

Proposed Saskatoon Freeway's effects on the Northeast Swale

To whom it may concern:

I am sending this letter to express my concerns about the ecological impacts of the Saskatoon Freeway. These are not just short-term impacts from construction; rather, there will be irreversible long-term effects on wildlife and plants.

The Freeway corridor is currently slated to run through the Northeast Swale and adjacent Small Swale, as well as some other natural lands through the southern extent. As with the North Commuter Parkway, the Saskatoon Freeway will further fragment the ecologically sensitive native prairie in the Swales of Saskatoon. Fragmentation of landscapes can and will have serious negative effects on the plants, animals, and the entire ecosystem.

Conservation of temperate grasslands is a global, regional, and local issue. Currently at 8% of global land cover, grasslands are considered the most altered and most endangered ecosystems in the world. Globally, only 5% of that grassland is under some form of protection.[1] Estimates of remaining native prairie in Saskatchewan vary from about 12% to 20%, but the extent and health of this ecosystem in Canada is generally considered to be in decline, and is lacking the protection it needs.[2]

Canada has signed on to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and is thus committed to the protection of at least 17% of terrestrial areas and inland waters.[3] As of 2017, Saskatchewan had protected 8.5% of its land-base, including grasslands and other ecosystems; this leaves significant portions of grassland ecosystems and networks at risk.[4] Major resource extraction projects and their associated infrastructure, urban and agricultural expansion, and roadways fragment, surround, and isolate local habitats from regional ecosystems. Fragmentation and isolation impair and imperil indigenous temperate grasslands, and reduce habitat for native species [5], including those at risk or endangered.

Dramatic declines in biodiversity are already occurring, and it is imperative that all levels of government take action on conservation.[6,7] The current routing of the Freeway is based on old models and projections of growth, and does not represent the current interests and concerns of residents, or current knowledge of Saskatoon's natural areas. Saskatoon's swales, and especially the Northeast and Small Swales, provide a rare opportunity for local recreation, education, and interpretation of our social and ecological heritage in a globally rare and regionally scarce ecosystem.

As a concerned resident, I want to know that the province is spending the public's money and building infrastructure that improves our lives, but not at the expense of critical environmental assets.

Healthy ecosystems are a common good, providing food, resources, and opportunities for spiritual connection. Humans and wildlife alike depend on healthy ecosystems and habitats for the provision of vital ecological functions and services. It is our responsibility — to each other,

to Indigenous Peoples, and to the environment — to steward the lands and ecosystems around us, including the iconic prairie grasslands.

For wildlife, for humans, and for reconciliation, the province needs to conserve biodiversity. That is why I am calling on the Government of Saskatchewan to

- restart the planning process with a new long-term transportation study that recognizes the value of the Swales and chooses avoidance over mitigation;
- conduct a regional strategic environmental assessment, or facilitate an equivalent assessment as an extension of the [Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth](#) (P4G) [Green Network Study](#);
- consult with Indigenous Peoples and organizations to better understand the importance of regional biodiversity to Indigenous Peoples, and the potential impacts of highway and resource development on Aboriginal and treaty rights;
- find innovative and effective ways to increase the amount of protected grassland ecosystems, as well as their connection to each other.

Sincerely,
Concerned Citizen

1. *Towards a Conservation Strategy for the World's Temperate Grasslands*, International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2010.

https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/tgci_strategy_paper_2010.pdf

2. "Canada's grasslands: 'most endangered, least protected ecosystems'", CBC Radio The Current, February 21 2017.

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-february-21-2017-1.3991287/canada-s-grasslands-most-endangered-least-protected-ecosystems-1.3991299>

3. *2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada*, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Government of Canada, 2016.

http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/eccc/CW66-524-2016-eng.pdf

4. *Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators: Canada's conserved areas*, Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2018. www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmentalindicators/conserved-areas.html

5. *Towards a Conservation Strategy for the World's Temperate Grasslands*, IUCN Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative, 2009.

<https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/grasslandsvisionnote.pdf>

6. "Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'", Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, May 2019.

<https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>

7. "One million species at risk of extinction, UN report warns", National Geographic, May 6 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/05/ipbes-un-biodiversity-report-warns-one-million-species-at-risk/>