



**RCE** REGIONAL CENTRE  
OF EXPERTISE  
ON EDUCATION  
FOR SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
**SASKATCHEWAN**



September 5, 2019

Dear Minister Dustin Duncan, Saskatchewan Minister of Environment &  
Mayor Charlie Clark, Mayor of Saskatoon,

We are writing to express our concern about the current planning process for a Perimeter Highway which will cross Saskatoon's Northeast Swale. In view of the significance of the swale, it is important that you are aware of the international commitments of Canada that are relevant in this matter. They reinforce the need for a comprehensive ecological assessment of the impacts of the proposed route in relation to the swale before substantive planning proceeds. A comprehensive assessment may reveal opportunities for both the City of Saskatoon and the province, especially in regards to cultural and natural heritage preservation and opportunities for greenhouse gas sequestration.

By way of background, RCE Saskatchewan is a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) acknowledged by the UN University in 2007.<sup>1</sup> Our RCE brings together scholars and community practitioners dedicated to researching and advancing ESD. The original intention of the 168 RCEs around the world was to support the UN *Decade on Education for Sustainable Development* (2005-2014). The RCEs now advance the UNESCO Global Action Programme on ESD (GAP).<sup>2</sup> We see education for sustainable development as essential in achieving the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals which are intended to guide the global development agenda through to 2030.<sup>3</sup> As part of our mandate for Education for Sustainable Development, we share education about our local responsibilities in relation to Canada's global sustainable development commitments.

The Sustainable Development Goals of relevance to the proposed Perimeter Road development through the Northeast Swale are Goal 13 on Climate Action, Goal 14 on Life Below Water, and Goal 15 on Life on Land. In addition, the 1976 (UN World Heritage) Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural

<sup>1</sup> UN University, "RCE Vision and Mission," available from: <https://www.rcenetwork.org/portal/rce-vision-and-mission>.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, "Global Action Programme on ESD." Available from: <https://en.unesco.org/gap>.

<sup>3</sup> UN, "Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform Our World." Available from: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

and Natural Heritage<sup>4</sup>, to which Canada is a signatory, must be considered. Under article 5.4 of this Convention, Canada has committed “to take appropriate, legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, preservation, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this [cultural and natural] heritage.”

In regard to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and related SDGs #14 and #15 (see above), the work of the Meewasin Valley Authority has identified that the Northeast Swale is home to several rare, endangered, or culturally significant species of plants, birds and amphibians, such as the Western Red Lily, the Horned Grebe and the Northern Leopard Frog. As well, the swale includes artifacts of our cultural history, including a remnant of the Moose Woods – Batoche Trail, tipi rings and the old town of Clarkboro, among others. If development on this landscape is not properly and carefully approached, we risk losing thousands of years of natural and cultural history and the educational opportunities this affords for future generations.

In regard to SDG #13 “Climate Action,” the impacts of any further development in the Northeast Swale must be evaluated through the lens of climate change. Both wetlands and grasslands have important roles to play in both climate change mitigation and adaptation. More specifically, in addition to providing natural drainage and flood control—something increasingly important with extreme weather events, wetlands are a recognized asset in carbon sequestration. Ducks Unlimited Canada estimates that Canada’s wetlands store approximately 150 billion tonnes of carbon<sup>5</sup> and scientists have identified that wetland restoration in the prairie provinces could make a significant contribution to greenhouse gas mitigation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, we’ve lost an estimated 70-90% of our wetlands and we continue to lose more. It is critical to protect those wetlands that remain. Like wetlands, grasslands are recognized as critical to carbon sequestration<sup>7</sup>, yet are severely threatened with less than 10% remaining intact<sup>8</sup> worldwide.

From the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030), to the 2016 Paris Accord within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, to commitments from all levels of government in Canada, the need to address climate change is irrefutable. Given this, any development that can significantly impact critical landscapes’ ability to support both mitigation and adaptation must be very carefully approached.

Given the cultural and natural heritage of the Swale, together with its potential contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation, we hope that a comprehensive ecological assessment will be

---

<sup>4</sup> Canada accepted the Convention on July 23, 1976. See States Parties Ratification Status at <https://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=246>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/01/31/1708736/0/en/Making-the-connection-between-wetlands-and-climate-change.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://cbmjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13021-018-0094-4>, <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/01/31/1708736/0/en/Making-the-connection-between-wetlands-and-climate-change.html>

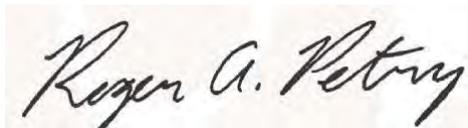
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/ccrc/topics/grassland-carbon-management>

<sup>8</sup> <https://biodivcanada.chm-cbd.net/ecosystem-status-trends-2010/grasslands>

completed before any further project endorsement or planning occurs. Development must proceed only with a view to a sustainable future. It should not occur simply because the project has “been on the books.” Circumstances change, as does our understanding of ecosystems and how they interact with human-built infrastructure, and these must be appropriately and carefully applied to developments that could impact important habitats, our cultural and natural heritage and our future climate. With Canada’s adoption of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals municipal, provincial, and federal governments now have an important metric whereby proposed developments can be evaluated in a holistic way in support of long-term citizen quality of life. Through implementing the goals, Saskatoon can position itself and “shine” as a global leader in sustainable development.

We look forward to hearing from you in regard to how you choose to proceed in this matter, including whether and when a comprehensive ecological assessment will be conducted and how the SDGs will be employed in your assessment. We will be sharing this letter and any updates with our RCE membership in Saskatchewan and our global RCE colleagues, along with relevant non-governmental, municipal, provincial and federal authorities for their information. Best wishes in your deliberations.

Sincerely,



Dr. Roger Petry, Co-coordinator  
RCE Saskatchewan ([www.saskrce.ca](http://www.saskrce.ca))  
[roger.petry@uregina.ca](mailto:roger.petry@uregina.ca)  
306-585-5295



Margret Asmuss, Co-coordinator  
RCE Saskatchewan ([www.saskrce.ca](http://www.saskrce.ca))  
[msasmuss@sasktel.net](mailto:msasmuss@sasktel.net)  
306-654-2075

Cc      Geoffrey Meinert, Saskatoon Freeway Project Manager  
         Hon. Greg Ottenbreit, Minister of Highways and Infrastructure  
         Swale Watchers, Saskatoon  
         Dr. Charles Hopkins, Regional Advisor for RCEs in the Americas  
         Dr. Philip Vaughter, Research Fellow, United Nations Institute for the Advanced Study of  
         Sustainability (UNU-IAS)  
         RCE Saskatchewan Partners and Members