

NATURAL SPACES MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.0 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

In May 2001 the Town of Lacombe retained Stantec Consulting Ltd. (Environmental Management) to conduct an Ecological Profile/Habitat Assessment of the natural areas within and surrounding the Town of Lacombe. The following report provides the results of the investigation as per the Town of Lacombe Terms of Reference.

The Subject Area consists of the Rank 2 and 3 natural areas within the Town of Lacombe and surrounding areas. Figure 1 illustrates the Subject Area.

The Town of Lacombe is unique in its location on the landscape and collection of natural areas. Unfortunately, the Town of Lacombe is not unique with respect to issues of increased urban development. The natural areas are what distinguish the Town of Lacombe for its residents. The landscape is variable and exhibits the natural patchiness inherent in the Central Parkland Subregion of Alberta. Wetlands include lakes, freshwater marshes, wet meadows, and riparian areas. Upland habitats include native grassland patches, mixedwood and aspen forest stands. The Parkland Region is a natural ecotone between the Grassland and Canadian Shield Regions of Alberta. With this ecotone comes an increased biodiversity, illustrated by the diverse vegetation and wildlife which occur spatially and temporally across the landscape. Due to urbanization, the remaining natural habitats are threatened. Therefore, the question is posed as to the importance of these habitats and their potential integration into the overall urban landscape.

1.2 ECOSPACE (NATURAL HABITAT) EVALUATION PROCESS

An environmental preservation program initiated by the City of Red Deer Community Services Division includes two important planning tools; the Red Deer Environmental Action Plan (REACT) and the Ecological Profile Process. Through the environmental action plan (REACT) the Red Deer community assessed and identified natural areas in order to develop site specific recommendations for future development. This process was formalized soon after, resulting in an ecological profile process, formally known as the Ecospace (Natural Habitat) Evaluation Process. The objective of the program is to balance residential, industrial and commercial development with the identification and preservation of natural areas. The approach considers ecological and developmental (economic) factors to evaluate sites. Site specific inventories were conducted with respect to nine ecological factors in order to produce a map of habitats across the potential development area. Eleven developmental factors were identified.

NATURAL SPACES MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Ecospace Evaluation Process is composed of four units:

1. Integration of ecological and development factors into a habitat ranking system, including nine ecological factors (wetlands, vegetation, animals, pathogens, soils, physical characters, contaminants, climate and fire) and eleven development factors (access, community values, development infrastructure, development policy and plans, education and awareness of natural areas, public use, residential/industrial/commercial/economic impact, and agriculture).
2. Assignment of ranks to all habitats using a three rank system in order to prioritize the habitats for management.
3. Completion of a detailed ecological profile based on the habitat rank assigned.
4. Negotiations and discussions among landowners, developers, planners and environmental groups based on the ecological profile with the final goal to produce a balance between urbanization and habitat preservation.

With the Ecospace Evaluation Process as a guideline, this project has been initiated to aid the *Natural Space Management Plan Steering Committee* in the development of policies with regard to creating “a balance between development and the need for the preservation of natural habitat and biodiversity”.

1.3 NATURAL SPACES MANAGEMENT PLAN OBJECTIVES

The overall objective for the *Natural Space Management Plan* is to determine how to sustain environmentally sensitive natural areas within the potential urban development area. In effect, how does the Town of Lacombe strike a balance between natural habitat preservation and human development.

In order to meet this objective, the Steering Committee is required to determine policies regarding environmentally sensitive areas within the Town of Lacombe. This project is the first step in the overall process with the goal to determine the ecological profiles of all undeveloped lands in the Subject Area. The profiles will be based on the City of Red Deer’s Ecospace (Natural Habitat) Evaluation Process.

Natural space identification and evaluation will be a baseline for prioritizing natural areas within the potential urban development areas. It is understood that an initial review has been completed through a review of air photos in order to identify natural resources. The lands have been categorized into the following rank groups:

Rank 1 = areas appropriate for development;

Rank 2 = areas requiring further ecological profiling (including inventory and mapping); and

NATURAL SPACES MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Rank 3 = biologically diverse natural areas selected for preservation.

In order to compile the baseline ecological information required for policy decision-making, Stantec will complete the following:

- preparation of the detailed ecological profiles of Rank 2 and 3 lands; and
- preparation of an overall AutoCAD map and Access data base for the Town of Lacombe.

In conjunction with the Steering Committee, Stantec will:

- review the attributes for ranking the land units based on ecological and developmental factors, as per the City of Red Deer's Ecospace (Natural Habitat) Evaluation Process;
- prepare recommendations for policy decisions;
- prepare a report to Town Council outlining the policy recommendations; and
- prepare a draft Natural Spaces Management Plan.