

# FORT MCMURRAY

WATERFRONT DESIGN BRIEF

PRIORITY AREA 1

2021-05-06



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
OF **WOOD BUFFALO**

**URBAN**  
SYSTEMS

**dtah**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	PROJECT INTRODUCTION
7	INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN BRIEF
11	GOALS OF THE PARK AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES
17	GUIDING DOCUMENTS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION
25	SITE ANALYSIS
41	SCHEMATIC DEVELOPMENT
49	CONCEPT OPTIONS
73	ENGAGEMENT
77	PREFERRED CONCEPT
87	CONCEPT DIAGRAMS
103	WHAT MAKES THIS PARK UNIQUE?
111	“WOW” MOMENT
127	BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS
131	CONCLUSION
133	APPENDIX
	- Public Engagement - Snye Point Outdoor Event Space: What We Heard Report
	- Indigenous Perspectives and Histories at the Fort McMurray Waterfront

# PROJECT INTRODUCTION



# PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The revitalization of Fort McMurray’s waterfront is an exciting opportunity, and important milestone. It has been on the community’s agenda for many years and garnered unanimous support as part of Council’s 2018-2021 Strategic Plan (Strategy 2e: Riverfront Master Planning & Revitalization). The Waterfront Park is a key project for downtown revitalization in our region and is further supported by recent public engagements, the 2019 Parks Master Plan, and the current Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan (DARP). Significant effort has been put towards this over the last 30 years including design work and in-depth consultation with the public and key stakeholders. The creation of the Wood Buffalo Waterfront Advisory Committee (WBWAC) in 2020 is one of the most recent dedicated waterfront revitalization efforts and builds on previous work completed under the City Centre Action Redevelopment Plan, the prior Waterfront Steering Committee, and Administration’s Preliminary Assessment Report completed as part of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB)’s preparation for hosting the 2015 Western Canada Summer Games.

This project leverages past work and engages with key stakeholders across the region to create, design and construct a passive and interactive park space along the Waterfront for residents and visitors all

year round. The project area spans from the western edge of the Athabasca Bridge and follows the water along the Snye and Clearwater River to the existing Horse Pasture Park in Waterways. It will include festival grounds (outdoor event spaces), recreation and play areas, destination nodes, amenities, public art, cultural and heritage recognition, and other elements, as well as consideration for key connections to other areas along the waterfront.

Fort McMurray’s waterfront is defined by its rich history, its dramatic natural beauty, and its bright future as a dynamic community resource. The waterfront project will provide an opportunity to enhance and redefine one’s relationship to the water’s edge, to create meaningful outdoor spaces for the enjoyment of residents, businesses and visitors. This project will transform and revitalize the waterfront into a local and regional destination.

Of immediate focus for the project is Priority Area 1 which includes the Snye Outdoor Events Space. The transformation of this space will provide a community venue for hosting a wide variety of events from the upcoming 2023 Arctic Winter Games to the music festivals and family gatherings. This will create a flexible, attractive, dynamic community space for generations to come.

# INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN BRIEF



# INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN BRIEF

In February of 2021, Urban Systems and DTAH were hired to work alongside the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to establish a design vision for the Waterfront Park and turn that vision into reality for the community. The significance and complexity of the Waterfront cannot be understated, and the conceptual design process associated with Priority Area 1 has been equal parts challenging and rewarding. As part of our preferred concept design package, this document aims to summarize and share much of this story by providing context and rationale for design considerations and decisions that respond to the significant constraints of the site as well as the unique opportunities that the Waterfront has to offer. There are many factors to consider within the context of a balanced design approach and it is critical to respond to a diverse range of inputs in order to ensure success on multiple levels. These inputs include but are not limited to the following:

- Site purpose and function
- Amenity value
- Community needs
- History and culture
- Mother Nature
- Fiscal responsibility

There are many layers - in plain sight and hidden - that have informed design decisions and shaped this public realm space from the perspective of both form and function. The systematic examination and intricate building of these layers have formed the basis for the holistic design solution. This design brief is a deliberate effort to provide insight into that process and clarity around the design approach that has led to the evolution of the preferred Priority Area 1 concept in its current form. The design basis established in the following pages is also intended to set the stage for future decisions that will both establish the foundation for the remainder of the Waterfront Park design and determine its place within the fabric of the community.

# GOALS OF THE PARK + GUIDING PRINCIPLES



# GOALS OF THE PARK + GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The goals of Waterfront Park were outlined in the RFP documentation through guiding principles, established by the RMWB in advance of the project’s initiation. These guiding principles have been embedded into the foundation of the project team’s approach and have continued to inform design decisions to date. The initial guiding principles include:

- Passive and active four-season waterfront space
- Key waterfront destinations for residents and visitors
- Continuous multi-use path with integrated cultural experiences, linking recreational opportunities
- Touch the water: public access to the water for pedestrians, bikes, boats and vehicles
- Integrate public art into the waterfront park and event spaces
- Incorporate existing Wood Buffalo Waterfront Revitalization Development Advisory Committee and past guiding documents
- Represent the larger diverse community through integral design elements that support both placemaking and placekeeping
- Build on and strengthen flood mitigation principles
- Work collaboratively with the public and stakeholders to jointly invest in the waterfront park development
- Respectful collaboration to appropriately represent Indigenous communities’ past and present land knowledge, stories and integration of cultural celebration into the waterfront



WATERFRONT MASTER PLAN PRINCIPLES + DESIGN RESPONSES

- Incorporate existing + new waterfront uses
- Opportunities for retail/commercial, including recreational
- Protection of natural areas along waterfront
- Create 365 active and safe public spaces
- Integrate living, playing and larger trail / open space connections
- Motorized (boat launch), non-motorized, floatplane and fuel access, Winterfest, trapper access, Snow Drifters
- Designated vendor opportunities (SUP, ski, snowshoe rental), programmable open space for yoga in the park, retreats etc. and heritage walks, native plant material courses
- Designating ‘touch the water moments’ to protect natural waterfront areas. Limit annual maintenance laydown to Snye Pt.
- Site porosity, CPTED principles, clear sightlines, park lighting, activate park and make inviting (eyes on park)
- Flexible open space to host events while maintaining a usable public park, exercise options (walk, cycle, ski, play), accessible connections to downtown, connect to existing and future trails

WATERFRONT MASTER PLAN PRINCIPLES + DESIGN RESPONSES

- Balance of structured and non-structured recreation
- Dynamic park and open space that can meet future community needs
- Sustainable operations and maintenance of park assets
- Use of sustainable materials
- Create a unique park experience
- Open space + natural play + water play + trails + volleyball + bouldering + water access + BBQ’s + discovery areas
- Balance open space with active uses while not over programming park. Recognize amenity context and future 5km of waterfront park.
- Ongoing coordination with RMWB parks + engineering departments
- Reinforced turf (permeable, usable natural lawn area, reduced heat-island vs hard surface, reduced maintenance, opportunity for ceremonial fire), dark-sky lights, native plants, opportunity for recycled and or permeable pavements, local material focus, local SWM management
- “Wow” factor and special moments throughout the park.

# GUIDING DOCUMENTS + BACKGROUND INFO



# GUIDING DOCUMENTS + BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During the proposal preparation and upon award of the project, a number of informational resources have been reviewed and inventoried to ensure a holistic understanding of the site and overarching policies, plans and work completed to date. This information has been slated into three categories of background information: guiding documents, the Indigenous Literature Review and a project data set, hosted via an ArcGIS Web Map. The documents cover a wide range of high level topics and detailed analysis that have built the framework to inform how Waterfront Park can exemplify the broader community vision and plug into a bigger network of connected public spaces and places that serve and reflect the communities’ interests.

In addition to the list of guiding documents proposed by the RMWB, provided on the following page, other informative resources and best practice documents have been reviewed to bolster the awareness of how the Outdoor Events Space is currently utilized and its existing contexts. Key pieces of information catalogued include:

- Adjacent land uses and business typologies.
- Land Ownership
- Environmental Studies as relevant to the project boundary.
- Geotechnical studies of key areas within the project site

- Contaminated Sites reports
- Event permits submitted within the previous 5 years for context of event layouts, proposed attendance and power requirements.
- Snye Aerodrome operational considerations and spatial requirements.
- Historical information and resource studies as relevant to the project boundary - An initial Historical Resources permit was submitted to Alberta Culture
- 2010-2020 Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness
- New RMWB Engineering Servicing Standards (Final Draft circulated March 2021)
- CPTED principles
- Precedents and examples from similar projects in Canada and around the world that will inform development of the design.

GUIDING DOCUMENTS:

- The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Council Strategic Plan (2018-2021)
- City Centre Area Redevelopment Plan (DARP) document and engagement report (current & ongoing)
- City Centre Waterfront Program (2012)
- Waterfront Steering Committee Preliminary Assessment Report (2015)
- Parks Master Plan and Urban Forestry Strategy (2019)
- Downtown Revitalization Engagement Summary (2019)
- Waterfront Development Planning, Public Works (2019)
- Culture Plan (2019)
- Wood Buffalo Social Sustainability Plan (2018)
- Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Wildfire Mitigation Strategy (2017)
- Envision Wood Buffalo (2010)
- Municipal Budget and Financial Plans
- Community Placemaking Initiative (2006)
- Municipal Development Plan (2011)
- Land Use Bylaw
- 2009 Lower Townsite Area Redevelopment Plan
- Active Transportation Plan (2014)
- Public Art Policy and Guidelines along with current Public Art Plan deliverables currently underway.
- Waterfront Development Report (2020)
- Riverfront Trails & Docks Project
- Flood Mitigation Studies
- Crime Prevention and Reduction Plan
- WHO Age-friendly Cities: A Guide
- Existing environmental reports relevant to the project;
- Provincial and Federal Acts as relevant to the project boundary.

INDIGENOUS LITERATURE REVIEW

This report, prepared under the scope of this project by Willow Springs Strategic Solutions, explores the existing documentation of histories and records of engagement of Indigenous communities in the region with a particular focus on areas closest to the settlement of Fort McMurray. It identifies key texts articulating the deep and longstanding relations of local Indigenous peoples to the waterfront, including specific sites of importance (e.g. Moccasin Flats, Waterways, McDonald Island, Cree Flats) and the wider related area. In addition, it identifies literature demonstrating how Indigenous use and occupancy were altered as a result of colonialism, pointing to specific displacements and transformations that took place from the 18th century onward. The overview has provided key context for the design plans for the RMWB Waterfront Park, with an eye to understanding how current municipal plans might honour Indigenous connections to the area, and acknowledge histories of displacement, ensuring that connection is maintained into the future.

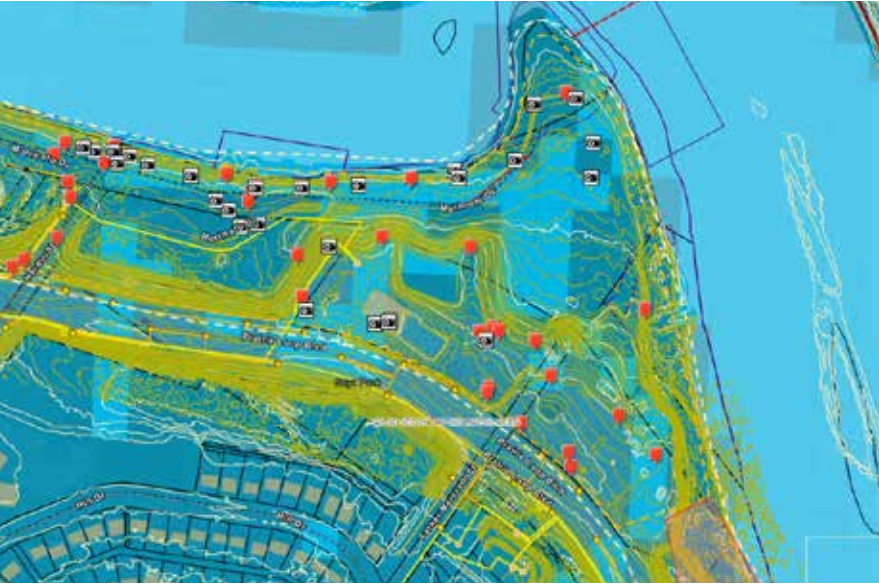
The report summarizes that for the Waterfront Park to be an act and space of reconciliation, Indigenous histories and persistent connections to the Waterfront must be reflected in design. Some ways to do so could be through land form design, to include signage and interpretation that clearly points to Indigenous and colonial histories, to include Indigenous art, and to raise the flags of Indigenous communities within the park. Regardless of the content and ultimate placemaking and placekeeping elements of the park, it is imperative to include members of the Indigenous communities through meaningful engagement in the process to ensure appropriate and accurate representation in the design.

Included as an attachment to this report is the full Indigenous Literature Review document: Indigenous Perspectives and Histories at the Fort McMurray Waterfront.

## CENTRAL DATA SET / WEB MAP

To establish a central source of comprehensive and accurate project data, spatial data files have been uploaded as received to a data sharing platform created for the Waterfront Park Revitalization Project. This has been an ongoing process in which over 2500 data files and counting have been transferred and integrated to date. The digital visual output is via a Web Map, accessible to the entire consultant team as a resource for comprehensive site understanding and analysis. This map includes layers of information and has been evolving as the project progresses and spatial information is collected in the field as well as received from third party sources. Included to date:

- Ortho Imagery (Current, historic – showing flooding extent)
- 2020 Lidar (Contour data)
- Legal Cadastral
- Bed & Shore delineation
- Underground Utilities (Water, Sanitary, Stormwater)
- Shallow Utilities (Electrical, Gas)
- Location of Recreational Amenities and site features
- Approximate Boundary of Aerodrome
- Site Photos; including imagery of WinterPlay, and key view corridors/vantage points
- Site information including environmental field reconnaissance
- Points of Interest and noted Conflicts
- Boundaries of contaminated lands
- Boundaries of lands requiring Historic Resources permits and further investigation
- Extents of overlapping and interfacing projects that are ongoing with other RMWB departments, key to understanding implementation
- Significant corridors
- Extents of Annual Operations ie. Dredging and de-weeding of the Snye
- Festival and Event Layouts from previous event records



# SITE ANALYSIS

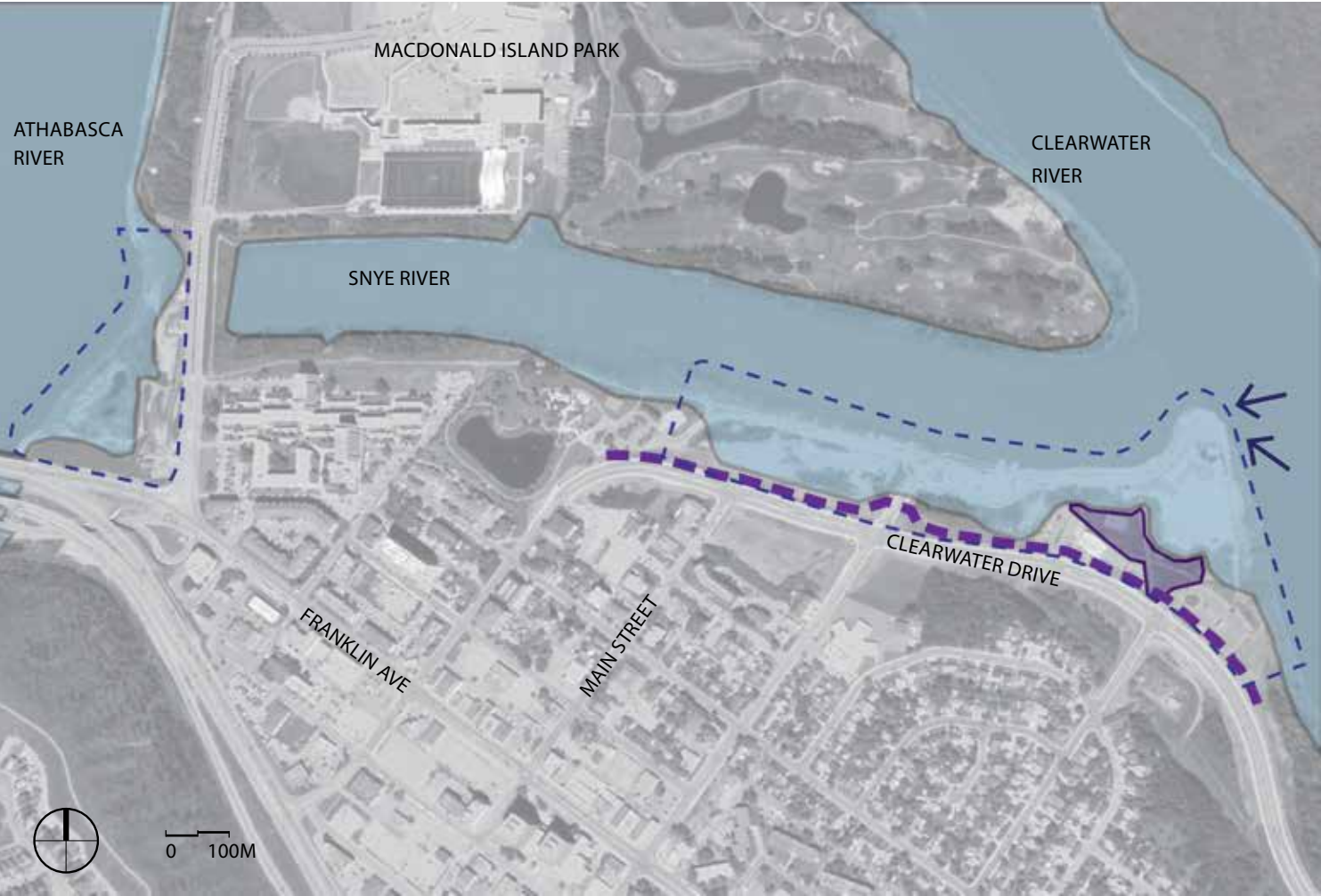




# SITE ANALYSIS

The following site analysis is derived from a combination of site visits, meetings with RMWB parks, maintenance and engineering departments and meetings with various stakeholders.

# FLOODING + ICE IMPACTS

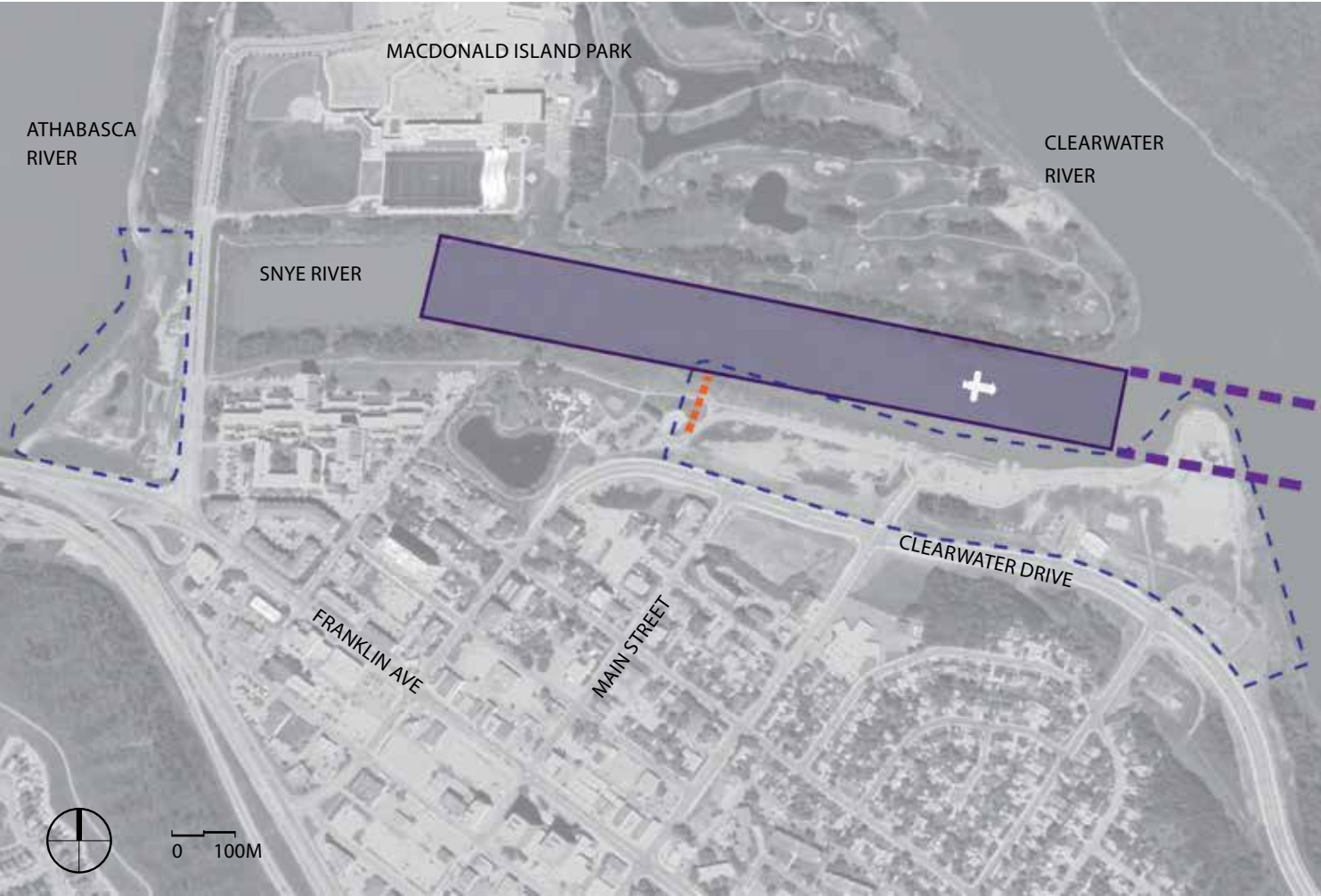


- The majority of the park and Athabasca site floods seasonally
- SnYE Point is heavily impacted by ice
- The 5m tall flood protection berm is under Clearwater Drive
- There is only one open space outside of the floodplain that is not on impacted soil



- This is a key location for legacy park elements that will not be damaged with ice and flood water

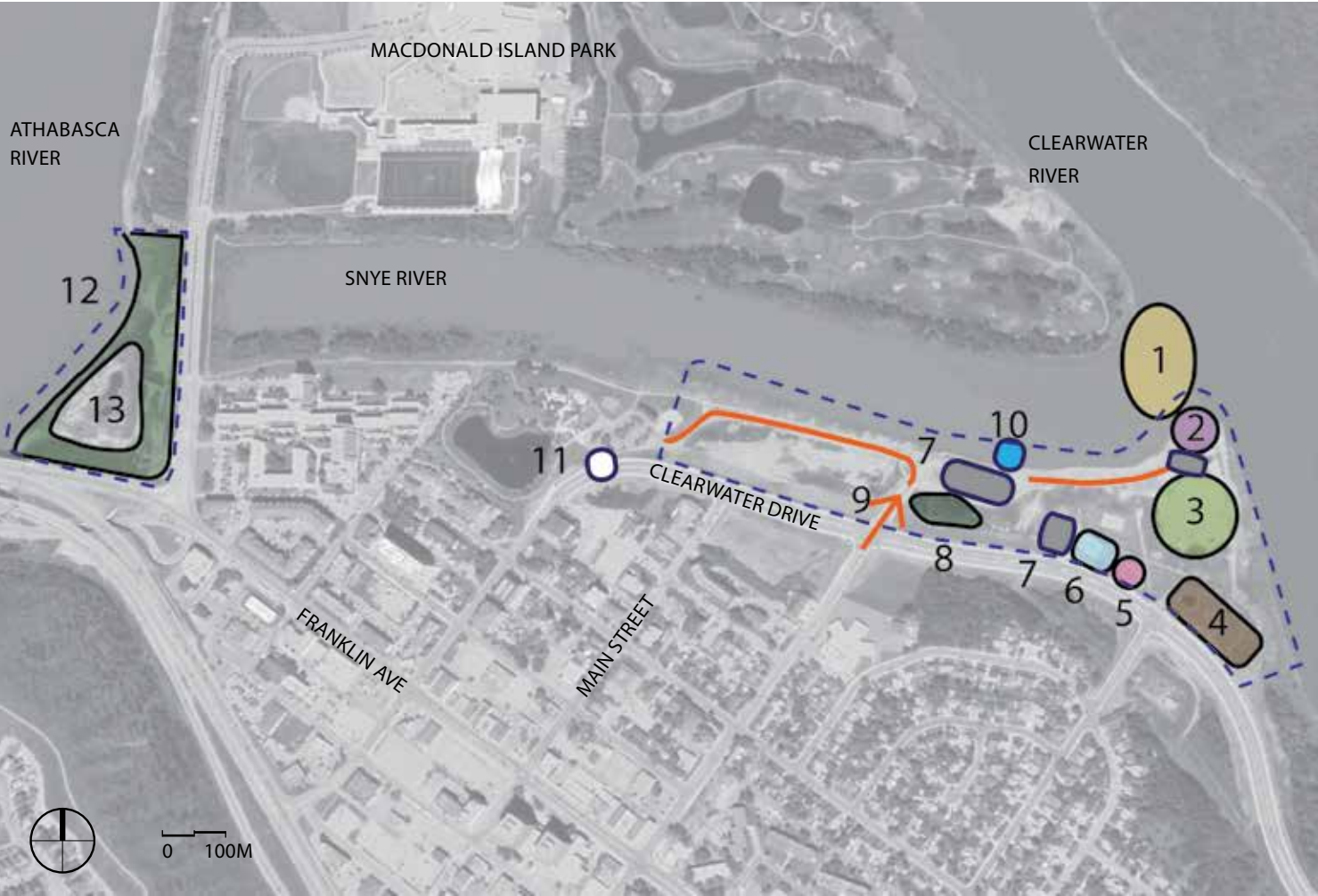
# AERODROME



- Current floatplane landing area
- Floatplanes are typically 3-4m above SnYE Point when landing
- No significant height structures at SnYE Point
- Temporary obstacles in SnYE River or at SnYE Point require coordination with aerodrome operators
- Require fuel truck access to floatplane dock
- Aerodrome active from May - October

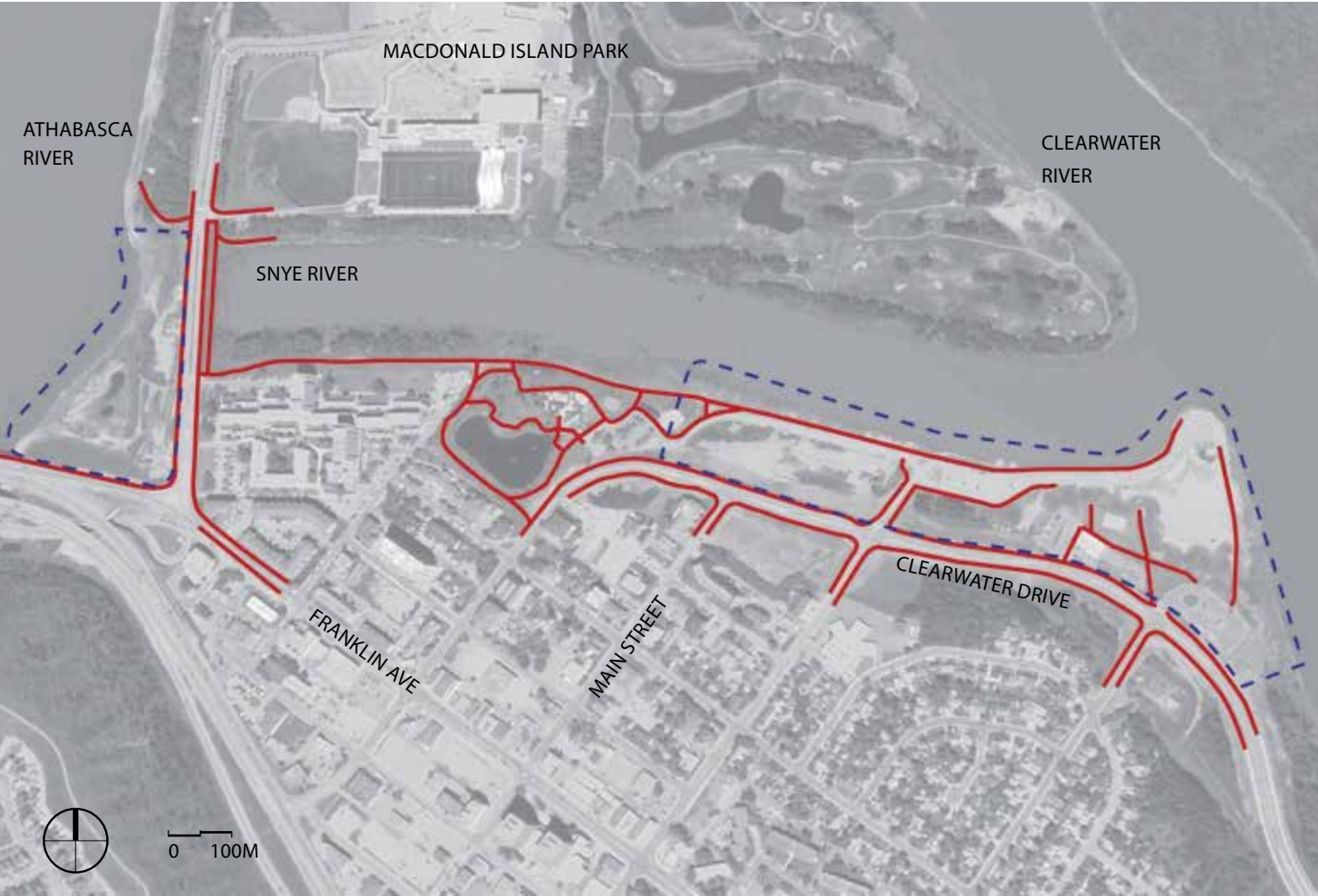


# EXISTING CONSIDERATIONS



1. Dangerous undertow + annual dredging activity
2. Snye Point: annual dredging staging, flight path, impacted by ice
3. Event space with natural amphitheatre
4. Parking lot capping impacted soil
5. Newer play equipment
6. Restaurant + public washroom
7. Parking lots
8. Only tree grove
9. Hardin Street vehicular entrance
10. Newer + well used boat launch
11. Proposed maintenance only access. Entrance does not meet TAC standards.
12. Majority of land under caretaker permit.
13. SWM facility

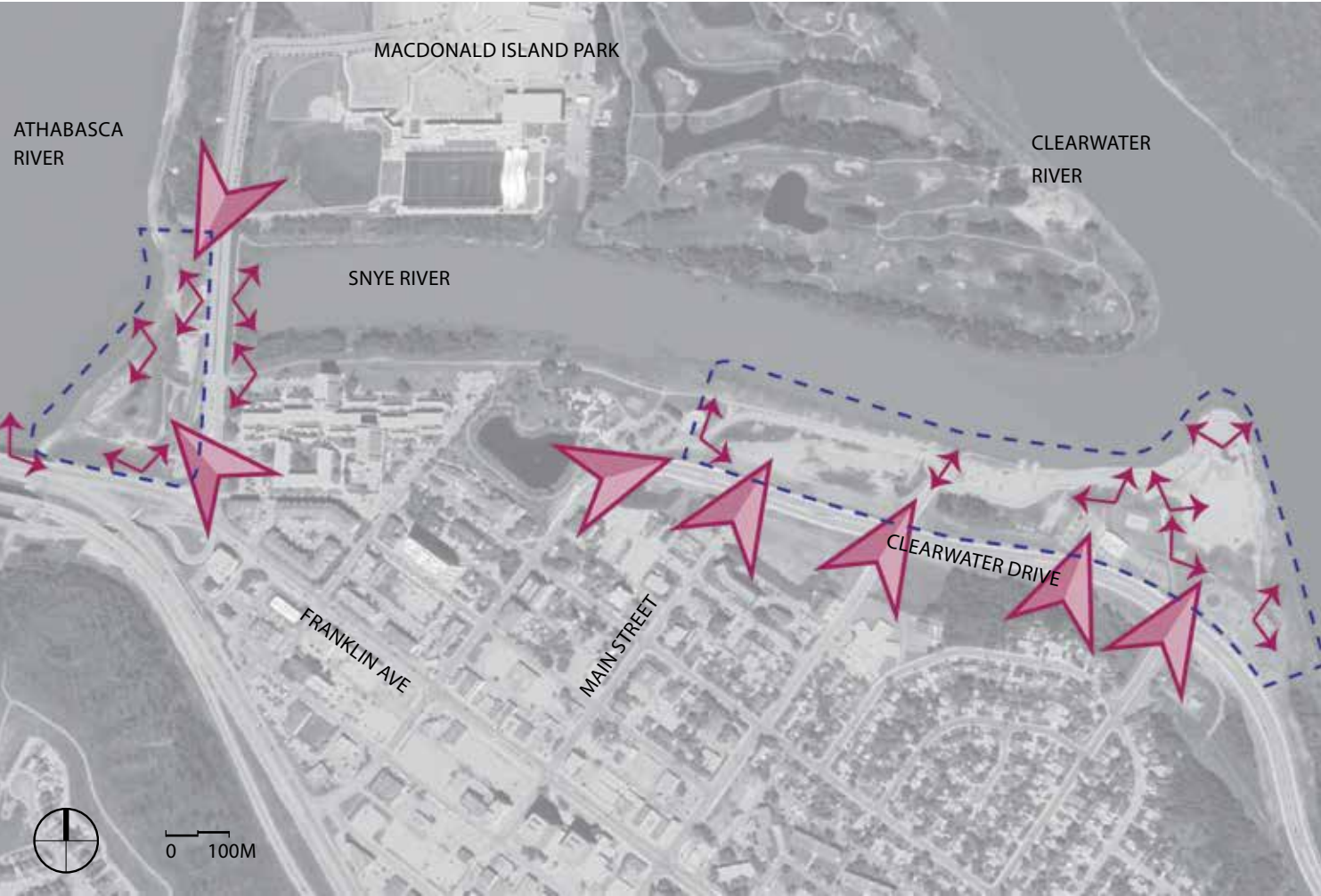
# PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS



- Existing pedestrian connections in and around Priority Area 1 and the Athabasca site



# VIEW CORRIDORS



- Current views in and out of Priority Area 1 and the Athabasca site

# SITE PHOTOS - PRIORITY AREA 1



1. Panorama view from the east lookout.



2. Panorama view from northwest corner of Fr Mercredi St + Clearwater Dr.



3. Looking south to Surekha's



SITE PHOTOS - PRIORITY AREA 1



4. Looking east from corner of Fr Mercredi St + Clearwater Dr



5. View northwest from Fr Mercredi



6. Looking South east from lookout



7. View north toward Snye Point

SITE PHOTOS - PRIORITY AREA 1



8. Play equipment by Surekha's



9. View north to MacDonald Island / Clearwater R.



10. Panorama view from the skate park looking toward MacDonald Island Park



# SITE PHOTOS - ATHABASCA SITE



11. Panorama looking south from SWM ponds



12. Panorama looking south toward Hwy 63 / Athabasca River Bridge

# SITE PHOTOS - ATHABASCA SITE



13. / 14. Multi-use trail Athabasca River Bridge



15. View west toward Ross Haven



16. View north from Athabasca River Bridge



SITE PHOTOS - ATHABASCA SITE



17. View northwest - Alberta Transportation bldg



18. Looking south to Hwy 63



19. View south along MacDonald Dr to Hwy 63



20. Looking south across SWM ponds

SITE PHOTOS - CAUSEWAY



21. Looking south, Snye R. on left



22. MacDonald Island trail



23. MacDonald Island trail



24. The Athabasca Valley Air Monitoring Station + Reflections on the River



25. Snye River looking southeast

# SCHEMATIC DEVELOPMENT



# SCHEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

The schematic development of Priority Area 1 needed to consider many elements, including:

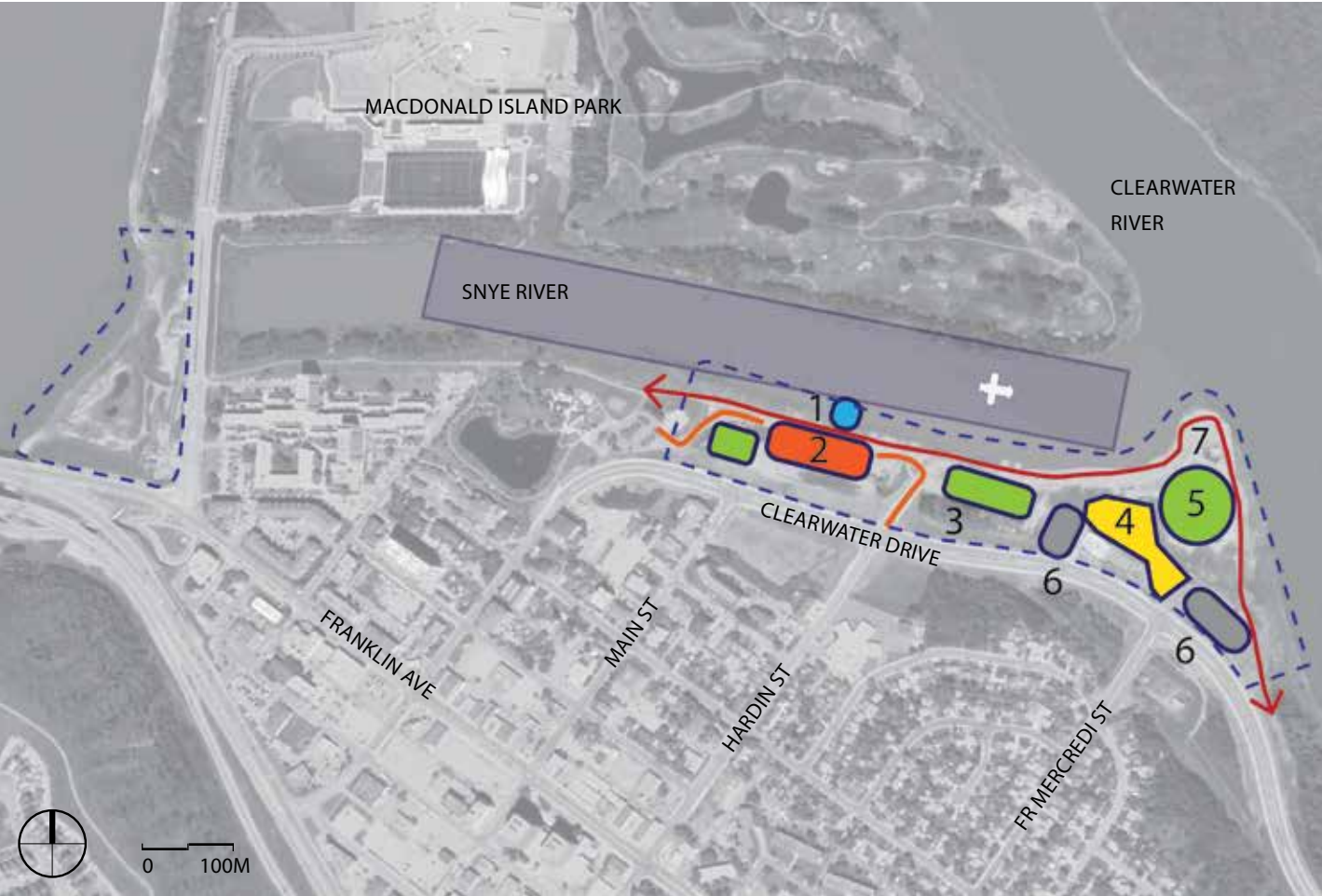
- Budget: total of \$9 million for Priority Area 1
- Building in floodplain – consider damage and key investment locations. Support flood protection.
- Flexible space: successful during large events, every day use and support different programming
- Support truth and reconciliation
- Four season park
- Natural park reflective of surrounding landscape
- Accessible and welcoming to all
- Walking, cycling and opportunity for cross country skiing are important
- Work collaboratively to build a community driven design that everyone will be proud of
- Parking is important as is vehicular access to Snye Point
- Touch the water – both motorized, non-motorized and aeronautical

The schematic design was inspired by the many guiding documents, guiding principles and the engagement completed just prior to the design team being engaged by the RMWB.

The following three concepts explore ‘big’ moves in the park, taking into consideration the design constraints and opportunities and weighing them against the many definitions of what would create a successful park.



# SCHEMATIC DESIGN CONSIDERATION - 1



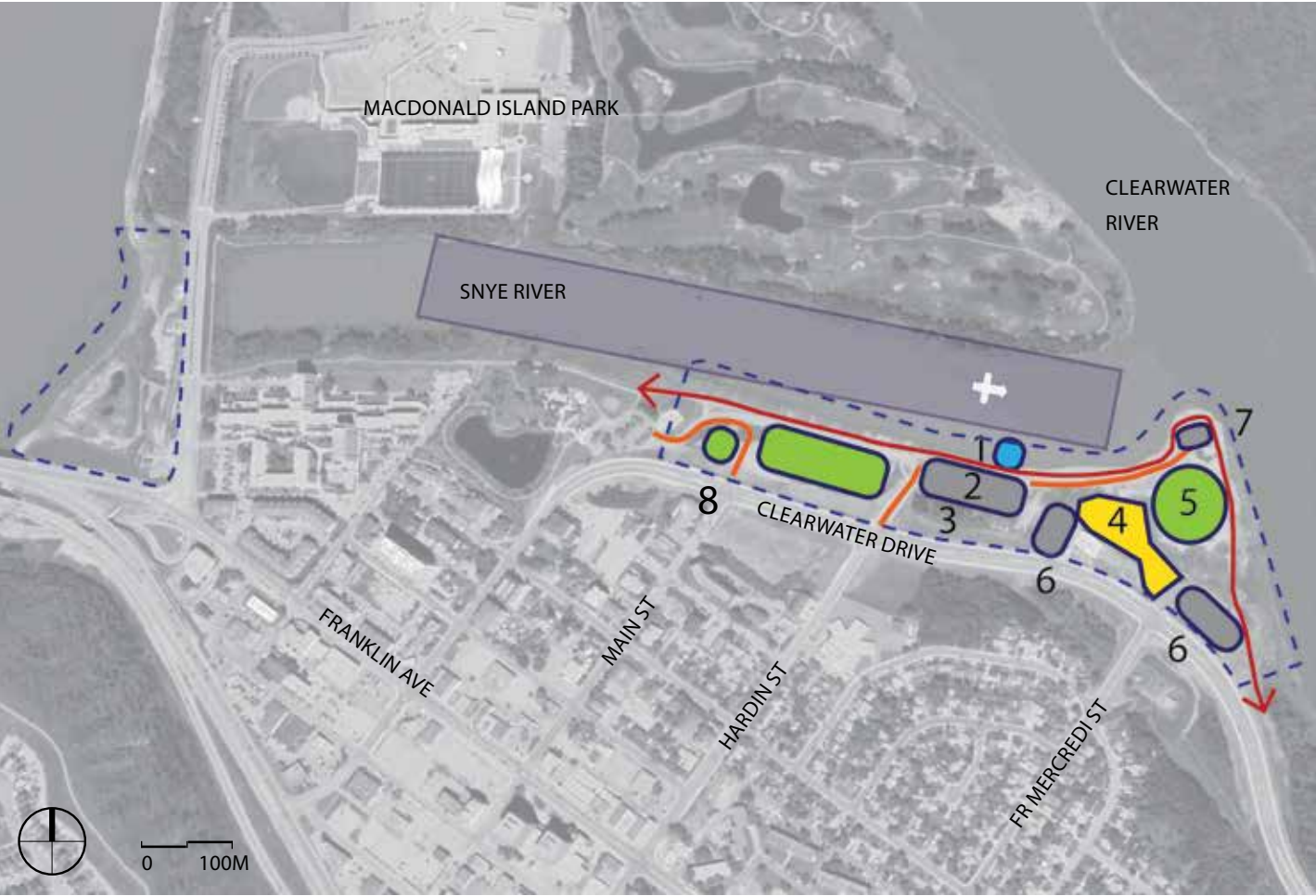
1. Relocate boat launch
2. Relocate parking
3. New flexible / event space
4. Open space out of floodplain
5. New flexible / event space
6. Keep existing parking
7. Pedestrian only access to Snye Point

Evaluation:

- No public vehicular access to Snye Point which was important to the community
- Costly to relocate boat launch. Possible increased conflicts with floatplanes.
- Open space is segmented
- Limited connectivity to water



# SCHEMATIC DESIGN CONSIDERATION - 2

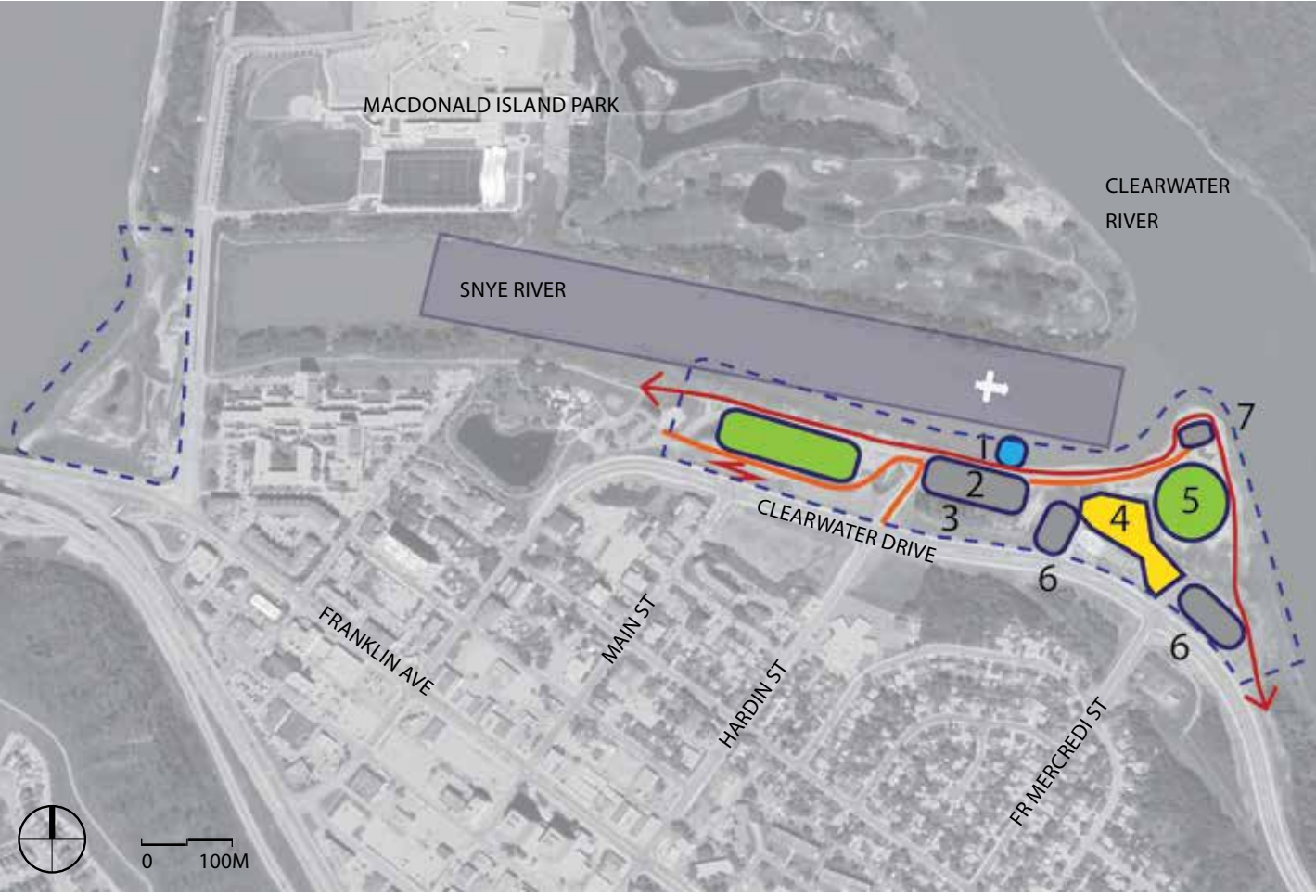


1. Existing boat launch
2. Reconfigure existing parking lot
3. Existing grove of trees
4. Open space out of floodplain
5. New flexible / event space
6. Keep existing parking
7. Vehicular access + parking at Snye Point
8. New vehicular and pedestrian connection to Main Street

Evaluation:

- New connection to Main St costly (grading + services)
- New large flexible space between Main + Hardin
- Vehicular access to Snye Point, as requested by the community

# SCHEMATIC DESIGN CONSIDERATION - 3



1. Existing boat launch
2. Reconfigure existing parking lot
3. Existing grove of trees
4. Open space out of floodplain
5. New flexible / event space
6. Keep existing parking
7. Vehicular access + parking at Snye Point

Evaluation:

- New large flexible space between Main + Hardin connected to the Snye
- Vehicular access to Snye Point, as requested by the community
- Morimoto Drive relocation cost

# CONCEPT OPTIONS



## CONCEPT OPTIONS

The design team and RMWB had their first kickoff meeting on February 18, 2021. Three and a half weeks later, the design team began sharing concept options with various stakeholders, First Nations and Métis groups as well as public meetings.

The following material was shared in over twenty presentations over a two-week period. The two concepts and program elements sparked good discussions and an understanding of two key priority elements: public vehicular access to Snye Point and the southern relocation of Morimoto Drive to create a continuous pedestrian environment to the waters edge.

Names were given to the two concepts to help distinguish the designs. The intention was not to rename the park but help participants distinguish between the two designs.

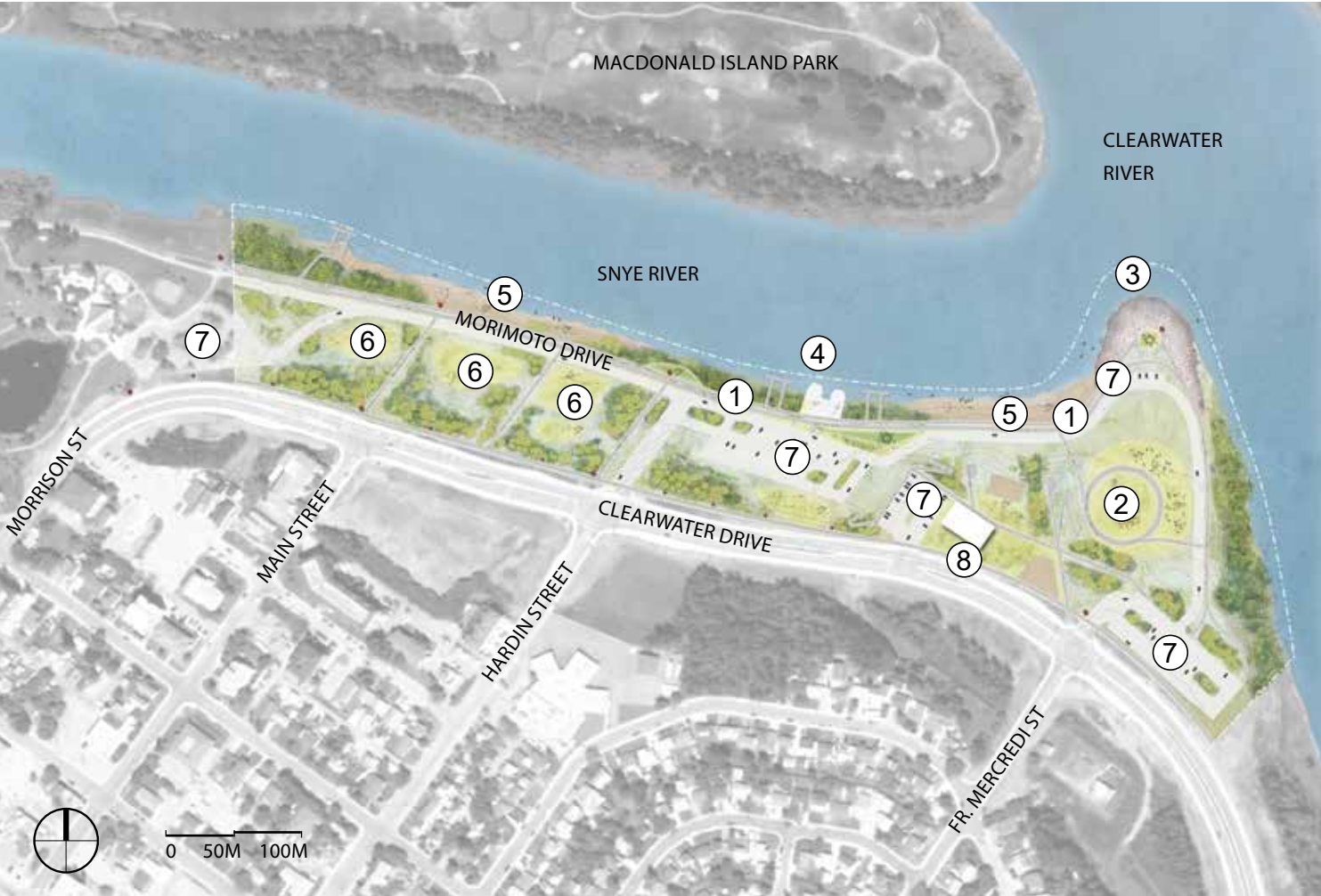
Mood sketches and diagrams were used to illustrate what it could feel like to be in the park and expose the different layers that would make up Snye Point Outdoor Event Space.

While the diagrams illustrate Concept 1 - Clearwater Commons, it is intended to broadly represent the intentions of both concepts.



# OPTION 1 - CLEARWATER COMMON

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



### LEGEND

- 1. Reconciliation Trail (pathway)
- 2. Great Lawn / ceremony area
- 3. Snye Point / fire pit
- 4. Boat launch
- 5. Beach
- 6. Flexible use area
- 7. Parking
- 8. Surekha's

# OPTION 1 - CLEARWATER COMMON

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE - ENLARGEMENT



### LEGEND

- 1. Reconciliation Trail (pathway)
- 2. Great Lawn / ceremony area
- 3. Snye Point / fire pit
- 4. Boat launch
- 5. Beach
- 6. Flexible use area
- 7. Parking
- 8. Surekha's



# OPTION 2 - SNYE LANDING

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



### LEGEND

- 1. Reconciliation Trail (pathway)
- 2. Great Lawn / ceremony area
- 3. Snye Point / fire pit
- 4. Boat launch
- 5. Beach
- 6. Flexible use area
- 7. Parking
- 8. Surekha's

# OPTION 2 - SNYE LANDING

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE - ENLARGEMENT



### LEGEND

- 1. Reconciliation Trail (pathway)
- 2. Great Lawn / ceremony area
- 3. Snye Point / fire pit
- 4. Boat launch
- 5. Beach
- 6. Flexible use area
- 7. Parking
- 8. Surekha's



# OPTION DIFFERENCES

## OPTION 1 - CLEARWATER COMMON



- LEGEND
- 1. Reconciliation Trail (pathway)
  - 2. Great Lawn / ceremony area
  - 3. SnYE Point / fire pit
  - 4. Boat launch
  - 5. Beach
  - 6. Flexible use area
  - 7. Parking
  - 8. Surekha's

## OPTION 2 - SNYE LANDING



- LEGEND
- Pedestrian area
  - Vehicular access
  - Periodic vehicular access (emergency vehicles, maintenance and event setup traffic)

# SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

## WELCOME CIRCLE

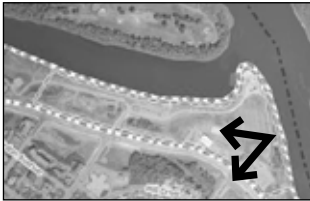


- KEY ELEMENTS:
- Signage
  - Lighting
  - Seating
  - Fire pit on the ground
  - Connection to Reconciliation trail
  - Connection to bike path
  - Connection to the water
  - New tree, shrub and meadow planting



# SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

## AMPHITHEATRE + RAMP ACCESS

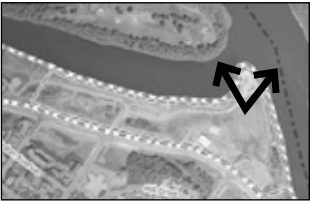


KEY ELEMENTS:

- Accessible Ramp
- Lighting
- Seating
- Connection to lawn / performance space
- Seating on benches and lawn for performances
- Lookout
- New tree, shrub and meadow planting

# SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

## SNYE POINT



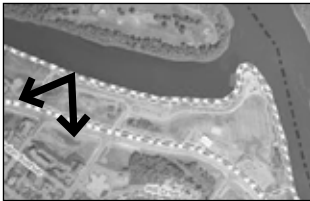
KEY ELEMENTS:

- Signage
- Lighting
- Seating
- Fire pit on the ground
- Connection to Reconciliation trail
- Connection to bike path
- Connection to the water
- New tree, shrub and meadow planting



# SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

## FLEXIBLE USE AREA



KEY ELEMENTS:

- Park entry marker pole - along Selby Ave / Clearwater Dr
- Accessible pathway
- Lighting
- Seating
- Playful art
- Open lawn area for quiet moments or hosting events
- New tree, shrub and meadow planting

# SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

## BEACH



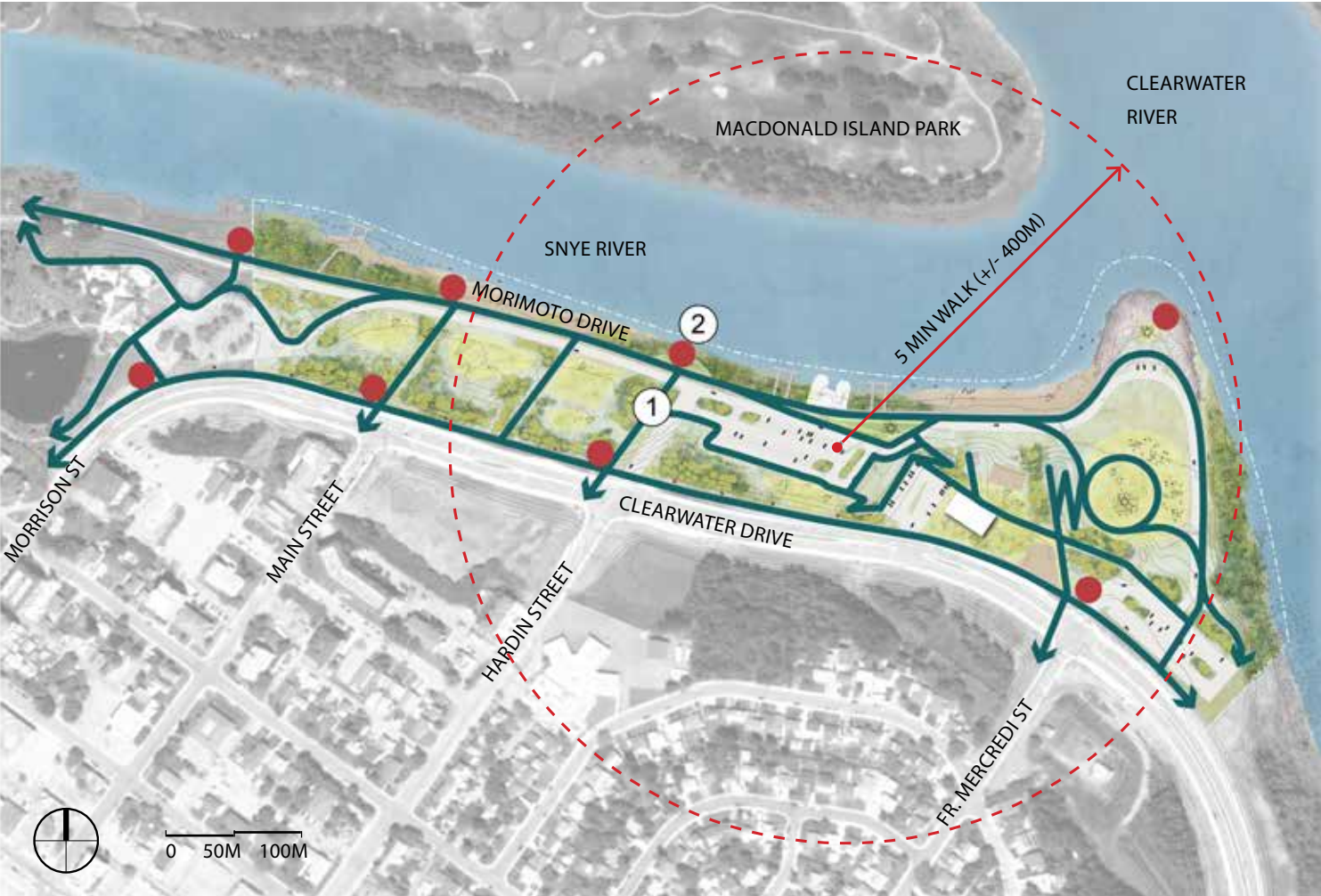
KEY ELEMENTS:

- Accessible pathway
- Bike path
- Signage
- Seating
- Beach
- All-season vendor opportunity
- Bioswale to help with stormwater
- New tree, shrub and meadow planting



# ACCESSIBLE PEDESTRIAN PATHS

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



LEGEND

- 1. Accessible pedestrian paths
- 2. Marker poles

# SIGNAGE + SHARING INFO





# PLACEKEEPING

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

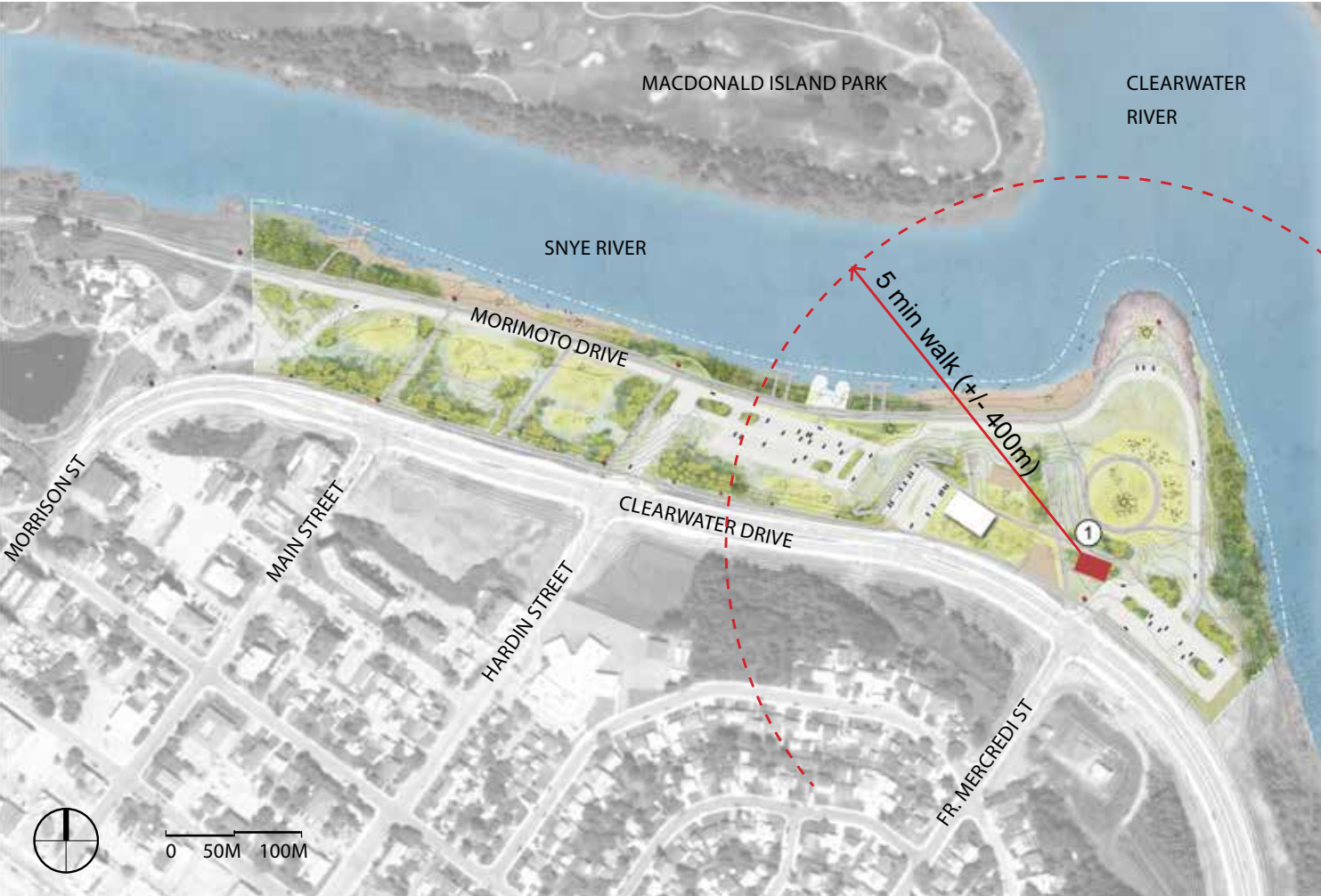


### LEGEND

- 1. Reconciliation Trail / Fox trail
- 2. Accessible fire pits with area for tents
- 3. Art - temporary + permanent
- 4. Traditional and ceremonial indigenous plants

# WASHROOM - POSSIBLE LOCATION

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



### LEGEND

- 1. Accessible washroom (location and construction timing to be determined.)



# TOBOGGANING SLOPE

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

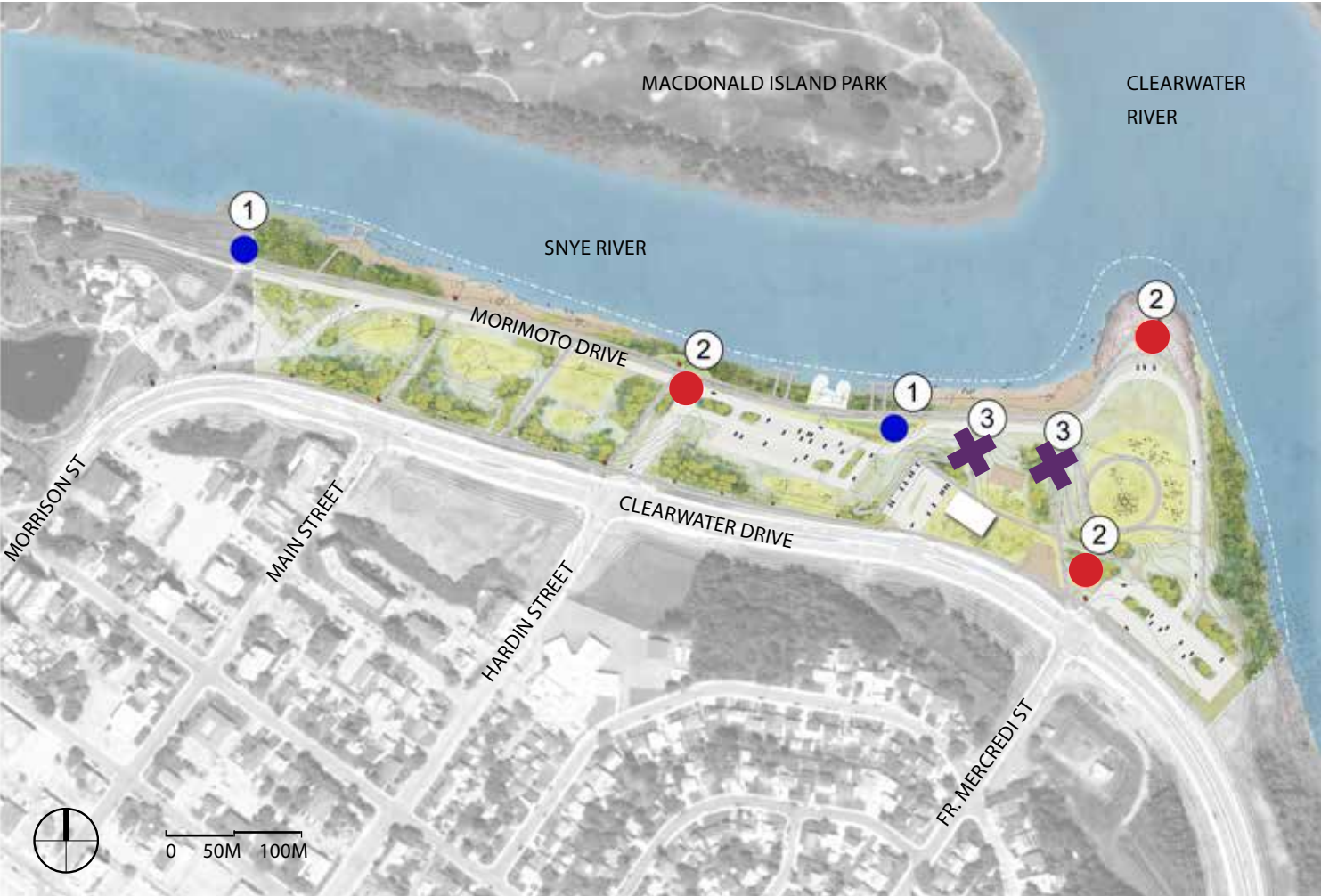


LEGEND

- 1. Tobogganing slope

# LOOKOUTS + WELCOME NODES

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



LEGEND

- 1. Welcome nodes
- 2. Welcome nodes with fire pits
- 3. Lookouts

# VENDOR / FISHING LOCATIONS

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



- LEGEND
- 1. Vendor opportunities
  - 2. Fishing locations

# LANDSCAPE TYPES

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



- LEGEND
- 1. Turf
  - 2. Existing trees
  - 3. Meadow
  - 4. Proposed trees
  - 5. Snye Point
  - 6. Beach



# VEHICULAR CIRCULATION + PARKING

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



LEGEND

- 1. Existing parking lots
- 2. Existing parking lots (+) spaces
- 3. Flexible use / temp parking

# EVENT HOSTING

## SNYE POINT OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE



LEGEND

- 1. Flexible use area
- 2. Transportation drop off
- 3. Event support WC / food / beverage
- 4. Stage
- 5. Audience
- 6. Secure back of stage
- 7. Event vehicular access

# ENGAGEMENT



# ENGAGEMENT

In December 2020 and into early 2021, the RMWB and its owner’s representative, LEES+Associates, planned and completed preliminary engagement with Indigenous partners and identified stakeholders. Preliminary engagement with Indigenous partners and stakeholders about the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space focused on understanding the site from varying perspectives and asking community members how they would like to be engaged throughout the project.

When Urban Systems and DTAH were hired by the RMWB in February 2021, the team worked closely with the RMWB and LEES+Associates to complete the next phase of engagement with Indigenous partners and stakeholders in March 2021 for the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space. During this phase of engagement, Indigenous Partners and stakeholders were encouraged to provide feedback on two concept designs.

During the two-week engagement period between March 15 – 28, 2021 the team employed three engagement tactics to hear from residents, Indigenous partners, and stakeholders:

Participate Wood Buffalo Online Engagement

450 survey submissions - 10 idea contributions

Virtual Indigenous Partners and Stakeholder Engagement Workshops

15 workshops - 65 participants

Virtual Open Houses

2 Live Events - 33 participants

These three tactics were selected as the appropriate engagement methods during a time when in-person engagement activity was limited due to health and safety guidelines related to the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic. The data collected was extremely valuable to inform and confirm community consensus. Our team completed a detailed analysis of all feedback including reviewing, analyzing and categorizing each comment recorded from across all three engagement tactics over the two-week period. This informed the articulation of several themed Key Findings from the concept engagement for the Snye Point Outdoor Events Space.

The detailed information and Key Findings were then considered alongside site analysis, cultural and historical significance of the region, and design best practices to refine the design of the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space, resulting in the generation of the preferred concept.

Included as an attachment to this report is the detailed What We Heard Report summarizing all of the feedback received through the March 2021 engagement period for the Snye Outdoor Events Space.

# PREFERRED CONCEPT





# PREFERRED CONCEPT

Building on the excellent community, stakeholder and Indigenous and Métis comments, the design team began to develop the preferred concept. This work spanned over the month of April.

In tandem, construction drawings for Phase 1 of Priority Area 1 were underway.

The preferred concept carefully considered the detailed engagement summary. This included protecting for continued vehicular access with parking at Snye Point and the southern relocation of Morimoto Drive with continuous pedestrian connection to Snye River shoreline.

Following a test-fit of the Athabasca Tribal Council Cultural Festival, the pathways and flexible open space to the west of Hardin Street was adjusted. The proposed restroom location was relocated close to the proposed natural play equipment and children’s water feature. Vendor opportunities were increased for the spaces south of the cycle track with the addition of parallel parking / vendor opportunities along the new Morimoto Drive.

A Sculptural Edge was added to the only open space outside of the floodplain that is not on impacted soil. The location was also chosen because of the stunning views, inviting people to sit and enjoy the natural beauty or take a selfie to share with others. Key Sculptural Edge design intentions include:

- Represent the movement of the surrounding rivers
- Building in height and increasing wood cover as the mounds move west toward the mighty Athabasca River
- Include trees for shade and comfort and can also open and close views north
- Offer a fun place for children to climb and explore
- Use of natural materials
- Offer accessible paths around the base of the mounds
- Framing the amazing natural views north

# PRIORITY AREA 1





LEGEND

- 1. Borealis Park
- 2. Existing Casselman Lush Memorial Skate Park
- 3. Volleyball Court
- 4. Welcome Circle
- 5. Main Street plaza, marker pole and pedestrian connection
- 6. Flexible open space
- 7. Flexible open space / overflow parking
- 8. Reconciliation Trail (pedestrian path)
- 9. Cycle tracks
- 10. Washroom
- 11. Natural Play with natural water play
- 12. Dock
- 13. Existing boat launch
- 14. Reconstructed Hardin St parking lot
- 15. Toboggan hill
- 16. Picnic area
- 17. Arrival Plaza
- 18. Existing parking
- 19. Marker Pole
- 20. Sculptural Edge

PRIORITY AREA 1 - WEST





# PRIORITY AREA 1 - EAST

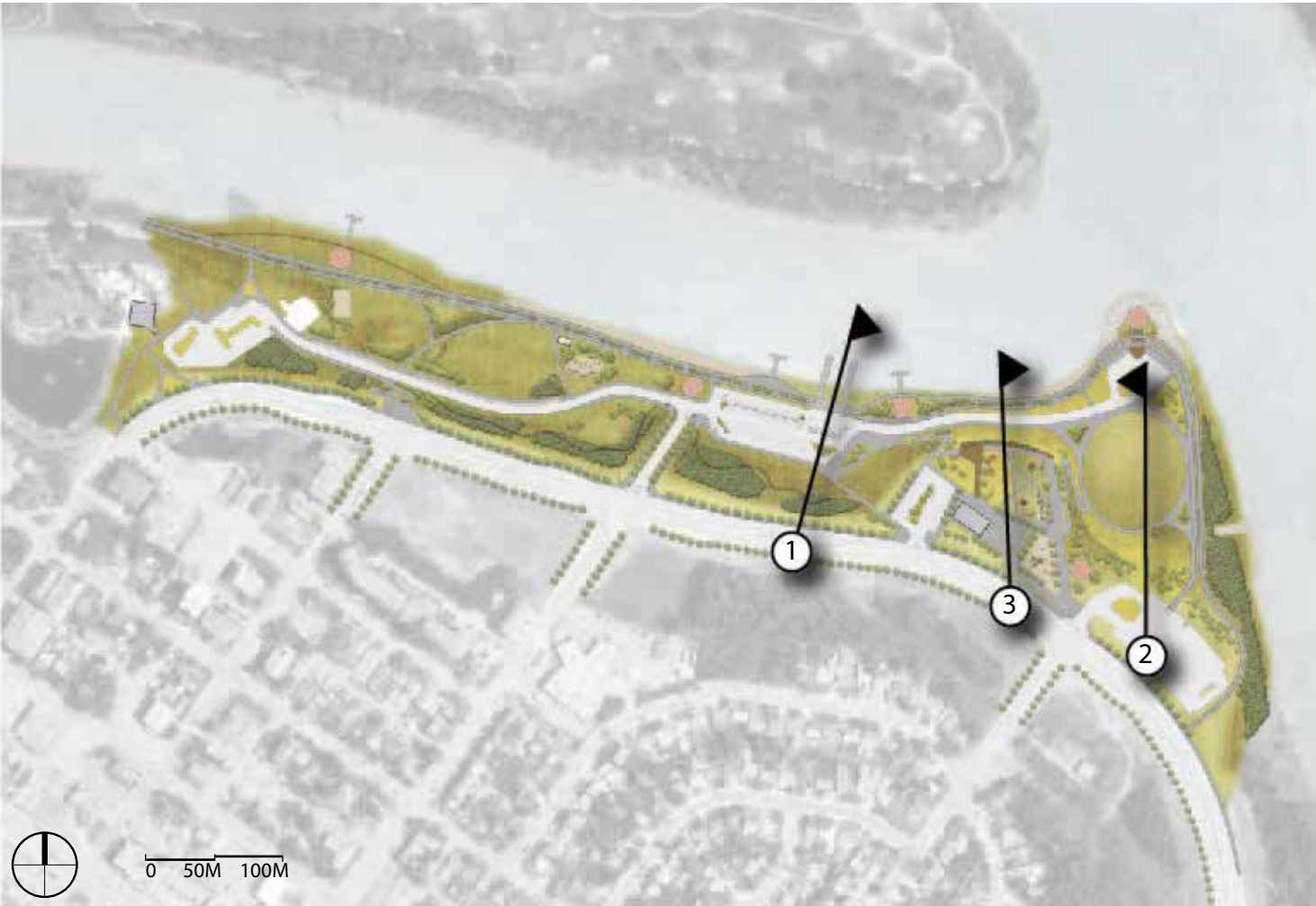
## LEGEND

- 1. Existing Casselman Lush Memorial Skate Park
- 2. Volleyball Court
- 3. Welcome Circle
- 4. Main Street plaza, marker pole and pedestrian connection
- 5. Flexible open space
- 6. Flexible open space / overflow parking
- 7. Reconciliation Trail (pedestrian path)
- 8. Cycle tracks
- 9. Washroom
- 10. Natural Play with natural water play
- 11. Dock
- 12. Existing boat launch
- 13. Reconstructed Hardin St parking lot
- 14. Toboggan hill
- 15. Picnic area
- 16. Arrival Plaza
- 17. Existing parking
- 18. Sculptural Edge
- 19. Marker Pole





# PRIORITY AREA 1 - SECTIONS



# PREFERRED CONCEPT DIAGRAMS



# PREFERRED CONCEPT DIAGRAMS

The following diagrams dissect the preferred concept into simple elements. Ultimately, the waterfront park will be a sum of all of the parts.

Snye Point Outdoor Event Space has many layers that create a rich and thoughtfully planned park that is a true reflection of the community’s voice and the guiding principles identified in the call for proposals.



# SUPPORT TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION



Incorporate Indigenous and Métis art, history, culture, storytelling and significant plant material through:

- Marker poles
- Reconciliation trail
- Signage + wayfinding (four languages)
- Story telling and history on signage
- Significant plant material throughout + around Welcome Circles
- Art incorporated in Discovery Moments + Art Plaza

# PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS



- Increase park porosity and accessibility
- Connections to Clearwater Drive and downtown core
- Cross country skiing opportunities on cycle tracks
- Access to new docks
- Provide walking options that support CPTED principles

# CYCLE CONNECTIONS



- Support guiding documents by providing separated cycle track in park
- On-street connections to Clearwater Drive and downtown core



# BOAT LAUNCH PARKING LOT MOVEMENTS



- Improved parking lot safety
- Increased vehicle capacity.
- Currently: 7 stalls; 17 boat / trailer stalls
- Proposed: 42 stalls; 12 boat / trailer stalls
- Boat launch stacking opportunity
- Simplified truck + trailer movement and parking
- Alternative pedestrian route along south edge of parking lot

# VEHICULAR CONNECTIONS



- Main vehicular park connection through Hardin St
- Realigned Morimoto Dr services Borealis Park parking lot
- Park maintenance / floatplane fuel truck access
- Access to SnYE Point with parking
- Existing parking lots accessible from Clearwater Drive to remain
- Event / park maintenance access to Great Lawn

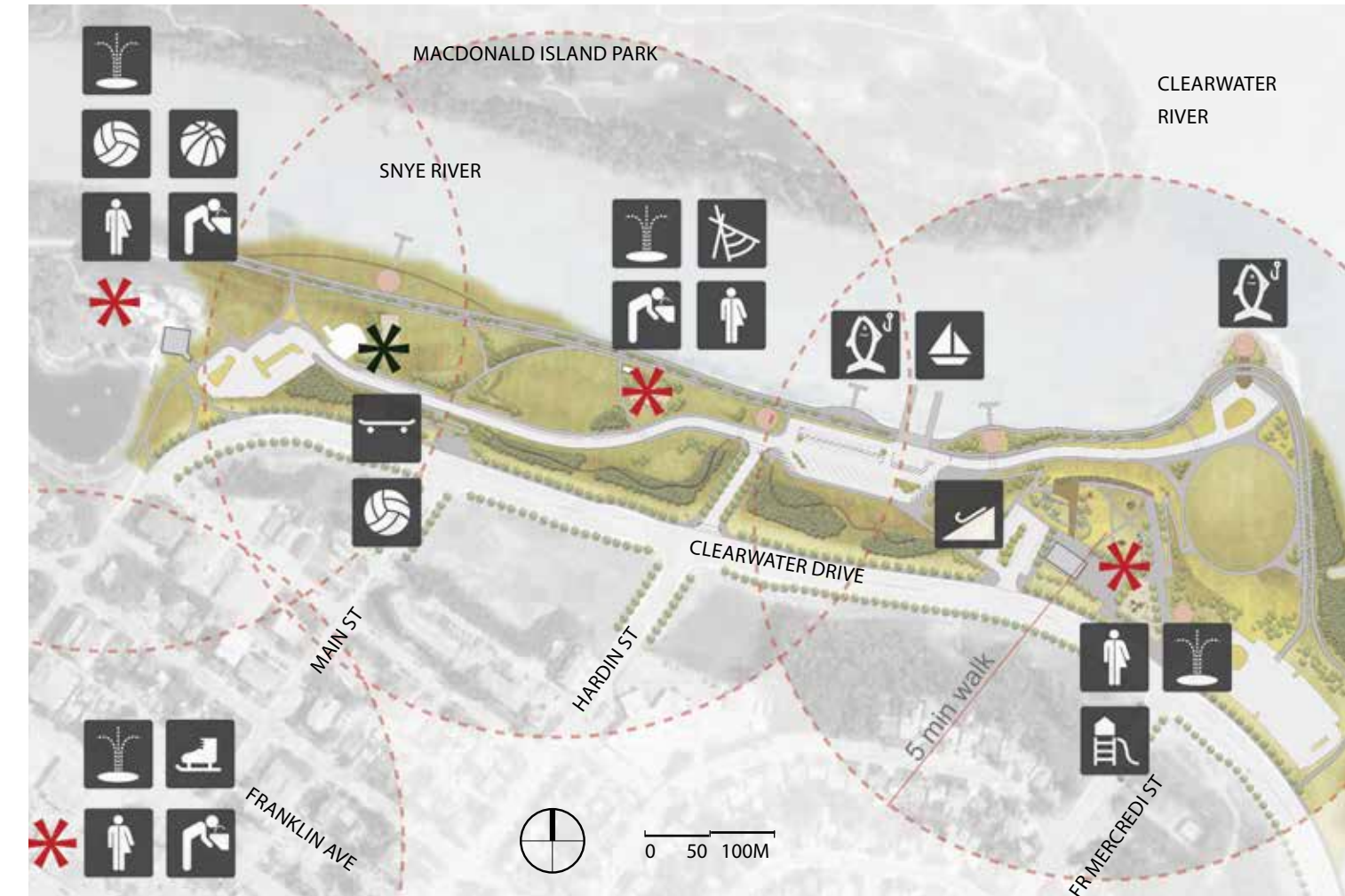


## SITE MOVEMENT - LAYERS



- Overlaying pedestrian, cycling, vehicular circulation to illustrate porosity and site accessibility
- Connections to downtown core

## SITE + ADJACENT PROGRAM USES



## Park Features

- 1 new WC
- 1 new natural play feature
- 1 new sand play area by restaurant

Note: 5-minute walking circles

MASTER PLAN  
PROGRAM  
SUGGESTIONS:

- Civic plaza / playground
- Seasonal skate rink
- Enhanced parking
- Boat launch
- Restored natural areas
- Trans Canada Trailhead
- Event / revenue generation (heavy traffic area)

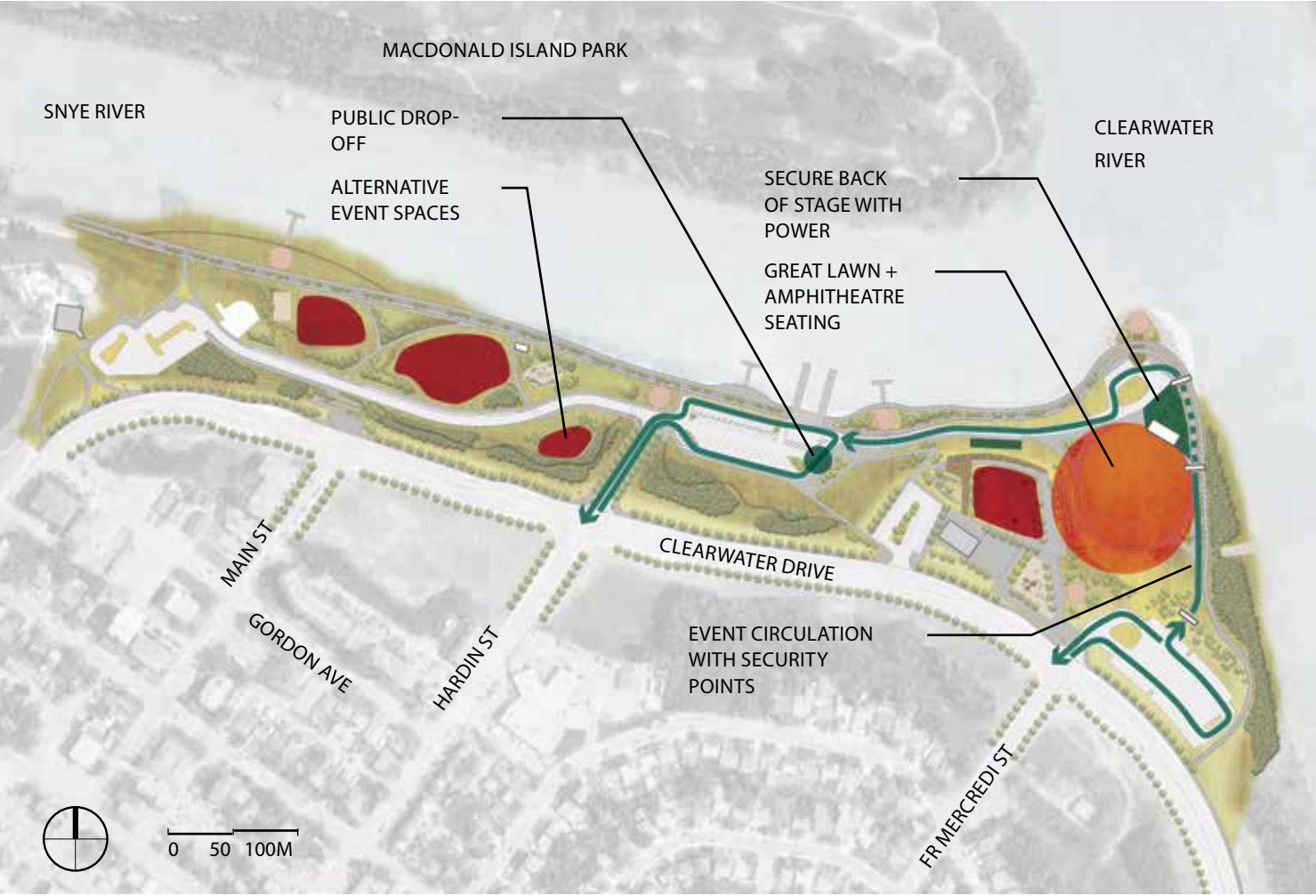


# DISCOVERY MOMENTS



- Special discovery moments are proposed to surprise visitors throughout the park
- Elements could include a bouldering wall, sculpture, small piece of children's play equipment, artistically placed rocks, adult swing or other spontaneous moments

# EVENT SETUP AND CIRCULATION



- Primary large event space: Great Lawn
  - Great Lawn proposed to include power for events
  - Pedestrian lights to be on dimmers
  - Great Lawn reinforced turf will reduce maintenance
- Other event spaces include:
- West flexible space (possibility for multi-event space)
  - Art Plaza
  - Hardin Street parking lot



# VENDOR OPPORTUNITIES



- Vendor opportunities south of cycle track
- Parallel parking along Morimoto Dr can include designated vendor opportunities
- During a large event, such as Ribfest, vendors can be located to the north and south of the large flexible pedestrian area

# WASHROOMS



- Existing public washroom at restaurant
- New proposed washroom at natural play feature + water element
- Washroom building located away from Snyc Point due to potential ice damage
- The Great Lawn area was avoided to protect for flexible large event setup
- Fr Mercredi St parking lot area was avoided due to prime sightlines, capped impacted soils and significant service connection constraints



# WHAT MAKES THIS PARK UNIQUE?



# COMPLEX LAYERS - SIMPLE PALETTE

- Strong community driven design to create a destination park
- Significant and meaningful truth and reconciliation engagement and future built representation
- Integrated signage and wayfinding in Cree, Dene and Michif (four languages)
- Opportunity to share stories, history and education about plants, animals and the environment
- Ability to integrate QR codes on signage to share videos of Elders recalling memories of people and the land, sharing stories and information about culturally significant plant material
- Natural park design
- Natural play opportunities
- Strong park ‘bones’ to support current uses and future evolving community needs
- Comfortably accommodate large events while being open to the public
- Balanced flood and capital investment programming locations
- Fully accessible and welcoming, both physically and culturally
- Embrace and incorporate guiding principles
- Resilient design

## GREAT LAWN CULTURAL FESTIVAL



## SCULPTURAL EDGE IN THE ART PLAZA





## WELCOME CIRCLE



## NATURAL PLAY + FLEXIBLE OPEN SPACE



# “WOW” MOMENT





# “WOW” MOMENT

Building on the strong organizational moves and creation of new exterior rooms within the park, spaces are created to allow for special points of interests, or “Wow” Moments. These moments offer exciting dramatic opportunities to accentuate the iconic park identity.

The intention is to provide an element that is unique, responds to the local context or cultural history and speaks to the greater Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

The proposed location for the “Wow” Moment is located on the upper open space, or Art Plaza, outside of the floodplain, which is north of the existing restaurant. The reason for this location is that the legacy feature will likely require significant investment and should therefore be protected from ice and flood water damage. A possible secondary goal is to attract people traveling along Clearwater Drive to enter the park and look at the feature that caught their eye.

The Art Plaza, provides an excellent opportunity for permanent and temporary art installations, cultural celebrations, family picnics, crafts fairs and other active uses. In addition, the space allows for dramatic views and backdrop north, towards MacDonald Island and Clearwater River. The “Wow” Moment dramatically celebrates and builds on the richness and character of Snye Point Outdoor Event Space.

## ART PLAZA CONTEXT

This render illustrates the larger context for the “Wow” Moment. The Art Plaza, north of the existing restaurant, is an excellent active programming space as well as an opportune passive space that would welcome people to eat lunch on the sculptural edge, soaking in the beauty of Clearwater, Snyc and Athabasca Rivers.

Marker Poles act as a gateway and demarcate the north edge of Clearwater Drive and park, and will continue along the 6km length of the waterfront.

This render illustrates the Water Sculpture feature along with the Sculptural Edge / lookout. Additional sculptural pieces can be added and integrated into the plaza and park over time.







LADY DIANA FOUNTAIN, UK



BANYOLES, SPAIN

The Water Sculpture is an interactive feature, a ribbon that is reminiscent of the braided Athabasca and Clearwater River. It includes islands and edges similar to the surrounding rivers. The sand bar islands provide an opportunity for explorers to step outside of the moving water or step from sandbar to sandbar.

The edge of the water feature lays flat with the adjacent grade in some locations and gently flows up into seating opportunities that invite people to pause for a moment with their feet in the water. The water moves with different turbulence and aeration, creating a dynamic intervention.

The feature is purposefully designed to give the impression of a continuous cycle of water, versus having a beginning and an end.

Visitors would be invited to interact with the water. It would offer quiet moments for people to slowly and thoughtfully move around the feature surrounded by the natural beauty around Fort McMurray or welcome the sounds of children splashing in and out of the water.

Integrated soft lighting lines the edges of the water features' sculptural edge and bars. In the evening and in the winter, proposed lighting accentuates a softly lit oval and art form. The light would move under the promenade through an open grate assembly. The lighting will complement the Art Plaza and will bridge the different seasons, bringing the promise of running water in fair weather.

## “WOW” MOMENT 1: WATER SCULPTURE (WINTER)







LADY DIANA FOUNTAIN, UK



BANYOLES, SPAIN

## “WOW” MOMENT 1: WATER SCULPTURE (DAY)







HARMONY, AB



HARMONY, AB

ARTISTIC ACCENT  
LIGHTING

The design inspiration for the tipi comes from the Cree name for the area that is now called Fort McMurray – Nistawoyou. Translated to English, this means “where three rivers meet”. This tipi structure is a modern interpretation of the traditional dwellings historically used by the Plains Indigenous peoples. Each of the three support structures that form this unique presentation represents one of the three rivers that inhabit Fort McMurray’s Waterfront – the Athabasca, the Clearwater and the Snye, with a hierarchy of scale consistent with that of each river. The number three takes on additional meaning in this context based on the Cree’s traditional tipi design which utilized a three primary pole system for the structural frame. The three structures presented here are intended to be constructed of steel with cut design patterns that represent flowing water and/or other cultural elements highlighted with creative backlighting that can be programmed through color, intensity, and/or timing.

The structure is prominent in scale with a proposed height of approximately 10 meters at its peak. It’s location at one of the primary entry points to the park is strategically selected to present a physical gateway opportunity to the waterfront and a unique frame for the incredible view. The wide pedestrian corridor that the tipi rises above has symbolic significance, as the Athabasca was historically described as a “main highway” and one of several major “axes” that linked together the members of local Indigenous bands along the river routes.

This iconic feature combines culture, history and an integrated component of public art that makes a statement, has a strong identity, and sets the tone for a unique community experience, bringing people together in the same way that these waterways did many years ago. Lastly, this feature and its associated design intent has strong ties to another important statement about the cultural connectivity of the rivers here – “Reflections on the River”, located on the western portion of our project boundary along MacDonald Drive.

## “WOW” MOMENT 2: TIPI







LARGE SCALE REALISTIC SCULPTURE



COLOURFUL ANIMATED SCULPTURE

Representing the larger RMWB, a massive wood buffalo would perch on the edge of the Sculptural Edge, offering visitors an opportunity to walk around the base and take memorable snapshots.

Looking north toward the confluence of Clearwater and Athabasca River, the wood buffalo sculpture could have a wood-like texture with a black colour representative of the oil rich sands. The dark colour would be a stark contrast to the winter snow. The wood texture would speak to the surrounding boreal forest.

The wood buffalo sculpture would perch above the Great Lawn and would also be very visible from Clearwater Drive, inviting visitors to take a closer look.

The sculpture is intended to have realistic proportions but with a texturized appearance. The wood buffalo would exude a confident, proud and strong appearance.

Accent lighting can be integrated in the Sculptural Edge wood decking, offering a soft glow in the evenings.

## “WOW” MOMENT 3: WOOD BUFFALO







SIMCOE WAVE DECK, TORONTO



SIMCOE WAVE DECK LIGHTING, TORONTO

Using engineered laminate wood technology, similar to the Sculptural Edge, the River Braid would start in three locations, and will move upward, bend and weave into a sculpted interwoven braid.

The three braided feature is representative of the Snye, Clearwater and Athabasca Rivers. They speak to the confluence of the rivers to the north, visible through the arches.

Soft ambient down lighting can provide a multi-season glow and accentuate the gateway feature.

The braided feature would frame the natural picture perfect view looking north and provide seating opportunities below. The River Braid would be visible from Clearwater Drive and would invite visitors to enter the park.

While the Sculptural Edge would provide an opportunity for people to climb on - both the soft mounds and the waving engineered wood deck - the River Braid would be steep and uninviting. The arching and twisting sculpture would create a strong gateway with many porous options at grade.

## “WOW” MOMENT 4: RIVER BRAID



# BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS





# BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Our understanding of the current budget is as follows:

Priority Area 1 - \$9 million (\$9 million / km)

Priority Area 2 - \$21 million (\$4.2 million / km)

Athabasca Lands - \$3 million

A Class D Cost Estimate for the 2021 proposed construction scope has been prepared in conjunction with the 60% construction document progress set. The proposed 2021 work is currently estimated at a value of \$4 million plus a 35% contingency for a total of \$5.4 million. Some of the basic design improvements and their associated cost are noted below:

Reinforced Turf Great Lawn: \$340,000

Update to Hardin Street Parking lot: \$370,000

Lighting (excluding special features): \$300,000

Concrete FlatWork (e.g. pathways): \$800,000

Imported Site Fill & Grading: \$400,000

The 2021 scope of construction work represents roughly 20-30% of the overall construction value for Priority Area 1. Consequently, it is clear that there will need to be deliberate efforts made to manage the budget throughout the design process for the remainder of the Priority Area 1. The design and the associated cost estimate will continue to develop with the intent of balancing design creativity and amenity value with the available project budget.

In addition to the above-noted pricing, the following is a preliminary range of costs associated with each of the “Wow” Moment options presented in conceptual form:

Water Sculpture: \$1 - \$1.5 million

Tipi: \$1.5 - \$2 million

Wood Buffalo: \$1.5 - \$2 million

River Braid: \$1.5 - \$2.5 million

It is important to recognize that the current budget estimate does not include a “Wow” Moment, and broader considerations including trade-offs, project budget allocations, and discussions on where investment can best be leveraged within the Waterfront Park project will need to be further explored.

# CONCLUSION





# CONCLUSION

The vision and goal for the Priority 1 area, Master Plan and following phases, is an ambitious one. Our team has already progressed some areas and elements of the Priority Area 1 preferred concept through to detailed design, in coordination with the RMWB to meet project timelines for a 2021 construction start. In tandem, we anticipate continued refinement of remaining elements of the preferred concept, as detailed design progresses across the Priority Area 1 site. These refinements will be made in conjunction with the RMWB team to ensure alignment with the overall project budget and ultimate vision for the project.

Key areas for further development include the potential addition of a Big “Wow” Moment, detailed design development for the 2022 proposed construction scope, and interpretive and cultural placemaking elements throughout the site. This will include signage and wayfinding that incorporate key site-relevant topics such as Indigenous culture, settler heritage, river dynamics, industrial ecosystems, and biodiversity. The ultimate design of Priority Area 1 and the broader Waterfront Park will reflect the Indigenous Peoples’ ties to the land since time immemorial, culturally significant areas such as Moccasin Flats, and centuries of stories encompassing exploration, fur trade, and the establishment of the Gateway to the Arctic.

Fort McMurray’s waterfront is a dynamic landscape with a multitude of stories to tell and a rich history to be shared. The park will act as a catalyst, through greater access and new connections to the adjacent community, through raising awareness and understanding of the rich Indigenous culture and importance of reconciliation, awareness of the importance of protecting/enhancing the unique ecology, and the potential for economic growth as a destination waterfront, and venue for community events for generations to come.

# APPENDIX







# Snye Point Outdoor Event Space

**PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:  
WHAT WE HEARD REPORT**



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
OF **WOOD BUFFALO**



# Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>II</b>
Overview of What We Did .....	ii
Land Acknowledgment.....	iv
Overview of Key Findings .....	v
<b>PROJECT INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Engagement Tactics.....	1
Purpose of Engagement .....	2
<b>PARTICIPATE WOOD BUFFALO .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Data Approach .....	3
Survey Findings .....	3
<b>VIRTUAL INDIGENOUS PARTNER AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Data Approach .....	13
Workshop Findings .....	13
<b>VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSES .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Data Approach .....	20
Open House Findings .....	20
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA INSIGHTS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Approach .....	22
<b>MOVING FORWARD.....</b>	<b>23</b>

# Executive Summary

## OVERVIEW OF WHAT WE DID

**Engaement Period:** March 15 - 28, 2021

### ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

We used **3 online tools** to engage the community.



**450**  
Survey  
Submissions



**10**  
Ideas  
Contributions



**0**  
Stories

450

Participants Engaged

889

Participants Informed

1,891

Participants Aware

### VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

9

Indigenous Partner &  
Stakeholder Workshops

6

Council Approved  
Committee Workshops

65

Participants attended  
and engaged directly  
with the project team  
via the engagement  
workshops.





## VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSES

 **10** Participant  
questions  
submitted

**2**   
**Live Events**

MONDAY

16 Participants

THURSDAY

17 Participants

## SOCIAL MEDIA

INSTAGRAM

**3**   
POSTS

19 Likes

TWITTER

**8**   
TWEETS

3 Likes

5 Retweets

1 Reply

FACEBOOK

**10**   
POSTS

22 Comments

22 Reactions

36 Shares

3224 Average Reach

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

### NISTAWÂYÂW: “WHERE THREE RIVERS MEET”

**This project is located on traditional lands.** We recognize that the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space is located on Treaty 8 land—the traditional territory of the Cree and Dene and the unceded territory of the Métis people.

We understand, and heard from Indigenous partners, that the waterways, shorelines, and lands have been central to the identities, lives, and cultural continuity of Indigenous peoples for as long as their ancestors have resided in the area.

Snye Point, and the surrounding area, provided subsistence, spiritual and cultural-well being for Indigenous peoples. It was a place to gather, meet economic needs, and access the waterways surrounding the site to travel throughout the region.

We respect this deep and continued history of the site.



## OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

### RECONCILIATION

**Forward truth and reconciliation.** Indigenous partners shared that this project is about reconciliation and requested that engagement be meaningful, authentic, and conducted with mutual trust and recognition.

**Recognize rich cultural ties and history.** The design team will develop the park spaces, materials, play elements, signage, wayfinding, and public art in partnership with Indigenous partners and community members.

**Ensure the park is a place for everyone.** The design team will explore design elements on the land and waterways that prioritize resident and visitor accessibility and inclusion.

### ACTIVITIES

**Incorporate play features in the park.** The design team will explore design elements that encourage play for all ages and abilities.

**Enhance ability to touch the water.** The design team will include design elements that have the potential to connect the park to the water while balancing user safety and the diverse needs of different park activities.

**Create spaces for unique vendor attractions.** The design team will consider how to support vendor opportunities in the park year-round.

**Incorporate places to rest and stop.** The design team will integrate places for people to stop, rest, and enjoy the natural beauty of the park.

**Activate the park year-round.** The design team is contemplating the ways in which the design can continue to support existing uses and enhance the experience of the park in all seasons.

**Enhance safety.** The design team will prioritize resident and visitor safety in the park by improving lighting, creating separated pedestrian and cycle spaces, and improving public awareness of multiple park activities and their potential conflicts (i.e., motorized vs. non-motorized uses along the Snye) using clear, visible signage.

**Celebrate natural beauty.** The design team will use the existing natural features within the park to inspire the design. The park will be a place to enjoy nature in park spaces that can adapt to different activities at different times of the year.

## CONNECTIVITY

**Confirm how vehicles will access Syne Point.** The design team will explore how permanent vehicle access to Syne Point can be accommodated in the design.

**Confirm placement of Morimoto Drive.** The design team will discuss how to realign Morimoto Drive in order to directly connect the park space with the water and establish a well-used space for generations to come.

**Address vehicle circulation.** The design team will explore different roadway designs for Morimoto Drive that balance vehicle movement, event-hosting capabilities, and pedestrian activity. The design team will ensure adequate materials and appropriate space is provided for vehicle-oriented areas of the park to ensure the area can host large-scale events while also functioning for all-season, everyday uses.

**Develop connected walking and wheeling pathways.** The design team will develop pathways that connect to destinations in the parks and to the downtown.

**Provide safe options for pedestrians and cyclists.** The design team will ensure people walking, running, and wheeling have safe options to access Syne Point.

## INFRASTRUCTURE + RESILIENCY

**Place infrastructure outside the floodplain.** The design team will work closely with RMWB to plan infrastructure and servicing investments at higher elevations in the park outside of the floodplain zone.

**Balance infrastructure investments with flood resiliency.** The design team will consider how best to provide utility and infrastructure servicing to the site while upholding best practices for design in flood prone areas.

**Increase parking count.** The design team will consider parallel parking options along Morimoto Drive and opportunities to address parking issues.

**Invest in a resilient park design.** The design team will incorporate resilient and adaptive design elements into the park so that the space can respond to and mitigate flooding and ice jam impacts.

## PROCESS

**Demonstrate a transparent process.** The design team will work with the RMWB to share design.

**Balance design elements from both concepts.** The design team will explore how to blend the design elements of the preferred concept with insights shared in Question 5, and in the Virtual Indigenous Partners and Stakeholder Engagement Workshops to create a design that meets the needs of the community.



# Project Introduction

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) is redeveloping the Syne Point Outdoor Event Space as part of the Waterfront Park Revitalization project. The Waterfront Park Revitalization project boundary includes 6 km of the waterfront from the Athabasca Bridge to Horse Pasture Park in Waterways. The current phase of engagement focuses on the Syne Point Outdoor Event Space.

In December 2020 and into early 2021, the RMWB and its owner's representative, LEES+Associates, planned and completed preliminary engagement with Indigenous partners and identified stakeholders. Preliminary engagement with Indigenous partners and stakeholders about the Syne Point Outdoor Event Space focused on understanding the site from varying perspectives and asking community members how they would like to be engaged throughout the project.

In February 2021, Urban Systems was hired by the RMWB to deliver the Waterfront Park Revitalization project, including the public participation process. Urban Systems worked closely with the RMWB and LEES+Associates to complete the next phase of engagement with Indigenous partners and stakeholders in March 2021 for the Syne Point Outdoor Event Space. During this phase of engagement, Indigenous Partners and stakeholders were encouraged to provide feedback on two concepts designs. The following What We Heard Report summarizes the insights collected during the March 2021 engagement period.

## ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

The RMWB hosted a two-week engagement period between March 15 – 28, 2021. During this time, three engagement tactics were used to hear from residents, Indigenous partners, and stakeholders.

1. Participate Wood Buffalo Online Engagement
2. Virtual Indigenous Partners and Stakeholder Engagement Workshops
3. Virtual Open Houses

These three tactics were selected as the appropriate engagement methods during a time when in-person engagement activity was limited due to health and safety guidelines.

The data collected from the Participate Wood Buffalo Online Engagement, Virtual Indigenous Partners and Stakeholder Engagement Workshops, and Virtual Open Houses will be considered alongside site analysis, cultural and historical significance of the region, and design best practices to refine the design of the Syne Point Outdoor Event Space.

In the next phase of engagement, the RMWB will share the refined design for the Syne Point Outdoor Event Space with residents, Indigenous partners, stakeholders, and outline how community input (alongside other information used to make project decisions) influenced the development of the detailed design.

## PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

### Participate Wood Buffalo Online Engagement

The Participate Wood Buffalo project page was the first community-wide public participation opportunity for the Waterfront Park project and was open for public input between Monday, March 15 – 28, 2021.

The RMWB used three tools on the Participate Wood Buffalo platform to engage the community.

TOOL	PURPOSE
<b>SURVEY</b>	To encourage focused and thoughtful feedback on the two concept options.
<b>IDEAS</b>	To use illustrations to share and receive feedback on the proposed “on-the-ground” look and feel on the concept options.
<b>STORIES</b>	To offer space for community members to share stories about the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space.

### Virtual Indigenous Partners and Stakeholder Engagement Workshops

The RMWB organized nine (9) Indigenous partner and stakeholder engagement workshops and attended six (6) Council Appointed Committee meetings between March 15 – 28, 2021.

A consistent format and slide deck was followed for each workshop, with slight modifications and tailoring to meet the needs of workshops participants (e.g., platform, presentation time). The purpose of each virtual engagement workshop was four-fold:

1. To introduce the design team.
2. To share the design process.
3. To share two concept options for the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space.
4. To listen to feedback from participants on the two concept options for the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space.

### Virtual Open Houses

The RMWB organized and hosted two (2) Virtual Open Houses during the week of March 22 – March 26, 2021. The first Virtual Open House was hosted on Monday, March 22; the second Virtual Open House was hosted on Thursday, March 25. In total, 33 attendees participated in the Virtual Open Houses. Preregistration was encouraged through Participate Wood Buffalo and event links provided prior to each event on social media and Participate Wood Buffalo

The RMWB hosted the Virtual Open Houses using MS Teams. The design team prepared a slide deck and presented the same content at each event. Participants were encouraged to connect directly with the design team by submitting questions via the Q&A tool during the Virtual Open House Events.

In addition, the RMWB recorded the Virtual Open House events. The recordings were shared on the Participate Wood Buffalo project page for community members unable to attend either event time.

# Participate Wood Buffalo

## DATA APPROACH

We followed a consistent approach to review and analyze data collected through Participate Wood Buffalo.

First, the quantitative results were downloaded, reviewed, and analyzed. Next, two questions included comment fields (i.e., Question 1 and Question 5). For these two questions, each comment was read and tagged. A second reviewer read each comment, confirmed the applied tags, and added a geo-reference tag if a specific location was included in the comment. Then, the second reviewer pulled out any design ideas, suggestions, or project questions that were submitted within a comment for the project team to review.

To develop findings for each question, we used the quantitative data points from the survey (i.e., number of votes received). Comments, tags, and the frequency of tags were used as information that offered insights into Indigenous partners' and stakeholders' perspective and sentiment.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

The Participate Wood Buffalo had a total of 2,200 pageviews between March 15 – 28, 2021.

450 participants engaged with content on the project page. This includes taking the Survey and contributing to the Ideas board; no participants submitted content to the Stories tool.

889 participants were informed by the content on the project page. This includes viewing a photo in the gallery, visiting the FAQ list, and downloading a document.

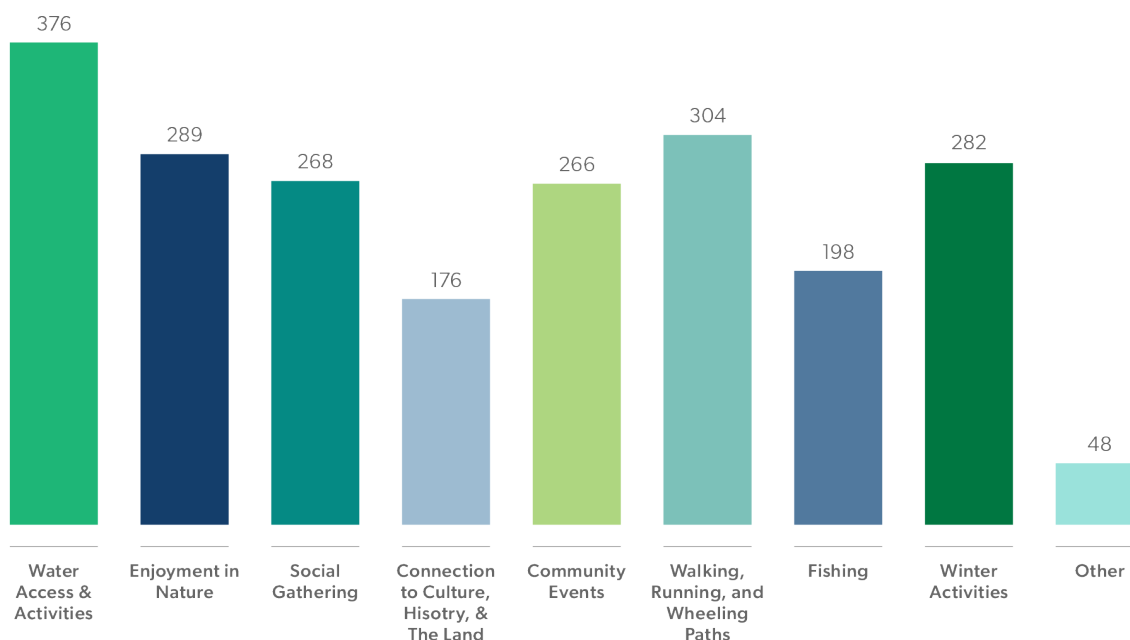
1,891 participants are earmarked as aware. Participants in this category visited at least one page on the project webpage.



## Activities at Snye Point Outdoor Event Space

### QUESTION 1

What type of activities would you like to see at Snye Point outdoor event space in the future? Select all that apply.



Question Type: Optional, Checkbox

Response rate: 442 responses, 8 skipped

### KEY INSIGHT

Of the options the survey provided in Question 1, the community select three top activities for Snye Point Outdoor Event Space in the future: water access and activities (e.g., canoeing, boating, tubing, swimming/wading), walking, running and wheeling paths, and enjoyment in nature.

A checkbox was provided that stated "Other" and we encouraged participants to share activities that we may have missed in the provided categories. We received 48 comments in response to this question. We read the comments, applied tags, and counted the frequency of the tags.

<b>Play</b> (15)	<b>31%</b>	Animal Space (4)	8%	Flood (2)	4%
<b>Event Hosting</b> (10)	<b>21%</b>	Environment (3)	6%	Maintenance (2)	4%
<b>Motorized Water Vehicles</b> (8)	<b>17%</b>	Funding (3)	6%	Lookouts (2)	4%
<b>Vendors</b> (7)	<b>15%</b>	Current Use (3)	6%	ATV Access (2)	4%
Beach (4)	8%	Parking (2)	4%	Accessibility (1)	2%
Pathways (4)	8%	Cultural Significance (2)	4%	Fishing (1)	2%

Format: Tag (Count) % of Responses

Response rate: 48 comments

## TOP TAG INSIGHTS

### Play

Participants shared several ideas for play in the park in the future, including outdoor pool/splash park, skate and BMX park, skating rink, outdoor exercise area, dog park, mini golf, bumper boats, playground, amphitheatre, food trucks, garden, bandstand, and picnic tables.

A few submissions mentioned restricting activities to certain areas. Such as a dedicated area in the river for motorized water vehicles and non-motorized water activity, and dedicated areas on land for pedestrian traffic.

### Event Hosting

Many participants noted that Snye Point is a community gathering place and shared their desire to see music events and festivals in the park; suggestions included spaces for concerts, open mic nights, bandstands, and theatre performances. Participants also expressed interest in temporary vendors brought in for events, such as food trucks.

### Motorized Water Vehicles

Participants stressed that motorized water vehicle uses are an existing and future activity desired for the park. Participants shared their support for float plane, snowmobile, boat (including a marina) and jet ski access. Some participants would like to see dedicated areas for swimming and floating to avoid safety concerns and conflict with motorized water vehicles uses. Participants are interested in keeping the existing boat launch.

### Vendors

Participants expressed support for all-season vendor opportunities in the park. Participants suggested vendors for the warmer months (i.e., ice cream, food trucks, canoe/kayak rental) and during the colder months (i.e., café, winter sport rental). Micro businesses were suggested by participants, with hopes of supporting local businesses and having all their needs met to enjoy a day in the park.

## GEO-TAG RESULTS

If a comment included a site-specific reference, it was tagged with geographic location tag. This information was used to understand which elements of the design, or existing spaces in the park, emerged as areas of interest for participants. Geographic analysis allowed for a secondary analysis of the data.

The Snye (6)	13%	Surekha's Hill (3)	6%	Flexible Use Area (1)	2%
Beach (5)	10%	Boat Launch (2)	4%		

Format: Tag (Count) % of Responses

Response rate: 48 comments

## HOW MIGHT THIS INFORM NEXT STEPS?

**Incorporate play features in the park.** The design team will explore design elements that encourage play for all ages and abilities.

**Develop connected walking and wheeling pathways.** The design team will develop pathways that connect to destinations in the parks and to the downtown.

**Incorporate places to rest and stop.** The design team will integrate places for people to stop, rest, and enjoy the natural beauty of the park.

**Ability to touch the water.** The design team will include design elements that have the potential to connect the park to the water while balancing user safety and the diverse needs of different park activities.

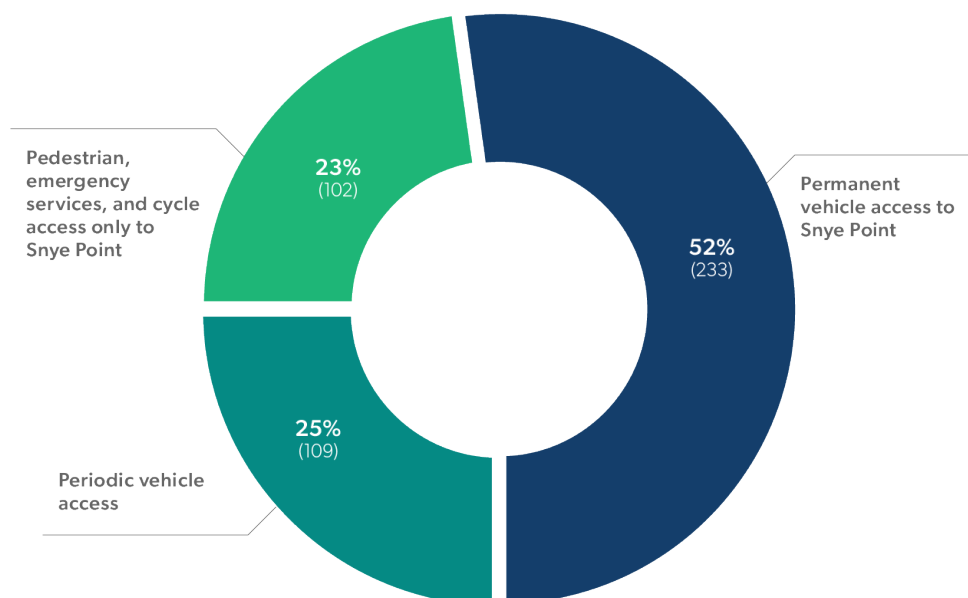
**Create spaces for unique vendor attractions.** The design team will consider how to support vendor opportunities in the park year-round.



## Access to Snye Point

### QUESTION 2

A key difference between Concept 1 (Clearwater Common) and Concept 2 (Snye Landing) is the kind of access allowed to Snye Point. What kind of access would you prefer to see at Snye Point in the future?



Question Type: Optional, Radial

Response rate: 444 responses, 6 skipped

### KEY INSIGHT

Participants were able to select one of three options in Question 2.

Fifty-two percent (52%) of participants prefer to see permanent vehicle access to Snye Point in the future. The remaining participants were split; twenty-five percent (25%) prefer to see periodic vehicle access and twenty-three percent (23%) prefer to see pedestrian, emergency services, and cycle only access to Snye Point.

### HOW MIGHT THIS INFORM NEXT STEPS?

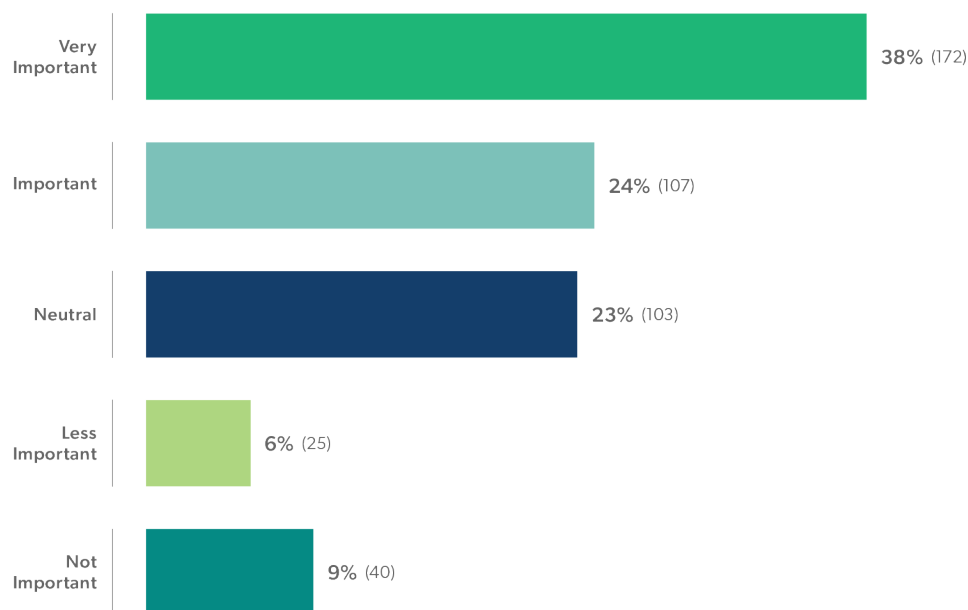
**Confirm how vehicles will access Snye Point.** The design team will explore how permanent vehicle access to Snye Point can be accommodated in the design.

**Provide safe options for pedestrians and cyclists.** The design team will ensure people walking, running, and wheeling have safe options to access Snye Point.

## Connecting the Park to Water's Edge

### QUESTION 3

Another key difference between Concept 1 (Clearwater Common) and Concept 2 (Snye Landing) is the connection between park space and the Snye River. Currently, Morimoto Drive is close to the water's edge. How important is it to you that the park space directly connects to the water?



Question Type: Optional, Likert

Response rate: 447 responses, 3 skipped

### KEY INSIGHT

When asked to rate how important it is to have park space directly connected to the water, sixty-two percent (62%) of participants answered that it was either very important or important.

### HOW MIGHT THIS INFORM NEXT STEPS?

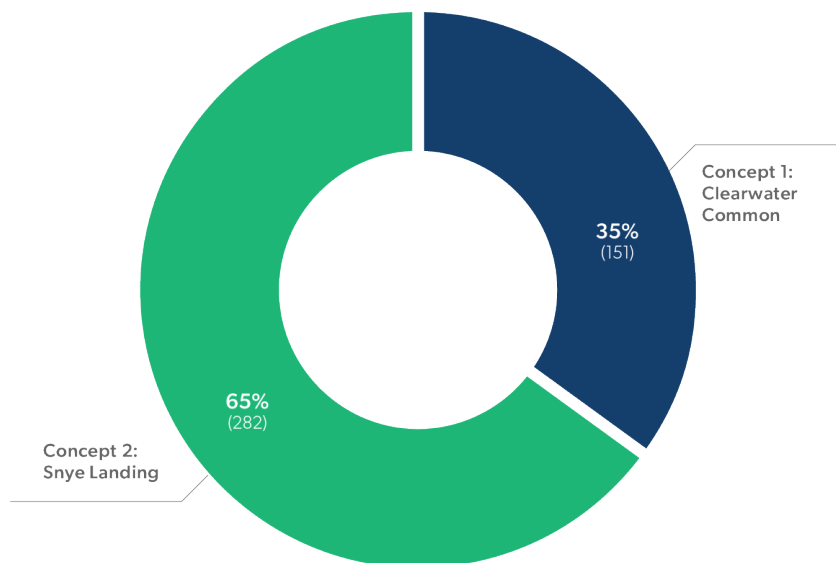
**Confirm placement of Morimoto Drive.** The design team will discuss how to realign Morimoto Drive in order to directly connect the park space with the water and establish a well-used space for generations to come.

**Address vehicle circulation.** The design team will explore different roadway designs for Morimoto Drive that balance vehicle movement, event-hosting capabilities, and pedestrian activity.

## Concept Preference

### QUESTION 4

After reviewing the two initial concepts, which one do you prefer?



Question Type: Optional, Radial

Response rate: 433 responses, 17 skipped

### KEY INSIGHT

Of the two concept options presented during this phase of engagement, sixty-five percent (65%) of participants selected Concept 2. Concept 2 (Snye Landing) proposed two key moves. First, moving Morimoto Drive closer to Clearwater Drive; second, periodic vehicle access to Snye Point.

### HOW MIGHT THIS INFORM NEXT STEPS?

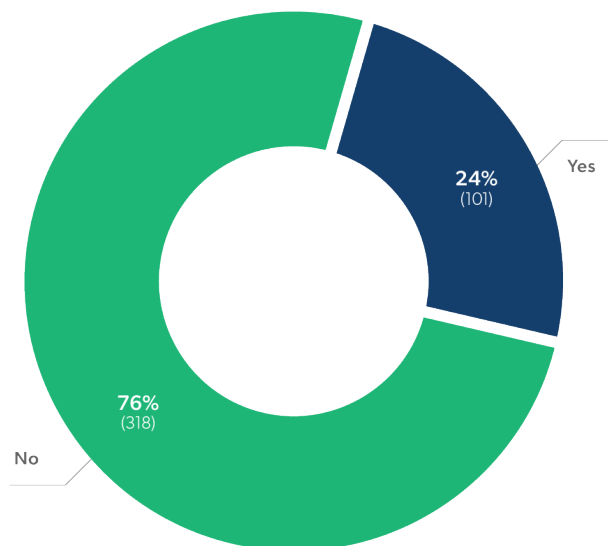
**Balance design elements from both concepts.** The design team will explore how to blend the design elements of the preferred concept with insights shared in Question 5, and in the Virtual Engagement Workshops to create a design that meets the needs of the community.



## Additional Feedback

### QUESTION 5

Have we missed anything in the initial concepts?



Question Type: Optional, Radial

Response rate: 419 responses, 31 skipped

### KEY INSIGHT

Twenty-four percent (24%) of participants shared a comment with the design team. We read each comment, applied tags, and counted the frequency of the tags.

<b>Cost</b> (24)	<b>24%</b>	Cultural Significance (8)	8%	Washrooms (5)	5%
<b>Flood</b> (23)	<b>23%</b>	Materials (8)	8%	Placement of Morimoto Drive (4)	4%
<b>Parking and Vehicle Circulation</b> (21)	<b>21%</b>	Leave as-is (7)	7%	Maintenance (4)	4%
<b>Play</b> (16)	<b>16%</b>	Naturalized Park (3)	3%	Water Access (3)	3%
Building (12)	12%	Shoreline (7)	7%	Minimize Crime (2)	2%
Event Hosting (11)	11%	Safety (7)	7%	Shade Structures (2)	2%
Vendors (11)	11%	Access to Snye Point (6)	6%	Survey Unclear (2)	2%
Fishing (10)	10%	Accessibility (5)	5%	Close the Snye (1)	1%
Motorized Water Vehicle Access (10)	8%	Boat Launch (5)	4%	Park Space (1)	1%
Beach (8)	8%	Environment (5)	4%	Plan not clear (1)	1%

Format: Tag (Count) % of Responses

Response rate: 101 comments

## TOP TAG INSIGHTS

### Cost

Participants expressed concern about the cost associated with the project; and, specifically, about investing infrastructure dollars in an area prone to flooding and ice jams. Participants are concerned about the region's economic recovery and suggested that the RMWB prioritize existing community infrastructure upgrades above the Waterfront Park Revitalization.

### Flood

Participants raised concerns about development in the floodway and flood fringe areas of the park. Recent experiences with flooding in the area were shared; participants expressed interest in understanding how the design will respond and be resilient to flooding in the future.

Participants provided suggestions for design elements that would not be as severely impacted by consistent flooding, such as temporary or removable street furniture, placing permanent design elements in areas with higher elevation, dirt pathways, and removable docks.

### Parking and Vehicle Circulation

Participants shared the community's need for large, accessible parking options at the park. Participants suggested that parking areas should be able to support oversized vehicles during events and circulation patterns that allow safe and efficient water access for motorized water vehicles. Further, participants encouraged the design to incorporate extra-wide pathways that could use for vehicles during events and accessible pathways from parking lots to ensure access to the park for all ages and abilities.

Several participants provided additional context for their preferred access to Snye Point. Some participants highlighted the benefits of permanent vehicle access (i.e., maintain existing uses at Snye Point, accessibility for elders, etc.) and other outlined the benefits of either periodic or no vehicle access to Snye Point (i.e., safety for pedestrians, cyclists, event vehicle circulation, etc.).

### Play

Participants shared several ideas for water and land activities that could take place in the park. Overall, participants want the design to prioritize safe play. Participants would like to see facilities that support and enhance existing uses, including picnic areas, fishing spots, and sledding. Participants also suggested new activities to be incorporated into the design, including areas for equipment rentals, local vendors, flexible sport fields, go karts, dedicated launch areas for paddle sports, swimming, and off-leash dog areas.

## GEO-TAG RESULTS

If a comment included a site-specific reference, it was tagged with geographic location tag. This information was used to understand which elements of the design, or existing spaces in the park, emerged as areas of interest for participants. Geographic analysis allowed for a secondary analysis of the data.

The Snye (12)	12%	Flexible Use Areas (4)	4%	Welcome Circle (2)	2%
Beach (11)	11%	Snye Point (3)	3%	Great Lawn (2)	2%
Boat Launch (11)	11%	Firepits (4)	4%	Borealis Park (1)	1%
Clearwater River (8)	8%	Morimoto Drive (2)	2%	MacDonald Island (1)	1%

Format: Tag (Count) % of Responses

Response rate: 101 comments

## HOW MIGHT THIS INFORM NEXT STEPS?

**Invest in a resilient park design.** The design team will incorporate resilient and adaptive design elements into the park so that the space can respond to and mitigate flooding and ice jam impacts.

**Demonstrate a transparent process.** The design team will work with the RMWB to share design details and anticipated project costs for upcoming project phases.

**Celebrate natural beauty.** The design team will use the existing natural features within the park to inspire the design. The park will be a place to enjoy nature in park spaces that can adapt to different activities at different times of the year.

**Place infrastructure outside the floodplain.** The design team will work closely with RMWB to plan infrastructure and servicing investments at higher elevations in the park outside of the floodplain zone.

**Address vehicle circulation.** The design team will ensure adequate materials and appropriate space is provided for vehicle-oriented areas of the park to ensure the area can host large-scale events while also functioning for all-season, everyday uses.



# Virtual Indigenous Partner and Stakeholder Engagement Workshops

## DATA APPROACH

We followed a consistent approach to listen and record community insights shared with the project team during each engagement workshop.

First, during each engagement workshop, we recorded participant comments using sticky notes (for workshops conducted in MURAL), and bullet points in a Word document for workshops conducted using a slide deck. Next, we transferred each collected comment into a central inventory. Then, we reviewed, analyzed, and tagged each comment. A second reviewer read each comment, confirmed the applied tags, and added a geo-reference tag if a specific location was included in the comment.

Finally, the second reviewer pulled out any design ideas, suggestions, or project questions that were submitted within a comment for the project team to review.

To develop findings from the stakeholder engagement workshops, we considered the comments, tags, and frequency of tags as information that offered key insights into Indigenous partners' and stakeholders' perspective and sentiment.

## WORKSHOP FINDINGS

The RMWB organized nine (9) Indigenous partner and stakeholder engagement workshops and attended six (6) Council Appointed Committee meetings between Monday, March 15 – Monday, March 28, 2021.

In total, 65 participants attended and engaged directly with the project team via the stakeholder engagement workshops.

**Indigenous  
Partners (10)**

Reconciliation  
Advisory Circle (5)

Trappers (1)

Athabasca Tribal  
Council (2)

Fort McKay Métis  
Nation (2)

**Stakeholders (15)**

Non-profit  
organizations and  
businesses (4)

Event vendors (4)

Community  
organizations (3)

Key stakeholders (4)

**Council Appointed Committees (40)**

Waterfront Advisory Committee (9)

Council Appointed Committees  
(Mayors' Advisory Committee on  
Youth, Advisory Committee on Aging,  
Regional Advisory Committee on  
Inclusion, Diversity and Equality) (3)

Wood Buffalo Downtown Revitalization  
Advisory Committee (3)

Wood Buffalo Development Advisory  
Committee (14)

Wood Buffalo Economic Development  
Committee (5)

Public Art Committee (6)

Format: Audience of Workshop (Total Number of Participants) % of Total Responses

## KEY INSIGHTS

In total we collected 341 comments from the virtual Indigenous partners and stakeholder engagement workshops. We read each comment, applied tags, and counted the frequency of the tags.

<b>Event Hosting</b> (54) <b>16%</b>	Pathways (18)      5%	Regional Connections (13)      4%
<b>Parking and Vehicle Circulation</b> (38) <b>11%</b>	Flood (17)      5%	Experience (11)      3%
<b>Infrastructure</b> (36) <b>11%</b>	All Seasons (17)      5%	Cost (10)      3%
<b>Amenities</b> (34) <b>10%</b>	Firepits (16)      5%	Fishing (10)      3%
<b>Cultural Significance</b> (32) <b>9%</b>	Environment (15)      4%	Motorized Vehicle Access (9)      3%
<b>Vendors</b> (28) <b>8%</b>	Signage and Wayfinding (15)      4%	Boat Launch (8)      2%
<b>Water Access</b> (27) <b>8%</b>	Materials (14)      4%	Community-Driven Design (8)      2%
<b>Accessibility</b> (21) <b>6%</b>	Maintenance (14)      4%	Beach (7)      2%
<b>Washrooms</b> (21) <b>6%</b>	Access to Snye Point (13)      4%	Public Art (7)      2%
<b>Safety</b> (21) <b>6%</b>	Play (13)      4%	Lighting (7)      2%
Traditional Knowledge (6)      2%	Flowing Water (4)      1%	Naturalize Park (2)      1%
Shoreline (5)      1%	Minimize Crime (3)      1%	Shade Structures (2)      1%
Tourism (5)      1%	Placement of Morimoto Dr. (3)      1%	Park Space (1)      1%
Aesthetic (4)      1%	Planting (3)      1%	Economic Reconciliation (1)      1%
Utilities (4)      1%	Language (3)      1%	

Format: Tag (Count) % of Responses

Response rate: 341 comments



## TOP TAG INSIGHTS

### Event hosting

Participants expressed interest for on-site infrastructure to be included in the design (i.e., power, gas, water, WiFi, etc.) that would support vendors and event activities; as well as comments regarding access and material selection for event areas and roadways that ensure safe vehicle movement through the site during events (i.e., large trucks, temporary stage installation, food trucks, emergency vehicles, etc.). Also, participants shared preferences related to the temporary stage, including orientation, back-of-house amenities, and potential noise impacts.

### Parking and vehicle circulation

Participants raised concerns about the conflicts between pedestrians/cyclists and parking and vehicle circulation in the proposed designs around the existing boat launch; participants shared that this is a preferred boat launch in the community and maintaining access is important. Participants noted that many residents and visitors will drive to this location and adequate parking is necessary, especially for events and specific members of the community (i.e., elders, seniors, differently abled, etc.).

In addition, current parking and vehicle uses were noted by the design team. Off Highway Vehicles (OHV), including ATVs and snowmobiles visit and park in the design area. Further, many people opt to drive-thru the park to view events from their vehicle; participants encouraged the design team to consider how these uses would integrate into the proposed concept options.

### Infrastructure

Participants shared differing perspectives regarding investment in infrastructure within the design area, particularly because of concerns around infrastructure resiliency in the event of flooding and ice jams. Some participants articulated the importance of permanent infrastructure on-site for events; other participants outlined the value of temporary infrastructure that has the potential to be removed during flooding and ice jams. Other comments related to infrastructure included notes about appropriate lighting and thoughtful material selection for park elements that would work for everyday activities *and* events.

### Amenities

Participants highlighted seating, sheltered gathering areas, and garbage cans as important design elements. Passive recreational uses were also noted by participants, including BBQ areas and picnic spots. Participants shared that structures for vendors (e.g., rental shops, food, etc.) and seasonal opportunities (e.g., warming huts) were important considerations to activate the park throughout the year. Many participants noted that the design team has a challenge to balance the function and aesthetics of amenity design elements.

Indigenous partners shared that the park will continue to be an important place for ceremony and cultural events; the park design will need to accommodate these important uses of the site.

## **Cultural significance**

Participants highlighted the rich and on-going history of the site, including its ties to the trapping community (i.e., former trapping residences in this location, access to traplines across the Clearwater River), its proximity and relationship to Moccasin Flats, and its link to regional transportation (i.e., float planes and boats) along the three waterways.

Indigenous partners emphasized the importance of accessibility to the site to ensure elders can participate and engage with community and ceremony on site. The design team heard strong support for Indigenous languages and stories to be shared through signage, wayfinding, naming, public art, and plantings. Several Indigenous partners stressed the importance of representing all Indigenous communities, languages, and histories in placekeeping opportunities.

Indigenous partners shared that this project is about reconciliation. Indigenous partners requested that engagement be meaningful, authentic, and conducted with mutual trust and recognition. Indigenous partners offered to share traditional knowledge with the design team in order to guide the design in a good way.

## **Vendors**

Participants expressed support for temporary vendor locations (e.g., food trucks, c-cans, “business in box” model) in the park. Participants shared vendor ideas (e.g., ice cream, coffee, rental shops, etc.) and emphasized that locations should encourage all-season use. Several participants noted that the placement of Morimoto Dr. closer to Clearwater Drive would work well for event closures and vendor opportunities adjacent to the Flexible Use Areas.

## **Water access**

Participants shared that connection to the water is very important. The design team heard that the site is a preferred location to access the region’s waterways year-round. Many existing uses for the water were shared, including recreational access (i.e., boating, fishing, floating), and travel (i.e., float planes, snowmobiles). Safety concerns about wading and swimming in the Snycor were shared during the workshops; dangers regarding the undertow, water quality, and impacts from dredging were voiced as major flags for the design team to consider.

## **Accessibility**

Participants raised concerns about accessibility on three central topics: washrooms, pathways, and access to Snycor Point. Participants highlighted that washrooms should be accessible to all genders and designed as single-stall facilities to be inclusive for all people. Other participants noted that one central washroom facility in the park may not be accessible for families and those with mobility challenges. Participants shared the importance for pathways to be designed for all ages and abilities. Also, several participants supported vehicle access to Snycor Point to ensure elders, people who are differently abled, and seniors can participate and engage with the community and events on site.

Washrooms

Participants raised concerns regarding only one washroom facility in the proposed designs; many participants stressed the importance of locating multiple washroom facilities throughout the site. Participants recognized the challenge of locating and servicing washroom facilities in an area prone to flooding and expressed concerns about paying for infrastructure investments that may be damaged by flood or ice jams in the future. Current washrooms facilities are located in the same building as a private business in park (ie. Surekha's on the Snye) and do not offer 24/7 public access.

Safety

Physical safety in the park was voiced by participants regarding beach/water access to the Snye and Clearwater River. Participants shared lived experiences of the dangers posed by both waterways (i.e., undertows, water quality, and impacts from dredging). Many participants shared they would not recommend swimming in the Snye. The design team also heard physical safety concerns related to conflict between vehicles and pedestrian activities, especially at Snye Point and the Boat Launch.

Cultural safety was also a theme expressed by participants; residents and visitors shared the importance of feeling safe to participate in cultural practices and traditional uses within the site boundary.

GEO-TAG RESULTS

If a comment included a site-specific reference, it was tagged with geographic location tag. This information was used to understand which elements of the design, or existing spaces in the park, emerged as areas of interest for participants. Geographic analysis allowed for a secondary analysis of the data.

Morimoto Drive (8)	2.3%	The Snye (4)	1.2%	Welcome Circle (3)	0.9%
Firepits (5)	1.5%	Snye Point (4)	1.2%		
Beach (5)	1.5%	Boat Launch (4)	1.2%		

Format: Tag (Count) % of Responses

Response rate: 341 comments



## HOW MIGHT THIS INFORM NEXT STEPS?

**Balance infrastructure investments with flood resiliency.** The design team will consider how best to provide utility and infrastructure servicing to the site while upholding best practices for design in flood prone areas.

**Activate the park year-round.** The design team is contemplating the ways in which the design can continue to support existing uses and enhance the experience of the park in all seasons.

**Recognize rich cultural ties and history.** The design team will develop the park spaces, materials, play elements, signage, wayfinding, and public art in partnership with Indigenous partners and community members.

**Increase parking count.** The design team will consider parallel parking options along Morimoto Drive and opportunities to increase parking stall counts in the park.

**Enhance safety.** The design team will prioritize resident and visitor safety in the park by improving lighting, creating separated pedestrian and cycle spaces, and improving public awareness of multiple park activities and their potential conflicts (i.e., motorized vs. non-motorized uses along the Snye) using clear, visible signage.

**Ensure the park is a place for everyone.** The design team will explore design elements on the land and waterways that prioritize resident and visitor accessibility and inclusion.

# Virtual Open Houses

## DATA APPROACH

We followed a consistent approach to listen and record community insights shared with the project team during each virtual open house.

First, following each virtual open house, we reviewed and analyzed the activity report. Next, we transferred each participant submitted question into a central inventory. Then, we reviewed, analyzed, and tagged each question. A second reviewer read each question and confirmed the applied tags.

To develop findings from the virtual open house, we considered the participant submitted questions, tags, and frequency of tags.

## OPEN HOUSE FINDINGS

The RMWB organized and hosted two (2) Virtual Open Houses during the week of March 22 – March 26, 2021. The first Virtual Open House was hosted on Monday, March 22; the second Virtual Open House was hosted on Thursday, March 25.

In total, 33 attendees participated in the Virtual Open Houses. Between the two Virtual Open Houses, 10 (ten) questions were submitted by participants.

## KEY INSIGHTS

Firepits (3)	30%	Play (1)	10%
Amenities (2)	20%	Accessibility (1)	10%
Construction (1)	10%	Event hosting (1)	10%

Format: Tag (Count) % of Responses

Response rate: 10 questions

## TOP THEMING INSIGHTS

### **Firepits**

Participants asked questions about the details of the proposed firepits, including quantity, design and if they would be available for public use.

### **Amenities**

Participants asked questions about specific amenities highlighted in the proposed designs, including proposed firepits and vendor locations.

### **Other**

Participants submitted questions about the safety of swimming in the Snye, event hosting capabilities, flooding history of the site, and construction timelines.

## HOW MIGHT THIS INFORM NEXT STEPS?

The questions submitted via the Virtual Open Houses help the RMWB and the design team in two ways.

First, the questions submitted during the Virtual Open Houses align with the key findings from Participate Wood Buffalo responses and the virtual Indigenous partners and stakeholder engagement workshops. Alignment between the different engagement opportunities helps the design team verify themes that may influence the preferred design concept.

Second, the questions submitted from attendees at the Virtual Open Houses help the RMWB and the design team understand which elements of the proposed designs may be of particular interest to community members when sharing the preferred design concept.



# Social Media Insights

## APPROACH

The RMWB and the design team did not use social media as a formal channel to receive engagement input from the community. Instead, the RMWB social media channels (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) were used by the project to share information and upcoming engagement opportunities. Other communication tactics were also employed, including media news releases, radio advertisements, and google ads.

Social media insights are included in this engagement summary to share project reach within the RMWB. During the two-week period, the following analytics were pulled from the project campaign.

### Instagram

3 posts / 19 likes

### Twitter

8 tweets / 1 reply / 4 likes / 5 retweets

### Facebook

10 posts (1 link, 3 videos, 6 photos) / 22 comments / 22 shares / 36 reactions / 3224 average post reach

# Moving Forward

A final preferred design for the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space will be shared publicly in May 2021. Construction will follow shortly after.

The feedback from Indigenous Partners and stakeholders was critical to refining the final preferred design for the Snye Point Outdoor Event Space. Thank you for participating and contributing to the future of our Waterfront.

Engagement for the Waterfront Park covering 6 km of waterfront from the Athabasca Bridge to Horse Pasture Park's is set to occur in summer 2021. To stay informed, sign up for email project updates, or follow the Waterfront Park Revitalization project by visiting [rmwb.ca/waterfront](https://rmwb.ca/waterfront).





# Indigenous perspectives and histories at the Fort McMurray Waterfront

Prepared for Urban Systems

Sabina Trimble, Research Associate, and Peter Fortna, Partner

Willow Springs Strategic Solutions

February 2021

## Introduction

In 1999 Parks Canada defined an “Aboriginal Cultural Landscape” as one that an Aboriginal group values because of

their long and complex relationship with that land. It expresses their unity with the natural and spiritual environment. It embodies their traditional knowledge of spirits, places, land uses, and ecology. Material remains of the association may be prominent, but will often be minimal or absent (Buggey 1999).

UNESCO similarly defines cultural landscapes as those that:

Combined works of nature and humankind, they express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment (UNESCO).

In northeastern Alberta, numerous studies have demonstrated the long and intimate relationship Indigenous communities have with Athabasca River.<sup>1</sup> The “Mighty Athabasca” as described by Métis Elder James R. Dickie Dragon the River and the lands in close proximity are of vital importance to local communities; they are a key Indigenous space which offers refuge and connection to a distant past.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Indigenous peoples have occupied and used what has more recently been called the Fort McMurray Waterfront (henceforth “the Waterfront”), where the Athabasca, Clearwater, Horse, Christina and Hangingstone rivers meet, since time immemorial. These waterways, their adjacent shorelines and surrounding lands have been central to the identities, lives, and cultural continuity of Indigenous peoples as long as their ancestors have resided in the area. They provide for subsistence and economic needs, spiritual

---

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Fort McKay Tribal Administration, *From Where We Stand* (Fort McKay, AB, 1983); Fort McKay First Nation, *There is Still Survival Out There: A Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study of the Fort McKay First Nations* (Fort McMurray: Arctic Institute of North America and Canada Alberta Partnership Agreement in Forestry, 1994) <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9625726c-66b5-4673-954a-8e96b67b6637/resource/32a650b4-ed97-48a2-ba7c-c01e6e0e8193/download/traditional-land-use-baseline-report-.pdf>; Fort McMurray 468 First Nation (FM468FN), *Nistawayaw,, ‘Where the Rivers Meet’: Fort McMurray #468 First Nation Traditional Land Use Study* (Calgary: Nicomacian Press, 2003), available at: <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/nistawayaw>; Brenda Parlee, *Traditional Knowledge Overview for the Athabasca River Watershed*, Contributed to the Athabasca Watershed Council State of the Watershed Phase 1 Report, 2011 <https://awc-wpac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AWC-WPAC-State-of-the-Watershed-Phase-1-Traditional-Knowledge-Overview.pdf>; Fort McMurray Métis MNA Local 1935, *Mark of the Métis: Traditional Knowledge and Stories of the Métis People of Northeastern Alberta* (Fort McMurray: McMurray Métis, 2012) <https://arpcresources.ca/consortia/mark-metis-traditional-knowledge-stories-metis-peoples-northeastern-alberta/>; Timothy Clark, Dermot O’Connor and Peter Fortna, *Fort McMurray: Historic and Contemporary Rights-Bearing Métis Community* (Cochrane and Fort McMurray: Willow Springs Strategic Solutions and Fort McMurray Métis MNA Local 1935, 2015) [https://www.academia.edu/14943775/Fort\\_McMurray\\_Historic\\_and\\_Contemporary\\_Rights\\_Bearing\\_M%C3%A9tis\\_Community](https://www.academia.edu/14943775/Fort_McMurray_Historic_and_Contemporary_Rights_Bearing_M%C3%A9tis_Community); and Peter Fortna, *Fort McKay Métis Nation: A Community History* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, In review).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Fortna and J.R. Dragon, “The Mighty Athabasca: Applied Métis Environmental and Historical Research, conference presentation given at the *Fur Trade and Métis History: Patterns of Ethnogenesis Mini-Conference*, 2009. <http://www.willowspringsss.com/products--services.html>

and cultural well-being, and mobility throughout the region. This critical landscape bears evidence of occupation and residence in the area, but also of deep cultural significance, embedded with the knowledge, stories and histories of the diverse Indigenous peoples of the region.

Indigenous relationships to this cultural landscape have changed over time, sometimes drastically, with the influx of traders, explorers, settlers and missionaries of European descent starting in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and, more recently, of industry. Over time, the colonial state assumed authority over this Indigenous landscape, a process that has resulted in physical transformations to the environment and also in changes and restrictions on Indigenous occupancy through a series of displacements, including a number of displacements taking place from the 1940s-1970s of families who were settled at Waterways, Cree Flats, Moccasin Flats, McDonald Island, and along the Snyc. This history in the Fort McMurray waterfront and surrounding area is part of the larger history of colonization, displacement and the growth of settler governance over Indigenous lands and waterways in Northern Alberta.<sup>3</sup>

This brief report will explore this past with a particular focus on areas closest to the settlement of Fort McMurray. It identifies key texts articulating the deep and longstanding relations of local Indigenous peoples to the waterfront, including specific sites of importance (e.g. Moccasin Flats, Waterways, McDonald Island, Cree Flats) and the wider related area. In addition, it identifies literature demonstrating how Indigenous use and occupancy were altered as a result of colonialism, pointing to specific displacements and transformations that took place from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward. The overview will thus provide key context for Urban Systems' design plans for the RMWB Waterfront Park, with an eye to understanding how current municipal plans might honour Indigenous connections to the area, and acknowledge histories of displacement, ensuring that connection is maintained into the future.

---

<sup>3</sup> Patricia McCormack, *Fort Chipewyan and the Shaping of Canadian History, 1788-1920s: "We like to be free in this country"* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).



## Indigenous<sup>4</sup> use and occupancy since time immemorial

### **Nistawoyou: An Indigenous space since time immemorial**

The Cree name for the area that is now called Fort McMurray, Nistawoyou, translates in English to “where three rivers meet.” This name articulates the importance of the rivers, waterfront, shorelines and surrounding region to the Indigenous peoples of this region, who have inhabited it for 10,000 years, as demonstrated through extensive archaeological and oral evidence. Contrary to what some have incorrectly believed to be a general view that the Fort McMurray area is “a harsh and tyrannical wilderness” that is not “regarded as deserving protection,” Indigenous traditional land use studies and community histories have shown how the Waterfront and surrounding region are critical Indigenous places with complex histories.<sup>5</sup> The area has always been an important meeting place, a central transportation hub, and an environment rich in resources providing for Indigenous people’s subsistence needs, cultural practices and traditional lifeways. For example:

- According to Fort McMurray 468 First Nation, “From time immemorial the ancestors of the FM468FN have lived on these traditional lands relying on their traditional foods, medicines, and supplies for their livelihood.”<sup>6</sup>
- Fort McMurray Métis Elders confirm: in this region, “harvesting, interacting with, or simply encountering non-human beings and landscape features contribute to maintaining relationships, which are inherent to Métis culture and way of life.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The Athabasca River Watershed falls within Treaty 8 territory and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 1. Treaty 8, signed in 1899, politically reorganized Indigenous societies across the region from their traditional kinship-based organization of small, mobile bands into larger linguistic categories including Cree (Nehiyaw) and Chipewyan (Dené). It excluded those of mixed descent, the Métis, who as a result had to negotiate with the newcomer government in different ways. Although these categories are of political and economic importance today, Indigenous peoples in the region sometimes treated them with fluidity, moving across categories as they saw necessary (Fortna, 2021). It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that many Indigenous communities in northeastern Alberta were granted the political status of First Nations or Métis locals, and that many bands received the reserve lands guaranteed by Treaty 8 or that some southern Métis communities were allotted settlements through the 1938 Métis Population Act. Prior to this, the communities surrounding Fort McMurray, whose ancestors occupied and used the Waterfront and wider region since time immemorial, moved freely throughout their homelands and were not restricted to small allotments. They were bound together by widespread kinship networks and yearly seasonal rounds (described in this paper). Indeed, many First Nations and Métis Nations in the RMWB region claim mixed Cree and Dené ancestry. Because of this history of fluidity, interconnection and mobility, this report refers to the Waterfront as an Indigenous space, since it has always held value for, and been used by, the diverse and interconnected original residents of this region.

<sup>5</sup> This perspective is voiced, for example, in C.J. Caldwell, W.L. Zwerman and A.D. Olmsted, *Perception of the Fort McMurray Environment Through Time*.

<sup>6</sup> FM468FN, “Niyanansap – Chapter 15: Conclusion and Fort McMurray 468 First Nation Elders and Land,” in *Nistawayaw*, <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/1txqh7qm02a36994sdc15dnlfko5>

<sup>7</sup> D. Hopkins, T.L. Joly, Harvey Sykes, A. Waniandy, J. Grant, L. Gallagher, L. Hansen, K. Wall, P. Fortna and M. Bailey, “‘Learning Together’: Braiding Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems to Understand Freshwater Mussel Health in the Lower Athabasca region of Alberta, Canada,” *Journal of Ethnobiology* 39, no. 2 (2019): 326.

- Fort McKay Tribal Council note that Indigenous peoples have lived and moved along the Athabasca River since time immemorial “as part of the seasonal movement of the traditional hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering cycle,” and that more permanent settlement in Fort McKay was only a very recent development.<sup>8</sup>

As the above quotations suggest, the Waterfront, at the confluence of the Athabasca and Clearwater Rivers, cannot be understood in isolation from the much wider Indigenous environment of which it forms a crucial part. The ancestors of the numerous First Nations and Métis Nations of the region—including but not exclusively those who eventually settled in and near Fort McMurray—have always relied on the land and waterways for their subsistence, livelihood, well-being and cultural continuity.

Although, as explained below, drastic transformations resulting from the influx of outsiders of European descent have markedly changed Indigenous relations to the Waterfront, these relations to the landscape have nonetheless persisted, reflecting the strength and resilience of Indigenous knowledge and land use. Brenda Parlee notes that the Indigenous knowledge of the Athabasca River watershed and surrounding region can “contribute to our understanding of historic and contemporary issues of planning, management and monitoring.”<sup>9</sup> Just so, Indigenous knowledge and history at the Waterfront and surrounding region cannot be ignored in municipal planning. To that end, this section summarizes some of the key literatures articulating Indigenous connections to, use of, and knowledge about the Waterfront and surrounding areas.

### **Traditional Use: harvesting, gathering and cultural transmission**

The ecological richness and importance of the Waterfront and surrounding area is evident from descriptions by postmaster Henry Moberly, who had established an HBC post at Fort McMurray in 1870. “The country about Fort McMurray,” he wrote in his 1929 memoir, “was rich in both game and fur-bearing animals...[it] occupies a flat about a mile long, and in places a quarter wide, the upper part prairie, the rest covered with poplar and a few jackpine...Almost any vegetable that grows along the Saskatchewan may be raised.”<sup>10</sup> A 2019 traditional use study of the McMurray Waterfront similarly describes the centrality of the rivers to the area’s richness: “there are two large river systems: the Athabasca River and the Clearwater River. The Clearwater River flows into the Athabasca River, which runs through the center of the region before draining into the Peace Athabasca Delta and Lake Athabasca.” All of this is “part of the McMurray Métis homeland and Treaty 8 territory, home to Cree, Dene (Chipewyan), and Métis peoples. The river systems are a source of water for the urban, rural, and Indigenous communities that inhabit this area.”<sup>11</sup> They are also a source of marine resources, and they provide life to the surrounding flora and fauna.

---

<sup>8</sup> Fort McKay Tribal Administration, *From Where We Stand*, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Parlee, *Traditional Knowledge Overview*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Henry John Moberly and W.M. Bleasdel Cameron, *When Fur Was King* (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1929), p. 146, available at: <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/bcbooks/items/1.0372569#p9z-5r360f>.

<sup>11</sup> Hopkins et. al., “Learning Together,” p. 318.

Indigenous land use in what became Northeastern Alberta was characterized by seasonal mobility, which involved moving from place to place to follow the movement of wildlife, including large game like bison, caribou and deer and small game like fox and rabbits. These “seasonal rounds” occurred in small kinship units or bands. As Fort McMurray First Nation (henceforth FM468FN) states: “Typically, families lived in tents or cabins during the late fall, winter, and early spring. The cabins were built close to muskrat and fine fur trapping areas. In the summer, they would move to the edge of a lake or river for fishing.” Many of the animals, plants and other resources people harvested depended on the river systems and thrived in areas like the Waterfront, where the confluence of rivers made for rich habitats. People upheld responsible stewardship practices as they harvested, demonstrating a respect for the land and its resources; taking care of the Waterfront and surrounding watershed area were key to survival.<sup>12</sup>

Fishing was also a staple year-round. According to FM468FN, “people would fish all year round in the lakes, river, and creeks throughout different areas of their traditional lands.”<sup>13</sup> McMurray Métis confirms that fishing was “an important resource especially when other foods were scarce, and served as an accompaniment to wild game, garden vegetables and berries.”<sup>14</sup> Fish also fed sled dogs, a key mode of transportation during winters. The Athabasca/Clearwater confluence and the Waterfront were rich in fish including pike and perch and other marine life, like freshwater clams. Métis Elders note that all marine life was connected, “necessary to the web of life...Everything is bound together and connects.”<sup>15</sup>

Indigenous residents also gathered berries, collected timber and drinking water, and harvested medicines in the area.<sup>16</sup> Blueberries, cranberries, saskatoon berries, fiddleheads and chokecherries could be found around the Waterfront area and at the Snye.<sup>17</sup> Pitch from the tar sands was useful for canoe building and repair.<sup>18</sup> Knowledge about gathering plants and medicines has been passed down across generations through oral tradition.<sup>19</sup>

Oral testimony from First Nations and Métis knowledge holders alike demonstrates that traditional harvesting and gathering practices were not only about subsistence and survival, but were also key to local identities and cultural continuity. As Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation eloquently put it, “The identity of a people is ultimately defined by their relationship to the

---

<sup>12</sup> FM468FN, “Niya’nan – Chapter 5: Traditional land use,” in *Nistawayaw*, <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/niyanan-chapter-5>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., “Ayina’new – Chapter 8: Fishing was a staple,” <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/ayinanew-chapter-8>

<sup>14</sup> Fort McMurray Métis, *Mark of the Métis*, p. 134.

<sup>15</sup> Hopkins et. al., “Learning Together,” p. 316.

<sup>16</sup> Hereward Longley, and Tara Joly. *The Moccasin Flats Evictions: Métis Home, Forced Relocation, and Resilience in Fort McMurray, Alberta*. Fort McMurray, AB, 2018.

[https://www.academia.edu/37504547/The\\_Moccasin\\_Flats\\_Evictions\\_M%C3%A9tis\\_Home\\_Forced\\_Relocation\\_and\\_Resilience\\_in\\_Fort\\_McMurray\\_Alberta](https://www.academia.edu/37504547/The_Moccasin_Flats_Evictions_M%C3%A9tis_Home_Forced_Relocation_and_Resilience_in_Fort_McMurray_Alberta) p. 9; FM468FN, “Mita’tat – Chapter 10: Collecting Plants, Berries, and Medicines,” in *Nistawayaw*, <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/mitathat-chapter-10>.

<sup>17</sup> Golder Associates, *Final Report: Wood Buffalo Elder Interview Project* (Calgary: Golder Associates), p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> McMurray Métis, *Mark of the Métis*, pp. 143-145.



land” and to the water.<sup>20</sup> Fort McKay Tribal Administration confirms, “Our culture is intimately tied to the land and our traditional resource harvesting.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, throughout the archaeological evidence of spiritual and cultural sites, burial grounds and seasonal settlement sites indicates the importance of the environment to the family history, identities and cultures of Indigenous residents.<sup>22</sup> Longley and Joly state, “cultural values, practices, and identity” are all embedded in the land and waters and transmitted through ongoing Indigenous use.<sup>23</sup> The area that became the Waterfront was a key part of the wider environment of Indigenous occupancy and use.

### **The Waterfront as meeting place and transportation hub**

It is not uncommon for rivers to be described as a highway. Moberly wrote of the Athabasca in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as “very shallow at low water, with numerous rapids, none however of considerable size. They may all be safely run by boats or canoes.”<sup>24</sup> His description demonstrates the rivers’ use as the “main highway” before roads and railways, making them key to Indigenous seasonal mobility, traditional lifeways, and kinship connections. As McMurray Métis Elders note, the “river was often described as a main highway linking communities together.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in her ethnohistory of Mikisew Cree First Nation, Patricia McCormack describes the Athabasca as one of several major “axes” that linked together the members of local bands along the river routes; the river brought together people from Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan regions.<sup>26</sup> It connected smaller communities such as Point Brule and Poplar Point “into the orbit of Fort McMurray.”<sup>27</sup>

As such, the confluence of the rivers at the McMurray Waterfront, was in a way a meeting place and transportation hub. It provided “an invaluable gathering place for all Indigenous people in the Athabasca Region...a place for people to make a home for a season or for life.”<sup>28</sup> Whether people stopped there temporarily or settled there for longer periods of time as part of their subsistence travels, the Waterfront was part of a wider transportation network, a gathering place that helped keep bands and families socially connected.

## Colonial changes and Indigenous continuity:

### The Waterfront never ceased to be an Indigenous space

#### **The fur trade: changing times and ongoing Indigenous presence at the Waterfront**

---

<sup>20</sup> ACFN, *Footprints on the Land*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Fort McKay Tribal Administration, *From Where We Stand*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Golder Associates, *Final Report*, p. 8.; Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> Longley and Joly, “Moccasin Flats,” p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Moberly and Cameron, *When Fur was King*, p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Longley and Joly, “Moccasin Flats,” p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Patricia McCormack, *Research Report: An Ethnohistory of the Mikisew Cree First Nation*, August 2010, p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Longley and Joly, “Moccasin Flats,” p. 30.

With the influx of European trappers and traders into the region in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries came changes to the ways Indigenous people related to the Waterfront and surrounding area. The Waterfront and Fort McMurray generally became key to the establishment and growth of the fur trade in northern Alberta in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, as FM468FN notes, “Significant changes in land use have occurred since the Cree ancestors first entered into trade with Europeans approximately three hundred years ago.”<sup>29</sup>

Traditional economies were in some ways fundamentally reorganized with the advent of the fur trade economy. Indigenous adaptations to the fur trade led to what researchers have called “the original moditional economy,” a mixed sociocultural and economic system combining international, market-based commercial trade with traditional Indigenous subsistence practices, “embedded in and consistent with local Aboriginal values and culture.”<sup>30</sup> As Clark et. al. point out, those who adopted this moditional lifestyle became central to the fur trade but also had to hold onto the traditional practices of their ancestors: “Having to travel often large distances to traplines from larger population centres such as Fort McMurray in the fall and winter made it necessary for trappers to have stable, local food supplies for the duration of the season. While geared toward commercial production for fur markets, trapping as an occupation entails a particular subsistence lifestyle. Trappers have to be relatively self-sufficient on the line, hunting game for food, collecting plants, and firewood and storing food for winter.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, traditional practices in the region (harvesting, gathering, seasonal mobility) were maintained, but altered. Likewise, the Waterfront area remained a key Indigenous space even as substantial changes were occurring.

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, some bands and families began settling more permanently at trade centres like Fort McMurray and became key figures in the growth of the fur trade in the north. Hudson’s Bay Company records as well as census and scrip records reveal the presence of Indigenous fur traders in the Fort McMurray area as far back as 1820.<sup>32</sup> Peter Pond was the first trader of European descent to use the Methye Portage. He established a fur trading post at the confluence of the Clearwater and Athabasca Rivers in the 1780s, where the Northwest trading Company established a Fort on the west bank of the Athabasca River in 1790. This was initially named Fort of the Forks.<sup>33</sup> Local Indigenous people travelled to and from the Fort, and some settled there temporarily, to take advantage of the trade economy. Some began to establish permanent cabins and residences “located close to their winter trapping areas. In the summer, they moved to the edge of a lake or river, then back to the winter trapping cabin in the late fall.”<sup>34</sup> In this way, they maintained the Waterfront area as Indigenous space. A devastating

---

<sup>29</sup> FM468FN, “Niyansap – Chapter 15: Conclusion”

<https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/1txqh7qm02a36994sdcl5dnlfkoa5>.

<sup>30</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> See Clark et. al., *Mark of the Métis*, Appendix II. This commissioned report details HBC archival documents from Fort McMurray and McKay Trading Posts, and from Lesser Slave Lake District Reports and Post Journals from 1820-1911. The report was authored by leading fur-trade historians Kenichi Matsui and Arthur J. Ray.

<sup>33</sup> Voorhis, 1930, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> FM468FN, “Nisto – Chapter 3: Conflicts and Agreements,” in *Nistawayaw*, <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/blog-post-title-three-tyc54>.

smallpox epidemic, however, led to the post at the Waterfront being abandoned shortly thereafter.

The Hudson's Bay Company took over the Fort in 1821 (though it was closed again by the 1840s), and Henry Moberly, the first postmaster there, re-established the post in 1870. Moberly reflected later that the intention was to establish it "as a terminus for a proposed steamboat route."<sup>35</sup> Moberly described the flurry of movement in and out of the Fort McMurray region and along the Methye Portage at this time: "The outfits for Athabasca, Peace River, Mackenzie River and the Yukon all passed here, as well as all the furs, caribou tongues, leather, etc., traded during the previous year."<sup>36</sup> Trade goods began moving in and out of the Fort McMurray area as much as people had previously. Moberly described how Indigenous traders from the region moved in and out of the fort, and from them he collected dozens of ninety-pound packs of fine furs every winter.<sup>37</sup>

*Mark of the Métis* indicates that, "shaped powerfully by the network of waterways in the area," the ancestors of McMurray Métis "settled along the rivers and lakes of the area and were among the first permanent settlers around the Fort McMurray HBC Post, rebuilt in 1870."<sup>38</sup> They were key to the success of the fur trade: "[a]s Canadian history unfolded in the Fort McMurray region, First Nations and Métis who participated in the fur trade played a major role in building up. Many settlements which today exist as towns and hamlets" were created by Indigenous residents who stayed there to take advantage of the new economic opportunities offered by the fur trade.<sup>39</sup> Permanent settlements began to appear along the Snye, and at what are now Waterways and McDonald Island.<sup>40</sup> Many of the ancestors of the local First Nations and Métis Nations were trapping families who settled along the rivers and around the new post in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup> The developing fur trade depended on their movements throughout the territory, while semi-permanent settlements in areas like the Waterfront ensured they could benefit from the trade and maintain other subsistence practices. On the shores of the Clearwater River, silt deposits made for good land for gardens and feeding livestock.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile they gathered fuel, food and water from the surrounding thick poplar forests Moberly described when he began to construct the new fort site at the confluence of the two rivers.<sup>43</sup> Thus the Waterfront area and surrounding region retained its character as a key gathering place and transportation hub for Indigenous and non-Indigenous traders alike.

### **Signing of Treaty 8 at Fort McMurray**

It is unclear where exactly in Fort McMurray an adhesion to Treaty 8 was signed in August 1899, but historical records indicate that Indigenous leaders met the treaty commissioners at the Fort

---

<sup>35</sup> Moberly and Cameron, *When Fur was King*, p. 142.

<sup>36</sup> Moberly and Cameron, *When Fur was King*, p. 151.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> McMurray Métis, *Mark of the Métis*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Tara Joly, "McDonald Island: a Métis History" (Cochrane, AB: Willow Springs Strategic Solutions, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

<sup>43</sup> Moberly and Cameron, *When Fur was King*, p. 142.



to negotiate the terms of treaty as it applied to their communities and territories. Some oral records suggest the signing may have taken place on the Snye. Treaty 8 is the foundation of the expansion of the Canadian state and non-Indigenous settlement into Northern Alberta. Oral histories and extensive research has demonstrated that the Indigenous signatories of Treaty 8 interpreted it differently than the commissioners and Crown did.<sup>44</sup> Indigenous leaders were under the impression that their ancient rights to harvest and use the land and water would not be impeded after signing the treaty, and that they were agreeing rather to peacefully sharing the land with newcomers. In addition to the terms of treaty written on paper, the oral record indicates that other promises were made orally in good faith to protect Indigenous rights, use and occupancy in the area. These Treaty promises have not been upheld. Métis peoples were not permitted to take treaty and instead took Métis scrip. Broken Treaty promises and the government's discriminatory treatment of Métis people are evident in the multiple displacements that have taken place at the Waterfront and in the rapid expansion of industry and non-Indigenous settlement into Indigenous territories, without accounting for impacts and infringements on rights, or appropriately informed consent throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Settlements, micro-villages and reserves at Fort McMurray**

According to several studies, by the early 1900s the Indigenous groups had settled in the area had well-established micro-villages.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, at this time, the government began to survey lands in 1915 in an attempt to fulfill the Treaty land entitlement of the Cree-Chipewyan Band of Fort McMurray. This entitlement reflected the following division:

- 2,275 acres were allocated at Clearwater (known as the Clearwater Indian Reserve) based on 17 people Robertson located in the area.
- 5,710 acres at Gregoire Lake (known as Willow Lake Indian Reserve) for the 45 persons Robertson said were at this location."

Orders in council formally established reserves in accordance with Treaty 8 from 1916-1921. These included the Clearwater Reserve, Fort McKay Reserve and Gregoire Lake (a.k.a. Willow Lake) Reserves. At first, the Fort McMurray band was collectively referred to as the Cree-Chipewyan Band, but in 1948-49 it was split into two separate bands administered from Fort McKay and Fort McMurray.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, René Fumoleau, *As Long as this Land Shall Last: A History of Treaty 8 and Treaty 11, 1870-1939* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004); McCormack, *We Like to be Free*, especially chapter 8. Traditional land use studies conducted by the region's Indigenous communities confirm this view through extensive oral testimony (e.g. ACFN, *Footprints on the Land*; FM468FN, "Chapter 3 – Nisto, <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/blog-post-title-three-tyc54>; Fort McKay Tribal Administration, *From Where we Stand*, pp. 25-29) as do the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Research report and interviews (1974).

<sup>45</sup> Longley and Joly, "Moccasin Flats"; Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*; FM468FN, *Nistawayaw*.

<sup>46</sup> FM468FN, "N'ew, Ne'wo, Ne'yo – Chapter 4," <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/blog-post-title-four-l338e>.

For those who did not live on the allotted reserves, small settlement lots along the Athabasca and Clearwater Rivers, including at the Waterfront, remained the densest area of Indigenous settlement in Fort McMurray.<sup>47</sup> Tara Joly explains how settlements in the Waterfront area grew in the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as people's economic patterns shifted to include urban wage labour. Clark et. al. confirm that Indigenous families settled on river lots "engaged in a variety of socioeconomic activities."<sup>48</sup> Clark et. al. have described this area has a "Métis proto village."<sup>49</sup>

Indigenous settlements along the Waterfront and all along the river systems were homes and harvesting spaces. They provided important social and economic opportunities and were necessary for the creation and maintenance of social and kinship bonds, on which Indigenous societies have always depended. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nistawoyou remained a key gathering space and critical to the cultural landscapes of the region's Indigenous peoples, even as settlements became more permanent and drastic changes took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As such, the Waterfront remained "a significant part of a wider Aboriginal homeland in what is now northeastern Alberta."<sup>50</sup> Settlements in the following areas grew in population in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and developed into micro-villages as they became increasingly permanent:

- Along the Snye,
- Moccasin Flats
- MacDonald Island,
- Cree Flats, and
- Waterways.

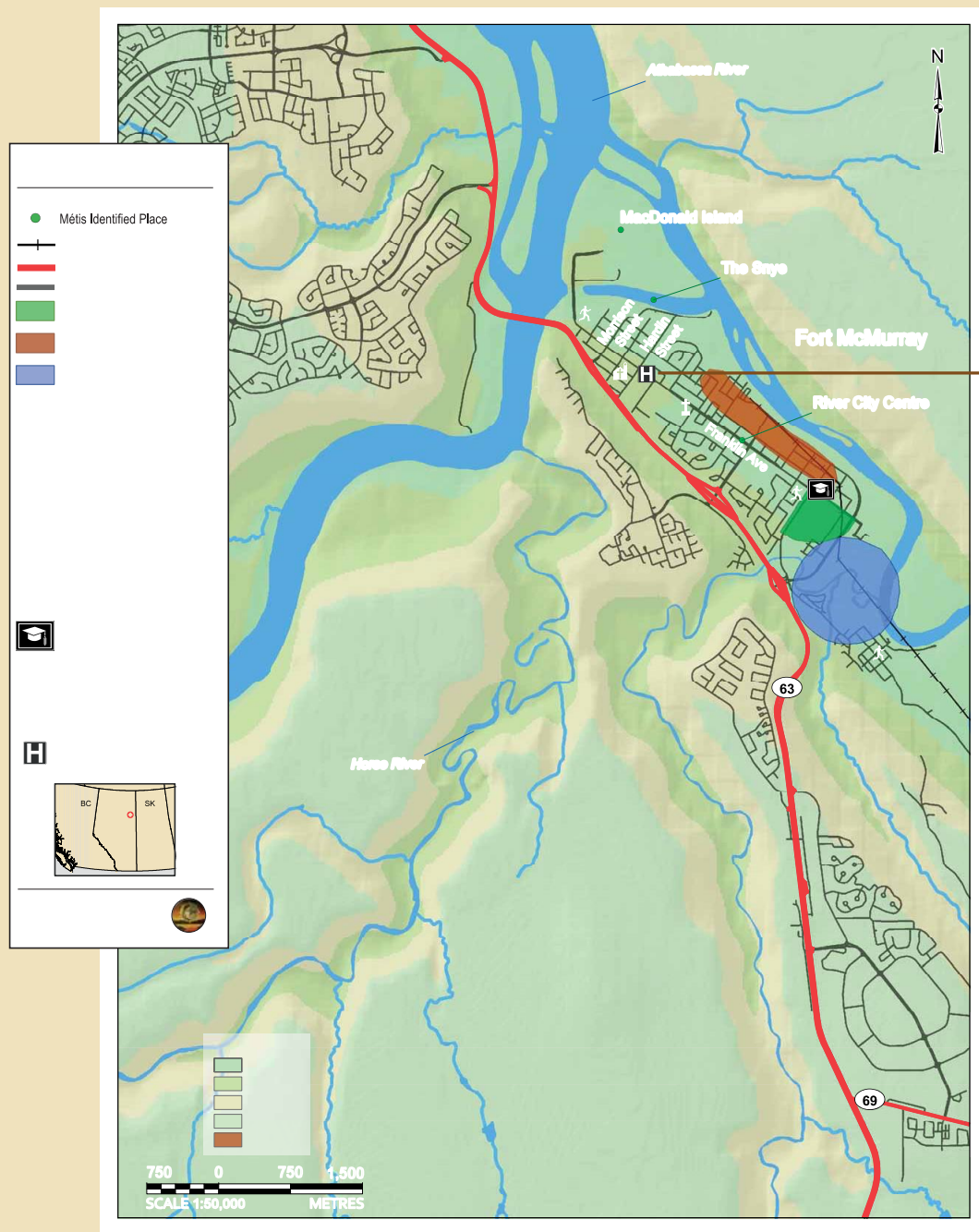
---

<sup>47</sup> Longley and Joly, "Moccasin Flats," p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> Clark et. al., McMurray Métis, p. 25.

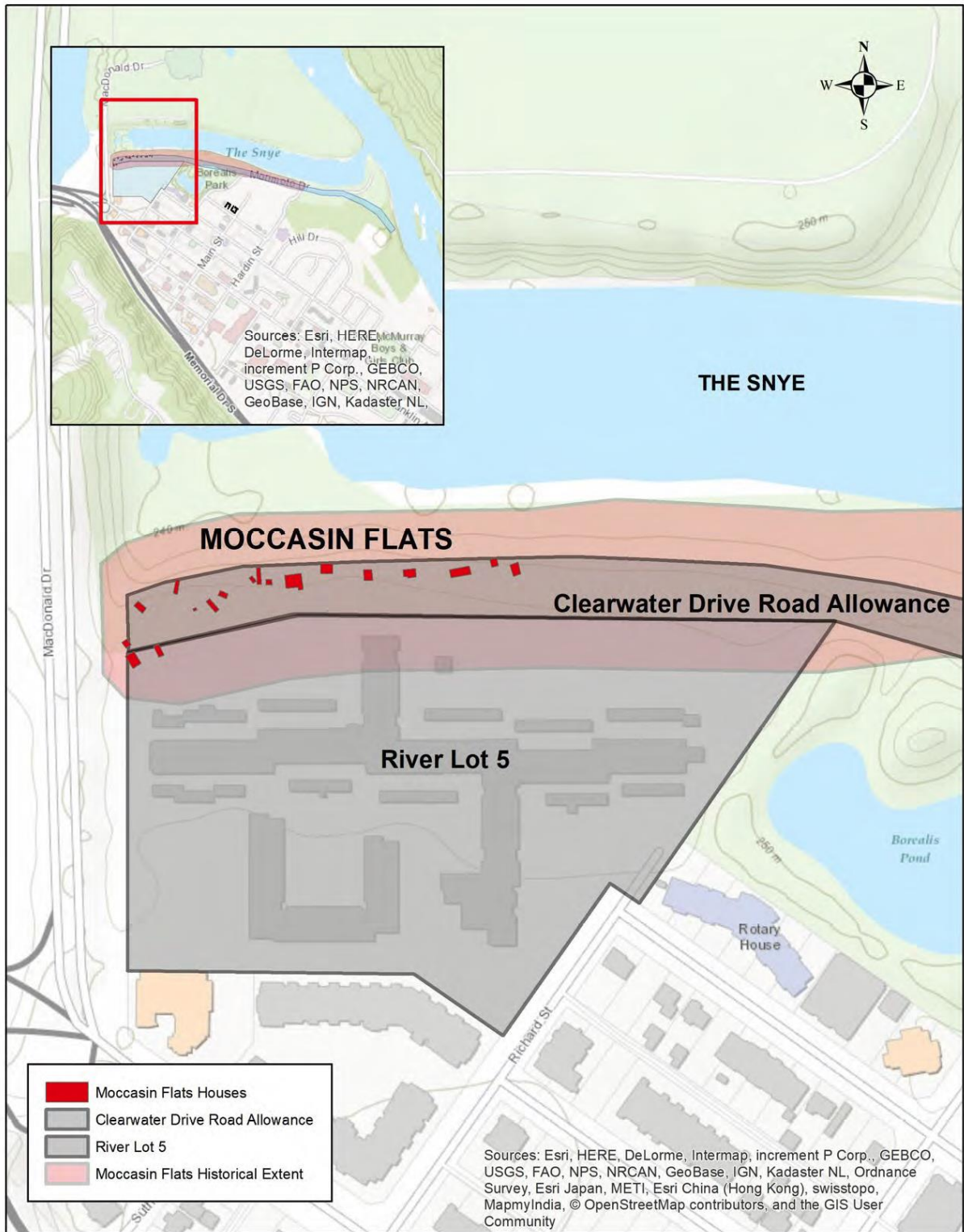
<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Joly, "MacDonald Island."



McMurray Métis, *Mark of the Métis*, 26.





Author: Hereward Longley

## Moccasin Flats in the 1970s

Longley & Joly, "Moccasin Flats," 2.

### ***McDonald Island and along the Snje***

According to Joly, many Indigenous families in the region have historically settled or gathered at MacDonald Island, and the Snje remained a common stopping point on seasonal rounds. The McDonald family were the first of several generations of the Métis people to settle on the island.<sup>51</sup> Elders recall the residents growing gardens and fruit trees, and building cabins and setting up tents, traps and fishing nets.<sup>52</sup> Eventually Indigenous residents were evicted from the island and from along the Snje to make way for development, as discussed below.

### ***Moccasin Flats***

Métis and First Nations families from along the Athabasca River used Moccasin Flats as their home in the summertime before returning to their traplines in the winter. Some HBC records suggest that a permanent settlement there, described as “Shanty Point”, may have existed as early as 1884.<sup>53</sup> By the 1910s, most of the permanent population at Fort McMurray were Indigenous peoples settled along the Snje and at Moccasin Flats.<sup>54</sup> Over time, it developed into a road allowance community, with a similar history to others elsewhere in the country. Because Métis people in Canada were left out of treaty entitlements, many of their families settled on 66-foot-wide strips of land set aside for roads by Crown surveyors.<sup>55</sup> Joly and Longley describe these communities as “temporarily vacant of settlers and development” but “never secure.”<sup>56</sup> Moccasin Flats has been described as “a home, a significant part of Métis space that supported cultural reproduction” and “a place for people to make a home for a season or for life.”<sup>57</sup> Evictions of Indigenous families from Moccasin Flats are described below.

### ***Waterways/Cree Flats***

Fort McMurray First Nation indicates that the Cree family, or Clearwater people, inhabited the Waterways area, living their traditional ways there for many years.<sup>58</sup> In addition, according to Clark et. al., many Métis families were also settled at Waterways and Prairies by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>59</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s some families were relocated from the Clearwater reserve to live at Cree Flats, which today is known as The Horse Pasture. This was because the government wanted Indigenous children to attend school, and there was no road access to the Clearwater Reserve for busses at the time. In the 1960s, as described below, the area was cleared of Indigenous settlements to prepare for incoming development.

### **Fort McMurray as a transportation hub**

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fur trade continued but gradually declined, as Fort McMurray began to urbanize, developing further as a critical transportation hub. As Clark et. al. point out,

---

<sup>51</sup> Joly, “MacDonald Island.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Longley and Joly, “Moccasin Flats,” p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>55</sup> For more on road allowances, see Maria Campbell, *Half-Breed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

<sup>56</sup> Longley and Joly, “Moccasin Flats,” p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 7 & 30.

<sup>58</sup> FM468FN, “N’ew, Ne’wo, Ne’yo – Chapter 4,” <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/blog-post-title-four-l338e>.

<sup>59</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 70.

after the launch of the first steamship, the Grahame, from Fort McMurray in 1884, the “transportation axis” flipped from west-east to north-south orientation as alternative forms of trade and industry gained traction.<sup>60</sup> During this time of transformation, Indigenous residents maintained their longstanding relationship to the Waterfront and surrounding region and demonstrated their resilience and adaptiveness as they took part in the change wage labour economy. They continued to move in and out of the increasingly urbanizing space, and their permanent settlements along the Athabasca River, especially around the Snye and down to the Waterways, continued to grow.<sup>61</sup>

Steamships remained key to the region’s economy and the Waterfront area’s transformation in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. G. MacGregor’s history covers this more modern period in *Paddle Wheels to Bucket Wheels on the Athabasca* (1974) as does D.J. Comfort in *Ribbons of Water and Steamboats North* (1974). Terry Garvin’s unpublished history of transportation in the region explores some of the changes taking place there at this time. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Methye Portage but Fort McMurray remained a meeting place for scows and steamers.<sup>62</sup> Steamboats provided new employment opportunities for Indigenous residents, who became guides and boat operators. Some of the most famous captains in the river transport economy at the time were from Indigenous families, such as the Shotts, Birds, McDonalds, Atkinsons, and Loutitts.<sup>63</sup> One Fort McMurray First Nation Elder described Indigenous participation in this changing transportation economy that moved through Fort McMurray:

The Indians would work on riverboats going downstream (barging) from Lac La Biche to Fort Chipewyan. I can remember when they used dogs for the trip that took place once a month. One man would walk in front of the dogs with snowshoes, because there was no road. There was nothing in that part of the country for a means of transportation, or for moving freight. The people would bring their freight to Athabasca to be moved by a scow on the river. They even used pack horses for hauling purposes.<sup>64</sup>

The completion of the Alberta and Great Waterways Railways in the 1920s further transformed the region. Waterways and Fort McMurray were two distinct communities at this time. Fort McMurray was the older community tied to the HBC post and trade, while Waterways was quickly growing, particularly once the railway was completed in the 1920s linking “keel to steel.” The rail had been laid to the edge of the Clearwater River at what then was called Waterways (a.k.a Draper) by 1921.<sup>65</sup> The arrival of the railway in the area also worked to fundamentally transform Indigenous relations to the area, especially as it eventually became

---

<sup>60</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 22-23.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>62</sup> Garvin, “History of Transportation in Fort McMurray,” Unpublished document, Terry Garvin Fonds, University of Calgary Archives.

<sup>63</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> FM468FN, “N’ew, Ne’wo, Ne’yo – Chapter 4: The First People and the Town of Fort McMurray,” in *Nistawayaw*, <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/blog-post-title-four-l338e>.

<sup>65</sup> Garvin, “History of transportation,” p. 30.



necessary for transporting people and materials north in response to the oil booms of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As Clark et. al. point out, these shifts led to Fort McMurray becoming “the axis” of regional Métis and First Nations communities, a “hub of the regional community”, binding together local families and communities. In addition to actively participating in transportation economy, Indigenous families living along the new railway were pulled into its developing “socio-economic orbit.”<sup>66</sup> In these ways, Indigenous people adapted to economic shifts in the region, while maintaining their longstanding connections to the land and waterways, including the Fort McMurray Waterfront. A moditional economy dependent on trapping and harvesting, wage labour and other subsistence practices remained the norm for many Indigenous residents at the time. Regional railways and river transport provided economic opportunities but also helped enhance the practice of traditional lifeways throughout the year, providing transportation and financial capacity for people to continue moving to and from traplines and hunting grounds. The Waterfront area remained a focal point of the wider Indigenous cultural landscape.

## Post-WWII: Oil Sands, Non-Indigenous settlement and Indigenous displacements at the Waterfront

Following the second world war, Indigenous communities continued to congregate along the Waterfront and maintained their moditional lifeways in the micro-villages they formed there. Transformations of the Indigenous spaces along the Waterfront ramped up with the Great Canadian Oil Sands, the first modern industrial oil sands operation, in the early 1960s. The plant was approved in 1962 and went into production in 1967. In the 1970s a second major development was proposed by Syncrude, and this went into production in 1978.<sup>67</sup>

These developments led to a massive influx of new people into the region, who travelled north in pursuit of growing economic opportunities in the region. They purchased lands in Indigenous spaces, driving the price of real estate up, and pushing Indigenous residents to the margins. This had a significant impact on the local Indigenous communities, who previously comprised the majority demographic, but by the 1960s were overwhelmed, seeing their population shift to representing just 10% of the total population.<sup>68</sup> This resulted in significant rise in the cost of living and presented “an unprecedented and economic cultural shock” to those who lived and grew up in traditional villages along the Waterfront.<sup>69</sup>

The situation was described well in a 1964 letter to the editor of the *Fort McMurray Today*:

---

<sup>66</sup> Clark et al. *McMurray Métis*, p. 75.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

After reading your article on the Oil Sands Boom in Fort McMurray (Sept. 3) I find myself wondering whether there is really freedom from racial prejudice in this “democratic” land of ours.

Referring to the article, it must be assumed that the Indian and Metis people living in and around Fort McMurray, perhaps longer than the white people, have been disregarded for years as the town lay dormant. Now the white land owners realized the value of these people’s property and have come to the dire conclusion: the “Injuns must go!” This problem now confronts the provincial government.

It seems the Indians are “free” to live in any part of this “free” country of ours until we whites have placed a value on their land surpassing their own. If we are to assume that the Indians are Canadian citizens this must be truly a breach of Confederation.

The Indians having been ousted, the next problem will be, to quote *The Journal*, “finding some place to put them.” Perhaps the Alberta Game Farm would serve, as the reference made to these people hardly differs from references to animals.

I am sure if the Indians were given half a chance, the so-called native shacks in the middle of the right-of-way on the proposed bypass highway to the south of town would be replaced by decent, respectable houses in town, not on the fringe, and the Indian citizens would contribute to the growth and development of this new community. This would be a much better solution to the problem than restraining these people from their rightful place in our society.<sup>70</sup>

The extraction of bitumen also radically altered the landscape, with broad impacts on people’s lives and livelihoods. These impacts combined with the steep decline of the fur trade, so that more Indigenous residents had to search for wage labour, though many faced racism or did not have the necessary skills to gain employment and deal with this period of disruption.<sup>71</sup> As Fort McKay Tribal Administration states, “[o]ur entire life-style was disrupted severely by thousands of people coming into our area and alienating us from our land, land over which we had roamed freely for thousands of years.”<sup>72</sup> FM468FN confirmed, “the increased development in

---

<sup>70</sup> Harassed New Resident, “Letter to the Editor Re: McMurray Indians,” *Edmonton Journal*, September 14, 1964 as found in the Terry Garvin Newspaper Scrapbook, volume 2, p. 40 and also found in PAA, GR76.502, box 40 file 15 – Clippings. While the letter is anonymous, given it was saved by Mr. Garvin, there is a strong likelihood that he penned it as he was seconded in July 1964 from the RCMP to work in Fort McMurray as a community development officer, and shortly thereafter, worked to establish the Nistowoyou Housing Co-Op to help individuals who were being displaced in the city. Also see Fortna, *Fort McKay*, 69.

<sup>71</sup> Some Indigenous people who were hired in the initial oil boom staged walkouts in order to protest unfair policies and practices. For this interesting history, see (for example), “No Indians Need Apply” *The Edmonton Journal*, 18 June 1966; “50 Planning Sitdown at Fort McMurray,” *The Edmonton Journal*, 17 August 1966. These changes are also discussed at length in Fortna, 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Fort McKay Tribal Administration, *From Where We Stand*, p. 2.

the north, particularly the oil sands development, has resulted in many disruptions to the wildlife habitat within the FM468FN traditional hunting, trapping and fishing areas.”<sup>73</sup>

In response to the population boom, development companies worked alongside the municipality, framing Indigenous residents as squatters, to justify their eviction and relocation as the real estate market and population quickly exploded. As a result, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a series of traumatic displacements of Indigenous communities took place along the Waterfront.

### **Displacements**

Indigenous residents of the Waterfront settlements were dispossessed of their homes and lands in the decades that followed WWII. Prior to this time, settlement in northeastern Alberta had been less regulated by government policies. As Clark et. al. point out, the government responded to the rising demand and cost of land by enforcing a new regime of property rights and taxes. Those Indigenous residents who could or would not pay taxes under the newly imposed system, or who could not show formal title for their settlements to the satisfaction of the municipality and developers, were evicted. Lands along the waterfront were subdivided, people evicted, and their concerns and protests dismissed by authorities. The impacts of these displacements are still deeply felt today.

### ***McDonald Island***

The McDonald family settlement at MacDonald Island was claimed as Crown land in the 1940s when the family was unable to pay a \$40 tax fine. After this, it could be subdivided and sold to developers. Elders explain that people were never even informed their homes were on sale until after they were sold.<sup>74</sup> As one Elder stated, “I don’t know if the MacDonalds told them they could have it, but they got it. I don’t know whoever told them they could put a dam to get that road across there. Nobody authorized them to do that, but it’s Crown property so they can do whatever they want, right? ...Everything was changed so fast.”<sup>75</sup> Additionally, in the 1960s, the Town of Fort McMurray built a land bridge to Macdonald Island in an effort to stop flooding in the area and to open up the Island for future development. This stopped water from flowing through the Snye and led to regular dredging of the area.<sup>76</sup> By building a dike on the Snye, the town was able to prevent flooding during spring runoff, but also to qualify for New Town status and gain provincial funding. This led to the area being gradually dispossessed of its Indigenous residents and then sold and developed.

### ***Along the Snye and Moccasin Flats***

Longley and Joly detail extensively the eviction of Métis residents from Moccasin Flats in the 1970s and 1980s. They point out that the evictions at the Snye “were part of a far bigger set of

---

<sup>73</sup> FM468FN, “Newosap – Chapter 14: Traditional Culture and Stories,” <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/newosap-chapter-14>

<sup>74</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> Joly, “MacDonald Island.”

<sup>76</sup> Clark et. al., *McMurray Métis*, p. 89

housing and economic issues facing Métis people in Alberta in the 1970s.”<sup>77</sup> Like elsewhere, “by labelling the Moccasin Flats families as squatters, the New Town of Fort McMurray used property law to disregard their rights as Indigenous peoples...and either evict the families or compel them to leave their homes with the relocation program.”<sup>78</sup> By 1972, the population had grown to 8,148 since the creation of GCOS, when it was roughly 1,000. Oral and archival records indicate that by this time, 14 Indigenous families had permanent dwellings at Moccasin Flats and another 15-30 made their homes there seasonally. Through a complex process from 1975-1981, these families were forcefully removed by the Town of Fort McMurray in collaboration with Northward Developments, Ltd., the subsidiary housing company owned by Syncrude Canada, Ltd.

In 1975, the town planned to build a new sewer line and planned to evict residents to do so. The plan faced resistance and protests from residents and Métis leaders, and the Métis Nation of Alberta presented an alternative plan to the eviction to the Board of Governors.<sup>79</sup> In the end, the Town decided instead to expropriate an easement from River Lot 5, which had been already sold to Northward Developments, Ltd.. Northward Development still sought to evict residents from the area so it could purchase the road allowance between River Lot 5 and the Snye for residential and retail development. It worked with the Town to develop a new plan to do so. By this point, the Town’s population had tripled to nearly 25,000. In 1978, the New Town committed to Northward Development to evict the remaining residents and sell the land they lived on. In 1979, Northward Developments built the River Park Glen Towers housing complex. Conflict immediately ensued between construction workers and new residents.<sup>80</sup> The Town Board of Directors voted in 1978 and 1979 to evict. Evictions took place over a few years, and many families were served eviction notices. Some moved to trailers and were offered a relocation package. Some were not eligible. Elder Pat Schott was evicted when he was not home, and his belongings destroyed. When he protested, he was jailed.<sup>81</sup> His home was bulldozed.

### ***Cree Flats/Waterways***

FM468FN records the history of how Cree families were forcibly removed from the Clearwater reserve in roughly the 1930s or 1940s and moved to Waterways, to Cree Flats, or what is now Horse Pasture Park because busses could not reach the reserve to bring children to school. Not long after, Indian Affairs removed a number of Cree families from Cree Flats and relocated them on the reserve at Gregoire Lake. The Métis families who had been settled at Cree Flats were also evicted but did not have an alternative place.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Longley and Joly, *Moccasin Flats*, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>79</sup> Métis Nation of Alberta, *Alternate Plan for Snye Residents*, presented to: Honorable W. Yurko. Fort McMurray, 7 November, 1975.

<sup>80</sup> Longley and Joly, *Moccasin Flats*, p. 57.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> FM468FN, “N’ew, Ne’wo, Ne’yo – Chapter 4,” <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/blog-post-title-four-l338e>; Joly and Longley, *Moccasin Flats*, p. 12.



As Joly indicates, “These narratives illuminate how the population boom and associated industrial expansion around McMurray led to increasing land management and subsequent dispossession of Aboriginal peoples” from the area.<sup>83</sup> However, Indigenous peoples though displaced have not forgotten or given up their longstanding claim and relation to the Waterfront area. While the impacts of forcible dislocation have been deeply felt, Indigenous residents maintain their connection to the Fort McMurray waterfront through ongoing land use, protest and resistance, and through traditional knowledge passed down through oral history.

## Conclusion: Persistent and uninterrupted connections to the Waterfront

As Fort McMurray has grown, the areas along the Waterfront have become important residential and recreational spaces. The Suncor Community Leisure Centre at MacDonald Island, for example, opened in 2010. Yet throughout this history of transformation, Indigenous peoples have maintained their deeply rooted connections to this important Indigenous space. Their persistent and uninterrupted claims to the Waterfront are ongoing to this day.

On the one hand, the influx of outsiders and industry fundamentally transformed Indigenous relations to land and water, leading to more permanent settlement and the development of modal lifeways at the Waterfront and surrounding region. Participating in the fur trade and transportation economies that developed there, they also were “still able to maintain many aspects of their traditional livelihood.”<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Indigenous populations carry in living memory their ancestors’ knowledge and connections to the area. They have protected and made publicly visible their claims to the Waterfront through protests and active political engagement.<sup>85</sup> Indigenous leaders have worked to collaborate with the Municipality to commemorate Indigenous histories and connections to this important landscape, such as through the ATC Cultural Festival and the plans to build the McMurray Métis Cultural Centre.

Moving forward, the Waterfront could be an important area of reconciliation if historical and ongoing Indigenous residency and use are appropriately represented, and the history of displacement and colonization meaningfully acknowledged. Since the release of the Truth and

---

<sup>83</sup> Joly, “MacDonald Island.”

<sup>84</sup> FM468FN, “Newosap – Chapter 14: Traditional Culture and Stories,” <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/chapters/newosap-chapter-14>

<sup>85</sup> Joly and Longley, *Moccasin Flats*. For news coverage see: Vincent McDermott, “For Fort McMurray’s Metis, the Snye a Memorial to Homes,” *Fort McMurray Today*, January 17, 2017, <http://www.fortmcmurraytoday.com/2017/01/17/for-fort-mcmurrays-metis-the-snye-a-memorial-to-homes>; David Thurton, “‘A Dirty Deed’: Fort McMurray Métis Demand Apology after Historic Eviction of an Indigenous Settlement,” *CBC News*, 25 April 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/fort-mcmurray-metis-want-apology-for-moccasin-flats-1.4634161>; David Thurton, “Teepee-Raising Protests Forced Removal of Indigenous Families in Fort McMurray,” *CBC News*, 21 June 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/moccasin-flats-fort-mcmurray-indigenous-1.4713292>; Michael Jesso, “Michael Jesso’s Fabulous, Derailed – Moccasin Flats,” *YMM Magazine*, 22 May 2018, vol. 6-4, <https://yourmcmurraymagazine.com/regulars/2317/michael-jesso-s-fabulous-derailed-moccasin-flats>.

Reconciliation Commission's final report in 2015, RMWB has been seeking ways to apply its calls for action in policy, planning and practice. Part of this involved the plan to build and promote infrastructure that depicts Indigenous history and ongoing claims to place. In light of the complex history summarized above, in order for the new Waterfront Park to become such a space of reconciliation, a number of important factors could be considered.

First, all parties involved in the design and development should be briefed on the Indigenous and colonial histories of the Waterfront. This includes understanding of the history of displacement and colonization from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward that fundamentally transformed, but did not succeed in eliminating, Indigenous relations to this space. All stakeholders should also be made aware of the active and positive contributions that Indigenous peoples have made to Fort McMurray throughout its history. Attending to these histories and engaging with Indigenous community members, Urban Systems will be prepared to meaningfully represent Indigenous residents' longstanding historical connection to the area, in order to give it the honour and active recognition it deserves in the design of the park.

Primed with this awareness, active parties could develop a space incorporating public education opportunities for all visitors, where Indigenous visitors will also feel welcome, safe and represented. This also will encourage the wider public, especially non-Indigenous visitors, not to take the Waterfront for granted as a new recreational area devoid of history, but to step into the space with sensitivity to its status as an *Indigenous space* within a wider Indigenous environment, and to engage with the history of harm and displacement that have occurred there. For the Waterfront Park to be an act and space of reconciliation, Indigenous histories and persistent connections to the Waterfront must be reflected in design. Some ways to do so could be to include signage and interpretation that clearly points to Indigenous and colonial histories, to include Indigenous art, and to raise the flags of Indigenous communities within the park.

## For further reading

### Studies with context on local Indigenous use

Fort McKay Tribal Administration. *From Where We Stand*. Ft. McKay, AB, 1983.

Fort McKay First Nation, *There is Still Survival Out There: A Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study of the Fort McKay First Nations* (Fort McMurray: Arctic Institute of North America and Canada Alberta Partnership Agreement in Forestry, 1994)  
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9625726c-66b5-4673-954a-8e96b67b6637/resource/32a650b4-ed97-48a2-ba7c-c01e6e0e8193/download/traditional-land-use-baseline-report-.pdf>.

Fort McMurray #468 First Nation (FM468). *Nistawaya, 'Where the Rivers Meet'*: Fort McMurray #468 First Nation Traditional Land Use Study. Calgary: Nicomacian Press, 2006. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/nistawayaw>.

Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935. *Mark of the Métis: Traditional Knowledge and Stories of the Métis People of Northeastern Alberta*. Ft. McMurray, AB: Fort McMurray Métis Local, 1935, 2012. <https://arpdcreources.ca/consortia/mark-metis-traditional-knowledge-stories-metis-peoples-northeastern-alberta/>.

Hopkins, D., T.L. Joly, H. Sykes, A. Waniandy, J. Grant, L. Gallagher, L. Hansen, K. Wall, P. Fortna and M. Bailey. (2019). 'Learning Together': Braiding Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems to Understand Freshwater Mussel Health in the Lower Athabasca region of Alberta, Canada. *Journal of Ethnobiology* 39, no. 2: 315-336.  
<https://bioone.org/journals/journal-of-ethnobiology/volume-39/issue-2/0278-0771-39.2.315/Learning-Together--Braiding-Indigenous-and-Western-Knowledge-Systems-to/10.2993/0278-0771-39.2.315.full>.

Parlee, Brenda. *Traditional Knowledge Overview for the Athabasca River Watershed*. Contributed to the Athabasca Watershed Council State of the Watershed Phase 1 Report, 2011 <https://awc-wpac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AWC-WPAC-State-of-the-Watershed-Phase-1-Traditional-Knowledge-Overview.pdf>.

### Métis history in the region

Clark, T.D., D. O'Connor and P. Fortna. *Fort McMurray: Historic and Contemporary Rights-Bearing Métis Community*. Cochrane and Ft. McMurray, AB: Fort McMurray Métis Local, 1935 and Willow Springs Strategic Solutions, 2015.  
[https://www.academia.edu/14943775/Fort\\_McMurray\\_Historic\\_and\\_Contemporary\\_Rights\\_Bearing\\_M%C3%A9tis\\_Community](https://www.academia.edu/14943775/Fort_McMurray_Historic_and_Contemporary_Rights_Bearing_M%C3%A9tis_Community)

### On displacements

Longley, H. and T. Joly. *The Moccasin Flats Evictions: Métis Home, Forced Relocation, and Resilience in Fort McMurray, Alberta*. Fort McMurray, AB, 2018.

[https://www.academia.edu/37504547/The Moccasin Flats Evictions M%C3%A9tis Home Forced Relocation and Resilience in Fort McMurray Alberta](https://www.academia.edu/37504547/The_Moccasin_Flats_Evictions_M%C3%A9tis_Home_Forcible_Relocation_and_Resilience_in_Fort_McMurray_Alberta).

## Bibliography

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. *Footprints on the Land: Tracing the Path of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation*. Fort Chipewyan: Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, 2003.

Buggey, S. *An Approach to Aboriginal Cultural Landscapes*. Presented to Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Ottawa, 1999. [Online]. Available at: [http://ip51.icomos.org/~fleblanc/in-memoriam/buggey-susan/im\\_buggey-susan\\_1999\\_Aboriginal\\_Cultural\\_Landscapes\\_HSMBC.pdf](http://ip51.icomos.org/~fleblanc/in-memoriam/buggey-susan/im_buggey-susan_1999_Aboriginal_Cultural_Landscapes_HSMBC.pdf)

Caldwell, C.J., W.L. Zwerman and A.D. Olmsted. *Perception of the Fort McMurray Environment Through Time*. Prepared for Alberta Environment, Research Secretariat by Kananaskis Centre for Environmental Research and Department of Sociology. Calgary: University of Calgary, 1979.

Clark, T.D., D. O'Connor and P. Fortna. *Fort McMurray: Historic and Contemporary Rights-Bearing Métis Community*. Cochrane and Ft. McMurray, AB: Fort McMurray Métis Local, 1935 and Willow Springs Strategic Solutions, 2015.  
[https://www.academia.edu/14943775/Fort McMurray Historic and Contemporary Rights Bearing M%C3%A9tis Community](https://www.academia.edu/14943775/Fort_McMurray_Historic_and_Contemporary_Rights_Bearing_M%C3%A9tis_Community)

Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*. Toronto: Penguin Random House, 1973.

Comfort, D.J. *Ribbon of Water and Steamboats North: Part 2 in a history of Fort McMurray, 1870-1898*. Ft. McMurray: Fort McMurray Public Library, 1974.

Fort McMurray #468 First Nation (FM468). *Nistawayou, 'Where the Rivers Meet'*: Fort McMurray #468 First Nation Traditional Land Use Study. Calgary: Nicomacian Press, 2006. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.fortmcmurray468firstnation.ca/nistawayaw>

Fort McKay First Nations. *There is Still Survival Out There: A Traditional Land Use and Occupancy Study of the Fort McKay First Nations*. Fort McMurray: Arctic Institute of North America and Canada Alberta Partnership Agreement in Forestry, 1994.  
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9625726c-66b5-4673-954a-8e96b67b6637/resource/32a650b4-ed97-48a2-ba7c-c01e6e0e8193/download/traditional-land-use-baseline-report-.pdf>

Fort McKay Tribal Administration. *From Where We Stand*. Ft. McKay, AB, 1983.

Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935. *Mark of the Métis: Traditional Knowledge and Stories of the Métis People of Northeastern Alberta*. Ft. McMurray, AB: Fort McMurray Métis Local,



- 1935, 2012. <https://arpcresources.ca/consortia/mark-metis-traditional-knowledge-stories-metis-peoples-northeastern-alberta/>.
- Golder Associates. *Final Report: Wood Buffalo Elder Interview Project*. Calgary: Golder Associates, 2008.
- Fortna, P. *Fort McKay Métis Nation: A Community History*. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press. In review.
- . *Cadotte Lake Métis: A Genealogical Narrative, 1850-2000*. Cochrane, AB: Willow Springs Strategic Solutions, 2021.
- Fortna, P and J.R. Dragon. "The Mighty Athabasca: Applied Métis Environmental and Historical Research." Conference presentation given at the *Fur Trade and Métis History: Patterns of Ethnogenesis Mini-Conference*. Ottawa, 2009. <http://www.willowspringsss.com/products-services.html>.
- Hopkins, D., T.L. Joly, H. Sykes, A. Waniandy, J. Grant, L. Gallagher, L. Hansen, K. Wall, P. Fortna and M. Bailey. 'Learning Together': Braiding Indigenous and Western Knowledge Systems to Understand Freshwater Mussel Health in the Lower Athabasca region of Alberta, Canada. *Journal of Ethnobiology* 39, no. 2 (2019): 315-336. <https://bioone.org/journals/journal-of-ethnobiology/volume-39/issue-2/0278-0771-39.2.315/Learning-Together--Braiding-Indigenous-and-Western-Knowledge-Systems-to/10.2993/0278-0771-39.2.315.full>.
- Joly, T. "McDonald Island: A Métis History." Prepared for Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, 2014.
- Longley, H. and T. Joly. *The Moccasin Flats Evictions: Métis Home, Forced Relocation, and Resilience in Fort McMurray, Alberta*. Fort McMurray, AB, 2018. [https://www.academia.edu/37504547/The\\_Moccasin\\_Flats\\_Evictions\\_M%C3%A9tis\\_Home\\_Fforced\\_Relocation\\_and\\_Resilience\\_in\\_Fort\\_McMurray\\_Alberta](https://www.academia.edu/37504547/The_Moccasin_Flats_Evictions_M%C3%A9tis_Home_Fforced_Relocation_and_Resilience_in_Fort_McMurray_Alberta).
- MacGregor, J.G. *Paddle Wheels to Bucket-Wheels on the Athabasca*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.
- McCormack, P. *Fort Chipewyan and the Shaping of Canadian History, 1788-1920s: "We like to be free in this country."* Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.
- . *Research Report: An Ethnohistory of the Mikisew Cree First Nation*, August 2010.
- Moberly, H.J. and W.M. Bleasdel Cameron. (1929). *When Fur Was King*. London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1929. [Online]. Available at: <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/bcbooks/items/1.0372569#p9z-5r360f>.

Parlee, B. *Traditional Knowledge Overview for the Athabasca River Watershed*. Contributed to the Athabasca Watershed Council State of the Watershed Phase 1 Report, 2011.  
<https://awc-wpac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AWC-WPAC-State-of-the-Watershed-Phase-1-Traditional-Knowledge-Overview.pdf>;

Peters, Evelyn, Matthew Stock, Adrian Werner (2018). *Rooster Town: The History of an Urban Métis Community, 1901-1961*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2018.

UNESCO. "Cultural Landscapes." [Online.] Available at:  
<https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/>

Voorhis, E. *Historic Forts and Trading Posts of the French Regime and of the English Fur Trading Companies*. Compiled for the Department of Interior and Natural Resources Intelligence Service. Ottawa, ON, 1930. [Online]. Available at:  
<http://www.enhaut.ca/voor1/Voorhis.pdf>

