

CHAPTER 4: RECREATION VALUES

This section describes the recreational values of the South Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Rivers and the reservoirs that have been created along the rivers. Together the rivers and the reservoirs provide a wide range of recreational activities, from dispersed activities such as canoeing, hiking and hunting to intensive activities including swimming, picnicking, and camping. The rich natural and cultural heritage resources enhance the quality of recreational experiences and the potential for tourism.

4.1 Description of Recreation Values

Recreational activities vary significantly on the river, on the reservoirs, and within the urban centres. Therefore, this section is organized according to River-based Recreation, Reservoir-based Recreation and Urban-based Recreation rather than by specific activities.

Theme 1: River-Based Recreation

The South Saskatchewan River provides opportunities for canoeing and boating through a natural landscape which varies from grassland to boreal forest. Because of the depth of the river valley, the cultivated flatlands are generally not visible, and the river provides the user with a feeling of remoteness and association with nature.

Watercraft will be carried by the current when travelling downstream. There are ample opportunities to launch canoes at river-crossing sites, and there are no dangerous rapids or waterfalls. This makes the South Saskatchewan River ideal for novice canoeists to gain experience before tackling the more challenging wilderness canoeing opportunities in other regions. Boating on the rivers is a more difficult proposition because there are a limited number of launch sites, and boaters must continually avoid sandbars.

Angling occurs mainly at river-crossing sites due to the lack of public access and difficult terrain along most sections of the rivers. Hunting remains a popular recreational activity in the river valleys as well as snowmobiling during the winter, although use of the river itself is hazardous.

There are three regional parks on the South Saskatchewan River between the Alberta border and the City of Saskatoon that are not located on reservoirs. These parks provide recreational activities for local residents. Lemsford Ferry, Eston Riverside and Outlook and District Regional Parks have campsites, picnic areas, playgrounds, hiking and cross country ski trails in the attractive setting of the natural river valley. Eston Riverside and Outlook and District Regional parks also have swimming pools, serviced campsites, golf courses, and nature trails. They also provide access to the river for fishing and canoeing.

Pike Lake Provincial Park, located within a 30-minute drive south of Saskatoon in the South Saskatchewan flood plain, was developed to provide public recreation facilities near the city. Facilities include a swimming pool, water slide, campground, two beaches, picnic grounds, nine-hole golf course, nature trails and canoe and paddle boat rentals. The level of Pike Lake is maintained by a pumping station on the South Saskatchewan River.

Theme 2: Reservoir-Based Recreation

Dams built for hydro-electric power generation and other purposes have enhanced the potential of the rivers for recreation and tourism. The reservoirs have increased the diversity of experiences available to visitors.

Lake Diefenbaker, created by the construction of the Gardiner and Qu'Appelle Dams, has provided a large lake in western Saskatchewan where there were no other lakes of significant size with water quality suitable for recreation. Lake Diefenbaker is located within a one hour drive of Swift Current, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon and less than two hours from Regina.

Lake Diefenbaker is 225 km long with a surface area of 430 km². Because of the ever-present wind, it is considered to be the best lake for sailing in Western Canada. There are major marinas with sail boat moorings at Saskatchewan Landing on the west end and Elbow Harbour at the east end of the lake. There are also boat launches at Danielson and Douglas Provincial Parks and Cabri, Palliser and Herbert Ferry Regional Parks on the south side of Lake Diefenbaker and Prairie Lake Regional Park on the north side. Boating and fishing have made Lake Diefenbaker a popular tourist attraction.

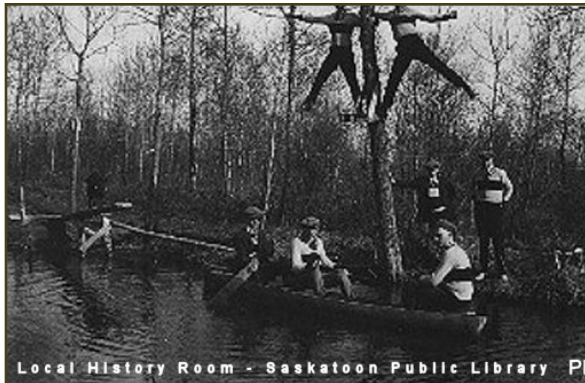


Figure 4.1. Seven Young Men Canoeing. 1920s. Saskatoon Local History Room. PH-96-24-9.

There are more than 800 km of sandy beaches on Lake Diefenbaker, making swimming and water skiing at all of the parks, cottage subdivisions and remote beaches are popular activities.

Saskatchewan Landing and Douglas Park are classified as Natural Environment Provincial Parks which provide large scenic natural areas for viewing their abundance of wildlife and native vegetation.

Interpretation of the cultural heritage of the river region is provided in the historic Goodwin House in Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park, and the history of the South Saskatchewan River Project is presented in the Gardiner Dam Visitor Centre in Danielson Provincial Park.

The Blackstrap Reservoir, located 40 minutes south of Saskatoon, was made possible by the creation of Lake Diefenbaker. The water level in the reservoir is maintained by a canal delivering water from Lake Diefenbaker. The main attractions are boating and fishing. Blackstrap Provincial Park is located on the east side of the reservoir.

The Saskatchewan River has two reservoirs developed for hydro-electric power generation. Both Tobin Lake and Codette Lake are located in the Boreal Transition ecoregion of eastern Saskatchewan where there are a number of other lakes with excellent recreation capability. Because Tobin and Codette Lakes are further removed from major population centres, they do not attract as many recreational users as Lake Diefenbaker.



Figure 4.2. Four Young Men Covered in Mud. Saskatoon Local History Room. LH-5247.

Tobin Lake is 60 km long and is widely known for its abundant large Northern Pike and Walleye fish. It attracts anglers from across Canada and the United States. Tobin Lake anglers have landed the record walleye at 18.2 pounds and the largest known Northern Pike at 38 pounds.

The Nipawin and District Regional Park, which features a full-service campground, 18-hole golf course, boat launch and trails for cross country skiing and snowmobiling, adds to the region's recreation and tourism potential.



Figure 4.3. Pike Lake (photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Parks)

Wapiti Valley Regional Park is located on Codette Lake and features a downhill ski facility with chairlift, a boat launch and dock on the reservoir, a campground, and cross country skiing and snowmobile trails.

Cumberland Lake in the Saskatchewan River Delta is shallow and has limited potential for recreation. However, the Cumberland House Provincial Historic Park provides interpretation of the historic community, including a display on the boilers of the Northcote steamboat. The abundance of wildlife in the marshes of the Saskatchewan River Delta is attractive for wildlife viewing and hunting.

Theme 3: Urban-Based Recreation

The Meewasin Valley Authority is dedicated to conserving the natural and cultural heritage resources of the South Saskatchewan River Valley in Saskatoon and immediate area. The Authority is supported by the Province of Saskatchewan, the City of Saskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan.



Figure 4.4. Saskatchewan Landing (photo courtesy of Sask Parks)

The Meewasin (a Cree word meaning “beautiful”) Valley Authority has jurisdiction over an area of approximately 60 km along the river from Pike Lake through the heart of Saskatoon to Clark’s Crossing northeast of the city. The Meewasin Valley Trail, which runs the length of the Authority, provides opportunities for cycling, jogging, cross country skiing and leisurely walks through landscaped parks and natural areas along the river banks. Programs focussing on river valley education, development and conservation are provided.

The weir across the South Saskatchewan River maintains a stable water level, ensuring a consistently attractive landscape within the City of Saskatoon. The weir is also a favourite fishing spot for local anglers.

There are a number of parks overlooking the river that provide picnic sites, sports facilities, playgrounds, memorials, public art works, and public washrooms.

Power boats are permitted on the river between the University and Idylwyld bridges and outside the city limits. This allows for activities such as waterskiing, tubing and wakeboarding. Saskatoon provides river boat tours during the summer months.

The parks along the river bank host many events that are major tourist attractions for the City of Saskatoon. These events include the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival, the Sasktel Saskatoon Jazz Festival, A Taste of Saskatchewan, the Saskatoon Dragon Boat Festival, and the Saskatoon Fireworks Festival.

Cranberry Flats and the Beaver Creek Conservation Areas provide a variety of opportunities to experience the natural heritage of the South Saskatchewan River Valley south of the City of Saskatoon. Beaver Creek provides outdoor educational programming for school children, displays and brochures about the area and a number of nature trails of various lengths. Cranberry Flats provides opportunities for viewing scenic landscapes, native prairie vegetation, animals and birds. During the winter, Beaver Creek is a popular skating, cross country skiing and snowshoeing area.



Figure 4.5. Moose in the Delta (photo courtesy of Ducks Unlimited Canada)

The Wanuskewin Heritage Park, 5 km north of Saskatoon, focuses on the interpretation of the cultural heritage of the area. Nineteen pre-Contact sites which were occupied by northern plains people featuring summer and winter campsites, bison kill sites, tipi rings, and a medicine wheel are located in the park. Visitors can participate in tipi-raising, outdoor bannock baking and guided walking tours. Traditional dances are performed daily during the summer. During the winter months, visitors can snowshoe on the trails.



Figure 4.6. Cyclist on the Trail (photo courtesy of Meewasin Valley Authority)

The towns of Outlook and Nipawin are partners in the Regional Park Authorities within their respective communities, and their citizens enjoy the amenities these parks provide (see previous section on River-based recreation and Reservoir-based recreation).

4.2 Assessment of Recreational Values

The South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities that are enhanced by the cultural and natural heritage resources of the rivers. These recreational values enhance the potential of the rivers to meet the selection and integrity guidelines of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

Selection Guidelines: Recreational Values.

Outstanding Canadian recreational value will be recognized when a river and its immediate environment possess a combination of river-related recreational opportunities and related cultural and/or natural values, which together provide an opportunity for outstanding recreational experiences.

Guideline: Recreation opportunities include water-based activities such as canoeing and other forms of boating, swimming and angling, and other activities such as camping, hiking, wildlife viewing and natural and cultural appreciation, which may be part of a river-touring experience.

The South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers provide excellent canoeing opportunities for novice canoeists within a scenic valley, and one which is representative of the natural environment prior to settlement and which has been lost to cultivation on the surrounding plains. Cultural heritage resources are readily accessible from the river including the Wanaskewin Heritage Park, Petite Ville Provincial Heritage Property and Battle of Tourond's Coulee/Fish Creek National Historic Site, the cultural landscape of the St. Laurent



Figure 4.7. Cranberry Flats



Figure 4.8. Wanaskewin Heritage Park (photo courtesy of Meewasin Valley Authority)

Settlement, the Batoche National Historic Site, the Forks of the South and North Saskatchewan Rivers and the site and remnants of the Hudson's Bay Company post and the Northcote steambot at Cumberland House.

The outstanding natural heritage resources that can be viewed while canoeing and boating include the natural vegetation of the Red Deer River Forks which includes habitat for rattlesnakes, spectacular numbers of waterfowl during migration at the west end of Lake Diefenbaker, the cliffs of the Swift Current Creek and possible sighting of Golden Eagles or Peregrine Falcons, native plant species of the Matador Grasslands, sand dunes in Douglas

Provincial Park, Beaver Creek and Cranberry Flats natural areas, cottonwood forest on Yorath Island and the unique natural features of the Saskatchewan River Delta.

Lake Diefenbaker, the reservoir created by the construction of the Gardiner and Qu'Appelle Dams, is an outstanding recreational resource in southwest Saskatchewan. Opportunities for boating, sailing, angling, swimming, and camping are popular here because of the proximity to major population centres.

Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park provides opportunities to interpret the grassland natural environment and cultural heritage features such as the Goodwin House Visitor Centre, tipi rings, a bison rubbing stone, homestead cellar depressions, remnants of the Battleford Trail, and the Heavy Haul Trail.

Within the urban setting of Saskatoon, the city and the Meewasin Valley Authority have undertaken programs and projects to protect the natural and cultural resources of the South Saskatchewan River Valley and preserve its scenic beauty.

The Saskatchewan River is less attractive for canoeing because the river is interrupted by two reservoirs. Tobin and Codette Lakes have flooded the natural river valley, but they attract anglers from distant locations because of their reputation for producing record-size Northern Pike and Walleye. Other water-based recreation opportunities such as boating and swimming are important to local residents.

Guideline: Natural values include visual aesthetics, and physical assets such as sufficient flow, navigability, rapids, accessibility and suitable shoreline.

The South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers are especially attractive from the valley walls or on the rivers because the steep slopes, native vegetation, and flowing water are in dramatic contrast to the adjacent uplands.

The rivers have sufficient flow and are navigable for canoeing, however they lack rapids which make them too tame for many expert canoeists. The shorelines are often difficult to access due to erosion and high banks along the river. However, they are usually high and dry, making them good locations for camping and hiking. Access to the rivers is usually possible only at river crossing sites and within provincial or regional parks.

4.2.1 Integrity Guidelines: Recreation Integrity Guidelines

In addition to meeting both of the recreation value guidelines, for a river to be judged as having outstanding Canadian recreational value, it must meet all of the following recreation integrity guidelines.

Guideline: The river possesses water of a quality suitable for contact recreational activities, including those recreational opportunities for which it is nominated;

Water quality in the South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers is monitored regularly for key contaminants including heavy metals, fecal coli forms, and ion concentrations. The water quality of the South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers meet all guidelines for water contact recreational activities.



Figure 4.9. Wildlife Viewing at Douglas Park (photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Parks)

Guideline: The river's visual appearance is capable of providing river travellers with a continuous natural experience, or a combined natural and cultural experience, without significant interruption by modern human intrusions;

Although Lake Diefenbaker floods 225 km of the South Saskatchewan River, more than 500 km of the river from the Alberta border to the Forks is not submerged. There are three distinctly different sections of the river that are not impacted significantly by human intrusions: the Mixed Grassland ecoregion from the Alberta border to Lake Diefenbaker; the Moist Mixed Grassland ecoregion from the Gardiner Dam to Saskatoon; and the Aspen Parkland ecoregion and the Boreal Transition ecoregion between Saskatoon and the Manitoba border.

The City of Saskatoon must be considered a modern human intrusion; however, the Meewasin Valley Authority has made a concerted effort to protect the river valley's natural values and improve the aesthetics of the riverbanks negatively affected by earlier urban developments.

The Saskatchewan River Delta near Cumberland House has been negatively impacted by the upstream reservoirs which have altered the river flow. The delta still provides a unique and diverse ecosystem of great interest to nature-oriented visitors. Visitors can also visit the Cumberland House Provincial Historic Park which displays the Hudson's Bay Company powder house and the boilers from the Northcote steamboat. A casual trip by canoe on the canals, which were developed in the 1930s to facilitate increased muskrat populations, provides excellent wildlife viewing, and hiking through the unique vegetation communities can be exhilarating.

Guideline: The river is capable of supporting recreational uses without significant loss, or impact on, its natural or cultural values or its visual character.

The natural and cultural resources of the South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers have been utilized well below their potential due largely to lack of promotion. Canoeing on these rivers has traditionally been ignored in favour of longer excursions on northern rivers. The South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers provide opportunities for day trips or weekend trips. Since the natural and cultural resources are under utilized, an increase in growth can be managed without impact.

Awareness has been steadily growing from both Saskatchewan and Alberta residents regarding the recreational value of the South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers and Lake Diefenbaker. The designation of the South Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan Rivers as a Canadian Heritage River will increase public awareness of their significance to the Province of Saskatchewan and increase tourism that will help develop a more sustainable economy for river related communities.

References

Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin. Canadian Heritage Rivers – South Saskatchewan & Saskatchewan River Background Document (Draft). 2009

About Meewasin <http://www.meewasin.com/about/>

Regional Parks Association <http://www.saskregionalparks.ca>

Provincial Parks <http://www.tpcs.gov.sk.ca/ParksGuide>