

CONSERVING EDMONTON'S NATURAL AREAS

A Framework for Conservation Planning in an Urban Landscape

Executive Summary

Alberta Environmental Network

Community Services
City of Edmonton

Westworth Associates Environmental Ltd. The Dagny Partnership IPS Consulting Ltd. The Land Stewardship Centre of Canada Environmental Law Centre

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February 2001

PREAMBLE

This report should be used as a tool to discuss future directions/policy changes with respect to the natural area planning and conservation process. At the time of the release of the report, the parent groups sponsoring this project including the Alberta Environmental Network, City of Edmonton and others such as the Urban Development Institute, etc., have not had the opportunity to review and consider what elements may be appropriate for implementation. Moreover, more discussion is necessary before the concepts could be brought forward for action. The report represents the views of the project Steering Committee and the Consulting Team and does not bind the parent organizations to any specific action. Further stakeholder consultation is required.

The report has been presented in three volumes:

Volume 1 – Executive Summary

Volume 2 – Technical Report

Volume 3 – Supplemental Information

Acknowledgements

The study's success is in large measure due to the countless hours of time contributed by Steering Committee members and the helpful participation of the many individuals that took part in workshops and focus sessions or met with Consulting Team members to discuss various aspects of conservation planning. The Phair-Bolstad Committee was instrumental in initiating this project and a number of members of this committee were extremely helpful to the Consulting Team and Steering Committee during various phases of the project. To all of these individuals the Consulting Team extends its warmest thanks.

Consulting Team

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Ernie Ewaschuk	The Land Stewardship Centre of Canada
Arlene Kwasniak	Environmental Law Centre



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It is up to us to plan with vision. Our responsibility is to retain what we treasure, because we are merely guests on those spaces of the earth that we inhabit. We should leave good impressions about our visit.

Steering Committee

Barry Breau, Chair	Alberta Environmental Network
Bob Priebe	Community Services, City of Edmonton
Charles Richmond	Citizen
Patsy Cotterill	Edmonton Natural History Society
John Wood	King's University College
Lindsay Kelly	Urban Development Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The rapid pace of residential and industrial land development within the City of Edmonton over the past few decades has dramatically altered the City's natural landscape. Concern over the loss of remaining natural areas led Edmonton City Council and the Administration to begin taking steps in the early 1990s to conserve some of these sites. These steps included an inventory of environmentally sensitive and significant natural areas and the passing of Policy C-467 (Conservation of Natural Sites in Edmonton's Table Lands). Policy C-467 directed the Administration to conserve natural sites by encouraging voluntary conservation and corporate and private sponsorship of natural sites, by facilitating natural site conservation through the planning and development process, and by promoting increased awareness about conserving natural areas.

Although these efforts have resulted in the conservation of a number of sites within the city, the loss of the Little Mountain Natural Area in the late 1990s highlighted deficiencies in the implementation of the existing policy framework and prompted City Council to direct the Administration to identify more proactive measures for implementing the Policy. An informal coalition of environmental interests, development interests and the Administration has been meeting periodically, facilitated and chaired by City Councilors Michael Phair and Alan Bolstad, to identify and discuss potential approaches.

To help move this initiative forward, the Alberta Environmental Network, a member of this coalition, in conjunction with the City of

Edmonton, obtained funding through the Edmonton Community Lottery Board to initiate a project that would provide City Administration with information or tools that will enable them to more effectively implement Policy C-467 and would serve as a foundation for increasing awareness and building community support. A contract was awarded to a consulting group led by Westworth Associates Environmental Ltd. in May 2000 to undertake this project.

Goals and Scope of Study

The study was designed to achieve four specific outcomes:

- Recommend a short list of sites on which to focus conservation efforts.
- Recommend the establishment of site specific conservation strategies for those sites.
- Develop a strategy to enhance natural areas awareness and education.
- Develop an appropriate fund raising strategy.

Although the focus of the project was on developing an approach that could achieve tangible evidence of successful natural area conservation within the next two years, both the City of Edmonton and the Alberta Environmental Network view this as an initial step in a longer-term process of conserving important components of Edmonton's natural heritage. In conducting this study, the project Steering Committee made it clear that the short list of sites is intended strictly as a starting point ***and in no way suggests that the other sites are less worthy of conservation efforts; rather is simply a recognition that simultaneous action on all remaining 62 sites is not possible.*** Until funding to support

acquisition of the remaining sites becomes available, efforts will be made to protect these sites through the normal planning process.

Study Process

Throughout the project, the Consulting Team worked closely with a Steering Committee comprised of members of the Alberta Environmental Network, the City of Edmonton Community Services Department and the Urban Development Institute. These groups met on a frequent basis to discuss approaches and review study findings.

The present study built on earlier efforts to inventory and classify natural areas in the city. Consequently, the study began with a review of all background and historical information pertaining to the project. Members of the Consulting Team contacted dozens of individuals representing both private and public sector organizations that are involved with planning, land development and natural area conservation in the Edmonton area. As well, the Consulting Team contacted members of other agencies and reviewed case studies from other cities in North America, to identify methods or approaches to natural area conservation that have been successfully used elsewhere.

All of the desired outcomes depended on first achieving a clear understanding of conservation issues, priorities, and constraints from the point of view of different stakeholders in the community. A key element of the study strategy therefore involved the use of workshops or focus groups to develop this understanding. Separate focus sessions were held with groups representing the general public and Edmonton's environmental community. The discussion sessions were structured to probe stakeholders' priorities both within specific land conservation types and areas,

stewardship priorities and issues as well as funding priorities within the context of other municipal service priorities.

The perspectives of the development industry to natural area conservation were explored during two workshop sessions arranged in conjunction with the Urban Development Institute. During the initial workshop, participants were asked to identify current obstacles to natural area conservation and conservation approaches that might work from a land development and economic perspective. During the second workshop the group provided input to the Consulting Team on a specific set of potential tools for achieving natural area conservation.

To determine whether the various approaches or tools identified were feasible from economic, ecological, legal, and administrative/policy points of view, additional consultations were held with members of various civic departments, provincial government agencies, the development industry, and the legal profession.

Site selection criteria identified during the stakeholder workshops were used to develop a short-list of potential conservation sites using a form of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. This analysis considered ecological factors such as size, potential linkages, biodiversity, and sustainability as well as external factors such as the threats and opportunities presented by the development marketplace. This type of analysis also provided a practical method of incorporating community issues, such as the level of community support, educational opportunities and potential partnership/stewardship arrangements into the site selection process.

Functions and Values of Natural Areas

Maintaining a system of parks and natural areas throughout our city not only beautifies our community but contributes to clean air and water, habitat for plants and animals, and a healthy environment. Natural areas serve as important sites for nature-related recreation and environmental education.

There are not only aesthetic and ecological reasons for conserving natural areas; there are important economic reasons as well. Many of the ecological services that natural areas provide translate into direct cost savings to communities. For example, natural areas intercept rainfall and reduce stormwater runoff, resulting in potential reductions in requirements for stormwater infrastructure. The shade and shelter provided by treed stands can also result in energy savings. In addition, treed areas and wetlands benefit human society by removing air pollutants and sequestering and storing carbon. We know that tree foliage filters and removes a number of known air pollutants, including carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and ozone. Trees and other natural vegetation also remove carbon dioxide from the air, helping to offset the harmful effects of 'greenhouse' gasses and global warming. In a city the size of Edmonton, these benefits can be expected to amount to millions of dollars annually. A number of studies have also shown that proximity to preserved open space or natural areas increases property values, particularly if the open space is not intensively developed for recreation purposes and if it is carefully integrated with the neighbourhood.

Natural areas are part of our heritage. Through its history Edmonton has been defined by its natural setting. Unlike many major North American cities, where urban development has eliminated all traces of the natural environment, Edmonton is

recognized for the green spaces associated with our river valley and the many remnant patches of forest and wetlands scattered across our table lands. Unfortunately, these remnant natural areas are disappearing rapidly. We may be at a crossroads that will determine the future character of the city. Either we must move quickly to protect the natural features that we cherish and take for granted within the City of Edmonton or we will see the remaining fragments of our natural heritage lost forever.

What Edmonton is Currently Doing to Conserve Natural Areas

Various environmental policies, guidelines and bylaws concerning conservation and protection of natural features within the City of Edmonton have been developed and incorporated into the municipal planning process over the last 25 years. Edmonton's Municipal Development Plan ("Plan Edmonton") provides overall strategic direction and a commitment to conserve natural areas in Edmonton's Table Lands and the North Saskatchewan River Valley. Protection of natural areas within the river valley system is provided through the 1985 *North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan Bylaw*, a comprehensive Plan that sets out policy and implementation directives for land uses in the City's river valley. In 1995 the City of Edmonton adopted the *Conservation of Natural Sites in Edmonton's Table Lands Policy* (Policy C-467) to encourage the conservation of environmentally sensitive and significant natural areas identified in an inventory prepared by Geowest Environmental Consultants.

In reviewing the various policies and programs put in place by the city to address the goal of natural area conservation, and discussing these policies and programs with various civic

departments, it became apparent that considerable uncertainty exists about the extent to which existing policies and procedures are providing effective protection to natural areas in different land use and development zones of the City.

Implementation of Policy C-467 depended heavily on the function of the Conservation Coordinator. The Coordinator position held responsibility for coordinating conservation efforts among civic departments and for implementing private conservancy programs to conserve sites that would not otherwise be protected through the planning and development process. When City Council decided not to fund that position, the effectiveness of the policy was compromised from the outset. Currently, the only avenue for implementing the policy is through the development process (review of Area Structure Plans, Neighbourhood Area Structure Plans and Neighbourhood Structure Plans). The Policy's main impact is felt when a landowner applies to the City for a change in use of land. However, at that stage a landowner's development plans have progressed to a point where efforts to conserve sites may be seen as intrusive and are less likely to be successful.

Currently, Policy C-467 does little to conserve natural areas in rural areas within the City. Much of the land on Edmonton's table lands does not face short-term pressures for urban expansion and in some cases may never be developed for residential or commercial uses. Although natural sites within these areas may not be threatened by residential development within the foreseeable future, ***the threats to conservation of these sites may be no less real and no less immediate.*** These threats are many including, for example, agricultural expansion, aggregate extraction, oil and gas development, timber harvesting, rural residential development, and golf course development.

Similarly, there are concerns that Bylaw No. 7188, the *North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan*, may not prevent the loss of valuable natural areas within the river valley system. The Bylaw, which was put in place to "ensure the preservation of the natural character and environment of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and its Ravine System", contains a number of policies for protecting the river valley environment. One of the major tools that is used to implement this policy is the requirement for environmental impact screening assessments for proposed facility development, if that facility is "publicly owned or is developed on public lands".

It would appear that this requirement may not necessarily apply to private development proposals on privately owned land. As a result of the City's policy to acquire lands within the river valley and ravine system as Environmental Reserve through the subdivision process, most of the lands in the 'built-up' area of the city are now publicly owned. However, lands within the river valley beyond the current urban development area are predominantly privately owned and natural areas within these zones may not be protected from the effects of agricultural expansion or other incompatible development.

Perspectives on Natural Area Conservation in Edmonton

Results of the focus sessions and subsequent stakeholder consultations pointed out some very interesting similarities and differences among various stakeholders in the community with respect to their attitudes toward natural area conservation.

The General Public

During the focus session involving representatives of the general public, there was **strong support** for conserving more land, particularly in those areas of the City that do not have access to the river valley or as much other “green space”. Natural spaces were seen as an important component of creating a good place to live throughout the City. Participants noted that while some neighbourhoods have a lot of natural areas and easy access to green space (Whitemud, Blackmud and North Saskatchewan River valley areas), communities in the southeast, northwest and northeast do not. There was support for the concept that areas that currently have less access to natural areas should receive priority in future conservation programs. A common theme that emerged with the discussions with this group was the importance of having controlled access to these sites to take advantage of the recreational and educational opportunities that these sites provide.

The Environmental Community

Like the public group, all of the participants in the environmental group focus session identified a need to conserve more natural areas within the City of Edmonton. The most frequently expressed reason was to preserve the ecological functions these areas provide, including their importance for conserving biodiversity and sensitive species, their watershed value (water quality and quantity), and providing connectivity between natural areas. Several participants also spoke of the educational value of natural areas, commenting that “*it is important for children to have the opportunity to experience natural communities first hand*” and noting that the study of natural communities is currently part of the school curriculum. Several also recognized the value of natural areas in terms of human health and wellness. Functions related to this include improvement of air and water quality, recreational

pursuits such as walking and bird watching, and the quality of community life.

The Development Industry

During two workshop sessions held with members of the Urban Development Institute, industry representatives identified a number of major issues concerning the existing planning and development process as it applies to the conservation of natural areas in the City of Edmonton. These included issues related to costs, the regulatory process, urban compatibility, and public expectations or acceptance of natural areas within neighbourhoods.

At issue with respect to costs is fairness, with developers indicating that the costs of acquiring and maintaining natural areas should be aligned with groups that directly benefit from natural areas or with public agencies that have a mandate for natural area conservation. It was pointed out that inclusion of a natural area within a neighbourhood has the potential for increased housing and development costs through process delays, increased permanent area contributions/levies, lost opportunity costs, and increased salable land unit and development costs. The importance of timing on cost is important. ***It is much less expensive to acquire/preserve natural areas long before lands are required for urban development and before the lands have been included in offsite cost levy calculations.***

A continuing theme throughout the discussions with members of the Urban Development Institute was the urban compatibility and sustainability of natural areas along with the ongoing stewardship responsibilities. Public education as to the value of natural areas was also seen to be important, particularly for wetlands, which may be viewed by some as nuisances or unsafe environments.

Site Selection

An important goal of the project was to develop a short list of sites on which to focus conservation efforts over the next two years. The short list developed during the present study was primarily drawn from the list of 62 sites identified by Geowest, although a number of additional sites were also considered at the suggestion of the Steering Committee or the Consulting Team.

The specific criteria considered in selecting these sites were based in large part on input obtained from the various stakeholders involved in the focus groups and workshops. During the sessions held with representatives of the environmental community and the general public, participants were asked to identify criteria that they felt were important in selecting potential conservation lands. While the specific list generated by each focus group was slightly different there was a consistent theme in the top priorities. Each of the groups stressed the need for land parcels that were large enough to be ecologically sustainable and were linked to other natural systems. The community and environmental representatives also

concurred that the inherent ecological value of a site, expressed in terms of its natural features, watershed value, and importance as habitat for native species of plants and animals, should be the principal consideration in natural area site selection.

The SWOT analysis resulted in the identification of 13 sites that were deemed to have high conservation potential within the terms of reference of the present study. These sites, which are summarized in the following table, included many of the largest and most diverse natural habitats remaining in the City. They included native woodlots, wetlands, and complexes of wetlands, meadows and remnant forest. The sites were distributed fairly evenly around the City. Most were located on privately-owned land, although several included land that is owned by either the City of Edmonton or the Province of Alberta. Subsequent contact with the landowners indicated that, in a majority of cases, ***a high potential existed for achieving conservation goals within the next one to two years*** using one or more of the conservation tools identified in the report.



Wepayoos Natural Area (NW7035)



Sandpiper Wetland (NW7018)



White Birch Woodland (NW384)



Henry Singer Wetland (Henry Singer Sports Field)



Winterburn Pond Natural Area (NW7010)



Muskakosi Natural Area (McDonagh Peatland)



Ezra Moss Natural Area (SE5007)



Knob and Kettle Natural Area (SE5010)



William Rowan Natural Area (SE5010)



Papastew Natural Area (NE8002)



Moran Lake



Lower Horsehills Creek



Oxbow Natural Area (Riverbend)

Today, cities are owned, controlled and influenced by all sorts of people, who are motivated by all sorts of goals, sometimes conflicting and sometimes harmonizing. The membership of the orchestra who makes things happen in a city is forever changing, and the job of the conductor is usually up for grabs. In order for urban land conservation to succeed, many different players must perform their functions at the proper time and to the proper degree, with equal measure of self-interest and compromise. That doesn't occur easily, but like great music, it is humanly possible. The key to the success of urban conservation projects is the development of active

Priority sites recommended for initial conservation efforts in the City of Edmonton

Site *	Site Number	Type Of Natural Area	Location	Significance
Wepayoos Natural Area	NW7035	Aspen Forest	NW	Local
Sandpiper Wetland	NW7018	Wetland	N	Local
White Birch Woodland	NW384	Poplar-Birch Forest	SW	Local
Henry Singer Wetland	HENRY SINGER SPORTS FIELD	Wetland complex	NW	Local
Winterburn Pond Natural Area	NW7010	Wetland-woodland complex	W	Local
Muskakosi Natural Area	MCDONAGH PEATLAND	Tamarack-black spruce bog	W	Local
Ezra Moss Natural Area	SE5007	Upland-wetland complex	SE	Regional
Knob and Kettle Natural Area	SE5004	Morainal upland-wetland complex	SE	Regional
William Rowan Natural Area	SE5010	Large wetland	SE	Regional
Papastew Natural Area	NE8002	Forest-wetland complex	NE	Local
Moran Lake	MORAN LAKE	Large Wetland	NE	Regional
Lower Horsehills Creek	HORSEHILLS CREEK	Riparian-ravine system	NE	Regional
Oxbow Natural Area	RIVERBEND	Riparian forest	NE	Regional

* Please Note: The names identified above are "working names" included to provide a more user-friendly "handle" for each site. The names were selected by the Steering Committee to reflect ecological elements present at each site, local geographic names, or names of important researchers in the field. If the sites are conserved, formal approval of site names by City Council or another body may be required. That process would consider a more detailed history of the site and approvals of any person or entity chosen for the naming.

Developing a Strategy to Conserve Natural Areas

The Need for a Long-Term Strategy

Although the focus of the present study was on identifying a short list of natural areas on which to focus initial conservation efforts, and on developing a short-term communication and fund raising strategy to move the initiative forward, input from the various groups that participated in this study raised a number of other issues related to the City's long-term goals for conservation and management of natural lands. These issues included:

- The expectation that these initial efforts to conserve short-listed sites represent only a **starting point** and that effective conservation of valued natural areas will be reflected in Edmonton's future growth and development strategy.
- The adversarial nature of the planning process when development is imminent.
- The need for a comprehensive inventory of remaining natural areas.
- The need to acquire sites earlier in the development process before land and servicing costs become prohibitive.
- Concerns about whether the City's goals and policies for conservation of natural areas are being effectively implemented within the administration.
- The lack of an effective strategy to coordinate internal and external resources interested in conserving natural areas.
- The lack of an effective internal mechanism to manage natural area conservation within the administration.

- The need to ensure that an administrative framework is in place and that sufficient resources are committed to ensure effective stewardship of conserved land.
- The need to develop and test a wider range of 'tools' for conserving natural areas.

Resolving all of these outstanding issues was beyond the scope of the present study, however the Consulting Team did identify a number of mechanisms that could be used to achieve more effective conservation and stewardship of natural areas, both now and in the future.

Elements of an Effective Natural Areas Conservation Strategy

The Role of the City of Edmonton

Although Edmonton's environmental community is providing the impetus for change, the ultimate success of natural area conservation initiatives will depend on the City's willingness to implement a meaningful conservation program and to work with the development industry in overcoming current obstacles to natural area conservation. There is a clear need for the City of Edmonton to take a leadership role in implementing this program.

The failure to save the Little Mountain Natural Area and a number of other identified natural areas point out the need for the City to undertake a comprehensive review of existing policies and to consider whether an adequate administrative and planning framework is in place for delivering an effective natural area conservation program. The study recommends that a corporate steering committee be struck to evaluate how current practices impact natural area planning and how we might collectively change our approaches to the goal of implementing Policy C-467.

Partnerships and Community Participation

Although the City must take a leadership role, it cannot do the job on its own. Natural area conservation should be viewed as a collaborative effort within the community. Civic leadership should provide the catalyst for change with the development industry and the environmental community becoming '*partners in conservation*'.

Partnerships bring resources and expertise to the table that might not otherwise be available. The Administration should continue to work in partnership with community leaders and stakeholders, including groups representing the development industry and the environmental community, to develop more effective programs to promote and conserve remaining natural areas. There is also a need for broader consultation with all stakeholders in the community on our policies and approach to natural area planning.

The Need for a Green Spaces Master Plan

We feel that a need exists for an overall plan that would translate the City's goals and policies for natural areas into a clear vision that balances future development and conservation needs. This type of plan may be essential if the goal is to develop an interconnected network of sustainable natural areas rather than to simply conserve a handful of sites scattered across the city. The report describes some of the required elements for a green spaces master plan. These include the need for a comprehensive inventory of remaining natural areas in the City, the use of 'greenways' for maintaining ecological linkages with the river valley system and remaining natural areas on the table lands, and the need for consultation with community stakeholders and adjacent municipalities.

The Role of a Conservation Land Trust

It became apparent from our discussions with various stakeholders that a need exists for a mechanism that would provide more flexible options for persons or organizations that wish to sell or donate land for conservation purposes, that would enable us to respond more quickly to conservation opportunities, and that would provide a vehicle for generating funds through various partners. One approach that has proven successful in other areas is the establishment of a conservation land trust.

Conservation land trusts are private, charitable organizations whose primary role is to protect land under their stewardship from undesirable change. Holding conserved natural areas in a land trust may have certain advantages over municipal ownership. Because conservation land trusts are created expressly to hold and manage conserved natural lands they may provide a more effective vehicle for stewardship of retained natural areas. They may also be viewed by some as providing greater long-term security for conserved sites, since they are less likely to be influenced by political changes.

The Need for Effective Tools for Conserving Natural Areas

Policy C-467 includes a "tool kit" of financial, operational and management tools for promoting conservation of natural areas. However, results of the focus group sessions with members of the Urban Development Institute members and subsequent contacts with individual developers, landowners and city officials led the Consulting Team to the conclusion that the lack or lack of awareness of effective tools for conserving these sites remains a major obstacle to natural land conservation in Edmonton. The industry as a group indicated that a need existed for tools that provide incentives for conserving natural areas or that are at least

'cost neutral', in that they do not financially penalize a landowner or developer that has a natural area on their land.

As part of the present study, some research was done on land conservation tools that may be appropriate for use in Edmonton. This entailed a comprehensive review of legal tools that are currently available to the City of Edmonton, examination of some of the conservation tools being used by other jurisdictions in North America, and consultation with members of the Urban Development Institute to obtain feedback on potential obstacles or opportunities associated with the use of these tools from an economic and land development perspective. The resulting list of tools, although not definitive, greatly expands the range of conservation options that have previously been used in the City to conserve natural areas. Further consultation with the development industry and other stakeholders is recommended as a basis for testing, refining and using the wide range of conservation tools that are available.

Stewardship of Conserved Sites

Effective management or stewardship of conserved lands is essential to maintain the ecological integrity of the conserved sites and to ensure that the social, economic and environmental benefits provided by natural areas are maintained into the future. The report outlines the required components of natural area stewardship plans and provides examples of interim stewardship plans developed for several of the short-listed sites.

Marketing and Financing Strategy

Scanning the Marketing Environment

The first step in the development of the marketing and financing strategy was to assess the current political, fiscal and social

environment. This helps to understand the public attitudes and priorities, assess key issues, identify levels of support or concern and develop key criteria for financial participation.

Our review of the public attitude research highlighted a growing concern towards environmental issues and questions over the kind of world that we will leave our children. These global and national trends also emerged locally.

In Edmonton, natural areas are viewed as an important contributor to the quality of life in this community. These areas are seen as providing an important "mental breathing space" in the urban environment as well as a significant passive recreational resource for residents of all ages.

Natural areas are seen as important public assets that require appropriate public accountability and funding. Corporate and community partnerships were seen as offering the opportunity to enhance the resources, not replace them.

The environmental pressures noted have created an emerging "window of opportunity" within the Metro Edmonton industrial sector. Many of these companies are very interested in projects that help them to counter greenhouse gas emissions. Conservation projects in other regions have benefited from these emerging corporate priorities and so can Edmonton's projects.

Marketing Strategy - Three-phase Approach

To capitalize on the current interest and opportunities, the table land conservation program needs a local champion with the credibility, skills, time and resources to convert interest into action. Two important ingredients for success will be the ability to create a ***new co-operative business approach*** between stakeholders and

a strong unified voice that moves forward conservation projects. Having surveyed the existing groups, it is clear that there is no local organization that is poised to take on this challenge.

The following three-phased marketing strategy provides an activity plan designed to achieve the credibility and awareness needed to optimize the current funding opportunities.

Phase 1 - Creating a Cohesive Public/Private Sector Team

- Consolidate current funding and organizational support.
- Define the stakeholder participants and working relationships for this program.
- Improve stability and continuity of the stakeholder relationships.
- Increase political support.
- Develop a clear long-range strategic vision for land conservation in Edmonton.
- Benchmark public attitudes.

Phase 2 – Formalizing Relationships into a New Organization with a Fresh Public Image

- Draft new organization structure – Edmonton's Nature Network Land Trust.
- Develop primary identity package and marketing tools.
- Explore collaborative “packaging” and funding approaches with the River Valley Alliance.

Phase 3 – Creating Community Momentum and Incremental Support

- Recruit “Corporate Legacy Leaders” as founding partners for the new organization and finalize the structure.

- Recruit marketing staff.
- Implement provincial funding strategy.
- Expand landowners and stakeholder consultation.
- Implement nature awareness program – Nature Week, Nature Legacy Catalogue, and Nature Conservation Award.
- Develop foundation and project specific funding strategies.

Stakeholder Participation

Participation by key stakeholders is an important component of the strategy, however this must be balanced with the existing demands on many of these organizations. For this reason we have created windows of participation for the stakeholder community that tie in with their primary activities. These revolve around the Nature Day/Week and the Legacy Catalogue. We feel at this juncture that this is a more effective use of these scarce volunteer resources.

With the introduction of a new organization, it is important that it is not seen as competing for the same resources that the existing stakeholders are. The overall goal is to **leverage and enlarge the funds dedicated towards land conservation, not simply divert funds from other environmental activities.**

Some organizations have indicated an interest in contributing some of their fund-raising efforts towards land conservation projects. The structure of the Trust provides two funding opportunities to accommodate this. **Local organizations may choose to raise funds to become founding members of the Trust** or they may contribute as **project partners on specific activities.** Because of the competitiveness of the community fundraising sector, we do not recommend introducing significant new grass roots fund-raising

activities but rather lobby and promote existing partners to dedicate some of their current efforts to the land conservation cause.

With the growing fatigue in the not-for-profit sector, we believe that for **sustained participation** by stakeholder organizations in the Trust, it needs to **provide participation opportunities that are seen as rewarding and beneficial**. They should *provide a win-win for the Trust and the participating stakeholder organizations*. By focusing efforts surrounding a couple of key projects, we feel the Trust can achieve this as well as avoid volunteer burnout.

Financing Strategy

The financial strategy proposed is divided into two phases and dovetails the public attitudes towards public and private sector participation.

The **first phase**, covering a five year period, is designed to **secure the establishment of the Trust and to commence the implementation of priority projects** before the opportunities to conserve them are lost forever.

Cumulative funding targets for the **five-year period** are as follows:

- 40% -\$2 million City of Edmonton
- 30% -\$1.5 million Province of Alberta
- 17.5% -\$875,000 Corporate Legacy Leaders
- 7.5% -\$375,000 Foundations and Marketing Partners
- 4% -\$250,000 Community Fund Raising

The second phase looks to developing sustained funding sources for the Trust while continuing to fund and implement additional conservation, awareness and educational projects.

Recommendations

The report should be used as a tool to discuss future directions/policy changes with respect to the natural area planning and conservation process. At the time of the release of the report, the parent groups sponsoring this project including the Alberta Environmental Network, City of Edmonton and others such as the Urban Development Institute, etc., have not had the opportunity to review and consider what elements may be appropriate for implementation. Moreover, more discussion is necessary before the concepts could be brought forward for action. This report represents the views of the project Steering Committee and the Consulting Team and does not bind the parent organizations to any specific action. Further stakeholder consultation is required.

Natural Areas Conservation Strategy

Site Selection and Acquisition

- The report supports the voluntary nature of Policy-C467. All sites identified in the Geowest (1993, 1999) inventories remain worthy of conservation.
- First priority on the use of Natural Areas Reserve Funds should go to the 13 priority sites identified, keeping in mind that purchase is just one of a number of tools that can be used to conserve sites.
- Efforts should be made to conserve remaining natural areas both through the normal planning process and on an opportunistic basis as funding becomes available.
- The City of Edmonton should move quickly to secure these sites as a number of the sites are at high risk for development and could be lost in the near future. Conservation should take place before the development

process renders retention of sites too costly in terms of both land and servicing costs.

Policy Implementation

- A corporate steering committee should be struck to evaluate how current practices impact natural area planning and how we might collectively change our approaches to the goal of implementing Policy C-467.
- The City should appoint a full time conservation coordinator to facilitate the implementation of Policy C-467 through partnerships with the community/land trust and corporate partners.

Partnerships and Community Participation

- The Administration should continue to work in partnership with community leaders and stakeholders, including groups representing the development industry and the environmental community, to develop more effective programs to promote and conserve remaining natural areas.
- Lines of communication should be maintained with the Province of Alberta and other organizations regarding opportunities for joint conservation and stewardship of wetlands and other natural areas.
- A proactive public outreach program should be initiated to keep citizens informed and involved.

Green Spaces Master Plan

- In consultation with community stakeholders and adjacent municipalities, develop a 'greenspace' master plan that sets out the City's long-term strategy for conservation of natural areas and integration of conserved sites with the river valley and open space lands.
- Conduct detailed inventories of potential natural areas within the City of Edmonton, including remaining sites on the table

lands and sites within the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System.

Conservation Land Trust

- The City of Edmonton should establish an independent land trust as a vehicle to hold and manage conserved natural areas.

Tools for Conserving Natural Areas

- The City of Edmonton should take full advantage of the range of available tools for conserving natural areas.
- Further consultation with the development industry and other stakeholders should be undertaken as a basis for testing, refining and using the wide range of conservation tools that are available.

Stewardship

- Detailed inventories and stewardship plans should be completed for each natural area as soon as the sites are acquired or conservation agreements are in place.

Marketing and Financing Strategy

Partnership Protocol

- Develop a formal protocol between partnership organizations. Key elements of this protocol should include areas of co-operation, program expectations and contributions, partner responsibilities and behaviour, conflict resolution between partners, media relations and terms of partnership and withdrawal.

Picture Edmonton 2010 – SMART Growth Vision

- Expand City Council's "Vision of Social Well-Being and Quality of Life" by the development of a "smart growth" vision policy. This vision statement should provide a clear policy

statement that defines the long term "picture" of what the City should look like.

Review of Current Land Management and Acquisition Priorities and Policies

- With the establishment of Council's Vision, a review of existing land use zoning, management and acquisition policies and inter-departmental communication should be undertaken. The goal of this review would be to ensure that the corporate policies support the implementation of the long-term "smart growth" vision policy.

Create "Edmonton's Nature Network Land Trust"

- Create a new organization comprised of "equity" partners that provide land, funds or administrative resources to coordinate the implementation of targeted conservation projects. To support this new organization, it is recommended that a visual identity package, conservation project profile sheets, and a web site be developed.

Development of an Integrated Fund Development Approach

- Explore the development of an integrated package and strategy with the River Valley Alliance that markets priority river valley and table land sites.

Quantify Current Annual Land Conservation and Natural Area Development Commitments

- Quantify the City of Edmonton's current annual land conservation and natural area development commitments, both in terms of financial and human resources, into a 5 year funding commitment that can be used to leverage other public and private sector contributions. Ideally, this would include both the \$250,000 per year commitment and the \$650,000 currently projected for 2004 and 2005. This would create a fund of well over \$2 million. These funds are identified in the approved 2001 – 2005 Capital Priorities Plan.

No new capital funds beyond these funds are requested during the five-year period.

Corporate “Legacy Leaders” Team

- Create a group of founding corporate partners that would each contribute \$35,000 - \$50,000 per year for 5 years towards the operations of the Trust. The initial target would be 5 partners.

Leadership Role for Office of the Mayor in Building the Legacy Team

- With the level of civic commitment already in place, we recommend that the Office of the Mayor take a leadership role in launching the development of the Legacy Team.

Trust to Secure Provincial Support

- Prepare a funding proposal from the Trust that outlines key priority projects, highlights corporate, community and regional supporters, and summarizes the recreational and environmental benefits that can be achieved for Metro Edmonton.

Media Relations Program – Launch Phase

- Roll out a media relations program that profiles a series of news items relating to the Trust.

Natural Heritage Day/Week

- Develop an annual event that profiles Metro Edmonton's Natural Areas and the advantages that they offer the community. This event could start as one day tied into an existing event such as Arbour Day.

Landowner and Stakeholder Updates and Project Briefs

- Provide a program brief to landowners and stakeholders on a timely and on-going basis.

Legacy Catalogue and Advertising Support

- Develop a “product” catalogue that sells sponsorships, products and activities that enhance and support land conservation and nature appreciation activities. All sales would be brokered through the Trust.

Foundation/Corporate Proposal Team

- Recruit a task team of 3 – 5 volunteers to support in the writing and development of funding proposals to targeted Foundations. This task team would review the potential foundations and match “packages” that would be eligible for funding consideration.

Urban Conservation Award within the Emerald Award Program

- Sponsor a new award for urban land conservation and proactively nominate projects for it.

Marketing Staff for Land Trust

- Acquire either 1 full-time or 2 part-time staff to implement the marketing and fund development program.

Evaluation Tools

- Undertake a benchmark attitude study on land conservation and nature appreciation activities in the Metro Edmonton area that provides appropriate statistically validated data.

