



Strathcona County **Regional Park Master Plan**

Backgrounder Document

February 2022

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Introduction

Strathcona County is embarking on a process to develop a Master Plan for a new 290-acre Regional Park on the North Saskatchewan River.

What is a Master Plan?

The Master Plan will give the County direction on the type of development and activity that is desired for the park for the next 15 years. The Master Plan will respond to community needs by engaging with the public and stakeholders throughout its development. Direction for the Master Plan will also come from municipal, provincial, and federal policy and an understanding of what may be appropriate for the park based on site analysis.

What is a Regional Park?

A Regional Park is part of a larger integrated and connected network of open spaces, serving a range of ecological and recreational purposes. These parks become outdoor destinations for people near and far.

Regional Parks can meet many different needs within the community with a variety of amenities in both indoor and outdoor spaces. They also have the potential to meet very specific needs (such as specialized sports facilities or targeted community gathering spaces) that draw people from a larger catchment area.

Strathcona County's new Regional Park will benefit the community through:

- **Nature:** Ecology and nature experiences
- **Park Uses:** Activities and recreation
- **Movement:** Getting to and around the park
- **Learning:** History, education, and storytelling
- **Creativity:** Arts and culture
- **Community:** Social connections and wellbeing

These themes will be used throughout the project to identify opportunities and challenges in the park and to present future park concepts.





Help shape the vision for the park for residents to enjoy for decades to come!

Public and stakeholder feedback is essential to ensure that the Master Plan reflects current and future community needs.

During Phase 1 of engagement (February 2022), you will be asked for ideas on what the new Regional Park could become for the community and how you would like to use it. Feedback from this round will be used to develop a shared park vision, guiding principles, and draft park concepts.

In the second round of engagement (Spring/Summer 2022), you will be presented with two or more park plans, each with its own amenities and activities that reflect the shared vision. You will be asked to provide feedback on which elements of the designs you prefer. Your feedback will be used to craft the final park concept for the Master Plan.

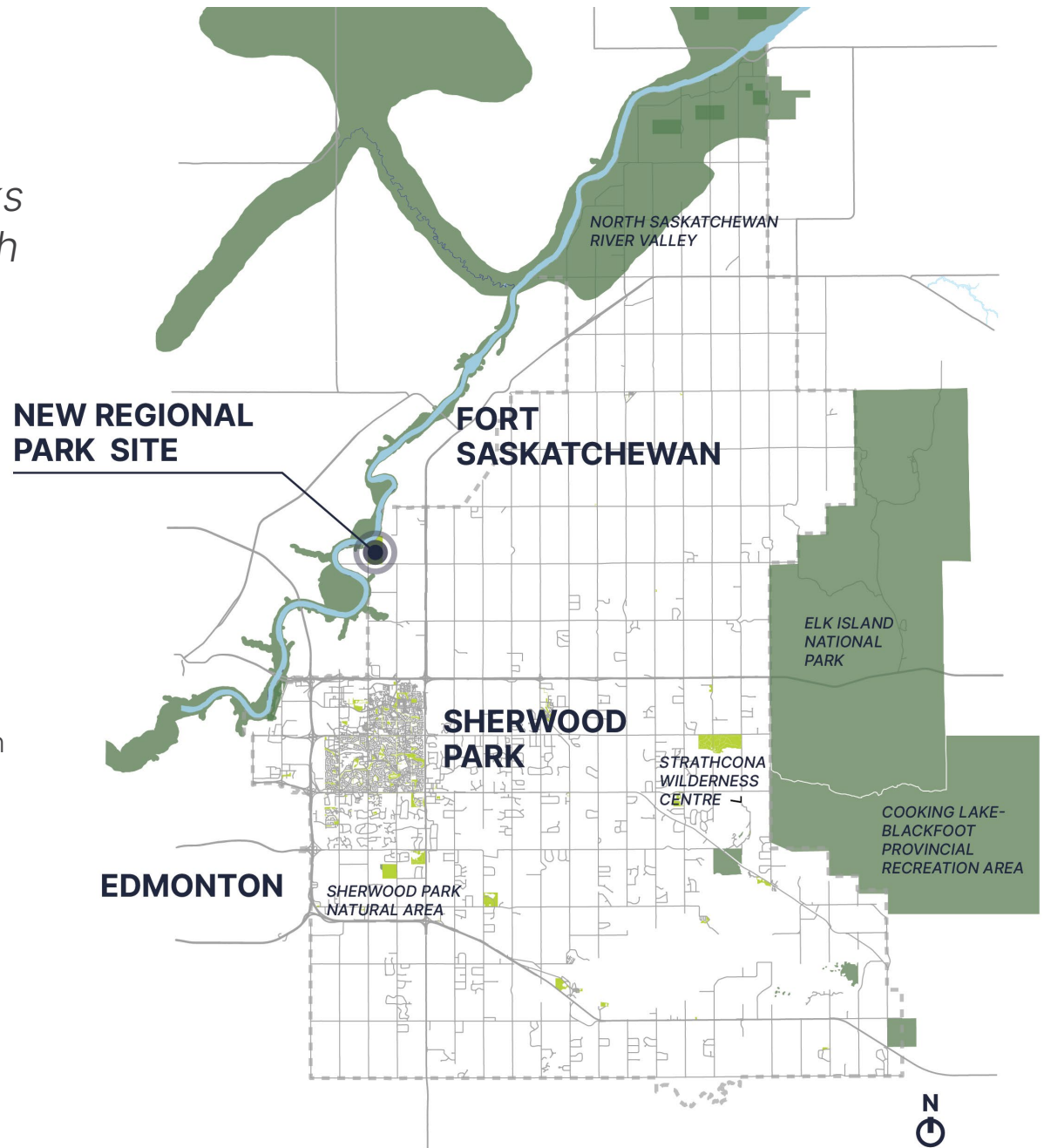
Visit strathcona.ca/newregionalpark to learn more.

Environmental Context

The new Regional Park will become part of a system of parks and open spaces along the North Saskatchewan River and within the surrounding landscape.

The North Saskatchewan River is an environmentally sensitive landscape and an essential wildlife corridor in the region. It has shaped the land over thousands of years and still shapes how we relate to the landscape today. Historically, the park site was a wooded upland habitat connected to creeks and streams that supported a diversity of plants and wildlife. The climate, geology, and soil conditions of the region made the site viable for farming and quarry operations as Alberta developed.

Five artificial water bodies were created on site during quarrying operations. They provide some habitat for birds, waterfowl, and amphibians, and have the potential to support fish. Past land uses have fragmented habitat on the site. The Master Plan has an opportunity to conserve, restore, and connect habitats in the park.



Existing Environmental Conditions

Site Stories and Historic Resources

The new Regional Park has a rich and layered history. The land itself is a wonderful recorder of past events. By studying the layers of soil and rock under the surface, we can learn about processes like glaciation and the evolution of the North Saskatchewan River Valley.

Palaeontology and Archaeology

Two palaeontological sites were previously recorded in the region of the new Regional Park. These sites contained fossilized bones of horses, bison, and other animals.

Although there are no recorded archaeological sites within the park boundaries, archaeological sites (such as campsites and workshops for making stone tools) in the surrounding area bear witness to the presence and activities of ancestral Indigenous peoples that date back thousands of years. Landforms along water sources, including the North Saskatchewan River, tend to be an indicator of high archaeological potential.

Indigenous Knowledge and History

The County held two engagements with Indigenous Communities and Organizations in 2020 and 2021. The engagements resulted in several recommendations for the Master Plan and the planning process, including Indigenous knowledge and history that could be incorporated into the park.

Métis Scrip

Historical records indicate that a portion of the park site was owned for several years by a Métis woman named Marie-Rose Cardinal in the mid-1880s. Cardinal was a residential school survivor. She took scrip (which Métis people living in the West obtained in exchange for their land rights) in the form of land and cash, and sold the land in 1887.

Early Homesteads and Family Farms

Relics of an 1880s homestead owned by Laurence Adamson (an English settler) were found during a field visit in 2021. Based on written records, the homestead originally consisted of several buildings on the property including a log house, two stables, a granary, a cow house, shed, and pig pens. Archival records from this time period help us to learn about how people lived in the late 19th century, how property was acquired and transferred, the significance of Métis scrip, and the transition to large-scale farming at the beginning of the 20th century.

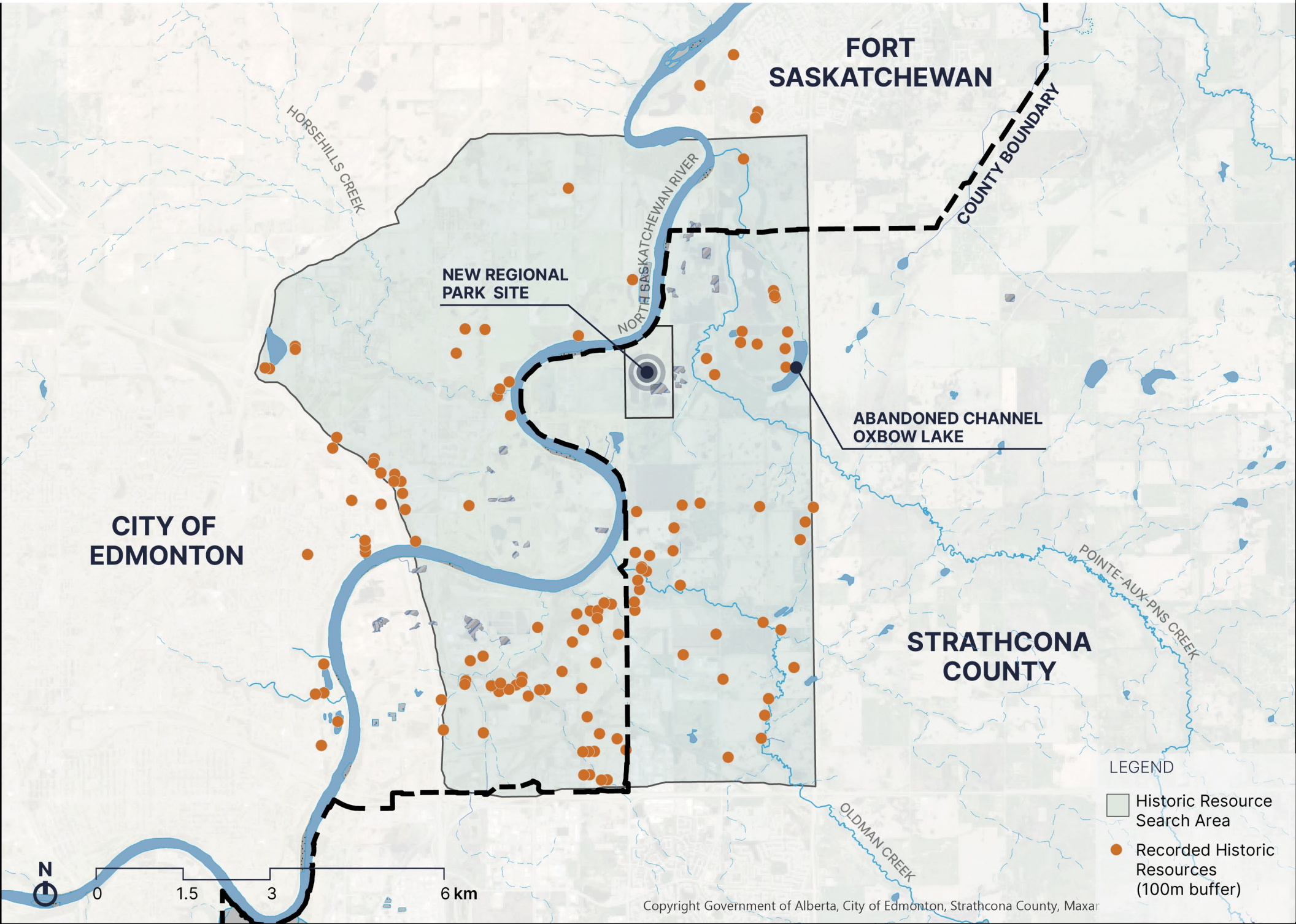
Communities of farm families, merchants, and service providers developed around cultural centres like schools, churches, fire halls, and community halls. Several families lived and farmed on the park site during the first half of the 20th century. The area became known informally as 'Poverty Flats', even though the farms in the area raised all types of livestock and crops, including vegetable gardens.

Gravel Extraction

The park site was identified as a location for gravel and sand extraction in the early 1980s by a subsidiary of the company now known as LaFarge Canada Ltd. The gravel from the site and other quarries in the region was used in the development of buildings and other aspects of Alberta's infrastructure.

Pit operations continued until 2017, resulting in dramatic changes to the landscape. Material stockpiles and pits have created new landforms and water bodies across the site. The legacies of farming and gravel extraction have left substantial footprint on the landscape, with opportunities to re-establish native ecologies.

REGIONAL HISTORIC RESOURCES



Hydrography

The new Regional Park is located along the North Saskatchewan River within the Beaverhills Subwatershed. Surface water on site flows eastward through the park, where it eventually enters Pointe-Aux-Pins Creek and the North Saskatchewan River. There are five artificial water bodies on site that were created during quarrying operations. They range from six to nine metres deep. These water bodies cannot be classified using the Alberta Wetland Classification System, but they do provide some habitat for wildlife.

Because the top of bank along the edge of the new Regional Park is quite steep (approximately nine metres higher than the river), the park does not tend to flood from the river during high water events. However, the artificial water bodies have been known to flood in the past. This is likely due to groundwater from the Bearpaw aquifer which is 80-100 metres thick and less than 100 metres below the surface. A more in-depth subsurface assessment would be needed to provide the County with information to help plan for water management and flooding in the new Regional Park.

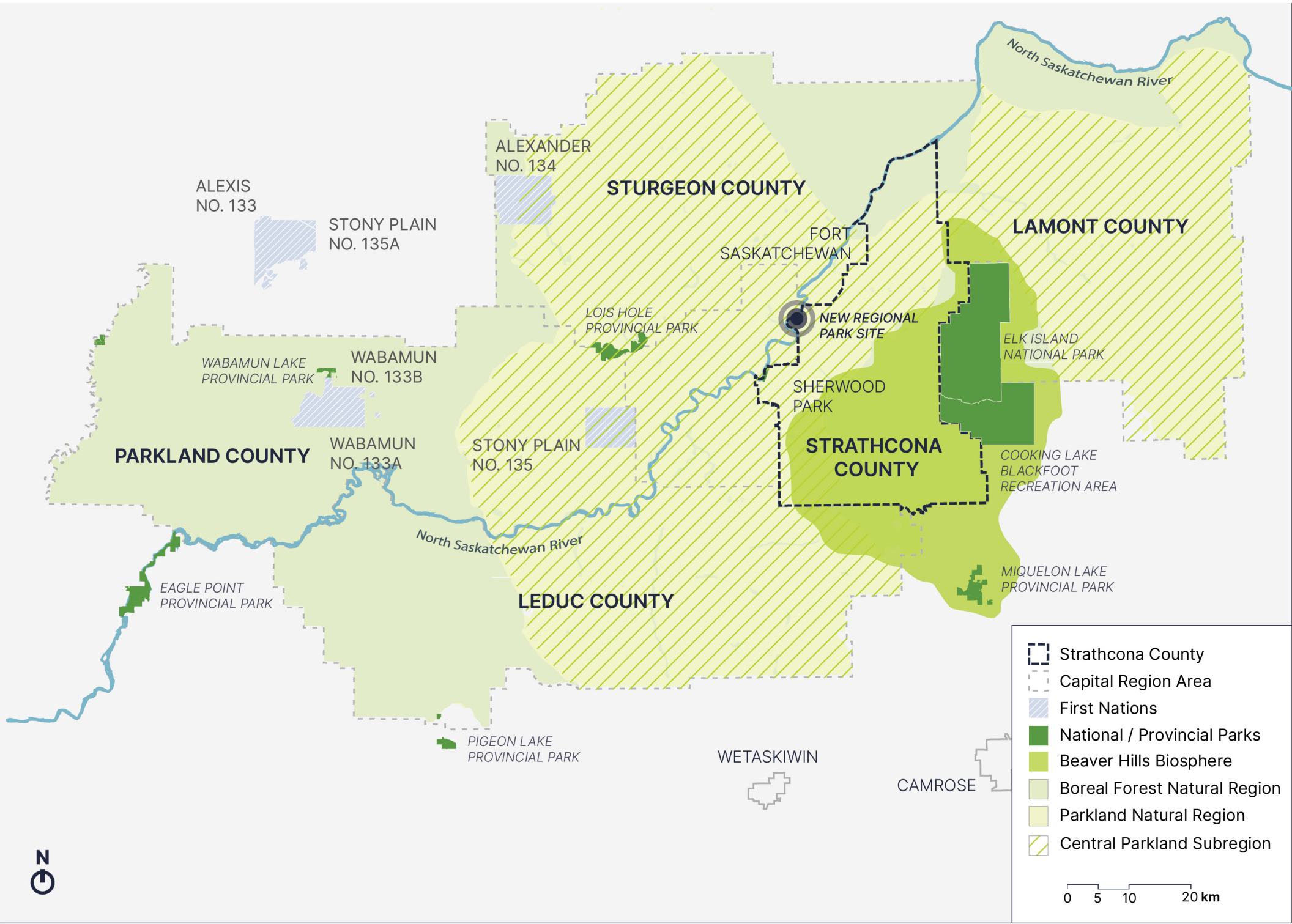
Climate, Geology, and Soil

Strathcona County is located in the Central Parkland Subregion. The climate of this Subregion is subhumid, continental with short, cool summers and long, cold winters. The mean May to September temperature is 13°C with an average growing period of 90 days. Annual precipitation averages 350 mm, with the majority coming as rain in June and July. Winters are dry with approximately 60 mm of precipitation. Typical vegetation in this Subregion includes aspen, balsam poplar, and shrubs such as snowberry, rose, choke cherry, and Saskatoon.

The underlying bedrock consists of deposits from the Cretaceous aged Edmonton Formation. This formation includes sandstone, mudstone, and shale with ironstone and coal beds. Subsurface materials also include alluvial deposits of gravel, sand, and silt. Dominant soils in the area are Eluviated Black Chernozems and Orthic Dark Gray Chernozems, but soils on the site have been significantly altered by pit activities and are not rated. There are several stockpiles of aggregate material and soils on site.



ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT



LOCAL ECOLOGY

Habitat

Priority habitat for conservation and/or restoration in the park includes all relatively undisturbed areas, including creeks, tributaries, riparian areas, water bodies, adjacent uplands, and remnant tree stands.

Although the water bodies on site are artificial, the three water bodies to the south have emergent vegetation zones that provide habitat for waterfowl, songbirds, and some shorebirds. Species observed near the northern water bodies are limited to mallards, red-winged blackbirds, and song sparrows. The water bodies are deep enough to support fish and amphibians. No fish surveys have been conducted, but boreal chorus frogs were observed on site.

A desktop assessment did not reveal any records of sensitive plants or wildlife species on site. Detailed vegetation inventories will be required prior to park development. A search of the Alberta Fisheries & Wildlife Management Information System (FWMIS) identified the following species that could exist in the park area:

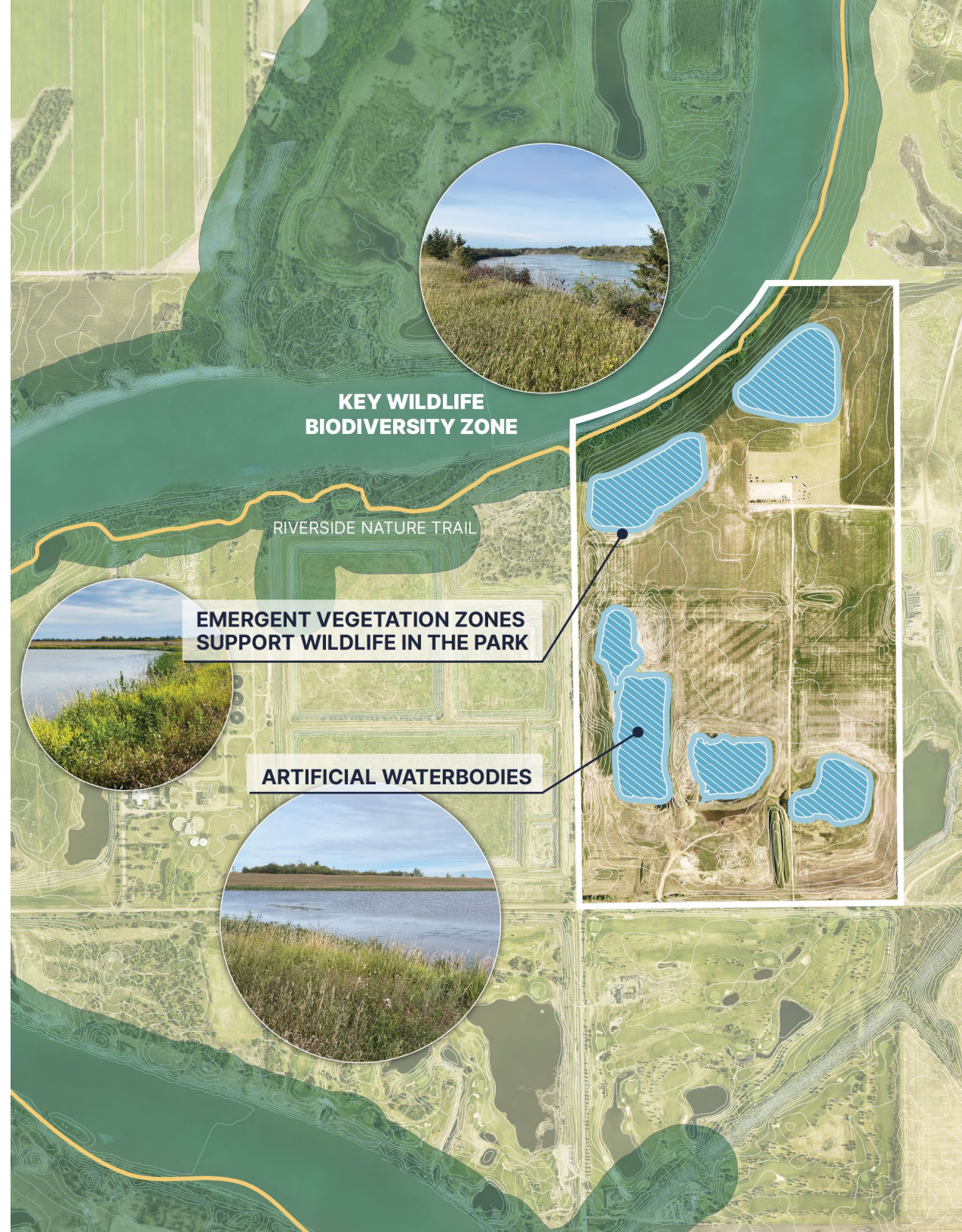
- Minnow family
- White sucker
- Goldeye
- River shiner
- Mooneye
- Northern pike
- Silver redhorse
- Walleye
- Bald eagle
- Red-sided garter snake



Environmental Sensitivities

The following identified environmental sensitivities will be considered in the development of the Master Plan for the new Regional Park.

- The North Saskatchewan River is a provincially significant feature. Areas that have a high sensitivity to disturbance in the river valley include riparian forests and valley walls, which tend to be unstable. Future development should prevent or minimize degradation of key riparian wildlife habitat.
- The artificial water bodies are connected to the river through groundwater, and surface runoff from the park eventually enters the river via Pointe-Aux-Pins Creek. The Master Plan should look to improve water quality on site and avoid impacts to the river.
- Most of the site has been disturbed from previous farming and quarrying operations. The small patches of forest and riparian vegetation that remain provide essential habitat and wildlife connectivity in the river valley. Much of the remaining wildlife habitat is located in a Key Wildlife Biodiversity Zone near the river, which is used to prevent loss and fragmentation of habitat. These areas should be conserved and prioritized for wildlife connectivity.
- Although sensitive plants and wildlife have not been identified in the park area, the site is within the Bald Eagle and Sharp-tailed Grouse Survey Areas. It is also in the yellow zone (high to moderate risk) on the Whirling Disease Decontamination Risk Zone Map. (Whirling disease is caused by a parasite that affects some fish species.)
- Residual impacts of farming and quarrying operations on soil and water quality are currently unknown. Water and soil tests will help to determine if there are any risks to the North Saskatchewan River due to contamination and whether remediation is required prior to public use.



LAND USE AND GROWTH AREAS

Land Use Context

Land Use Designation

Strathcona County's Municipal Development Plan (2017) Bylaw 20-2017 locates the future park site within the Agriculture Large Holdings Policy Area. Priorities for this Policy Area include: agricultural and livestock operations with minimal fragmentation; local food production and distribution; and respect for rural landscapes, natural landscapes, and heritage.

The County's urban service areas are directly south of the park, with nearby land uses including: Light/Medium Industrial, Residential, Commercial, and Transportation/Utility Corridor.

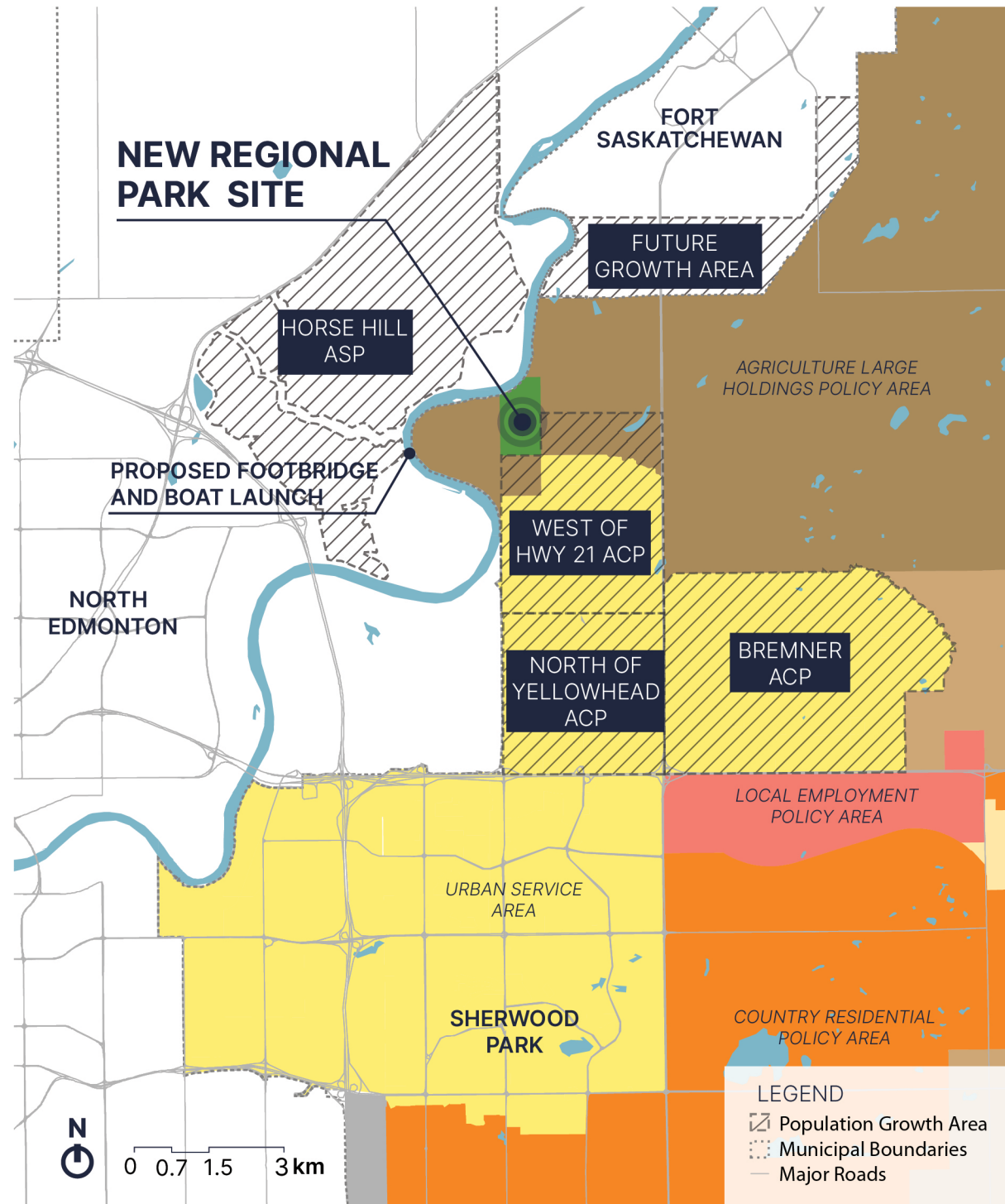
Current On-Site Uses

Most of the site for the new Regional Park is currently not accessible to the public. Much of the site is being farmed to maintain the land and control the spread of weeds. The Edmonton Radio Control Society leases a portion of the land for flying radio controlled aircraft. The Strathcona County Regional Trail along the north edge of the site is a popular trail for active recreation, including walking, dog-walking, running, and cycling.

Adjacent Land Use

The surrounding land uses include the following:

- The Bremner Lagoon Site west of the new Regional Park is owned by the City of Edmonton. Reclamation of the site is slated to begin in 2022. A risk assessment indicated that the site does not pose a risk to the North Saskatchewan River.



- An active gravel quarry is located to the east of the new Regional Park. This activity is not anticipated to be a major nuisance for the enjoyment of the new Regional Park due to noise, sight lines, or odors.
- The Legends Golf and Country Club is located south of the new Regional Park site and has been in operation for over 14 years.
- Other nearby land uses include agriculture and light/medium industrial to the south. Potential development across the river may include restored natural areas and a bird sanctuary.

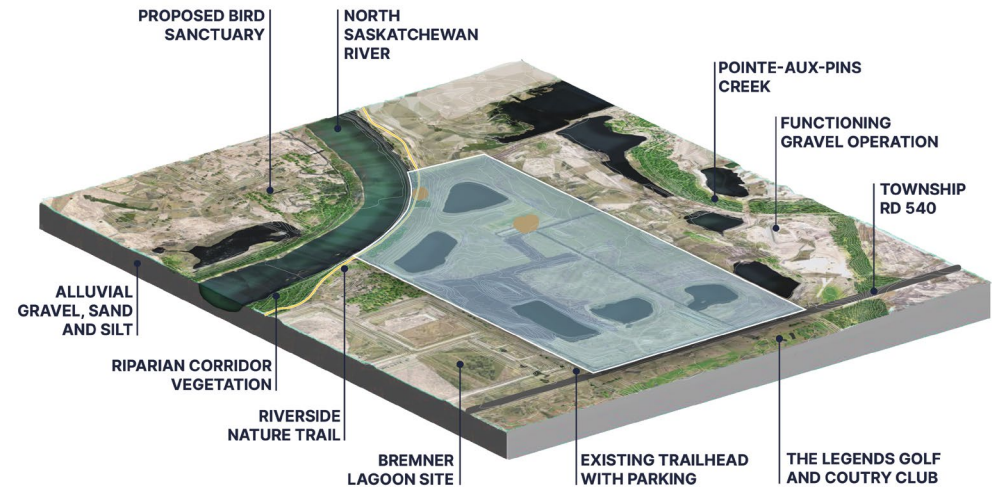
Utilities and Infrastructure

Currently, the site for the new Regional Park has minimal utility infrastructure. A power line extends from Township Road 540 to the Edmonton Radio Control Society site. A Telus line also runs along Township Road 540. There is a Utility Right of Way along the southern edge of the park for a buried gas pipeline and a buried sewer ROW on the east edge of the site. Future studies will help to determine the viability and potential environmental impacts of bringing more utilities to the site.

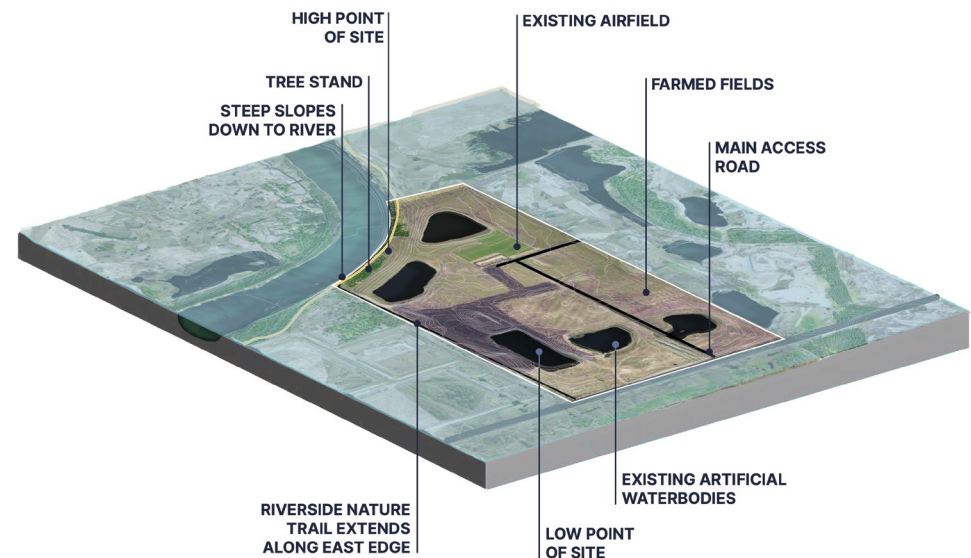
Future Park Use

The types and intensity of park uses selected for the new Regional Park must respect areas of higher environmental sensitivity on site. For example, only passive activity is recommended within the Key Wildlife Biodiversity Corridor along the river. Trails, pathways, and amenities planned for the site should minimize impacts to key wildlife corridors. The water bodies on site have potential to be used for recreational purposes, such as boating or fishing, but the impacts of these activities need to be studied further to ensure the environmental quality is not significantly degraded by introducing human activity.

SURROUNDING CONDITIONS



ON-SITE CONDITIONS





Open Space and Connectivity

Strathcona County Parks

With over 130 parks and playgrounds, 15 outdoor courts for tennis, volleyball, pickleball and basketball, as well as numerous fields and diamonds, Strathcona County offers a wide variety of places to participate in many activities.

Public engagement results from the Strathcona County Recreation and Culture Strategy (2019) identified several outdoor amenities that County residents would like to see increased or improved in their parks. These include picnic areas/shelters, event grounds, dog off-leash areas, amphitheatres/bandstands, natural areas, outdoor rinks, trails, and more. These will be considered in the development of the Master Plan.

Getting to the Park

Existing pedestrian and cyclist access to the site occurs along the Strathcona County Regional Trail, which runs along the river. Vehicle access is available off of Township Road 540. Residents of Fort Saskatchewan and Sherwood Park can drive to the new Regional Park in about 5-10 minutes. Most residents of the City of Edmonton could potentially drive to the park in under 45 minutes.

Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan are within a one hour bike ride of the park. The park site is not readily accessible for pedestrians. Walking to the park from the edge of either community would take someone approximately 1.25 hours.

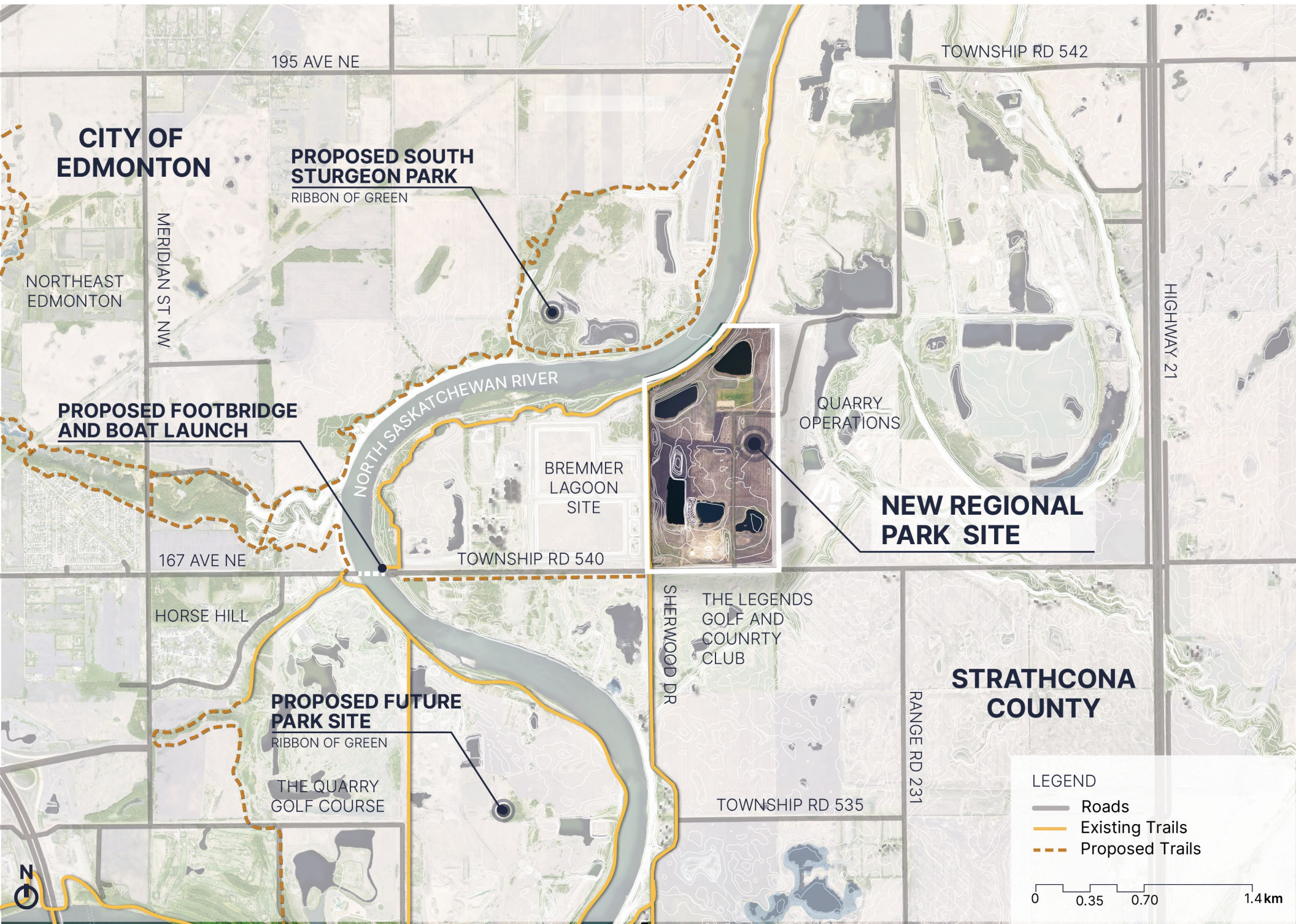
Proposed Footbridge

In partnership with the River Valley Alliance, a new footbridge is planned west of the new Regional Park site. The Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge is slated for construction in the summer of 2022 and will improve pedestrian connections between the new Regional Park and north Edmonton.

River Access

Due to the steep slope at the river's edge, direct river access will not be possible in the new Regional Park. Existing nearby boat launches include the Fort Saskatchewan Boat Launch (7km downstream) and the Capilano Boat Launch in Edmonton (20km upstream).

SITE LOCATION

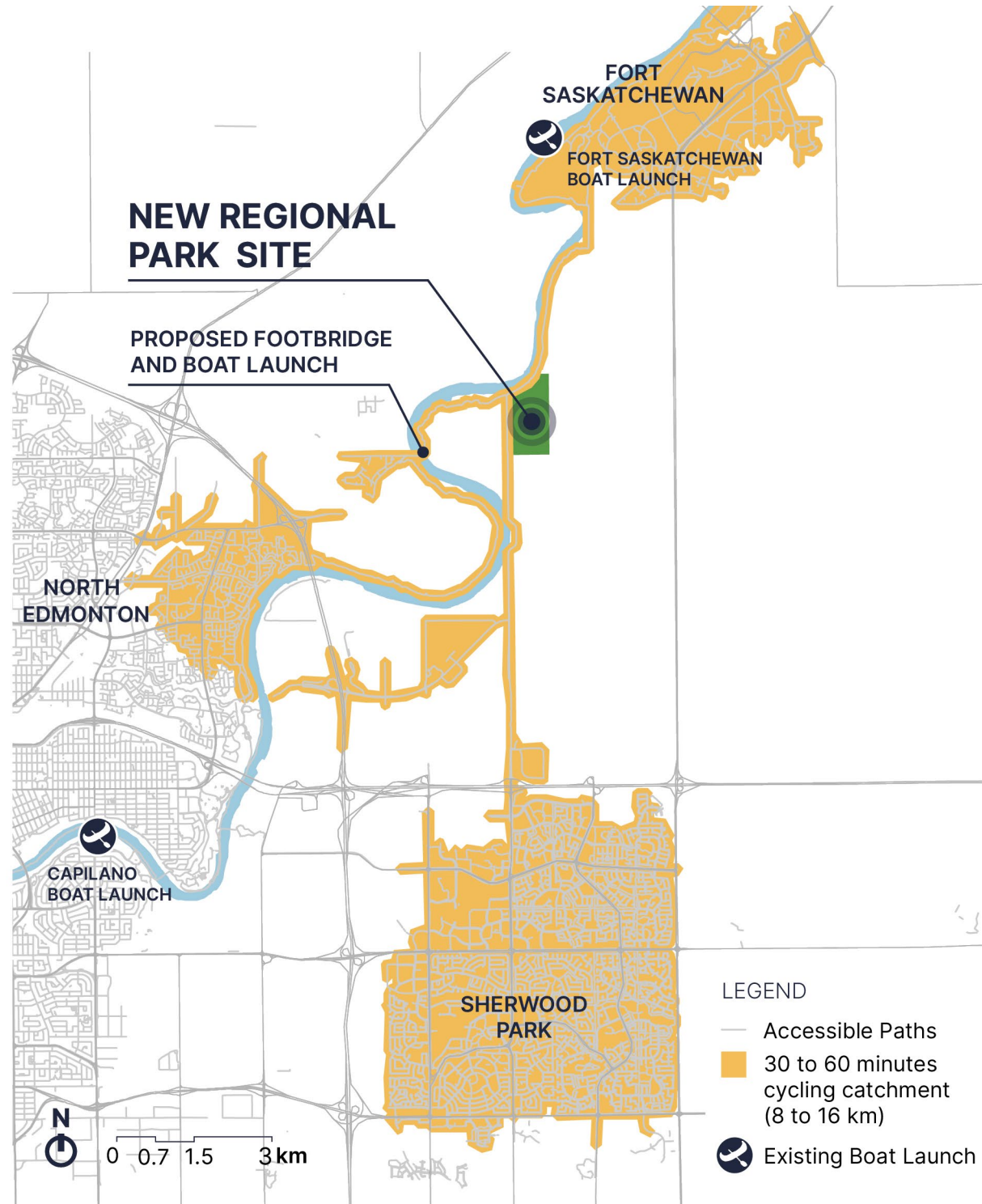


In partnership with the River Valley Alliance, three new boat launches, two docks, and one hand launch will be constructed in Edmonton and Strathcona County in the coming years. One new boat launch will be located at the Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge west of the new Regional Park.

Getting around the Park

Access within the site is limited to a gravel road that services the Edmonton Radio Control Society. Currently, there are few limitations for trail and pathway development in the park. The site is relatively flat and there is high visibility into the park from adjacent roads and pathways. The Strathcona County Regional Trail is more secluded due to dense vegetation along the pathway. Safety of park users and sight lines in this area will be considered in the Master Plan.

PARK CATCHMENT



A Regional Amenity for a Growing Population

Significant growth in the coming years will support the need for a new Regional Park in Strathcona County.

Strathcona County and its adjacent municipalities will experience significant growth in the coming years. According to the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan, Strathcona County is anticipating a population growth of 40-60,000 people in the next twenty years.

Fort Saskatchewan anticipates that they will see growth of more than 40,000 people in the next 45 years. The Horse Hill neighbourhood in Edmonton expects about 70,000 people to join their community in the same time period.

Input from the public and stakeholders will help to form the vision for the new Regional Park through the Master Plan process. The vision will establish the overall direction for planning, design, and management of the park to serve residents of Strathcona County and nearby communities for years to come.



Policy Theme Matrix

Regional Park planning is not guided by one specific policy or regulation. The conservation of natural and cultural features in the park and the introduction of recreational opportunities is guided by policies from all levels of government. The following table outlines direction from a few of the local and regional policy documents that will impact the Master Plan. Other key projects in the County and surrounding area are also highlighted to help us understand their potential influence on the future Regional Park.

Theme	Regional Policy	Local Policy	Other Related Projects
Nature	<p>The Public Lands Act states that the Province owns the bed and shore of rivers and other naturally occurring water bodies in Alberta. The Water Act states that the Crown owns the resource of water, which applies to the floodplain, bed, and shore. Any potential future work that may impact the river or riverbank would require approval through both of these Acts.</p> <p>The artificial water bodies on site were created during quarry operations, and therefore are not considered natural wetlands protected by the Alberta Wetland Policy.</p> <p>However, there is potential for an opportunity for the County to partner with Alberta Environment and Parks through the Wetland Replacement Program should wetland restoration become a priority for the Master Plan.</p>	<p>The Municipal Environmental Framework provides a guide to assess environmental factors and impacts in the County's planning and decision-making.</p> <p>The Conservation of Biological Diversity Policy (SER-009-041) sets the County's conservation goal to protect the integrity of natural resources while providing opportunities for appropriate uses that will benefit the community.</p> <p>The Municipal Wetland Conservation Directive aims to ensure that the County has procedures designed to conserve wetlands during planning and development through No Net Loss - which means that the loss of wetlands in some areas will be balanced with the rehabilitation or enhancement of wetlands in others.</p> <p>The purpose of Strathcona County's Light Efficient Community Policy (2010) is to reduce light pollution and increase access to dark night skies by promoting the use of light only where and when it is needed, and at the levels suited to the task.</p>	<p>Nearby regional parks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elk Island National Park • Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area • Sherwood Park Natural Area (Provincial Park) <p>Nearby places to appreciate and learn about nature include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strathcona Wilderness Centre + Arbor Day • The Biodiversity Trail in the Beaver Hills Biosphere <p>The Bremner Lagoon Site (located west of the new Regional Park and owned by the City of Edmonton) is planned for remediation to improve soil and water quality on the site.</p>
Community	<p>The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada's mandate was to inform all Canadians of what happened in residential schools, documenting the truth of Survivors, their families, communities, and anyone personally affected. The TRC prepared a report that includes Ten Principles for Reconciliation and 94 Calls to Action that speak to all sectors of Canadian society.</p> <p>The Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan (2017, amended 2020) helps to set the path to plan growth across the Region with the goals of responsible growth, regional prosperity, and well-being.</p>	<p>One of the strategic goals of Strathcona County's Strategic Plan (2013-2030) is to build strong communities to support the diverse needs of residents. Some of the desired outcomes include programming that meets the changing needs of residents and opportunities for meaningful connections within communities.</p>	<p>Edmonton's City Plan (2020) provides guidance on future growth areas within the City of Edmonton. One of the growth areas identified is located across the river from the new Regional Park site. The Horse Hill Area Structure Plan (2021) will guide development in this new neighbourhood.</p> <p>The City of Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County councils have approved a negotiated area of expansion for Fort Saskatchewan. This area of annexation is 952 ha and is located north-east of the new Regional Park site, bounded by Range Road 542 and the major pipeline corridor. It is intended that this area will provide for another 35 years of growth for Fort Saskatchewan.</p>

Theme	Regional Policy	Local Policy	Other Related Projects
Movement	<p>The Framework for Recreation in Canada (2015) prioritizes equitable access to high quality, accessible recreation opportunities for all. This policy document highlights the importance of inclusivity and accessibility in the design of existing pathway connections and future Regional Park trails.</p> <p>The River Valley Alliance (RVA) Action Plan (2007) is a plan to integrate 88km of the North Saskatchewan River Valley from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan. The RVA Strategic Plan (2021-2024) outlines priorities, plans, and a funding schedule for short- to mid-term goals.</p>	<p>Strathcona County's Municipal Development Plan (2017) includes policy to design, develop, and maintain an integrated active transportation network with linkages to other municipalities, using connections like the Trans Canada Trail and the River Valley Alliance Trail Network.</p> <p>The Open Space and Recreation Facility Strategy (2008, 2017 update) highlights the importance of building relationships with key funders, including Federal and Provincial Governments, the Trans Canada Trail, the River Valley Alliance, and Inter Pipeline, with the aim of completing the County's regional trail commitments.</p> <p>The Strathcona County Trails Strategy (2012) provides direction to help create a positive impact on the overall quality of life of residents, recognizing that trails and pathways are key to increasing community health and well-being by providing recreation and active transportation opportunities for all ages.</p>	<p>Strathcona County partnered with the River Valley Alliance to plan and fund the new Edmonton-Strathcona County Footbridge, slated for construction in the summer of 2022 pending funding decisions. The bridge will be located just west of the new Regional Park, connecting to the Riverside Nature Trail. The project will also include a new boat launch.</p> <p>The River Valley Alliance (RVA) has proposed a regional trail marking system to create an overall visual identity and orientation system for trail users. This signage project is planned for 2022. The RVA is also leading a process to assign an official name to the Strathcona County Regional Trail.</p>
Park Uses, Learning, Creativity	<p>The County recognizes that the new Regional Park will become part of a broader open space network and that it is important to coordinate with other municipalities and governing bodies.</p> <p>In Edmonton, Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy and Ribbon of Green are guiding documents for open space planning, particularly in the river valley. They identify locations for new amenities, trails, and conservation areas as well as neighbourhoods that may be lacking park space.</p> <p>The Fort Saskatchewan Recreation Facility and Parks Master Plan Update (2015) and the City of Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County Alliance Report (2020) provide direction on how to improve service delivery in the community.</p> <p>Guidance from these documents may be used to understand which uses are best suited to the new Regional Park based on community needs, partnership opportunities, and environmental sensitivities.</p> <p>The Alberta Historical Resources Act provides for the use, designation, and protection of historic resources. This Act will help to protect potential historic resources within the Regional Park boundaries.</p>	<p>Public engagement results from the Strathcona County Recreation and Culture Strategy (2019) identified several outdoor amenities that County residents would like to see increased or improved in their parks. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic areas/shelters • Event grounds • Dog off-leash areas • Amphitheatres/bandstands • Natural areas • Outdoor rinks • Trails • And more <p>This list may help inform the Master Plan to ensure community needs are being met.</p>	<p>The new Strathcona County Indoor Fieldhouse will soon be located in the north-west of Sherwood Park, east of Broadmoor Boulevard on Buckingham Drive. This project is currently in the Design Phase. The facility is planned to include indoor field space, gymnasium/court space, fitness tracks, and multi-use program spaces to promote active living.</p> <p>The County's future multi-purpose agricultural facility, Pointe-aux-Pins Acres, will be located 15 minutes northeast of Sherwood Park and less than ten minutes from the new Regional Park. The facility will be designed for year-round use and is planned to include a camping area, a multi-purpose field, animal housing, and covered outdoor arena.</p>

Sources

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