

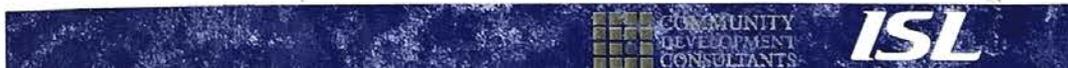


WASKASOO PARK

SPECIAL GATHERING PLACES

Master Plan Report

November 2005



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Waskasoo Park system is one of Red Deer's most well known and well used features and one of the City's proudest accomplishments. Planned and developed as part of the Province's Urban Park Programs in the 1980's, The City has identified the need to reassess the needs and uses of Waskasoo Park by updating the Waskasoo Park Master Plan. Some of the key drivers of the **Waskasoo Park Study** include:

- The City's commitment to the Cornerstone Values, Vision, Purpose and Guiding Principles as defined in the Strategic Plan for The City of Red Deer.
- The Recreation, Park and Culture Department's adoption of an integrated planning approach based on community needs.
- The recognition of the increased and changing use patterns of the Park combined with the city's growth.

The updated Master Plan will consist of a number of separate components. This study, the second component of the overall master plan update, has focused on four **Special Gathering Places** within Waskasoo Park: Heritage Ranch, Bower Ponds, Three Mile Bend and River Bend. This document reviews the last twenty years of development within each of these parks as well as creates possibilities for the next twenty years.

The City's overall goal for this study is to reenergize the Special Gathering Places with innovative and sustainable programs and services, identifying and addressing conflicting uses, and achieving synergy with current planning directions. When implemented, the plans and recommendations defined in this report will assist the City in enhancing the four Special Gathering Places so that they are sustainable, innovative and reflective of community needs and desires. The ideas outlined in this report allow for the long term success of these parks as users' needs have altered since their first development twenty years ago.

The following report defines the process, findings, ideas and recommendations of the Special Gathering Places Study. The study process has been managed by a project steering committee made up of City staff, stakeholders and community representatives. Throughout the study, the Committee and the consulting team have involved stakeholders and the general public in providing input on the features and programs of the four Special Gathering Places and more importantly, generating and evaluating ideas for new, innovative and sustainable programs and features for now and into the future.

1.2 Context

Often described as the park of many places because of its diversity, Waskasoo Park was developed in the 1980's for the residents of Red Deer and for the many visitors who pass through the city each year. The park was named using the Cree word "Waskasoo" which means "Elk".

The vision for Waskasoo Park was realized as a result of the Province's Urban Parks Program. The goal of the Urban Parks Program was to "establish significant areas of open space to ensure that populations have easy access to natural environments; and to develop these areas to enable their sustained and unimpaired use for outdoor recreation".

By 1982, the master plan for Waskasoo Park was completed for Red Deer and work was underway. Land was bought, existing parks were tied into Waskasoo Park, and trails, maps and brochures linked everything. When development was finished in the late 80's, Waskasoo Park was a very large, diverse and integrated system of natural areas, parks and recreational facilities (Figure 1.1).

Now in its third decade of use, Waskasoo Park has become one of the most popular features for residents and a key tourism attraction for Red Deer, balancing between providing outdoor recreation, historical interpretation, environmental study and overnight camping. Over 80 kilometers of easily accessible paved, hiking and equestrian trails connect the park user to the beautiful green areas and special attractions. Joggers, cyclists, walkers and in-line skaters, use paved trails, while hiking trails are an excellent way to commune with nature. All recreational sites and special attractions within Waskasoo Park can also be reached by vehicle.

Some of the largest and most well used locations within Waskasoo Park are the four **Special Gathering Places:** Heritage Ranch, Bower Ponds, Three Mile Bend and River Bend. Each of these locations provides different natural and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

With aging facilities and changing community needs, there are opportunities to expand and update the features and programs of these sites to meet community needs now and in the future. The results of this study provide the roadmap for developing those opportunities.

1.3 Study Objectives

The Special Gathering Places study was guided by three major objectives:

- Review and evaluation of how the Special Gathering Places are currently used by the community in order to determine whether or not they are meeting the needs of park users.
- Investigation of potential alternative/enhanced uses for each location to better reflect community need, demographics, and leisure service trends.
- Assessment of the environmental impact of future plans for park use, ensuring that recommendations are attractive for all ages and that they balance the environmental stewardship aspect of the park with users desires for development.

1.4 Study Process

The study process included four major phases of work: Evaluation, Concept Development, Business Case and Report Preparation & Approvals.

1.4.1 Special Gathering Places Evaluation

To provide a framework for consideration of new development opportunities, a detailed evaluation of the four Special Gathering Places was completed by the study team.

- **Background Research:** In order to assess what had been studied and proposed in the past for the four Special Gathering Places, as well as for the entire Red Deer community, a thorough analysis of various city documents was completed. This information was used as a platform to guide future planning. (See section 2.1 for more information)
- **Recreation Trends & Best Practices:** The analysis of various provincial and national recreation trends and best practices provided the framework for considering new and innovative development ideas and operational practices. The impact of other broad based trends (i.e. economic, technological, social) affecting participation in outdoor recreation and leisure activities were also defined. Community Development Consultants (CDC) assessed similar models that have worked in the past or are currently being used within other parks and outdoor recreation areas. The trends and best practices report can be found in Appendix A.
- **Site Evaluation:** The evaluation of each site involved three distinct tasks:
 - a) Current Program and Uses: To evaluate the current status of each park node interviews were conducted with the Mayor, City Manager, six City Councillors, the Director of Community Services, the Heritage Ranch Operators, Alberta Sports Hall of Fame & Museum Staff, Tourism Red Deer Staff, Recreation Parks & Culture Program and Facility Staff, Bower Ponds Concessionaire, River Bend Staff and Board Members, the Executive of the Cross-Country Ski Club and the Cultural Heritage Society. All were asked to “think outside the box” as to the potential for these special places as well as giving current status feedback. Those interviewed were also asked to tell of site specific strengths and weaknesses and what development or programming that may have been tried in the past but failed.
 - b) Site and Facilities: ISL met with City staff to gather background information, and then completed an inventory and mapping exercise which evaluated the existing conditions related to the facilities, amenities, infrastructure, and use patterns of each Place. The evaluation looked at the relationship of each site to the surrounding park and trail system, adjacent land uses and the spatial opportunities to support additional or enhanced uses. An existing conditions plan was produced for each site for use throughout the

project.

- c) **Environment:** Spencer Environmental completed an evaluation which focused on vegetation and wildlife habitat as well as the site characterization that is qualitative in nature. The evaluation was based on discussions with City environmental staff, site visits, and air photo interpretation. The evaluation defined current environmental impacts that related to existing uses and provided a baseline for defining potential impacts of proposed uses. A general biophysical overview for Waskasoo Park is provided in Section 2.3. During the course of the study, Spencer Environmental also completed an Environmental Impact Assessment for a proposed 9-Hole Expansion at River Bend Golf and Recreation Area. This report can be found in Appendix E.

1.4.2 Vision & Alternative Concepts

This phase focused on developing and evaluating ideas for park features and programs. Early activities provided the community with an opportunity to consider any and all ideas for the future of the Special Gathering Places. These ideas were then evaluated and refined during the rest of the study.

- **What's Your Vision? – Community Workshops:** The workshop took place on March 5th & 19th, 2005. It involved members of the Red Deer community along with artists from Co-Design. This workshop enabled stakeholders to envision a wide variety of programmatic opportunities and park features for now and in the future. The workshop formed the initial thinking about various improvements to the four Special Gathering Places. Information regarding the outcome of this part of the process can be found in Appendix B.
- **Alternative Concept Plans:** Based on the information gathered in the evaluation phase and the ideas generated during the visioning workshop, alternative concept plans were prepared for each of the Special Gathering Places. Each concept plan illustrated how the preferred ideas and visions fit within the context of existing infrastructure, facilities, environment, adjacent land uses and parks. An overview of the potential opportunities, innovation, issues and constraints of each alternative was also prepared. |
- **Waskasoo Park Discovery Tour:** The Waskasoo Park Discovery Tour was held on May 5, 2005 at the Carnival Cinemas. The Discovery Tour involved the viewing of a multimedia presentation of the alternative concept plans for the four Special Gathering Places. The public was invited to come out, eat some popcorn, and enjoy the show. They were then asked to fill out 'passports' which documented their innovative and fresh ideas and to indicate their preferences on ideas generated to date. The questions which were presented and the results of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

- **Alternative Concept Plan Assessment:** a preliminary assessment of the various alternative concept ideas was prepared by the study team and reviewed with the Steering Committee. The assessment gave preliminary consideration to site impacts, environment, capital costs and business case planning.
- **Proposed Development Concepts:** Based on input from the public who attended the community workshop and the Discovery Tour, as well as the input from the Committee, a single development concept was prepared for each of the Special Gathering Places.
- **Public Open House:** On June 21, 2005, the public was invited to attend a an open house which presented the proposed development concepts and to submit their input on the Study recommendations. Results of this feedback can be found in Appendix D.

1.4.3 Special Gathering Places Business Case

Following selection of the preferred concepts, detailed business case scenarios were prepared and evaluated for each location. The business case evaluation gave consideration to the following areas:

- Scope & Assumptions
- Economic impact
- Implementation with phasing options
- Financial Implications
- Funding Sources, Partnerships and strategic alliances

Following consideration of the scenarios, the consultant presented a preferred business case for consideration by the Committee. With consideration of the development concept ideas, the capital costs, the environmental impacts and the preferred business case, the Committee was able to reach a consensus on the recommended development concept for each of the Special Gathering Places.

1.4.4 Study Report Preparation, Presentation & Approvals

In preparing the recommended development concepts for the Special Gathering Places, the consulting team prepared two drafts of the development concept plans and business case analysis to the Committee for review and discussion. A final draft of the overall report was then provided to the Committee for review. Based on Committee approval of the final draft report, recommendations were presented to the Environmental Advisory Board, the Recreation and Parks Board and the Culture Board for comment. Based on the input of the boards, final revisions were made and the final report was presented to City Council.

1.5 Acknowledgements

Throughout the study, the project team has received tremendous input and support from The City, the Steering Committee, stakeholders and the public. In particular, ISL wishes to acknowledge the following individuals who have contributed their time and expertise to ensure that the Waskasoo Park Special Gathering Places report is a practical and valuable document for The City of Red Deer.

The project steering committee included the following:

- City Staff: Corina Dixon, Neil Evans, Jeff Graves, Barbara Hill, Dave Matthews, Ed Morris, Greg Scott.
- Stakeholders & Community Representatives: Michele Boudreau, Dick Huddleston, Ron Lebsack, Hugh Lockhart, Ron Schuster, Don Wales.

2.0 Background Research

2.1 Document Review

The document review covered sixteen documents for which summaries have been provided in this report. The documents can be organized into two categories which are reflected in this document. Part One includes study specific documents and Part Two includes documents relating to the general community.

2.1.1 Waskasoo Park – Master Plan, 1982

In 1982, the City of Red Deer completed the Waskasoo Park Master Plan as part of the Province's Urban Park Program. The Master Plan consisted of five components which addressed the physical, natural and built environments, major factors affecting development, the overall park concept, land requirements and financial implications. The key elements of the master plan are summarized below:

- **Master Plan Goals and Objectives:** Review all previous recreation and open space planning related to the area; Identify unique natural resources; Review existing relevant development, legislative controls and planning proposals; Encourage public participation; Prepare Master Plan - policies and strategic planning
- **Park Concept Recommendations:** Conservation of river valley and wildlife movement corridor, Recommended size – 993.54 Ha (2,455.03 acres) - 624 ha to be acquired from the province and private landowners. Two broad control zones recommended: Conservation Area & Development Area
- **Trail Concept Recommendations:** Comprehensive trail system linking the park; Highest support for Hiking, cross-country skiing, bicycling/walking and snowshoe trails; Focus trails system on existing historical and environmental features and identify and interpret these where possible; Three major trail types - Bicycling/walking, Hiking, Equestrian
- **Vehicular Access Recommendations:** Principle of limited access; Recreation vehicle access a hot topic, but no access to motorcycles and river only access to snowmobiles (City has no jurisdiction over river).

Development Proposals from the original Waskasoo Park Master Plan for each of the Special Gathering Places include:

- **Heritage Ranch (Hooper Property):** Develop part as wildlife habitat area; Develop access road from Cronquist Drive and parking area; Link trails; Develop open sports fields and equestrian centre; Develop gravel pits and open areas on lower area with fishing/skating ponds (no boats), group picnicking areas; canoe landing; Develop equestrian and bicycling trails
- **Bower Ponds:** Develop boat launch, dock, trails; Warm up hut/concession; Accessible; Year round staff in facility; Acquire portable stage unit; Lighting; B.M.X. track

- **Three Mile Bend:** Acquire eastern portion and incorporate into urban park; Apply a moratorium on development; Lease a portion; Basic reclamation work and peripheral landscaping
- **River Bend:** develop municipal golf course in final phase; Develop trails; Develop a multi purpose clubhouse; Develop fishing/skating, picnicking and canoe launch; Family fun area

2.1.2 Waskasoo Park –Great Chief Park and Bower Pond Development Plan, 1982

This report defined the development plans for Bower Ponds including: Pavilion; Amphitheatre with portable stage; a system of natural trails to link to Bower Ponds; accessible main promenade; decorative bridge; other connecting pathways; Landscaping.

2.1.3 Waskasoo Park – River Bend Development Plan, 1984

Program elements defined in this plan included:

- 18 Hole municipal golf course
- Multiple-use "clubhouse" and parking
- "Situation golf" area and mini links
- Lake side recreation area with docks, boardwalk, model boat basin, children's play area and picnicking and service building
- Day use recreation area with 10 picnic sites, canoe launch, parking and trailhead and washroom
- Park maintenance area
- Pedestrian and bicycle trail system

2.1.4 Waskasoo Park – Hoopfer Property (Heritage Ranch), 1982

Heritage was first proposed to include the following components and programmatic facilities:

- **Tourist Day Use Area:** Entrance arch and gate, Asphalt loop road/bikeway, 50 parking stalls- asphalt, 40 overflow parking stalls, 30 picnic sites, Informal softball diamond, Free play/mini soccer, Texas Gates, Grading/preparation and seeding, Highway sign, Remove old road bed
- **Equestrian/Visitor Centre:** Two Storey Building, Courtyard, Farmyard Playground, Service access, Removal of Homestead/clean-up, Gymkhana, riding ring, Chutes/tie stalls, Stallion corral, Mare corral, 15 picnic sites, Spectators slope, Public corral, Private corral, 20 pull through stalls – gravel, Land exchange agreement with AB Transportation
- **Fishing Island:** Trout Pond, Dock, Boardwalk, Bridge
- **Picnic and play area:** Group Picnic Shelter, Sliding Hill, Windmill, Waterfall, Play area, Washroom/Warming Hut

- **Other components included:** Maintenance Storage Area, Stairway/Observation Platform, Bikeway Overpass, Carriageway/sled path, Bikeway, Carriage Station, Natural Reclamation Area, Interpretive Node, Equestrian Training Area, Equestrian Trail, Pit Privy, Canoe landing (two-three), Hillside Trail, Regional Trail Bridge, Pedestrian Trails

2.1.5 Waskasoo Park – Three Mile Bend Development Plan, 1984

The Three Mile Bend Development plan created a Conceptual Development plan that consisted of two phases.

- **Phase One:** Park road, North bridge, Parking – 50 stalls, Bicycle/pedestrian trail, 10 Picnic sites, Model aircraft and model boat area, Pond, Mound viewing, Designated Archery range, Existing osprey nest relocation, Canoeing Ponds – canoeing labyrinth complete with Landing and Launch.
- **Phase Two:** Visitors Centre, Recreation Lagoon, Miniature Golf course, Botanic and Display garden, Natural display garden, 15 Picnic sites, interpretive display for McKenzie Sawmill Heritage Site, Park Road – pond bridge and parking loop road, South Bridge, Park assess – construct entrance at 77th and turn around loop, Parking – 96 stalls, Trails - 1,000 meters of trails, Hiking trail – through botanic and display garden and link to visitors centre.

2.1.6 Red Deer React: Environmental Action Plan, February 1995

The Environmental Action Plan defined a phased process which included the following priorities:

- To determine means whereby formal and informal education programs (schools, public awareness and community participation) will motivate and enlist the public to undertake activity which prohibitively influences the natural ecology and other physical environment issues in Red Deer.
- To itemize and assess environmentally related social issues, economic development activity and municipal programs so as to determine their significance and relevance to the Environmental Action Plan.
- The Environmental Action Plan should provide a framework for the revision of Administration and Council Policy.

The report listed the following as the City of Red Deer's top five environmental priorities:

- Water Supply/Watershed
- Air Quality
- Preservation of natural areas
- Solid waste management
- Environmental education

2.1.7 Waskasoo Park –Heritage Ranch Environmental Overview and Guidelines for Development, 1996

Report details the sensitivities of the site and assesses the various development options allowable under County land use By-law for suitability within the site. Defines three management zones (A, B and C) and identifies Zone C (upper lands) as suitable for recreational and tourism development.

2.1.8 Waskasoo Park – Heritage Ranch Review, 1997

This report defines short and long term goals for site and program development:

- **Short Term Goals (1997-1999):** Establish Heritage Ranch Advisory Committee; Implement an ongoing environmental monitoring program; User survey every 5 years; Encourage development and delivery of environmental awareness programs and natural history interpretation; On site visitor information closer to highway; Introduce residents through facility services; Develop trail link to Fort Normandeau; Encourage compatible programs and special events
- **Long-term Goals for year 2000+:** Maintain natural area; Introduce users of the facilities to the natural environment; Encourage equestrian service at Upper Heritage Ranch (user fees); Moratorium on all new developments/uses on the Heritage Ranch site.

2.1.9 City of Red Deer Greater Downtown Action Plan, 2000

This document considers the short and long term future of Red Deer's commercial core, as well as neighbouring residential and light industrial areas. The document gives clear action steps toward future development. Of particular note to this study, the redevelopment planning for the Riverlands area was recommended for the years between 2001 - 2003. The Bower Ponds pedestrian bridge was recommended for development between 2003 - 2005.

2.1.10 Red Deer Community Culture Master Plan, 2001

This Master plan defines culture as: "Culture includes visual arts, performing and literary arts, as well as Heritage, including explorations of our history as a community or as individuals. It relates to the interaction of society with the arts in formal and informal settings." Notable recommendations of this report that were applicable to the Special Gathering Places (note: this report was in the process of being updated during this study):

- That the City designate the Riverlands area as a cultural development hub and that the area be retained for the purpose of integrated indoor and outdoor culture facility development in line with the Greater Downtown Action Plan.
- Proceed with the development of the 48th street Promenade, including the link to Bower ponds, as outlined in the Greater Downtown Action Plan.

- That the Parks and open spaces Policy be reviewed and guidelines added to promote culture opportunities in the design and operation of existing and future parks and open space resources.

2.1.11 City of Red Deer Strategic Plan 2002-2005, 2002

The Strategic Plan focuses on community and economic development as primary goal areas for the city and defines numerous recommendations applicable to this study including:

- Community and Leisure Activities – to ensure opportunities are available for all citizens to participate in and enjoy community and leisure activities in Red Deer.
- Environment – To ensure that the development and sustainability of an attractive clean healthy and ecologically sound natural and built environment, while providing a climate for community economic growth
- Social Responsibility – facilitate planning development and delivery of social programs that support individuals, families and a healthy community.
- Community and Land use Planning – To ensure that land use policies, development guidelines and procedures support sustainability and a vision focused on quality of life.

2.1.12 City of Red Deer Riverlands Community Plan, 2003

The following recommendations were applicable to the investigation of the four Special Gathering Places.

- Development Concepts: a major park will be developed at the river's edge; designated to be sensitive to the natural environment at the river. Attractive bridge to be constructed to connect to Bower Ponds.
- Parks and Open Space: develop a parks and open space system providing for a major new riverside park, upgraded riverside trails and landscaped and treed boulevards and sidewalks throughout the area, the open space system will provide for a variety of passive and active recreational experiences.
- A Major Riverside Park: Designated to be sensitive to the natural environment at the river while serving as a multi-functional gathering place for all kinds of civic events, celebrations and cultural activities. Incorporate the principles of 'nature-scaping' into any improvements made to the river escarpment and into the design of the riverside park and pathway system.
- Designing of the Riverside Park: Policy #11 – Determine the design of the major park area details.
- River's Edge Open Space: Open space at the river's edge zoned A2 Environmental Preservation District. Public service district zoning to provide for the development of the park. P1 Parks and recreation zoning for buffer areas

2.1.13 City of Red Deer Community Services Action Plans: 2003 to 2006 with a vision for the Future... Places, 2003

The Community Services Action Plan includes many specific action items related to Waskasoo Park development and operations. A few of the key recommendations include:

- Expand and preserve Waskasoo Park according to city growth to connect, enhance and complete neighbourhoods, including downtown, by acquiring escarpment and natural amenity areas through reserve dedication and land purchase.
- Use the Ecospace Management Area Maps as a guide for determining the most valuable natural areas and their appropriate uses.
- Continue to support the River Valley Concept Plan, which provides for a continuous open space corridor along the Red Deer, Blindman Rivers and the Waskasoo and Piper Creeks and work cooperatively with the adjacent Counties of Red Deer and Lacombe to ensure that plan is updated and implemented on an ongoing basis.
- Support and promote the concept of regional trails.

- **Heritage Ranch:** Maintain the upper ranch for high impact recreation use and the lower ranch as an important low impact natural area. Undertake a Heritage Ranch needs assessment and implement the recommendations from the resulting study.

- **Bower Ponds:** Retain as an all season recreation and special events area. Undertake a needs assessment and renew focus for Bower Ponds. Consider stage development and suitability for other events/programming. Play a facilitative role in supporting the Red Deer Cultural Heritage Society in operating Cronquist house at Bower Ponds. Consider the opportunity to include this Cronquist House in the Bower Ponds needs Assessment process and renegotiate the 1979 operating agreement, with the Society.

- **Three Mile Bend:** retain as a natural park and valuable wildlife area with limited facility development. Recognize area for diverse recreation activities. Actively promote as an "off-leash but under control" area.

- **River Bend Golf and Recreation Course:** Retain as a multi-use recreation area that includes the golf course, Discovery Canyon, ski and hiking trails. Endeavour to acquire the balance of private land immediately west of the River Bend Golf Course and Recreation Area. Explore the opportunity to expand the golf course to 27 holes. Explore opportunities to link this area to McKenzie Recreation area through the trails system.

2.2 Trends & Best Practices

The term 'best practice' refers to highly recommended and endorsed procedures considered to be a good example of the processes, practices, and systems that perform exceptionally well and are widely recognized as improving an organization's performance and efficiency in specific areas. In other words, the term 'best practice' generally refers to the best possible way of doing something.

In an effort to create a framework by which to evaluate the current level of development, operations and programming within the Special Gathering Places, an evaluation of trends and best practices was completed during the study. Given the number of shifts and emerging trends today, definitive best practices are lacking in parks and open space management. Instead, a number of suggested best practices for coping with the new realities of park management have been identified and offered within the context of Waskasoo Park.

The information presented in the Trends & Best Practices report provided in Appendix A is the result of a two phase approach including: 1) survey of how similar Canadian cities plan for and manage successful parks, and 2) using the concepts and information gathered in phase one, an international web-based exploration of suggested best practices was completed.

Park planners and programmers from ten municipalities and related organizations were contacted to participate in the survey. The survey consisted of the following six questions related to parks development and programming trends:

1. Think of a successful park in your city. In your opinion what makes it successful and why? What is the name of the park?
2. There are a number of financial management models being used for parks. Please tell us what model is used in your area and why (advantages and disadvantages).
3. There are many trends influencing park development (and programming). What do you think are the three most important trends to be aware of and why?
4. How do you see the types of programs and special events offered in parks changing in the next 5 to 10 years?
5. Is programming for parks becoming more of a requirement for them to be utilized in a vital and positive way?
6. Considering all of your citywide parks, what are some examples of exciting new elements, programs and special events that are in place or being planned?

The range of information gathered from the survey is reflective of the many different approaches park planners are using to manage the various and changing issues

impacting their parks. All of the information gathered during the survey process is presented in the report (Appendix A), with particular emphasis on innovative practices and concepts.

2.3 Biophysical Overview

Waskasoo Park is situated along the Red Deer River within the defined boundaries of the City of Red Deer. The majority of the park is contained within the Red Deer River Valley, but several tributary ravines and some adjacent upland areas are also included. Waskasoo Park, as a whole, in fact comprises numerous site-specific parks throughout the Red Deer River Valley, all with differing levels of development and different intended land uses. Consequently, the four Special Gathering Places detailed within this report differ widely in character. Urban park development is, however, not the only land use present in the valley. In many areas, particularly in the downtown core, commercial, industrial and residential development also occupies much of the valley. As a result of this, some areas of Waskasoo Park are quite narrow and the majority of the total area of the park occurs towards the periphery of the City. What follows is a general overview of biological and physical features for the Waskasoo Park system. For more specifics in regards to the biophysical nature of each of the four parks refer to sections 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, and 6.2.

2.3.1 Surface Geology, Soils, and Hydrology

The Red Deer River Valley is characterized by relatively steep slopes along the valley walls, a result of rapid down cutting by the Red Deer River over geologic time. Along much of its length within the City, the river meanders repeatedly and wide floodplains are common. Historic inundation of those floodplains deposited much sand and gravel, creating the current rego black and orthic regosol soils that are widespread within the floodplain. Both the 100-year floodplain limit and soils types were mapped as a component of the original Waskasoo Park Master Plan (1982). The floodplain was more recently mapped as a component of a provincial study of flood prone areas in Alberta's larger cities (WER Engineering Ltd. 1991). That study designated a floodway and a flood fringe area. Both areas would be inundated in a 100 year flood. The distinction relates to potential damage caused by flooding as a function of floodwater velocity. Together the two areas comprise the 1:100 year flood risk area. Groundwater, throughout most of Waskasoo Park, consists of a major surface aquifer formed by the extensive alluvial deposits that are common along the valley floor (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982).

2.3.2 Vegetation

Red Deer is located in the Central Parkland Sub-region of the Parkland Natural Region (Achuff 1994). A mosaic of grassland and forest typifies that sub-region, with valleys and ravines typically being forested. Two forest types typically predominate within this sub-region, and represent the most common native vegetation communities within Waskasoo Park. Trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) is characteristic over much of the area, and balsam poplar (*P. balsamifera*) is common on poorly drained sites. Both forest types

usually have a well-developed and diverse shrub understory, which is typically dominated by species such as snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), beaked hazel (*Corylus cornuta*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), and willow (*Salix spp.*). The steep valley walls of the Red Deer River Valley and tributary ravines do, however, result in variable slope aspects which can lead to variations in microclimate and soil moisture. Those variations influence the vegetation community and, as a result, several areas within the valley are occupied by white spruce (*Picea glauca*), particularly the steep north, east, and west facing escarpments. Some areas within the bottomlands, the flat terrain on the valley floor, display vegetation communities dominated by flood tolerant species. Many of these areas are, however, experiencing much regeneration of species more typical of upland areas. Riparian zones occupy several areas along the Red Deer River, although the size of these areas has been reduced by development in some locations. Natural areas in Waskasoo Park occupy a total of 716 ha (72 percent of total park area), of which 475 ha (47 percent) are defined as natural tree areas and 179 ha (18 percent) as grasslands (Environmental Advisory Board 1995). Typical of urban parks, some areas of Waskasoo Park are also landscaped and, therefore, dominated by exotic species of grasses, flowers, shrubs, and trees.

2.3.3 Wildlife

The diversity of habitats available within Waskasoo Park appears to support a wide variety of wildlife species. More specifically, the abundance of native vegetation communities within the park system compared to the surrounding areas of urban and agricultural development is especially attractive to wildlife. A study of the Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary identified 128 species of birds and 24 species of mammals. Based on species provincial distributions, the potential for many more species exists, including 6 amphibian species and 3 species of reptile. The inventory conducted for the original Master Plan (1982) identified 14 species of fish in the Red Deer River within Waskasoo Park. Many of the other water bodies within the park system also contain fish, though many of the populations are the result of stocking.

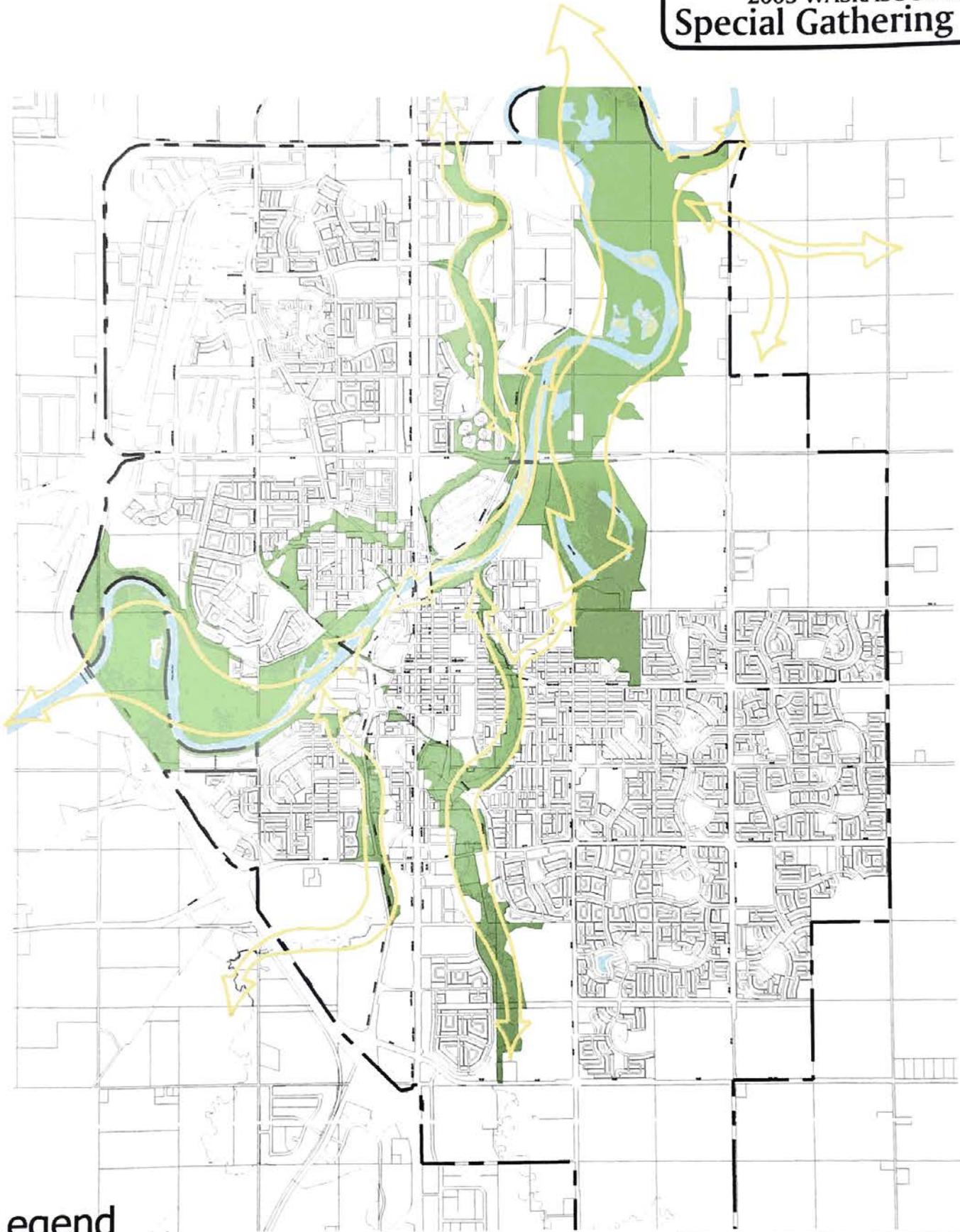
Riparian communities, such as the treed areas bordering the river throughout Waskasoo Park, support high levels of natural biodiversity, especially when these communities occur in prairie environments (Cows and Fish 2005). The structural complexity and high plant diversity of riparian areas are two of the main factors that make these areas attractive to wildlife (Cows and Fish 2005).

In addition to providing resident wildlife habitat, the Red Deer River Valley and tributary ravines within Waskasoo Park function as important corridors for wildlife movement (Figure 2.1). Areas of native vegetation along watercourses, or riparian ecosystems, often function as wildlife movement corridors because they provide a safe buffer zone through which wildlife can move during daily activities, migration, and dispersal (Palone and Todd 1998, Connecticut River Joint Commissions 2000). Although the valley escarpments in Red Deer contain much of the natural vegetation, their steep slope can be restrictive to the

movement of some species. The preservation of forested regions within the flatter bottomlands is, therefore, of central importance for the effective protection of wildlife corridors in Waskasoo Park. At a regional level, the Red Deer River Valley as a whole likely provides a significant corridor for wildlife passage along its general southwest-northeast course within the Red Deer area (Ken Froggat pers. comm.). Many of the large areas of native vegetation within and adjacent to the river valley, including tributary ravines, provide a direct and continuous link connecting habitat within the Red Deer River Valley to rural lands outside of the City's boundaries. White-tailed and mule deer, moose, and coyotes are among the species most likely to use the river valley in this manner, particularly during the cover of darkness (Ken Froggat pers. comm.). Although such large-bodied species may be among the more conspicuous users of wildlife corridors, smaller wildlife such as amphibians, invertebrates, and plants also benefit from the maintenance of corridors. At a smaller scale, many locations within the park where vegetation occurs in a linear orientation or across wide areas of flat terrain provide suitable travel corridors for many species of birds and small mammals.

The issue of wildlife movement corridors is at the forefront of current ecological and conservation-based management. The role of corridors as linking features between suitable habitats has been acknowledged as a key component in the conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity in an increasingly fragmented landscape. Not only is this an issue of concern to conservation biologists and other scientists, but the presence and maintenance of functional wildlife corridors has become an important consideration for city administration and urban planners during the planning process.

2005 WASKASOO PARK STUDY Special Gathering Places



Legend



Potential Wildlife Corridors
*arrow width represents potential permeability



City of Red Deer Park Space

City of Red Deer

Potential Wildlife Corridors

ISL

March 2005
N.T.S.

Figure:

2.1

3.0 Heritage Ranch

3.1 Context

Heritage Ranch is a large 87 hectare (ha) natural area, immediately east of Queen Elizabeth II Highway (QE II), which was acquired and developed through the Urban Parks Program¹. The park includes a variety of natural environments and is divided by a heavily wooded escarpment into an upper and lower area. A bicycle/pedestrian trail links Heritage Ranch with Bower Ponds via a major river bridge and a trail along the southern boundary of the Red Deer Golf & Country Club.

The facilities at Heritage Ranch include a Visitor Centre that houses public washrooms and coffee service/concession, viewing tower, a stable and a tack shed. The Ranch located on the extreme west side of Red Deer, is accessible from QE II via a roadside turn-off (Figure 3.1). The site has picnic facilities, a ball diamond and a children's playground. Heritage Ranch has the only equestrian facilities within the city. The City of Red Deer manages the facility and equestrian programs through a contract operator. Services offered by the equestrian operator include riding lessons, trail rides and hay rides during summer and sleigh rides during winter.

Adjacent to Heritage Ranch, the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame and the Tourism Red Deer Centre share the site and are accessible from QE II.

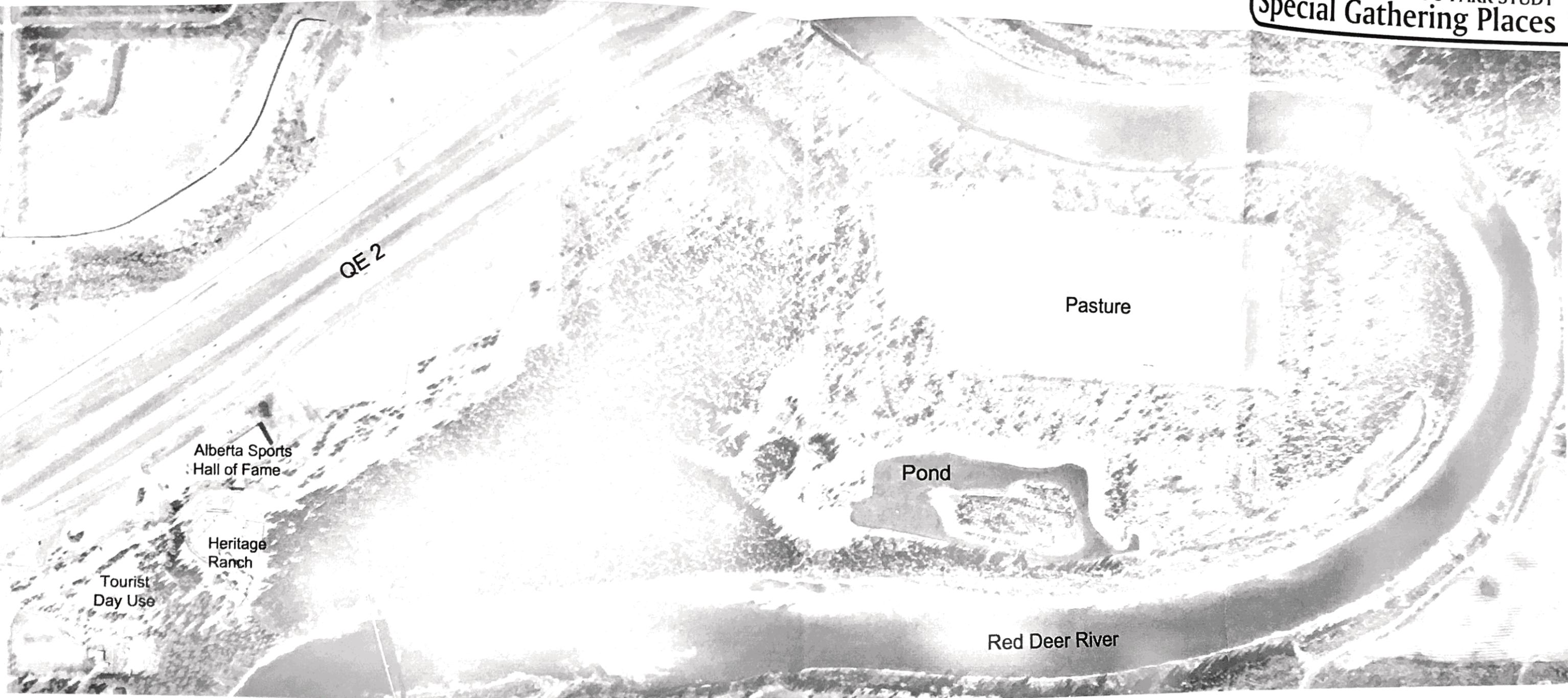
The lower bottomlands of Heritage Ranch, running along the river, remain in a relatively natural state. There is an established 10 km of equestrian trails. Facilities include a major fishing lake that has been developed from a series of abandoned gravel pits, a picnic shelter, a washroom/warming hut, and a playground. The natural environment in this area makes it a unique habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. The lower pasture area and the lower trails are groomed for cross country skiing and are well used throughout the winter.

In the Waskasoo Park Master Plan (1982), the following goals were established to create this park: acquire from province, develop part as wildlife habitat area, develop access road from Cronquist Drive and parking area, link trails, develop open sports fields and equestrian centre, develop gravel pits and open areas on lower area with fishing/skating ponds (no boats), group picnicking areas, canoe landing, develop equestrian and bicycling trails. All of these were developed. This park is now 23 years old, the facilities and programs are in need of upgrading.

3.2 Biophysical Overview

In the past Heritage Ranch supported some small scale gravel extraction operations before being acquired by The City of Red Deer just prior to the establishment of Waskasoo Park (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). Heritage Ranch consists of a partially-forested valley bottom, a steep section of the valley escarpment, and a

¹ General Descriptions have been adapted from the City of Red Deer Ten-Year Capital Planning and Infrastructure Maintenance Plan (Sept. 2004)



HERITAGE RANCH

Existing Conditions

ISL

March 2005

Figure:

3.1

Scale: 1:200

relatively flat area above the top-of-bank (Figure 3.2). These three areas fundamentally match three management zones into which the park was divided for development purposes (AGRA 1996). The area above the top-of-bank includes the majority of the infrastructure related to the equestrian activities, and consequently represents the most heavily developed area of Heritage Ranch. The valley escarpment remains, for the most part, undeveloped, although a few trails are present and some degradation has occurred as a result of mountain biking (Red Deer River Naturalists (RDRN) *pers. comm.*). The valley bottomlands include a large cleared field used as pasture, an old gravel pit reclaimed as a fishing pond, a picnic and playground area, and several trails that wind through the surrounding forested areas.

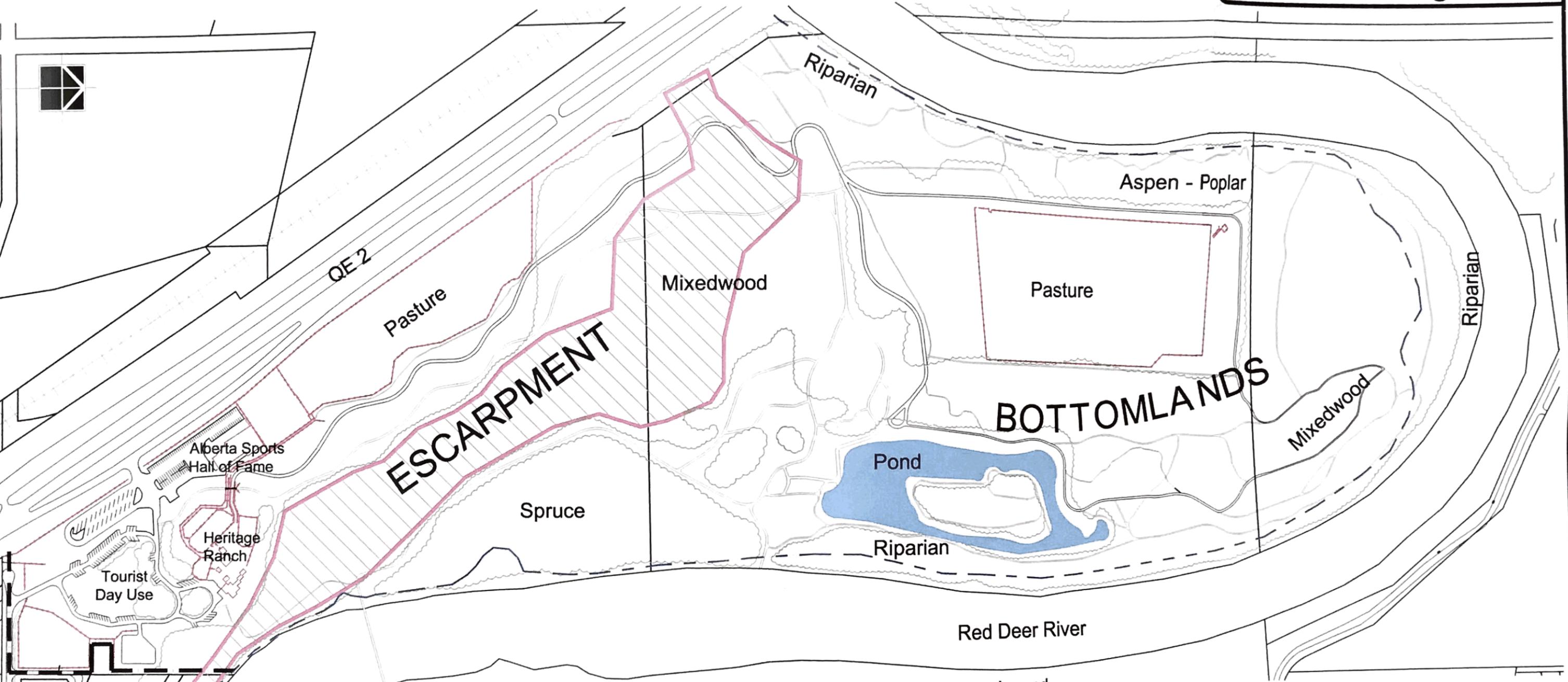
3.2.1 Vegetation

The vegetation of Heritage Ranch is closely linked with the topography. As a result of the extensive disturbance to the area above the top-of-bank, pasture grasses and manicured lawns dominate the area (AGRA 1996). The relatively steep valley escarpment remains largely in a natural state and supports a mature, predominantly white spruce stand. The canopy of this forest is largely closed, resulting in reduced light penetration to ground level. Low light levels have resulted in a restricted understory, but increased moisture levels have lead to an associated complex community of mosses (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). Along the base of the escarpment the vegetation becomes more typical of a mixedwood community, with white spruce, aspen, and balsam poplar all occurring in abundance. Although the bottomlands have experienced some degree of development, about two thirds remains naturally vegetated in the form of a mixedwood community. Of particular value to wildlife and ecological processes as a whole (e.g., provision of slope stability, water filtration, creation of fish habitat in the form of cover) is the presence of a band of mature riparian vegetation (a transitional, flood-tolerant vegetation zone bordering the edge of waterbodies) immediately adjacent to the Red Deer River.

3.2.2 Wildlife

The diversity of habitats present within Heritage Ranch suggests that this area supports a wide variety and abundance of wildlife. AGRA Earth and Environmental (1996) reported that 149 wildlife species, including 42 mammals, 101 birds, and 6 herptiles could occur in Heritage Ranch. Based on provincial species distributions the potential for many additional species exists. Among mammals, numerous species are expected to commonly occur. Those species include: red squirrel, least chipmunk, deer mouse, masked shrew, red-backed voles, coyote, and moose (AGRA 1996). Deer and porcupine are reported to be abundant (RDRN *pers. comm.*). The more common bird species would include mixedwood forest species (e.g., yellow-bellied sapsucker, northern flicker), deciduous forest species (e.g., least flycatcher, veery), grassland species (e.g., savannah sparrow, vesper sparrow), and riparian species (e.g., gray catbird, belted kingfisher) (AGRA 1996).

Habitats within Heritage Ranch that are of particular ecological value include the mature white spruce stand and the riparian mixedwood community. The mature white spruce stand likely offers thermal cover to ungulates and is,



Legend

-  Tree Line
-  Park Boundary
-  100 Year Flood Risk Line
-  Steep Slope / Escarpment
-  Water

HERITAGE RANCH
Biophysical Features

ISL

March 2005
Scale: 1:200

Figure: **3.2**

therefore, likely to be an important area for deer during the winter. Bird species that are more heavily dependent on coniferous forests, such as the boreal chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, white-winged crossbill, and both ruby- and golden-crowned kinglets are likely to occur in this area of white spruce (Fisher and Acorn 1998). Riparian communities, such as the treed area bordering the river throughout this park, likely support high levels of natural biodiversity.

Heritage Ranch is likely a significant component of the wildlife travel corridor available in the City of Red Deer Red Deer River Valley (Ken Froggat *pers. comm.*). Its location at one end of Waskasoo Park, and at the periphery of the City, likely provides a valuable link connecting habitat within the Red Deer River Valley to more remote areas of wildlife habitat outside of the City's boundaries. The intact border of riparian habitat along the Red Deer River in particular is expected to function as a key travel corridor.

3.2.3 Sensitivities

Heritage Ranch includes Red Deer River Valley bottomlands, a section of the valley escarpment and a smaller area of uplands between the valley and Highway 2. The bottomlands immediately adjacent to the river are situated in the 100-year flood risk area (WER Engineering Ltd. 1991). Additionally, the soils throughout much of the bottomlands are either rego black or orthic regosols and have moderate to severe limitations for construction, and slight to moderate limitations for other uses (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). The steep escarpment within Heritage Ranch presents two different limitations. The steep slope is unsuitable for most forms of infrastructure development, and even trail development on the escarpment would present the challenge of erosion control. The mature white spruce stand that occupies much of the escarpment is a relatively unusual natural feature within the Central Parkland Subregion of Alberta and, by virtue of a limited number of major ravines, is highly valued for its role as wildlife habitat. Wildlife and soil characteristics were also both identified as sensitivities in AGRA Earth and Environmental's (1996) environmental overview of Heritage Ranch. Further facility development in the area of white spruce should be avoided. Even subtle development, such as trail maintenance and upgrading, could lead to increased erosion. Informal mountain biking trails within the escarpment have been anecdotally identified as contributing to increased erosion (RDRN *pers. comm.*) It is possible, however, that carefully executed upgrading could in fact be used to mitigate existing erosion problems.

3.3 Opportunities & Constraints

The diversity of habitats and expected abundance of wildlife within Heritage Ranch provides an opportunity to develop a comprehensive system of interpretive signs along the existing trail system. The regenerating area in the bottomlands would be particularly well suited to a natural succession-themed interpretive display. Other non-invasive activities, such as bird watching and hiking, could be further encouraged in most areas of the park. Much of the infrastructure needed for orienteering already exists at Heritage Ranch, however, it is understood that the orienteering club is currently inactive (RDRN *pers. comm.*). Orienteering programs could again be promoted. The off-

trail nature of some orienteering programs does, however, present the potential to adversely impact some aspects of the environment. To minimize the potential for impacts, it is recommended that proposed orienteering activities be concentrated in the bottomlands or along existing trails within the escarpment. The extensively developed area of Heritage Ranch above the valley escarpment is the most suitable location for further development, an opinion that was also stated by AGRA Earth and Environmental (1996), although any additional clearing of native vegetation in that area should be avoided.

A number of opportunities were identified by the Heritage Ranch operators;

- Providing private horse boarding would generate more year round revenue.
- Increasing marketing programs, special events and services
- The area around the upper perimeter road is under utilized and could be developed into 20-30 RV camping stalls.
- The existing ball diamond is under utilized and could be developed into miniature golf course.
- In order to provide more experiences for year round activity on the site, a skating rink could be added.
- The natural features are unique in this park. An environmental interpretive center could be developed to aid the public in appreciating the beauty. This could also be developed with the aboriginal communities.
- There have been requests to have weddings or banquets at Heritage Ranch - possible upgrading of facilities to accommodate 300 people, plus providing adequate kitchen areas and larger shelter units.
- To encourage active lifestyle in Red Deer, more connections could be provided; to Maskepetoon Park, to West Lake, to Red Deer College, to Fort Normandeau. Bicycle rentals at Heritage Ranch could allow visitors to explore the surrounding trails.
- Special events that would be compatible with current programs include; a country Thanksgiving, cabana sucre, hayrides at Christmas to West Lake with hot chocolate, and remote control boat races

A number of constraints dealing with the equestrian service, and the park in general, were indicated by the Heritage Ranch operators:

- Not enough pasture land to support the current service,
- Trail width and clearing is compromising safety,
- Limited possibility to provide year round programming due to lack of indoor facility,
- Limited amount of workshop and storage space,
- Staffing resources are limited, animals need 24/7 care,
- Picnic sites that are dispersed throughout the site are under utilized,
- Water quality is poor,
- No Transit service to the Park,
- Not easily accessible from the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame,
- Inadequately promoted. Public is not aware of services, features and programs provided at Park site,
- Buildings look old and dated.

3.4 Preliminary Development Ideas

Through the early public consultation activities (Co-Design Workshop & Discovery Tour) there were several development ideas which were proposed and evaluated. Ultimately, through either community comments or Committee discussion these ideas were not selected to be included in this development plan. These preliminary development ideas are described below:

- **Camping:** The idea of a campground to provide enhanced services for highway travelers was proposed for the day use area of the Heritage Ranch site. A short-term stay, unserviced, 20-30 stall concept plan was developed which fit well on the existing loop road. Issues related to operations, security, and impacts on adjacent residents were the key factors in this idea being left out of the development plan.



- **Heritage Retreat Centre:** The Heritage Retreat Centre idea was developed in response to an opportunity identified by the contract operators to enhance the overall business operations of Heritage Ranch by developing a facility for large groups of 200-300 people. The target would be weddings and other large group functions focused around the Heritage theme (eg. Western theme weddings). The idea was expanded to providing a stand alone retreat centre for bookings by small companies up to large corporations. The business case analysis identified potential benefits to the overall business operations and the Committee discussed the potential for partnership or joint venture with private operators (eg. An existing Hotel). However, it was not clear that there was a significant need for this type of facility within the City of Red Deer.



3.5 Development Concept

Throughout the study, the sustainability of the Heritage Ranch operation in its current form has been a key topic of conversation among members, the stakeholders and the public. Early on it was agreed that the trail rides should be discontinued due to high costs and low revenues. Ultimately, after much consideration of the historically poor levels of use of the site and programs, the consensus of the Committee was that the entire equestrian program at Heritage Ranch should be phased out over time. In its place, a new centre has been proposed to provide a 'Gateway' to the natural

environment and recreational features of Waskasoo Park. The recommended development concepts for Heritage Ranch are described below and illustrated on Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4:

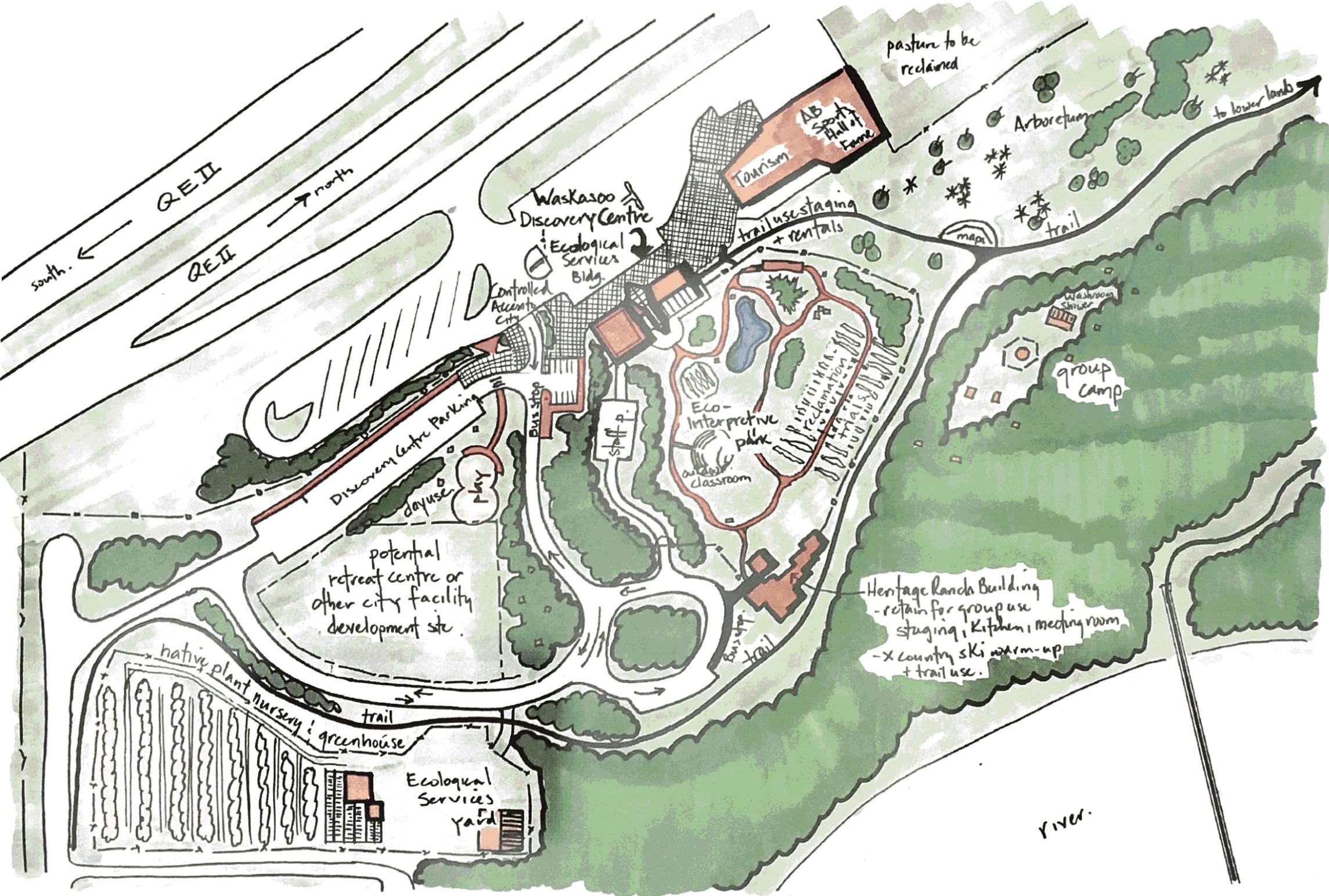
- **Access & Awareness:** A new marketing and signage program should be developed to increase awareness of the site and programs along the highway and within the entire QE II corridor. Controlled access between the city and highway will be maintained to allow tourist access to the city. The access must not allow vehicle movement from the city to the highway. Transit service will be proposed into the site.



- **Waskasoo Discovery Centre:** A new building with direct highway frontage and access will be developed with a focus on creating a 'gateway' to the Waskasoo Park system. The building will include a static and high tech interpretive gallery. An outdoor ecological interpretive garden will be developed to tell the story of Waskasoo Park and its many unique environments. The Centre will also provide cross programming with the Kerry Wood Nature Centre. An information and rental desk will allow visitors and residents to learn about Waskasoo Park and rent bikes, inline skates and cross country skis for access to the trails.



- **Ecological Services Facilities:** The City of Red Deer Ecological Services Section, of the Recreation Parks & Culture Department, offices and operational facilities will be developed as a key element of the Heritage Ranch site. Offices for Ecological Services staff will be developed within the Waskasoo Discovery Centre building, as well as programming space, meeting rooms, laboratory, laundry room, and storage. Other on-site facilities could include an operations yard, equipment storage, native plant nursery and greenhouses.



HERITAGE RANCH
Development Concept
Upper Lands
ISL September 2005 Figure: **3.3**
N. T. S.



Link to Fort Normandeau

Link to Maskepetoon

More multi-use trails

Cross Country Ski Trails

Reclamation of Lower Pasture

Lower lands walk-in Group camp

Convert some Horse Trails to Interpretive walking trails

HERITAGE RANCH

Development Concept

Lower Lands

ISL

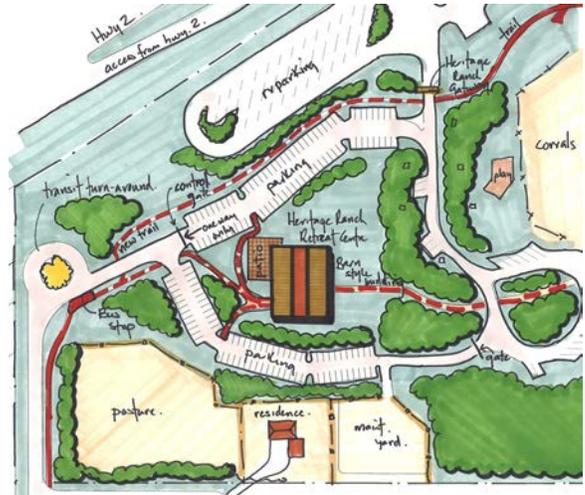
September 2005

Figure:

3.4

N. T. S.

- **Heritage Ranch Building and Programs:** The existing Heritage Ranch Building will be maintained and utilized as a group rental and program support facility. In the next few years equestrian programs will be phased out, starting with the trail riding in 2006 and the wagon/sleigh rides by 2008. The existing building will be maintained and utilized as a staging area, kitchen and classroom for group camps for school and community groups. A group camping area with shelter and tent sites will be developed in the forest to the north of the existing building. The building will also be open to provide washroom, changing and warm-up facilities for cross country skiing support. The building and kitchen could continue be used as a meeting facility for groups up to 30.
- **Day Use Area:** The existing day use area including the picnic sites and open field/ball diamond should be retained and should be enhanced with a playground to provide a short term stopping area for highway travelers. The day use area site should be retained as a potential development site for the Retreat Centre (See Section 3.4) or an alternative City facility in the future.
- **Lower Lands:** As the equestrian programs are phased out the lower pasture lands can be reclaimed as native parkland forest and interpretive/training programs could be developed. Some of the equestrian trails should be converted to nature interpretive trails. The lower lands will also continue to include extensive cross country ski trails and the major Waskasoo Park paved trails could be extended to provide a starting point for a future connection to Fort Normandeau and to Maskepetoon Natural Area. Orienteering can still be promoted as an active group use. A 'walk-in' group camp site should also be developed.



3.6 Capital Costs

The estimated capital costs for the proposed development concepts for Heritage Ranch total \$6,860,000 as defined in the table below:

Item	Description	Notes	Total
1.0	Directional/Information Signage	New Signage on highway and within site (\$20,000).	\$ 20,000.00
2.0	Heritage Ranch Building	Undefined upgrades/maintenance/repairs of ex. building (Allowance \$75,000) Utility Servicing connection to via new Discovery Centre Servicing (\$75,000).	\$ 150,000.00
3.0	Waskasoo Discovery Centre	New Building of 6000 sq. ft. at \$250/sq.ft. Includes ecological Services Department offices, lab, storage etc (4000 sq. ft) Utility Servicing for building (\$400,000)	\$ 1,900,000.00
4.0	Waskasoo Discovery Centre Eco-Garden	Outdoor Ecological Interpretive Garden includes native plantings, displays, interpretive signage, water feature, landscaping, paths, furnishings, outdoor classroom.	\$ 230,000.00
5.0	Roads & Parking	Widen access roads within park, additional parking for Discovery Centre & Staff, Bus stop - includes clearing, grading, paving, signage	\$ 125,000.00
6.0	General Landscape/Site Improvements	Additional tree planting, amenities, repairs - allowance	\$ 50,000.00
7.0	Group Camp Site - Upper	Includes 10 tents on concrete pads (\$2100 ea), fire pit with benches (\$4000), Cook house/shelter (\$25000) vault toilet (\$15,000), power & light (\$8000)	\$ 73,000.00
8.0	Reclamation of Pasture - Lower Lands	Removal of fences, design & planting of reclamation forest (5000 sq.m) and meadow species (15000 sq.m), interpretive paths and signage	\$ 65,000.00
9.0	Asphalt Trails	Conversion of horse trails to 3.0 m wide asphalt trails - Includes subgrade prep, gravel base & asphalt - (approx. 1600 m)	\$ 160,000.00
10.0	Interpretive Trails	Conversion of horse trails to interpretive trails - Includes subgrade prep, gravel/wood chip surface and signage - (approx. 3500 m)	\$ 175,000.00
11.0	Group Camp Site - Lower Lands	Includes 10 tents on concrete pads (\$2100 ea), fire pit with benches (\$4000), vault toilet (\$15,000)	\$ 40,000.00
12.0	Bridge to Maskepetoon	120m long, 5m wide, basic design pedestrian Bridge	\$ 2,500,000.00
13.0	Trail Link Fort Normandeau	A master plan is required for this development to be considered	\$ -
Subtotal			\$ 5,488,000.00
25%Contingency & Fees			\$ 1,372,000.00
Heritage Ranch Total			\$ 6,860,000.00

3.7 Recommended Business Case

The Business Case for Heritage Ranch is based on information collected from the current contract operators, staff and anecdotal information gained through focus groups, public meetings and interviews.

In preparing the business case, the following business case scenarios were evaluated:

- Status quo (Keep the site as is with no changes)
- City operated site
- Phase out trail ride program
- Create a new Waskasoo Discovery Centre in the existing facility

- Create new Discovery Centre (interpretive centre) including Ecological Services offices as a stand alone facility
- Build a new Waskasoo Retreat Centre (leaving the Heritage Ranch building as is)
- Build both new centres
- Close all facilities and convert site into a park.

From the review of all scenarios, and considering input from the committee it has been recommended that the redevelopment of Heritage Ranch would include the phasing out of all equestrian programs and the development of the Waskasoo Discovery Centre as a new focal point for tourism, recreation and environmental stewardship. As described below, this new focus for the site is not necessarily supported from a business case perspective.

This new development concept will enhance existing infrastructure and create sustainable revenue sources by building new infrastructure and expanding programming to include:

- group interpretive programming (Kerry Wood/Waskasoo Park Programming)
- group day camping
- consider City staff for education and interpretive program as a part of the Waskasoo Park system
- build the Waskasoo Park Discovery Centre as a portal/entrance to west Waskasoo Park
- build the Ecological Services offices and facilities as a major component of the Discovery Centre Building
- reclaim current pasture areas
- convert some horse trails to nature interpretive trails

Interim Operation

In order to allow for a smooth transition, the business case recommends the continuation of some of the existing services and programs. The existing facility services would allow the continuation of access to trails and other park features through bike and ski rentals. With the assumption that the existing facilities would stay in the short term (2008), the predicted potential revenue generation is based on the following usage projections for total revenue of **\$121,862**. (See table next page).

- **Pony Rides, Hay Rides and Sleigh Rides:** Pony rides, hay rides and sleigh rides will remain in place as the ponies and draft horses require less attention and their numbers are fewer than the trail horses. It is expected that in 2006, these events will continue to create an income of \$35,000 until eliminated in 2008.
- **Group Day Camps:** As part of the transition to new operations, large group day camping such as Scouts or business retreat camps would be promoted as an additional business opportunity. Total net revenue is estimated at \$5,940. This figure is based on the following: two day camps of 30 individuals per week for the summer months of June, July, and August, with a charge of \$15/person and a 45% expenditure (24 x (30 x \$15.00)) = (\$10,800) x 55% = \$5,940 net revenue.

- **Existing Facility Rentals:** Revenue from existing facility (50 person capacity) is calculated utilizing figures from the financial statements supplied by the management at Heritage Ranch, the gross revenue for catering, ice cream, cooler items and the gift shop is currently \$76,922.
- **Bike and Ski Rentals:** It is projected that the income generated from bike and ski rentals will be approximately \$4,000.

Interim Operation - Projected Gross Revenue	
Equestrian (pony, hay and sleigh rides)	\$35,000
Day Group Camps	\$5,940
Existing Facility	\$76,922
Bike and Ski Rentals	\$4,000
Total:	\$121,862

New Discovery Centre & Existing Operation (Less Equestrian)

The concept of a 'Gateway' to the Waskasoo Park System would be developed through the creation of a Waskasoo Discovery Centre. This centre would provide opportunities and programs for interpretative education and recreational use of the site and park system. Building and servicing the new Discovery Centre would cost \$1.9 million with the capital costs and future operating budgets (parks/tourism) offset by having the Ecological Services as the primary tenant.

The existing Heritage Ranch building would be upgraded as required over time to support the group use of the site as well as similar types of rental operations as it does today. Revenue & expense assumptions are detailed below:

New Discovery Centre & Existing Operations - Projected Revenue	
Staff Office Rental - 4,000 s.f.	\$ 40,000
Interpretive/Education Tours (Net)	\$15,600
Day Group Camps	\$11,940
Existing Facility	\$100,000
Bike and Ski Rentals	\$8,000
Total:	\$175,540

The **expenditures** for Heritage Ranch are calculated based on the following:

- The sum of the current 2004 expenditures for the operator
- Minus the expense for the trail horses
- Plus the City's expenditure
- Plus \$65,520 for front desk/information staff
- Plus \$36,000 for operating costs in the new building

Existing costs incurred by the City to maintain the grounds are outlined in the following table:

	Trail Maintenance Annually	Turf Maintenance Annually	Total Annually
Staff	\$24,108	\$5,000	\$29,108
Fleet	\$7,000	\$4,000	\$11,000
Cont Serv/ Materials	\$7,200		\$7,200
Total Heritage Ranch	\$38,308	\$9,000	\$47,308

Estimates of operating costs in comparison to the existing operation are detailed in the chart below:

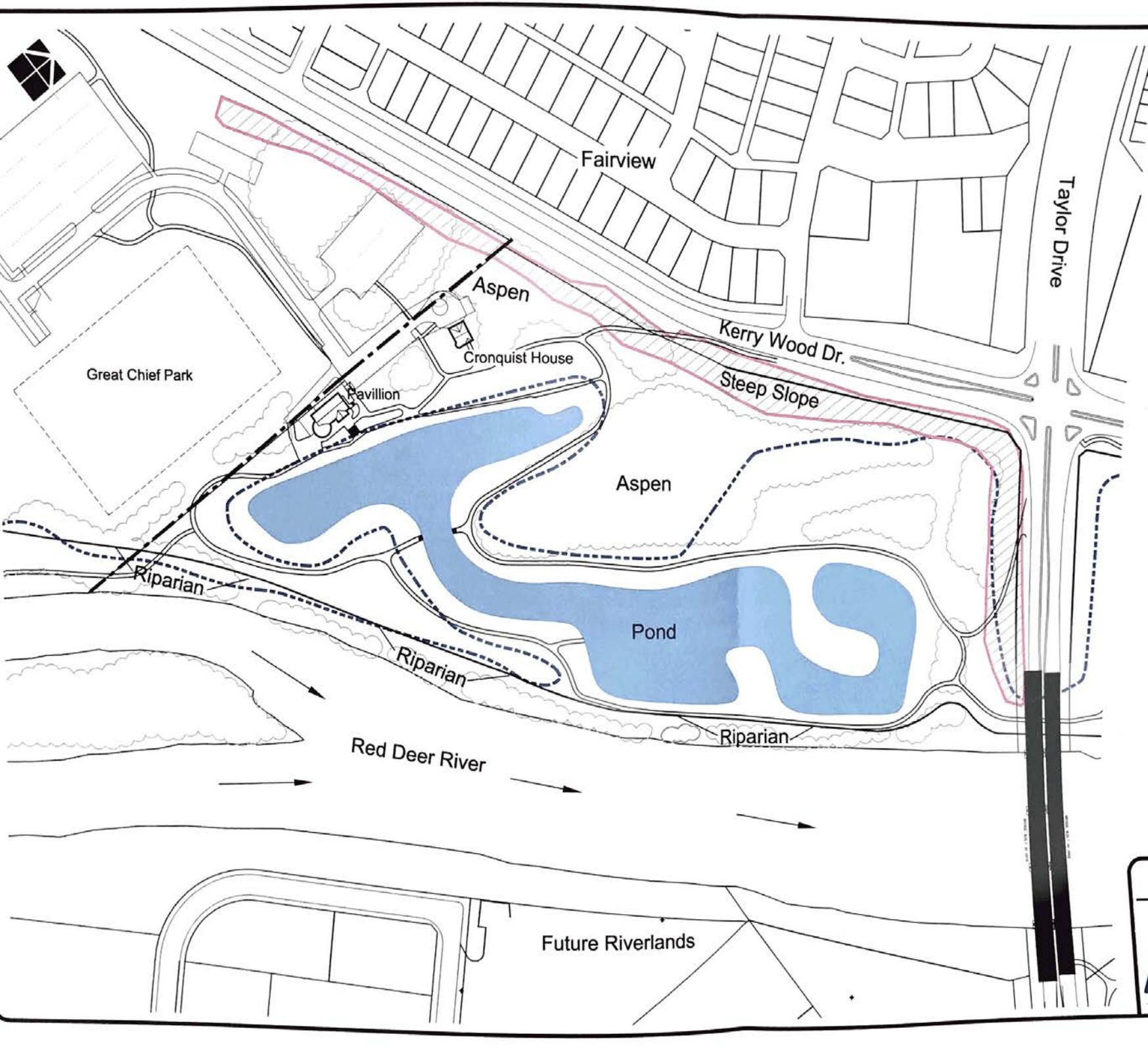
	Status Quo	Interim Operation	New Discovery Centre
Revenue	\$141,800	\$129,862	\$175,540
Expense	\$161,985	\$179,067	\$280,587
Surplus/Deficit	(\$ 20,185)	(\$ 49,205)	(\$ 105,047)
Operator Income	\$ 34,444	\$ 38,200	\$ 38,200
Cost to City – Operations	\$ 54,628	\$ 87,405	\$ 143,247
Cost to City – Maintenance	\$47,308	\$47,308	\$47,308
Cost to City – Total	\$101,936	\$134,713	\$190,555

3.8 Development Summary

Heritage Ranch is a vital natural area and a significant aspect of the Waskasoo Park system that must be protected and preserved for the future. Existing low impact uses such as walking, cross country skiing and orienteering will be maintained. As a gateway to Waskasoo Park, Heritage Ranch and the new Waskasoo Discovery Centre will provide interpretive and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors and provide potential cross programming opportunities with the Kerry Wood Nature Centre. Since the Heritage Ranch property is within the County of Red Deer, all detailed development plans will need to be prepared in consultation with the County.

It has been agreed that the equestrian operation is not viable and should be discontinued over-time. With a focus on education and interpretation, the park will become a distinct and unique Special Gathering Place within the Waskasoo Park system. As illustrated, costs to The City (i.e. subsidy to Heritage Ranch) would increase with this program. However, there are tremendous potential benefits gained by increased use and marketing of the Waskasoo Park system, as well as introduction of new and unique program opportunities to the community. The inclusion of the Ecological Services as primary tenant in the Discovery Centre will raise the profile of the important work of this group with the added benefit of providing site management and security.

The change in the focus of the park from equestrian to the 'Gateway' to Waskasoo Park, and the plans to reclaim parts of the site to natural state provide an important environmental focus and sustainable programs which fits well with The City's strategic and environmental objectives.



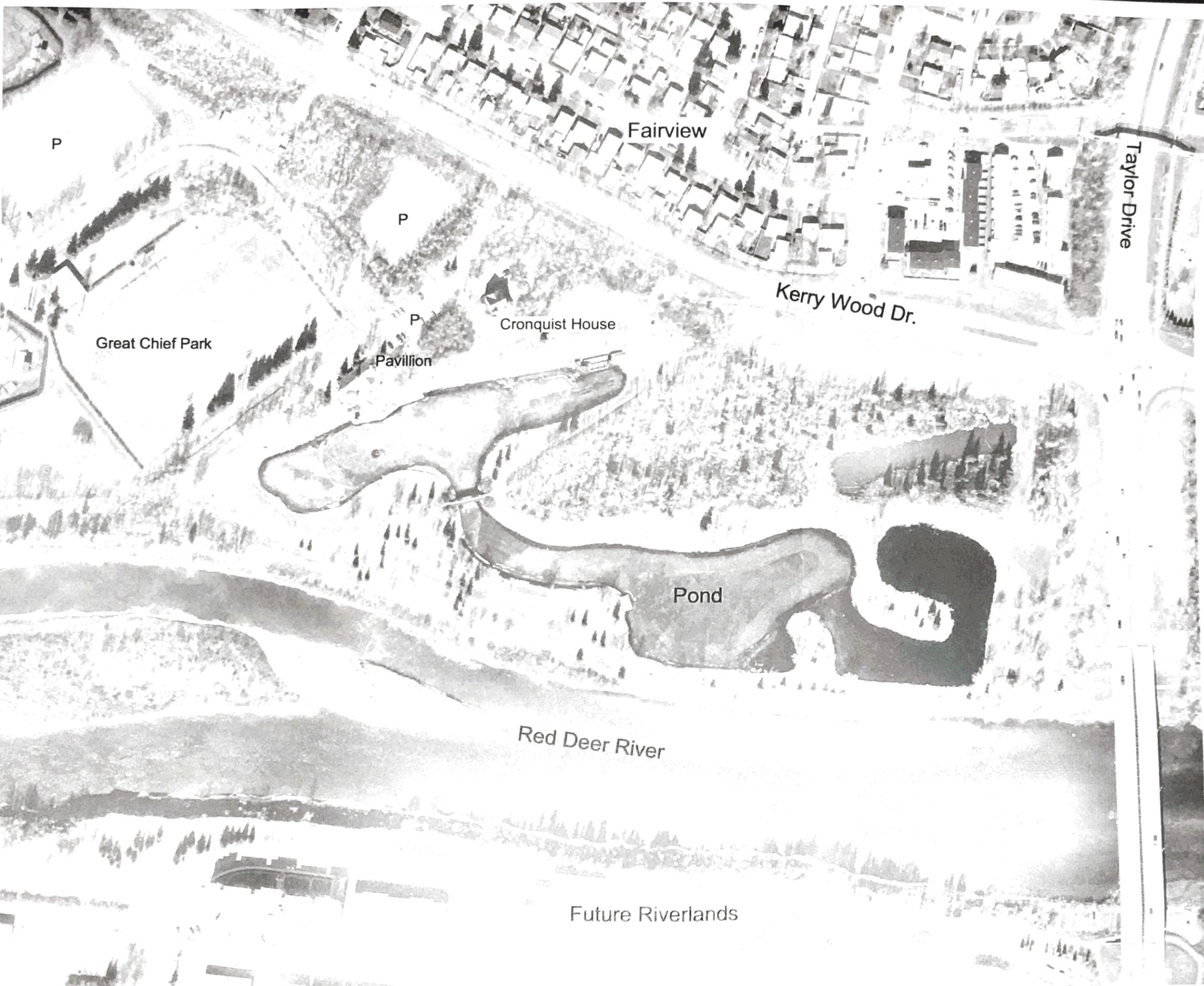
Legend

- ~~~~~ Tree Line
- Park Boundary
- 100 Year Flood Risk Line
- [Hatched Box] Steep Slope / Escarpment
- [Blue Box] Water

Bower Ponds
Biophysical Features

ISL March 2005 Figure: **4.2**
Scale: 1:250

2005 WASKASOO PARK STUDY
Special Gathering Places



Bower Ponds
Existing Conditions

ISL

March 2005
Scale: 1:250

Figure:

4.1

4.0 Bower Ponds

4.1 Context

Bower Ponds was developed as part of the Waskasoo Park Master Plan as an urban, active, family oriented, destination park in the centre of Red Deer. Bower Ponds is accessed through Great Chief Park and is well connected through the community via the trail system (Figure 4.1).

The Bower Ponds Pavilion is a year-round service building used by both, Waskasoo Park and Great Chief Park patrons. The Pavilion along the edge of the pond houses a food concession, rental operation, rest area, skate change area and washrooms. The operation of the Pavilion is contracted out to a concessionaire.

The Cronquist House was built circa 1891, and was moved by the Red Deer International Folk Festival Society from West Park to its current site beside Bower Ponds in the late 1970's. This historic building became the property of The City of Red Deer, in exchange for allowing the building to be located on City land. The City has an operating agreement with the Red Deer Cultural Heritage Society since 1990. The agreement outlines expectations for refurbishment, maintenance and insurance along with how the building should be made accessible to the general community.

In the Waskasoo Park Master Plan (1982), the following goals were established for this park: develop boat launch, dock, trails, warm up hut/concession, accessible, year-round staff in facility, acquire portable stage unit, and add lighting. These ideas were developed and now this park is over 20 years, and a re-evaluation of the parks facilities and programs needs to be addressed.

4.2 Biophysical Overview

Along with the adjacent Great Chief Park, Bower Ponds is described as one of the premier recreation areas within Waskasoo Park (City of Red Deer 2005). A constructed, irregularly shaped pond is the main recreation focus of the Bower Ponds area (Figure 4.2). Summer uses of the pond include rental use of canoes, paddle boats as well as fishing. Special events are sometimes held here, and these events often exceed the capacity of the park and its amenities. Public skating is a popular winter use of the pond. This area is also the location of the Cronquist House, a historic Victorian farmhouse, and an outdoor stage that receives use during special events. A paved multi-use trail winds its way through the park. Much of the Bower Ponds area is manicured, although a small stand of trees occupies the area to the north of the pond and a strip of riparian vegetation exists along the Red Deer River. The Bower Ponds area covers a total of 32 ha, much of which is located within the flood risk area (WER Engineering Ltd. 1991).

4.2.1 Vegetation

The most significant area of natural vegetation in the Bower Ponds Park is a stand of aspen northwest of the pond. This stand is situated adjacent to and along a relatively steep slope that effectively forms the northwest boundary of the park. Our observations indicate that the aspen stand is regenerating, an opinion also held by the RDRN (*pers. comm.*) The only other area of native vegetation is a narrow strip of riparian vegetation along the Red Deer River bank. The remainder of the park is largely manicured and occupied by lawns and ornamental flowers, shrubs, and trees.

4.2.2 Wildlife

Although this park is the most heavily developed of the four Special Gathering Places, the pond and areas of native vegetation provide suitable habitat for a number of wildlife species. The ponds are frequented by a diversity of duck species, Canada geese, and muskrats (RDRN *pers. comm.*). The pond is stocked with rainbow trout, while pike and white sucker occur naturally (Neil Evans *pers. comm.*). As recently as 2004, a pair of osprey has nested near the corner of Fountain Drive and Kerry Wood Drive, west of Bower Pond. The lack of large continuous tracks of native vegetation and the surrounding developed lands reduces the probability of large terrestrial mammals and rare or urban-intolerant bird species to occur in the park. Most likely to occur regularly are small mammals and a variety of bird species that are adapted to the urban environment. Those species might include: deer mouse, black-billed magpies, American robins, and yellow warblers. The area around the Cronquist House is noted as particularly good for bird viewing (RDRN *pers. comm.*).

The location of the Bower Ponds within the Red Deer River Valley, a significant regional wildlife travel corridor, presents the potential for wildlife species to use this area when in transit. Waskasoo Park becomes quite narrow in the area of Bower Ponds and, consequently, any terrestrial species moving along the north side of the Red Deer River would likely be funneled through this area. The vegetated slope northwest of the pond and the strip of riparian vegetation are likely to be used as a movement corridor, particularly by songbirds during spring and fall migration.

4.2.3 Sensitivities

The regenerating aspen stand is the largest area of native vegetation in the park, is locally-significant wildlife habitat and, therefore, the feature of the Bower Ponds area most deserving of protection during future development, with the exception of the critically important narrow band of riparian vegetation. The stand is currently in good condition with only a few trails (RDRN *pers. comm.*). Any reduction in size or introduction of trails would be detrimental to the wildlife value of the area. Potential impacts to the osprey nest should be considered when determining suitable uses for the area surrounding the nest. Nesting individuals would be most likely affected during the breeding season, typically late April through July. The majority of the Bower Ponds area, including the pond itself, is within the 100-year flood risk

area (WER Engineering Ltd. 1991), presenting a constraint with respect to the type of development that can be undertaken.

The strip of riparian vegetation, though relatively narrow, and the vegetated slope northwest of the pond are thought to both function as wildlife corridors. In the Bower Pond area of Waskasoo Park, lands suitable for wildlife movement are already limited, therefore, any future development plans should be sensitive to the area's function as a wildlife corridor and should make adequate provision to ensure that this function is not adversely affected.

4.3 Opportunities & Constraints

From an environmental perspective, further development of various low-impact recreational facilities in the surrounding manicured areas of Bower Ponds would be acceptable. As elsewhere in Waskasoo Park, the Bower Ponds area would be suitable for the establishment of a network of interpretive displays. Potential themes specific to this area might include urban-adapted wildlife, riparian vegetation, and bird migration. Bower Ponds could also be promoted as a 'Downtown natural area', providing opportunities for bird watching, picnicking, and jogging.

In association with further development of Bower Ponds, an opportunity exists to enhance the natural vegetation in a manner that could improve the suitability of the park as a wildlife movement corridor. Specifically, increasing the continuity of the natural vegetation between the west end of the pond and the football field, and the treed area along the Red Deer River to the southwest would result in an overall increase in connectivity and a likely increase in function as a wildlife corridor.

From the operators and service providers at Bower Ponds the following opportunities and constraints were identified:

- Limited use of canoes on the ponds.
- Use of ponds for ice skating has decreased, especially after removal of hockey area.
- Limited income from the concession; (may be related to inconsistent hours of operation).
- Only one access for vehicles limits efficient traffic flow. On special event days parking and traffic flow is problematic.
- Size of outdoor stage limits types of performances. Lack of overhead and back stage area is also limiting. Power has been upgraded to stage, adequate for all users.
- Only pedestrian access from downtown is over Taylor Bridge. Access from this Bridge is somewhat limited. Possibilities at this location include steps down from Taylor Drive to existing trails.
- Cronquist House is under utilized.

The following are some examples of programming opportunities at this site, as suggested by Bower Ponds stakeholders:

- Special event programming would benefit from additional support; this can vary, from additional promotion to creating a larger stage for events, to additional budget for human and programming resources.
- There have been requests for outdoor wedding photos. Proper design could significantly add to the appeal of this program.
- As the concession isn't being used to its full potential upgrading the picnic area and adding an outdoor hard surface patio with picnic tables and umbrellas could add to the concession service.
- A good quality sound system encircling the ponds would enhance the skating experience.

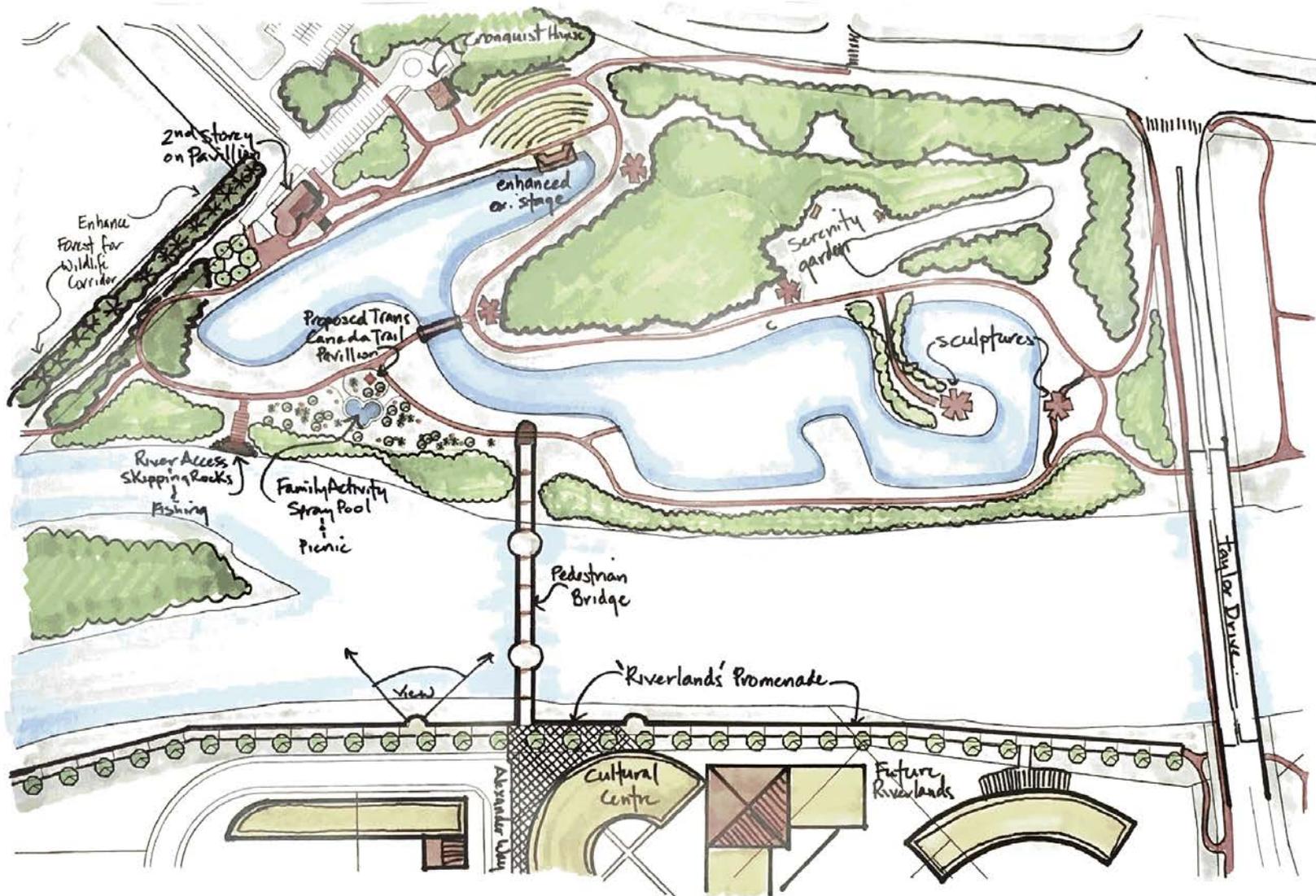
The following actions were listed in the Community Services Action Plan 2003-2006:

- Retain as an all season recreation and special events area. Undertake a needs assessment and renew focus for Bower Ponds. Consider stage development and suitability for other events/programming.
- Consider further stage development at Bower Ponds, including cover and change rooms.
- The Bower Ponds skating pond and pavilion will be maintained to a high standard. There are no plans to maintain ice surfaces for skating on other park ponds.
- Risks will be monitored and addressed along with providing ongoing maintenance as required at sliding hills at Bower Ponds.
- Play a facilitative role in supporting the Red Deer Cultural Heritage Society in operating Cronquist house at Bower Ponds
- Consider the opportunity to include this Cronquist House in the Bower Ponds needs assessment process and renegotiate the 1979 operating agreement, with the Society.

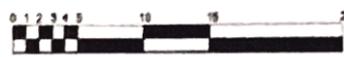
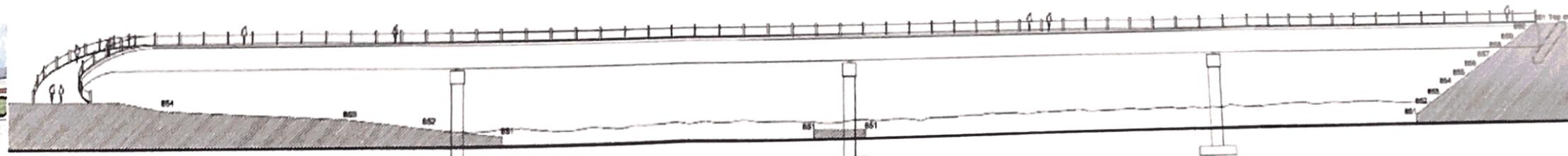
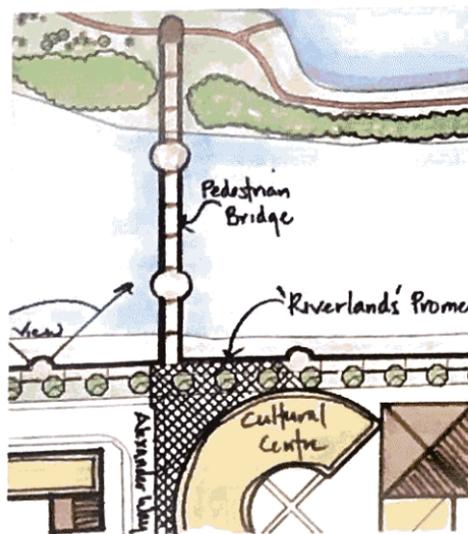
4.4 Preliminary Development Ideas

Through the early public consultation activities there were several development ideas which were proposed and evaluated for Bower Ponds. Ultimately, through either community comments or Committee discussion, these ideas were not selected to be included in this development plan. These preliminary development ideas are described below:

- **Boardwalk around Pond:** a boardwalk along the waters edge extending from the pavilion to the pond bridge was proposed, however, stakeholders preferred a more natural edge to the pond.
- **New Stage:** The idea of a new, larger and re-oriented stage was proposed to meet opportunities for enhanced programming of small and larger scale community and cultural events in Bower Ponds. Through discussions it was agreed that as the city grows, Bower Ponds will not be well suited to hosting large scale civic events because of poor access, impacts on adjacent residential and the small amount of suitable open space within the park. This idea was dropped in favour of enhancements to the existing stage.



Bower Ponds Development Concept



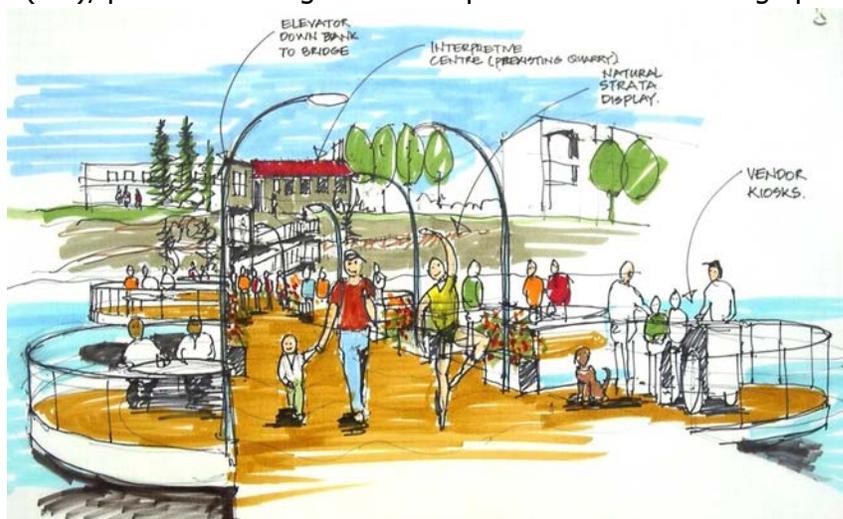
Bower Ponds
Riverlands Bridge

- **Cronquist House:** A number of ideas were proposed for Cronquist House including conversion to an Art Gallery, a tea house and to a fine dining restaurant. Since the Cronquist house is operated by an independent, not-for-profit organization, it was agreed that no program or facility changes should be proposed as part of the new development concept.
- **Whitewater Kayak Course:** The idea of a white water kayak teaching, training and recreation site around the island in the Red Deer River below Bower Ponds was originally proposed prior to the Co-Design workshop. A stakeholder has prepared a preliminary concept report which describes the opportunities to create the course and add rock features, in the shallow waters on the Bower Ponds side of the island. This approach has been used to develop a number of high level and Olympic courses in North America. Approvals for this type of development would include the Department of Fisheries and Oceans from both a navigable waters and fish habitat compensation perspective. Additional analysis would be required for functional planning of this concept. Depending on the design and detailed evaluation of river hydraulics, this proposal could be workable. Since the idea was not presented to the public and stakeholders the consensus of the committee was to leave it out of the recommended development concept.

4.5 Development Concept

The public and stakeholders clearly identified the need to re-establish Bower Ponds as a family oriented, destination park in the centre of the city. To achieve this, users defined the need to provide more facilities and features, expanded services and operating hours, and enhanced programming. In addition, to tie into the future cultural focus of Alexander Way and the Riverlands development, it was suggested that the park could provide a suitable location for cultural/artistic elements. The following concepts and programs have been recommended for Bower Ponds (Figure 4.3):

- **Pedestrian Bridge:** A pedestrian connection between the Riverlands area, Alexander Way and Bower Ponds has been proposed previously in approved City plans and continues to be well supported by the public. As illustrated, the concept is to create a wide (6m), prominent bridge with viewpoints. Due to the long span and elevation difference between the west and east sides the bridge will have a significant capital cost. (Figure 4.4)



- **Riverlands Promenade:** As an addition to the approved Riverlands Development Plan, an urban, pedestrian promenade has been proposed along the top of the east bank overlooking the river and Bower Ponds. The promenade would create a strong visual link with the park and in combination with the pedestrian bridge (see below), provide a great meeting and strolling opportunity for residents and visitors. The promenade is envisioned as a 5m wide concrete walk with lights, viewpoints and benches. The capital cost has not been included in the cost for Bower Ponds as the promenade has been proposed as component of the future Riverlands development.

- **Art in the Park/ Serenity Garden:** The concept of Art in the Park has been designed to provide opportunities for the placement of significant public art works in Bower Ponds as a logical terminus to the cultural theme of the proposed Alexander Way. The proposed sites illustrated on the plan would also be designed simply as special places for artists to paint and draw and also for people to sit, read and contemplate. The Serenity Garden idea, originally proposed for River Bend would also be designed to provide a quiet, contemplative place within the park. This area could also be designed to be suitable for wedding photos.



- **Existing Stage Enhanced:** Proposed enhancements to the existing stage should include change rooms, power servicing, overhead canopy, and better sound controls (directional/less spill). It is recommended that acoustical analysis be conducted to determine the impacts of stage use on adjacent residents and to identify mitigation measures if deemed necessary. Stage programming also needs to be enhanced as a means to encourage and support more use of the park. Consideration could be given to programming every other weekend during the summer and programs in support of other facility use and events.



- **Family Use Features:** To encourage more family use of the park several features have been proposed including a small spray park, playground and picnic area. A river access location has also been proposed to provide a safe and accessible location for fishing, throwing rocks or just sitting back and watching the river.
- **Enhancement Planting:** to provide a buffer between the activities of Great Chief Park (football field) and Bower Ponds, extensive native planting will be installed to create a natural forest area and wildlife corridor. The planting will take advantage of the existing mature spruce and poplar and will be located on either side of the existing drainage swale.

- Expanded Pavilion:** With the development of other facilities and opportunities within the park, and with an increase in resident use with the development of Riverlands, it is anticipated that the overall use of Bower Ponds will increase over time. To support this increased use the public has indicated that the pavilion needs to provide a level of service (hours, goods, services) consistent with a downtown, urban park. This includes year round public access to the pavilion and the washroom facilities. In addition, a concept for an expanded pavilion, with a redesigned first floor and additional second floor café and deck, has been well supported throughout the study. The expanded pavilion could offer light lunches, lattes and healthy snacks through the day and evening hours. The feasibility of expanding to a second floor has been reviewed with the building architect.



4.6 Capital Costs

The estimated capital costs for the proposed development concepts for Bower Ponds total \$9.25 million dollars and are defined in the table below:

Item	Description	Notes	Total
1.0	Riverlands Promenade	Concrete promenade (5m wide) with view points, lighting, seating and landscaping (600 m @ \$ 2500/m)	not included in Bower Ponds costs
2.0	Pedestrian Bridge	170m long, 6m wide Pedestrian bridge with viewpoints, barrier free access from Riverlands to Bower Ponds	\$ 5,800,000.00
3.0	Art in the Park	Development of paths (75 m @ \$75) and four Art/sculpture nodes (concrete pads, benches, landscape). Note: Art/Sculpture cost not incl.	\$ 26,000.00
4.0	Serenity Garden	Includes benches, fountain, planting beds	\$ 40,000.00
5.0	Existing Stage Enhancements	Includes roof, dressing rooms, stairs, ramps, storage rooms, power service, noise management provisions	\$ 240,000.00
6.0	Family Use Features	Includes small spray park (\$340,000 incl. water service), Small playground (\$120,000), River access improvements (\$25,000), Picnic Table on pads (15 @ \$1500), Tree planting (15 @\$500)	\$ 515,000.00
7.0	Pavilion Expansion	Add second storey with lounge, food service & patio. Based on 2000 sq. ft. at \$250/sq.ft.	\$ 700,000.00
8.0	Enhancement Planting/Wildlife Corridor	Includes planting of native trees and shrubs between Bower Ponds and football field (Great Chief) to provide buffer and create wildlife corridor	\$ 85,000.00
Subtotal			\$ 7,406,000.00
25%Contingency & Fees			\$ 1,851,500.00
Bower Ponds Total			\$ 9,257,500.00

4.7 Recommended Business Case

Bower Ponds has evolved to become one of the most popular family recreation areas in Waskasoo Park but is in need of refurbishment and increased usage. If the current operations and facilities remain unchanged, the most prevalent impact would be the loss of a potentially great year round community gathering space and consequently all of the associated opportunities and benefits to residents. Without some, or all, of the recommended improvements the potential of Bower Ponds as a natural attraction for downtown businesses would be lost, or at the very least inhibited. The recommended business case supports the implementation of the proposed development concepts.

This business case is built upon information collected from the current contract operators, staff and anecdotal information gained through focus groups, public meetings and interviews. The following business case scenarios were considered:

- Status Quo (keep the park as is)
- Expand the Pavilion
- Change the Focus of Cronquist House
- Enhance Park Facilities

A number of issues related to the redevelopment of Bower Ponds were identified:

- There are considerable noise/sound and traffic impacts from special events on the surrounding communities.
- The Pavillion is not viable in its current operation format, related to this are the hours of operation and profitability.
- The amphitheatre needs to be upgraded and expanded.
- The park needs to be connected to the downtown by a pedestrian bridge.
- The focus of the park should be Arts, Culture and Family Activities.
- Programming is required to generate increased visitation.
- The pavilion needs to be upgraded and expanded.
- Family activities should include a playground and water park.

Other important issues/impacts include the following:

- Without some degree of improvement toward increasing pedestrian traffic the current concession and equipment rental operators would have little choice but to move on.
- The existing noise from events is a major issue with surrounding residents. This issue needs to be addressed to win support of these residents as it is important to the park's success.
- Vandalism is already an issue at Bower Ponds (as it is in any park). With no operator(s) on site vandalism is expected to increase. Increased vandalism would likely mean that The City would be liable for a greater expenditure to patrol and maintain the area.

Costs for operating the amenity elements of the park are as follows:

Expenditures for 2004	
Salaries/Wages	\$22,086
Contracted Services	\$4,358
Security	\$496
Repairs & Maintenance	\$7,160
Janitorial	\$2,525
Materials	\$2,434
Utilities	\$15,903
Expenses - Other Departments	\$4,465
Ice Maintenance	\$55,000
Total	\$114,427

According to The City of Red Deer concession and equipment rental operator contracts, the return from both contracts is 5% to The City. It is important to note, however, expenditures are expected to rise if there are not contract operators on site and vandalism increases.

The expansion of the pavilion would provide better service to the current clientele as well as to attract new users. The expansion would include updating and expanding the concession and equipment rental space, more seating capacity, storage space and a second floor restaurant and patio.

By providing a comfortable space in which to socialize and by enhancing the concession amenities, the operators will have an increased opportunity to offer more people a broader range of choices. In the winter, the expanded facility would allow people to come in from the cold while still enjoying Bower Ponds, and in the summer, the outdoor patio and second floor balcony could be a local gathering point. People could still bring their own food and beverages; however, the improvements may encourage more spontaneous use of the pavilion year round and thus potentially affording the operators a more desirable profit.

For this business case two sub-scenarios were considered:

- Contract operator
- City operated (no contract operator)

Financial impacts of the various scenarios are high lighted in the chart that follows:

	Status Quo	No Operator Status Quo	Expand Pavilion	No Operator & Expanded Pavilion
Revenue From Operators	\$2,965	\$26,920	\$2,019	\$40,380
Revenue – Food & Beverage		\$32,380	\$36,000	\$36,000
Total Revenue	\$2,965	\$59,300	\$38,019	\$76,380
Expense – Food & Beverage		\$19,955		
Expense – City Operations	\$59,247	\$129,895	\$74,284	\$142,625
Expense – City Parks	\$90,300	\$90,300	\$90,300	\$90,300
Cost to City	\$146,582	\$222,190	\$126,565	\$156,545

The design program and capital cost estimate for enhancing the existing pavilion would be as follows:

- Lower level retrofit (\$200,000) - upgrade concession, increase rental storage and sales area, upgrade washrooms
- Second level or addition (\$500,000) - 2,000 square feet, seating for 40, kitchen, washrooms, storage, balcony

4.8 Development Summary

The park has become staid and redevelopment is necessary to ensure the resurgence of the park and its ongoing viability. Elevating the family activities and arts & culture program brings a strong focus for an urban park and expanding family opportunities will encourage increased usage. In addition, retrofitting the Pavilion will better meet user needs and offer a special food & beverage service in the park. Improving the stage facility will facilitate increased programming and usage for regular, small scale performances.

In terms of risk, it is important to note that The City has to subsidize the current contractors to ensure at least minimal coverage is maintained. Not undertaking the improvements could result in the facility being turned over to The City. Expanding the food & beverage operation is a large undertaking and should only be considered if a contract operator can be found who is willing to invest in the development.

Finally, the recommended development concept for the park has evolved with strong consideration of the positive impacts of the proposed Riverlands development. Enhancing the park will compliment the plans for the Riverlands project, and with those new developments, the park will draw users from downtown and families from around the city.



Future
City Yards

RC
Car Club

Washrooms

Pond

Pond

Red Deer River

Esso
Lease Site

Ice Jamming
Location

THREE MILE BEND

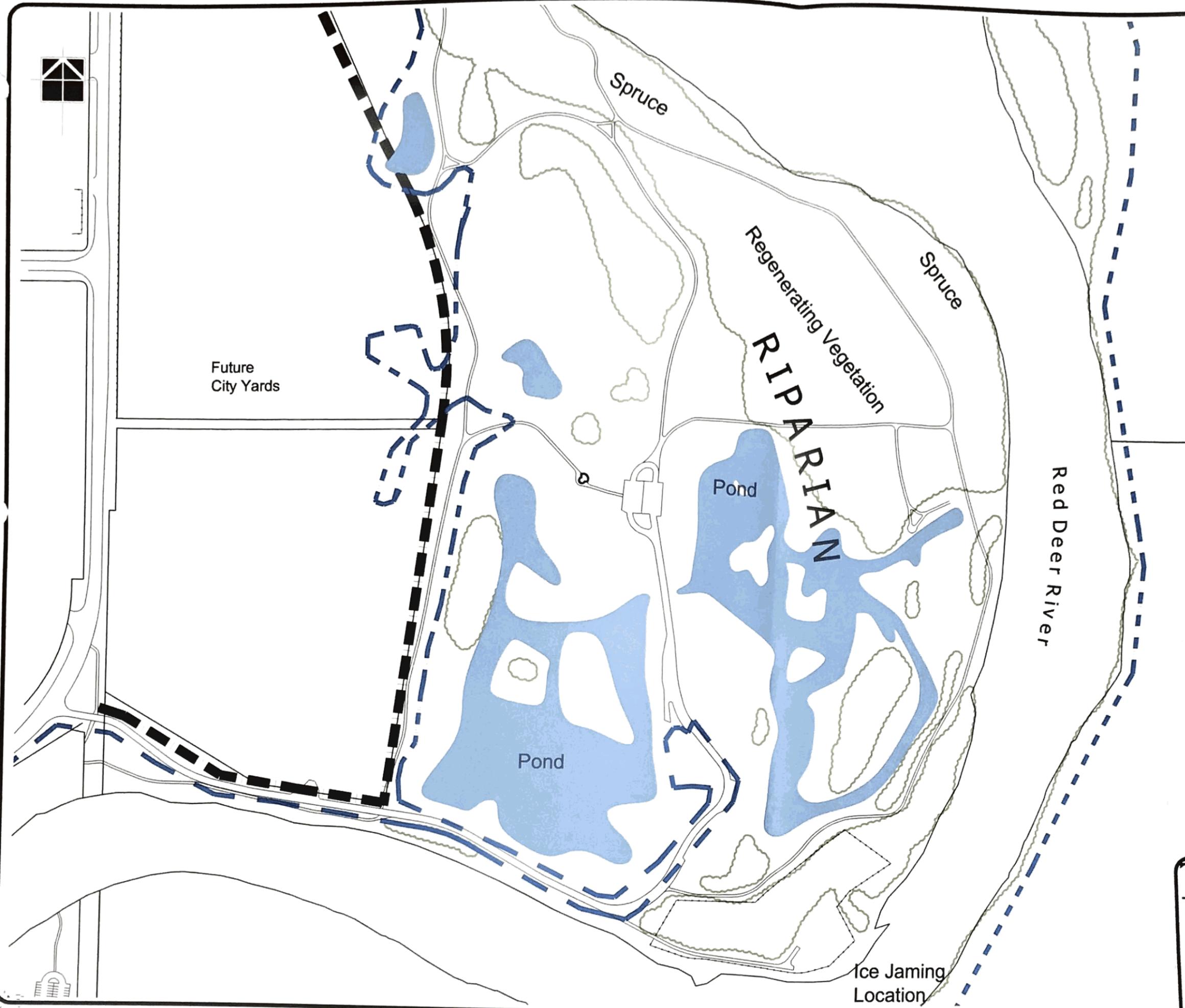
Existing Conditions

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March 2005
Scale: 1:400

Figure:

5.1



Legend

- Tree Line
- Park Boundary
- 100 Year Flood Risk Line
- Water

THREE MILE BEND
Biophysical Features
ISL March 2005 Figure: **5.2**
Scale: 1:400

5.0 Three Mile Bend

5.1 Context

Three Mile Bend was designed in 1984 as part of the Waskasoo Park Master Plan. The park was planned as a passive park designed for unstructured recreation uses. Over time the park has developed into a popular and highly used off-leash area for city dog owners. The park also includes a freestyle ski jump, Remote Control Car Club track, and the ponds in the park are well used by the Canoe/Kayak Club for flat water training as well as use by and recreational canoe enthusiasts (Figure 5.1). The level of use continues to rise in this park, which has put pressure on the current facilities and amenities.

5.2 Biophysical Overview

Historically, this area within the bottomlands of the Red Deer River Valley was used for both gravel extraction and storage, and was described as an unsightly intrusion in the river valley as recently as the early 1980's (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). Since then, however, native regeneration in the area has flourished and Three Mile Bend is now a large (53 ha) and aesthetically-pleasing natural area within Waskasoo Park (Figure 5.2). The gravel pits of the past have formed an irregularly shaped and groundwater fed pond that now provides suitable habitat for many species of aquatic wildlife. Of the four Special Gathering Places, Three Mile Bend is the least developed, with very little recreational facility infrastructure. The park is intended to function as a multi-use park as outlined in Community Services Open Space and Facility Action Plan (City of Red Deer 2003), and does in fact receive a varied and high level of use from a number of community organizations. The main use of Three Mile Bend is as an off-leash dog area, with a small area of freestyle ski training facilities comprising a second facility (Hodgson 2005). The canoe club makes regular use of the pond as a venue for training sessions (RDRN, *pers. comm.*). The Remote Control Car Club is also active within the park, and the picnic sites are well used (Hodgson 2005). A multi-use trail and bridge connects Three Mile Bend to the River Bend Golf and Recreation Area to the north, and other areas within Waskasoo Park to the south.

5.2.1 Vegetation

The vegetation of Three Mile Bend consists of small areas of native vegetation that were left undisturbed during past excavation, and widespread areas of regenerating vegetation. The northern portion of the park contains a remnant mixed wood community with white spruce and balsam poplar dominating (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). The north facing slopes along the Red Deer River support a few small stands of a mature white spruce community (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). Much of the native vegetation in the southern portion of Three Mile Bend has regenerated during the past 20 years. Prior to that, gravel extraction activity dominated the area leaving very little undisturbed land. The diversity of species that has become established in that area of the park include aspen and willow, both extensive; white spruce saplings, achieving heights of approximately 10 m in some areas; and a broad shrub community, including dogwood and other

native species. The past use of this area for gravel extraction has resulted in some interesting micro-topography within the park. That variation in terrain may cause small differences in microclimate, further increasing the diversity of plant species.

5.2.2 Wildlife

Most of the habitat in Three Mile Bend is relatively young and in an early stage of succession. That characteristic of the park renders much of it generally unsuitable for wildlife species that are dependent on mature vegetation communities. At the same time, however, the regenerating vegetation provides ideal habitat for many other species. Young aspen and a healthy shrub community provide an abundance of palatable browse for ungulates, and consequently mule deer, white-tailed deer, and moose are all commonly found here (Ken Froggat *pers. comm.*). Evidence of ungulate browsing was abundant during our brief site visit. The remnant mature white spruce and mixed wood communities likely provide a good degree of cover for ungulates, further improving the habitat suitability of Three Mile Bend for those species. In addition to the wealth of young trees and shrubs, the riparian communities associated with the several ponds create ideal nesting habitat for many songbird species. Given the diversity of habitat available, many of the small mammals common to the Central Parkland Sub-region of Alberta could potentially occur in this park.

The several ponds in Three Mile Bend combined with the relatively undisturbed nature of the riparian areas may provide some of the better amphibian and reptile habitat in the Waskasoo Park system. The ponds contain natural fish populations of yellow perch and white sucker (Neil Evans *pers. comm.*), directly and indirectly adding biodiversity to the park. Several osprey nest platforms are located near the ponds, one of which is typically used annually (RDRN *pers. comm.*). The presence of fish species is likely the key to the presence of the osprey, and the fish could attract other fish-eating species to the area (e.g., belted kingfisher, double-crested cormorant, and American pelican). Beavers are also a resident species in the ponds (RDRN *pers. comm.*). Many of the typical waterfowl species of the region could also be expected to use the ponds. While the riparian and even more distant vegetation appears to provide suitable cover for waterfowl nesting, the reportedly heavy dog use in the area may discourage ground nesting species.

5.2.3 Sensitivities

The most popular use of Three Mile Bend is as an off-leash dog area. That activity attracts vast numbers of users to the park and represents a desired recreational activity promoted through the City of Red Deer Community Services Action Plans (City of Red Deer 2003). The presence of a high number of free-running dogs does, however, introduce the potential for a variety of dog-wildlife conflicts. One possible impact is the decreased use of riparian areas as bird nesting habitat and adult herptiles. Less conspicuous are the possible impacts that off-leash dogs may have on reproductive success, particularly low shrub or ground nesting bird species.

The relatively undeveloped nature of Three Mile Bend is a unique characteristic of this park within the context of the whole Waskasoo Park. The ecological value of the relatively large and continuous area of regenerating vegetation within the park would be compromised if large areas were cleared. Many wildlife species will only occupy an area of suitable habitat if it meets a minimum size threshold. The loss of natural vegetation in Three Mile Bend could, therefore, lead to a decrease in species richness. Any infrastructure development in the southern portion of the park where the ponds are situated, would likely adversely impact the function of the ponds as wildlife habitat. The presence of several osprey nesting platforms in the park, and the probability of nesting individuals, should be considered when reviewing development proposals. The osprey breeding season would be of particular sensitivity, typically late April through July.

The majority of Three Mile Bend is within the flood risk area of the Red Deer River (WER Engineering Ltd. 1991) and is characterized by alluvium-based soils (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). The sharp bend in the Red Deer River adjacent to the southeast corner of the park is, in fact, historically the first ice jamming location downstream of the city centre and, consequently, prone to spring flooding (Earthscape Consultants 1982). The flood risk area and soil characteristics should both be considered when evaluating potential future park uses.

5.3 Opportunities & Constraints

Within the park, areas that have not yet begun to regenerate naturally are not likely to do so in the near future. Aerial photo interpretation suggests that, though not abundant, a few such areas do exist within Three Mile Bend. An opportunity, therefore, exists to actively rehabilitate and revegetate parts of the site. This park provides one of the best examples of natural succession and, therefore, a network of interpretive signs and displays could be erected along currently existing trails to illustrate the successional process and value of early successional habitat to wildlife. The several ponds provide an opportunity for low-impact water based recreation. Suitable uses may include developing an area for model boat enthusiasts, perhaps with some temporal controls, and encouraging canoeing as a relatively non-invasive method of exploring the pond and its wildlife.

The following opportunities and constraints were identified during stakeholder interviews:

- The major use for this park is as a Dog off-Leash area. The park is intended however as a multi-use park.
- The park is reclaiming itself nicely with little maintenance necessary beyond the trails, the shelter and the roads and parking area.
- The Remote Control Car Club is active again and is using the site developed for this activity.
- There are times when there is insufficient parking in this park.
- Some canoe and kayak training takes place in these ponds.

- This park operates well. Picnic sites and the washroom/warming hut are well used.
- Remote control boats could use the ponds if an area was designated to them and a pad was placed for operators to stand on.
- More dispensers and receptacles are needed for the dog owners
- Site security is an issue related to after hour access.
- A good buffer strip will be necessary when the public works yard moves to the industrial land adjacent to this park.

The Community Services Action Plan 2003-2006 provided several recommendations for park enhancements:

- Retain as a natural park and valuable wildlife area with limited facility development.
- Recognize area for diverse recreation activities. Actively promote as an "off-leash but under control" area.
- Work with the Remote Control (RC) Car Club to facilitate the development of a track for motorized model cars at Three Mile Bend.

5.4 Preliminary Development Ideas

Throughout the study the focus has been on maintaining Three Mile Bend as an off-leash park. During early public consultation activities consideration was given to providing improved access to the park, controls on after hours use, and buffering of the City yards which will be developed to the west. During early review it was agreed that most of the ideas did not have sufficient merit to be advanced further as part of this plan.

5.5 Development Concepts

The public and stakeholders were clear that Three Mile Bend should be retained primarily as an off-leash area and the proposed development concepts for the site support this message. In addition, there was support for retaining and enhancing the facilities and current use of the site by other key users such as the Freestyle Ski Club, the Canoe/Kayak Club and the Remote Control Car Club. The concepts proposed for Three Mile Bend are defined below and illustrated on Figure 5.3:

- **Dog Park Improvements:** In support of continued and growing use as an off-leash area, additional support amenities have been proposed such as benches, more parking, more waste bins and bag dispensers. An interpretive signage program is also proposed to educate park users on the unique vegetation communities and wildlife habitat of Three Mile Bend.
- **Canoe/Kayak Boardwalk, Pier & Circuit:** To support the teaching and training programs of the Canoe/Kayak Club, a boardwalk and pier have been proposed. In





THREE MILE BEND
Development Concept

addition, a flat water/ river circuit has been proposed allowing users to portage between the ponds and the river, paddling through and around the park

- **Ski Jump Improvements:** Architectural improvements to the ski jump would be designed to improve the overall aesthetics of the structure but also to meet the needs of the users from a teaching, training and safety perspective.
- **Water Quality Improvements:** There was strong support for improving the water quality within the ponds by providing aeration through the pumping of water by fountain and/or windmill.
- **Remote Control Car Club Improvements:** Improvements proposed to the RC Club site are designed to better integrate the facility into the park and reduce potential conflicts with other park users. Proposed improvements include fencing, landscape screening, and bleachers.



5.6 Capital Costs

The estimated capital cost for the proposed development concepts for Three Mile Bend is \$358,750 as defined in the table below:

Item	Description	Notes	Total
1.0	Dog Park Amenity Improvements	Includes some trail widening (1200m), additional benches (15), trash/recycling receptacles (10), expand parking lot, info board/map	\$ 75,000.00
2.0	Water Quality Improvements	Windmill/wind powered circulating pump/fountain	\$ 12,000.00
3.0	Interpretive Trails	Trail signs on existing trails - 1 major trail head sign (\$4000) and 10 interp signs (\$1700 each)	\$ 21,000.00
4.0	Canoe/Kayak Circuit	River & Pond pedestrian/portage access ramps	\$ 24,000.00
5.0	Canoe/Kayak Boardwalk & Pier	Floating Boardwalk (40m) and pier, grading and restoration of slope for easy launching and teaching, benches (4)	\$ 75,000.00
6.0	Ski Jump - Architectural Improvements	New cladding, paint, steps, platforms, ramp repairs, architectural embellishments (eg. Flags, banner poles)	\$ 48,000.00
7.0	RC Club Track - Site Improvements	Includes Fencing (200 m), gates (service & person), landscaping, bleachers (24 person)	\$ 32,000.00
Subtotal			\$ 287,000.00
25%Contingency & Fees			\$ 71,750.00
Three Mile Bend Total			\$ 358,750.00

5.7 Recommended Business Case

As described previously, Three Mile Bend primarily serves the dog walker community with secondary users such as public use of trails, canoe/kayakers, ski jumpers and RC Car Club site users. The recommended business case supports maintaining the primary focus of park for off-leash dog use and implementing a number of proposed amenities as they will enhance activities at the site and increase the enjoyment of all users.

The following business case scenarios were evaluated:

- Status Quo
- Expand Amenities - create a canoe/kayak circuit, enhance ski jump, contain the remote car track, enhance trails and day use activities

Currently the only operational costs incurred by the City for the park are for turf and trail maintenance. A summary of the costs is as follows:

	Annual Trail Maintenance	Annual Turf Maintenance	Annual Total
Staff	\$23,388	\$2,500	\$25,888
Fleet	\$7,000	\$2,300	\$9,300
Cont Serv/ Materials	\$7,200	\$0	\$7,200
Total 3 Mile Bend	\$37,588	\$4,800	\$42,388

5.8 Development Summary

Expanding the facilities and amenities for all of the user groups of Three Mile Bend will improve the use and enjoyment of this Special Gathering Place. A commitment to improved water quality and protection and interpretation of the unique natural features of the park will provide for a sustainable environment.

Improvements to the facilities for the RC Car Club and the Freestyle Ski Club will be welcomed by these groups and there should be good partnering opportunities for these improvements. As well, the teaching area and the canoe/kayak circuit will be unique features in an urban park setting and should receive good levels of use.

As this is the City's only off-leash dog park it is an important asset to enhance and protect. With the reduction in useable area with the development of the City yards and with gradual increases in use there is the potential of dog/human conflicts. This issue can be addressed through the creation of another off-leash dog park in south sector of Red Deer.

6.0 River Bend

6.1 Context

The River Bend Golf Course and Recreation Area is over 100 hectares (247 acres) of groomed and natural environments at the north end of Waskasoo Park within the County of Red Deer. Developed as part of Waskasoo Park and opened in 1987, the facility includes an 18-hole golf course, a 9-hole mini-links, a driving range, and situation golf area. Other non-golf amenities include Discovery Canyon water park, picnic facilities, canoe launch, hiking/cross-country ski trails, and a biathlon range (Figure 6.1). The site also houses the golf course maintenance shop and a superintendent's residence. The River Bend club house, which has been recently renovated, has a commercial kitchen, a pro shop, washroom-locker rooms, a meeting room, and a small administration staff office.

The west side of the larger 14 ha (34.6 acres) lake has been landscaped as an amphitheatre. It was planned that this area would ultimately become a major family recreation area, with paddleboats and canoeing on the lake in the summer and skating in winter. A future pavilion was also proposed, which was to include a skate change facility, a seating area, washrooms, and a concession for food and rental equipment.

The River Bend node is operated on behalf of The City, by the River Bend Golf and Recreation Society, which is an independent society consisting of nine members appointed by the City, plus one member of City Council. The original agreement required the society to pay an annual "fee" for the facility, which was to be used to assist with the financing operations of the Waskasoo Park system. In 1997, a new agreement was developed to establish a threshold level for revenue and determined a payment to the city's general revenues. In 2002 the agreement was again revised to direct specific revenue payments to The City's River Bend Reserve Fund. These funds would be used to offset some of the capital costs that were beginning to result from the aging facility. Through this series of agreements the River Bend Golf and Recreation Society has done an excellent job in managing and operating the River Bend facilities while providing revenues to the City.

The Kinsmen Club has also played an important role in the River Bend node by providing funding to support upgrades to Discovery Canyon since 2000. The funds have been managed through a partnership with the River Bend Golf and Recreation Society and have provided important capital for development and capital maintenance of Discovery Canyon. As a result of these contributions the facility has been renamed the Kinsmen Discovery Canyon.

6.2 Biophysical Overview

As with the other Special Gathering Places, the following is a general overview of the biophysical characteristics of the River Bend Golf & Recreation area. During the study, a detailed environmental assessment was completed for a proposed nine-hole expansion of the golf course. This assessment can be found in Appendix D.

Before becoming incorporated as part of Waskasoo Park in 1987, the area of River Bend

2005 WASKASOO PARK STUDY
Special Gathering Places



RIVER BEND

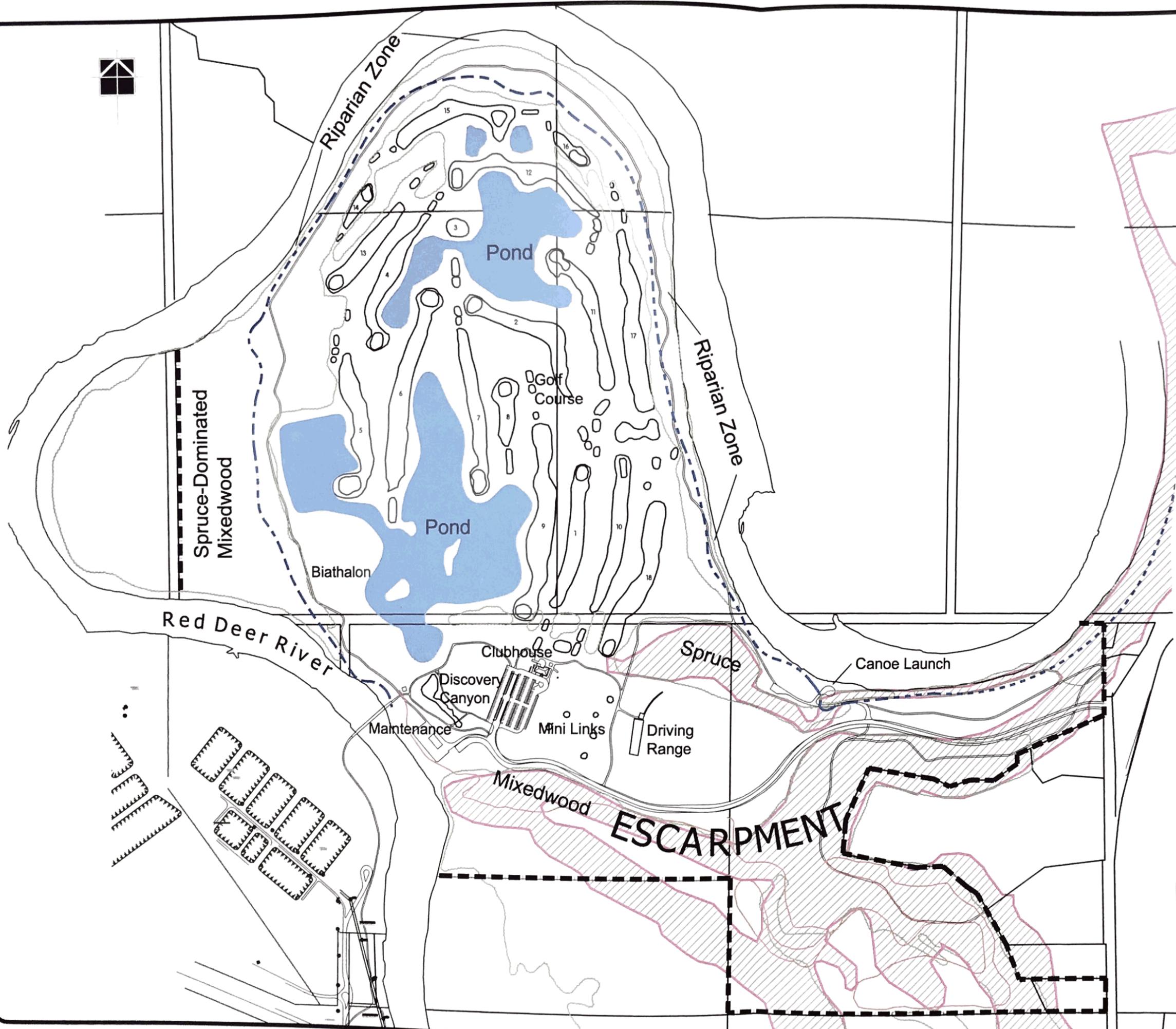
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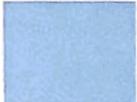
March 2005
Scale: 1:800

Figure: **6.1**

2005 WASKASOO PARK STUDY
Special Gathering Places



Legend

-  Tree Line
-  Park Boundary
-  100 Year Flood Risk Line
-  Steep Slope / Escarpment
-  Water

RIVER BEND

Biophysical Features

ISL

March 2005

Figure:

6.2

Scale: 1:800

Golf and Recreation Area consisted of privately owned agricultural fields and large gravel pits surrounded by natural wooded areas (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). From the outset, the original Waskasoo Park Master Plan (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982) recognized the potential for development of this large area to include a golf course. In addition to the recreational development, much of the River Bend Golf and Recreation Area remains in a natural state. In its entirety, this park covers 170 ha (Figure 6.2).

6.2.1 Vegetation

The majority of the River Bend Golf and Recreation Area is occupied by the golf course and its associated manicured grasses and ornamental trees and shrubs. Riparian mixed wood forest surrounds much of the golf course, forming a narrow fringe that separates it from the Red Deer River. A small but dense stand of mature white spruce exists east of the golf clubhouse and west of the canoe launch, and contains some of the largest spruce trees in the City of Red Deer. A larger area of white spruce dominated mixed wood forest occupies the area west of the golf course. A steep north facing valley escarpment dominates the southern portion of the River Bend Golf and Recreation Area. The valley escarpment in the southern portion of the park contains a large area of mature spruce and mixed wood forest.

6.2.2 Wildlife

The River Bend Golf and Recreation Area functions as a key component of the wildlife corridor within the greater Red Deer River Valley. At a regional scale, River Bend, and in particular the large forested area on the west side of the golf course, provides an important link in a network of natural areas that includes Gaetz Lake Sanctuary, McKenzie Trails, Three Mile Bend, River Bend and a forested tributary north of River Bend. In addition, the overall north-south orientation of this regional network likely makes it particularly attractive as a corridor for migrating songbirds during spring and fall migrations. So while the manicured nature of the golf course does not provide suitable habitat for most wildlife, other than a few species that are attracted to golf courses, such as Canada geese and deer, the fact that the whole area is part of a major wildlife movement corridor does, however, result in heavy use by many other wildlife species (Figure 6.2).

Mule deer, white-tailed deer, and moose are all likely to use the dense stands of spruce and travel throughout the general River Bend Golf and Recreation Area (Ken Froggat *pers. comm.*). The stands of mature white spruce, and the thermal protection they provide, have particular value as winter habitat for ungulates. The mature mixedwood vegetation along the edge of the Red Deer River and the valley escarpment likely supports an abundance and diversity of bird species, as well as many of the more common small mammals such as porcupine, red squirrel, snowshoe hare, deer mouse, and red-backed vole. Mature vegetation communities, in general, are valued as wildlife habitat because they often contain a high number of snags (standing dead trees) and deadfall, important factors to the presence of cavity-nesting bird species and small mammals, respectively. Though the golf course itself is unsuitable for many species, the ponds within the course are heavily used by waterbirds.

The location of the ponds within the river valley and near the City limits, as well as the presence of fish are likely contributing factors to the ponds use by numerous species. The fish community, maintained via a drainage pipe link to the Red Deer River, includes northern pike, walleye, yellow perch, and white suckers (Neil Evans *pers. comm.*). Common loons have been reported to nest on the ponds, and common goldeneye, Canada geese, mallards, green-winged teal, northern pintail, and American widgeon have all been sighted (RDRN *pers. comm.*). Fish-eating species reported from the ponds include American white pelican and mergansers (RDRN *pers. comm.*).

6.2.3 Sensitivities

Much of the remaining natural vegetation in the River Bend Golf and Recreation Area is sensitive to disturbance. The steep-sloped valley escarpment is the parks most sensitive natural feature. In addition to the development constraints of the steep slope, the mature mixedwood forest that occupies much of the area would likely become vulnerable to erosion and the wildlife habitat quality decrease if any large-scale development was to take place. Any clearing of forested area would mean a loss of productive and mature forest habitat and could lead to a decrease in species richness. As well, the large size of the trees within the dense stands of white spruce appears to be a unique feature within the City of Red Deer and probably deserves protection to maintain this feature within the future of the park.

The fringe of mixedwood forest, already quite narrow in many places, would lose value if reduced in size. Much of that fringe lies within the defined boundaries of the 100-year flood risk area (WER Engineering Ltd. 1991). Except for the valley escarpment, the whole River Bend Golf and Recreation Area is characterized by alluvium-based soils (Red Deer Regional Planning Commission 1982). Both these factors are associated with various development constraints.

6.3 Opportunities & Constraints

The following issues, comments, opportunities and constraints related to existing and future development in River Bend were identified through Stakeholder Interviews:

- The golf course is as good a municipal golf course as you will find anywhere in the province. It is very well maintained and used.
- The cross country ski trails are excellent and offer opportunity for the novice and the more competitive skier. Opportunities exist to enhance the ski trails in the park and to improve the overall maintenance standard.
- Discovery Canyon is considered by many as the jewel of the park.
- The costs of maintaining all the services offered here are increasing significantly. Increasing golf user fees may not match these costs so additional revenue sources are being considered in order to maintain the current standards.
- The Horseshoe Club has expressed interest in developing hard surfaced courts here, perhaps with shelters in the future.
- The opportunity for youth golf on the Mini Links is an excellent service presently not provided at other Central Alberta golf courses. This is very

appropriate for a municipal golf course to be introducing the game to youth.

- A trail linkage to McKenzie Trail on the east side of the river is a long standing need in order to complete the linkage to trails throughout the Waskasoo Park System. Land ownership continues to be a hurdle, however, the link should be accomplished when these lands are made available.
- Infra-red heaters and shelters at the driving range might increase use and revenue.
- 'No parking' signs on both sides of the road outside the park gates eliminates easy access for cross country skiers who access the trails after sunset and when the gates are locked. The parking restrictions have been put in place to ensure emergency vehicle access to the park is maintained after the gates are closed.

The Community Services Action Plan 2003-2006 recommended the following with respect to development and operations in River Bend:

- Retain as a multi-use recreation area that includes the golf course, Discovery Canyon, ski and hiking trails.
- Endeavour to acquire the balance of private land immediately west of the River Bend Golf Course and Recreation Area and explore the opportunity to expand the golf course to 27 holes
- Explore opportunities to link this area to McKenzie Recreation area through the trails system.
- The River Bend Golf and Recreation Society will continue to operate the golf facilities at the River Bend Golf and Recreation. Enhancements and improvement of the RB golf course, mini-links and clubhouse and expansion of the golf course to 27 holes shall proceed only after a business case and environmental analysis has been conducted and as funding becomes available through the Society. All improvements will be in accordance with the River Bend Golf Course and Recreation Area Master Plan.
- The trails at River Bend will be track-set and groomed by the RBG&RS to acceptable standards.

As noted in the biophysical overview, despite the large size of the River Bend Golf and Recreation Area, it is important that the naturally vegetated areas be retained because of the aesthetic value of those areas, their contribution to the park's total biodiversity, their role as a wildlife corridor, and their provision of erosion control. The development of any further recreational facilities should, therefore, be clustered in areas already cleared of natural vegetation.

6.4 Preliminary Development Ideas

Through the early public consultation activities there were several development ideas which were proposed and evaluated for River Bend. Ultimately, through either community comments or Committee discussion, these ideas were not selected to be included in this development plan. These preliminary development ideas are described

below:

- **Paddle Boats:** The idea of adding paddle boats to a controlled area of the ponds (away from golf) as an added feature of Discovery Canyon was not considered to be practical or necessary.
- **Biathlon Range:** Changes to legislation on firearms control has been a key factor in the lack of use of this facility. It was agreed early on in the study that this facility should be removed from River Bend, due to the lack of use.
- **Serenity Garden:** The idea of developing a serenity garden overlooking River Bend from the mound above the golf course and biathlon range was appealing to some stakeholders (trail users, artists), however, it was agreed that a better location could be found in Waskasoo Park. A site in Bower Ponds was selected.
- **Golf Course Expansion:** Throughout the study, the concept of adding an additional 9 holes to the golf course received strong support from the golf community and mixed support from the public and other stakeholders. For the most part, community concerns related to the impacts on mature forests and wildlife habitat. From the golf course perspective, the benefits included improved accessibility for juniors and to open up more public tee times. As part of the development of the business case for River Bend, numerous scenarios were investigated. The scenario that related to the addition of nine holes did in fact show a positive cash impact of approximately \$600,000 over current operations. Of that total approximately \$230,000 would be required for debt service leaving \$370,000 available for future lifecycle costs and new development.

From The City's perspective, the issues relate to whether the golf course can continue to meet its mandate as a public course, without expansion, and what the benefits of expansion would be in relation to The City's role in providing golf as one of many community recreation activities. From an environmental perspective, the proposed expansion area is part of a regional wildlife corridor and there will be impacts if developed. While the environmental report defines potential mitigation measures it clearly indicates that any decision related to development must be one of balance between providing for recreational use and maintaining natural habitat. If additional land can be obtained, therefore reducing the potential impacts on the natural environment, then a stronger case for the expansion could be made.

In the end, the consensus of the committee, in light of the discussions of the business case and the input of the community through the public consultation activities, was that the nine hole expansion of the golf course would not be included as part of this plan. It was agreed that the River Bend Society (RBS) does an excellent job of operating the golf course, and it is expected that the Society will include an additional nine holes in their



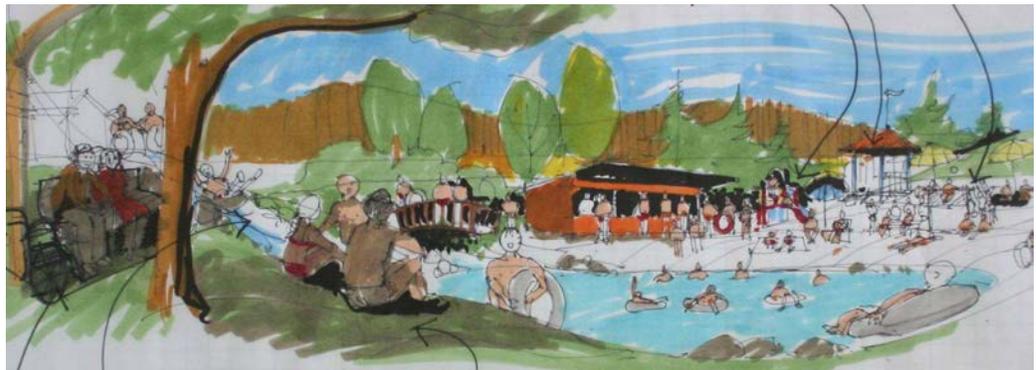
RIVER BEND
Development Concept
ISL September 2005 Figure: **6.3**
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vision for the recreation area over the next twenty years.

6.5 Development Concept

Throughout the study the focus of discussion regarding River Bend was on the expansion of the golf course, improved community access to the park node and protection of the natural resources of the site. As the city grows, this Special Gathering Place will become the focal point for outdoor community activity for residents from the northeast specifically and from the region generally. As such, improvements and expansion of the existing community facilities received strong public support throughout the study. These concepts are defined below and illustrated on Figure 6.3:

- **Discovery Canyon Expansion:** As one of the most popular summer recreation facilities in the City, Discovery Canyon can be an extremely busy place. The concept for the proposed expansion of Discovery Canyon includes an expanded beach area, a 'kiddy creek' tube ride for younger kids, a large scale water spray park and an expanded playground. All this would be supported by additional parking, picnic area, walks and beach volleyball.



- **Night Skiing:** To facilitate after work/evening skiing, a lighted cross country ski course has been proposed for the driving range area of River Bend. A 1.2 km circuit would be created and would be lit with solar powered, low level lights designed to provide suitable visibility and safety without excess light spill or environmental impacts.



- **Secondary Parking Lot:** In support of the night skiing and to provide evening/after work access to the trails a secondary parking lot has been proposed

along the access road by the east end of the driving range. This parking lot, associated security gate and fencing would allow River Bend staff to control access to the golf course while still providing an accessible parking area for trail users, particularly in the winter when the course is closed.

- **Trail Enhancements:** To enhance the site for trail users several additional features have been proposed including additional benches and waste receptacles, interpretive signage, and warm-up/picnic shelters. River Bend, in consultation with the cross country skiers, is committed to maintaining the sky trails to meet skiers' needs and expectations.

6.6 Capital Costs

The estimated capital cost for all of the proposed development for River Bend totals \$1.99 million based on the following development concepts:

Item	Description	Notes	Total
1.0	Discovery Canyon - Beach expansion	400 sq.m - Includes excavation & removals, grading, retaining walls, new sand	\$ 65,000.00
2.0	Discovery Canyon - 'Kiddy Kreek'	Includes excavation & removals, grading, boulders, liner	\$ 120,000.00
3.0	Water Play Park	Major, regional level water play park including all site development, water service, controllers and activators, and water spray components	\$ 750,000.00
4.0	Playground Expansion	Major, regional level playground including all site development and play components	\$ 320,000.00
5.0	Discovery Canyon - Site Development	Includes additional picnic tables (30 @\$700), benches (15 @\$1000), trash/recycling receptacles (10 @ \$1200), groups shelters (2 @\$14,000)	\$ 80,000.00
6.0	Parking Lot Expansion	2250 sq.m - Includes excavation & grading, subgrade preparation, compacted base, concrete curbs, asphalt, line painting and landscaping	\$ 170,000.00
7.0	Night Skiing Circuit	Power Service and 14 lights	\$ 32,000.00
8.0	Lower Parking Lot	20 car gravel parking lot, control gates, light and fencing	\$ 35,000.00
9.0	Trail Improvements	Trail signs on existing trails - 1 major trail head sign (\$4000) and 10 interp signs (\$1700 each)	\$ 21,000.00
Subtotal			\$ 1,593,000.00
25%Contingency & Fees			\$ 398,250.00
River Bend Total			\$ 1,991,250.00

6.7 Recommended Business Case

This business case is built upon information collected from staff and anecdotal information gained through focus groups, public meetings and interviews.

In preparing the business case, a number of key issues were considered:

- The escarpment and mature forest are environmentally sensitive areas that need to be protected.
- The public wants expanded access to the trails in River Bend and to Discovery Canyon, both of which fall under the jurisdiction of River Bend Society.
- Managers of the surrounding private golf courses feel the River Bend course does not compete on a level playing field. Specific concerns of these other Courses relate to fees, high quality of the product and a perception of low tournament costs. Many of these perceptions are incorrect and the City has taken steps to provide the correct information.
- The RBS feels that an additional nine holes are required to meet the needs of junior and league play.
- The City wants to ensure that the mandate of the course, affordable recreation opportunities, is maintained.
- Consider The City's position on public golf in the city.

Scenarios analyzed for the business case included:

Keeping the course as it is with 18 holes

- no changes to programs
- eliminating all tournament play
- changing current pass holder system to user pay system
- eliminating tournament play and changing the pass holder system to user pay

Build an additional 9 holes and new community amenities

- build on existing land
- build on additionally purchased land
- eliminating tournament play
- changing current pass holder system to user pay system
- build community use infrastructure including the expansion to Discovery Canyon and lit trails.

The recommended business case proposes a revision to the operating format by refocusing the mandate to enhance community use, to increase golf user fees, and to alter the governance model. It does not support the expansion of the golf course until such time that the land situation is resolved and The City determines its commitment to expansion of public golf in the city.

The total number of rounds completed at the course in 2004 was 38,310. Of that total, 40 restricted members played 2,066 rounds, 90 senior restricted members played 3,920 rounds and 190 unrestricted members played 10,637 rounds for a total of 16,623 rounds. Therefore pass holders play 43% of rounds played. 2004 revenue of \$297,458

or 30% of total revenue generated (\$989,073) is attributed to pass holders. If 43% of rounds played generate only 30% of the total revenue, then there is clearly an opportunity to increase revenues through an adjustment to the pass holder rates.

To make this adjustment it is suggested that a fee increase be implemented over two years. The anticipated results of this change are twofold, more public will play with better times and existing pass holders will play potentially less often at higher rates.

In the Business Case Analysis, based on the financial information supplied by River Bend, the estimated total surplus generated in 2005 would be \$338,307. Of that, \$140,000 is committed to retire a debt for the clubhouse construction and \$178,000 for the River Bend Reserve on deposit with The City. In order to demonstrate an increased commitment to the community non-golf amenities, the proportion of additional capital/operating funds for Discovery Canyon and trail maintenance will need to be increased. Currently, in addition to the River Bend Reserve annual deposit, The RB Society also budgets for, and carries certain major maintenance initiatives in its operating budget.

It is recommended that the management of the River Bend Golf and Recreation Area establish a vision to guide future development and upgrading. The vision needs to include a commitment to enhancing community access to the recreation area and planning for further enhancements for junior golf. If other courses and taxpayers could see the vision, expansion may be viewed in a better light.

The golf community is a very valuable asset to the recreation area, and it has done an excellent job of developing the course. There is still need for a broader focus on developing the entire recreation area, as a multi-activity node of Waskasoo Park. This could be achieved through the involvement of more residents on the board who are interested in the broad recreation needs in the community.

The River Bend Society is appointed by The City, on recommendation from the Society. It has proven challenging to involve specific individuals who would represent the general public because most of the meeting times revolve around golf course activities. For the future, both the RBS and The City will need to work together to improve the balance of golf interests and general public interests on the River Bend Society Board, in order to focus the node's future development on River Bend as a diverse Special Gathering Place, of which, only one element is golf.

Finally, the Golf and Recreation Area is only accessible by personal vehicles, there is no City transit to the site. The RBS should explore the possibility of offering a shuttle service, especially to junior golfers to ensure their safety. Additionally, if a shuttle service was available the area may become more accessible to more people and thus increase usage of the facilities there. It is expected that in the future, City transit services will be expanded to cover this area.

The **financial impact** of the preferred scenario as well as suggestions from the staff and Board of River Bend are outlined in the following table:

		Status Quo	Increase Fees
Revenue			
	Golf Revenue	\$1,846,287	\$2,035,470
	DC & Trails	\$44,922	\$90,000
Total Operating Revenue		\$1,891,209	\$2,125,470
Expense			
	Golf Expense	\$1,519,569	\$1,519,569
	Cost of Sales	\$302,383	\$302,383
	DC & Trails Expense	\$44,922	\$60,000
	Amortization Cost	(\$314,472)	(\$314,472)
Total Operating Expense		\$1,552,402	\$1,567,480
Operating Surplus/Deficit		\$338,807	\$557,990
Capital Expense	Clubhouse Loan	\$140,000	\$140,000
Net Surplus		\$198,807	\$417,990
	Deposit Fund	\$191,334	\$225,019
Balance After Deposit Fund		\$7,473	\$192,971

Increase in Fees model

- Revenue increased \$189,183 from status quo based on an increase of fees for pass holders and green fees and the elimination the free pull cart and bucket of balls for each user
- An expanded Discovery Canyon will generate increased revenue
- Deposit fund changes based on revenue
- Society reserve is calculated by adding the deposit fund to the surplus.

Current financial statements do not include a specific breakdown of the operating costs for the trails and Discovery Canyon. Based on the existing operation, RB administration estimates that these costs are break-even. In order to better track these costs for future review and analysis, it is suggested that costs to operate the trails and Discovery Canyon be itemized separately in the RB financial statements.

In a major capital budget to The City for the years 2003–2008, RBS identified \$1,180,000 in capital spending. Of that amount, the community elements total \$215,000 (18% of the total), and include the DC playground (\$10,000) in 2003, DC building (\$100,000) in 2005 and Mini-Links upgrade and repair (\$105,000) in 2007. In future capital plans RB will need to address the lifecycle costs for the golf course while still increasing the amount of funds allocated to other park amenities.

6.8 Development Summary

The proposed development concept supports the ongoing management and protection of the escarpment and natural areas of River Bend and the expansion and upgrading of the existing community recreation facilities. The expansion of Discovery Canyon and the other proposed recreational upgrades have been designed to meet future use requirements as the City grows in and around River Bend. In light of the proposed capital expenditures it is important to recognize that the significant use of Discovery Canyon occurs in the summer and that weather can have a dramatic effect on the level of use.

The business case has recommended an increase in green fees and pass holder fees and suggests that the River Bend Society Board prepare a long range vision for the Special Gathering Place as a recreation area with golf as a key interest. Currently, River Bend is developing a new Master Plan (2006) which will identify the needs and related costs of future development in the Park. The RBS Board provides ongoing important work that enables the continuing success of the River Bend Golf Course and Recreation Area. The business case also recommends that the RBS Board and The City work towards a better balance of community and golf interests and that the Board establish a life-cycle costing plan to maintain the golf assets and improve community access to non-golf activities.

The golf course is developed to the desired level of The City and should be maintained at this level for the future enjoyment of users. Although the financial argument for an additional nine holes is strong, it is the protection of the natural areas by minimizing development that is most important at this time. The decision not to include the expansion in the Master Plan is based on the protection of the natural environment, the benefits of having additional land on which to expand, and the consideration that the City is already meeting their mandate of providing accessible and affordable golf for its citizens under the current operating format and facility.

7.0 Master Plan Implementation

7.1 Development Summary

As defined in the previous sections, the recommended development concept for each of the Special Gathering Places has evolved during the study through the discussions with the Committee, stakeholders and the public. With a concept plan for each location in place, it will be up to Council and administration to move forward with the implementation of the Master Plan in a staged approach. The following section provides a summary of the recommended development and priorities for each of the Special Gathering Places. It also defines the overall development priorities, an implementation framework and an implementation schedule for the staged implementation of the Master Plan.

The following is a summary of the recommended development concept for each of the four Special Gathering Places.

- **Heritage Ranch:** As a gateway to Waskasoo Park, Heritage Ranch and the new Waskasoo Discovery Centre will provide interpretive and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. The Ecological Services Section of the Recreation Parks and Culture Department will be the primary tenant with the added benefit of providing site management and security. The change in the focus of the park from equestrian to the 'Gateway to Waskasoo Park', and the plans to reclaim parts of the site to natural state provide an important environmental focus and sustainable programs which fits well with The City's strategic and environmental objectives.
- **Bower Ponds:** Elevating family activities and arts & culture programming brings a strong focus to an urban park and will encourage increased usage. Retrofitting the Pavilion will better meet user needs and improving the stage facility will facilitate increased programming for regular, small scale performances. Enhancing the park will compliment the plans for the Riverlands project, and with the new developments the park will draw users from downtown and from around the city.
- **Three Mile Bend:** This site will be protected and enhanced as the city's only off-leash dog park. A commitment to improved water quality and protection and interpretation of the unique natural features of the park will provide for a sustainable environment. Improvements to the facilities for the Remote Control Car Club, Freestyle Ski Club and Canoe/Kayak Club will be welcomed, and there should be good partnering opportunities for these improvements.
- **River Bend:** The development concept supports the ongoing management and protection of the escarpment and natural areas of the River Bend node. The expansion and upgrading of the existing community recreation features have been designed to meet future use requirements as the city grows. The business case has recommended an increase in green fees and passholder

fees and suggests that the RBS Board prepare a long range vision for the Special Gathering Place as a recreation area with golf as a key interest. The golf course is developed to the desired level of City Council and should be maintained for the future enjoyment of users.

- **Waskasoo Park Programming:** During the study there were three program concepts proposed which apply to the overall Waskasoo Park system: (1) **Webpage:** a Waskasoo Park webpage could provide special features such as real-time views into the parks, captured video of animals in the parks or special park events. The City could utilize cameras installed in the parks to enhance overall security and community groups could use the site to advertise special events. (2) **Park Rangers:** The concept of Park Rangers within Waskasoo Park has been proposed previously and was well supported during this study. Park Rangers would provide year round enforcement and education for the entire Waskasoo Park system. The City is presently considering the implementation of Park Rangers. (3) **Special Events Coordinator:** The need for a city-wide special events coordinator has been identified by both city staff and by Waskasoo Park user groups. Each of the special gathering places, in addition to other nodes in the park, could benefit by the effort of a special events coordinator.

7.2 Development Priorities

During the final Steering Committee meeting, the committee was asked to rank the recommended development concepts for each of the Special Gathering Places. In determining the rankings, individual committee members considered the development scope, the capital costs, potential related/linked projects, and other general considerations. The following is a summary of the key projects identified by the Committee for each of the Special Gathering Places. The rankings are provided in detail in Appendix 8.6.

- **Heritage Ranch:** The top three priorities for Heritage Ranch were improved directional and information signage, development of interpretive trails and the development of the Waskasoo Discovery Centre.
- **Bower Ponds:** The top three priorities for Bower Ponds are the family use features, stage enhancements and Art in the Park. Each of these projects is focused on encouraging increased use.
- **Three Mile Bend:** The top three priorities for Three Mile Bend are focused on improving the environment and the amenities for the primary users. The top three projects were Dog Park amenity improvements, water quality improvements and interpretive trails.
- **River Bend:** for River Bend, the committee members selected the expansion of Discovery Canyon (Beach & Kiddie Kreek) and associated site development as the top three priorities.

With consideration of the individual rankings of the priorities for each of the Special Gathering Places, the committee members were then asked to identify their top ten priority projects from the overall list of 36 projects. The results of this exercise were compiled, two projects were combined and four additional projects were added. During preparation of the report the consulting team recommended an additional 3 projects. The following table identifies 17 priority development projects and the associated development costs of close to \$5.1 million. The overall total development cost for all 36 projects is estimated to be \$18.5 million (See Appendix 8.6).

Overall Rank	Special Gathering Place	Development Project	Capital Cost	25% Fees & Contingency	Total
1	Bower Ponds	Family Use Features	\$ 515,000	\$ 128,750	\$ 643,750.00
2	Heritage Ranch	Waskasoo Centre	\$ 1,900,000	\$ 475,000	\$ 2,375,000.00
3	Heritage Ranch	Interpretive Trails	\$ 175,000	\$ 43,750	\$ 218,750.00
4	River Bend	Parking Lot Expansion	\$ 170,000	\$ 42,500	\$ 212,500.00
5	Bower Ponds	Stage Enhancements	\$ 240,000	\$ 60,000	\$ 300,000.00
5	Heritage Ranch	Roads & Parking	\$ 125,000	\$ 31,250	\$ 156,250.00
7	Heritage Ranch	Directional & Information Signage	\$ 140,000	\$ 35,000	\$ 175,000.00
8	River Bend	Discovery Canyon - Beach & Kiddie Kreek	\$ 185,000	\$ 46,250	\$ 231,250.00
9	Bower Ponds	Art In Park	\$ 26,000	\$ 6,500	\$ 32,500.00
10	Three Mile Bend	Canoe/Kayak Circuit & Boardwalk/Pier	\$ 99,000	\$ 24,750	\$ 123,750.00
11	Three Mile Bend	Dog Park Improvements	\$ 75,000	\$ 18,750	\$ 93,750.00
12	Three Mile Bend	Water Quality Improvements	\$ 12,000	\$ 3,000	\$ 15,000.00
13	Three Mile Bend	RC Car Club Improvements	\$ 32,000	\$ 8,000	\$ 40,000.00
14	River Bend	Trail Improvements	\$ 21,000	\$ 5,250	\$ 26,250.00
15	River Bend	Discovery Canyon Site Development	\$ 80,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 100,000.00
15	River Bend	Waskasoo Centre Eco-Park	\$ 230,000	\$ 57,500	\$ 287,500.00
15	Three Mile Bend	Interpretive Trails	\$ 21,000	\$ 5,250	\$ 26,250.00
Totals			\$ 4,046,000	\$ 1,011,500	\$ 5,057,500.00

7.3 Implementation Framework

As part of the discussion and identification of the priority development projects, the Committee was asked to identify parameters or criteria which should form the framework for implementation. The following decision making considerations were identified:

- **Realistic Timelines:** projects and the associated development timelines should be realistic in terms of expectations for delivery. Projects should also be developed in a logical order to ensure that related projects are linked together and support each other. Future projects should not impact existing development.
- **Planning Tool:** the priority projects list and implementation schedule are subject to further detailed planning and budget processes.
- **Changing Priorities:** recognition that priorities may change due to opportunities and circumstances related to land use, budgets, partnerships, community involvement or environmental needs. The plan must be flexible.
- **Momentum:** implementation of lower cost, immediate impact projects will be important to overall development momentum and community/partner buy-in. There is also a need to balance projects across all four Special Gathering Places.
- **Partnerships:** many of the development projects have excellent partnership opportunities. Key partners include the County of Red Deer, River Bend Golf and Recreation Society, Service and Recreational Clubs, Culture Link, Friends of Three Mile Bend, Red Deer College, Red Deer River Naturalists, Fort Normandeau Historical Society, Evergreen Foundation, and Tree Canada.
- **Contract Operators:** proposed development is designed to strengthen and enhance current operations making them more viable. City should solicit the input of current operators on considerations such as transition from old operations to new.
- **Operations:** during detailed design, operational issues and budgets should be prepared for all new development projects. Operation levels and budgets will need to be monitored and adjusted to reflect new development.

7.4 Five Year Implementation Schedule

With consideration of the development priorities and the implementation framework a five year implementation schedule was prepared. The schedule (on the next page) identifies the development projects for each year and the associated development costs (capital, contingency & fees). Key development considerations have also been identified. It is important to note that planning and detailed design for some projects has been included in the year prior to the planned construction.

Year	Special Gathering Place	Development Project	Key Development Considerations	Total
1	Heritage Ranch	Waskasoo Centre	Visioning, planning, programming, concept, detailed design, Sustainable design	\$ 237,500.00
1	Three Mile Bend	RC Car Club Improvements	Car Club prepared to partner immediately on improvements. Partial development in Year 1	\$ 18,000.00
1	River Bend	Trail Improvements	Good partnering and community buy-in projects	\$ 26,250.00
Year 1 Total				\$ 281,750.00
2		Planning & Design	Bower Ponds Art in the Park & Stage Enhance; River Bend DC Beach/Kiddy Kreek/Playground	\$ 103,125.00
2	Heritage Ranch	Waskasoo Centre	Construction of this major, high profile project, reflecting the future of Waskasoo Park.	\$ 2,137,500.00
2	Heritage Ranch	Directional & Information Signage	Vision, Market position, materials and signage for new Heritage Ranch/Waskasoo Discovery Centre	\$ 175,000.00
2	Three Mile Bend	RC Car Club Improvements	Complete the development	\$ 22,000.00
2	Three Mile Bend	Dog Park Improvements	High levels of use, improve user experience and site. Offsets impacts of City Yard development	\$ 93,750.00
2	Three Mile Bend	Water Quality Improvements	Positive environmental impacts, improves site, low cost, good sponsorship/grant project	\$ 15,000.00
2	River Bend	Discovery Canyon Site Development	Related to Discovery Canyon expansion	\$ 100,000.00
Year 2 Total				\$ 2,646,375.00
3		Planning & Design	Bower Ponds Family Use Features; River Bend Water Park	\$ 156,250.00
3	Bower Ponds	Stage Enhancements	Good project in support of improved programming for site. Partnership opportunities	\$ 270,000.00
3	Bower Ponds	Family Use Features	Top ranked project, site available, water service required. Immediate impact, increased use	\$ 643,750.00
3	Bower Ponds	Art In Park	Good link to Culture Master Plan, provides additional evolution of park programming/activities	\$ 32,500.00
3	Three Mile Bend	Interpretive Trails	Good partnering and community buy-in projects	\$ 26,250.00
Year 3 Total				\$ 1,128,750.00
4	Heritage Ranch	Roads & Parking	Related to Waskasoo Centre development	\$ 156,250.00
4	Three Mile Bend	Canoe/Kayak Circuit & Boardwalk/Pier	Combination of two linked projects. Good Partnering opportunity	\$ 123,750.00
4	River Bend	Parking Lot Expansion	Already identified by River Bend as need	\$ 212,500.00
Year 4 Total				\$ 492,500.00
5		Planning & Design	Bower Ponds Pavillion Expansion	\$ 87,500.00
5	Heritage Ranch	Interpretive Trails	Good partnering and community buy-in projects	\$ 218,750.00
5	Heritage Ranch	Waskasoo Centre Eco-Park	Allows two years for deveopment & marketing of (indoor) Waskasoo Centre Programming.	\$ 287,500.00
5	River Bend	Discovery Canyon - Beach & Kiddie Kreek	Expansion in Year 5 reflects population growth	\$ 231,250.00
Year 5 Total				\$ 825,000.00
Five Year Master Plan Total				\$ 5,374,375.00

7.5 A Twenty Year Vision

During the first five years of this Master Plan, just less than half of the overall projects have been identified for implementation. This is a fairly aggressive schedule from a planning, budgeting, design and construction perspective but it reflects the importance of the Waskasoo Park Special Gathering Places to community identity, health and values. The implementation of the priority projects will have immediate impact on the use and enjoyment of the Special Gathering Places.

During the fifth year of the implementation schedule the Master Plan should be reviewed by City staff in consultation with stakeholders. A new 5 year list of priority projects and implementation schedule should be developed. At this time additional projects may be considered or existing proposed projects may be modified. It is important that the plan remain flexible to accommodate changing needs and partnership opportunities.

The City's overall goal of the Waskasoo Park Special Gathering Places Study was to develop a plan which would reenergize the Special Gathering Places with innovative and sustainable facilities, programs and services. Through the work of the committee, the project team, the stakeholders and the public, this Master Plan has met that goal and provides the City with an important tool for ensuring that the next twenty years of Waskasoo Park development, operations and use are as successful as the first twenty years.

When implemented, the plans and recommendations defined in this report will assist the City in enhancing the four Special Gathering Places so that they are sustainable and reflective of community needs and desires for now and into the future.

8.0 Appendix

- 8.1 Appendix A: Trends & Best Practices**
- 8.2 Appendix B: Co-Design Workshop**
- 8.3 Appendix C: Discovery Tour**
- 8.4 Appendix D: Open House**
- 8.5 Appendix E: River Bend Expansion Environmental Assessment**
- 8.6 Appendix F: Development Concept Rankings**