

WASKASOO PARK – THE CONSERVATION OF A UNIQUE NATURAL RESOURCE

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In Junie 1981 is 'n nuwe Provinsiale Stedelike Parke-program vir die stede Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Lloydminster en Medicine Hat in die Alberta-provinsie, Kanada, aangekondig.

Die doel van hierdie program is “die daarstelling van betekenisvolle oop ruimtes om aan die bevolking maklike toegang tot die natuurlike omgewing te verseker; asook die ontwikkeling van hierdie gebiede om sodoende volgehoue en onverminderde gebruik in die hand te werk”.

Ter verwesenliking van hierdie doel, is \$28 miljoen deur die “Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund” aan Red Deer toegesê vir die ontwikkeling van 'n groot stedelike park, om die stad en sy omstreke te bedien. Die fondse is beskikbaar vir beplanning, die aanskaffing van grond en kapitaalontwikkeling.

Uit die staanspoor, het die Provinsie die belangrikheid beklemtoon om die park op 'n omvattende manier te beplan. “Alberta Recreation and Parks” het gevolglik 'n

Meesterplan vir die park benodig, breedvoerig opgestel en goedgekeur, alvorens fondse beskikbaar gestel is vir grondaankope en ontwikkeling. Die Meesterplan moes die presiese grense van die park aandui, en riglyne vir die ontwikkeling en gebruik daarvan, vaslê.

Die voorbereiding van 'n Meesterplan vir die beoogde Waskasoo Park, is namens Red Deer deur die Stadsbeplanningsafdeling van die Streekbeplanningskommissie onderneem.

1. INTRODUCTION

A new Provincial Urban Parks Programme was announced in June 1981 for the Cities of Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Lloydminster and Medicine Hat in the Province of Alberta, Canada.

The goal of the Urban Parks Program is “the establishment of significant areas of open space to ensure populations have easy access to natural environments; and the development of these areas to enable their sustained and unimpaired use for outdoor recreation.”

In terms of this goal a sum of \$28 million was assigned to Red Deer from the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund for the development of a major urban park to serve the City and its region. These funds are available for planning, land acquisition and capital development.

From the outset, the Province stressed the importance of planning the park in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, Alberta Recreation and Parks required a detailed Master Plan for the park to be prepared and approved, before funds were made available for land acquisition and development. The Master Plan was required to outline the precise boundaries of the park and establish policies for its development and use.

The preparation of Master Plan for the newly named Waskasoo Park, was undertaken by the City Planning Section

of the Regional Planning Commission, on behalf of the City of Red Deer.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

From the outset one of the major planning principles was the involvement of the public in the planning process before final recommendations were made. The Planning Commission undertook an intensive four month phase of public participation during the preparation of the Master Plan. Different and contrasting views were expressed, but the overall support for the park concept and the acquisition and preservation of sensitive natural areas was virtually unanimous.

The various elements of the public participation programme included the following:

- Fifty thousand mail back questionnaires were circulated throughout the region, asking the public what facilities they would like to see included. A return of approximately 9% was received, which provided a clear statement of the public's priorities for the development of the park.
- Twenty five detailed briefs were submitted by special interest groups and individuals outlining suggestions in regard to how the park should be developed.
- More than 450 persons attended a series of public and group meetings, and thousands of written comments were received, and commented on.

The extent of the programme was unique for a city planning project in Red Deer and with the co-operation of the media resulted in the greatest response to any planning project in the City's history.

3. THE MASTER PLAN

The proposal is to create a major urban park along the Red Deer River and the Waskasoo and Piper Creeks as shown in Figure 1. It is planned to link existing park facilities and to protect and enhance the river valley, as well as to create new facilities to serve the future recreation needs of the population.

The park is planned to stretch 12 km along the river valley and comprise a total of approximately 1 000 ha. Of this area, 620 ha have to be acquired from the Provincial Government and private landowners.

It is recommended that the park be linked by a comprehensive bicycle/pedestrian trail system, which can also be used for cross country skiing in the winter months. Hiking trails are proposed in areas with physical and environmental restrictions. It is proposed that this trail system should focus on existing historical and environmental features within the area and that these be clearly identified and interpreted where possible.

Major features proposed within the park include:

- Fort Normandeau
This is the site of the first permanent

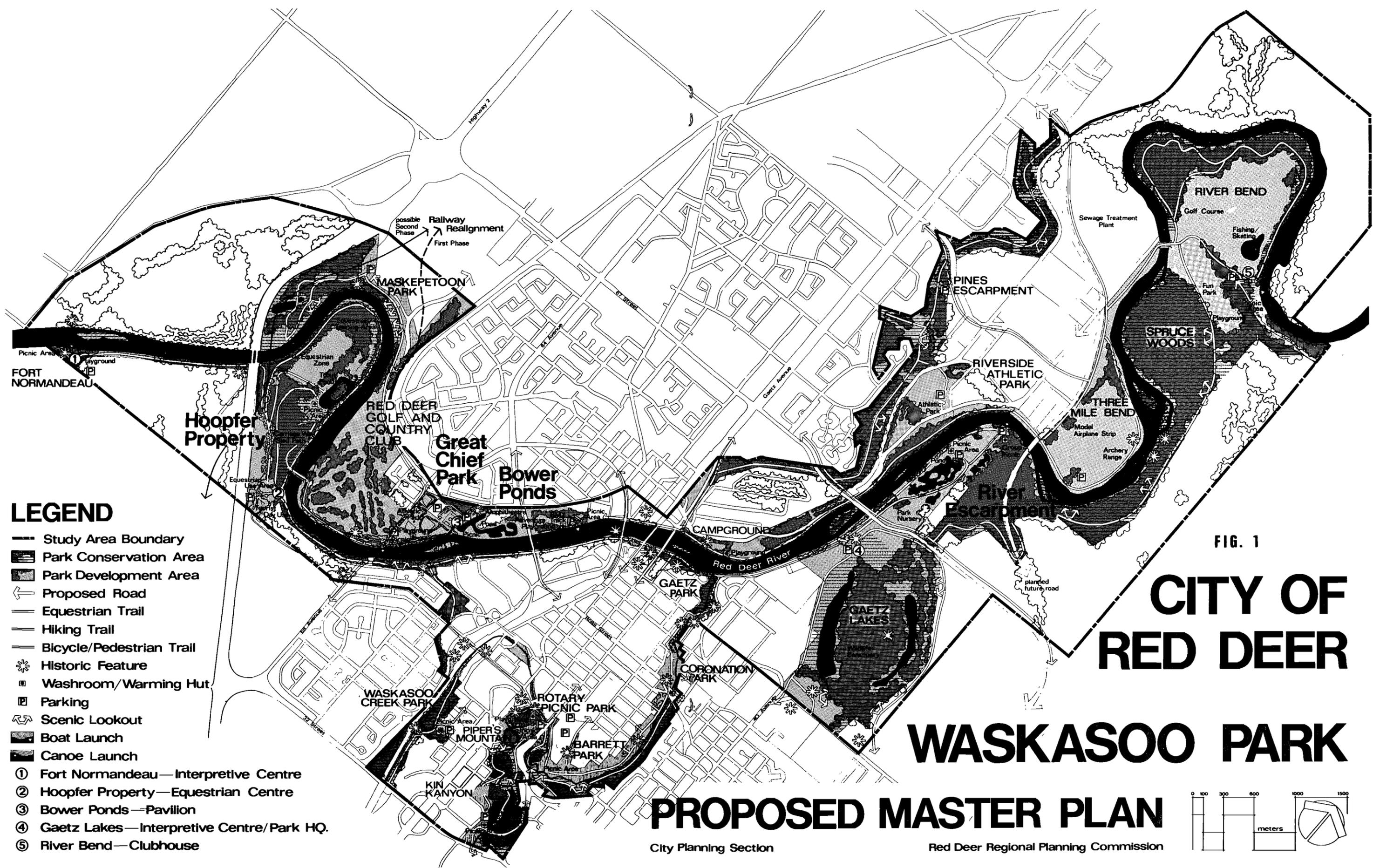


FIG. 1

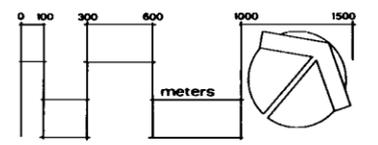
CITY OF RED DEER

WASKASOO PARK

PROPOSED MASTER PLAN

City Planning Section

Red Deer Regional Planning Commission



LEGEND

- Study Area Boundary
- ▨ Park Conservation Area
- ▨ Park Development Area
- ← Proposed Road
- Equestrian Trail
- Hiking Trail
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail
- ✻ Historic Feature
- Washroom/Warming Hut
- Parking
- ↖ Scenic Lookout
- ▨ Boat Launch
- ▨ Canoe Launch
- ① Fort Normandeau—Interpretive Centre
- ② Hooper Property—Equestrian Centre
- ③ Bower Ponds—Pavilion
- ④ Gaetz Lakes—Interpretive Centre/Park H.Q.
- ⑤ River Bend—Clubhouse

settlement in Central Alberta and the forerunner of the present City of Red Deer. It is planned to be developed primarily for historical interpretation in conjunction with the reconstructed Fort. Other facilities proposed include a day use picnic area and canoe launch along the river.

● **The Hoopfer Property**

This area includes a large 80 ha parcel of land in a loop of the river containing a variety of environments including forested escarpments and bottomlands, open fields and abandoned gravel pits. The upper portion of the area is planned to include an equestrian centre and gymkhana area, whereas the lower area along the river will include a major fishing lake surrounded by picnic areas and equestrian, bicycle and hiking trails. During winter, the area will be used extensively for cross country skiing and sled rides.

● **Maskepetoon Park**

This park unit includes a fairly unique bog vegetation community with a significant stand of tamarack forest. The area is designated for conservation purposes in the Master Plan and is planned to include a self guided nature interpretive trail down to the river.

● **Great Chief Park**

Great Chief Park is at present the City's major athletic park and includes baseball and fastball diamonds, playing fields and a picnic area along the river. It is proposed that these facilities be upgraded and linked with the proposed bicycle trail system. A new canoe launch is planned adjacent to the picnic area immediately upstream of the Cronquist Rapids.

● **Bower Ponds**

The Bower Ponds area includes a large man made trout pond used for fishing and canoeing during summer and skating during winter. The historic Cronquist House is a unique feature in the area and is the focus of the annual Folk Festival and Heritage Day celebrations. It is proposed that Bower Ponds be developed with a dock, boat launch, and pedestrian trails and bridges, as envisaged in the original development plan for the area. A pavilion is proposed along



LEGEND

- 1 TOURIST DAY USE
 - ENTRANCE ARCH
 - ASPHALT LOOP ROAD/BIKEWAY
 - 50 PARKING STALLS
 - 40 OVERFLOW PARKING STALLS
 - 30 PICNIC SITES
 - INFORMAL SOFTBALL DIAMOND
 - FREEPLAY/MINI SOCCER
 - TEXAS GATES
- 2 EQUESTRIAN/VISITORS CENTRE
 - TWO STOREY BUILDING WITH COURTYARD
 - FARMYARD PLAYGROUND
 - SERVICE ACCESS
- 3 MAINTENANCE/STORAGE AREA
- 4 STAIRWAY/OBSERVATION PLATFORM
- 5 EQUESTRIAN USE AREA
 - GYMKHANA
 - RIDING RING
 - CHUTES/TIE STALLS
 - STALLION CORRAL
 - MARE CORRAL
 - 15 PICNIC SITES
 - SPECTATORS SLOPE
- 6 EQUESTRIAN PARKING
 - 20 PARKING STALLS
 - PUBLIC CORRAL
 - PRIVATE CORRAL
- 7 BIKEWAY OVERPASS
- 8 CARRIAGE WAY/SLED PATH
- 9 BIKEWAY
- 10 CARRIAGE STATION
- 11 GROUP PICNIC SHELTER
- 12 TROUT POND
- 13 FISHING ISLAND
 - DOCK
 - BOARDWALK
 - BRIDGE
- 14 WINDMILL
 - WATERFALL/PLAY AREA
- 15 SLIDING HILL
- 16 PICNIC AREA/INTENSIVE LANDSCAPE
 - 25 PICNIC SITES
 - PEDESTRIAN LOOP TRAIL WITH RIVER VANTAGE POINTS
- 17 WASHROOM/WARMING HUT
- 18 NATURAL RECLAMATION AREA
- 19 INTERPRETIVE NODE
- 20 EQUESTRIAN TRAINING AREA
 - JUMPS
 - WATER COURSE
- 21 EQUESTRIAN ZONE
 - OPEN PASTURE
 - WOODED TRAILS
- 22 PIT PRIVY
- 23 CANOE LANDING
- 24 REGIONAL BIKEWAY
- 25 HILLSIDE TRAIL
- 26 REGIONAL TRAIL BRIDGE
- 27 POSSIBLE SECOND PHASE RAILWAY REALIGNMENT

FIG. 2

ILLUSTRATIVE HOOPFER PROPERTY



the water's edge including a skate change area, small concession and washroom facilities. In addition, it is recommended that the area surrounding Cronquist House be graded as a natural amphitheatre with a permanent stage extending out into the water. The disturbed area to the east of Taylor Bridge is planned to include an adventure park, BMX track and a launching area for power boats in summer and snowmobiles in winter.

- Waskasoo and Piper Creeks

The park areas along Waskasoo and Piper Creeks include a variety of natural environments and recreation facilities. It is proposed that these be linked by bicycle/pedestrian trails to form an integrated open space system connected directly to the river valley recreation areas.

- Lion's Campground

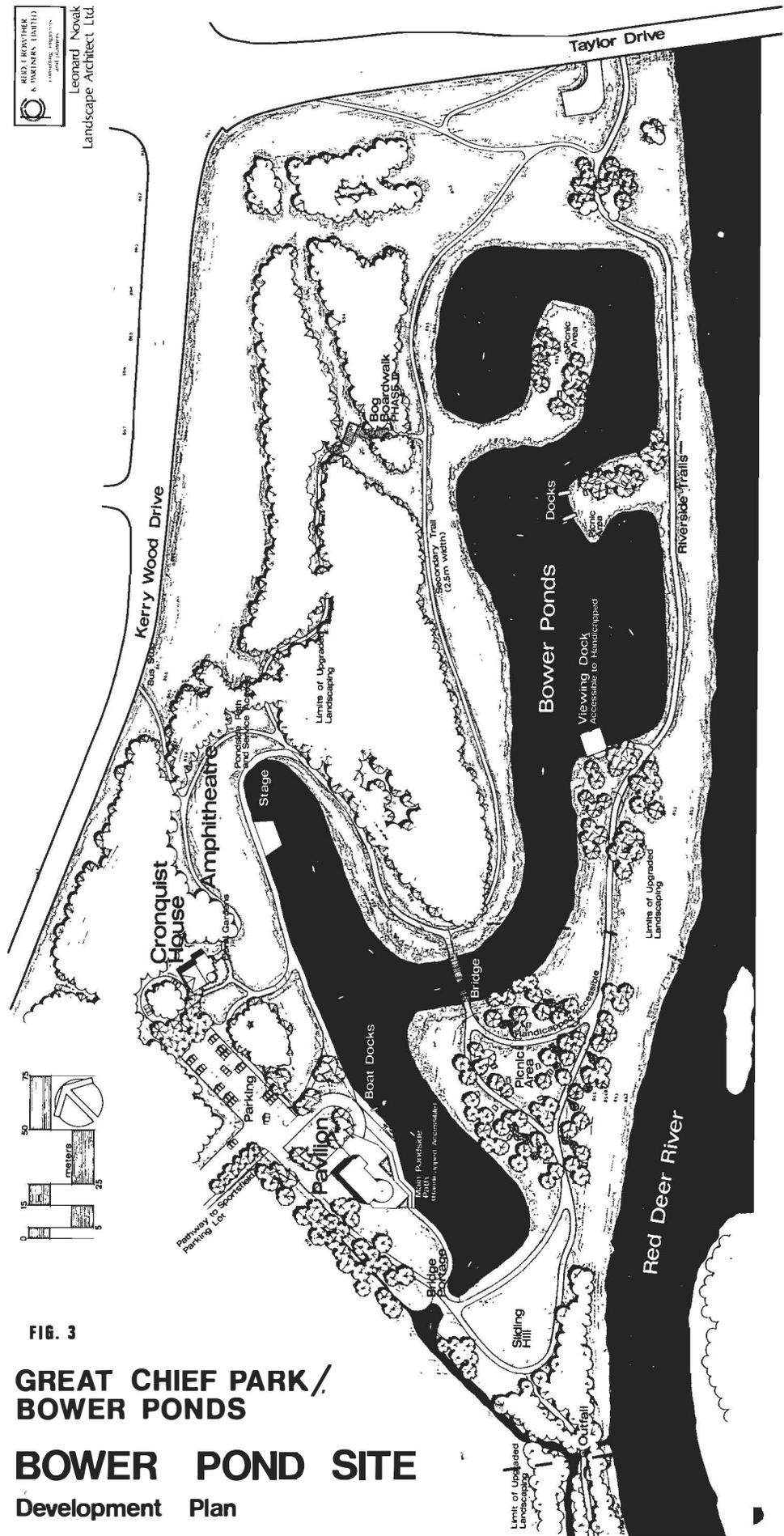
The existing campground in this area comprises approximately 100 sites in an attractive natural setting along the river. It is proposed that the facilities in this area be upgraded and expanded as a major campground and tourist attraction.

- Gaetz Lakes

The Gaetz Lakes area is an important wildlife habitat of approximately 80 ha, including a wide variety of vegetation communities. These include stands of climax white spruce and mixed wood along the escarpments and poplar and deciduous slough vegetation communities in the lowlands surrounding the oxbow lakes. A large portion of the area, which was formerly owned by the Provincial Government is a proclaimed Bird Sanctuary. It is proposed that this area be retained primarily for conservation purposes with a minimum of development. A nature interpretive centre is planned on the periphery, from which the Sanctuary and its relation to the river will be interpreted. The historic Allen Bungalow on a site along the river is planned to be renovated as the park headquarters.

- River Escarpment

This area to the north of the Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary includes forested escarpments, a low lying area of disused gravel pits and the City's former sanitary landfill site along the



historical and natural history interpretation within the park system.

Both these plans are well advanced and it is anticipated that they will be completed in August this year.

- **Detail Design:-**

During 1982 consultants were appointed to prepare detailed development plans for all portions of the park in City ownership. Consultant teams were selected on the basis of previous experience and expertise in various forms of park design. In general, each design team includes a landscape architect, an engineer, an architect and in some cases a display designer.

Construction of the overall trail system was begun during 1982 and 20 km of bicycle/pedestrian and hiking trails have already been constructed, at a cost of approximately \$500,000. The capital development

budget for 1983 is approximately \$7,000,000, which includes provision for the completion of the following major park nodes:

- The Hoopfer Property (Figure 2)
- Great Chief Park/Bower Ponds (Figure 3)
- River Escarpment (Figure 4)

5. CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult for those involved to evaluate the merits of the Waskasoo Park Master Plan. In general, however, the plan has been extremely well accepted by the Red Deer community as illustrated in the following quote from an editorial in the Red Deer Advocate:

“Today is a day of praise.

For the planners and the Urban Park Committee who have done a superb job in preparing a blueprint for park development. Their planning has been characterized by

openness and a successful effort to ensure public involvement in planning. Leadership was provided, but at the same time the park represents the proposals of many groups and individuals. The final plan reflects the concerns and needs of the community expressed through public meetings and a survey. Not everyone will be completely satisfied but no one can say they were ignored.

The handling of park planning should serve as a model for others considering public projects. By sharing information openly and seeking public participation at every stage, planners succeeded in responding to the needs of the community”.