

What We Heard

Report:

Canadian Heritage River System
Nomination Survey –
North Saskatchewan River
Rivière Saskatchewan Nord
kisiskâciwani-sîpiy
omaka-ty
Північна річка Саскачеван

2021



Canadian
Heritage
Rivers
System



Réseau
des rivières
du patrimoine
canadien



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Wise Use

Photo Credit:
E. W. Smith.
North Saskatchewan River,
Edmonton, AB.

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SUMMARY

WHAT WE DID



WEBINAR

37 Participants



ONLINE SURVEY

279 Participants

WHAT WE HEARD

“I fully support the nomination of the North Saskatchewan River to the Canadian Heritage River System.”



87%

Support the nomination of the Alberta portion of the North Saskatchewan River to the Canadian Heritage River System.

People against the nomination felt that change was not required or that the designation would result in access restrictions.

WHAT PEOPLE VALUE MOST

Recreation Heritage

VARIETY
ACCESSIBILITY
WATERSPORTS
BICYCLING & WALKING
CLEAN WATER, WILD
NATURE &
BEAUTIFUL SCENERY
HISTORY
GATHERING PLACE
NATURE IN THE CITY

Cultural Heritage

INDIGENOUS
CONNECTION
RICH & DIVERSE
TRADE &
TRANSPORTATION
WATER & NATURE
GEOLOGY

Natural Heritage

WILDLIFE
PLANTS
EXPERIENCES
NATURAL FEATURES

“It is a river to explore. The river is a connection for land, cultures, Indigenous history, and newer settler history. The river supports a rich biodiversity that we need to support and sustain. The river has long been used to transport: Indigenous peoples, fur traders and settlers. It is a connector of people, history, cultures and it's health is imperative for a healthy future of land and peoples.”

BACKGROUND

Smoky Lake County with support from riverside municipalities and Indigenous groups are leading an effort to designate the Alberta portion of the North Saskatchewan River as a Canadian Heritage River. The designation recognizes the River’s significance in shaping Canada’s identity. Adding the North Saskatchewan River to the list of Canadian Heritage Rivers does not restrict activities along the river but rather creates a platform for celebration. The designation tells Canada and the world that the North Saskatchewan River matters.

There are three documents required for the designation process:

- Background Study (completed in 2005)
- Nomination document (underway 2021)
- Designation Document (planned for 2022)

This report summarizes public feedback collected during an online survey and informs the nomination document. The goal of the survey was to capture views and perspectives of the recreational, cultural, and natural heritage of the North Saskatchewan River.

Smoky Lake County is leading the nomination of the North Saskatchewan River to promote economic development, renewed relations among communities and Indigenous nations in Alberta, and to strengthen stewardship.

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

Webinar

A webinar was presented on April 7, 2021 and posted to YouTube. The webinar was designed to increase awareness of the nomination process and recruit online survey participants.

Public online survey

An online survey collected public perspectives from March 31, 2021 to April 30, 2021. 390 people responded to the survey and 279 completed the survey.

COMMUNICATION TACTICS

Smoky Lake County recruited online survey participants via several platforms, including:

Presentations

Strathcona County Council April 13, 2021

Edmonton City Council April 19, 2021

Leduc City Council April 19, 2021

Press releases and articles

Leduc Representative April 15 and May 7

Fort Saskatchewan The Record April 15

City of Leduc April 22, 2021

Taproot April 20, 2021

A link to the survey was **shared on social media** by:

Beaver Hills Biosphere

City of Leduc

Lamont County

Mayor Burke, Town of Rocky Mountain House

Mayor Hnatiw, Sturgeon County

North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance

River Valley Alliance

Senator Paula Simons

Smoky Lake County

Strathcona County

Sturgeon County

Town of Rocky Mountain House

Facebook and Instagram advertising promoted the survey.

Invitations to complete the survey were sent via email or Facebook to various outdoor associations and groups.



WEBINAR

39 Participants
98 YouTube views



ONLINE SURVEY

279 Participants

SOCIAL MEDIA

65,963 Reach
2,209 Engagements
1,684 Link Clicks

Invitations were sent to:

ABMA	Edmonton Bicycle and Touring Club	Northwest Voyageurs
Agro-Forestry Woodlot Extension Society	Edmonton Dragon Boat Racing Club	Paddle Alberta
Alberta Bilingual Municipalities Association	Edmonton Heritage Council	Parkland County
Alberta Conservation Association	Edmonton Historical Board	Peace River Boating Association
Alberta Dirt Riders Association	Edmonton History	Protect Alberta's Rockies and Headwaters
Alberta Equestrian Association	Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition	Red Deer Ramblers
Alberta Fish and Game Association	Edmonton Rowing Club	Red Deer Watershed Alliance
Alberta Fish and Game Association - Club Facebooks	Elk Point	River Valley Adventure (tourism company)
Alberta Mushers	EPCOR	River Valley Alliance
Alberta Off-highway Motor Vehicle Association	Explore Edmonton	River Valley Conservation Society
Alberta Recreation and Parks Association	Friends of Historical Northern Alberta - History Check App	Rocky Motorcycle Club
Alberta Rowing Association	Ft. Saskatchewan	Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association
Alberta Trail Riders Association	Go EAST	Smoky Lake Heritage Board
Alberta Trappers Association	Grant MacEwan Mountain Club	Southern Alberta Trail Riders Association
Alpine Club of Canada	Headwinds Cycle Club	St. Paul County
Bighorn Heritage ATV Association	Heritage Calgary	Strathcona County
Brazeau ATV Club	Heritage Forward!	Sturgeon County
Bruderheim Riding Association	Hike Alberta	Taproot
Calgary Area Whitewater (Calpaddle)	Historic Edmonton and Northern Alberta (Original)	Thorhild County
Calgary ATV Riders	Indigenous Edmonton	Town of Devon
Calgary Outdoor Club	Kayak Alberta & BC	Town of Rocky Mountain House
Canadian Club of Edmonton	Lac St. Anne ATV Club	Treaty 6 Confederacy
Central Alberta River Boat Association	Lakeland Breakers	Two Hills County
Ceyana Canoe	Lakeland LICA	UAPS
City of Edmonton	Lamont County	Vermillion River County
Clearwater County	Leduc County	Victoria Home Guard
Cows and Fish	Lethbridge Motorcycle Club	Wapiti Off-road Association
Drayton Valley Paddle Club	Metis Nation of Alberta	Waskahegan Trail Association
Eagle Point Blue River	North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society	Wetaskiwin County
Edmonton and District Historical Society	North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance	Whitecourt ATV Club
		Whitemud Equine Learning Centre Association

ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

People were asked to declare where they lived. Survey participants lived across Alberta. Most participants lived in Edmonton.



Edmonton	53%
Calgary	6%
North	2%
East	10%
Central	10%
West	9%
South	5%
Other	1%
Prefer not to say	3%

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE NOMINATION

Support the nomination

Do not support the nomination

Neutral



87%



9%



4%

People against the nomination felt that change was not needed or that the designation would result in access restrictions.

“The existence of the North Saskatchewan River is responsible for a large part of Alberta's history and culture.”

“It is a river to explore. The river is a connection for land, cultures, Indigenous history, and newer settler history. The river supports a rich biodiversity that we need to support and sustain. The river has long been used to transport Indigenous peoples, fur traders and settlers. It is a connector of people, history, cultures and it's health is imperative for a healthy futures of land and peoples.”

“It continues to become more important as we see more development here in Alberta. Places like the North Saskatchewan River Valley are vital to our quality of life and protecting the river and its associated natural resources (not only its fresh water) will be exponentially more important in the years to come.”

RECREATION HERITAGE

“I love canoeing the river and have done so from Horburg to Rocky Mountain House, and Rocky Mountain House to Edmonton. I find it astounding that you can almost canoe into downtown Edmonton before you realize you are in a major city.”

CULTURAL HERITAGE

“The North Saskatchewan has been an important part of Canadian history since the first people inhabited this area. Its influence on our history is profound, and its recognition has a Heritage River is likely overdue.”

NATURAL HERITAGE

“Foothills, Central Mixedwood, and Parkland natural regions all have their unique features that make them extraordinary. The diversity of these areas are what makes the whole length of the River amazing.”

“Personally, I walk and ski, but I like that there are many choices available.”

“It is my primary source of recreation. It is heaven.”

“We like the old trails best because you can walk or bike or ride horses. It's free and you can take the kids.”

RECREATION HERITAGE

The North Saskatchewan River is a special place for Albertans. For some, the River provides a unique vacation destination once per year, while for others it enriches their daily life. Survey participants used the North Saskatchewan River for 45 activities. Walking or hiking, sightseeing and nature observation were the most popular activities.

- 99% of those surveyed use the North Saskatchewan River recreation
- 52% use the River for recreation more than 20 times per year
- 20% use the River for recreation monthly

People use the River for several recreational activities, the popularity of each activity reported was:

67% Walking or hiking	23% Cultural activities	5% Dirt biking
64% Sightseeing	22% Sunbathing	3% Horseback riding
61% Nature observation	21% Running	2% Snowshoeing
58% Riverside picnicking	20% Float tubing	2% Paddle boarding
58% Canoeing	19% Motor boating	2% 4x4 truck driving
49% Camping	14% Art	1% Snorkelling/scuba diving
38% Riverside entertainment	13% Spiritual activities	1% Dog sledding
38% Fishing	13% Hunting	1% Water use
32% Dog walking or swimming	12% Historical re-enactment	1% Wagon train
29% Mountain biking	12% Gold panning	1% Star gazing
28% Swimming	11% Rafting	1% Searching for rock and petrified wood
28% Berry picking	9% ATV/UTVing	1% Maintaining cemeteries
26% Kayaking	8% Tobogganing	1% Agriculture
24% Cross-country skiing	7% Snowmobiling	1% Photography
	7% Rowing	
	6% Boat racing	
	5% Climbing	

“I find it amazing that we can go foraging for wild berries inside the City of Edmonton. The continuous trail network within Edmonton is also very special to me. The most special activities, however, involve the traditional use of the river as a transportation corridor. Canoeing on the river and camping on its banks is truly a special experience and one that I think more people should add to their "bucket list".

WHAT PEOPLE VALUE MOST

People were asked what they valued most about North Saskatchewan River recreation. Eight themes emerged from their responses. People identified 50 recreational activities they find special along the River.

The most special activities in order of popularity were:

1. Canoeing
2. Walking or hiking
3. Camping
4. Fishing
5. River boating
6. Kayaking
7. Cross-country skiing
8. Nature watching
9. Bicycling
10. Mountain biking
11. Berry picking
12. Bird watching
13. Dog walking
14. Running
15. Picnicking
16. Nature walks
17. Swimming
18. Wildlife viewing
19. Gold panning
20. Historical re-enactment
21. Hunting
22. Float tubing
23. Photography
25. Rafting
26. Sightseeing
27. ATV
28. Paddleboarding
29. Spending time with family and friends
30. Watching boat races
31. Art
32. Being alone
33. Being outdoors near water
34. Climbing
35. Collecting litter
36. Culture
37. Day trips
38. Dog sledding
39. Exploring
40. Golfing in the centre of Edmonton
41. Looking for rocks
42. Rock skipping
43. Sunbathing
44. Viewing historical places
45. Visiting family farms, churches, and cemeteries
46. Visiting Metis Crossing
47. Watching ice
48. Watching rafters, kayakers and dragon boat teams
49. Watching sunrise and sunsets
50. Whitewater canoeing

Themes

VARIETY

“Opportunity. It is such a vast river that you can do pretty much any recreational activity on or near it.”

“The diversity of the river all along it from the mountains to the prairies it's constantly changing. It's a great easy river from Genesee down for teaching canoeing on, the wildlife along the river, especially in the less populated areas, I guess I value the river and its environment the most.”

“The natural beauty, the birds and other animals, ... it's course and proximity to higher density residential areas; it's history as the 'highway' for trade and travel across Canada.”

“The varied species of game fish and the unique geography.”

“The wonderful mix of good recreation, and cultural history.”

“The opportunities to enjoy the River from the shore (hiking trails) and from the water (canoe/kayak/paddleboard access).”

ACCESSIBILITY

“I value it's accessibility to many people, but also the remoteness of it. You can be in the river valley in Edmonton and barely know that you're in the middle of a large city centre.”

“Having a few places to launch and land a canoe that are within easy walking distance of parking, for day trips and to start, end multi-day trips.”

“Nice easy flowing river which makes it accessible for a lot of people and uses.”

WATERSPORTS

“It is a grand river. Crazy rapids up near the beginning and lots of twists and turns lower down and so much wildlife and berries!!!!”

“Whitewater canoeing; Canoe tripping and camping on river; Taking beginners and new visitors to Edmonton in Voyageur canoe tours on river through Edmonton.”

“It's a place to go and feel like you are in the wilderness, there are also many good day trips for canoeing--Genesee to Devon, Devon to Edmonton, through Edmonton, it's an amazing way to see the city from a totally different perspective when you paddle through it on the river.”

“Extraordinary would be the reaches from above Saskatchewan Crossing to Rocky Mtn House... some of the best canoe tripping in Western Canada, and a tourist draw amongst paddlers.”

BICYCLING & WALKING

“We love to walk the trails and have picnics near the river.”

“Walking and seeing what I find or what is different depending on seasons, weather, time of day and who I am with.”

“I love gathering Saskatoons in the fall and admiring the change of the seasons in daily walks.

CLEAN WATER, WILD NATURE AND BEAUTIFUL SCENERY

“Being able to be one with nature. I have seen incredible vistas and been able to view nature in amazing ways.”

“Bird watching during the migration in Edmonton.”

“I really value the trees and diversity of plants that grow (even if it is disturbed/ invaded by many non-native species). I value the habitat that it provides for birds and other wildlife. There's nothing better than being able to forget you're in the city.”

HISTORY

“Peace and tranquillity - the feeling of being connected to my ancestors, to Canadian history.”

GATHERING PLACE

“Space to exercise and visit with friends.”

“Nature, relaxing, people watching as I get to show new Canadians about Pusey willows, different kinds of birds we have here and meeting new people.”

“The river is a part of who we are. It brings us life through providing us with clean water. It connects us to the rest of the North Saskatchewan watershed. When you think of the river, you think of history and connecting people from all over the continent.”

NATURE IN THE CITY

“The mid-city "wilderness". In portions, it is difficult to see signs that you are in the city other than the trail beneath your feet.”

“You can leave the city behind in just a few steps.”

CULTURAL HERITAGE WAS APPRECIATED BY PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS & ANCESTORS

Recreation along the North Saskatchewan River is multi-generational for over half of the people surveyed.

“Our family has camped and gathered along the North Saskatchewan for generations.”

“I am a fifth generation Canadian and 3rd generation Albertans. Although we are not First Nations my family has respected, learned about and adventured into the lands of the North Saskatchewan River. We have hiked, backpacked, fished, canoed, camped and my father and grandfather used to hunt in its regions.”

“My parents have used the river in many of the same ways I do. They introduced me to most of the activities I engage in on and along the North Saskatchewan River”

“I think the entire river offers an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful nature settings Alberta has to offer.”

“The entire river is extraordinary.”

“Beaches.”

“Parks and protected areas.”

“The paddle and overnight camping from south of Nordegg to the Blue bridge is extraordinary.”

“The wild places. The further away from others the better.”

“Fishing and hunting between Drayton Valley and Devon”

SPECIAL PLACES

People were asked to identify places that they found extraordinary for recreation. For those that love the River, they found this a challenging request. Exceptional places included both features of the river and locations. Over one-third of the special locations were within the city of Edmonton.

AREAS

- Beaches
- Islands
- Parks
- Picnic areas
- Trails

LOCATIONS

- Area below Berrymoor Bridge
- Aylmer Provincial Recreation Area
- Big Island
- Bighorn Dam to Rocky Mountain House
- Blue Rapids area
- Brazeau River headwaters
- Constable Chelsea Robinson Park
- Devon
- Edmonton River Valley
- East of Prince Albert
- Fort Saskatchewan
- Frenchman’s Butte area
- Genesee
- Iron Horse trail
- Islands between Redwater area and the Saskatchewan border
- Métis Crossing/Victoria Settlement
- Modeste Natural area
- Nordegg
- Nordegg to Rocky mountain house
- Parkland County
- Ram Falls
- Rapids above Rocky Mountain House
- River valley south of Drayton Valley
- Rocky Mountain House
- Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site Campground
- Rocky Mountain House to Drayton Valley
- Saskatchewan River Crossing
- Saunders Provincial Recreation Area
- Scenery from Snake Hill at Lea Park near Marwayne
- Shandro
- Smoky Lake
- Stretch of the River from the Forestry Trunk Road to Drayton Valley
- The banks, downriver of the Bighorn Dam.
- The West Country to the Banff Park border
- Undeveloped portion from Devon east

“It is spectacularly beautiful and any time I can get to the river, even here in and around the capitol region, I can escape from the day to day grind and enjoy the sites and sounds of the river valley.”

“The entire length in Edmonton, such a break from the city.”

“The trail system in Edmonton is amazing both in size and diversity. Big Island.”

“I spend most of my time in the Edmonton portion of the valley - an incredible resource and the city's crowning glory.”

EXTRAORDINARY PLACES IN EDMONTON

- 50 street boat launch
- Accidental Beach in Edmonton.
- Area near the zoo
- Belgravia Dog Park
- Edmonton area
- Emily Murphy Park
- Gold Bar boat launch
- Government House Park
- Hawryluk Park
- Historical boat launches in Edmonton
- Hotel Macdonald
- Island above Fort Edmonton
- Kinsman Park
- Laurier Park
- Les Park
- Queen Elizabeth Park
- River Valley near University of Alberta
- Rosedale
- Rundle Park
- Strathcona Science Park
- Terwillegar Park
- Victoria trail
- Waltherdale
- Whitemud Creek

“Relaxing environment in which to enjoy nature.”

“The trails, boat launches and the water itself.”

“The paved and unpaved paths.”

“The endless ravine trails.”

“All the trail systems for biking and hiking.”

“Off-leash portion of trails.”

“Nature in the city.”

“As an immigrant, I appreciate learning more about the history of Canada and of Alberta through the lens of the North Saskatchewan River.”

“We value the amazing history this river represents from first European contact and the rich pre-history embedded in every meter along this river even back to sabre toothed tigers and mastodons.”

CULTURAL HERITAGE

100% of people who responded to the cultural heritage survey appreciated the culture and history of the North Saskatchewan River. Eight themes captured the perspectives shared.

WHAT PEOPLE VALUE MOST

Themes

WATER & NATURE

“Water is life. We need to protect this river.”

INDIGENOUS

“The fur traders are long gone, the First Nations and Métis are still here. We have a unique chance to have them tell the story, in their words...”

RICH & DIVERSE

“There is so much history and diverse cultures”

“The life it has given Edmonton via its festivals and parks where we gather.”

TRADE & TRANSPORTATION

“The significance of the river in transporting goods and people in the development of the West.”

“The fact that it was the highway that brought people in and out of what is now Alberta for 1,000s of years. First Nations, French, British, other Europeans, early scientific expeditions, early celebrity tourists (9th Earl of Southesk, artist Paul Kane etc.).”

CONNECTION

“The sense of its sheer length and scope -- the variety of the terrain it covers. We can drive back and forth across it every day and not register that it connects us all the way from the Rockies to the Nelson and Hudson Bay.”

“I value the long history of the river and its importance to all humans. We seem to be drawn to rivers, and it binds all of us together, no matter our background or ethnicity.”

GEOLOGY

“The long history, from the melting of the glacier until now: 15,000 years of history that made the landforms and shaped the river and the people along the river.”

HOW DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE CULTURAL HERITAGE?

People primarily experience the culture and history of the North Saskatchewan River by reading history, visiting historic sites, and exploring the river while imagining a different time.

READING HISTORY

“I read a lot of material on the history of the exploration of western Canada. The North Saskatchewan is a key transportation link in that history.”

VISITING HISTORIC SITES

“When I paddle on the river I often think of the voyageurs and explorers like David Thompson that plied this river. Reading the stories that have been published in books and visiting historic sites along the river help to give a taste of what it may have been like as well as make one realize the significance of the river.”

EXPLORING THE RIVER

“Whenever I am recreating in the vicinity of the river, I imagine the historical uses of the first peoples and the fur trade.”

RIVERSIDE CULTURAL & HISTORICAL EVENTS

“We love the museums and forts and festivals along the river.”

SHARING STORIES

INTERPRETIVE SIGNS

CULTURAL HERITAGE WAS APPRECIATED BY PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS & ANCESTORS

People said that some of their relatives attended events and historic sites. While for others, culture and history were alive in day-to-day life while living along the river.

“My parents told stories of how settlers came downriver on rafts from Edmonton and how many people spent their first winter in caves dug into the riverbank. My dad was a trapper and knew about how the beaver brought Europeans up this river. He also knew it was First Nations people who showed Europeans how to build birch bark canoes and snowshoes so the river could be a highway in all seasons.”

“The whole river is special.”

“I love the parts of the river where you can be alone and benefit from 'river medicine.'”

“The actual historic sites, of course, but also the land in between where ancient people walked and where our grandparents struggled to survived in a rich/wild land.”

SPECIAL PLACES

AREAS

- Abandoned coal mines along Edmonton River Valley
- Bridges
- Cemeteries
- Ferry sites and crossings
- Fishing spots
- Forts
- Fur trade sites
- Geological features
- Indigenous burial grounds
- Indigenous campsites and important places
- Indigenous lands
- Islands
- Old growth forests on islands
- Picnic and riverside places
- River crossings
- Ukrainian churches and museums

LOCATIONS

- Batoche
- Battleford
- Big Island
- Concordia seminary grounds
- Constable Chelsea Robinson Park

- Fort Edmonton
- Fort George
- Fort Pit Provincial Park
- Fort Saskatchewan
- Frenchman's Butte
- Frog Lake
- Heinsburg
- High Level Bridge
- Iron Horse Trail
- John Walter Museum
- Kootenay Plains
- Macdonald hotel
- Metis Crossing /Victoria Trail
- Pakan
- Rabbit Hill
- River Lot 11 Indigenous art park
- River near Devon
- Rocky Mountain House
- Rossdale Cemetery
- Smoky Lake historical use areas
- The layer of ash from the explosion of Mount Mazama (near Edmonton LRT bridge)
- University of Alberta
- Victoria Trail
- Walterdale Cemetery

“I love its intrinsic values such as it’s beauty and listening to the water flow. But I also recognize it’s other values for Edmonton’s water supply.”

“I value that it provides a "natural" (or at least nature) haven within the city of Edmonton. I love feeling like I'm out of the city, even if I'm not. I value the trees, the understory and the habitat that it provides.”

“The “oasis” that the river represents amid the prairie.”

“The history, scenery geology and the rest from the city. I’m not a city person and I find peace here.”

NATURAL HERITAGE

99% of people who responded to the natural heritage survey appreciated the nature of the North Saskatchewan River. The natural elements that the public valued most fit into four themes.

WHAT PEOPLE VALUE MOST

Themes

WILDLIFE

“Garter snake hibernaculum, river hills full of crocus in the spring, fish spawning at the mouth of creeks, petrified wood, pelicans, cliff & mud swallows, great herons, kingfishers, river clams.”

- Beavers
- Biodiversity
- Birds
- Coyote
- Eagle nests
- Fish
- Snake hibernacula
- Sturgeon
- Swallow banks
- Waterfowl

PLANTS

“The fact the river is a transitional zone between the Aspen Parkland and Mountains, and then between the Aspen Parkland and the Boreal Forest.”

“Dogbane and that First Nations used it for fishing nets. It makes such good fibre.”

- Berry bushes
- Buffalo beans
- Dogbane
- Grasses
- Rare plants at Gibbons
- Rare plants such as *Hedysarum boreale*, *Polygala seneca*, and *Shepherdia argentea*
- Silver willow
- Vegetative variations in ravines and micro-climates

NATURAL FEATURES

“The sandstone cliffs are my fave, but I like it all.”

“The ice flows are cool, I appreciate the trails and the woods along them. We pick Saskatoon berries every year. I love the bentonite formations in Dawson Park and the pelicans that visit every year.

- Clean water
- Geology
- Ice flows
- Islands
- Kootenay Plains
- Natural features
- Natural landscape
- Rapids
- River tributaries
- Riverbanks
- Rocky edges and cliffs
- Transition of habitats and landforms
- Wildlife corridor

EXPERIENCES

“We love watching the river ice flows, the cliffs along the river, the beautiful flowers and fruit trees, the beavers and the action they take to live on the river”

“Watching birds flying on the updrafts of the riverbanks.”

- Contrast to the city
- Fishing
- Fresh air
- Peace
- Reflections on the water
- Richness and diversity
- Seasonal changes
- Smells
- Sounds
- Textures
- Vast scale of the river
- Vistas
- Winding river

“My grandfather and great-grandmother were Metis and their ancestors Cree. Their lives were closely bound with the nature of the North-West and its land and rivers.”

“My parents and grandparents made good use of all the berries that grow along the river and they encouraged us kids to find out about the names of birds and animals we saw.”

“My family is from along line of farmers and were taught the importance rivers and clean water is important to the ecosystem and how it all ties together.”

NATURAL HERITAGE WAS APPRECIATED BY PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS & ANCESTORS

The parents, grandparents, or ancestors of 68% of participants appreciated the nature of the North Saskatchewan River. Their appreciation followed 25 themes.

Themes

- NATURE SUSTAINED LIFE
- DRINKING WATER
- BEAUTY
- CHANGING OF THE SEASONS
- PLANTS
- WILDFLOWERS
- ENTIRE ECOSYSTEMS
- FISHING
- HUNTING
- BERRY PICKING
- TRAPPING
- COLLECTING BIRD EGGS
- EXPLORING NATURE FREELY
- NATURAL LANDSCAPES
- BIRDWATCHING
- CAMPING
- WALKING AND HIKING
- BOATING
- PICNIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- AFFORDABLE VACATION

“The entire river is extraordinary”

“The whole area is a total mind-altering experience.”

“Terwilliger Park has some fantastic ponds and really displays the Beaver Hills topography and power of the river while also having so much wildlife! Dawson Park has extraordinary bentonite formations that catch the eye.”

SPECIAL PLACES

AREAS

- Bends in the river with long views
- Central mixedwood forest
- Coal seams
- Creeks
- Eagle nesting areas
- Eddies
- Floodplains
- Foothills
- Islands
- Mudflats
- Natural corridors
- Oxbows
- Parkland
- Ravines
- River beaches
- River flats
- Riverbanks teeming with life
- Sandbars
- Temporary islands
- Undeveloped areas

LOCATIONS

- Abraham's Gates
- Big Island
- Brazeau area
- Brierly rapids
- Burtonsville Island
- Dawson Park
- Devon area
- Devon River trails
- Devon to Fort Saskatchewan river section

- Devon Voyageur Park to Prospectors Point
- Downstream of Edmonton
- Edmonton River Valley
- Fort George area
- Fort Saskatchewan River trails
- Genesse
- Gibbons Prairie Natural Area
- Hills from Lindbergh to Heinsburg,
- Iron Horse Trail
- Kinnaird Ravine in Edmonton
- Kootenay Plains
- Lea Park
- Mineral springs below Government House in Edmonton
- Modeste Creek Natural Area
- Nordegg area
- Rapids near Rocky Mountain House
- Rapids upstream of Drayton Valley
- River along Fort Saskatchewan
- Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site
- Rocky Mountain House area
- Sir Wilfred Laurier Park
- Smoky Lake
- Telfordville area
- Terwilliger Park
- The old Pakan sight
- Two Hills strip in east Edmonton
- Watershed and tributary creeks like Mooswa and Middle Creek and Frog Creek
- Whitemud Creek biodiversity
- William Hawrelak Park

“Every city, village, and tiny hamlet in the world from Cambodia to Peru to Namibia has cafes and places alongside their lakes and rivers. Edmonton has nothing.”

“Try to avoid restrictions on jet boaters, I have helped stranded people almost every outing. Without boats people could get into a lot of trouble as most tubers do not carry enough supplies for survival. Most boaters have everything including rescue equipment and first aid training.”

“It is a fairly untouched river. I like it that way!”

TENSIONS

People expressed a range of concerns and areas of improvement. Four themes emerged.

CONCERNS & IMPROVEMENTS

Themes

DAMAGE TO THE RIVER

“A lot has been done over the past few decades to clean up this river, we must not let it become a dumping ground for whatever. I fully support this initiative to further protect this valuable and important waterway.”

“As this river provides drinking water for cities in Alberta and Saskatchewan, it is vital that the NSR watershed is protected, especially from coal mining.”

“It does not need protected status.”

“Leave it alone.”

- | | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Proposed coal mining▪ Pollution from cities, industry, and agriculture▪ Damage and refuse from camping▪ Proposed and ongoing industrial and residential | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ development in and adjacent to the river valley▪ Damage from motorized land and water-based vehicles▪ Impacts from legacy oil and gas sites and pipelines | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Invasive plant species▪ Overfishing▪ Logging▪ Proposed Big Island Provincial Park glamping▪ Proposed solar farm in the river valley |
|--|---|---|

USE OF THE RIVER

“I do not want access restricted IN ANY WAY for recreation purposes.”

“Let all people keep using this river, it's everyone's.”

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Maintain access to everyone▪ Improve and maintain facilities including | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ boat launches, trails, toilets, and garbage cans | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Increase the number of interpretive signs▪ Add riverside restaurants |
|---|--|---|

PUBLIC AWARENESS

“More information on what plants and animals and fish are in danger because of people, of what we do. Most people don't want things in nature to die off because of us but most of us don't know what we can do to stop it.”

“Leave the Settler history for now. Concentrate on the natural and Indigenous culture and history.”

- Education on leave-no-trace camping
- Increase education of historical and cultural heritage of the River
- Make history interesting and available to youth
- More investment in culture and history museums and exhibits
- More emphasis on Indigenous people history and stories
- Increase the historical exhibits from a female perspective
- Increase awareness of the archaeology
- Formalize river tripping routes and increase awareness of trips, routes, and camping locations
- Identify designated whitewater rapids

PROTECTION OF THE RIVER

“Absolutely, keep all development back from the river and all of its tributaries.”

“I am torn about promoting the river but completely in favour of protecting the river. It seems like when parts of nature are promoted, people find and hurt them.”

- More legally binding protection needed
- More enforcement of existing laws
- Create designated use areas along the River
- Change Natural Areas to Provincial Parks
- Protect riparian areas and tributaries
- Protect shoreline
- Protect forest from beavers

“It is the proverbial Canadian river. It is an important watershed for many areas. Historically, it was important for travel and spiritual. Nature all along the river captures the essence of Canada. There are make fun recreational places for paddling along the river. It just seems to be the life blood of Western Canada in many ways.”

CONCLUSION

Most of the people surveyed supported the nomination of the North Saskatchewan River to the Heritage River System. Those that opposed the nomination felt that no change was needed or that a designation to the Canadian Heritage River System would eventually result in restricted access to the River. The North Saskatchewan River generates and sustains a wide variety of recreational activities, cultural practices, and nature appreciation. The River and adjacent land provide diverse opportunities for enjoyment and gathering of people, culture, and history. In essence, the River provides a platform to connect to the past and enrich the present.

From what we heard there is a yearning to learn more about the Indigenous peoples’ history and culture along the River. Numerous special areas were identified providing daily and multi-day exploration. Tensions exist between developing economic opportunities and protecting the extraordinary nature. Access to the River was a primary theme among the survey responses and highlights a need for education about the commemorative nature of the Canadian Natural Heritage River System designation. It is clear from the responses received that the North Saskatchewan River matters to Canadians. It is an icon of Western Canada’s identity.