

# State of the Valley

April 2019 - March 2024

*Thinking Globally, Locally*

Meewasin 

# Preface

## Innovation Through Collaboration And Connection On The Prairie Landscape

Meewasin continues to grow the vision of creating a World Class Corridor by advancing collaborations at all levels and across jurisdictions. Meewasin recognizes more than ever how interconnected we are with others around the globe, and the importance of partnerships and community building to support health and wellness. Nothing highlighted this more than the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic presented unique challenges in providing a safe, accessible Meewasin Valley while ensuring the safety of our staff. At the same time, it renewed appreciation for nature, physical and mental well-being, and underscored the vital role of the Meewasin Valley in offering opportunities for wellness and connection to the land during a global crisis.

During and following the pandemic, use of the Meewasin Valley surged — trail usage doubled on some of the busiest sections and Beaver Creek Conservation Area experienced an overall increase of 40% visitation since 2019. Alongside this increase, the Saskatoon Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) experienced continued population growth of 7.6%, reaching nearly 318,000 people in 2021. This growth outpaced the national average growth of CMAs during that period (StatsCan, 2021).

Meewasin met these challenges by continuing to harness the power of partnership to enhance and evolve its strategic direction. Regional partnerships with organizations like the City of Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Tribal Council, Saskatoon Public Schools and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools were established or renewed. Beyond the region, Meewasin also expanded its reach to collaborate with partners to grow recognition of Meewasin's conservation efforts, contribute to sustainability strategies, join the growing group of Canadian urban parks within the Cornerstone Parks Program, and partner with Parks Canada to explore the designation of a National Urban Park in the Saskatoon Region.

The “Thinking Globally, Locally” graphic found on page 2 illustrates how the work conducted within Meewasin's mandate and scope contributes to the achievement of funding partner mandates and how the success of Meewasin's mandate has a cascading effect, supporting and contributing to broader regional, provincial, national and global strategies.

To support Meewasin's mandate in the face of accelerated growth in the region, Meewasin launched the More Than a Trail Campaign in 2020. In addition to statutory and participating party funding, Meewasin is a non-profit and registered charity that relies on the support of our sponsors, donors, volunteers, and grants to maximize the impact of Meewasin's work.

**Visit [meewasin.com](http://meewasin.com) to discover the ways you can explore the Meewasin Valley, access up-to-date Annual Reports, and learn how you can help Meewasin make an impact.**

*Meewasin is located on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We humbly acknowledge the traditional caretakers of the land and honour the First Nations and Métis people of this place.*

## Report at a Glance

# 90%

of publicly accessible native, naturalized and green spaces in the Study Area are provided by Meewasin Sites

# 2x

Meewasin has doubled volunteer participation since the Friends of the Valley program was launched in 2022

# 50,000

people reached this reporting period through education, outreach and tourism programming



Overall, native & naturalized land cover stayed stable – experiencing a -0.43% net change

30% of native and naturalized land is protected — 86% of which is within the Meewasin Valley

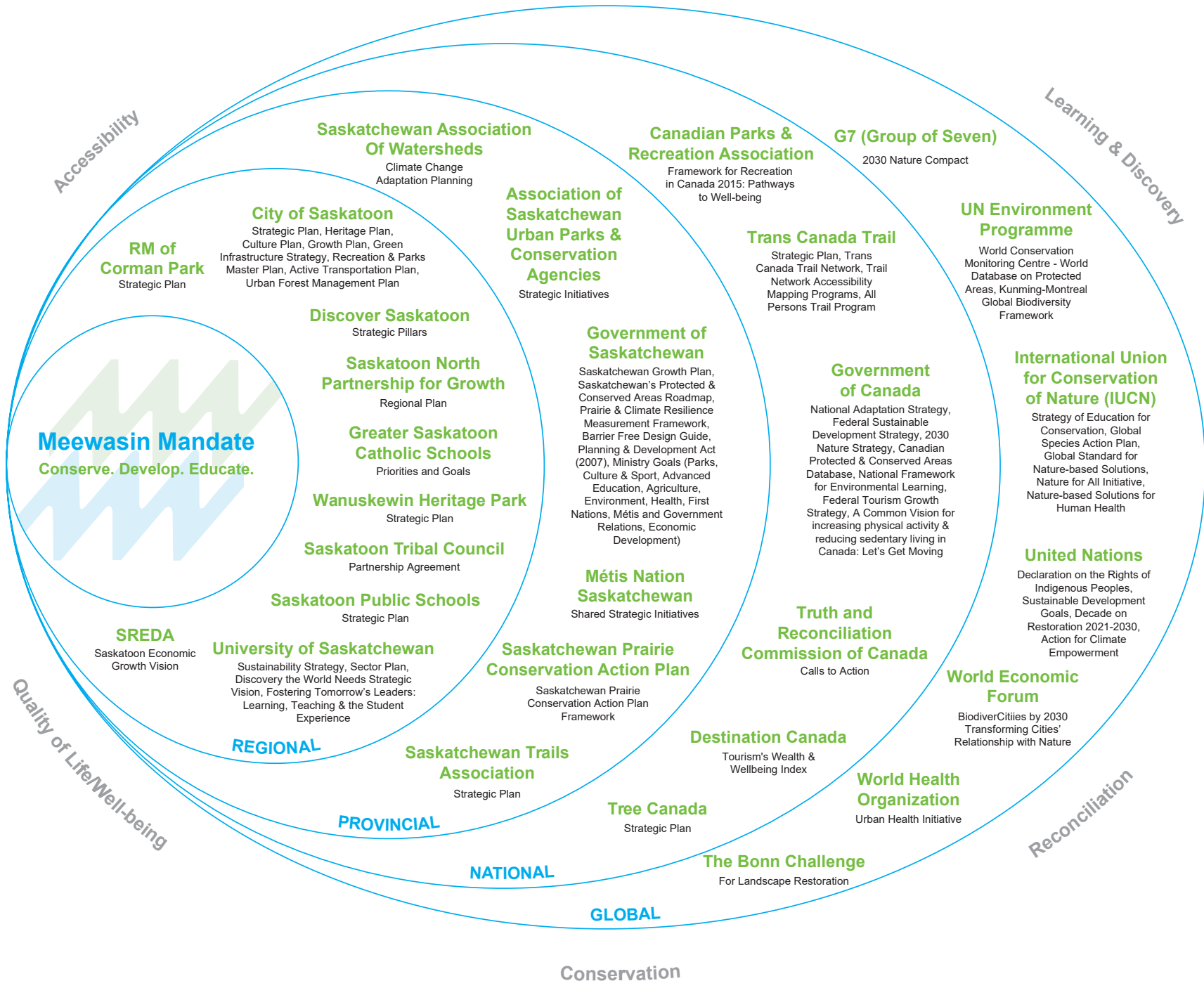
# 49%

rise in average trail visits since last period



# 230%

increase in prescribed fire application in the region since inception of Canadian Prairies Prescribed Fire Exchange in 2021



## Contributing to 30 by 30

Meewasin commenced a multi-year collaborative effort with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of the Environment to screen sites within the Meewasin Valley for recognition within the Provincial, Canadian and World Protected and Conserved Areas Databases. This work contributes towards Canada's and global goals of 30% of lands protected or conserved by 2030. This work was undertaken to:

- Demonstrate Meewasin's commitment to biodiversity and sustainability goals;
- Recognize that Meewasin's conservation management mechanisms meet national and global standards; and
- Address under-reporting of Meewasin's conservation lands contributing to provincial, national and global protection goals.

The screening analyzed factors such as conservation strategies, biodiversity goals and outcomes, cultural and heritage significance, management mechanisms and site history. Multiple collaborative working sessions were undertaken with ECCC, the Ministry of Environment as well as partners such as the City of Saskatoon.

Use the QR code on page 5 to access a profile of Meewasin's efforts toward designation from ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability Canada's: Conservation Close to Home (2021) and learn more about Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM's).

# 44%

of Meewasin Sites are recognized in the Protected and Conserved Areas Network

# 640

additional hectares of Meewasin Sites have been designated as Protected Areas or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in this reporting period

## Enhancing Connections: National Urban Park Exploration

Parks Canada announced the Saskatoon region as a candidate site for exploration of a proposed National Urban Park in 2021. Existing experience in urban park operation and established collaborative partnerships within the region positioned Meewasin as a lead partner in the exploration process, with the Meewasin Valley being chosen as the initial study area. A Steering Committee consisting of key governments and organizations is guiding the exploration of the proposed park's vision, boundaries and governance.

### National Urban Parks Program Core Objectives

- Conserving nature
- Connecting people with nature
- Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples

Visit <https://urbanparksask.ca/> to learn more about the Saskatoon Region National Urban Park exploration process, the Steering Committee members and how to get connected.



## Promoting Prairie Conservation to the World: COP15

Meewasin's legacy of leadership and collaboration on prairie conservation objectives was showcased at a global scale at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal, in which the historic Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted. This framework aims to put nature on a path to recovery through nature protection and addressing biodiversity loss through refined 2030 and 2050 targets.

This landmark conference provided a unique opportunity to highlight Meewasin and partner-led successes and challenges with a range of leaders locally and internationally. It also offered a chance to connect with conservation leaders and share best practices from around the world. Meewasin led or participated in the following panels:

- **Women Leading the Way: Prairie Conservation Along Our River**
- **The Importance of Green and Blue Spaces in Urban Environments**
- **Volunteering and Community Involvement for the Achievement of 30 by 30**
- **Achievement of Target 3 (30 by 30) through OECM's and Protected Areas**



## Milestones

2019

- 40th Anniversary Meewasin Gala

2020

- COVID pandemic - policies formed & implemented
- Canada Target 1 (25% of lands protected or conserved by 2025) screening of Meewasin Valley sites begins
- City of Saskatoon and Meewasin Master Agreement renewed
- Chief Whitecap Trail added to Trans Canada Trail Network
- Public launch of Meewasin More Than a Trail Campaign

2021

- Proposed National Urban Park feasibility assessment commences
- Meewasin-owned lands added to Conserved and Protected Areas Databases
- Joined Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan (SK PCAP)

2022

- 7 Protected Areas & 9 OECMs recognized in Conserved & Protected Areas Databases
- Meewasin attended the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in Montreal
- Southwest Trail and Victoria Park west loop added to Trans Canada Trail Network

2023

- Proposed National Urban Park draft Vision, Boundaries and Governance created
- University of Saskatchewan and Meewasin Memorandum of Understanding reviewed and re-signed
- Silver Certification as GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Business
- Meewasin Valley selected as a Cultural Landscapes Legacy Project by the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects
- Meewasin signs onto Cornerstone Parks Program

## The Meewasin Valley Project



### Connecting People Through Places and Spaces *In Memory of Raymond Moriyama (1929-2023)*

With heavy hearts, Meewasin mourns the passing of Raymond Moriyama: visionary leader, architect and author of the Meewasin Valley Project 100-year Plan.

While walking the river valley, Raymond posed the question ‘**In 100 years, what will remain absolutely the same as today?**’ - imploring us to think beyond ourselves and the current moment in order to honour and safeguard the sacred relationship between this land and the people. This question is as relevant nearly five decades later as when it was originally posed in 1978.

In Raymond’s honour, Meewasin remains committed to advancing his vision of stewardship of the river valley to ensure his legacy endures on this beautiful landscape for many generations to come.



# 1.0 The State of the Valley Report

Since 1998, the State of the Valley Report has evaluated measurable indicators related to the overarching themes of **Health, Balance, Fit and Vibrancy** introduced in the vision modeled in Meewasin’s founding document, **The Meewasin Project – 100 Year Conceptual Master Plan (1979)**. This report utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to assess progress and trends in relation to both Meewasin’s stated goals and objectives set out in guiding documents - *Meewasin Strategic Goals and Objectives 2019 – 2024*, *Key Performance Indicators 2019 - 2024*, *Meewasin Valley-wide Resource Management Plan 2017 - 2027*, *Meewasin Valley-wide Monitoring Framework 2021 - 2026*, *The Meewasin Trail Study 2014* and previous State of the Valley reports.



This report is available as a linked PDF on the Meewasin website. A Report Supplement is also provided that provides comprehensive report details, including:





- Methodology
- Tables & Figures
- Appendices, including maps and supporting materials

Scan the QR code to access this additional content and learn more about Meewasin.

# 2.0 Interpreting this Report






## Progress Indicators

Refer to current achievement level attained on measurable indicators presented in guiding documents relative to targeted completion windows.

	Goal is currently being achieved or is completed
<b>Achieving Goal</b>	
	Goal is on pace to be completed within timeframe
<b>On Pace</b>	
	Progress delayed relative to completion timeline
<b>Progress Lagging</b>	
	Action is currently paused
<b>On Hold</b>	

## Trend Indicators

Trend relative to the last State of the Valley assessment.

	Data reflects favourable trend since last report
<b>Positive</b>	
	Data reflects adverse trend since last report
<b>Negative</b>	
	Data reflects variance of less than ±1% since last report
<b>Steady</b>	
	Baseline data not previously measured
<b>New</b>	
	Retrospective data that is cumulative or historical
<b>Retro</b>	

## Geographic Context

**Study Area** – The Meewasin Valley with a 2 kilometre buffer established to assess potential influencing factors impacting the Meewasin Valley.

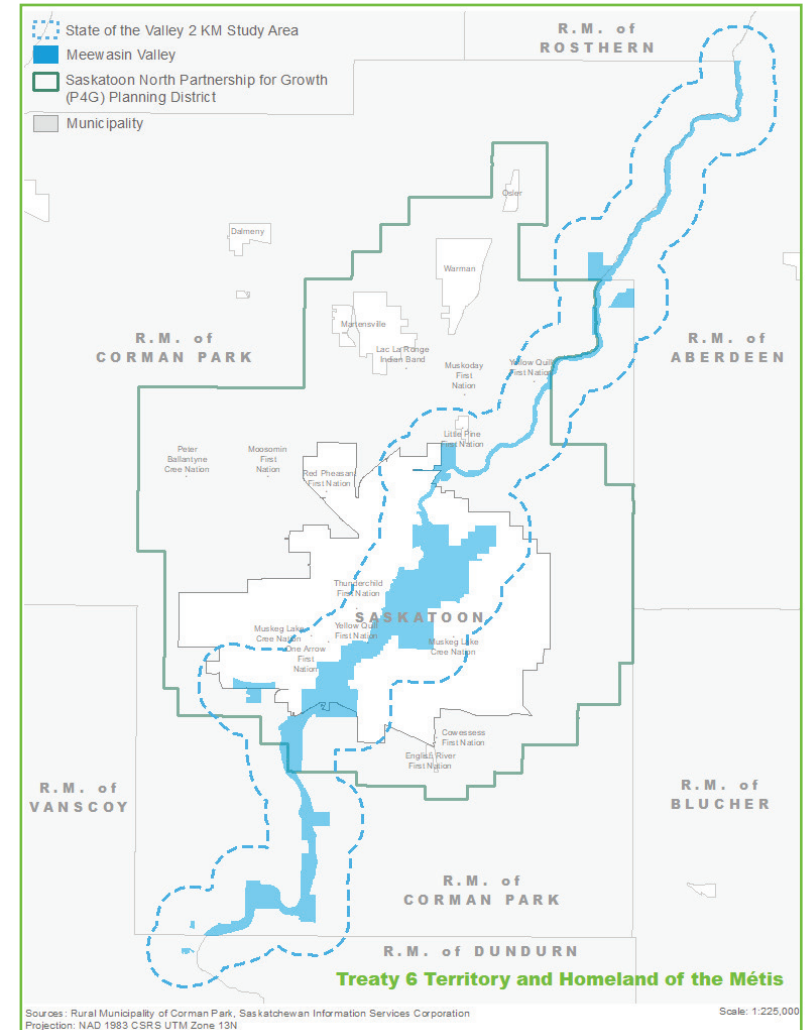
**Meewasin Valley** – refers to the South Saskatchewan River, as well as lands described in Schedules A and B in *The Meewasin Valley Authority Act (1979)*.

**Meewasin Sites** – refers to a variety of Meewasin-owned or managed sites within the Meewasin Valley.

## Temporal Scope

**5 year reporting cycle** – Unless otherwise stated, this report contains fiscal data April 1 2019 – March 31 2024. The Report Supplement includes footnotes to denote which data is tracked over calendar year rather than fiscal year.

## State of the Valley Geographic Context



# 3.0 Health

Meewasin has significantly advanced conservation initiatives across its own sites and the broader region, through strategic collaborations and advancing partnerships. This work is aimed at minimizing ecological impacts, undertaking restorative work, and engaging the public in stewardship activities. These efforts are balanced with the importance of accessible natural and naturalized areas to support physical, mental, social, and cultural health outcomes, reinforcing the importance of conservation to community well-being.

Significant expansion of Meewasin's conservation efforts has occurred in this period, bolstered by the first phase of implementation of the Valley-wide Resource Management Plan (Tomlinson et al., 2017), and the formation of a Valley-wide Monitoring Framework (Keller & Grilz, 2021). Work towards actions named in these plans is substantially underway or achieved, including expansion of monitoring capacity on Meewasin sites, engaging the public with ecological restoration and monitoring work, enhancing layers of conservation protections through the Protected and Conserved Areas network, and supporting regional conservation efforts. With the City of Saskatoon and support from the Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada Natural Infrastructure Fund, Meewasin was able to undertake projects to install wildlife-friendly fencing, plant trees and shrubs, as well as manage invasive species at key sites.

Collaborative successes include the creation of the Canadian Prairies Prescribed Fire Exchange (CPPFE), the implementation of the Urban Wildlife Information Network (UWIN), completion of the Natural Areas Inventory Report for the City of Saskatoon (Bouvier, 2019) in support of their Green Infrastructure Strategy (City of Saskatoon, 2020), and supporting Wanuskewin Heritage Park on efforts towards the re-introduction of Plains Bison, habitat restoration work and undertaking a site-specific resource management plan as part of their bid to be designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The ecological health metrics assessed in this report have generally remained stable since the last report. Land cover and patch size proportions have remained consistent since 2018, with the largest areas of change resulting from the restoration of cropland to native grass species, river changes due to channelization and fluctuating levels, and community development within both the urban and rural gradients. Increases in biodiversity and conservation measures speak to the successes of Meewasin's collaborative stewardship and engagement strategies within and beyond the region.



## Milestones

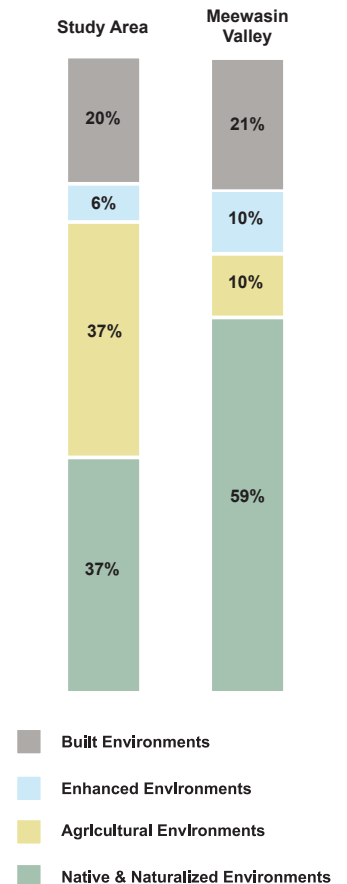
- 2019**
  - Natural Areas Inventory for the City of Saskatoon
  - Wildlife friendly fencing installed at:
    - Beaver Creek Conservation Area (partial)
    - Northeast Swale
    - Peggy Mc KERcher Conservation Area
- 2020**
  - 2 million+ stems of European Buckthorn treated since 1998
  - Habitat Evaluation of the Saskatoon Freeway Project Through the Northeast and Small Swale Complexes
- 2021**
  - Seedbank Feasibility Study Commences
  - Meewasin Valley-wide Monitoring Framework
  - State of the Valley: Path to Progress Report
  - Wildlife friendly fencing installed at:
    - Northeast Swale Recreational Zone
- 2022**
  - Maple Grove Baseline Inventory
  - Environment and Climate Change Canada includes Cranberry Flats Conservation Area as proposed Critical Habitat for Gibson's Big Sand Tiger Beetle
- 2023**
  - Wanuskewin Heritage Park Resource Management Plan
  - Joint CPPFE TREX event achieved the largest prescribed fire season to date on Meewasin sites (160+ hectares)
  - Wildlife friendly fencing installed at:
    - Chief Whitecap Park
    - Cranberry Flats
    - Beaver Creek Conservation Area (complete)

### 3.1.1. Land Use and Land Cover Analysis

The assessment of land use and land cover conducted in 2023 for this report employs a desktop analysis to best determine the state of cover at the time of the assessment. This data informs the assessments of ecological metrics related to land cover and land use changes, natural areas proportions, patch sizes and fragmentation, protections and the provision of green spaces included in the 'Balance' section. The classification schema has been updated since the last reporting period. Additional resources describing these updates, an overview of the classification schema, and related definitions can be found in the Report Supplement.

Subcategory 1	Subcategory 2	Subcategory 3	Subcategory 4	Meewasin Valley Total (ha)	Study Area Total (ha)	Subcategory 1	Subcategory 2	Subcategory 3	Subcategory 4	Total in Meewasin Valley (ha)	Total in Study Area (ha)	
<b>Built Environments:</b> Environments where artificial surfaces predominantly comprise the land cover. These surroundings are created for humans, by humans, and used for human activity						<b>Agricultural Environments:</b> Arable lands used for agricultural purposes, such as crop or forage production.						
Urban & Rural Development				727.98	4515.26	Crop				538.39	12544.24	
Outdoor Recreation Facility				26.49	66.16	Tame Forage	Agricultural Production	Pasture		0.24	297.52	
								Old Field		72.34	277.20	
								Forage Crop		47.97	2847.91	
Agricultural Operations				27.16	158.38	<b>Native &amp; Naturalized Environments:</b> Environments where naturally occurring or naturalized vegetation predominantly comprise the land cover. Includes environments that may have been originally anthropogenically created or altered but demonstrate indicators of naturalization over time.						
Industrial				112.47	1133.79	Grassland Systems	Known Prairie	Known Prairie		296.58	405.84	
Road & Rail				461.97	2395.93			Agricultural Production	Pasture	83.52	1278.21	
Exposed & Barren	Development			46.23	492.62		Naturalized Grass	Naturalized Grass		148.24	509.56	
	Informal Road & Trail			23.18	102.15			Agricultural Production	Pasture	94.33	2786.04	
Old Field									92.62	1160.46		
Green Space	Formal Green Space	Park & Recreation Lawn		201.73	508.99			Naturalized Grass	Agricultural Production	Naturalized Forage	0.67	393.87
										Urban Garden		1.19
		Urban Afforested	Planting		21.25			38.95	Naturalized Green Space	Vegetated Margin	Field Edge	47.94
			Urban Tree Cover		99.35		195.13	Field Pocket		1.29	30.66	
	Informal Green Space	Verge		182.5	847.54		Naturally Non-Vegetated			0.69	2.86	
		Vacant Lots		2.63	72.05	Forested and Shrubland Systems	Native & Naturalized			711.74	3355.64	
		Utility Right of Way & Lot		0.45	4.03			Afforested	Shelterbelt	19.04	506.69	
	Outdoor Recreation	Sport & Recreation Fields		22.01	61.54	Native & Naturalized Aquatic Systems	River	River		1773.57	1957.57	
								Golf Course		116.9	331.7	Emergent Sandbar
		Zoological Park		12.38	12.38	Wetland	Creek		7.6	46.65		
Campground			4.36	4.36	Native & Naturalized Wetland		139.68	1977.26				
Altered Aquatic Systems	Constructed Wetland			23	124.53	Naturalized Drainage		12.91	42.41			
	Constructed Drainage			1.38	4.43							
	Altered Wetland			5.31	552.39							
										<b>6756.52</b>	<b>43612.28</b>	

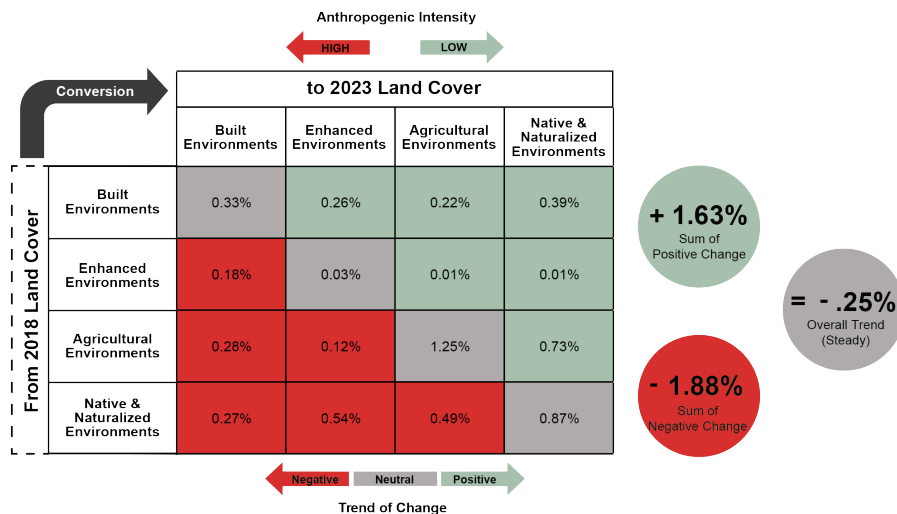
### Land Use and Land Cover Proportions



### 3.1.2 Land Use and Land Cover Change Analysis

The land use and land cover analysis also considers changes detected since the 2018 analysis between land use and land cover categories. For analysis purposes, change conversions to higher degrees of anthropogenic intensity are considered negative, while conversions to lower degrees of anthropogenic intensity are considered positive. Changes that occurred between subcategories of the same upper category were considered neutral. The table below summarizes conversions between the four upper land use and land cover categories in the Study Area. The analysis showed that land cover proportions have remained generally consistent since 2018, with 6% overall change found in both in the Meewasin Valley and in the Study Area. Proportions of known prairie cover in the Study Area have remained steady since 2018. A portion of cover change that did occur was due to the establishment of informal trail at the Northeast Swale which was intended to direct human impact to designated areas.

Summary of Land Conversions 2018-2023 Study Area



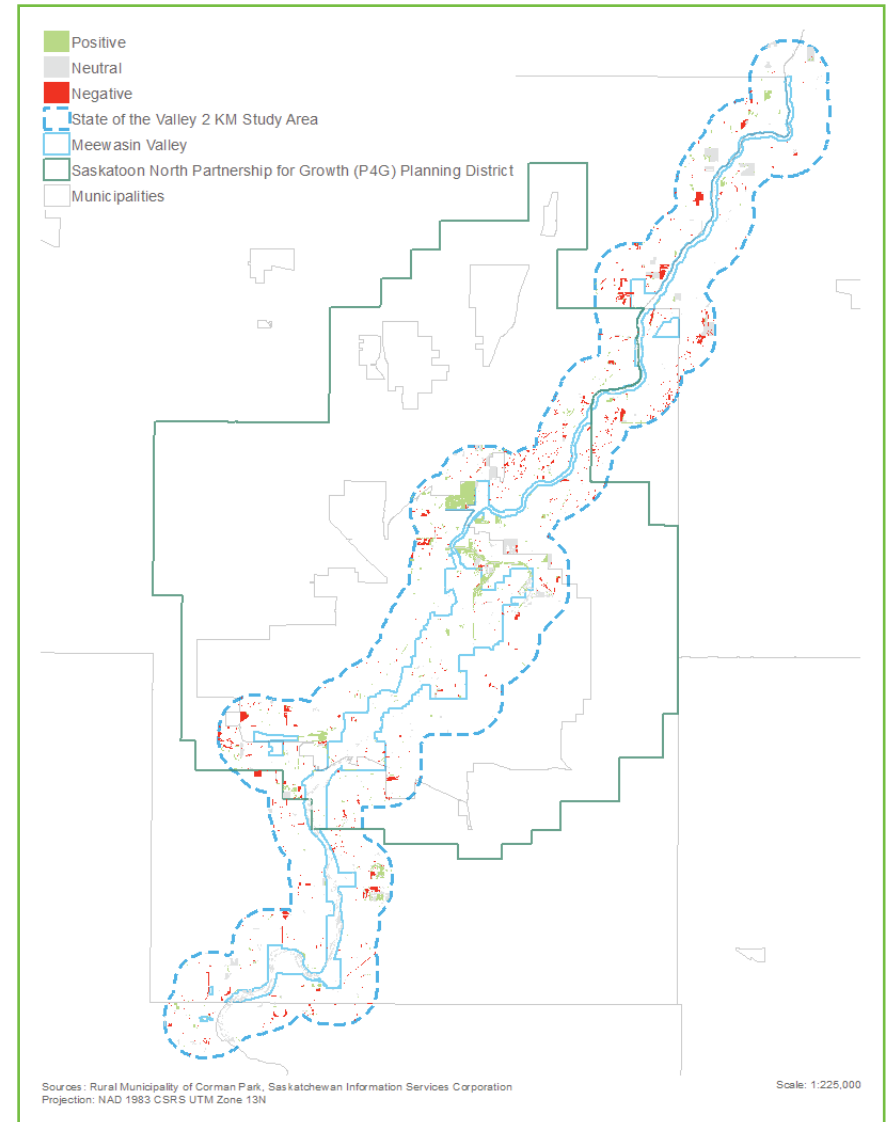
#### Notable Results

##### Positive Trends:

- Restoration of cropland to native grassland for the Plains Bison at Wanuskewin Heritage Park
- Revegetation of disturbed development areas along McOrmond Drive and Central Avenue

##### Negative Trends:

- Alteration of naturally occurring wetlands for agricultural purposes
- Net change of river converting to emergent sandbars, possibly indicative of drought period in the region



##### Native and Naturalized Environments

The amount of native & naturalized cover has remained steady in both the Study Area and Meewasin Valley since the 2018 assessment. The Meewasin Valley saw a slight increase of 0.46% in this type of cover compared to the slight decrease experienced in the Study Area.



### 3.1.3 Patch Size and Fragmentation

The analysis of patch size and fragmentation relies on the aggregation of contiguous parcels of land cover. This resulting data is compared to the 2018 dataset class size thresholds in order to identify fragmentation affected through anthropogenic means since the last report. The analysis shown here considers native and naturalized patch size proportions across the study area. It also considers the proportion of native and naturalized patches over 20 hectares in the Meewasin Valley.

● **90%**  
of Native & Naturalized Environments patches in the Meewasin Valley occur in patches greater than 20 ha

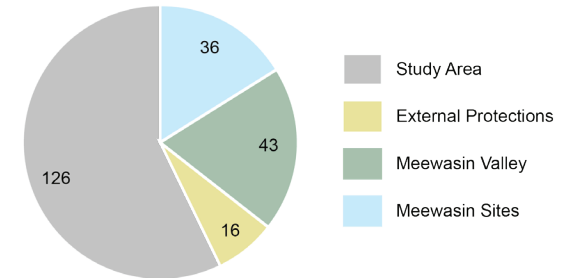
#### ● Patch Size Analysis in the Study Area

Native & Naturalized Environments						
Size Class (Ha)	≥1000	100 - 999	50 - 99	20 - 49	10 - 19	<10
Count	1	19	16	40	48	10451
Percent of Total Study Area	17.41%	8.56%	2.67%	2.72%	1.52%	3.75%

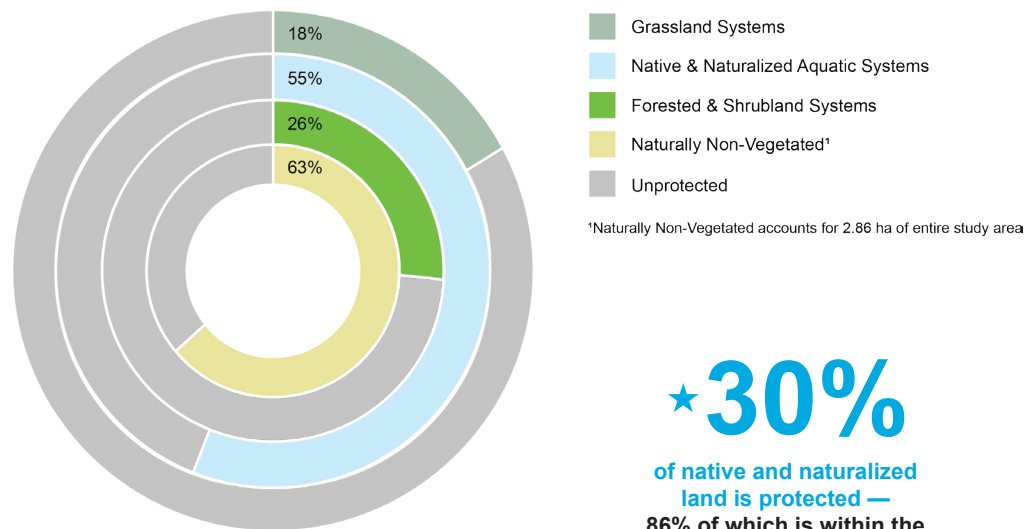
### 3.2 Protected Lands

An analysis was conducted to determine the amount of land with formal protections in the Study Area. In addition to the protections provided by Meewasin sites and the Meewasin Valley, external protections at national, provincial, regional, and local levels were also considered. These protections play an important role in conserving ecological and cultural landscapes for current and future generations. Protections of publicly accessible lands also serve to provide natural or formal green spaces for public health and wellness. A full description of the protections considered in this analysis can be found in the Report Supplement.

#### ● Documented Cultural Heritage Distribution

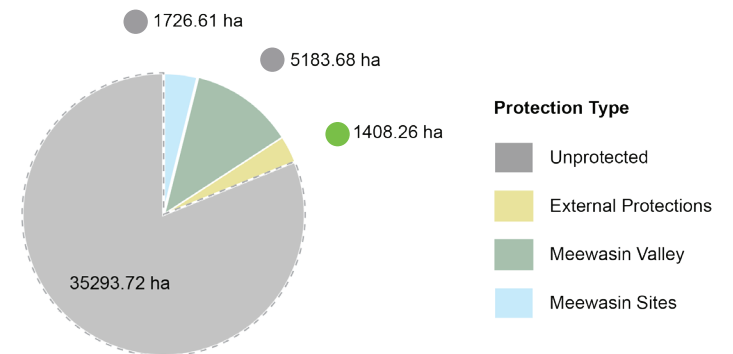


#### ★ Native and Naturalized Land Cover Under Protection in Study Area



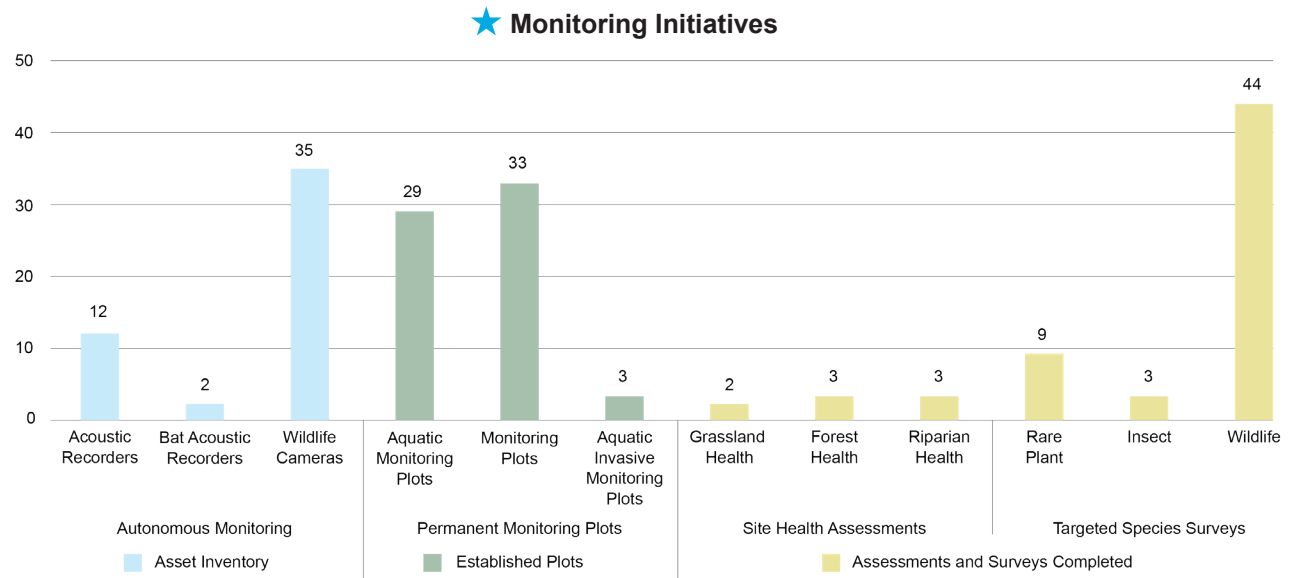
★ **30%**  
of native and naturalized land is protected —  
86% of which is within the Meewasin Valley

#### Total Lands Under Protection in Study Area



### 3.3 Meewasin Monitoring Program

Meewasin has an expanded network of both active and passive monitoring to inform and support site level and broader Valley-wide reporting mechanisms. Meewasin continues to utilize partnerships and community outreach to conduct and inform targeted species surveys, such as volunteer events to inventory Crowfoot Violet (*Viola pedatifida*) and partnering with Environment and Climate Change Canada to conduct Smooth Goosefoot (*Chenopodium subglabrum*) surveys.

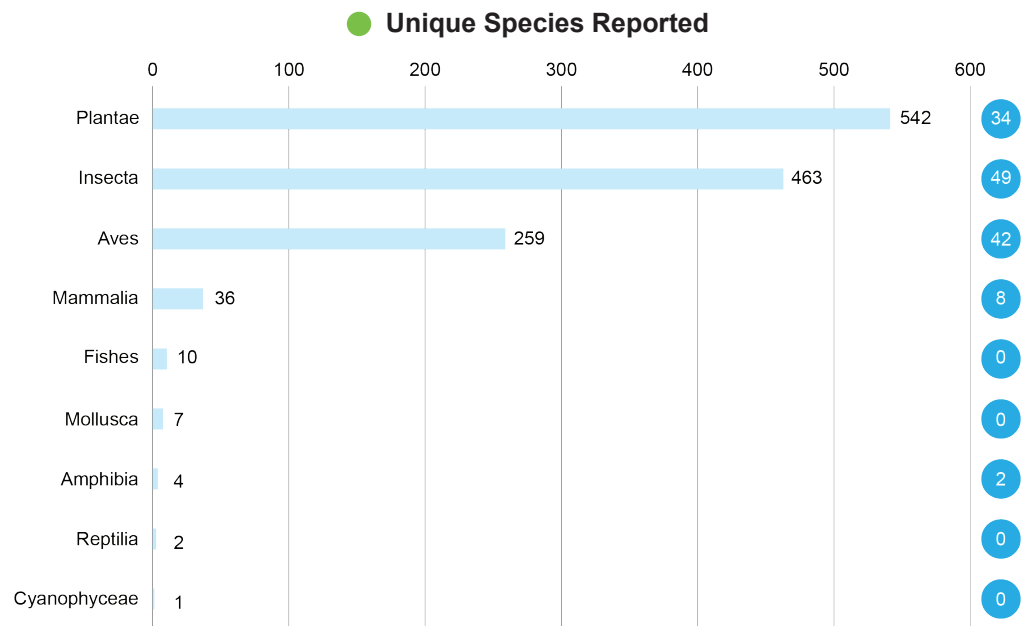


### 3.4 Species Biodiversity

Species observations and the number of rare or at risk species have both increased since the last report. These increases reflect the growth of Meewasin’s monitoring program, the expansion of publicly accessible databases, and the growing promotion and use of platforms such as iNaturalist and eBird by citizen scientists and agencies such as Meewasin to log species observations and special projects in the region. The full list of species compiled for this report can be found in the Report Supplement.

#### Species at Risk Act (SARA) Listed Endangered Species in Study Area

- Little Brown Myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*)
- Monarch (*Danaus Plexippus*)
- Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus circumcinctus*)
- Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)
- Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*)



1324 Species Reported

135 Rare or At Risk Species

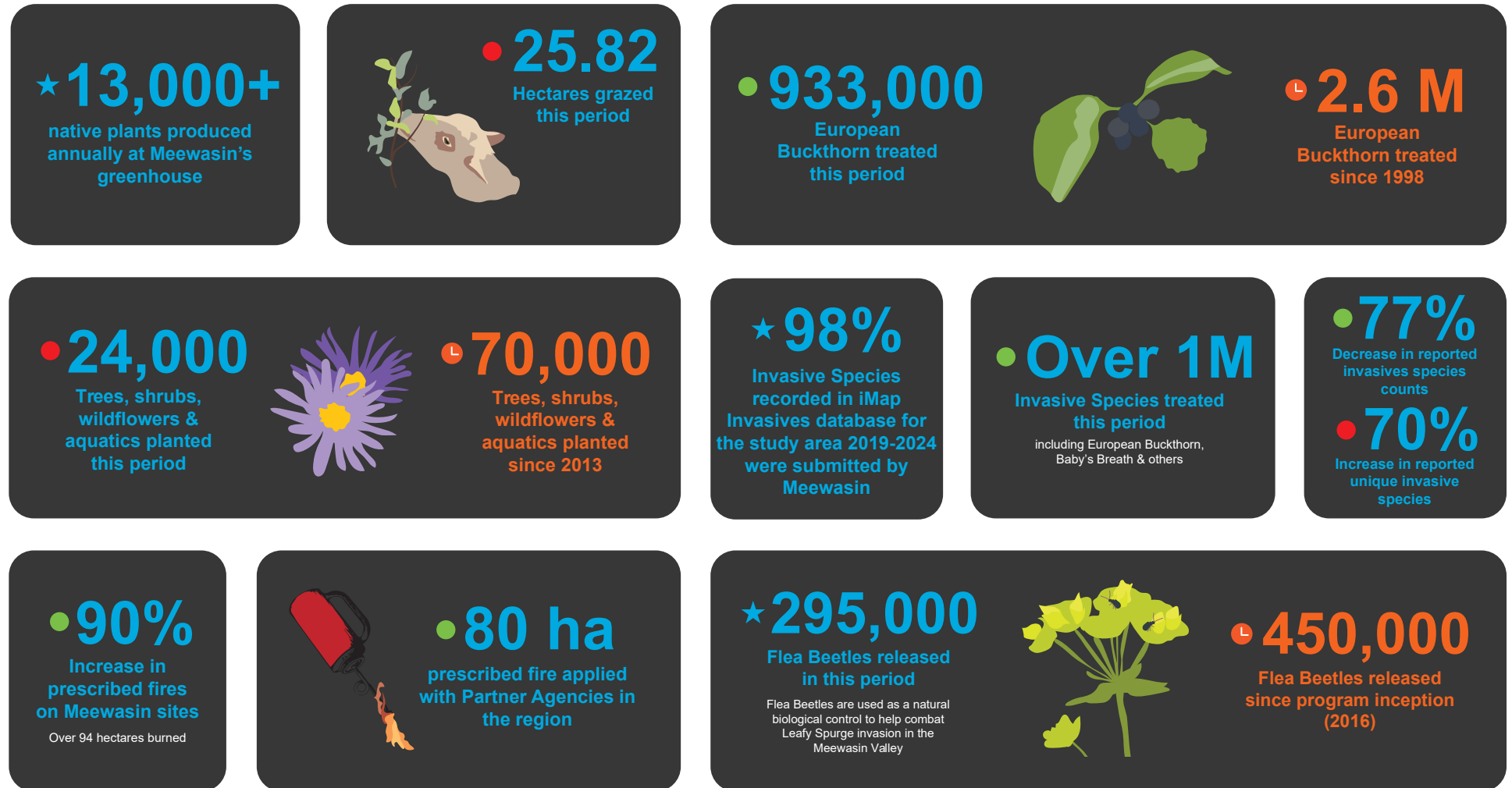
**250%** increase in citizen science reporting since 2018

### 3.5 Conservation Land Management

Conservation land management is a mechanism for enhancing land and habitat quality relative to its natural state. Meewasin's work towards grassland and habitat quality enhancement employs a variety of land management techniques including targeted conservation grazing, prescribed fire, restoration activities, native seed production and plantings for restoration, and invasive species management.

### Invasive Species Management

Invasives species reporting doubled in this period, with the number of unique species reported matching that trend. Conversely, individual species counts fell during this period. At this time, the causes and impacts of this trend are unclear. Further analysis is needed to understand the dynamics of invasive species reported in the Meewasin Valley. Meewasin continues to employ integrated tactics to combat invasive species, including herbicide treatments, bio-control agents, targeted conservation grazing, and mechanical and/or manual removals.



#### Most Reported Invasive Plant Species in the Study Area

European Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Narrow Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), Nodding Thistle (*Carduus nutans*), Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), Absinthe (*Artemisia absinthium*)

## Connecting: *Community Outreach*

- Natural ecosystem processes for species at risk in urban landscapes at RE3 (Restore, Reclaim, Rewild) Conference.
- Global, National, Provincial and Local goals related to nature conservation and climate impacts at International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives 2023 Livable Cities Forum.
- Hosting events for groups such as Outdoor School, Science Trek and EcoQuest to engage youth in hands-on conservation education.
- Hosted a tour for the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists Saskatoon Branch focused on native plant identification and native prairie management.
- Presented to the Master Naturalist Program on Meewasin's role in conserving aquatic habitats in the Meewasin Valley.
- Presented at the 2023 Prairie Conservation and Endangered Species Conference on the role of fire and grazing to enhance species at risk habitat.

## Collaborating: *Partnership in Action*

- Meewasin featured as a case study showcasing the process undertaken towards the potential establishment of a Saskatoon Region National Urban Park in a joint research study by the Department of Geography at the University of Guelph and Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership focused on strengthening Indigenous-led conservation in urban landscapes.
- Attended virtual Prescribed Fire course hosted by The Minnesota Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.
- Partnered with the City of Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan, Wild About Saskatoon, Saskatoon Wildlife Federation, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), Saskatoon Nature Society, Nature Saskatchewan, Wanuskewin Heritage Park and the Saskatoon Forestry Farm Zoo and Park to make Saskatoon the 2nd city in Canada to join the Urban Wildlife Information Network (UWIN), utilizing wildlife monitoring protocols to better understand the ecology and behaviours of urban wildlife species.
- Partnership with the City of Saskatoon and South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards, Inc. funded by RBC Tech for Nature to install aquatic floating islands at the Northeast Swale Storm Pond, including public engagement signage.
- Continued partnership with South Saskatchewan River Watersheds Stewards, Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan and other organizations to survey for and remove Flowering Rush along the South Saskatchewan River.
- Worked with University of Saskatchewan College of Agriculture and Bioresources Renewable Resources Program students to develop monitoring strategies for swale complexes in the Saskatoon Region.
- Collaborated with Saskatoon Fire Department to increase prescribed fire training and awareness in the region.
- Prairie Conservation Action Plan's Multiple Species-at-Risk Habitat Assessment Protocol beta-tested at Beaver Creek Conservation Area.
- Implemented a project at Devil's Dip, Gabriel Dumont Park and Beaver Creek Conservation Area to engage citizen scientists in tracking the natural, successional habitat changes caused by beavers in riparian ecosystems. This project was in partnership with the Department of Geography at the University of Saskatchewan and supported by RBC Tech for Nature.
- Partnered with the City of Saskatoon in a city-wide assessment of planting sites as part of the Government of Canada's 2 Billion Trees program.
- Participated in Canadian Wildlife Federation's National Native Seed Strategy Framework.

## Progress Summary: *Health*



### Progress Indicators

 Achieving Goal	Strategic Goals and Objectives
 Achieving Goal	Key Performance Indicators
 Achieving Goal	Valley-wide Resource Management Plan
 Achieving Goal	Valley-wide Monitoring Framework
 On Pace	Trail Study

## Looking Ahead

Advancements of actions defined in the Valley-wide Resource Management Plan and Valley-wide Monitoring Framework continue to progress despite no new funding to support these initiatives. Seeking alternative means to analyze, clean, store and externally share monitoring results remains a priority. Efforts to reinstate formal annual site reporting will help guide annual site work plans on conservation sites. Continued work to digitize historical site data to inform comparative analysis on site-specific actions identified in the Valley-wide Resource Management Plan is required to assess the success of the plan; this work is contingent on availability of staffing resources.

Barriers such as unfavourable climate conditions, resulting fire bans, resource and funding limitations have impacted Meewasin's ability to achieve the goal of 25% annual site restoration. Meewasin will continue to collaborate with the Canadian Prairies Prescribed Fire Exchange (CPPFE) and other partners to address the challenges.

Site planning processes continue, with the implementation of Resource Management Plans for Maple Grove and Wanuskewin Heritage Park underway. The completion of a Baseline Inventory Report for the Beaver Creek Conservation Area is expected in 2025. These documents report on site-level resource management planning and actions, monitoring outcomes and ecological health status. Meewasin is also providing technical contribution in support of the City of Saskatoon for Natural Areas Management Plans for the Small Swale and Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area.

Work on a Valley-wide Resource Management mid-term report is underway, with a draft expected in 2025. An update to the Valley-wide Resource Management Plan will commence in advance of the plan's expiry in 2027; this work will include various levels of engagement and a Steering Committee to help guide and inform ecological priorities and action planning.

# DARK SKIES

Ecology at Night

Recognizing the important effects of dark skies for the health of nocturnal wildlife, Meewasin has implemented monitoring of bat species in the Valley, with the acquisition of a bat-focused Autonomous Recording Unit (ARU) in 2022. While ARUs were already in use to monitor other species such as birds and frogs, bat detection requires the setting of a different acoustic range that is generally inaudible to humans. ARUs allow for the passive collection of data which is less resource-intensive and can be conducted over long periods of time.

Meewasin also conducts active monitoring through bat surveys and engagement with the public. Meewasin partners with the Royal Astronomical Society to host Dark Skies events with a focus on learning about our night sky, nocturnal wildlife, and how light pollution affects the natural world. Attendees can participate in *Bat Blitz Events* where they are introduced to citizen science survey methods that can support Meewasin's work. These popular events have grown annually since their inception, with a waitlist that peaked at 150 people in 2023!

## Why is bat monitoring important?

- Five out of six bat species detected in the 2 km Study Area are designated provincially rare and/or "Endangered" by The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).
- To demonstrate benefits to ecosystem health - bats help control insect populations that may spread disease or destroy crops.
- To track population trends, which is especially important due to the significant threat of White-nose Syndrome detected in Saskatchewan for the first time in 2022.
- Aid in understanding patterns of migration and/or hibernation, habitat needs and usage – these behaviors are still not well understood in the region and require more research.

**The data collected from these initiatives help inform Meewasin's land management practices, with the goal of providing and conserving good habitat for bats.** Scan the QR code on page 5 to learn more about Meewasin's tourism events and species monitoring opportunities!



## Transforming Prairie Grasslands and Parklands through the Power of Partnership



Meewasin is proud to house the Canadian Prairies Prescribed Fire Exchange (CPPFE), an inter-agency collective founded in 2021 with funding provided by the Weston Family Prairie Grasslands Initiative.

Since its inception, the CPPFE has exponentially grown its vision to foster a strong collaborative of partners committed to stewarding ecological health, biodiversity and wildfire risk reduction through the use of prescribed fire as a safe and effective land management tool across the 3 prairie provinces. The CPPFE aims to provide a safe return of fire regimes to the landscape by increasing awareness of prescribed fire techniques and the use of fire historically and culturally to mimic natural disturbances occurring across the prairie parkland and grassland region.

A multi-faceted approach involves identifying and addressing barriers faced by agencies, communities and individuals in the application of safe prescribed fire such as limited resources, deficiencies in training and planning experience, prohibitive costs for equipment, insurance and logistical barriers, regulatory complexities, and public perception toward the use of fire as a management tool.

A highlight of the collaborative nature of this partnership is the introduction of Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TRES) events to Canada in partnership with the Nature Conservancy (United States) and the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange. To date, these events have been held annually in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and provide an opportunity to build relationships, provide mentorship, share knowledge and gain hands-on experience, while utilizing cross-agency collaboration to affect a more extensive application of prescribed fire through a coordinated team effort. TRES events involve participants from a spectrum of experience from beginners to experienced leaders, and a diverse mix of backgrounds, from individual land owners and producers, Indigenous communities, fire departments, school boards, non-profits and governmental agencies. The event has also grown to include practitioners beyond the prairie provinces, encompassing national and international participants in an effort to expand reach and expertise.



# 230%

Increase in the application of prescribed fire in the Meewasin region since the inception of the CPPFE

## Objectives and Implementation

### Expand Capacity through Collaborating

- Establish a network of multi-agency expertise
- Forum for communication, mentorship and sharing of best practices
- Support planning and logistics to increase manageability
- Increased access to resources and equipment

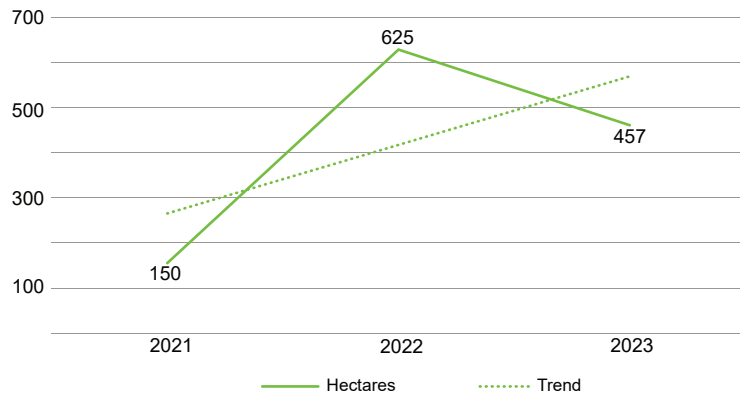
### Increase Awareness

- Education and training targeting all levels of knowledge and expertise
- Outreach aimed at communities, agricultural producers, and the general public
- Technical workshops for all levels of practitioners
- Experiential training opportunities

### Strengthen Research Opportunities

- Expand existing research initiatives and open pathways to new partnerships
- Publish scan of available wildfire and prescribed fire training resources
- Centralized grassland fire research database
- Create fire science analysis laboratory

## Hectares of CPPFE Partners Prescribed Fire



## ★ Achievements Since Inception

Permanent monitoring transects established	<b>15</b>
Research papers in database	<b>356</b>
Training and workshop participants	<b>537</b>
Grassland samples collected	<b>793</b>
Land managed through prescribed fire (hectares)	<b>1232</b>

★ **17**  
partner agencies

★ **1232**  
hectares managed through  
prescribed fire

### Connecting: *Community Outreach*

- Presented at the Wildland Fire Canada Conference in Edmonton - focused on the prairies cooperative fire model and research.
- Presented at Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum's 2022 Transboundary Grasslands Partnership Workshop in Medicine Hat, resulting in 1st international partner, the Great Plains Fire Science Exchange joining CPPFE.
- Presented at the Grassland Restoration Forum in Claresholm, AB, promoting collaboration aimed at stewardship and restoration of native grasslands.
- Promoting CPPFE collaborative partnership at the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution – Canadian Botanical Association, RE3 Restoration Conference for the Society for Ecological Restoration and Society for Range Management conferences.
- CPPFE partners were plenary speakers at the Canadian Land Reclamation Conference.

### Collaborating: *Partnership in Action*

- Collaboration on research projects across the prairies, including the University of Saskatchewan, University of Lethbridge, the Saskatchewan Association for Environmental Law and Mitacs.
- Prescribed fire workshop in Loreburn, SK focused on using prescribed fire as a management tool for community pastures in the region. Representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment Lands Branch, Saskatchewan Parks, Culture and Sport, Nature Conservancy of Canada Saskatchewan, and community pasture groups in attendance.
- Workshop for Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation to assist development of a prescribed fire program and succession planning using multi-agency collaboration.
- Partnership with kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre at the University of Saskatchewan aimed at incorporation of two-eyed seeing approaches (western science with Indigenous ways of knowing) within the CPPFE prescribed fire program.
- CPPFE partners are 1st Canadian participants in the Loess Hills Cooperative Burn Week in Iowa, which aims to exchange prescribed fire knowledge and enhance multi-agency collaboration.
- CPPFE and Meewasin supported Muskeg Lake First Nation on a proposal to provide prescribed fire and wildland fire training to the community, in compliment to the Bridging Living Water and Sky Living Labs project, in partnership with the Prince Albert Grand Council.
- Assisted Stuartburn Prescribed Burn Association (Manitoba) in applying for funding aimed at enhancing fire training capabilities.

## Milestones

2020

- Secured funding from the Weston Family Foundation

2021

- Canadian Prairies Prescribed Fire Exchange (CPPFE) established
- Website launched
- Course 'Introduction to Prescribed Fire in the Grassland Environment' developed & delivered to participants across the 3 prairie provinces
- 1st Prescribed Fire Workshop held for landowners

2022

- Launch of 'Introduction to Prescribed Fire in the Grassland Environment' online course offered through University of Saskatchewan
- 1st Canadian Prairies Training Exchange (TREX) established in Saskatoon
- Launch of Grassland Fire Research Database
- 1st international partner joins CPPFE
- Largest CPPFE partner prescribed fire to date with over 140 hectares of private ranch land in the Alberta Foothills managed with the use of CPPFE training and resources

2023

- 1st Prescribed Fire and Targeted Conservation Grazing Monitoring Workshop hosted in Saskatoon
- 1st Manitoba Tallgrass Prairie & Aspen Parkland TREX event held
- Prairie-wide Prescribed Fire Monitoring Protocol developed
- Launch of webinar series 'Embers of Insight'
- First & Second Indigenous Elder's Facilitated Traditional Knowledge Keepers Gathering event

# 4.0 Balance

Meewasin continues to prioritize safe public access to the river, natural areas, green spaces and trail system - resources whose importance was underscored during the COVID-19 pandemic. Monitoring conducted through the network of Meewasin Trail counters showed that trail use nearly doubled during the pandemic and has remained consistently high throughout this reporting period.

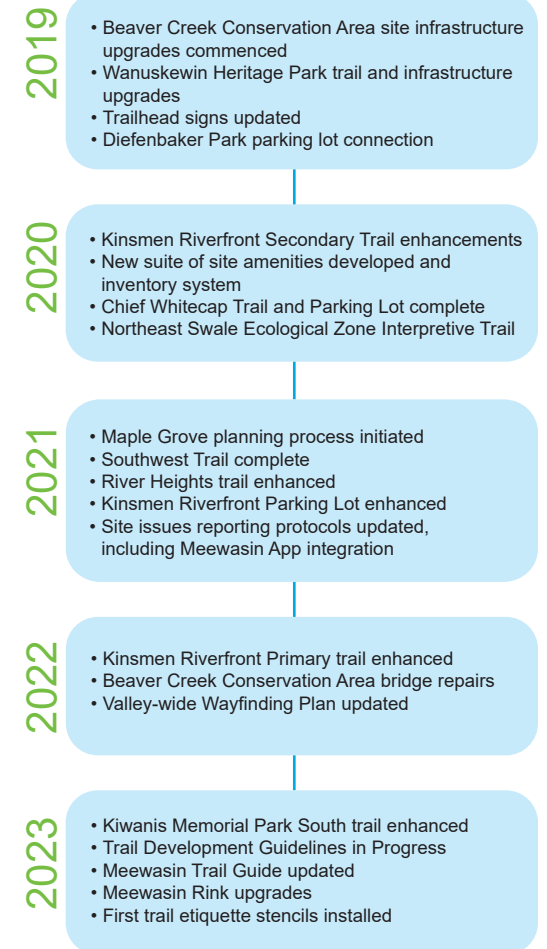
To ensure the Meewasin Trail remained a safe outlet for the community, Meewasin implemented additional safety measures, including one-way traffic routing on specific sections of trail, rural site monitoring and the installation of safety signage. Once facility operations were resumed, additional measures including traffic routing and visitation caps were implemented to maintain visitor safety.



Meewasin utilized the temporary facilities closure to refresh infrastructure at key facilities and sites, including Beaver Creek Conservation Area. The opportunity was also taken to update the Valley-wide Wayfinding plan, begin to draft a set of Trail Development Guidelines and design and implement a new suite of site furnishings. An enhanced system for tracking condition and donation status of these amenities was also created. In partnership with Trans Canada Trail, the Meewasin Trail was added to the AccessNow platform and app, which provides accessible trail information to users across the world.

Despite pandemic-related challenges, momentum on trail expansion and enhancement projects continued to advance with the support of funding from City of Saskatoon, Canada Community Revitalization fund from Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan), Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program and Trans Canada Trail. The Maple Grove planning process commenced, and a design charrette brought together a diverse group of regional stakeholders, partners and community members to help inform the planning process. New trails were established at a number of locations throughout the Valley, and work began to upgrade older trail sections. These upgrades were initiated to address current accessibility and design standards, to keep pace with an increasing population, and better serve visitors both within the community and beyond the region.

## Milestones



## 4.1 Public Shoreline

### ● Public Shoreline Ownership

Study Area	73%
City of Saskatoon	92%
RM of Corman Park	68%

### ● Publicly Accessible Shoreline

Study Area	47%
City of Saskatoon	89%
RM of Corman Park	41%

## 4.2 Access Points

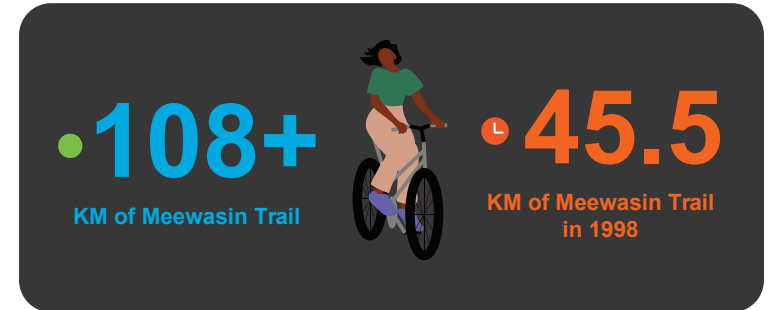
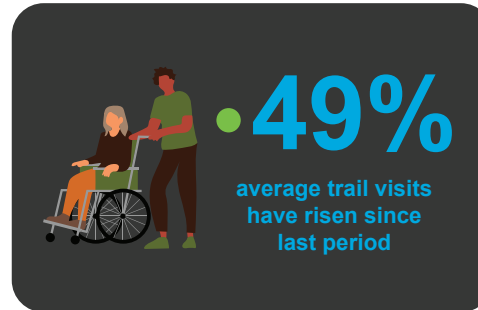
### ● Public Access Points

North of City	24%
City of Saskatoon	50%
South of City	26%

## 4.3 Trail

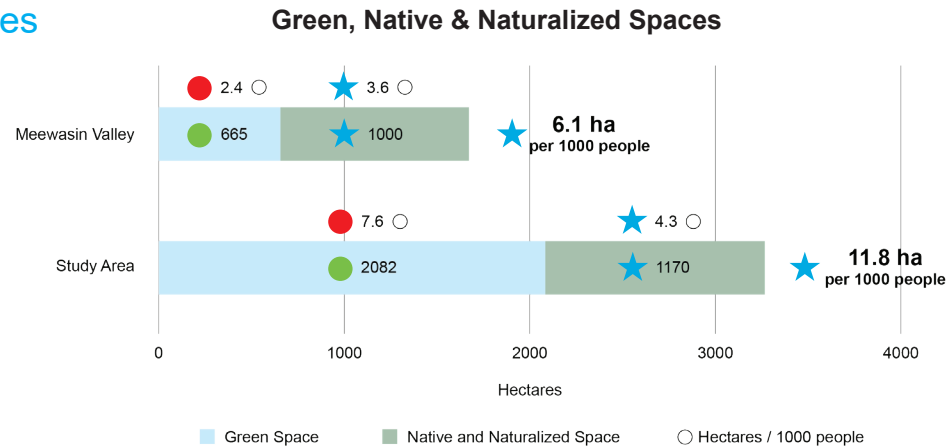
### ★ Top 5 Busiest Trail Sections (in millions)

Kinsmen Riverfront	2.0+
River Landing	1.7+
Friendship Park Riverfront	1.5+
West Bank Weir	1.4+
East Bank Weir	1.0+



## 4.4 Green, Native & Naturalized Spaces

As was done in 2018, the subcategory 'Green Space' was selected out of the 2023 land use and land cover data to compare with the previous report's assessment. Historically, this analysis did not include any subcategories outside of 'Green Space'. The analysis was expanded for this report to include the complement of publicly accessible native and naturalized spaces, such as the Northeast Swale, that also provide benefits to the public.



**340**  
 hectares of Green Space reported in the 1998 report

**90%**  
 of publicly accessible native, naturalized and green spaces in the Study Area are provided by Meewasin Sites

## 4.5 Meewasin Valley Uses

### New reported uses since 2018:

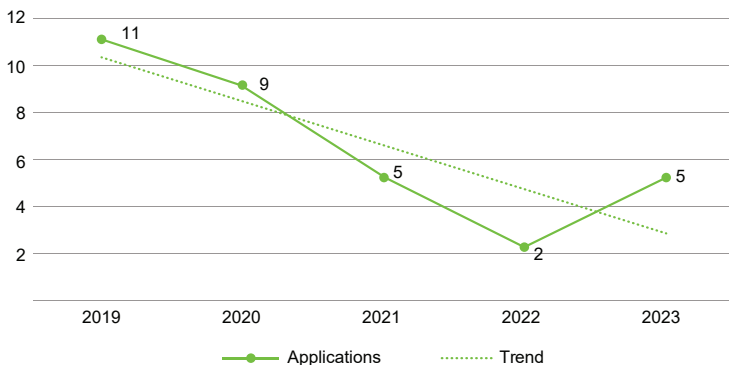
- Commuting to work, school, or other places
- Group activities
- Tourism and Tourism events
- Research, discovery or outdoor learning
- E-bike
- Beach access
- Cultural use
- Scooter (E-scooter or push)
- E-Unicycle or hoverboard
- Geo-caching/orienteering
- Exercise/fitness
- Socialization/family time

### ★ Trail user types:

Pedestrian **72%**  
 Cyclists **28%**



## 4.6 Development Review Applications



**235**  
 applications reviewed by Meewasin's Development Review Committee since 2005





## Progress Summary: *Balance*

### Connecting: *Community Outreach*

- Northeast Sector Future Trails Planning engagement.
- Maple Grove Design Charrette and engagement.
- Hosting Valley tours as part the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects 2023 Congress.

### Collaborating: *Partnership in Action*

- Partnered with the City of Saskatoon and RM of Corman Park on rural site enforcement strategy.
- Supported Wanuskewin Heritage Park on site upgrades including plantings beds and Meewasin Trail re-alignment.
- Coordinated with City of Saskatoon to incorporate new Meewasin Trail adjacent to the Northeast Swale, including plantings, restoration and seating nodes as part of Fedoruk Road widening project (from Zary Road to kīwētīn Greenway).
- Updated historical interpretive signage on the Victoria Traffic Bridge, with input from the City of Saskatoon and Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee.
- Partnership agreement with Saskatoon Trail Alliance and the City of Saskatoon to promote stewardship and maintenance of single-track mountain biking trail throughout the Valley.
- Partnering with groups such as City of Saskatoon, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, ERCO Worldwide, SOS Trees, BASF, FedEx, TreeCanada, TD, Wawanesa Insurance, to undertake multi-year planting projects throughout the Valley.



### Progress Indicators

- ✓ **Achieving Goal** Strategic Goals and Objectives
- ✓ **Achieving Goal** Key Performance Indicators
- ✓ **Achieving Goal** Valley-wide Resource Management Plan
- ✓ **Achieving Goal** Valley-wide Monitoring Framework
- **On Pace** Trail Study

## Looking Ahead

Looking forward, Meewasin will continue the planning process for the Maple Grove site. Work on trail expansion in the Northeast Sector will remain on hold pending funding availability and further community engagement. Meewasin will continue implementation of nature-friendly best practices in internal enhancement projects and external projects subject to development and review throughout the Valley. Trail Design Guidelines drafted in 2023 will continue through the approval process and are projected to be finalized in 2025.

Beyond 2025, Meewasin aims to update strategies related to conservation, access, visitor experience and fund development, the implementation of which will be contingent on funding availability. This work includes an update to the 2014 Trail Study, as population growth and trail usage have exceeded projections made for the past decade.

## Project Snapshot: Development Review Process in Action at the Kinsmen Riverfront

A long-time cultural fixture on the South Saskatchewan River, the Kinsmen Park Riverfront is home to attractions such as Nutrien Playland and WonderHub, the Prairie Lily and Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan. This area has recently seen a series of enhancements aimed at supporting this node of culture, recreation and education, with several years of development project components undertaken by groups like Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan, the City of Saskatoon and Meewasin.

### Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan

The redevelopment of Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan saw the installation of the first permanent structures in support of the festival. The architectural design complements the festival's rich history, cultural heritage and natural history of the area by blending contemporary designs and elements of Tudor architecture with the riverfront landscape. Development of the site included landscaping, feature lighting, a deck with river views, and a trail along the river. In addition to housing the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan festival, this site aims to support the local community by hosting other cultural events on the riverfront.

### Kinsmen Riverfront Amenities

As part of the Kinsmen Park Master Plan, multiple projects were undertaken to install and enhance amenities in the support of the attractions at and adjacent to the riverfront community hub. These enhancements included upgrades to the parking lot and drop-off zone by Meewasin (with support by the City of Saskatoon) and dark-sky friendly lighting installed by Saskatoon Light & Power. The City of Saskatoon also installed a year-round accessible washroom building, with an accessible fountain attached to the exterior.

### Meewasin Trail and Amenities

Originally constructed in the early 1980s, the Meewasin Trail runs along the riverfront, providing important links to the attractions in this area. To better support this cultural hub, Meewasin undertook enhancements to the trail and amenities, including widening primary and secondary pathways, dark-sky friendly trail lighting, installation of new amenities such as benches, trash cans, bicycle racks, and picnic tables featuring a new accessible design. Wayfinding, regulatory and interpretive signage was also updated for this project. A new stairway and ramps from the primary trail down to the Prairie Lily dock significantly improved accessibility between the primary and secondary trails.

In conjunction with these projects, over 1300 tree, shrub and plug plantings were added in planting beds around the site. Meewasin also undertook river edge armoring (stabilization using rip rap and planting methods) prior to the other redevelopment work, in an effort to help stabilize the slope adjacent to the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan site.

In conformance to *The Meewasin Valley Authority Act (1979)*, these projects undertaken in the Meewasin Valley were subject to review by Meewasin's Development and Review Committee. These projects were contingent on conditions specified by the committee, such as but not limited to, submission of lighting design specifications and annual review of lighting plans, submission of landscape plans, and biomass replacements.



### Development Review Process



# 5.0 Fit & Vibrancy

During this period, Meewasin has continued to adapt and innovate to deliver on its core mandate. This mandate supports public health, wellness, and enjoyment through nature-based education, tourism programming, and volunteer engagement.

Through collaborative partnerships, Meewasin has expanded the reach and impact of its initiatives. While initial pandemic-related closures of Meewasin facilities, schools, and limited public interactions led to a temporary decline in engagement, participation not only stabilized but increased beyond pre-pandemic levels as people sought meaningful local experiences and deepened their appreciation for nature. 83% of respondents surveyed in 2021 felt Meewasin had become more important to residents since the COVID-19 pandemic (Insightrix, 2021). A survey of University of Saskatchewan department staff found that nearly half of respondents use or visit the Meewasin Valley as part of their courses or for research purposes, with the majority of those utilizing the Valley multiple times throughout the year. 80% of respondents expressed the desire to expand or enhance collaboration with Meewasin (Meewasin, 2020).

Creative, safe engagement and accessible programming became a cornerstone during the pandemic. Meewasin developed land-based learning resources — like self-guided educational tours, eco-scamper hunts, backyard bingo, colouring pages, and citizen science tools to support education at home and outdoors. Once restrictions were lifted, safety measures such as booking limits and infrastructure improvements contributed to staff and public health. Meewasin leveraged its social media and website platforms and introduced the Meewasin App to stay connected and deliver content to the public.

Signature community events like Pelican Watch continued alongside new initiatives such as the Crocus Capture Contest — a partnership with the Saskatoon Nature Society and Wild About Saskatoon — encouraging people to explore, photograph, and share prairie flora while promoting environmental stewardship.



National and international attention to Meewasin’s work has grown, with new tourism programming attracting visitors from across Canada and even abroad. The phased roll-out of these new offerings has since seen year-over-year expansion, driven by demand and successful collaboration with regional partners.

Public perception and community-building has been strengthened through this period; these efforts underscore the power of partnership and the region’s growing identity as a destination for transformative, eco-conscious experiences.

In 2023, the Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin (PFSRB) ceased its operations, with the Board of Directors and membership supporting the organizational closure. Meewasin will continue to deliver PFSRB programs on behalf of the City of Saskatoon (Yellow Fish Road™ and Prevent Irritable Sewer Syndrome). These programs continue PFSRB’s legacy of empowering youth of all ages to make changes in order to ensure a healthy river system and healthy water sources.

## Milestones

2019

- Partnership agreement with Saskatoon Tribal Council

2020

- COVID pandemic impacts Education & Experiences Programming offerings
- Launch of Digital K - 12 Resources to support teachers in leading safe land-based education during the pandemic
- Valley-wide interpretive and experiences program updated

2021

- New Volunteer Program ‘Friends of the Valley’ established
- Meewasin App launched
- Launch of Naughty By Nature
- Dark Skies programming reintroduced
- Launch of Sip & Skate
- K - 12 Resources received the RCE Saskatchewan Lyle Benko Future Generations Award (Excellence in K-12 Education for Sustainable Development)
- Launch of Eco-Adventure Camps

2022

- Renewed Memorandum of Understanding with Saskatoon Public Schools and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools to support land-based education in the Valley
- Friends of the Valley recognized with an RCE Saskatchewan Award for Education for Sustainable Development
- Indigenous Experiences project launched at the Northeast Swale through the Meewasin App
- 1st set self-guided walking tours using QR codes integrated with the Meewasin App
- Launch of Downtown Walking Tour
- Birding Breakfasts and Grazing Dinners introduced

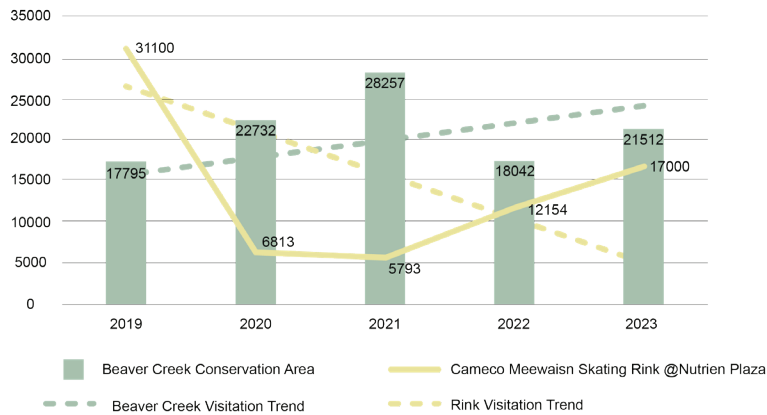
2023

- Meewasin App awarded an RCE Saskatchewan Award for Education for Sustainable Development
- Reinstatement of full suite of free public programming at Beaver Creek Conservation Area
- Launch of Wildflower Walks
- Meewasin Tourism Master Plan drafted

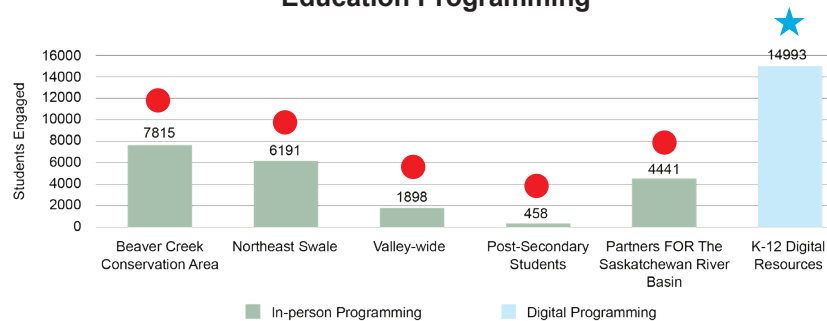
## 5.1 Community Engagement

Although visitation to Meewasin's facilities at the Beaver Creek Conservation Area and Cameco Meewasin Skating Rink @Nutrien Plaza experienced ebbs and flows due to the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation numbers have stabilized in 2023. Overall rink visitation has decreased since the last report. This decrease can be attributed not only to pandemic restrictions, but also to the increase in measures to ensure visitor and staff safety, and the 26% decline the average days the rink was in operation annually due to temperature factors (cold and wind chill, early thaw).

### Facility Visitors



### Education Programming



● **15,000**

People reached through community outreach programming

● **35,000**

Students engaged this period

(Pelican Watch, grazing demos, summer camps, etc)

## Community Connections: Friends of the Meewasin Valley



Community is at the heart of Meewasin's mission to conserve the beautiful Meewasin Valley for current and future generations, and our volunteers are an integral part in the stewardship and connection to this land we call our home.

Meewasin launched *Friends of the Meewasin Valley nitôtêm – my friend* with support of the Grandey Family Foundation in 2022. Since its launch, Meewasin's volunteers have made meaningful impacts, contributing to the advancement of Meewasin's work towards conservation and enhancement in the Meewasin Valley.

### Big Hearts, Big Impacts:

Trees Wrapped	<b>650+</b>
Tree, Shrub and Plugs Plantings	<b>5,800+</b>
European Buckthorn Stems Treated	<b>9,000+</b>
Wildlife Friendly Fencing Tabbed (metres)	<b>14,000+</b>
Clean-up Campaign Waste Removed (kgs)	<b>35,000+</b>
Invasive Species Stems Treated	<b>36,000+</b>

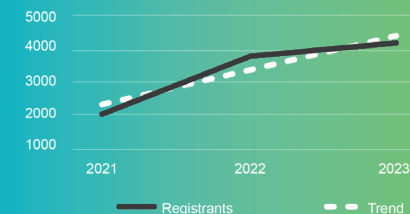
★ **2x**

Meewasin has doubled volunteer participation since the Friends of the Valley program was launched in 2022

★ **12,000**

hours contributed annually by volunteers to restoration and protection projects in the Valley

### Volunteer Participation



## Tourism Programming: Transforming Visitors Through Meaningful Experiences

In 2021, Meewasin introduced a new suite of tourism Signature Experiences focused on sustainable ecotourism and transformative visitor experiences. By aligning with national and international sustainability goals, Meewasin seeks to position Saskatoon and the broader region as exemplars of regenerative tourism, ensuring experiences that showcase the ecological vibrancy and cultural richness of the region.

Designed to deepen public connection with Meewasin's mission, these experiences aim to:

- expand awareness of and engagement with Meewasin's work;
- strengthen the region's identity as a leader in conservation and sustainability;
- contribute to regional, provincial, national and international environmental stewardship and sustainability goals; and
- collaborate with local educators, organizations and businesses to offer these immersive experiences that showcase the vibrancy and ecological significance of the region - elevating its reputation as an eco-tourism destination.

In recognition of these efforts, Meewasin became the first GreenStep-certified organization in Saskatchewan in 2023. This third-party certification assessment encompassed over 80 sustainability criteria, ranging from environmental stewardship and habitat preservation to socio-cultural responsibility and operational sustainability. This process provides a strategic roadmap for improvement, guiding future programming and supporting Meewasin's efforts to lead the way in regionally-recognized sustainable tourism in the prairies.

Meaningful Experiences = Meaningful Impacts



★ **313**

Signature Experiences  
guests have also  
volunteered with or  
donated to Meewasin

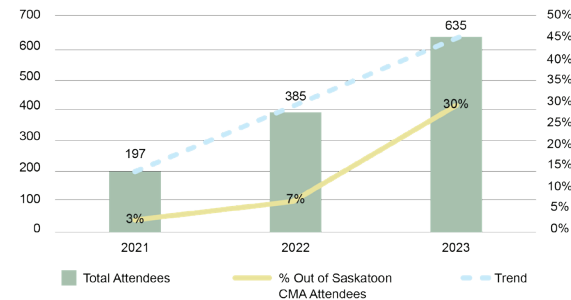
★ **7**

Signature  
Experiences  
Established  
since 2021

★ **19%**

of Signature Experiences  
guests are from outside  
the Saskatoon CMA

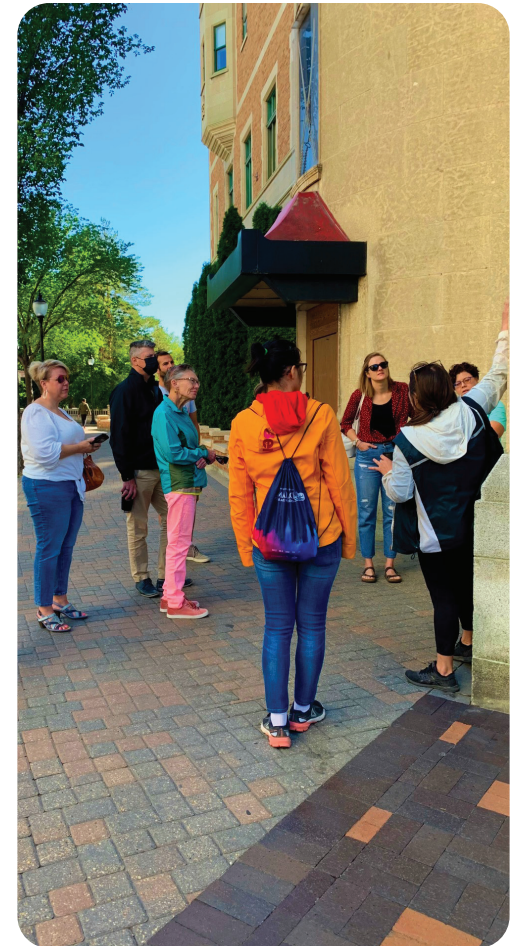
### ★ Year-Over-Year Growth



★ Attendee Growth by Program



“It was eye opening! I must have hiked that particular trail dozens of times in my life, but did not know what was all around me. I learned so much! I also got to reflect on the healing properties of nature, as I felt very refreshed, connected and energized after the tour. Finally, the food and coffee were both great.”  
 - Birding Breakfast



## 5.2 Governance, Committees and Strategic Partnerships

Collaboration is foundational to Meewasin's structure and the message of 'doing more together' has become increasingly important to Meewasin's work. Meewasin operates under a collaborative governance model, with a Board of Directors comprised of appointees from Meewasin's participating parties – the Government of Saskatchewan, University of Saskatchewan and City of Saskatoon. In addition to its Board, Meewasin maintains several advisory and specialty committees that provide valuable input and diverse perspectives. Representation of these committees includes participants from municipal, regional, and community groups as well as the public. In 2019, Meewasin undertook a review in collaboration with its Governance Committee, resulting in the amalgamation of several non-legislated committees.

Meewasin and its staff also participate in external boards and committees of other community and non-profit organizations which include a wide range of strategic areas relevant to Meewasin's work, including conservation, heritage, reconciliation, planning, education and tourism.

● **32**

Meewasin staff memberships in external organizations

● **58**

Representatives on Meewasin Board of Directors and committees

★ **4**

New or Renewed Partnerships

City of Saskatoon  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon Tribal Council  
Saskatoon Public Schools &

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools

● **21**

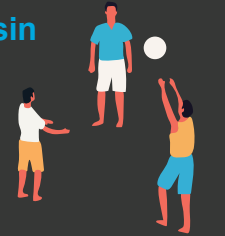
Meewasin seats on external board/committees

## 5.3 Public Perception

Meewasin undertakes public surveys to quantify the public's understanding of Meewasin and its mandate, and gain insight on how the public experiences the Meewasin Valley. Multiple surveys were undertaken in this reporting period, including surveys targeted at understanding COVID-19 impacts in the Valley. (Meewasin, 2020 and Insightrix, 2021/2024)

### Predominate Meewasin Trail Usage

- Leisure & recreation
- Attending events
- Group activities
- Commuting



● **96%**

Support Meewasin activities

**#1**

Trail activity is walking/running

Responses rose regarding Meewasin being a good use of tax dollars, drawing business and employee recruitment, and growth of funding and jurisdictional boundaries consistent with population growth

### Most important activities

- Conserving and restoring natural resources
- Long-term vision and planning
- Controlling types of riverbank development

● **95%**

Agree Meewasin is an important contributor to quality of life

### Largest increase in trail use:

- Biking & e-biking
- Dog walking
- Education via interpretive signage



### Perceptions of Meewasin

- People support free access to facilities
- People want Meewasin to continue:
  - Conservation of the river valley
  - Development of trails
  - Education about the river valley

● **92%**

agree trails and natural areas support physical and mental health

### Perceptions of the river valley

Largest response increases:

- Makes people proud to live here
- Popularity with tourists, and provision of entertainment and diverse activities
- Is important to climate change
- Is under-resourced
- Is important to reconciliation activities
- Is subject to too much development
- Boosts the economy

## Connecting: *Community Outreach*

- Collaboration with Tourism Saskatoon including articles for Going Places magazine, their Learning Thursday features on social media and blogs.
- Presented at Truly Green Tourism at National Trust Conference 2023.
- Arbor Day event including planting in partnership with SOS Trees.
- Celebration of World Environment Day with the Prairie Lily's 'Saskatooning Cruise' -highlighting the unique biodiversity of the river valley corridor.
- Hosted francophone youth volunteers on a guided French planting volunteer event & interpretive walk as part of the "Prends Ta Place" event presented by Association Jeunesse Fransaskoise (AJF).
- Delivered a Naughty by Nature Signature Experience event for Tourism Saskatchewan that gathered tourism professionals across the province who operate in Saskatchewan Provincial Parks as part of Tourism Saskatchewan's Achieving AWEsome program. The event focused on inspiring operators to "think outside the box" when developing experiential tourism products.
- Showcased the Meewasin Valley and Friends of the Valley Program at the University of Saskatchewan's Welcome Week and at Doors Open with the City of Saskatoon.
- Canadian Association of Science Centres national conference swales tours - showcased Meewasin's work and connecting with science and ecology educators from across Canada.
- Partnered with Discover Saskatoon on nature-focused content for blogs that help promote summer experiences.

## Collaborating: *Partnership in Action*

- Partnered on the 7GenCities Initiative, along with the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre and City of Saskatoon; gathering focused on cultural spaces and the commitment to embed Truth & Reconciliation principles within social infrastructure.
- Participation in and support of Decolonizing Food and Land Access group, aimed at identifying and addressing policy gaps that may restrict traditional cultural practices in the Saskatoon region.
- Collaboration with the University of Saskatchewan, College of Education Pedagogies of Place classes, on Meewasin-led tours aimed to educate future teachers on the important of place-based learning and natural education techniques.
- Collaboration with Saskatchewan Polytechnic Recreation & Tourism Management to help inform course components surrounding interpretive program; trail maintenance field components.
- Developed partnerships with the Saskatoon Wildlife Federation, YMCA Saskatoon and Community Living Association Saskatoon to provide guided programs and volunteer opportunities for these groups at Beaver Creek and the Northeast Swale.
- Cross-agency collaboration begins with Parks Canada to help promote their Learn-to-Camp program at the Beaver Creek Conservation Area and the Cameco Meewasin Skating Ring @Nutrien Plaza.
- Collaborative partnership with Saskatoon Road Runners Association for the Saskatchewan Marathon; Meewasin Trail utilized for route with proceeds benefitting Meewasin.
- In partnership with the City of Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Health Authority, Meewasin, Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, Saskatoon Police Service, Wanuskewin Heritage Park and Parks Canada, Meewasin facilitated a gathering of Elders, Knowledge Keepers and youth to explore urban cultural spaces in the Meewasin Valley.
- Meewasin Sweat & Community Fire Ceremony at the Northeast Swale.

## 5.4 Community and Visitor Significance

In recent years, Meewasin has begun working with partners to explore data related to Meewasin's role as a destination and economic driver for the region and beyond. Although this work is still taking shape, partners have supplied preliminary data to better understand these impacts.

★ **62%**

of Saskatoon events take place in the Meewasin Valley

(City of Saskatoon Tracked Events, 2019-2024)

★ **2.35**

million event attendees, equal to 82% of all city-wide attendees

(City of Saskatoon, 2019-2024)

★ **1280**

real estate listings featuring the Meewasin Valley in property description

(Saskatchewan Realtor's Association, 2025)

## Progress Summary: *Fit & Vibrancy*



### Progress Indicators

- ✓ Achieving Goal Strategic Goals and Objectives
- ✓ Achieving Goal Key Performance Indicators
- ✓ Achieving Goal Valley-wide Resource Management Plan
- ✓ Achieving Goal Valley-wide Monitoring Framework
- On Pace Trail Study

## Looking Ahead

Looking forward, Meewasin plans to undertake a Valley-wide assessment of interpretive programming signage. This assessment will inform future site enhancements and expansion of the suite of self-guided interpretive routes integrated with the Meewasin App. Continued growth of the volunteer program to engage the public and support Meewasin's conservation activities will help meet strategic goals and objectives.

To guide future expansion of the tourism program, Meewasin undertook an aspirational Tourism Master Plan process drafted in March 2024, aligned with the vision of creating a world-class corridor. Implementation of this strategy remains contingent on sustainable funding to support plan initiatives, but reflects a forward-thinking commitment to Meewasin's role as a leader in conservation-focused tourism.

## The Meewasin Indigenous Experiences Project

Meewasin recognizes and acknowledges that the land and the water on which we work is on Treaty Six Territory, the homeland of the Métis, and traditional trade and hunting territories of the Dakota. Through thoughtful and planned work, Meewasin is integrating First Nation and Métis perspectives into our conservation and education initiatives in the Meewasin Valley.

**In 2019, Meewasin began working with local organizations, First Nation and Métis communities, and a Circle of Elders on the Meewasin Indigenous Experiences Project.** The goal of this project was to create a digital platform to provide authentic and interactive content focused on interpreting stories of First Nation and Métis people. The Northeast Swale was identified by local Elders and Knowledge Keepers as a culturally significant area to be highlighted on the new app. Interviews and site visitations provided insight to linkages between Indigenous knowledge and the landscape at the Northeast Swale. Physical interpretive panels on site are linked to a broader suite of digital resources on the Meewasin App, including videos sharing Indigenous world views.

This project was funded by Western Economic Diversification's Canadian Experiences Fund. This enabled Meewasin to consult local organizations, First Nation and Métis communities, and Elders and Knowledge Keepers to create accurate and informative content, including language translations in nêhiyawêwin/Cree, Michif, Dakota and French.

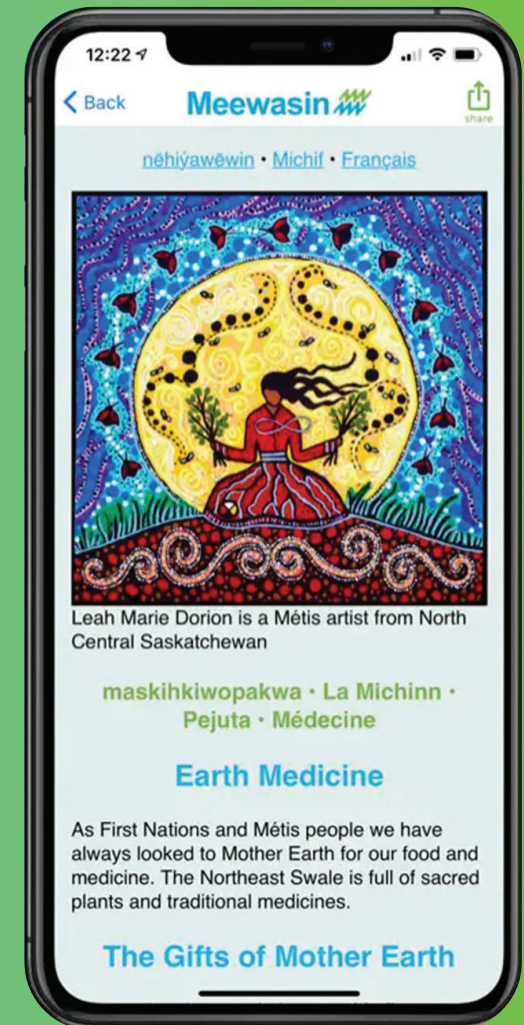
Concurrent with developing the Meewasin App, Meewasin partnered with Saskatoon Public Schools and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools during the COVID-19 pandemic to develop curricula-linked land-based educational resources. This included a specific set of resources called **Ways of Seeing the World: Indigenous Connections to the Northeast Swale** to help teachers connect with the stories and traditional knowledge gifted via the Indigenous Experiences Project. These resources focus on curricular ties to Treaty Outcomes, Arts Education, Social Studies, History, Indigenous Studies, Environmental Science and Health Science for grades 9 – 12.

In 2023, the Meewasin App was recognized with an award from RCE Saskatchewan which honours leaders in sustainable development education. Encouraged by the success of these initiatives, Meewasin plans to continue growing this meaningful work with the project partners in the years ahead.

Meewasin extends gratitude to all who contributed to this project; the digital content and list of contributors can be viewed at [app.meewasin.com/ne-swale/](https://app.meewasin.com/ne-swale/)

### Interpretive Themes:

- Ways of Seeing the World (introduction to Indigenous World View)
- Being a Good Relative
- Our Journey Through Time
- Our Creative Spirit
- Mother Earth Provides Everything



## Meewasin's Path Forward

Meewasin remains committed to advancing its existing planning efforts and furthering sustainable growth planning within its mandate areas. This work will be in conjunction with funding partner objectives and broader strategic planning outlined in this report's preface, in an effort to keep pace with the growth seen throughout the region, province and country.

Meewasin continues its work to identify and secure sustainable funding sources necessary to drive and achieve existing goals in implemented or drafted plans. These include the Tourism Master Plan, Conservation Strategies and Greenhouse and Seedbank planning, all of which were developed in this period but have yet to be implemented due to funding constraints. The leveraging of collaborative partnerships at all levels and across jurisdictions continues to propel Meewasin's work forward despite these constraints.

The pursuit of new research partnerships will complement existing collaborations with groups like the CPPFE and the University of Saskatchewan. These partnerships aim to inform land management strategies and support climate change mitigation efforts undertaken by Meewasin and its regional partners.

Meewasin will also continue its work with partners such as the City of Saskatoon on an updated Natural Capital Asset Valuation process specific to natural areas in the prairie region. This work will help inform both conservation efforts, site planning and urban planning priorities within and adjacent to the Meewasin Valley. This includes conservation targets such as swales, hydro-riparian areas, wetlands and native grasslands throughout the region.

With the conclusion of Meewasin's Strategic Goals and Objectives 2019-2024, Meewasin will initiate updates to its strategic plan in conjunction with its Board of Directors. Additionally, work will begin to update the Valley-wide Resource Management Plan ahead of the plan's expiry in 2027. This work will include an end of term status update and include engagement across a spectrum of stakeholders, guided by a Steering Committee to support and inform ecological priorities and action planning.

Following the completion of the National Urban Park pre-feasibility phase, Meewasin and the Steering Committee will move into the planning phase of the process. This next step includes further refinement of vision, boundaries and a governance model, along with stakeholder and public engagement and the initiation of operational planning.

Beyond 2025, Meewasin aims to update strategies related to conservation, access, visitor experience and fund development. The implementation of these strategies is contingent of funding availability. These updates are critical to Meewasin's growth planning, as population, regional growth and trail usage have exceeded projections made for the past decade in Meewasin's existing strategies.

*miywâsin is nêhiyawêwin/Cree for 'it is beautiful'.*

Created in 1979 – pursuant to The Meewasin Valley Authority Act – Meewasin is responsible for stewarding the Meewasin Valley. The creation of Meewasin further established a partnership between the City of Saskatoon, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the University of Saskatchewan, to ensure a healthy and vibrant river valley for the benefit of present and future generations. Meewasin was founded on the belief that meaningful progress is best achieved through collaborative partnership. Meewasin works in collaboration with many partners, stakeholders, and community members to make balanced decisions about human use and conservation.

### **Acknowledgements**

In undertaking this report, a host of internal contributors and external partners provided a wealth of project support, technical contribution, data and valuable feedback. The authors would like to extend profound gratitude to the members of the Meewasin Board of Directors, Meewasin Conservation Advisory Committee, Meewasin Education Advisory Committee, Meewasin Development Review Committee, the City of Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan, Government of Saskatchewan, the Rural Municipality of Corman Park, Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth (P4G), SREDA, Saskatchewan Realtors Association, Tourism Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce, North Saskatoon Business Association, and others that helped to inform and evolve this report. The authors also wish to recognize the invaluable contributions of the Meewasin staff and management, whose support and dedication were instrumental in shaping this report.

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*My cathedral was to pursue truth and that was  
the Meewasin... This is closer to a cathedral than  
a cathedral itself.* - Raymond Moriyama



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