



CHAPTER 1.0

INTRODUCTION



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Edmonton has actively conserved natural lands within its boundaries since the early 1900's, when Edmonton's first municipally protected park (Victoria Park) was created in the North Saskatchewan River Valley (Gibbs, Brown Johansson and EDA Collaborative 2006). Only recently, however, has the City approached conservation of natural lands in an integrated way and they are now actively working toward a comprehensive approach to manage and protect all of Edmonton's Natural Areas. Parts of the North Saskatchewan River Valley System (NSRV) have been protected for many years, but the continuous NSRV park system (including the tributary valleys), now well-recognized within Edmonton, was created in 1985, through the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP, By-law 7188). The Ribbon of Green Concept Plan and the Ribbon of Green Master Plan established in the early 1990s defined the basic management objectives for the river valley that have guided its management since then. Their emphasis on conservation, recreation, development, trails and education provided the guidance for managing the valley lands, implemented through the ARP by-law.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, attention also turned to the newly annexed fringes of the City (Tablelands), and the remnant natural sites occurring within them. The apparent rate of loss of those sites due to rapid expansion of the City became a management concern, prompting the City to determine the abundance of the Natural Sites on the Tablelands in an inventory completed in 1986 (City of Edmonton 1986). A second, more focused inventory in 1993, identified 246 Natural Areas, 27 Significant Natural Areas (SNAs), 38 Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) and 17 other ESAs within the NSRV system (Geowest Environmental Consultants Ltd. 1993). This inventory then formed the basis of management efforts in the Tablelands and provided extra context for management of select parts of the NSRV. In 1995, the City established a formal conservation policy for Natural Areas (Policy C-467: *Conservation of Natural Sites in Edmonton's Tablelands*), which has since guided development affecting these sites.

In 1998, the City's Municipal Development Plan (Plan Edmonton) initiated a new management approach that provided for treatment of the NSRV and Tableland Natural Areas as an integrated system. Since then, the City has been developing the infrastructure and policy to implement an integrated approach. In 2002, the City created the position of Conservation Coordinator to oversee Policy C-467 (*Conservation of Natural Sites in Edmonton's Tablelands*). In 2003, the Natural Areas Advisory Committee and the Natural Areas Policy Implementation Committee were formed. Together these groups were charged to address Natural Areas issues and develop a comprehensive Natural Areas management plan for the City. The City has since supported that work through various funded initiatives, including creation of the Office of Natural Areas, with a staff to coordinate Natural Areas management throughout the City.

In early 2006, the Office of Natural Areas began preparing an Integrated Natural Areas Conservation Plan. That process comprises three sequential components that will create



a plan based on the best available science, comprehensive public involvement, and an informed and involved Council and administration. The three components are:

- ∓ Component 1: Reporting on the State of Natural Areas and Conservation Planning in Edmonton.
- ∓ Component 2: Developing a conservation vision for Edmonton.
- ∓ Component 3: Developing a Strategic Natural Areas Conservation Plan, including an Implementation Plan.

This strategic conservation plan will also consider Edmonton's Natural Areas in the regional context. In April 2006, the Office of Natural Areas retained Spencer Environmental Management Services Ltd. to undertake Component 1: The State of Natural Areas Project.

1.2 State of Natural Areas Project

The State of Natural Areas Project is designed to provide a solid foundation of information, analysis and presentation materials for preparation of a conservation plan. The deliverables from this project are to be used directly in a wide variety of settings, including administration meetings and public fora, during development and implementation of a conservation plan. The State of Natural Areas project is divided into three main objectives, each of which has been summarized in a stand-alone report:

- ∓ Objective 1: Conservation Mapping Using Existing Data Sources
- ∓ Objective 2: Landscape Linkages/Connectivity Analysis
- ∓ Objective 3: Natural Areas Systems Analysis.

Reports on Objective 1 (Spencer Environmental 2006a) and Objective 2 (Spencer Environmental 2006b) provide updated mapping of Edmonton's Natural Areas, a description of the regional context of Edmonton's Natural Areas, mapping of other natural resources, determination and mapping of Edmonton's Ecological Network, and analysis of the essential network elements. This Objective 3 report focuses on:

- ∓ the current scientific approach to conservation of Natural Areas;
- ∓ existing conservation policies, strategies and plans in Edmonton and other jurisdictions; and finally,
- ∓ an analysis of the trends associated with the conservation of Edmonton's Natural Areas to date and indicators suitable for use in tracking future conservation/management efforts.

1.3 Report Organization

This report is presented as 5 chapters. Chapter 1 provides the context of Objective 3 within the State of the Natural Areas Project and preparation of the Integrated Natural Areas Conservation Plan. Chapter 2 reviews the state of conservation science, and the



understandings by which land managers may currently approach Natural Areas planning. Existing conservation policies, strategies and plans and their relevance to Edmonton are reviewed in Chapter 3. An analysis of the current trends and indicators for Edmonton's Natural Areas follows in Chapter 4. Lastly, all references cited in the report are compiled in Chapter 5. The report has one appendix: a glossary of terms used in the report.