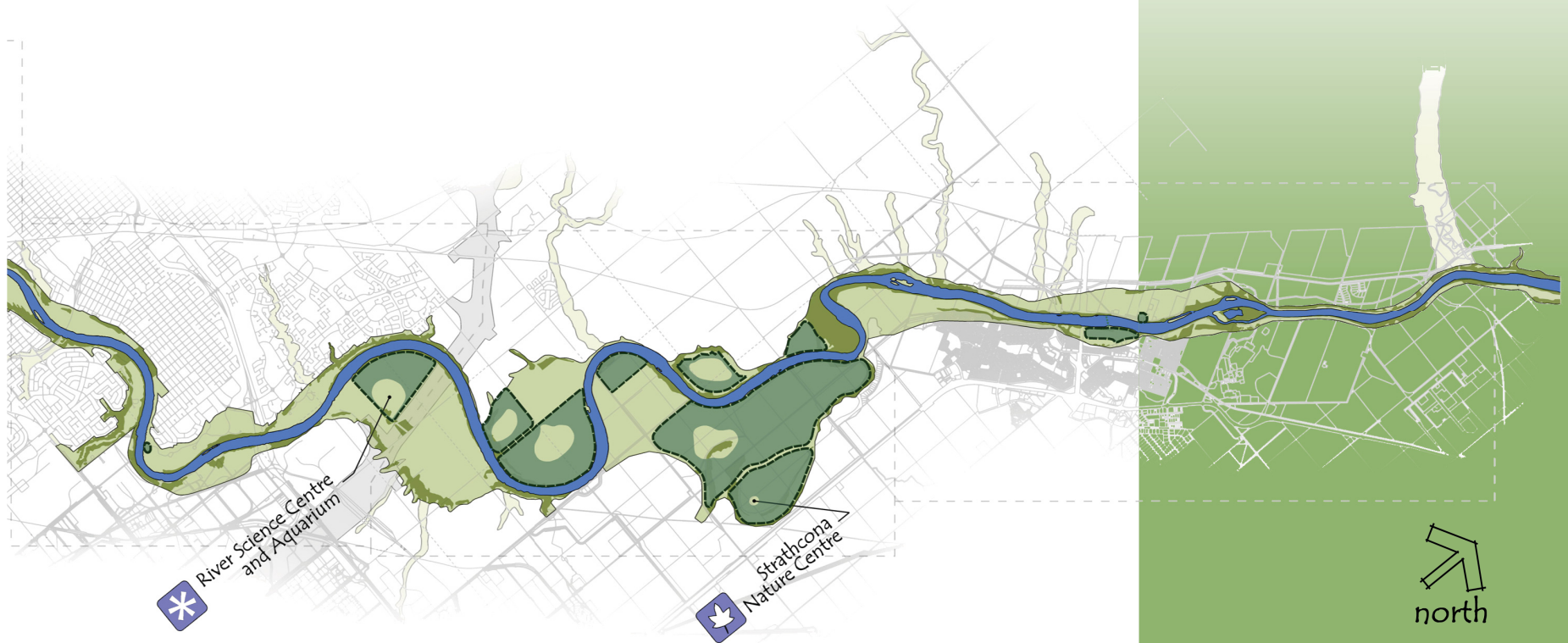
3.3 PLANNING THEMES

To achieve the specific environmental, social and economic objectives and achieve a new vision for the river valley, six key planning themes underlie the overall planning framework.

Nature Conservation and Management

Nature conservation and management, along with natural history research, education and presentation, are important outcomes of the planning framework. Some of the regional partners have implemented important initiatives in natural area conservation and

Capital Region River Valley Park



conservation planning on a municipal and/or regional basis. A variety of environmental organizations exist in the region including the Federation of Alberta Naturalists, Sierra Club and the Edmonton Nature Club.

Within the context of a balanced approach, conserving the natural environment is the overriding priority that shapes how we

plan for and manage the river valley park. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the conceptual planning framework and show the primary emphasis on preserving and protecting the natural environment of the river valley. The sensitivity and current status of the natural environment determines which landscapes to protect (meeting environmental objectives), which landscapes could sustain moderate

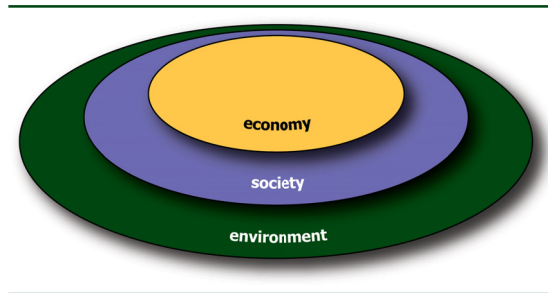


Figure 3.2 – A sustainable conceptual framework for the relationship between economy, society, and the environment.

uses (meeting societal objectives), and which landscapes are suited to more intensive uses (meeting economic objectives). This approach applies to the entire river valley as well as to specific sites within the park. Sensitive landscapes should be buffered from zones with intense use. A number of sites within the river valley have been disturbed by industrial development, which creates opportunities for environmental reclamation. Buffer zones need to be established around new development sites and efforts should be made to restore naturally occurring vegetation.

Conservation planning is integral to the planning and management of every site in the river valley. Initiatives would include:

- Natural area management planning, assessment of the impacts on the environment and reporting on mitigation efforts as part of the decision-making process for each initiative
- Ecological restoration of sensitive areas
- Conversion of disturbed extraction sites to diverse constructed wetlands and prairie grassland
- Setting aside sensitive areas and special landscapes
- Parks development using less horticultural and more indigenous, low energy landscape approaches

Maintenance and operations of conserved natural parkland will need a new approach. People responsible for maintaining the parks will need experience in environmental conservation sciences and biology to manage uses and ensure the integrity of natural systems. Naturalists will be needed at a number of sites to help visitors appreciate nature and tread lightly. Environmental education will be an important component of the operational planning and implementation for the park.

The plan also proposes two new enhancement opportunities with an emphasis on environmentally-focused education, interpretation and research. These new projects would complement the current interpretive and educational resources of the John Janzen Nature Centre, the Bennett Environmental Education Centre and the Strathcona Wilderness Centre.

- **Strathcona Nature Centre** – This proposed new centre is modeled after the Earth Rangers organization in Woodbridge, Ontario (<http://www.earthrangers.ca>). A variety of programs would be offered for individuals and school groups, focusing on environmental education, environmental stewardship and sustainable lifestyles. Venues for learning would include the Oxbow natural area, the community, the classroom and the Internet. Corporate sponsorship would subsidize user fees. Early acquisition of this valuable natural area is a vital first step.
- **Clover Bar River Science Centre and Aquarium** – This Centre is intended as a research and public education/interpretation

facility focused on the North Saskatchewan River and its watershed. A river aquarium would feature fish, invertebrate and benthic species and ecosystems of the river. It would be a main new attraction for the public and for school groups. The Centre could also be the research home for aquatic biologists, river hydrologists, and some non-governmental organizations.

Access and Linear Trail Systems

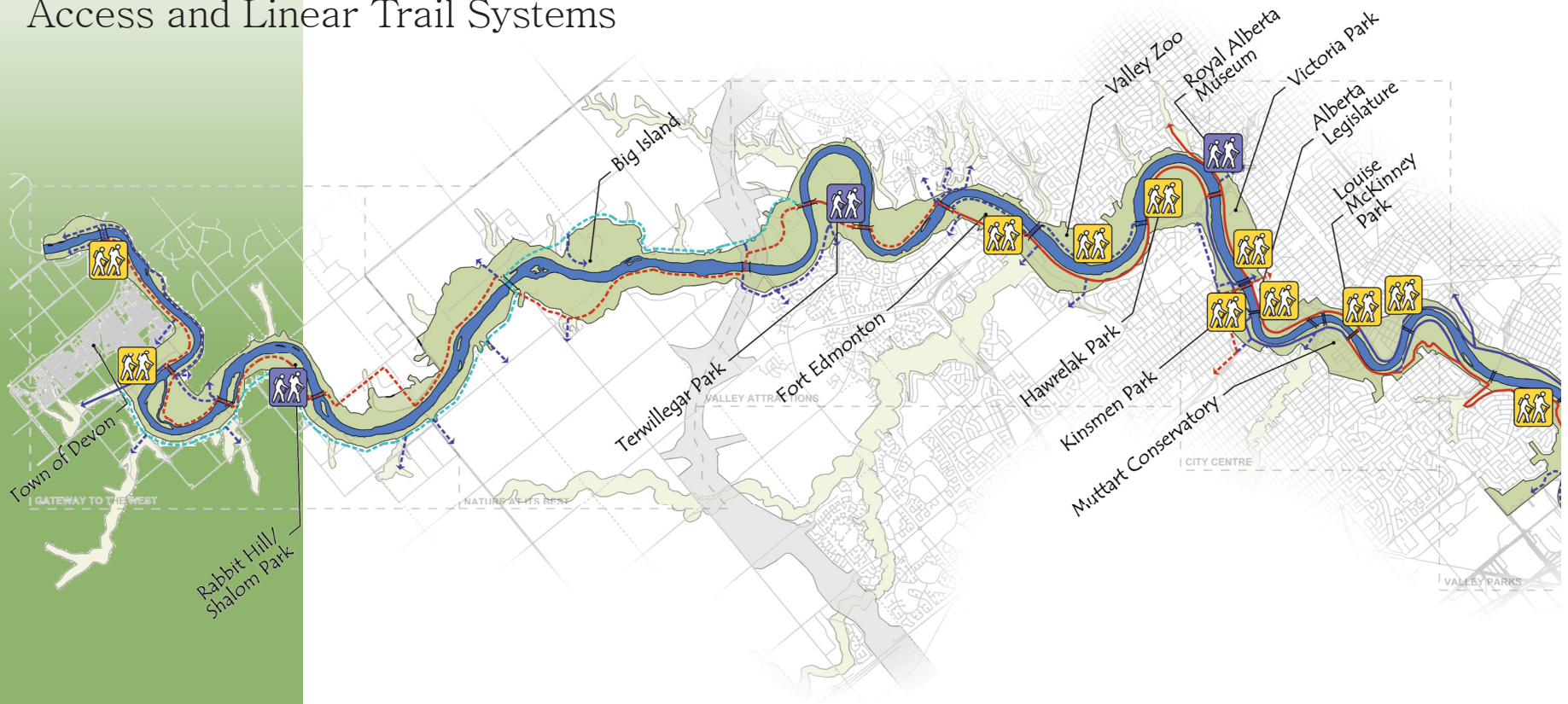
An intent of the RVA and of the Plan is to connect the entire length of the river valley with a land and water based trail system.

Current municipal planning documents provide a consistent definition of trail:

A linear recreation facility which is marked, mapped and maintained and allows for travel by people in one or a combination of modes including foot, bicycle, ski or horse. Its surface will vary from hard asphalt to natural dirt.

The Plan envisions a broader definition of trails to include land and water activities and to view trails as a facility for recreation, touring and regional connection. This broader definition

Access and Linear Trail Systems



provides the opportunity to address various forms of linear activity within the river valley while respecting the fragile balance between people and the environment.

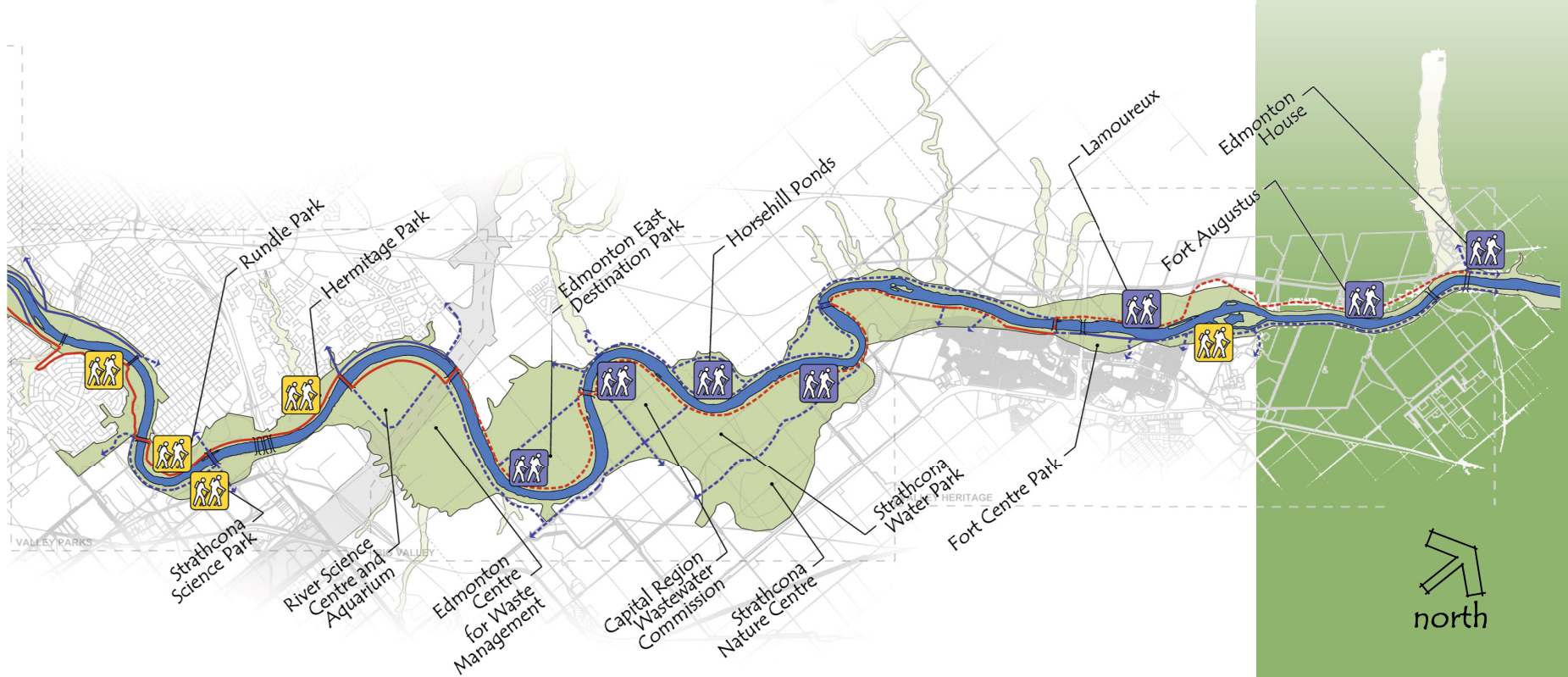
A continuous recreation corridor is proposed, linking Devon through Edmonton to Fort Saskatchewan and providing connections between intensive recreation uses, informal

nature experiences, major attractions, historic features and links to attractions adjacent to the river valley.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

The GIS trail model was used to determine the most appropriate location of the proposed trail alignment in order to protect and preserve

Capital Region River Valley Park



the natural environment. Areas which were identified as having a higher sensitivity to trail development were further assessed and mitigation measures applied in order to align the trail appropriately.

In addition to the GIS modeling, contour information was used to determine areas where the topography would accommodate trails.

Due to the topography and often dangerous side slopes, a continuous trail on both sides of the river from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan is not always possible. In order to make a continuous recreation corridor a possibility, a number of pedestrian bridge crossings are required. This approach allows the trail to avoid dangerous sections of the river valley and still provide a continuous link through all seven municipalities.

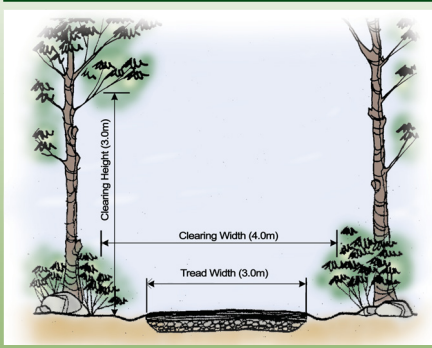


Figure 3.3: Minimum Clearing Width and Height and Tread Width for Primary Trails

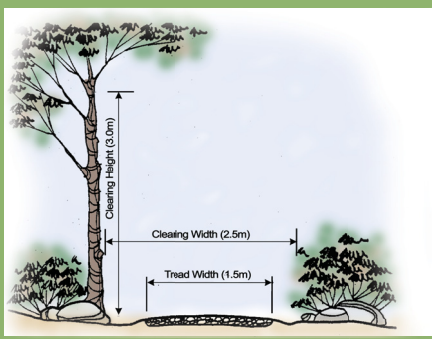


Figure 3.4: Minimum Clearing Width and Height and Tread Width for Secondary Trails

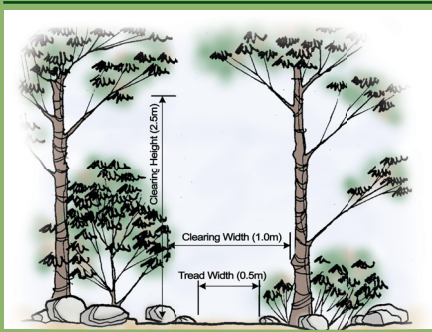


Figure 3.5: Minimum Clearing Width and Height and Tread Width for Tertiary Trails

Most of the land within the study area is predominantly privately owned and, in order to achieve a continuous trail from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan, the trail alignment has to cross current private land. Landowners have raised concerns regarding safety, vandalism, security and privacy as it relates to the public accessing their lands. The RVA and its member municipalities should continue consultations with landowners in order to develop a mutually-beneficial approach to ensure that the necessary land can be accessed while the rights of landowners are respected.

TRAIL USERS

As previously mentioned, extensive public and landowner consultations were completed to determine the extent of use in the river valley. These consultations indicated that there are many trail uses in the river valley including: hiking, biking, nature activities, equestrian, ATV and boating. One of the concerns raised in landowner meetings was the use of motorized recreation vehicles in the river valley. Landowners felt that these vehicles contributed to environmental degradation,

trespassing and dangerous user conflicts. Many of the municipalities within the RVA are moving toward “zero tolerance” of motorized recreation vehicles. In an effort to address the concerns of the landowners and support current municipal rulings, the Plan recommends that motorized recreation vehicles (ATV and snowmobiles) not be allowed in the Capital Region River Valley Park.

TRAIL TYPES AND STANDARDS

Standards should be in place to guide the design and construction of trails in the river valley. The guidelines proposed in the Plan are intended to foster a common level of understanding among the municipalities involved in the river valley. Municipalities may wish to adopt all or part of these guidelines as standards.

The following goals and objectives have been used as a guide in the development of the trail guidelines and standards:

- **User Needs:** User requirements should be met with the design of the trail, including functional and aesthetic considerations.

Capital Region River Valley Park

- **Environmental Protection:** Protection of the environment is an important concern that is met through sensitive design solutions.
- **Levels of Accessibility:** Trails should be developed to different levels of accessibility which respond to variations in site (facility) conditions, resources and user ability.
- **Full Opportunity:** A full range of trail opportunities should be provided for users of all ages and abilities.
- **Trail Networks:** Trails should be planned and designed as a continuous integrated network.
- **Participation:** Users should have the opportunity to participate in evaluation, planning and design of trails.

To accommodate a variety of user groups, the river valley corridor is separated into six categories of trail types: primary, secondary, tertiary, promenade, historic and adventure. The first three categories form the basis of the trail network, while later three provide new trail experiences specific to certain planning areas of the river valley. The proposed trail alignments utilize portions of the existing

municipal trail network and also recognize and reinforce current municipal planning documents. The trail alignments take advantage of the unique and often extreme land form of the North Saskatchewan River valley. From the top of bank to the bottom of bank, the trail alignment is aimed at providing users with a variety of experiences for a variety of skill levels.

- **Primary Trail**

As a fundamental goal of the Plan, primary trails are intended to provide a continuous connection from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan. Primary trails accommodate a variety of recreational users and should be accessible for people of all ages and physical challenges, wherever possible. Trails should be hard surface with a minimum tread width of 3 m. Municipalities may construct primary trails in two stages, beginning with gravel and later upgrading to paving. Trailheads should be included at major access points and rest stops should be provided at regular intervals along the trail.



Figure 3.6: Photographic Example of a Promenade

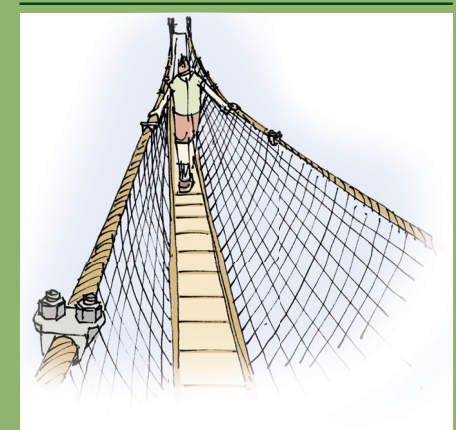


Figure 3.7: Cable Bridge Crossing on an Adventure Trail

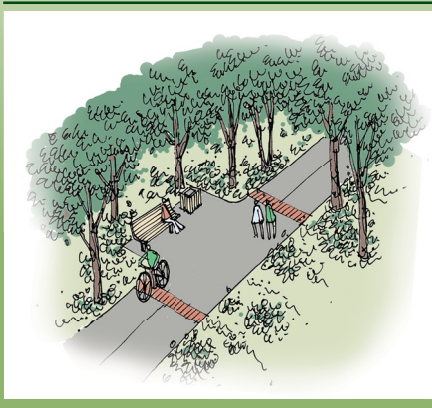


Figure 3.8: Conceptual Sketch of a Rest Stop



Figure 3.9: Conceptual Sketch of a Trail Viewpoint Deck

- **Secondary Trail**

Secondary trails are supplementary to the primary trails and vary in width from 1.5 m to 3 m. Secondary trails provide alternative routes from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan as well as linkages to trails and areas outside of the river valley. Secondary trails are typically surfaced in compacted crushed stones; however, depending on use, they may also have a hard surface.

- **Tertiary Trail**

Tertiary trails are designated trails less than 1.5 m in width. Surface material will vary depending on the location but may include compacted crushed stones, grass, soil or other material. This level of trail development is best suited for low traffic areas and/or areas where minimal development is sought. Depending on the surface material, these trails may not be suitable for use when wet because of soil deformation.

- **Promenade**

Promenades are geared towards a higher number of pedestrian users in urbanized areas. They provide opportunities for a relaxed stroll along the river valley, with ample opportunities to sit on a bench and

enjoy the scenery or a coffee from an adjacent café. Intricate paving patterns of significant tread width would be well suited along promenades, as would trees flanking the walkway to create a canopy.

- **Historic Trail**

The purpose of historic trails is to provide an interpretive route where users can learn about the history of an area. As such, historic trails are best suited along historic settlement routes and other areas of historic significance, and should be supported with interpretive literature to tell the story. Trail standards should be determined on a case-by-case basis, recognizing the existing environmental context and anticipated users. Historic trails may include routes that follow existing roads over great distances and would be suitable for vehicular or bicycle tours.

- **Adventure Trail**

The intent of this trail type is to provide a difficult and physically challenging course for experienced outdoor enthusiasts. These trails should be located to include challenging slopes, vegetation and obstacles

(tree roots, small rocks, etc.). Adventure trails would involve the use of rope ladders, escarpment pitches and cable bridges.

- **Supporting Amenities / Development**

A series of amenities support the trail network and make the land trail experience more pleasurable for all visitors. These amenities may include, but should not necessarily be limited to, trail heads, rest stops and signage.

- **Trail Heads**

In an effort to create a sense of entry into the river valley trail system, trail heads are proposed at many major attractions and locations where a high volume of visitors is anticipated. Trail heads also act as educational tools to provide the public with information on trail safety, multi-use trail etiquette, history of the area, and trail routes. Visitors will be able to determine the frequency of rest stops, the condition and length of trail from the information provided at the trail head. Trail heads also aid in identifying locations along the trail should an emergency occur. The design of trail heads should include parking, a kiosk/shelter, washrooms, signage, identification number and access for emergency vehicles,

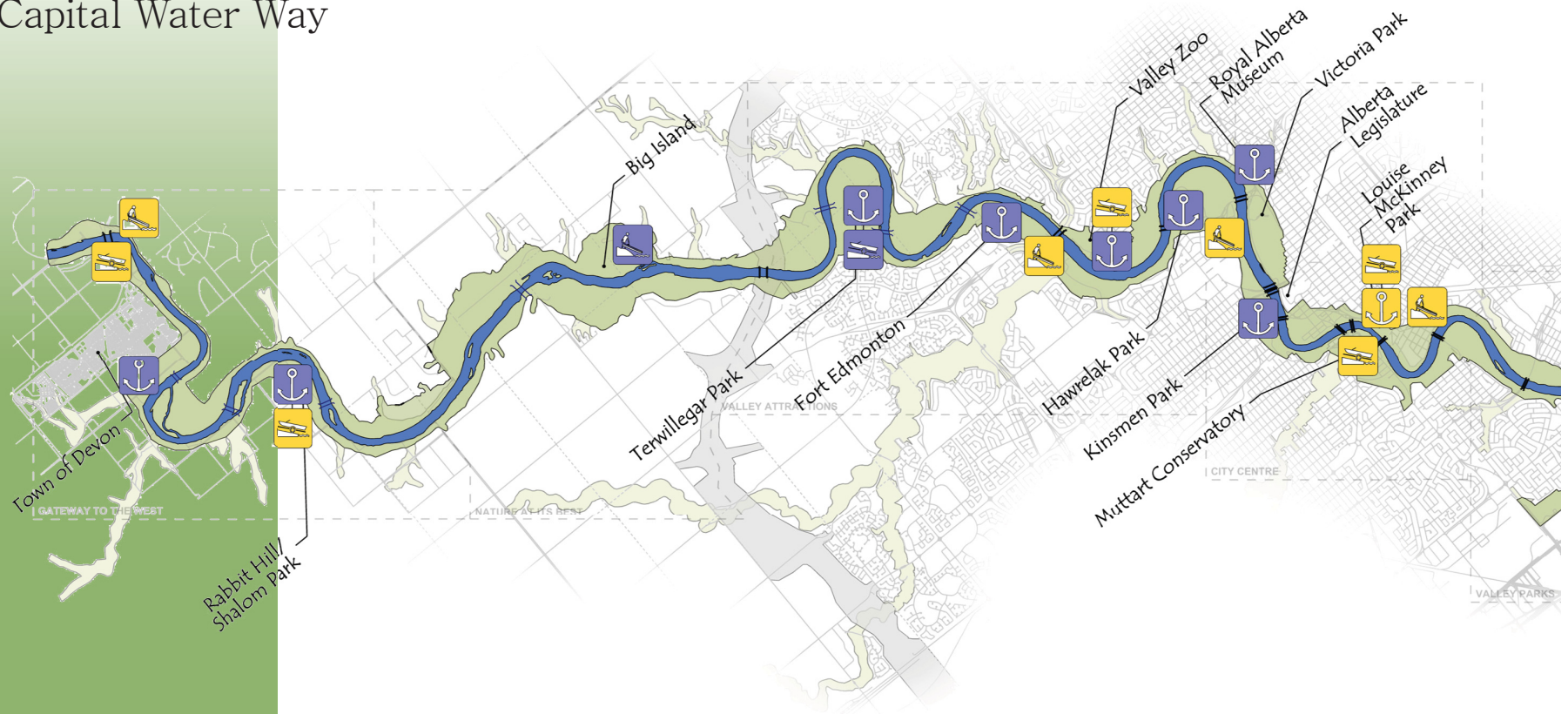
and may include emergency phones (refer to stream S8: Public Safety).

- **Rest Stops and Viewpoints**

In addition to trail heads, rest stops are proposed at regular intervals along the primary trail. Rest stops are level areas along a trail that provide users with a place to rest and gain relief from the physical demands of the trail. Rest stops may also provide points of interest for visitors and can be used as interpretive stations for self-guided river valley tours. Providing rest stops for users also increases the diversity of the visitors to the river valley trail network.

Rest stops should be equipped with benches and trash receptacles and should be wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and/or strollers. The distance between rest stops should reflect the amount and types of anticipated users. Primary trails and promenades may have rest stops located every 700 m, whereas adventure trails may have no rest stops. Viewpoints include many of the same amenities as rest stops; however, their location is dependent on the numerous opportunities to take advantage of river valley views and vistas.

Capital Water Way

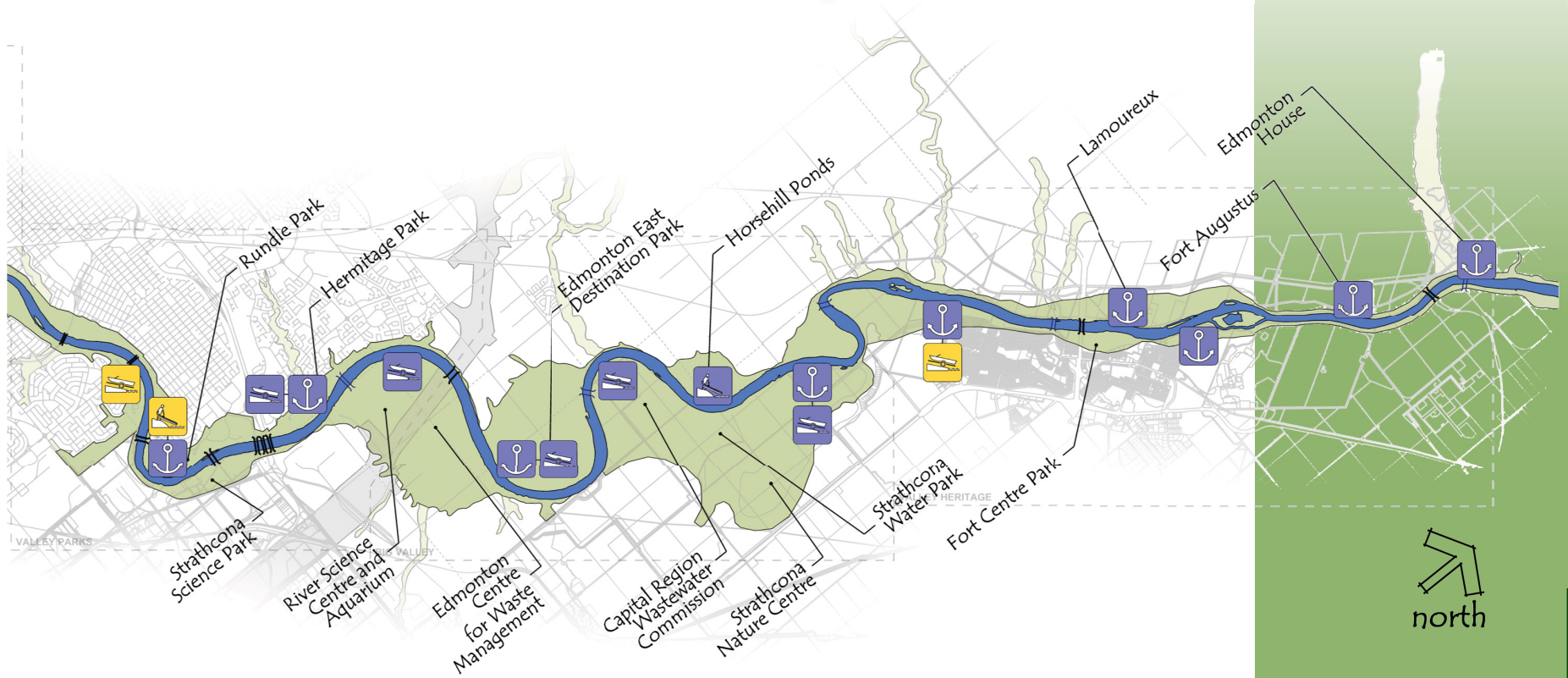


Capital Water Way

A proposed river trail will connect the park and provide a binding feature for the 88 kilometre long park. The river trail would include: access to boating and fishing and the ability to “touch” the river directly, river edge treatment, marina, floating docks, boat launches, and walk-in launches for car-top boats. This reflects a combination of new sites and enhancement of existing facilities. New

access points have been chosen based on site visits, hydrological studies, and proximity to existing and new attractions and sites where high volumes of visitors are anticipated.

Capital Region River Valley Park



THE RIVER

The plan for the river valley should reflect a clear understanding of the nature of the North Saskatchewan River passing through the Capital Region. The headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River are found in the Saskatchewan Glacier of the Columbia Icefield in Jasper National Park. The river is part of Canada's Nelson / Saskatchewan watershed including the North and South Saskatchewan

Rivers, the Bow River, the Saskatchewan River, Lake Winnipeg and the Nelson Rivers which exit into the Hudson Bay. Its watershed in Alberta drains 80,000 km² or 12.5% of the provincial landmass and vast majority of the population in the watershed lives within the Capital Region. The river flowing through the Capital Region is approximately 122 km in length and descends approximately 35 meters in elevation over the distance.



Figure 3.10: Photographic Examples of River Edge Treatments

Historically, flooding is a threat to adjacent low-lying lands. Major floods occurred most recently in the mid 1980s. River flows are regulated by two upstream dams, the Brazeau and Big Horn dams, which were designed to reduce annual high and low flows and to provide more reliable water supply and waste assimilation throughout the year. The Big Horn dam also generates electricity, which causes water levels to fluctuate by approximately 0.75 m/day.

The river is a federally regulated navigable water course. It is used by a variety of water craft including canoes, kayaks, jet boats and the Edmonton Queen. The river provides an easy canoe or kayak trip with no rapids. Jet boats navigate the river throughout the ice free season; however, operators require knowledge of the river to avoid rocks or shallow areas. The Edmonton Queen's extent of travel is limited by its larger draught depth.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO THE RIVER

There are very few places in the river valley to directly experience the river or take a cruise. Providing more contact with the river and increasing opportunities for the public to travel on the river was a clear message from

the project surveys and consultation program. Infrastructure investment in docks and boat ramps and fostering new private sector charter boat operations are important objectives for the park.

To accommodate an increase in use of the river, five types of access are proposed:

- River edge treatment
- Marina
- Docks
- Boat launches
- Hand launches

These categories reflect a hierarchy of water access from most intensive (river edge treatment) to least intensive (hand launches). The intensity of the water access type refers to the amount of work it takes to build, operate and maintain the facility. It also refers to the amount of supporting infrastructure (e.g. roads, parking and servicing) required to operate it.

- **River Edge Treatment**

The river edge treatment is a constructed transition from land to water. The transition may be abrupt or gradual. River edge treatments may vary from large boulders

Capital Region River Valley Park

along an existing water edge to a concrete structure redefining an edge. Some examples of river edge treatment are shown in the following images. River edge treatments may occur anywhere along the river valley but are generally more appropriate for more urbanized or highly-used constructed areas.

• **Marina**

A marina is a dock or basin providing secure mooring for pleasure boats and often offering supplies, repair and other facilities. The proposed marina location is at Hermitage Park. This location offers access to the surrounding region and neighbouring communities and is located on the existing trail network. It is also the site of other water-based activities and based on the preliminary river engineering review, it is a feasible location for a marina to be established. The marina requires intensive supporting infrastructure such as parking, washrooms, picnic areas, shops, restaurants, hotels and supporting facilities (e.g. fuel and repair services).

• **Dock**

A dock is used as a landing place or moorage for boats. Docks are located

throughout the river valley and are usually sited close to an existing facility which provides the necessary supporting infrastructure. Docks require fewer infrastructures than a marina; however, it is expected that a dock would be equipped with parking and a washroom facility.

Any use of the river for recreation or development of docks and boat launches must take into account the limitations and opportunities specific to this river.

Some of the factors affecting navigation and dock design include:

- Winter ice limits navigation from November to March
- Ice flows exert very high forces on any permanent installations
- Periodic floods inundate shore installations and cause debris and velocity hazards for water craft
- Water levels fluctuate some 30 m from a 1:100 year flood discharge to an annual low flow elevation, making long dock gangways and boat ramp arrangements problematic
- The velocity of the river can vary from 0.4 to 4 m per second depending on discharge rates and location in the channel



Figure 3.11: Photographic Example of a Marina



Figure 3.12: Conceptual sketches of different dock approaches



Figure 3.13: Boat Launch at Devon

- The depth of the river varies considerably and navigation is more reliable in the deeper portions of the channel

Considerations for the location of public docks and boat ramps include the following:

- Sufficient water depth (0.75 m) near the shore location of the dock
- Preferably a lower velocity location outside of the main flow channel
- Close to high ground above the 1:100 flood elevation for permanent access and construction of support facilities

Design considerations for docks include:

- Light weight durable systems that can be easily removed and stored for winter
- Strong enough systems to sustain loads from personal and commercial craft
- Floating dock systems that can adapt to 5 m of change in water levels and accommodate strong summer flows
- Preferably bank-mounted mooring systems which are relatively easy to disengage

An existing dock at Straechen's Landing in Fort Saskatchewan uses a straight arm, structural gangway with a stabilizing arm which locks

the dock to bank-mounted anchor pivots. The straight arms allow the floating dock to move freely with the fluctuating water levels.

• **Boat Launch**

Boat launches are areas where a boat can be launched from a ramp via a vehicle. Boat launches throughout the river valley have been located based on the initial hydrological assessment. They require parking, washroom facilities and ample space for the construction of a ramp into the water.

Boat launches require access to even-sloping graded river edges which provide launching depths over a range of normal and elevated river flow cycles. In addition, a road system and some high ground must be in the vicinity. A reinforced surface will be needed on steeper and soft ground sections. The ramp should be pointed slightly to the downstream to facilitate more controlled trailer mounting and dismounting.

• **Hand Launch**

Hand launches provide specific locations for people to launch a small boat (e.g. canoe) by hand. Typically, these locations will not accommodate the necessary supporting infrastructure required for a dock or a

Capital Region River Valley Park

boat launch. Hand launches can be used by visitors who are entering the water without constructed ramps and supporting infrastructure.

CONSIDERING A RECREATIONAL WEIR

In 1975, a study was conducted as part of the Capital City Recreation Park Project which proposed the construction of a 4.6 m high weir across the river near the Clover Bar bridge. The purpose of the proposed weir was to raise low-flow water levels for approximately 13 km upstream so that the river could have more use for recreational purposes. Sedimentation modeling was carried out to assess the impact of the weir on water intakes and other in-river structures. While it was eventually concluded that impacts on sedimentation could be minimized with proper operation of the weir, the weir was not constructed. The main reasons for not proceeding with the weir included an expected large resistance from fisheries concerns and potentially large costs to mitigate or compensate for fisheries impacts.

Since 1975, new and strengthened environmental legislation has been introduced

and implemented. As a result, it would be costly to undertake the required provincial and federal environmental impact assessment studies to determine whether or not a recreational weir is viable today. Risks to civic infrastructure and adjacent properties due to bank flooding and potential instability would have to be assessed. A complete archaeological assessment would be required for all flooded lands and structures. An in-depth socio-economic study would be required to demonstrate that socio-economic benefits would outweigh the negative effects on the environment and other river users. Costs would have to include expensive mitigation and compensation under federal law.

Consequently, the conclusion about the appropriateness of a recreational weir has not changed. A weir justified on a recreational basis may not be successful in acquiring environmental permits. Furthermore, the notion of interrupting navigation up and down the length of the Capital Region River Valley Park goes against the direction of the Plan. The plan promotes regional linkages with trailways and waterways. It promotes a balanced approach between social, economic and environmental objectives. Above all, the Plan promotes the protection and conservation

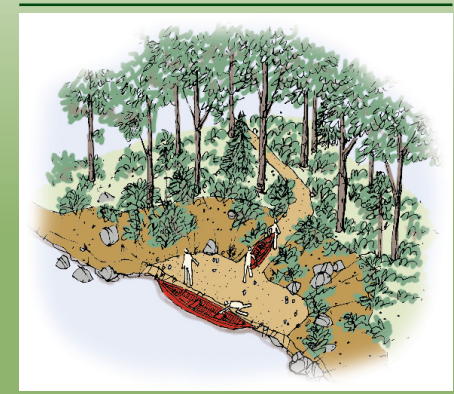
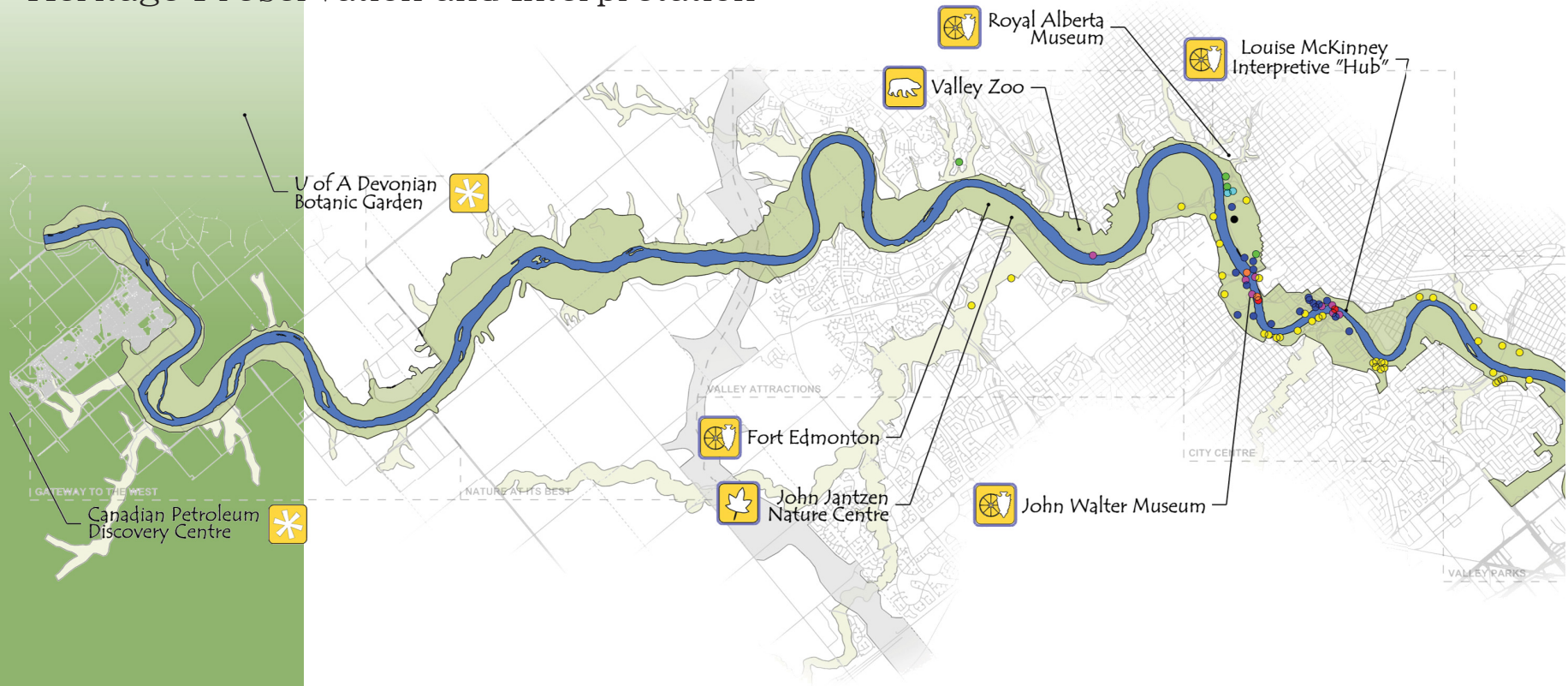


Figure 3.14: Conceptual Sketch of a Hand Launch

Heritage Preservation and Interpretation



LEGEND

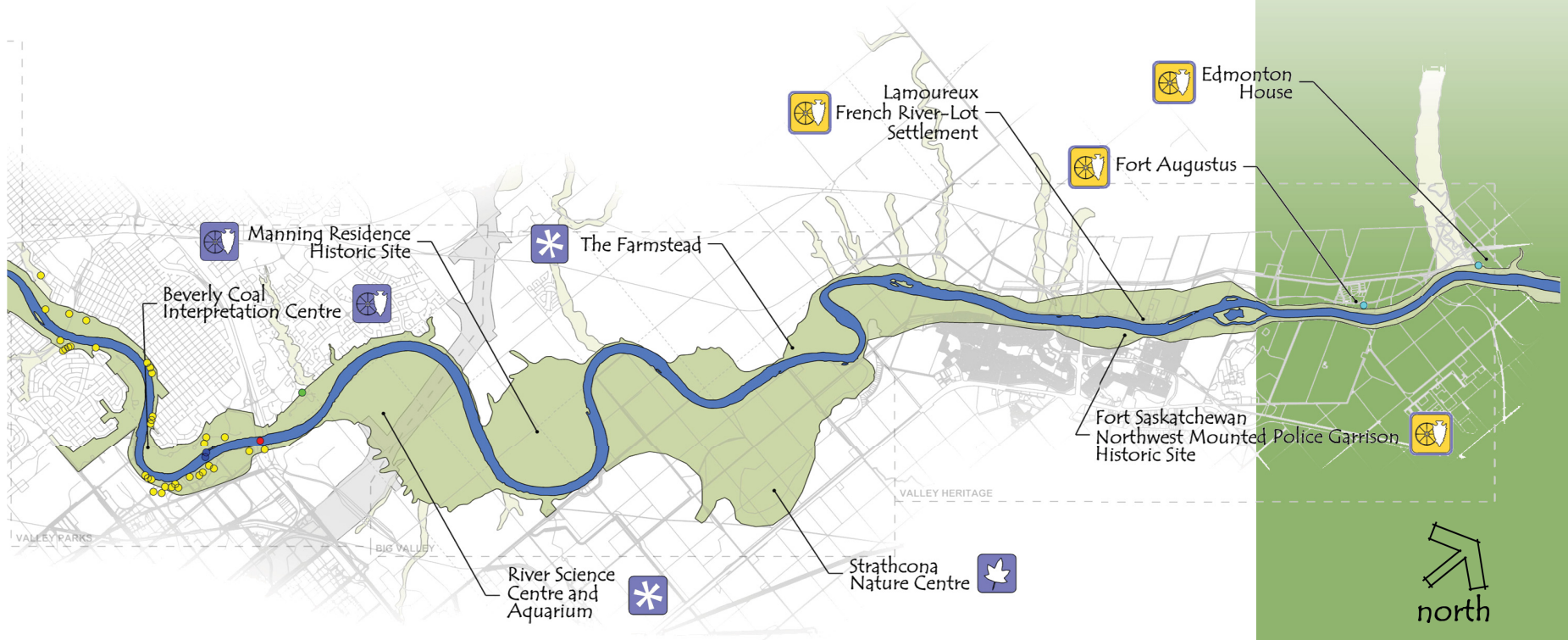
- Agricultural Site / Farm
- Ferry
- Ford
- Fur Trade Post
- Historic Mine
- Indian Camp
- Industrial Site
- Steamboat Landing

of the natural environment. A waterway which promotes increased public and commercial use of the natural river for longer distances provides a clear benefit at relatively low cost. That benefit would be compromised with a recreational weir.

Heritage Preservation and Interpretation

Preservation and interpretation of the river valley’s cultural and natural history is a high priority for the river valley plan. Heritage covers a variety of features including:

Capital Region River Valley Park



- Archaeology and paleontology sites
- Settlement history sites
- Interpretive theme parks
- Nature centres
- Museums
- Zoology gardens
- Interpretive signage of for historic sites

Existing historical attractions within or near the river valley include:

- Devonian Botanic Garden
- Canadian Petroleum Discovery Centre
- Fort Edmonton Park
- John Jantzen Nature Centre
- Valley Zoo
- Royal Alberta Museum

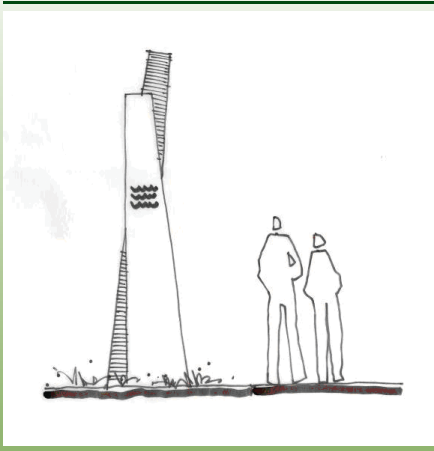


Figure 3.15: Conceptual Sketch of a Valley Marker

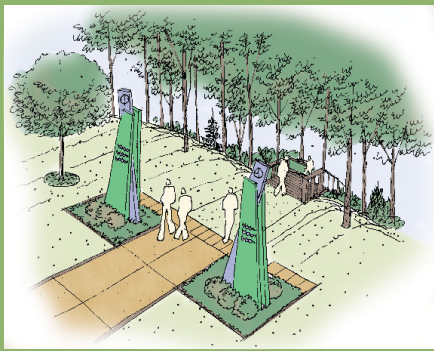


Figure 3.16: Conceptual Sketch of Valley Markers at a Trail Head

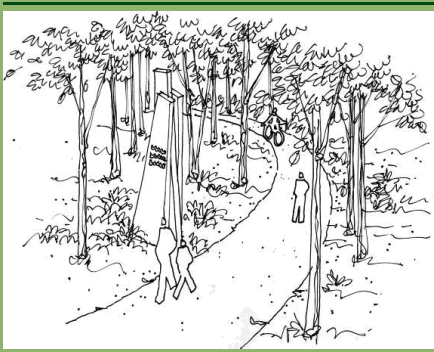


Figure 3.17: Conceptual Sketch of a Valley Marker adjacent to a Primary Trail

As part of the Plan, a variety of heritage sites, attractions and events would be an important feature of the park. A series of new or enhanced sites are identified in the Plan. In addition, a variety of cultural history events and festivals may be associated with specific sites within the river valley.

The following new projects are proposed as part of the Plan (further details are provided in the next section of this report):

- Louise McKinney Park – Interpretive Directory Signage
- Beverly Coal Mine Interpretation Centre, Rundle Park
- Clover Bar River Science Centre and Aquarium
- A new destination Historic Site and Conference Centre
- The Farmstead Model Farm
- Strathcona Nature Centre
- Fort Saskatchewan NWMP Garrison Barracks Reconstruction at Fort Centre Park
- Lamoureux Historic Settlement
- Victoria Trail and the early sites of Fort Augustus and Edmonton House.

A detailed historical plan will be necessary for the RVA to ensure that the river valley park retains the essential historic features of the river valley. The Plan should engage the local historical societies. Detailed feasibility and business plans would be required for each of the new sites. Priorities for implementation would depend on a number of factors including market demand, volunteer support, availability of land, sponsorship and partnering arrangements.

Parks and Trail Signage

A regional signage system is proposed to link the existing features and parks together with a common identity. This would also help ensure that the river valley is seen as a single, unified park in terms of its overall visual identity and orientation by the users of the park.

The proposed signage system is based on cooperation among existing partners to link the existing features and parks together as well as supporting future components and parks within the system.

Capital Region River Valley Park

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the signage system is to establish a uniform “look and link” along the entire river valley system. The signage system is intended to augment and complement the existing park signage systems and to provide the connection between the various sections of the river valley to form a cohesive whole. Key objectives include:

- identifying boundaries, gateways and entrances at key locations
- providing directional signage along the key trail routes
- providing “reminders” of the river valley identity along the way
- ensuring compatibility with existing municipal signage systems
- not adding visual and information clutter along the trail systems
- providing a reference for emergency location requirements

COMPARABLES

Signage systems in several comparable park systems were reviewed. These include:

- Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail
- Loyalist Parkway, Ontario
- Niagara Parkway Commission
- Rouge Park, Toronto, Ontario

CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

The proposed signage system for the Capital Region River Valley Park is designed to provide an additional layer of identity and way-finding signage along the corridor. The coordination of signage systems among the partnering municipalities is a two-fold process – one that recognizes and accommodates the overall Capital River Valley Park but also provides complementary and coordinating identities for each municipality in the RVA. A colour-coded system for each municipality may be one way to accomplish this objective

SIGNAGE COMPONENTS

• Valley Markers

Valley markers are located at key entrances along roads, the river, parks and trail heads, and at key boundaries along highways, roads, the river and trails that pass through the Capital Region River Valley Park.



Figure 3.18: Conceptual Sketch of Identification Markers along Adventure Trail



Figure 3.19: Conceptual Sketch of Distance Markers

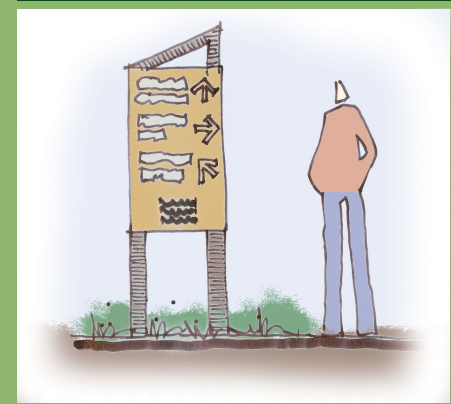


Figure 3.20: Conceptual Sketch of Trail Directional Marker

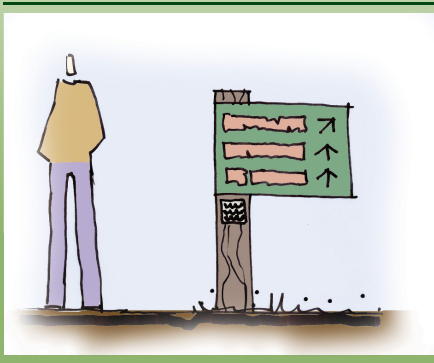


Figure 3.21: Conceptual Sketch of Trail Identification Marker added to Existing Municipal Trail / Directional Sign

- **Identification Markers**

Identification markers (e.g. distance markers, directional signage and trail head signs) are used independently and as additions to existing municipal directional signs. Regulatory and cautionary signs would be part of the municipal sign systems and must meet or exceed standards adopted by each municipality.

- **Trailhead Signs**

Signs at the trailhead should provide users with objective information about the trail experience. Information provided on these signs would include the trail name and logo (if applicable), permitted uses, and impartial descriptions of the trail features (length, average and minimum width, typical and maximum slopes and cross slopes, known obstacles at the ground level or within the clearance area) in addition to trail surface(s) and a map. This type of detailed trail information allows potential users to determine whether or not a trail is appropriate for their skill level and ability.

Safety

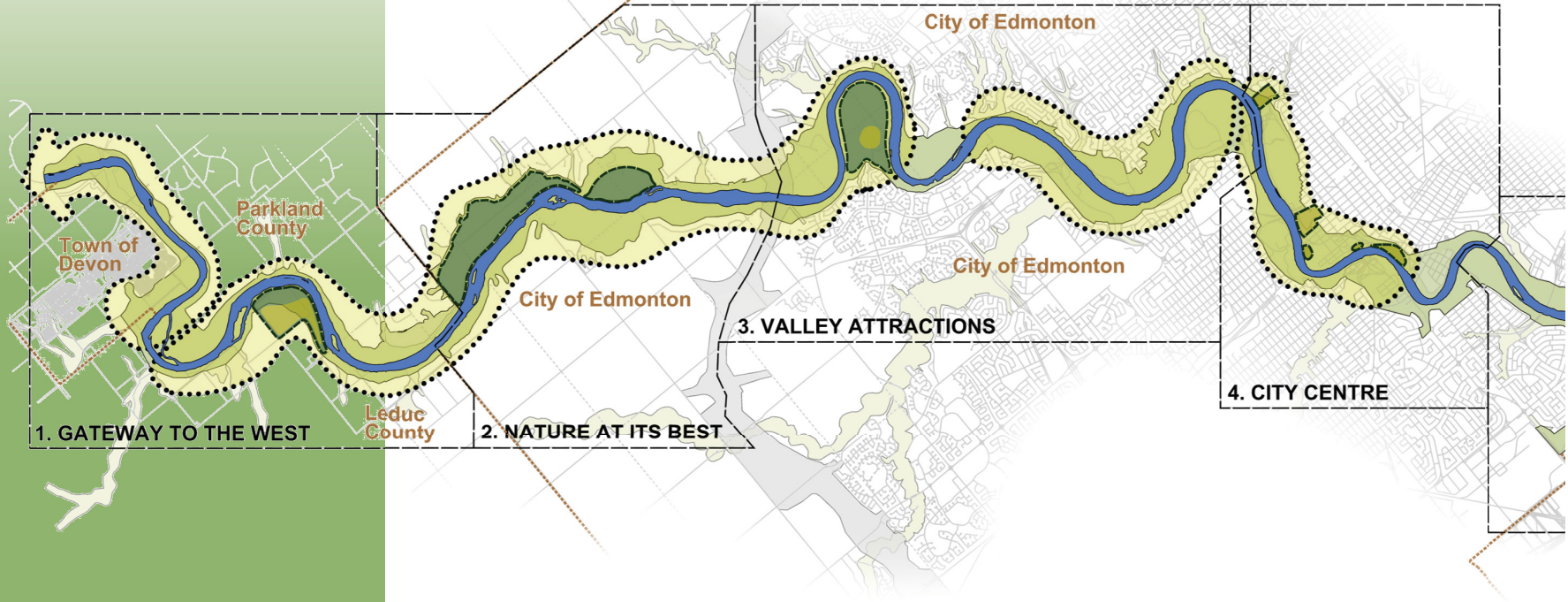
To protect the safety of park users, the Plan proposes a combination of signage and hazard identification, municipal coordination of policing and emergency services (including police boats and emergency phones), communication and education, and managing competing activities in the park.

The planning framework should take into account safety concerns related to:

- Biophysical Characteristics of the North Saskatchewan River Valley
- Public Use of the River Valley
- Access Points – Top of Bank to the Water’s Edge
- Public Interface with Industry and Public Infrastructure
- Stormwater Outfalls
- Oil and Gas Industry
- Public Interface with Wildlife
- Municipal Policy for Safety in the River Valley
- Provincial and Federal Jurisdictions
- Current Emergency Deployment in the River Valley

SUMMARY OF SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Slope Stability:** Assess factors to determine potential stability problems. Reroute trails, install signage, implement tributary bridge crossings, and other site-specific erosion controls to avoid conflict between recreational use and unstable slopes.
- **Water Quality:** Regularly test water quality and post results and signage to advise of possible dangers and precautions.
- **Access Points:** Post permanent regional maps at access points, indicate anticipated seasonal conditions, recommend alternative access routes, and establish citizen patrol program. Formalize and upgrade existing and new access points to help create effective network of formal accesses for emergency response.
- **“Blufones” – Public Emergency Call Stations:** Expand the existing “Blufone” network to increase emergency communication opportunities.
- **Hunting in the North Saskatchewan River Valley:** Eliminate the conflict between hunting or trapping activities and recreational trail use. Raise awareness of permissible hunting areas, provide notice of potential nearby hunting activity. Hunting is controlled by provincial regulation.
- **Public Communication:** Provide public maps and information regarding emergency contact info, safe boat launch facilities, wayfinding markers, periodic water depths, and periodic weather updates.
- **Vehicular Access and Pedestrian Accessibility:** Implement vehicle barriers at trailheads. Post pedestrian signage regarding trail difficulty, steepness of inclines/declines, trail surface, and potential interaction with other transportation modes.
- **Application of CPTED:** Implement the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in all future development projects in the park.
- **Emergency Response:** Encourage a specific, river valley mutual aid agreement between the seven RVA shareholder municipalities.



3.4 SEVEN PLANNING AREAS

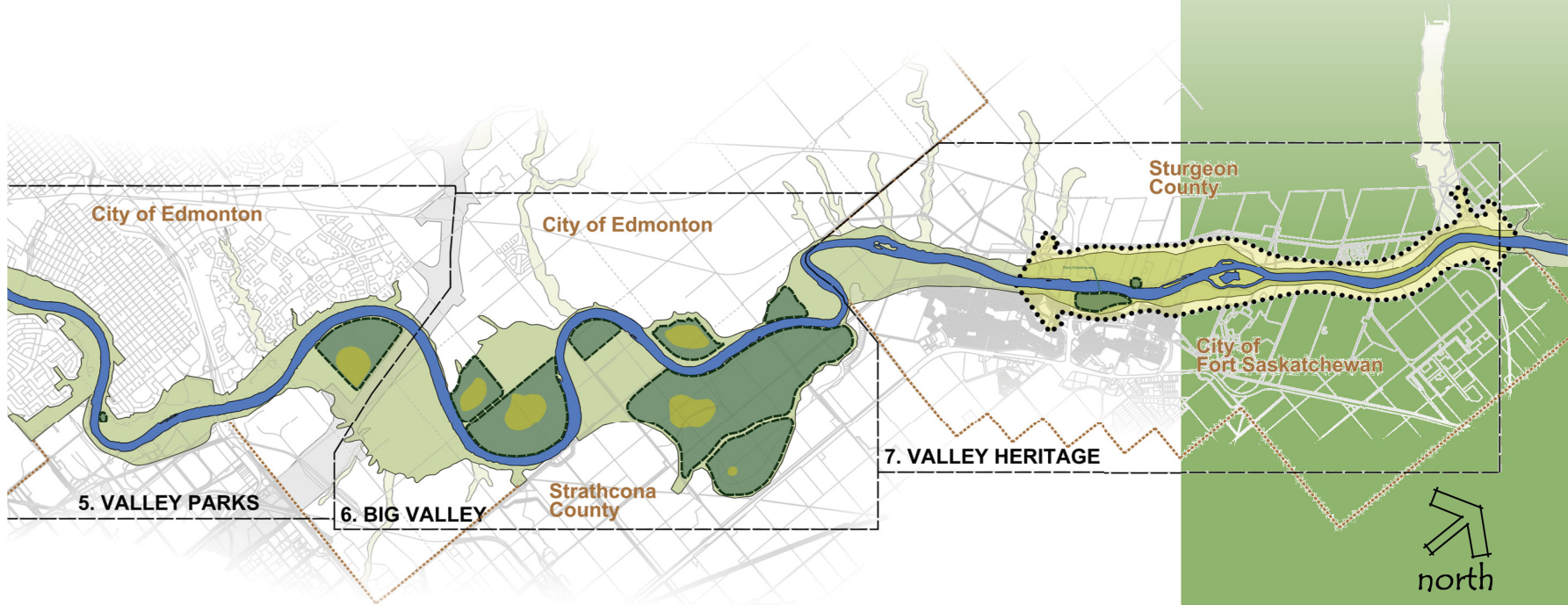
Consistent with the planning framework, the Plan for the Capital Region River Valley Park outlines seven distinct planning areas. This approach proposes distinct themes, primary uses and potential opportunities for new attractions, facilities and activities in each of the seven areas while, at the same time,

achieving the overall objectives for the river valley.

The following section describes each of the seven planning areas. Some features are focused on one site while others are a connected cluster of sites and related features (see Legend). Each plan feature focuses on different facets of the Plan, such as:



Capital Region River Valley Park



- Natural area conservation and management
- Adventure attraction
- Environmental education
- Recreation
- Urban amenity
- Heritage interpretation
- Environmental restoration

LEGEND

- Capital Region River Valley Park
- Special Opportunities:
 - Facility Development
 - Natural Conservation / Naturalized Parkland
 - Group of Opportunities

Destination Devon

River Valley West Park in the Town of Devon and Prospectors Point across the river in Parkland County are the park's western terminus and could be home to an exciting array of activities including hiking, boating, camping, gold panning, golfing, and visiting nearby attractions.

Rabbit Hill

The Rabbit Hill Ski/Mountain Bike Resort with Shalom Park and the Leduc Regional Park would create a proposed all-seasons regional park.

1. Gateway to the West

From the Town of Devon through Parkland County and Leduc County to the southwest boundary of Edmonton

Scenic natural areas and nature-based adventures define this planning area. The Town of Devon's Valley West Park is a logical departure point for excursions up and down the river. Rabbit Hill in Leduc County could expand beyond skiing and mountain biking to include a regional day use area with connections to trails leading to key attractions such as the Devonian Botanic Garden and the Leduc #1 Interpretive Centre. A proposed new Rabbit Hill conference centre could attract people to a wide array of conferences, seminars and workshops in the midst of a breathtaking natural landscape. And a new Adventure Trail would test the skills of bike riders, runners and hikers beginning in Devon, moving through Parkland County, and extending to Terwilligar Park.

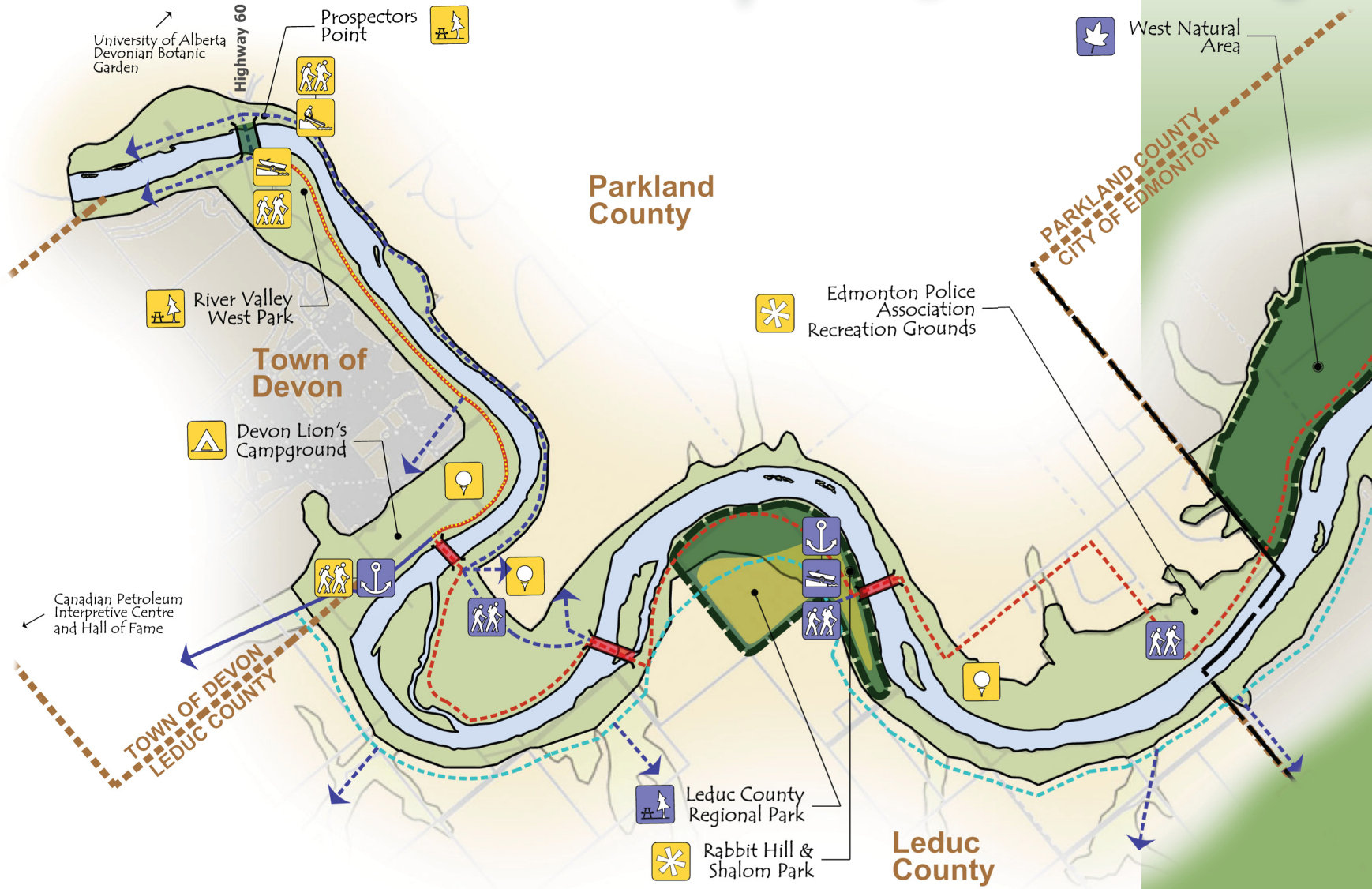


Conference Centre

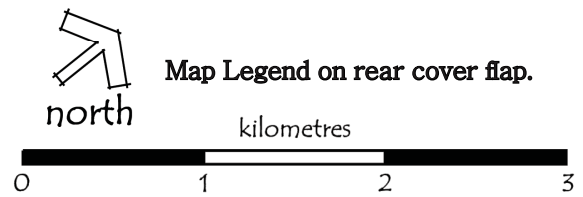


Rabbit Hill

Capital Region River Valley Park



AREA 1: GATEWAY TO THE WEST



THE CURRENT RESOURCE

- The Town of Devon is both a river adventure launch site and a destination for river valley users and tourists.
- River Valley West Park, Devon Golf Course, and Lion's Campground highlight the excellent existing leisure facilities of the river valley in and near Devon.
- Nearby destinations like the Leduc #1 Interpretive Centre make Devon an ideal touring or stay-over destination.
- Across the river and downstream, Parkland County boasts Prospectors Point, the Devonian Botanical Gardens, the Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary, the Westridge Golf Course and Convention Centre, the Blackhawk Golf Course, and the Edmonton Police Association recreation grounds.
- The Rabbit Hill Ski Area and Shalom Park in Leduc County are two privately-operated and well-established destinations that provide the Capital Region with both summer and winter recreation opportunities such as alpine and Nordic skiing, mountain biking and water skiing.

- Together, the Town of Devon, Parkland County and Leduc County provide a variety of well-developed golf opportunities, heritage and nature products, trail systems and camping facilities.
- A portion of the Trans Canada Trail is located within the Town of Devon.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Theme: Gateway to the West

Scenic natural areas and nature-based adventures define this planning area. River Valley West Park in the Town of Devon is a logical departure point for excursions up and down the river. Rabbit Hill in Leduc County could expand beyond skiing and mountain biking to include a regional day use area and connections to trails leading to key attractions such as the Devonian Botanic Garden and the Leduc #1 Interpretive Centre. A proposed Rabbit Hill conference centre could attract people to a wide array of conferences, seminars, and workshops in the midst of a breathtaking natural landscape. A new Adventure Trail would test the skills of bike riders, runners and hikers beginning in Devon, moving through Leduc County, and extending to Terwilligar Park.

Capital Region River Valley Park

As part of the Plan, there are opportunities to:

- Assemble an exciting full-season outdoor recreation and adventure destination to serve outdoor recreation users, the outdoor sports market, and the sports event market built upon the well-established venues and attractions already operating in the area. Features could include canoe rentals, bike rentals, training programs, sports events and competitions, ski equipment rentals, education, school partnerships, banquet facility rentals, summer and winter festivals, group picnics, and sports tournaments.
- Create a “Centre for Excellence” for training and hosting competitions in alpine skiing, Nordic skiing, mountain-biking, and water-skiing.
- Valley and river tours by boat, bicycle, canoe, kayak, etc. including day tours to Edmonton and overnight tours to Fort Saskatchewan.
- Utilize this river reach as a major access hub and stop-off point for Capital Region river valley users.

LAND

- Easements for trail linkages and land for the proposed Leduc Regional Park will need to be negotiated with private landowners.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

Destination Devon: the Capital Region River Valley Park’s western terminus and activity hub

Features include:

- Adventure hiking/walking trail
- Trail touring products
- River access, docks and staging area
- River touring products
- Camping and golfing facilities
- Nearby attractions such as Leduc #1 Interpretive Centre, the Devonian Botanical Gardens, and Clifford E. Lee Nature Sanctuary

All-Season Regional Park: an all-season Centre of Excellence comprised of Rabbit Hill Ski Area, Shalom Park and Leduc Regional Park.

Features include:

- Alpine skiing and snowboarding facility
- Nordic ski trails
- Water-skiing and wake-boarding lake
- Spectator water-ski venue
- Mountain bike park
- Elite athlete training centre
- Conference and retreat centre
- Tournament sports field complex
- River-edge day-use area
- Road enhancements and expanded parking facilities
- Food and beverage services
- Expanded trail connections

THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Destination Devon

- Town of Devon
- The RVA
- City of Fort Saskatchewan (for tours of the entire Capital Region River Valley Park)

All-Season Regional Park

- Shalom Park operator
- Rabbit Hill operator
- Leduc Count
- Minor sports groups
- The RVA

THE BENEFITS

Environmental

- Preservation of the existing terrestrial, riparian and aquatic ecosystems

Social

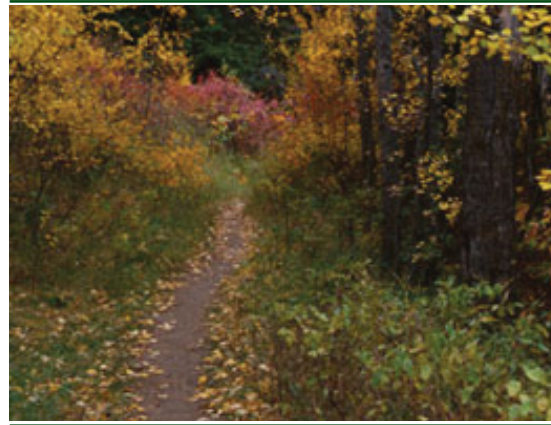
- Greater capacity for local and regional sports organizations to flourish and stage events
- Provides a unique opportunity for regional residents who seek safe adventure, solitude and escape from urban lifestyles

Economic

- Expanded public investments in river-based and land-based infrastructure which provide an expanded market for unique goods and services

Capital Region River Valley Park

- Increased opportunities for public-private joint marketing
- More potential for the private sector to invest in new and improved infrastructure as well as expanded services



Adventure Trail

A proposed adventure trail would provide a challenging hiking opportunity in natural surroundings. With end points at Devon and Terwillegar Park, the trail would connect important sites including the West Ridge flats, Edmonton West Natural Area and the Big Island river campsite.

West Natural Area and Big Island

These two important natural areas have been heavily affected by ATV use and are proposed for protection under the Plan. Low impact uses such as river-access camping and nature-based day programs will be facilitated and interpretive signage would be provided.

2. Nature at its Best

From the City of Edmonton's southwest boundary to Anthony Henday Drive

The natural beauty of the river valley is showcased in this planning area. Because of the pressures of growth, the southwest part of Edmonton is home to a growing number of families and suburban developments. The objective is to preserve a treasure of nature amidst a growing urban population. People will be able to see and touch nature at its best, walk along trails, catch a glimpse of waterfowl at Big Island, launch a canoe for a closer look at the river, and just enjoy everything nature has to offer in the valley.

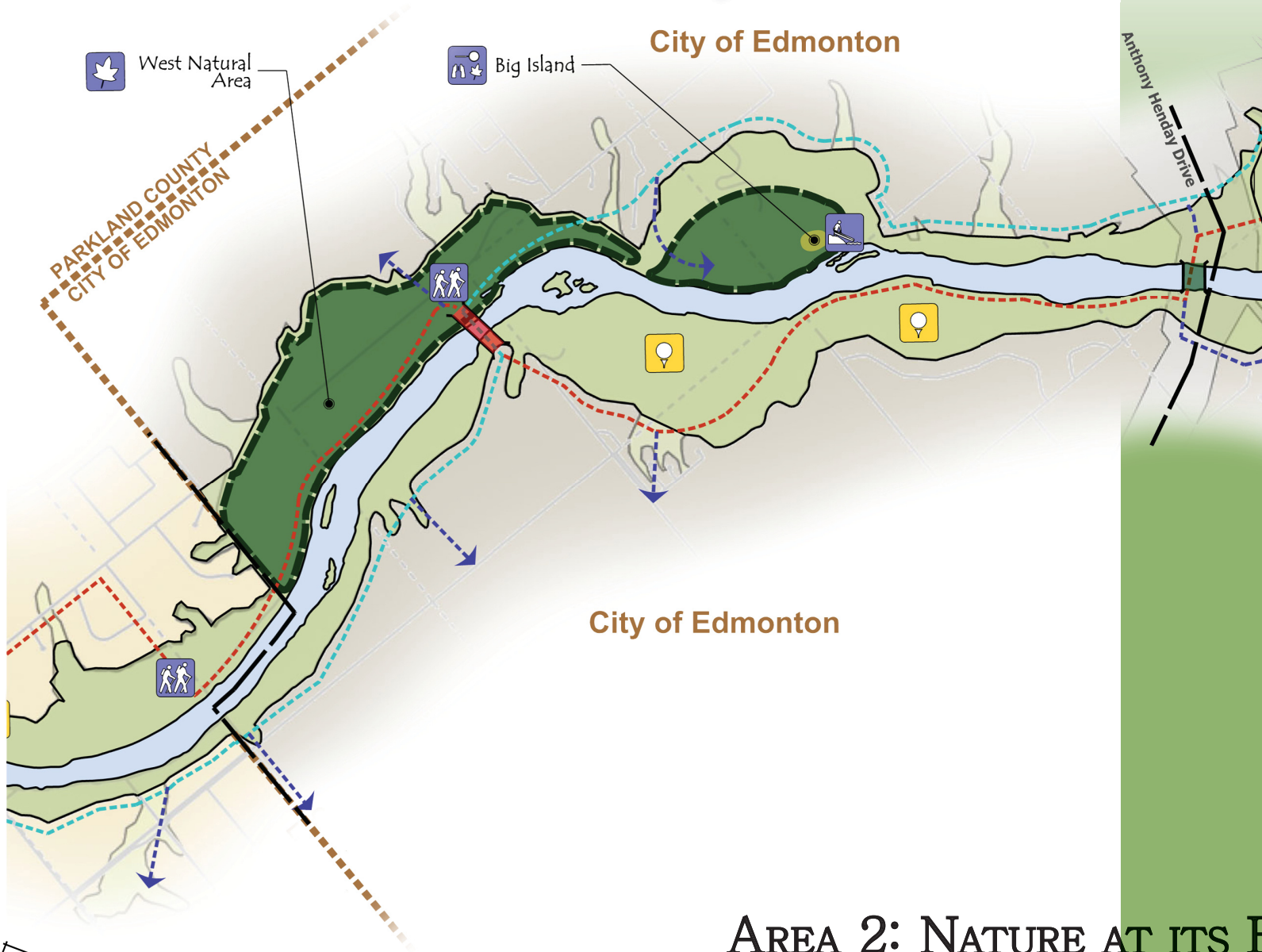


Hand Launch

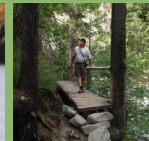
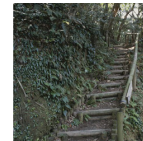
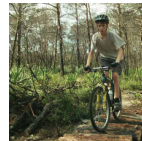
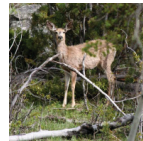


Big Island

Capital Region River Valley Park



AREA 2: NATURE AT ITS BEST



THE CURRENT RESOURCE

- The lands in this section of the river valley represent some of the more natural and well-forested lands within the river valley.
- The existing semi-rural setting and random natural trails make this section of the river valley a popular destination for trail users of all types.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Theme: Safe Adventure

The natural beauty of the river valley is showcased in this planning area. Because of the pressures of growth, the southwest part of Edmonton is home to a growing number of families and suburban developments. The objective is to preserve a treasure of nature amidst a growing urban population. People would be able to see and touch nature at its best, walk along trails, catch a glimpse of waterfowl at Big Island, launch a canoe for a closer look at the river, and just enjoy everything nature has to offer in the valley.

Plans for this area provide opportunities to:

- Retain and manage existing trails in their natural state to allow for nature appreciation and low-impact outdoor trail activities
- Provide recreational opportunities – such as walking, hiking, low-impact cycling, nature interpretation, classroom study, wildlife viewing, and risk adventure – while preserving the natural setting of the area
- Design a nature adventure trail system that is safe and enjoyable and would include interesting suspension bridges, rest places and interpretive information that will add to the natural experience
- Create a backcountry, river campsite at Big Island for canoeists, kayakers and adventure trail users
- Develop guided interpretive programs and increased cataloging of local flora and fauna, through cooperative efforts from naturalist groups, environmental groups, and the City of Edmonton

LAND

- Easements for trail linkages and land for the West Natural Area and Big Island

Capital Region River Valley Park

will need to be negotiated with private landowners.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

Adventure Trail: an adventure hiking trail and river water trail that provides a challenging outing in natural surroundings, with end points at Devon and Terwillegar Park.

Features include:

- Low-impact, limited-width trail
- Rough terrain and challenging vertical and horizontal crossings and obstacles
- Backcountry river campsite and hand launch at Big Island
- Connections to important stop-overs including West Ridge flats, Edmonton West Natural Area, and Big Island
- Pedestrian river crossing bridges
- Perimeter parking and staging area
- Interpretive and way-finding signage

THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Adventure Trail

- City of Edmonton
- Alberta Naturalists
- University of Alberta

- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
- Alberta Conservation Association
- Edmonton Land Trust
- The RVA
- Police, Fire, and Military

THE BENEFITS

Environmental

- Preserve existing terrestrial, riparian and aquatic ecosystems to support sustained biological diversity
- Provide a model for sustainable integration of human recreation and natural ecosystems
- Provide increased opportunities for environmental education and research
- Preserve and expand the natural capital of the river valley

Social

- Provide a unique opportunity for regional residents who seek safe adventure, solitude and escape from urban lifestyles

Economic

- Expanded adventure touring, equipment, and services.
- Training for police, fire, and military

Terwillegar Park

This outdoor recreation park is intended to provide a unique set of nature-based activities in a natural park setting and act as the gateway to the Adventure Trail to the Town of Devon.

Valley attractions

Major existing attractions in the river valley are proposed for upgrading and enhancement under the Plan including:

- Fort Edmonton
- John Janzen Nature Centre
- Whitemud Park / Fox Farm
- Whitemud Equine Centre
- Valley Zoo
- Buena Vista Park
- Hawrelak Park

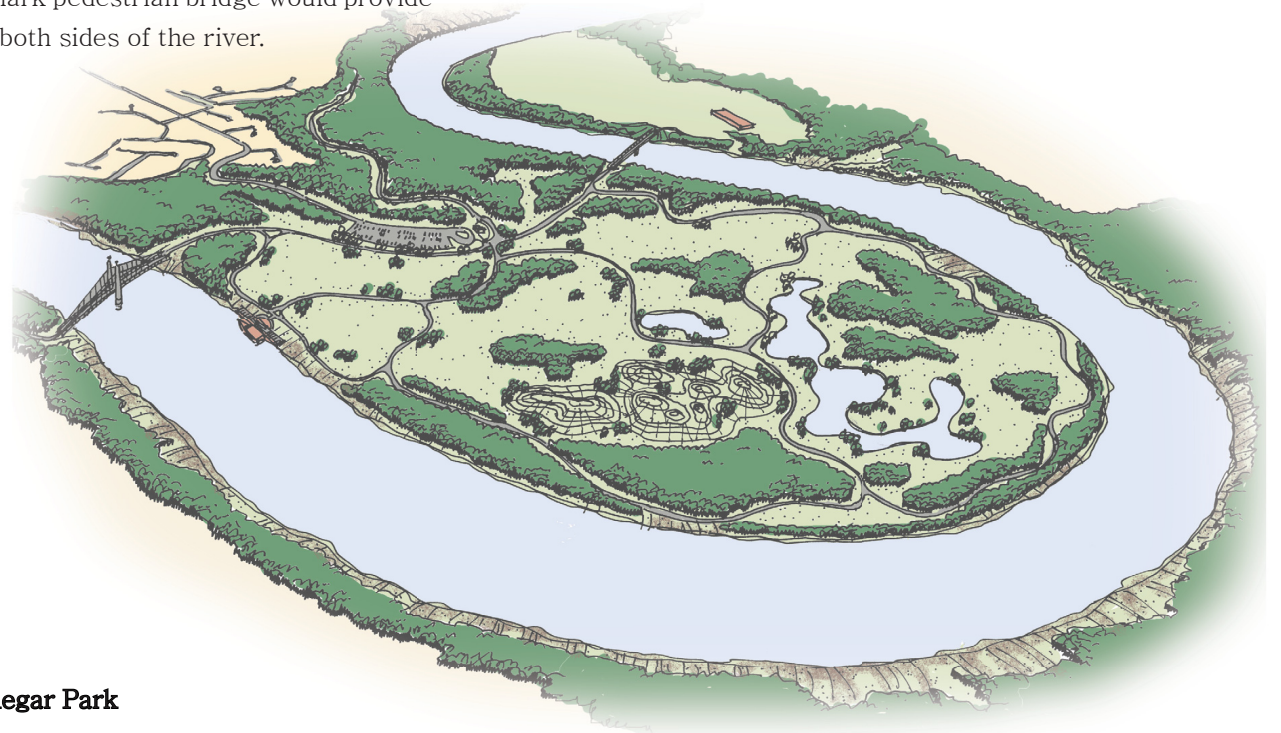
3. Valley Attractions

From the City of Edmonton's Anthony Henday Drive to Groat Road

The pace is different here, with opportunities to visit some of the river valley's leading attractions — Fort Edmonton Park, Valley Zoo, John Janzen Nature Centre, the Whitemud Equine Centre, and Hawrelak Park. The plan calls for major upgrades to all of these attractions to make sure they continue to be vibrant and exciting places to visit. Terwillegar Park is proposed as a new nature-based outdoor recreation park to serve the rapidly expanding southwest Edmonton population. A new landmark pedestrian bridge would provide access to both sides of the river.

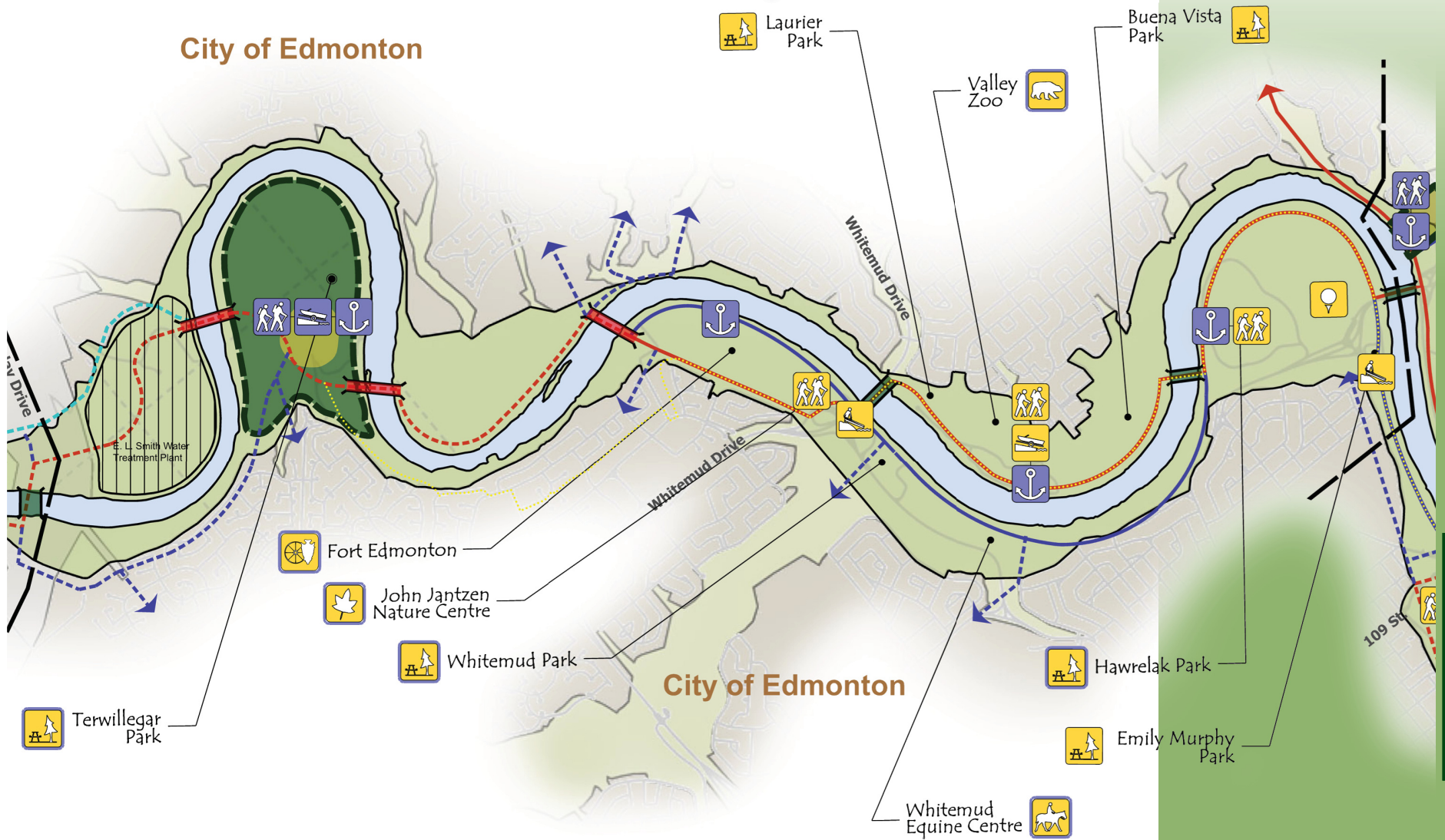


Landmark Pedestrian Bridge



Terwillegar Park

Capital Region River Valley Park



AREA 3: VALLEY ATTRACTIONS



Map Legend on rear cover flap.

kilometres



THE CURRENT RESOURCE

- The lands in this planning area represent the most vibrant and most visited lands with the Capital Region river valley.
- Valley attractions – such as the Valley Zoo, Fort Edmonton Park, John Jantzen Nature Centre, and Whitemud Equine Centre – continue to record increased annual visitation and plans for accommodating future growth are needed.
- Terwillegar Park is currently planned as a major public park with a predominant natural focus and with opportunities for mountain-biking, off-leash dog walking, picnicking, nature appreciation, and general outdoor recreation in a natural setting.
- A portion of the Trans Canada Trail runs from Terwillegar Park to the Strathcona Science Park.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Theme – Bundling Heritage, Nature and Outdoor Recreation

Plans for this area provide opportunities to:

- Tap into the potential for enhancing existing valley attractions and the tremendous synergies between the City of Edmonton and not-for-profit associations already in place
- Create a mixed tourism attraction zone that provides nature interpretation, heritage interpretation, scientific discovery, and outdoor/indoor recreation programming accessed from innovative valley-based water and trail transportation routes
- Transform the well-established attractions from excellent city destinations to venues and cooperative programs that have world-class appeal
- Plan Terwillegar Park to provide a landscape transition between the attractions and golf courses downstream and the natural areas upstream in Parkland

Capital Region River Valley Park

County, Leduc County and the Town of Devon.

- Enhance current facilities and programs to provide activities such as trail riding, equestrian events, winter cutter rides, summer carriage tours, safety programs, cross-country skiing, tourism transportation, recreation equipment rentals, souvenir sales, sporting equipment sales, interpretive programming, heritage exhibits, and more.

LAND

- The process for negotiating access to land and/or easements for remaining trail linkages from private landowners is underway by the City of Edmonton.
- The majority of land in this planning area is already under public ownership.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

Steps would be taken to enhance and/or upgrade current major attractions and the trails system to link them together.

Features include:

- Completion of the Valley Zoo Master Plan and expanded public infrastructure construction
- Pedestrian river crossing bridges
- Boat docks and boat launches
- Infrastructure for horseback riding & carriage tours
- Trail development and trail access agreements
- Food and beverage outlets
- Information kiosks
- Retail shops
- River valley tours
- Local community programming development
- New aboriginal village attraction
- Tourism promotion, planning coordination, and fundraising initiatives

THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- The City of Edmonton
- Valley Zoo Development Society
- Terwillegar Park Advisory Group
- Whitemud Equine Centre
- River valley golf courses
- Tour operators and vendors
- Local area councils
- Nature and environmental groups
- University of Alberta
- School boards
- Recreation groups
- Culture groups

THE BENEFITS

Environmental

- Preservation of existing terrestrial, riparian and aquatic ecosystems

Social

- Expanded and enhanced world-class attractions

Economic

- Expanded private vending, retail opportunities and river valley/river tourism potential
- Increased market to support vendors and tour operators
- Creation of innovation and positive viability for investors
- Expanded revenue-generating programs from linking destinations and bundling tour experiences

Capital Region River Valley Park



Aerial view of Terwillegar Park

Capital Park Downtown

A proposed river promenade with linkages to major public institutions, restaurants and other establishments welcomes people from across the Capital Region, especially the growing number of people living in Edmonton's downtown, as well as tourists from around the world.

4. Capital City Centre

From the City of Edmonton's Groat Road to Dawson Bridge

The bustle of downtown urban life meets the quiet of the river valley in this portion of the Capital Region River Valley Park. One of the most prominent symbols of Alberta — the Legislature Building — would be surrounded by world-class grounds befitting the province of Alberta. Linkages would be in place with the soon to be expanded Royal Alberta Museum, historic Government House, the Shaw Conference Centre, and Edmonton's downtown. Restaurants and other establishments will welcome people from across the region, especially the growing number of people living in Edmonton's downtown and tourists from across Canada and around the world. This level of enhancement would provide added vibrancy to the downtown segment of the Capital Region River Valley Park and continue to act as a catalyst for renewal of Edmonton's downtown.



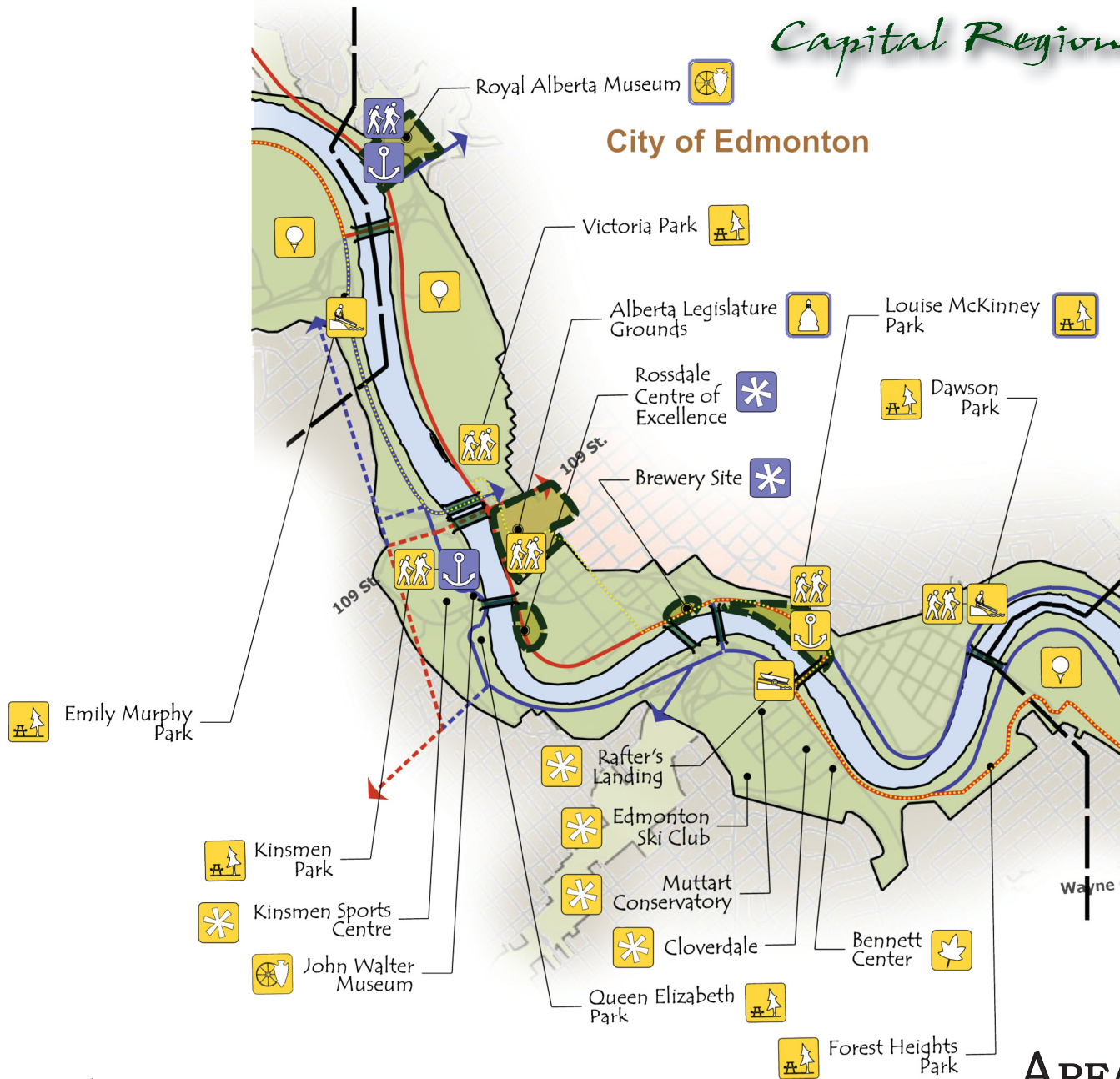
The Brewery



Alberta Legislature Grounds

Capital Region River Valley Park

City of Edmonton

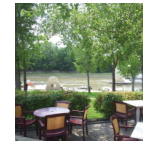


Map Legend on rear cover flap.

kilometres

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AREA 4: CITY CENTRE



THE CURRENT RESOURCE

- The lands in this planning area form a spine of public parks in the heart of Edmonton, crossed by unique heritage bridges.
- The area is already connected with a mosaic of well-established trail networks, public parks, historic neighbourhoods, and golf courses.
- Existing prominent destinations include the provincial Legislature grounds, the Royal Alberta Museum, the Shaw Conference Centre, and the Muttart Conservatory.
- The Royal Alberta Museum has unveiled a new vision and plans to expand their world-class facility.
- The Alberta Legislature acts as a prominent architectural symbol of our provincial pride.
- Louise McKinney Park is Edmonton's new signature river park which accentuates the newly expanded conference centre.
- A portion of the Trans Canada Trail runs from Terwillegar Park to the Strathcona Science Park.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Theme: Government and the Business Community Welcome the World

Plans for this area provide opportunities to:

- Build upon the strong existing network of partners to create a positive impression of pride for the Capital Region.
- Create a prominent welcome for tourists from across Canada and around the world and the growing number of people living in Edmonton's downtown.
- Integrate the primary attractions of the city centre area together into a combined and enhanced attraction with a new vitality and opportunities to attract new private sponsors, revitalize businesses, and energize existing and new valley tour operators, hospitality providers and event organizers.

LAND

- The majority of land is already publicly owned.
- No negotiations for private land are necessary for implementation.

Capital Region River Valley Park

KEY ATTRACTIONS

Capital Park Downtown: a new, integrated and connected development that builds on prominent, established destinations in our provincial capital to create a new vitality and energy within the city centre and to act as a catalyst for continued renewal of Edmonton's downtown.

Features include:

- An enhanced redevelopment of the Royal Alberta Museum and Government House Park with new connections to developed river lands and the river
- A new Alberta Legislature grounds that connect to a new waterfront with river walks and links with the Victoria Promenade and Heritage Trail
- An enhanced Louise McKinney Park as a site for celebration and ongoing social activity with a funicular railway that ties the river valley to the heart of downtown Edmonton
- A new Epcor Treatment Plant Centre of Excellence in Rosssdale

- A unique restaurant and market zone around the Brewery in Rosssdale with views across to Rafter's Landing and connected into the existing network of trails and parks
- Key river docks, boat launches, and staging areas for river transportation
- Infrastructure, equipment and programming for public horse and buggy excursions and snow-cutter excursions to connect to city centre attractions

THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Alberta Legislature Grounds

- Government of Alberta
- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- Royal Glenora Club

Royal Alberta Museum and Government House Park

- Government of Alberta
- Friends of the Royal Alberta Museum
- The RVA
- City of Edmonton
- Edmonton naturalists

Louise McKinney Riverfront Park and Funicular Railway

- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- Historic societies
- Downtown Business Association
- Alberta Community Development
- Economic Development Edmonton
- Railway operators

River Docks and Boat Launches

- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- Tour boat operators
- River boating organizations
- Key river valley attraction operators

Horse & Buggy and Snow-Cutter Excursions

- Whitemud Equine Centre
- City of Edmonton
- Fort Edmonton Park
- The RVA

Capital Region River Valley Park

THE BENEFITS

Environmental

- Preservation of existing terrestrial, riparian, and aquatic ecosystems.

Social

- Expanded festival and social programming opportunities
- Development of new river valley experiences unique to the region
- Greater harmony between the business community and the public sector
- Increased diversity of opportunities for leisure, education, interpretation, and heritage experiences
- Greater community pride and socialization in the downtown Edmonton

Economic

- World-class heritage and cultural attractions bundled with greater marketability for packaged tours
- Larger market base and greater operational recovery through fees, charges, and merchandising

- Increased residency and economic development in the downtown Edmonton
- Improved market for resources for non-profit groups and societies which will lead to operational sustainability and revitalized volunteer activity
- New business opportunities for restaurant owners, vendors, and recreational equipment rental

Coal Mining Interpretation Site – Rundle Park

This proposed interpretation site would represent the region’s coal mining history and feature an outdoor kiosk, displays, historic artifacts, and a potential underground hard rock coal mine representation.

River Marina in Hermitage Park

A proposed marina facility that houses commercial and private water craft would serve as the working hub and service centre of the Capital Waterway. Louise McKinney Park is expected to be the tourism-related docking facility.

River Science Centre and Aquarium – Clover Bar Park

A proposed Western Canadian Rivers Interpretive Centre would feature a river aquarium and an interpretive centre.

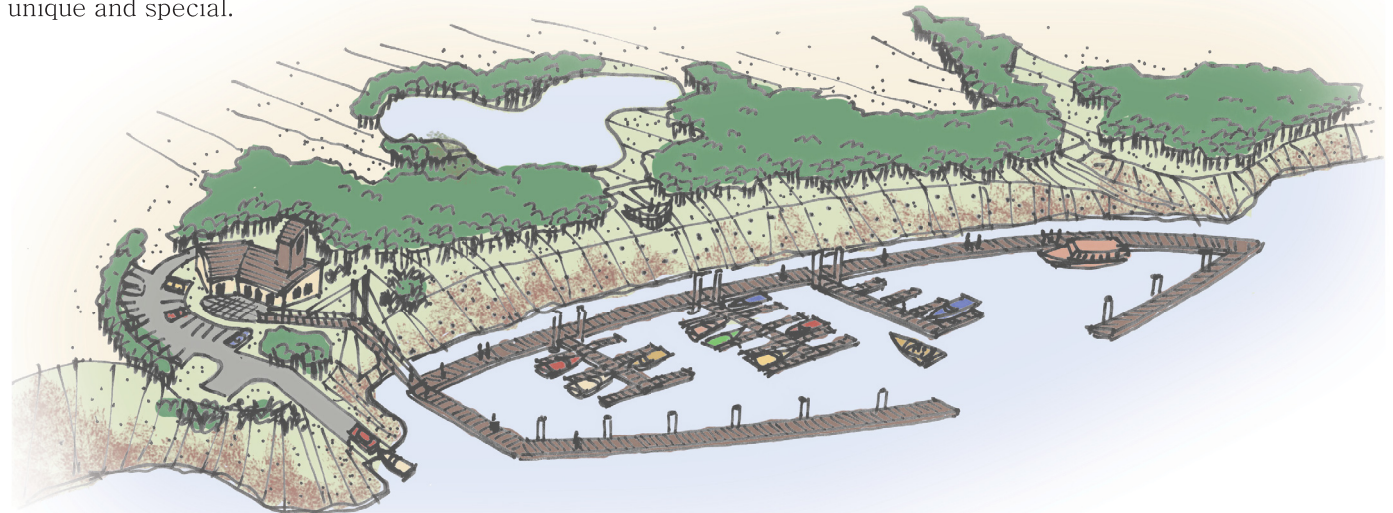
5. Valley Parks

From Dawson Bridge to the future Anthony Henday Drive east

Take in a round of golf or a walk along the river edge in Hermitage Park. This segment of the river valley contains parks and golf courses, walking trails and a proposed new marina to give people direct access to an afternoon cruise up and down the river. A new Coal Mine Interpretative Centre is proposed for Rundle Park and a river marina could be built in Hermitage Park. A new River Science Centre and Aquarium proposed for Clover Bar Park would provide an opportunity for people to learn first hand what makes rivers like ours unique and special.

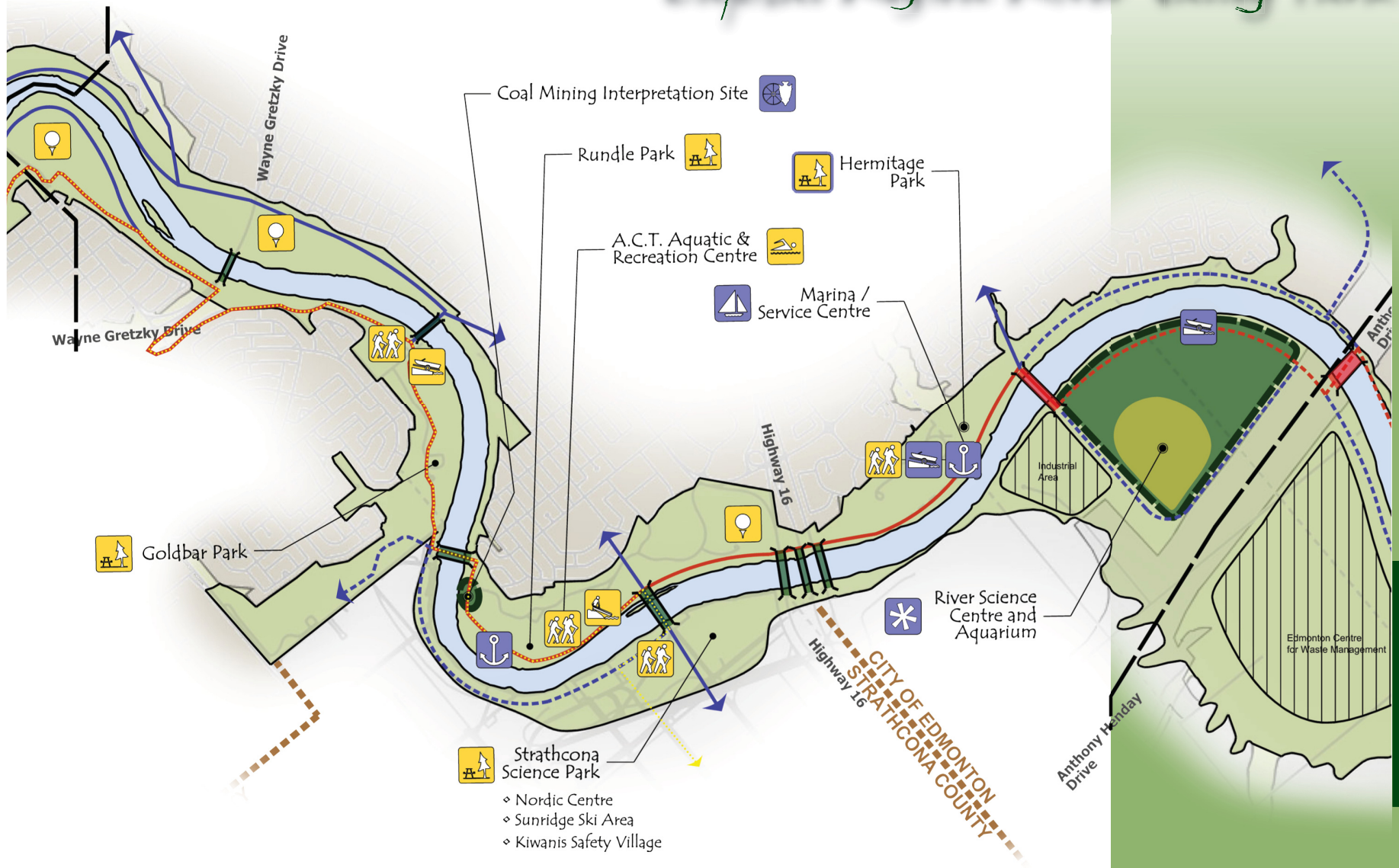


Trailhead



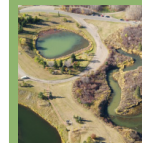
Marina at Hermitage

Capital Region River Valley Park



Map Legend on rear cover flap.

kilometres



AREA 5: VALLEY PARKS

THE CURRENT RESOURCE

- The river valley is relatively narrow within this planning area, with forested banks. The valley widens at the northern end into a large river flat.
- The river valley is occupied by various golf courses and public family destination parks.
- A number of associations provide public programs within Strathcona County along the south bank of the river.
- A cluster of oil, gas, and petrochemical refineries are located near the south side of the river valley. These refineries work in partnership with municipalities to ensure the safety of the river valley trail systems and recreational destinations within the vicinity of the refineries.
- Current operating partnerships among river valley stakeholders provide valley trail systems, cross-country skiing, golf, safety programming, family recreation, and group recreation activities.
- A portion of the Trans Canada Trail runs from Terwillegar Park to the Strathcona Science Park.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Theme: New adventure and education destinations.

Plans for this area provide opportunities to:

- Expand on existing partnerships to forge new, exciting recreation opportunities
- Create new educational opportunities through a proposed Coal Mine Interpretive Centre
- Take advantage of ideal river hydrology near Hermitage Park to create a major marina for recreational river boaters, river tour operators, and civic police and emergency response departments
- Partner with educational groups, scientific groups and agencies, and environmental groups to create a River Science Centre and Aquarium.

LAND

- The majority of land is already publicly owned.
- No private land is necessary for implementation.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

Coal Mining Interpretation Site in Rundle Park:

An interpretive display and facility for the Edmonton area's coal mining history

Features include:

- Heritage preservation and interpretation
- Outdoor kiosk displays with a canopy structure and artifacts
- Potential underground hard-rock coal mine educational experience
- Other educational outlets
- Retailing and food services

River Marina in Hermitage Park: a marina facility housing commercial and private water craft that would act as the working hub of the Capital Waterway.

Features include:

- Full service marina centre
- Boat launch
- Boat trailer and guest parking
- Recreational boat rentals
- Public services and river information
- Public transit access

Clover Bar River Science Centre and Aquarium:

a western Canadian rivers interpretive science centre and aquarium that would focus on advancing knowledge of our changing river and work towards ensuring sustained water quality, preservation of fish species and aquatic habitat, riparian enhancement, and public education

Features include:

- River aquarium
- Interpretive centre
- Knowledge clearinghouse
- Offices for environmental non-governmental organizations
- Outdoor water quality exhibit
- Walking trails and other park amenities
- Support infrastructure

THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Coal Mining Interpretation Site

- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- Alberta coal industry
- Regional historical groups

River Marina

- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- River tour operators
- River taxi services
- Edmonton Police and Reserve
- Marina operator
- Canadian Coast Guard

Clover Bar River Science Centre and Aquarium

- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- University of Alberta
- North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance
- Alberta Environment
- Canadian Coast Guard

THE BENEFITS

Environmental

- Creation of a major river ecosystems research and education centre
- International stewardship and environmental recognition

Social

- Celebration of the area's coal mining history
- New and enhanced venues for programming services
- Increased collaboration between public and private sectors
- Expanded river access, river use, and river safety education

Economic

- Expanded business opportunities through rentals, food services, boater services, and retail sales

Capital Region River Valley Park



Examples of science and nature centre facilities

Edmonton East Major Destination Park

This proposed new destination park would provide regional day use, a swimming lake, a youth camp, a historic residence, conference centre, and boat launch.

Strathcona Water Park

A proposed whitewater and flatwater sports venue and athletic training centre could provide world-class facilities and public attractions.

Strathcona Nature Centre

This proposed Nature Centre would provide environmental education for school-age children.

Horsehills Ponds Regional Amphitheatre

This proposed amphitheatre provides a site for large outdoor concerts and theatrical events.

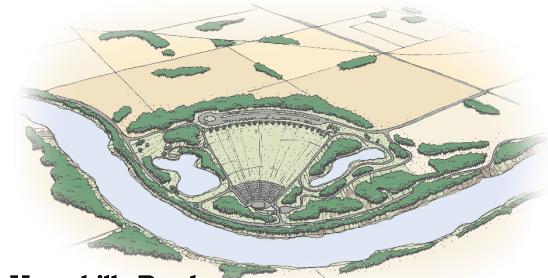
The Farmstead Model Farm

This proposed interpretive centre would showcase local agriculture and food production in this region's unique microclimate.

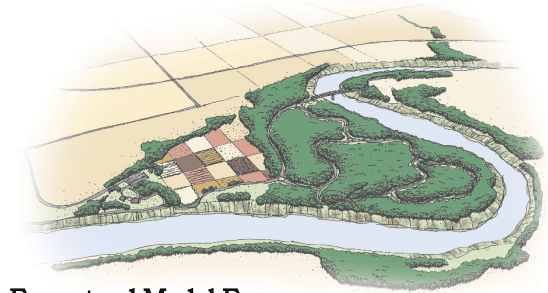
6. Big Valley

From the future Anthony Henday Drive east through Strathcona County to Edmonton's northeast boundary

Large tracts of land in this segment of the park are active or former industrial sites. That makes it an ideal location to showcase environmental reclamation as industrial activities wind down in the years ahead and a top location for potential new river valley destinations. A proposed new major regional destination park would provide a swimming lake, major boat launch and a festival venue with a Walk of Nations celebrating our heritage. Adjacent to it is a proposed new heritage site and conference centre. A new children's ranch camp adds a place for children of all ages. Across the river, the Strathcona Water Park is proposed as a destination whitewater and flatwater recreation park. Both of these parks could provide potential sites for international fairs and sports events. Rounding out this area are the proposed Horsehills Ponds Amphitheatre, Farmstead Model Farm, and Strathcona Nature Centre. Specific site allocation for recreational facilities within Big Valley will require environmental assessments, rezoning applications and the municipal planning and development process. Sites will also require to be assessed in regards to proximity to industry, risk management as per the municipality's MDP and LUB.



Horsehills Ponds



Farmstead Model Farm



Strathcona Nature Centre and Water Park

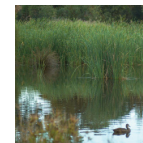


Edmonton East Major Destination Park

Capital Region River Valley Park



AREA 6: BIG VALLEY



THE CURRENT RESOURCE

- The river valley broadens into wide, highly disturbed river flats including a large oxbow lake.
- Current development includes random trails and a few golf courses.
- The area currently is occupied by industrial land uses such as gravel extraction and waste and wastewater management facilities.
- The majority of the area is prime for conversion to recreation-related development.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Theme: Big Valley Country

Plans for this area of the river valley include opportunities to:

- Create an exciting array of integrated regional metropolitan parks, natural areas and world-class attractions
- Exhibit and emphasize the heritage of the region's cultural groups
- Create a mix of nature appreciation, outdoor

adventure, family recreation, cultural exposé, and sporting exhibitions

- Animate the river valley with opportunities for hosting international water-based sporting events, and large festivals, combined with public nature centres and a working farmstead
- Attract tourists and regional residents alike to enjoy popular beaches, swimming lakes and boating opportunities

LAND

- Land for trail linkages will need to be negotiated from private landowners.
- Areas under public ownership include the Horsehill Ponds special opportunity site.
- Access to portions of the river flats will be need to be negotiated.

KEY ATTRACTIONS

Edmonton East Regional Destination

Park: a regional, family recreation park for local residents and tourists alike with outdoor water recreation, picnicking, trail activities, shopping, cultural festivals, nature interpretation, river access, youth camp, and historical interpretation

Features include:

- A proposed Historical Site and Conference Centre
- A Historical Site Interpretive Centre & Meeting Facility
- Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch (Youth Camp)
- Swimming lake
- Park centre building
- Public boat launch facility
- Walk of Nations festival area
- Constructed wetlands

Strathcona Water Park: A world-class venue for whitewater and flat water sports events and competitions as well as an athletic training centre for summer water sports

Features include:

- World class whitewater facility and water adventure park
- Flat water park (for canoes, kayaks, and rowing)
- Summer water sports training centre
- Recreation lake (for swimming, canoes, and paddleboats)
- Fishing lake, enhanced wetlands and interpretive walk
- Pond hockey and warm-up facilities
- Extensive trail systems

Strathcona Nature Centre: an environmental education centre modeled after the “Earth Rangers” in Woodbridge, Ontario (<http://www.earthrangers.ca>) which provides environmental programming for school age children and is managed by a private foundation.

Features include:

- Interpretation and natural history education
- Interpretive displays
- Interpretive trails
- Natural areas restoration
- Administration building

Horsehill Ponds Regional Amphitheatre: a potential venue for large outdoor concerts and theatrical events in the natural, bowl-shaped escarpment and river terrace

Features include:

- Amphitheatre stage and seating
- Amenities building and restaurant
- Grass slope seating
- Naturalized ponds
- Trails and other park amenities
- Park and ride program

The Farmstead: a local agriculture and food interpretation centre that celebrates and preserves a portion of the area's superior soils and microclimate and supports a collection of market gardening businesses

Features include:

- Agriculture and food interpretation centre
- Agricultural displays
- Working market gardens
- Working greenhouses
- Woodlot protection
- Trails and other park amenities

THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Edmonton East Regional Destination Park

- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- Regional culture organizations
- Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch
- Historical organizations
- Alberta Community Development
- Festival organizations

Strathcona Water Park

- Private investors
- National sports bodies
- Sport Alberta
- Land owners and developers
- The RVA
- Economic Development Edmonton
- Water-sports and paddling associations
- Wetland environmental groups
- Alberta Fish and Game Association
- Ducks Unlimited
- Alberta Conservation Association

Capital Region River Valley Park

Strathcona Nature Centre

- Strathcona County
- Industry sponsors and private foundations
- Environmental steward organizations
- Education institutions
- Youth groups
- The RVA, Alberta Environment
- Alberta Community Development
- Alberta Education
- University of Alberta
- Ducks Unlimited
- North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance
- Alberta Conservation Association

Horsehill Ponds Regional Amphitheatre

- Festival organizations
- Event organizers
- City of Edmonton
- The RVA
- Canadian Folk Festival organization

The Farmstead

- Local market garden enterprises
- Alberta Agriculture
- City of Edmonton
- Communities in Bloom
- The RVA
- Major agricultural industry sponsors
- Horticultural associations
- Alberta 4H
- Muttart Conservatory

THE BENEFITS

Environmental

- Restoration of significant zones of riparian forest
- Addition of habitat diversity including wetlands
- Creation of a major environmental education centre

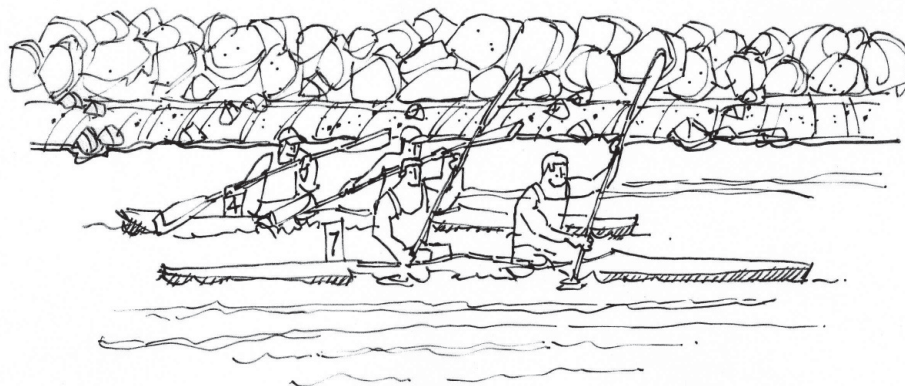
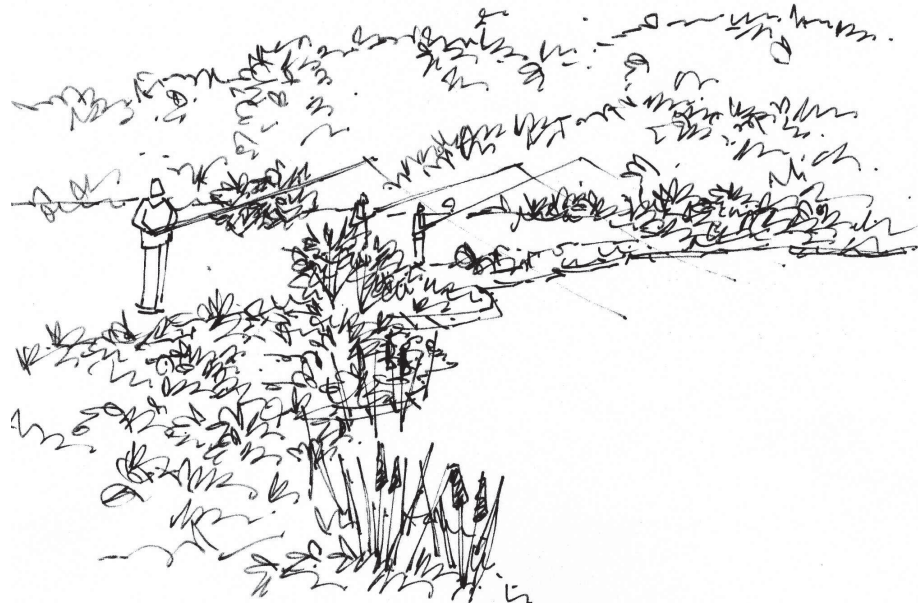
Social

- Future regional populations will be connected to this area with completion of Anthony Henday Drive
- The five special opportunity sites will be available for families, individuals and special needs groups
- The proposed new Regional Destination Park will celebrate our ethnic diversity which is a strength of Capital Region

Economic

- The area will be a destination for world class festivals
- The water based summer sports venue and training centre will host competitions and provide athlete training
- The area will have the potential to host a world's fair.

Capital Region River Valley Park



Fort Centre Park

The 1875 Northwest Mounted Police Barracks is intended to be recreated at this site along with festival grounds for gatherings and events such as the RCMP mounted horse musical ride.

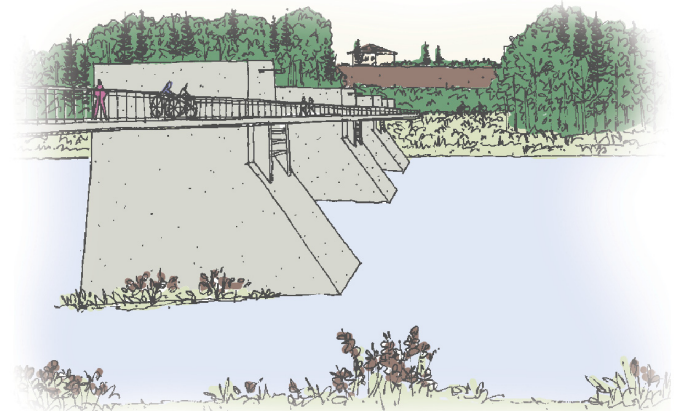
Victoria Heritage Trail

This proposed heritage trail would have three crossings to the parks and historic attractions in Fort Saskatchewan. Each historic site along the trail is proposed for upgrading including the Lamoureux Settlement, Edmonton House and Fort Augustus. A proposed historic river ferry would link the Lamoureux Settlement to Fort Centre Park.

7. Valley Heritage

From Edmonton's northwest boundary to the mouth of the Sturgeon River in Sturgeon County and the City of Fort Saskatchewan

History is the key feature of this segment of the park. With historic forts and settlements like the Lamoureux Settlement, Fort Augustus, Edmonton House, and Fort Saskatchewan Northwest Mounted Police Garrison Barracks, this part of the park will connect people to the Capital Region's roots. A proposed new pedestrian bridge and existing and proposed riverfront parks in Fort Saskatchewan provide day use, camping, golfing, sports grounds, a ferry crossing, and walking trails. This area is the downstream terminus of the Capital Region River Valley Park.



Pedestrian bridge attached to existing abandoned rail bridge



Capital Region River Valley Park

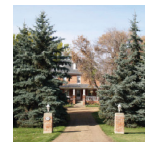
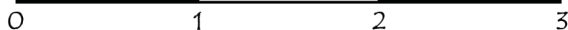


Ferry Crossing



Map Legend on rear cover flap.

kilometres



UNIT 7: VALLEY HERITAGE

THE CURRENT RESOURCE

- The river valley narrows in this planning area. Heavily forested areas and farmland in Sturgeon County occupy the north side of the river, while the newer neighbourhoods of the City of Fort Saskatchewan are located on the south side.
- Downstream, the river valley widens to reveal Fort Saskatchewan city centre and neighbouring petro-chemical plants.
- Current parks are limited to Turner Park – a major destination for sports fields, camping, picnicking, and general outdoor recreation.
- The City of Fort Saskatchewan and Sturgeon County are in the process of developing various heritage based recreational assets in the valley, including the historic Lamoureux Settlement and Fort Centre Park.
- A portion of the Trans Canada Trail is located within the City of Fort Saskatchewan and continues across the river into Sturgeon County.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Theme: Celebrating Our History

Plans for this area provide opportunities to:

- Celebrate the heritage that abounds in this area by redeveloping, operating, and linking the area's various historic sites – such as Edmonton House, Fort Augustus, Lamoureux Settlement, and Fort Centre Park – as the key driver for enhanced recreation, economic development, and overall revitalization of these lands
- Redevelop the historic ferry crossing across the river
- Emphasize the historic Victoria Trail as an important travel route for early settlers
- Integrate the area's heritage with new opportunities for camping, river access, river recreation, golf, and trail development

LAND

The majority of lands needed are already in public ownership.

Capital Region River Valley Park

KEY ATTRACTIONS

Fort Centre Park: a re-creation of the 1875 Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) Barracks site in Fort Saskatchewan

Features include:

- Re-creation of the original Fort
- Linkages to surrounding amenities
- Park amenity centre
- Festival grounds for gathering and events
- NWMP Mounted Horse Musical Ride site
- Stables and support facilities
- Ties to existing historical grounds and museum
- Trails and park amenities
- Ferry crossing to Lamoureux Settlement and Victoria Trail

Victoria Heritage Trail and Fort Saskatchewan

Trails: linking historic sites on both sides of the river with a historical trail that follows the original Victoria Trail. It will connect at four river crossings to the parks and historic attractions in Fort Saskatchewan.

Features include:

- Upgraded Lamoureux heritage settlement
- Upgraded Edmonton House historical site
- Upgraded Fort Augustus historical site
- Historic river ferry between Lamoureux Settlement and Fort Centre Park

THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Fort Centre Park

- City of Fort Saskatchewan
- Sturgeon County
- Industrial Heartland
- The RVA
- Historic groups
- River tour operators
- Alberta Community Development
- RCMP
- Heritage Resources Canada
- Alberta Solicitor General

Victoria Heritage Trail and Fort Saskatchewan Trails

- City of Fort Saskatchewan
- Sturgeon County
- Industrial Heartland
- The RVA
- Historic groups
- River tour operators
- Alberta Community Development
- RCMP
- Heritage Resources Canada
- Alberta Solicitor General

THE BENEFITS

Environmental

- Preservation of existing terrestrial, riparian, and aquatic ecosystems.

Social

- New venues with a purpose and quality to facilitate increased programming for river valley visitors
- Creates a greater balance of experiences for local residents, regional visitors and tourists

Economic

- Improves the capacity of local recreational open space in the area and for cultural/heritage events and festivals
- Increases the product mix for tour operators
- Generates small business and local vendor opportunities
- Provides an avenue for industry sponsorship and advertising



Chapter 4 Implementing the Plan

A number of key components are required to ensure that the Plan is implemented in a consistent, effective and efficient manner. That includes implementing a strategic business model, adopting a specific partnering strategy, using appropriate planning tools to secure the necessary land, and putting the necessary funding in place.

4.1 STRATEGIC BUSINESS MODEL

To ensure that the vision and objectives for the river valley park can be achieved in a coordinated, timely and cost-effective manner, a strategic business model is proposed as part of the Plan, including a recommended organizational structure, a governance model, a model for acquiring the necessary funds for

the park, and a business implementation plan. The objective is to create a strategic, proactive and timely approach to respond to immediate and future planning and management needs.

Considerable work went in to developing the recommended business model including comparative research on park systems elsewhere and best practices, an analysis of the current RVA funding and administrative model, research into governance and business model options, and numerous discussions with RVA Board Executive and key stakeholders. The end result was an obvious interest in embracing a new and creative approach for moving forward.

4.2 LEARNING FROM PARKS ELSEWHERE

Major parks across the country were developed and are operated with core values of protection, enhancement, natural and human heritage, preservation and economic sustainability. Most major parks:

- are managed/governed under a single authority, but with multiple stakeholder decision-making capacity
- are created through an Act of legislation with direct funding from senior government levels
- rely on multiple public, private and charitable funding sources
- have predictable levels of base funding
- operate with a broad network of stakeholders

In the case of the RVA, the core principles are identical to the model used in most major parks. Multiple stakeholder decision-making is in place and there is a clear capacity to build on a broad network of stakeholders. On the other hand, the Capital Region River Valley Park has not been established under

legislation; independent municipalities have authority over the lands through the Municipal Government Act. There is no direct tie to ongoing or predictable funding from senior governments nor is the RVA set up to accept charitable giving.

4.3 ASSESSING THE CAPACITY OF THE RVA

The RVA has a number of key strengths along with some initial weaknesses in moving forward with the implementation of the Plan. Its strengths include:

- balanced representation
- the ability to speak with a common voice
- a vision that is unsurpassed
- mutual respect among members
- credibility with governments, industry, regional publics and partners
- strong leadership

On the other hand, the organizational capacity of the RVA is limited, future funding is not in place, charitable tax status has not been secured, and more work is needed to expand planning, communications and partnering capacity.

In terms of opportunities, the presence and credibility of the RVA continues to grow and there is enormous potential to solicit funding partners. Significant funding from governments, combined with an interest from major industry,

heralds a strong intent by governments, the not-for-profit sector, environmental and philanthropic groups to “come to the table” to support the river valley park. The vision is well aligned to community and government objectives and there is a window of opportunity for securing the necessary funding and support from both governments and industry. With a strong economy and growing interest in preserving our environment, the opportunities for garnering support for the vision of the river valley are significant. There is a growing need to increase the capacity of outdoor parks, trail systems, festival sites, river access points and tourism attractions, and the RVA is starting with a tremendous resource

But there are also clear threats. As noted earlier in this report, with growing demands on the river valley and a growing population, there are threats to the sustainability of the river valley. Demands for residential and other developments threaten the park and open spaces in the river valley. The fact that key parcels of land within the river valley are privately owned also affects the ability of the RVA and municipalities to plan, fund and develop the river valley. The lack of ongoing,

reliable funding sources affects the ability of the RVA to plan and provide stewardship for the future of the park. There is also a potential for unrelated inter-municipal planning and governance issues to create conflicts and disputes.

Given this assessment, it is even more important to move forward with a clear business model that positions the RVA for success.

4.4 IMPLEMENTING A NEW BUSINESS MODEL

Based on this assessment, the strategic business model for the RVA should meet five clear objectives to:

- Build the business plan and readiness for implementation
- Ensure municipal river valley planning is coordinated in meeting the Plan's objectives
- Ensure the orderly negotiations for river valley park lands in order to provide public access to the park and through the park
- Ensure ongoing implementation of the Plan
- Achieve international recognition for the park

The proposed business model positions the RVA as the steward of the implementation plan with the following primary roles:

- **Provide leadership and oversee implementation of the Plan:** The RVA, working with municipalities, should ensure municipal planning and development activities and decisions affecting the river valley are guided by and are consistent with the Plan.
- **Participate in land use planning and development of coordinated statutory land use controls:** A variety of coordinated statutory land use controls should be used by member municipalities in order to respect and integrate the intent of the Plan.
- **Secure operational short-term funding:** To initiate implementation of the Plan, the RVA should have committed sustainable funding in place for at least three years to provide for the required staff/administrative resources and operations.
- **Secure sustainable long-term capital and operational funding:** Funding commitments and partnerships with all orders of government, stakeholders and philanthropists, along with funding mechanisms such as charitable tax status, should be pursued to sustain long-term implementation of the Plan.
- **Continue to maximize RVA Board effectiveness:** The RVA should facilitate long-term business planning, capacity building, partnering and strategic lobbying.
- **Establish project, marketing and promotional partnerships:** Partnerships should provide

the essential leveraging of skills and resources to create a world class riverfront park for the benefit of current and future generations. The RVA should also consider establishing a new name for the Capital Region River Valley Park and include this as part of a comprehensive marketing strategy with a common visual identity.

4.5 ESTABLISHING A GOVERNANCE MODEL

The RVA has to start with basic principles to establish an appropriate and effective governance model for the future. Those principles should reflect the following:

- **Autonomy and flexibility for municipal partners in The RVA:** Municipal partners in the RVA have to cooperatively develop and agree to the overall plan for the river valley park. At the same time, the autonomy and flexibility of each municipality can not be compromised. They must retain the flexibility to make choices about how to manage the resources within their jurisdictions and to make decisions in the best interests of their municipalities and electors. Treatment of individual properties and property owners must remain the domain of municipalities. Governance options that establish another layer of authority are not recommended. The voluntary nature of the RVA has worked well and is the most powerful incentive to seek win-win solutions to issues that might arise.

- **Sustainability:** In order to be sustainable, the RVA must become an independent entity with status as a legal entity. This is important because the members of the RVA board, including municipal councillors, volunteer members, and boards of special organizations, can change over time and the organization needs the stability an independent entity can provide. It also needs a stable funding model to protect the RVA from swings in the capacity or interest of major funding partners. The organization must be flexible and able to adapt to changing values and needs and respond to the changing directions of key partners. These components, combined with a clear, consistent, and broadly accepted long-term vision and short-term action plans, will provide a strong foundation for a sustainable organization.
- **Stewardship and enhancement of the river valley:** Preservation of the natural capital in the river valley is a top priority for the RVA. That means the RVA must have a mandate and the ability to be more effective in achieving this objective than individual municipalities acting independently.

Enhancement of the social and economic capital of the river valley is also a basic objective. The RVA must have the mandate to balance and achieve all of these objectives.

- **Equity and harmony for stakeholders:** The RVA governance model must provide a fair and equitable approach for municipalities – one that respects their needs and responsibilities. Fair representation, transparent communication and fair treatment are all essential to the business model design. The governance model must respect the rights and concerns of stakeholders, some of whom may have competing interests. The model must provide a meaningful role for stakeholders, support cooperation and partnership, and balance commercial opportunities and social needs without over-riding environmental and heritage priorities.
- **Synergy and financial value:** The ability of each municipality to accomplish its own goals, financial and non-financial, must be greater as members of the RVA than operating alone. There must be a net financial

benefit for each participating municipality. The RVA should be more effective in marketing and generating revenue than each individual municipality. The alliance of municipalities, the RVA and the river valley park must be seen as a positive contributor to the Alberta economy, its social values and environment. The business model must also effectively address the liability exposure of each individual municipality.

4.6 IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC BUSINESS MODEL

A series of steps are required to implement the strategic business model. The initial focus should be on putting the business model in place and securing the necessary financial resources to move forward.

While the exact timing for implementation depends on a number of factors, some of which are beyond the control of the RVA, the objective is to encourage implementation to proceed as quickly as possible, in line with growing demands and an increasing population in the Capital Region.

The availability of funding and the acquisition of lands for the river valley park will ultimately impact the timing for completion of many of the components of the Plan. Funding and timing for developments will also affect the administrative functioning of the RVA. As projects and opportunities accelerate so will the demand for increased capacity within the RVA organization.

Implementation of the Plan is expected to proceed in three phases:

- The transition phase
- Land assembly and commencement of key public projects
- Implementation of major growth projects and new developments

The next three years will be critical to implementation. During this time, approval of the Plan should be achieved, the organizational capacity of the RVA should be developed, and steps should be taken to achieve a broad and predictable funding base.

4.7 PARTNERING STRATEGY

Partnerships will be critical for the RVA to implement the Plan and accomplish its goals within available budgets and appropriate timelines.

What Is a Partnership?

For the purposes of the Plan, partnering is defined as a long-term relationship with another organization for the mutual benefit of the RVA, the partnering organization, and current and potential future users of the valley. From that perspective:

- Users of the river valley park are customers
- An association of customers is a potential partner
- Private operators must be kept at arms length
- Individual donors are not partners unless their donation has a specific measurable purpose
- Vendors are not partners

The following criteria are recommended as the basis for selecting and investing in long-term partnering relationships:

- Clearly defined common areas of purpose and objectives
- Agreement on basic principles and values
- Ability to contribute to the achievement of the RVA's objectives
- Acceptance of the rights of all other stakeholder interest groups
- Approval by the municipality or municipalities most directly affected by the partner's interests.

At the outset, six critical partners have been identified in the Plan:

- RVA shareholder municipalities
- Government of Alberta
- Government of Canada
- Business and industry
- Stakeholder organizations
- Residents of the Capital Region

Recommended Partnering Strategy

Several alternative partnering strategies were considered including:

- Partnering as a core function, where any and all partners are aggressively pursued
- A selective strategy, with a managed focus and pace reflecting the RVA's priorities
- Arms length, where the RVA does not take a lead role and has no close relationships that might compromise other stakeholders

Based on the business and governance model recommended for the RVA, a selected strategy with a carefully managed and focused pace related to selected RVA and municipal priorities is the most appropriate and effective approach. This approach allows the RVA to direct most of its energies to core functions (e.g. government relations, marketing, planning, etc.) rather than relationship building and relationship management.

The partnerships that are developed should be more long term and sustainable. Most potential partners are more likely to be interested in this type of relationship based on shared goals

and values, rather than limited to specific projects. This strategy would also allow closer interaction with municipalities. It would lead to a well-defined long-term plan that can be managed closely. Funding requirements can be planned in advance with confidence. At the same time, this strategy does not preclude the ability of the RVA to respond to new partnership opportunities as they arise so that valuable opportunities are not missed.

Overall, this selective partnering strategy:

- Allows the RVA to maintain a small core organizational group with minimal overhead. Most of the responsibility for managing partnership relationships would reside with a senior officer position.
- Recognizes that progress in developing partnerships must be planned, focused and controlled
- Requires and relies on individual municipalities to be actively involved with the RVA in initiatives within their domains

A specific partnering policy, framework and action plan should be developed by the RVA and its member municipalities. A number of

key components should be addressed in a partnering policy including the need to:

- Develop long-term relationships with organizations to the mutual benefit of the RVA and those organizations
- Dedicate the necessary commitment of effort and resources to address expressions of interest from many different sources
- Establish an annual partnering plan with benchmarks and report progress annually to the RVA and all stakeholders
- Establish clear reporting relationships for partnering initiatives with the various governments involved
- Determine how partnering organizations can best communicate and be connected with the RVA
- Establish the terms and conditions of partnering agreements

It is important to ensure that there is broad, general communication about the RVA and its initiatives and directions. Priority areas where partnerships are required should be defined and potential candidates should be identified. A large and diverse network of contacts should be used to solicit potential partners.

The challenge of attracting new partners is an ongoing management responsibility involving the following key steps:

- Ensuring there is broad general communication about the RVA and its initiatives and directions so that potential partners can identify themselves to the RVA
- Defining business areas in which partnerships are required and researching candidates in defined industry, business or social sectors
- Identifying and introducing potential partners through the very large and diverse network of contacts the RVA has through its Board, government and industry contacts

To implement the partnering strategy, the administration requires both staffing and tools to plan and manage partnerships effectively. There are many contact management software applications available, such as ACT™, that support the proper management of contacts. In addition, there should be an annual plan that identifies the specific nature of each partner's interests regarding infrastructure development (where appropriate).

Managing Partnerships

The RVA needs to pay special attention to its municipal partnerships. Municipalities are the RVA's most important and closest partners. Effective, sustainable relationships must be developed and maintained with member municipalities. For that reason, the following specific strategy for managing municipal partnerships is recommended:

- Maintain Council membership on the RVA Board to deal with major policy matters. An Executive Committee which includes a mix of representatives from the seven municipalities should have direct policy responsibility
- Create a Policy and Planning Committee with representation from senior municipal managers to take responsibility for reviewing and recommending RVA budgets, strategic plans, and development plans
- With approval of the overall plan for the river valley, create a long-term development plan (based on the Plan) through a specific project working group comprised of municipal planners
- Assign a single management resource from each municipality to serve on a coordinating

committee and to act as the single point of contact for each municipality when different functional expertise is required

- Identify senior managers in each of the functional departments as contacts for the RVA and manage those relationships to keep a high level of awareness of the RVA's plans and activities
- For each major development project involving more than one municipality, have the RVA assign a member to the project steering committee
- For each major development project involving only one municipality, have the RVA sit as an observer on the project steering committee

The provincial government is also an important partner for the RVA. The Plan is designed to position the river valley as a valuable resource and a lasting legacy for the province. The objective should be to establish a positive relationship with the provincial government and to secure the necessary financial and political support. A specific strategy is required to identify the various departments involved, provincial programs and initiatives that are consistent with the objectives of the river

valley park (e.g. the Water for Life Strategy, environmental, or health-related initiatives), existing funding programs that could be accessed, and individuals of influence who can lend their support to the RVA plan.

A provincial partnering strategy should address each of these components, identify actions to be taken, and assign appropriate responsibilities to the executive director, board members, the board chair, or other resources to pursue the objectives. These efforts should also be coordinated with municipalities to reinforce their support.

Partnerships with businesses in the river valley and organizations using the river valley also need to be carefully pursued. It will be important to balance the approach to commercial organizations and non-commercial/environmental groups in order to minimize potential conflicts. Partnerships should be developed carefully to ensure that a perceived close alliance with one group does not alienate other potential partners. Each situation must be evaluated on its own merits and managed carefully.

4.8 LAND USE AND LAND SECUREMENT STRATEGY

The river valley contains both public and private land. This mixture of land ownership, coupled with the desire of RVA member municipalities to maintain their local autonomy, means that flexibility is required in how statutory planning tools are used to address river valley land use and resources for future generations.

Land Use Control Tools

Experience from other projects (e.g. the Beaver Hills Initiative) indicates that individual municipalities prefer to maintain local autonomy when it comes to authority for land use control. Therefore, a “bottom up” approach to land use control will be more successful.

Since many of the RVA member municipalities are currently reviewing and updating their respective Municipal Development Plans and Land Use Bylaws, there is an opportunity to include or revise more detailed land use policies and bylaws regarding protection and enhancement of the Capital Region River Valley Park area in their statutory plans.

Statutory Plan Overlays (SPOs) are an important tool that could be used to provide specific guidance for river valley land use without affecting existing land use zones. Implementing coordinated SPOs in each municipality would ensure a consistent approach to land use planning while also providing individual RVA member municipalities with opportunities to adopt land use policies reflecting their local needs and conditions. Consultation with each municipality is essential in order to determine the best planning mechanism to support moving ahead with plans for the river valley.

Specifically, it is recommended that the RVA:

- Encourage municipalities to include more detailed policies within their respective statutory plans (municipal development plans, areas structure plans, and area redevelopment plans) to support the goals, objectives and implementation strategies contained in the Capital Region River Valley Park Plan. This should include:
 - methods for determining the top of the bank
 - required setbacks from the top-of-bank

- control of incompatible land uses
- protection of environmentally significant and riparian areas
- development controls within the flood plain
- restrictions on the removal of trees and vegetation
- protection of view corridors
- protection of potential trail and greenway links
- whatever other development regulations are deemed necessary
- Consider initiating public education programs that promote best management priorities and environmental stewardship by property owners and other user groups in the Capital Region River Valley Park. Public education on best management practices and the benefits of environmental stewardship is a critical element and an important prerequisite for getting stakeholder ‘buy-in’. The “Municipal Guide – Planning for a Healthy and Sustainable North Saskatchewan River Watershed,” prepared by The River Valley Alliance, provides an excellent resource document for that purpose.

Land Securement Tools

Securing the necessary land for the river valley park clearly is a priority for the Plan. In the case of negotiating public access to or the acquisition of privately-owned land needed to implement the Plan, a number of possibilities have been considered through a review of relevant literature and discussions with regional planning directors.

Our analysis indicates that:

- Environmental and municipal reserve dedication will continue to be important land securement tools; however, these can only be used in cases where subdivision is proposed
- Determining the top of the bank and required setbacks is one of the major challenges facing RVA municipalities
- Land purchases and donations are the most common and effective land securement tools used in other jurisdictions
- Environmental and municipal reserve dedication is a preferred method for land securement rather than conservation easements

- Establishing a River Valley Land Trust is a viable and effective option
- Given the size of the undertaking in implementing a land securement strategy for the Capital Region River Valley Park, a partnership will be required among federal, provincial and municipal governments as well as corporate and not-for-profit sectors
- Structure public/private partnerships with federal, provincial and municipal governments as well as corporate and not-for-profit sectors to raise the funds necessary to implement the land securement strategy and capital improvements needed for the Capital Region River Valley Park

In all cases, consultation and negotiation with private land owners is an essential component of the Plan's implementation process.

Given this assessment, it is recommended that the RVA:

- Work with individual municipalities to secure land for parks and trail development through environmental and municipal reserve dedication as part of the subdivision application process
- Establish its own River Valley Land Trust specifically to administer a land securement program through purchases or donations within the Capital Region River Valley Park similar to the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT)

4.9 KEY COMPONENTS OF A FUNDING STRATEGY

A costing exercise was completed to address the scope and timing of an investment strategy for achieving the vision and key components of the Plan. Given the overall scope of the Plan, a phased in strategy to address components of the Plan will be required.

Three interrelated components are necessary for achieving the vision and success of the Plan.

COMPONENT 1

All those elements which connect the length of the park, the river and the associated river valley environment are included in Component 1. This includes steps to protect specific existing valley landscapes, acquire necessary access to lands, and connect the various components of the river valley park including key trail connections, water access and landscape protection. This would enhance the over \$500 million already invested in the river valley over the past 50 to 60 years.

As noted earlier in this report, a significant portion of the river valley has been disturbed

(e.g. for gravel extraction) and this offers an opportunity for restoration and reclamation. Costs associated with these protection and restoration components are identified as a Component 1 cost.

Pedestrian trails are proposed in the Plan as the key way of providing a continuous east-west link from Fort Saskatchewan to Devon. All of the components associated with the trail network such as trailheads, entry point gateways, rest nodes, viewpoints, bridge crossings, and wayfinding and interpretive signage help to enhance that lineal connection and are included in Component 1.

Creating more opportunities to access the river is included in Component 1. This includes water-based developments such as hand launches for small boats, canoes and kayaks; boat launches for power boats; and docks that provide more access to and from the river.

COMPONENT 2

Proposed plans for growth, updating, and renewal of existing parks and recreational developments, either public or private, make up the second component of costs. Facilities such

as the Valley Zoo, Fort Edmonton, the Royal Alberta Museum, the Alberta Legislature and numerous existing parks are recognized as important destinations within the Capital Region and they form a significant part of future plans for the river valley park. Estimates of costs for these potential enhancements have come from a variety of sources and are generally based on existing development plans which are currently at various levels of implementation.

COMPONENT 3

This component includes opportunities that expand beyond initiatives to connect the length of the river valley park. This includes opportunities for enhancements at specific nodes throughout the river valley park. Funding partnerships or governments will play a major role in supporting these initiatives. The costs for these projects have been estimated based on the level of landscape development involved. The levels include such things as reshaping the land, landscape enhancements, internal tertiary trails, basic road access and parking. Opportunities included in this component include the following general categories:

- **Protection /Restoration:** This includes natural or undisturbed areas not significantly affected by development which are to remain in a natural state with select minor enhancements to improve access, aesthetic quality, and safety. Enhancements would include removal of unsafe trees and deadfall adjacent to trails, slope stabilization in close proximity to areas potentially accessed by the public, and restorative infill planting.
- **Enhanced Natural Areas:** This includes natural or undisturbed areas that are to remain in a natural condition but with enhancements to provide for pedestrian circulation, limited vehicular access, and specific low to moderate intensity activity areas. Development would take place with limited disturbance to the natural environment. Enhancements would include development of tertiary trails, access roads and parking, landscape enhancements, site furnishings and signage.
- **Reclaimed Landscape:** This includes areas disturbed by past developments (generally mining of surface materials) which are to be restored to a natural or semi-natural

condition with significant re-grading and restoration and with enhancements to provide for pedestrian circulation, vehicular access, and specific moderate to high intensity activity areas. Enhancements would include development of tertiary trails, access roads and parking, landscape enhancements, site furnishings and signage.

- **Manicured Landscape:** This includes areas in either their natural condition or disturbed by past development which are to be redeveloped to a manicured park condition, with significant re-grading and restoration and enhancements which provide for structured sports and recreation activities, pedestrian circulation, vehicular access, and specific moderate to high intensity activity areas. Enhancements would include development of tertiary trails, access roads and parking, landform enhancements such as berming or ponds, structured sports fields, landscape enhancements, site furnishings and signage.

The development of Component 3 elements would include clearing, grubbing, grading

and installations. Specialty items would also be part of Component 3. These include infrastructure enhancements specific to a particular nodal development site, ranging from elements such as shelters and washroom facilities to a whitewater facility or marina.

Global Estimate of Probable Cost	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3	Total Capital Cost	Land	Total Land and Capital	Annual O & M Costs
Gateway to the West	\$42 M	\$1 M	\$9 M	\$52 M	\$5 M	\$57 M	\$5 M
Nature at its Best	\$16 M	\$ -	\$3 M	\$19 M	\$8 M	\$27 M	\$2 M
Valley Attractions	\$54 M	\$80 M	\$17 M	\$151 M	\$ -	\$151 M	\$15 M
Capital City Centre	\$26 M	\$6 M	\$33 M	\$65 M	\$ -	\$65 M	\$6 M
Valley Parks	\$26 M	\$18 M	\$20 M	\$64 M	\$ -	\$64 M	\$6 M
Big Valley	\$56 M	\$ -	\$73 M	\$129 M	\$22 M	\$151 M	\$13 M
Valley Heritage	\$30 M	\$50 M	\$5 M	\$85 M	\$5 M	\$90 M	\$9 M
Totals (no GST)	\$250 M	\$155 M	\$160 M	\$565 M	\$40 M	\$605 M	\$56 M

Table 4.1 — Estimated Cost of the Seven Planning Areas

4.10 GLOBAL CAPITAL AND OPERATING COSTS

A preliminary estimate, in 2007 dollars, is as follows:

- Component 1 – \$290 million
- Component 2 – \$155 million
- Component 3 – \$160 million

The total estimated cost of all three levels is \$605 million. Implementation over an extended period of time would allow for more cost effective use of funds and resources.

Operating costs to maintain and operate the components are estimated at \$56 million per year. These operating costs do not include RVA operating costs.

4.11 SECURING THE NECESSARY TRANSITION FUNDING

A major pool of funding will be required to protect, preserve and enhance the river valley and to implement the Plan over the longer term.

TRANSITION FUND

Initially, a Transition Fund of approximately \$900,000 will be required over three years to fully develop the business model and business plan. Key steps will include expanding the capacity of the RVA, formalizing government funding sources, assisting in the implementation of appropriate municipal planning tools, applying for charitable status, and building a broad base of public and stakeholder support.

Full implementation of the Plan will – of necessity – occur in phases. Negotiating access to necessary land is an immediate priority and will require a variety of approaches outlined earlier in this report. Funding for trail extensions, pedestrian bridges and detailed planning for future projects will also be necessary in the early implementation phase.

Both member municipalities and governments are expected to contribute to the Transition

Fund which will be used to build the capacity of the RVA to a point where full implementation of the Plan can proceed. Annual municipal funding commitments may then be reduced or eliminated after the initial transition period of approximately three years.

OPERATING FUND

The RVA should manage an Operating Fund supported by both government and charitable funding. The purpose of this fund should include managing implementation of the Plan and providing charitable grants to volunteers and volunteer organizations that operate programs in the river valley park.

CAPITAL FUND

The RVA should also manage a Capital Fund supported by both government and charitable funding. This fund would be used to purchase and hold land as well as to provide grants for municipal projects and projects initiated by volunteer groups and other charitable organizations.

4.12 ASSESSING THE BENEFITS

Implementation will substantially increase the environmental, social, and economic capital of the Capital region river valley and generate a wide range of ongoing benefits. Based on a cost-benefit analysis completed for this plan, overall additional net benefits resulting from implementation are very conservatively estimated at \$89.1 million per year.

Summaries drawn from the economic evaluation are as follows:

1. Increased environmental net benefits.

Natural areas provide valuable ecosystem services that directly benefit people living in or near these areas. These typically include: air and water filtration and purification, storm water management, erosion control, carbon sequestration, habitat protection, noise control, and pest control. Analysis of the current river valley concludes the annual value of these ecosystems services, before plan implementation could exceed \$255 million. Implementing this plan will generate a variety of beneficial ecological goods and services resulting in a net additional benefit of \$11.3 million per year.

2. Increased social net benefits.

Social capital refers to the ways in which the river valley region adds to the quality of life for local residents and users. This includes opportunities for passive and active recreation, education, and improvements in health. Analysis of the river valley concludes the current annual value of social capital (recreation non-market and expenditures and health care savings) before plan implementation could be \$111 million. Implementing this plan will generate a net additional benefit of \$17.1 million per year.

3. Increased economic net benefits.

The river valley benefits the regional economy by generating employment and labor opportunities and by creating wealth. Examples are: capital investment, net revenues from operations, tourist expenditures, and increased land values. The value of economic capital, measured in terms of income and wealth effects before plan implementation is conservatively estimated at \$241 million per year. Implementing this plan will generate a net additional benefit of \$60.8 million per year.

Capital Region River Valley Park

As noted, the current value of environmental, social, and economic capital of the river valley is \$607 million per year. Implementation of this plan provides an opportunity to enhance the environmental, social, and economic capital of the river valley beyond current levels through land reclamation and protection, expanding recreational opportunities, and attracting more visitors to the region. The additional net benefits of plan implementation are conservatively estimated to be \$89 million per year.



Chapter 5 Concluding Comments

This summary report provides an overview of the detailed plans for the Capital Region River Valley Park based on extensive research, public input, and reviews of a wide range of information and studies. Additional information is available in a series of technical reports prepared as part of the Plan.

Overall, the direction of the Plan is clear. The opportunity to create an internationally recognized world class park in the Capital Region and a lasting legacy for future generations is within our grasp. We must build on the considerable work done over the past several decades to preserve and protect the

natural areas in the river valley as well as to establish and maintain attractions, facilities and recreation opportunities in the river valley.

Time is of the essence. With a demanding economy, growing population, and huge pressures on existing infrastructure, costs are increasing dramatically, putting important potential opportunities to both protect and enhance the river valley at risk. We can not let the vision for this river valley park suffer from those same pressures. Nor can we let

the immediate pressures of the day detract from the need to take action now, to protect, preserve, and enhance the river valley and to put the essential building blocks in place for the future.

The Plan is a realistic and reasonable approach to securing a lasting legacy for the river valley. With the support of all orders of government, stakeholders and partners, the RVA, along with the one million residents in the Capital Region, the Plan can succeed.



LEGEND

-  Capital Region River Valley Park
- Special Opportunities:
 -  Facility Development
 -  Natural Conservation / Naturalized Parkland
 -  Group of Opportunities
- Primary Trail:
 -  Existing
 -  Proposed
- Secondary Trail:
 -  Existing
 -  Proposed
 -  Proposed Adventure Trail
 -  Trans Canada Trail
- River Crossings:
 -  Existing Bridge
 -  Proposed or Future Bridge
 -  Proposed Ferry Crossing
-  Municipal Boundary
-  Planning Area Boundary

PARK FEATURES

-  proposed major enhancements to existing
- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| existing | proposed | |
|  |  | major attraction |
|  |  | destination park |
|  |  | natural conservation area |
|  |  | historical interpretation |
|  |  | nature centre |
|  |  | campground |
|  |  | aquatic & recreational centre |
|  |  | equine centre |
|  |  | zoo |
|  |  | legislature |
|  |  | marina |
|  |  | trailhead |
|  |  | golf course |
|  |  | dock |
|  |  | boat launch |
|  |  | hand launch |

Turn flap over for Legend



The River Valley Alliance Shareholders

