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May 24, 2024

City of Saskatoon
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**Re: Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 Endorsement Request
– May 2024 Update (Agenda item 10.1.1)**

To His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council:

As you know, the Northeast and Small Swales are refuges for nature and for the people of Saskatoon. These ribbons of native grassland and natural wetlands support an astonishing abundance of life, including at least 49 species so rare that they are listed as Species of Conservation Concern and several listed as Species at Risk, including the horned grebe, short-eared owl, common nighthawk, yellow rail, loggerhead shrike, northern leopard frog, bobolink, American badger, crowfoot violet, marsh felwort, and plains rough fescue. Additionally, a sharp-tailed grouse lek has been observed in the Small Swale (as noted in The Biological Assessment released by the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure). This is an ecologically and culturally significant wildlife feature that should be protected. The Biological Assessment also maps rare marl bog habitats.

In a time of ever worsening biodiversity losses across the globe, natural areas of this diversity and importance need to be protected from development. Instead, City Council has been asked to endorse a plan—developed by the Ministry of Highways—that would drive multiple lanes of high-speed traffic through both Swales. The damage and degradation this development would cause is well documented and the impact of the proposed highway will cause irreparable damage to these valuable natural areas. Building the Saskatoon Freeway through the Swales will also undoubtedly disturb the human communities near the Swales via stressors such as light and noise pollution. As indicated in the Functional Planning Study, also released by the Ministry of Highways: "Phase 2 crosses critical environmentally sensitive areas at the Small Swale and Northeast Swale. This phase also directly impacts numerous existing landowner's and access for future residential developments" (pg. iii, 2023).

It is worth reiterating that as green infrastructure, these wetlands and grasslands also provide unmatched ecosystem services to the people of Saskatoon by purifying air and water, sequestering carbon, preventing floods, supporting research, education, mental and physical health, and much more.



It is also important that City Council considers the climatic impact of a project of this scale. New and debatable highway developments are ultimately shortsighted given the need for transformative change to address the climate emergency.

We applaud the steps Saskatoon City Council has previously taken to protect the Swales from harm. Special care was taken with the design of McOrmond Drive where it crosses the Northeast Swale, and Council recently established pre-development boundaries for both the Northeast and Small Swales as part of the planning for the proposed University Heights 3 neighbourhood.

We are now writing with two requests for Saskatoon City Council:

1. Vote NO to the Phase 2 Proposed Saskatoon Freeway alignment through the Northeast and Small Swales.
2. Live up to your commitment to protecting these natural areas and to being a leader in municipal climate action.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Megan Van Buskirk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Megan Van Buskirk
Associate Director
Saskatchewan Environmental Society