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Meewasin

News Release

for immediate release

Highlights of the Meewasin Board Meeting

Friday, April 7, 2017

1. Meewasin reviewed its budget for the April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2018 fiscal year. With a 17% reduction in statutory funding, it is the most challenging budget in Meewasin's 38 years.

Despite the difficult budget news, Meewasin believes that the three Participating Parties value the work of Meewasin and are committed to determining a sustainable funding model. By anyone's measure, the Meewasin Valley Project, first envisioned by master planner Raymond Moriyama in 1978, has been well received. Overcoming early opposition, Meewasin has become one of the most popular and appreciated organizations in the province. Today, more than one million visits are made annually to the award winning Meewasin Trail. Attractions like Beaver Creek Conservation Area, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Cranberry Flats, Gabriel Dumont Park, Meewasin Park, Riverworks Weir Redevelopment, River Landing Riverfront and the river access launches at Fred Heal, Poplar Bluffs, Meewasin Park and Paradise Beach are treasured assets in a community shaped by the South Saskatchewan River. This is a story of extraordinary accomplishment. Created by the Government of Saskatchewan, City of Saskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan, shaped by dedicated directors and staff, and supported by countless volunteers and donors, Meewasin continues to work to fulfill its mission "to create a healthy and vibrant river valley with a balance between human use and conservation for the benefit of current and future generations.

Meewasin is confident in its future. The *Meewasin Valley Authority Act (1979)*, despite modifications in funding, still exists. During these tough economic times, the Government of Saskatchewan has provided Meewasin with \$500,000 for the 2017-2018 fiscal year. Meewasin continues to have regulatory authority over development in the 67 square kilometres of Conservation Zone; and the City of Saskatoon, Government of Saskatchewan and University of Saskatchewan continue to value Meewasin and its ability to manage their riverbank lands. There is overwhelming public support for the work of Meewasin to continue. The community cherishes its river valley and all of the benefits it provides. Meewasin will work with the Participating Parties to determine a sustainable future.

The Government of Saskatchewan also announced an amendment to the *Meewasin Valley Authority Act (1979)* that removed its statutory funding requirements, as well as the statutory funding requirements of the University of Saskatchewan, to provide annual funding to Meewasin. While the statutory funding requirement for the University of Saskatchewan and the Government of Saskatchewan will be eliminated, the two parties have provided funding in this fiscal year. The requirements for the City of Saskatoon to provide annual statutory funding to Meewasin remains in the Act. Although the City of Saskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan received reductions to their budgets, Meewasin is expecting their contributions to remain at similar levels to last year.

As a consequence, Meewasin is planning a reduction in programs and services for the 2017 – 2018 fiscal year. These changes will result in reduced funds to deliver programs and services, staff reductions through attrition and hiring restrictions, restrictions to training opportunities, and a reduction in the number of planned summer students (from 10 to 7) who assist Meewasin with resource conservation and construction. This continues an ongoing trend of reducing the number of seasonal staff to address budget constraints each year, further limiting Meewasin's capacity to deliver conservation, development and education programs.

Meewasin is working with all the Participating Parties to find a suitable funding model.

The change to the current funding level impacts Meewasin operations. These impacts range from continuing with current services and programs but at reduced levels to a complete shift to operate within new parameters. At this time Meewasin is planning the following for the 2017 - 2018 fiscal year.

Public Programs

Meewasin will no longer offer interpretive canoe tours on the South Saskatchewan River where the novice canoeist can learn about the river from the river. The program has been in operation for the past twenty years operating for approximately 120 days each summer receiving partial sponsorship from various individuals and agencies.

Meewasin will no longer deliver the annual Pelican Watch Contest. The American White Pelican that appeared on the South Saskatchewan River by the weir in the mid 1970s is a conservation success story, celebrated annually by Meewasin through the contest.

Meewasin will continue to operate Beaver Creek Conservation Area (BCCA), providing the Grade 5 school program. However, the number of days that BCCA will be open to the general public will be reduced. The new dates and times are yet to be announced.

Meewasin will continue interpretation of the Meewasin Northeast Swale and the Saskatoon Natural Grasslands, as conservation of the two sensitive ecological sites can best be realized through community interpretation and education.

Resource Conservation

Meewasin will close its river access sites at Paradise Beach, Fred Heal Canoe Launch, and Poplar Bluffs Canoe Launch. These have been important sites for the general public to access for recreational activity. The sites provide access to Crown Land including beaches and the river, and have been developed with parking lots and small craft boat launches. Meewasin no longer has the capacity to maintain these sites that provide river access to the general public.

Meewasin will continue to coordinate and control the development, conservation, maintenance and improvement of land within the Meewasin Conservation Zone. Meewasin is advised by a statutory committee of professional planners, architects, landscape architects, geotechnical engineers and/or professional geoscientists. Meewasin's Development Review process is complementary to other environmental or heritage review permitting processes focusing on:

- Consistency with the Meewasin Development Plan;
- Conservation and interpretation of significant natural systems, and natural and cultural heritage;
- Slope stability and good drainage practices;
- Designs complementary to the natural setting of the river valley; and
- Provisions for public access.

Meewasin will continue to focus on biodiversity, ridding the valley of intrusive invasive plants that are threatening our natural areas. A decrease in the number of summer student field staff will mean this work will be limited to areas that are directly funded through grants or fees for service contracts. The work covered under these contracts, is critical to maintaining and enhancing the value of this region's most precious resource; however, the budget will allow Meewasin to manage only a fraction of the more than 67 square kilometers of land within the Meewasin Valley, 41% of which is Crown Land.

Design & Development

If awarded, an application to Fisheries and Oceans Canada to support the ongoing shoreline armoring at the Mendel will be declined.

Meewasin will undertake trail upgrades only when project specific funding becomes available. Two current grants from Trans Canada Trail will likely remain unclaimed due to the inability to provide the required matching funds.

Trail signage and site furniture replacements will be undertaken on a limited basis with reduced funding or by specified donation.

The Meewasin Trail brochure will no longer be available in a print format. The general public will be advised to download the brochure from the website or use the online map.

Meewasin will provide only emergency repairs for facilities, including those at Beaver Creek Conservation Area, the Meewasin Valley Centre, and the maintenance shop located at the University of Saskatchewan.

All capital projects that are proceeding are a result of conditional funding and grants that are outside of core funding. These include trail upgrades from the

Mendel to the Weir, and trail development and fencing within the Meewasin Northeast Swale.

Meewasin is also providing services to the City of Saskatoon for a number of projects including plantings at the Water Treatment Plant, Cosmopolitan Park, and the Remai Modern Art Gallery; as well as project management for the Aspen Ridge Greenway.

Fund Development

Statutory funding has always served as a foundation to attract matching funds from granting agencies, donations and sponsorship investment. Approximately 40% of all dollars invested in the Meewasin Valley in the past 38 years for conservation, development and education work have come from non-statutory sources.

Meewasin's volunteer fund development cabinet continues to advise Meewasin in offering donor opportunities. These range from sponsored programs and projects to planned giving and conservation endowments. Donors wanting to honour special people or events can sponsor trees, bricks, benches, and other amenities in the Meewasin Valley; as well as attend a celebration of these gifts every June. Meewasin's Green Circle is a new program offered to the public allowing donors to invest in the work of Meewasin on an ongoing basis. More details about the Green Circle can be found on Meewasin's website at <http://meewasin.com/donate/donor-programs/>.

Opportunities to participate in trail improvements along the most popular and prominent segments of the Meewasin Trail will also be available to donors.

2. Meewasin appointed Eric Oluson as the Government of Saskatchewan representative to the Linkage Committee.
3. Meewasin approved the award of the construction contract to Wilco Contractors Southwest Inc. for upgrades to the existing Meewasin Trail, west of the river, from north of Queen Street to Duke Street (southern end of Weir). The upgrades include replacement of the existing trail with a 4.0m wide asphalt trail, associated grading, railings and retaining walls, vegetation removal, seating nodes, planting, and topsoil and seeding as necessary. The work will also include site work to accommodate future widening of an additional 2.0m width of trail as usage increases. This project is possible through special project funding from the City and the Canada 150 program.

For more information contact Lloyd Isaak or Doug Porteous at Meewasin 306-665-6887