



Weaselhead/Glenmore Park SWCRR Impact Study

Social Study January 2017 – August 2017

Year 2 conditions

Author: Briannah Mollison-Read, BA (Anthropology and Geography)

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I INTRODUCTION

The South West Calgary Ring Road (SWCRR) construction phase started in fall 2016. The Weaselhead Natural Environment Park (the Weaselhead), one of Calgary's most biodiverse and well-used urban parks, 245ha in size, lies directly east of the Elbow River Crossing section of the SWCRR. This project's EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment, 2006, updated in 2015) predicts moderate short-term effects on recreational users 'related to sensory disturbance resulting from construction activities', and negligible (positive) effects upon completion owing to improved access to the area.

In this context, the Weaselhead/Glenmore Park Preservation Society initiated the SWCRR Impact Study, of which this report is a part. It details the results of the Social Study component and deals with the social value of the park to user groups and individual park-users. This Study will be continued throughout the SWCRR construction phase and into the operational phase (post 2020). The objective of the Social Study is to quantify the impact of the SWCRR on the services provided by the Weaselhead to the community, establish the validity of the EIA predictions, and provide objective data upon which to base any requests for additional mitigation measures to be included in the Elbow River Crossing

The results of the first year of the social study component of the Impact Study are available in the report *"Social Study Aug 2016 to January 2017 – baseline conditions"* (author Briannah Mollison-Read). This is the second year of the SWCRR Impact Study and contains data collected in 2017. Data collection will continue during construction of the SWCRR and once it is operational to quantify changes in park use, for example specific types of activity may increase or decrease over time, and/or how the visitor experiences the park change. It is anticipated that any changes observed may be tied to changes in the local environment and ecology (e.g. fewer bird-watchers in response to loss of bird diversity, changes in patterns of use in response to increased noise).

Environmental change is being monitored by the Society in addition to changes in social use. Results of the biophysical monitoring are presented in companion reports: *"Environmental Monitoring Report 2016: baseline conditions"* and *"Environmental Monitoring Report 2017"* (author: Cassiano Porto).

II METHOD

The South West Calgary Ring Road (SWCRR) Social Study is comprised of 2 different surveys: a participant survey, and a non-participant observation survey. They are explained below:

During the summer months when the park is busy, one person records the non-participant observation and one does the participant surveys. During the winter months when the park sees fewer visitors, the participant and non-participant observation are completed by one person.

Participant Survey:

The participant survey contains a total of 18 questions. Its purpose is to help understand the social value of Weaselhead and what attracts visitors to the park. This survey gathers qualitative data through a variety of question types including multiple-choice, short answer, yes/no questions, and scale questions.

The survey is conducted year round in the park, by Weaselhead staff and volunteers. Summer surveying months are May/June/July/August/September/October. Winter surveying months are November/December/January/February/March/April.

Weaselhead staff stands at the locations described below (see Figure 1 and 2) with paper copies of the survey, and ask passersby if they are interested in answering questions about their use of the park. The survey is administered and recorded by Weaselhead staff. All survey data are later compiled into a master-list on an Excel spreadsheet.

Summer Surveying:

- There are three distinct locations for summer surveying:
 - Two locations are on the main paved, multi-use pathway:
 - Location (A): Beaver Pond bench, west side of the valley
 - Location (B): benches at the notice board just south of the green bridge, east side of the valley
 - One location is on one of the unpaved trails:
 - Location (C): beaver lagoon bridge
- The survey is conducted each month for a total of 14 hours. These hours are divided as follows: 7 hours for weekend surveying, and 7 hours for weekday surveying. Each surveying shift is no longer than 3.5 hours at a time, between the hours of 10a.m. and 2p.m.

Winter surveying:

- There are two locations for winter surveying:
 - The main paved, multi-use pathway, anywhere between the two bridges.
 - The trail system, anywhere along the Elbow River trail, or Beaver Lagoon trail.
- Due to fewer hours of daylight and much colder weather in winter, the survey differs slightly from that undertaken in the summer. The survey is conducted each winter month for a total of 14 hours. These hours are divided as such: 7 hours for weekend surveying, and 7 hours for weekday survey. Each surveying shift is no longer than 3.5 hours between the extended hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Rather than staying in one particular spot for the duration of a shift, the surveyors are encouraged to move around and collect data from as many park-users as possible. Surveyors are not required to survey for the entire 3.5 hour duration of their shift if the weather is extremely cold.

Non-Participant Survey:

The non-participant observation records the number of people participating in specific activities in the park. The survey gathers quantitative data through a simple tally record.

The survey is conducted year round in the park by Weaselhead staff and volunteers. Summer surveying months are May/June/July/August/September/October. Winter surveying months are November/December/January/February/March/April.

Summer surveying:

- There are three distinct locations for summer surveying (see fig. 1)
 - Two locations are on the main paved, multi-use pathway:
 - Location (A)- Beaver Pond bench,
 - Location (B)- benches at the notice board just south of the green bridge.
 - One location is on the trail
 - Location (C)- Beaver Lagoon bridge
- The survey is conducted each month for a total of 14 hours. These hours are divided as such: 7 hours for weekend surveying, and 7 hours for weekday survey. Each surveying shift is no longer than 3.5 hours at a time, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Winter surveying:

- There are two locations for winter surveying (see fig. 2):
 - The main paved multi-use pathway, anywhere between the two bridges.
 - The trail system, anywhere along the Elbow river trail, or Beaver Lagoon trail.

Due to fewer hours of daylight and much colder weather in winter, the survey differs slightly from that undertaken in the summer: The survey is conducted each month for a total of 14 hours. These hours are divided as such: 7 hours for weekend surveying, and 7 hours for weekday survey. Each surveying shift is no longer than 3.5 hours between the extended hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Rather than staying in one particular spot for the duration of the survey, the surveyors are encouraged to move around and to collect data from as many park-users as possible. Surveyors are not required to survey for the entire 3.5 hour duration of their shift if the weather is extremely cold.

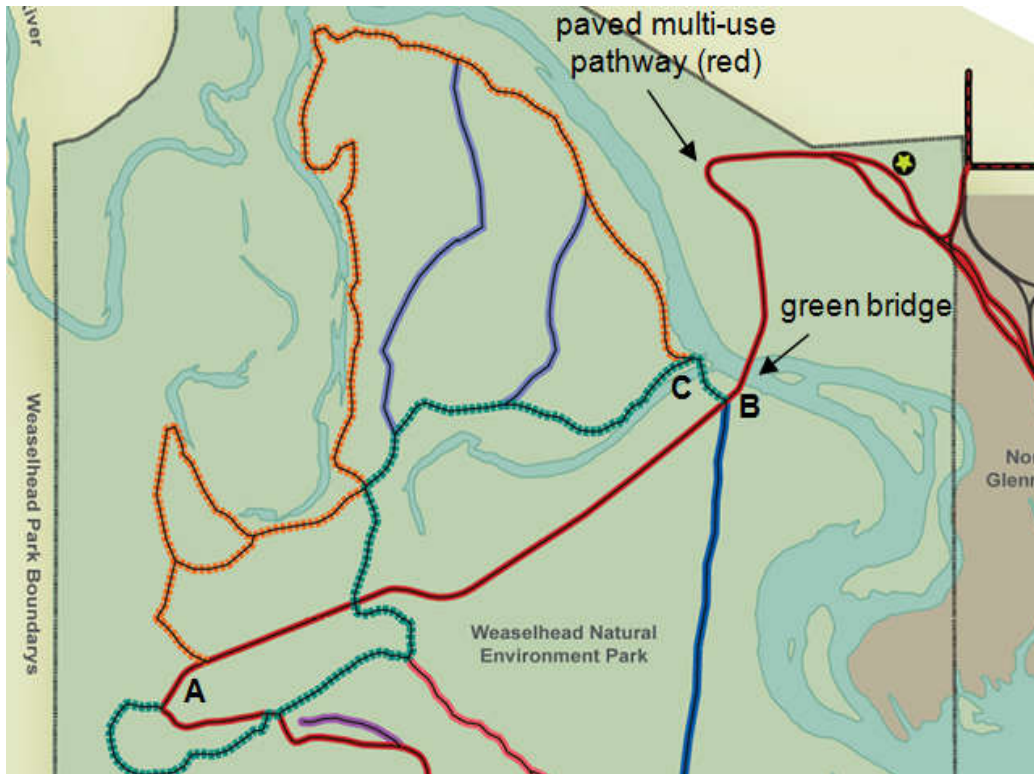


Fig. 1 – location of surveys in summer (scale: from west to east park boundary is 1.6km)

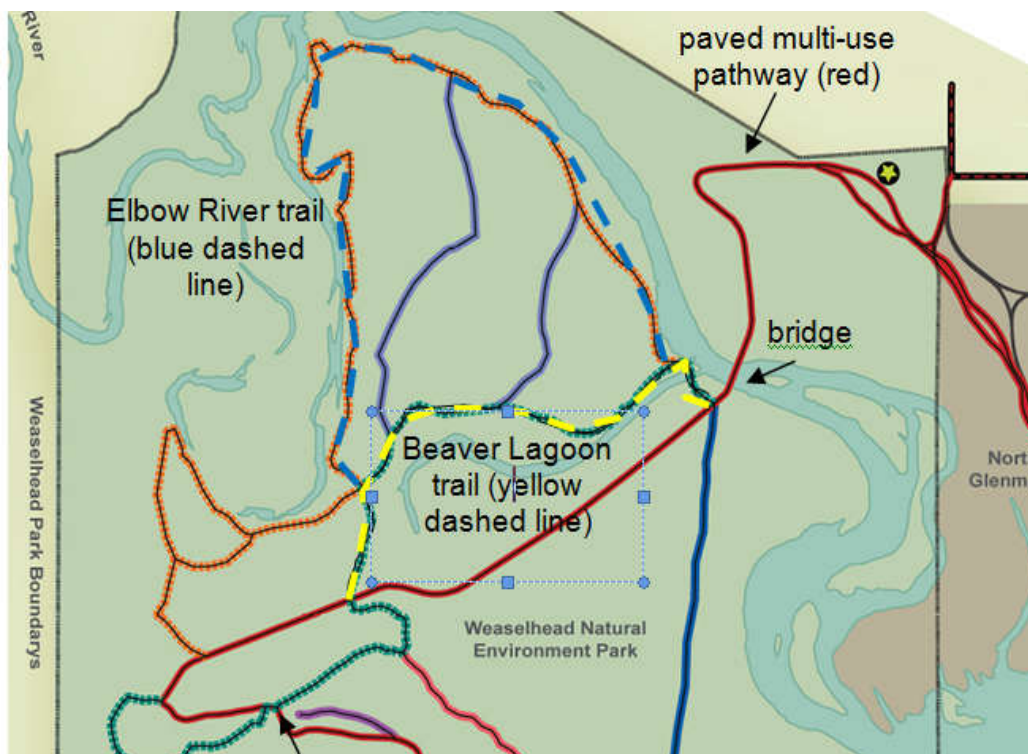


Fig. 2 locations of survey in winter (scale: from west to east park boundary is 1.6km)

Number of surveys completed (January 2017 to August 2017) , Tables 1 and 2

- Individual participant surveys collected: 225
- Non-participant observation surveys recorded: 34

Winter Months		
Participant Survey dates	Time (3.5 hours max, within this time frame)	Non- Participant Survey Dates
January 9	9 am – 4 pm	January 9
January 21	9 am – 4 pm	January 21
January 22	9 am – 4 pm	January 22
January 26	9 am – 4 pm	January 26
January 28	9 am – 4 pm	January 28
February 9	9 am – 4 pm	February 12
February 12	9 am – 4 pm	February 13
February 13	9 am – 4 pm	February 26
February 26	9 am – 4 pm	
March 13	9 am – 4 pm	March 13
March 20	9 am – 4 pm	March 20
March 26	9 am – 4 pm	March 26
March 27	9 am – 4 pm	March 27
March 30	9 am – 4 pm	March 30
April 9	9 am – 4 pm	April 9
April 14	9 am – 4 pm	April 14
April 17	9 am – 4 pm	April 17
April 22	9 am – 4 pm	April 22
April 28	9 am – 4 pm	April 28
	9 am – 4 pm	April 29

Table 1: Completed 2017 winter survey dates for both participant and non-participant surveys. Note that the dates for both surveys are not always identical, some days both surveys were conducted and some days only one was conducted.

Summer Months		
Dates	Time (3.5 hours max, within this time frame)	Non-Participant Survey Dates
May 15	10 am- 2 pm	May 15
May 16	10 am- 2 pm	May 16
May 28	10 am- 2 pm	May 22
May 29	10 am- 2 pm	May 24
May 30	10 am- 2 pm	May 28
May 31	10 am- 2 pm	May 30
June 7	10 am- 2 pm	June 5
June 18	10 am- 2 pm	June 14
	10 am- 2 pm	June 18
	10 am- 2 pm	June 28
July 18	10 am- 2 pm	July 15
July 22	10 am- 2 pm	July 31
July 31	10 am- 2 pm	
August 11	10 am- 2 pm	August 3
August 17	10 am- 2 pm	August 13
		August 14

Table 2: Completed 2017 summer survey dates for both participant and non-participant surveys. Note that the dates for both surveys are not always identical, some days both surveys were conducted and some days only one was conducted.

III RESULTS

The results section is separated into participant survey results, and non-participant survey results.

Participant Survey

From January 1st 2017 to August 31st 2017, a total of 225 participant surveys were conducted.

The data below examine the percentage of people in particular categories by using data from the total number of surveys with that particular information filled in, i.e. although we have 225 total surveys completed, not all data points and questions were filled in or answered.

The people who participated in this survey were all pedestrians (i.e. cyclists, roller-bladers etc. are not included) and the following results therefore only represent this sub-set of park-users.

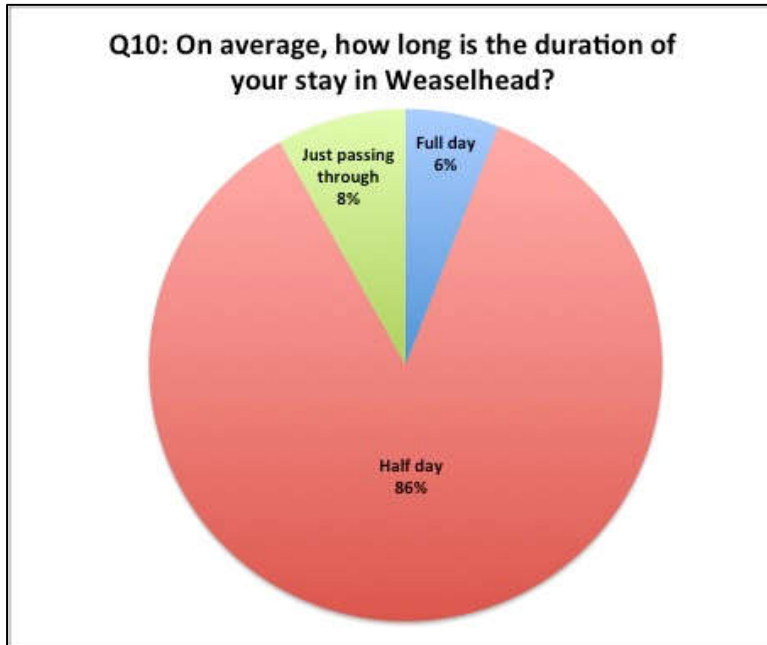
Responses to Factual Questions:

- Just over half the visitors surveyed (53%) were between the ages of 25-50; 39% were 50 years of age and older, and 8% were under 25 years of age.
- 40% of survey respondents were female, 36% male, and 24% were male and female who were surveyed together.
- 30% of people visit the park multiple times a month, 27% visit multiple times a week, 25% visit a couple of times a year. For 15% of people, it was their first visit ever or first visit in the last 12 months. 3% visit every day.



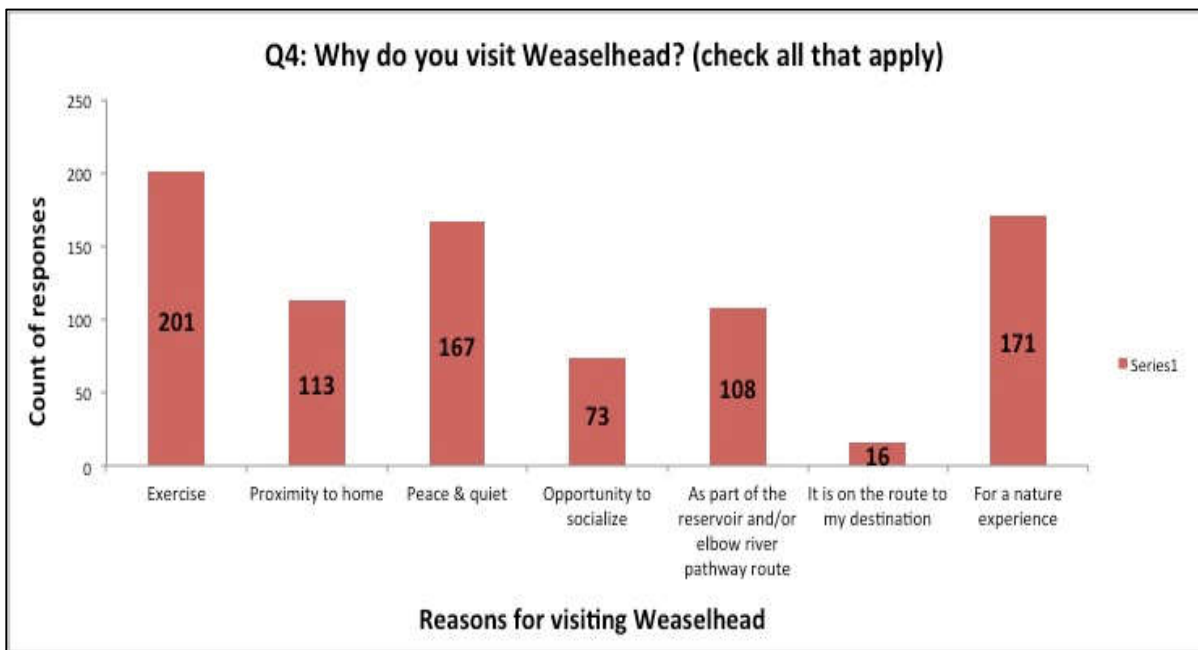
- Respondents came from 85 different neighbourhoods in Calgary (out of a total of 198), especially from communities near the Weaselhead such as Lakeview, Signal Hill, Marda Loop, Glamorgan, Oakridge, and Killarney. There were 58 neighborhoods from which only one survey was obtained. 12 surveys were completed by visitors from elsewhere in Alberta, Canada or overseas.
- Most people arrive at Weaselhead by car (80%) or by walking (15%). Only (5%) arrive by bike.
- 90% of respondents used the paved path (unsurprising as it is the main route into the park) and 84% used the walking/hiking trails. Fewer people (56%) used the areas by the river.

- Most respondents (86%) visited the park for half-days (1-3 hours); 8% were just passing through (less than 1 hour), and 6% expected to stay for a full day (3+ hours).

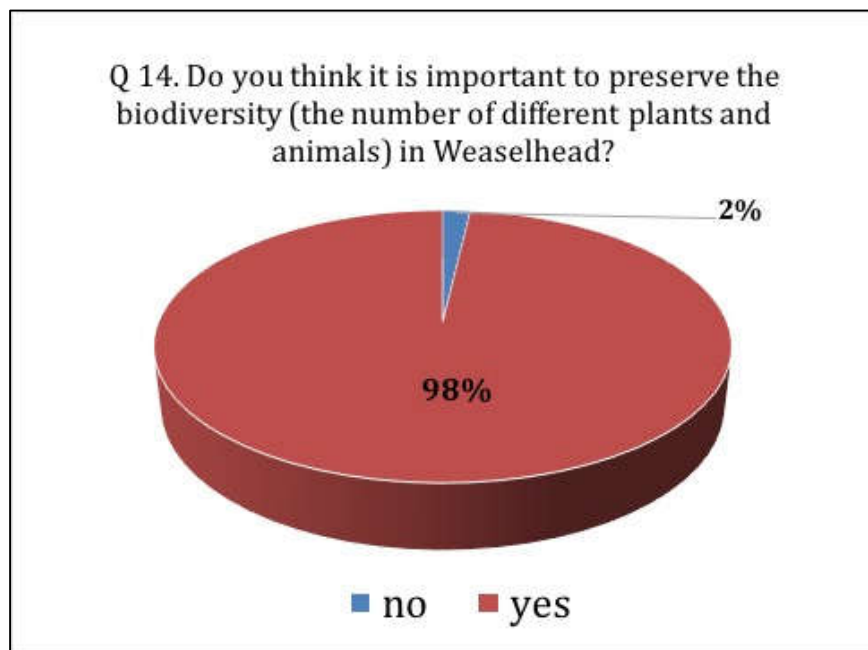


Responses to Questions about Opinions:

- Survey question # 4 asks participants to check all the reasons they come to Weaselhead. The top 3 reasons for visiting Weaselhead include *Exercise*, a *Nature Experience*, and *Peace and Quiet*. The least checked activity is “it is on the route to my destination.”



- Participants were asked if their personal nature experience has changed since they first started visiting the park. Many similar answers can be grouped together that relate to: (1) the paved path as a positive addition to the park, (2) construction of the Ring Road including the noise of construction, (3) the park getting busier with people, (4) the trail system, including greater exploration and use of it, (5) the increased use of the park by cyclists.
- On a scale of 1-4 (1 being low, and 4 being high), the majority of respondents found noise levels fall between 1 and 2.
- On a scale of 1-4 (1 being low, and 4 being high), the majority of respondents found the level of busyness between 1 and 2.
- On a scale of 1-4 (1 being low, and 4 being high), the majority of respondents indicated satisfaction with their park experience on the day of the survey as a '4', which is 'very satisfied'.
- When asked if respondents think it is important to preserve the biodiversity in Weaselhead 98% said 'yes'



- When asked about the Ring Road, most believe it will have a negative impact with respect to their experience and usage of the park (59%). The next highest percent was the 'not sure' category (28%).
- When asked how Weaselhead Park compares to other parks that participants use in the city the responses were varied, but groupings with similar responses include: (1) more 'wild' or 'natural' (2) the park is large in size, (3) has more wildlife (4) is 'secluded or quieter', and (5) 'feels like you are out of the city'.
- When asked what people liked least about Weaselhead, most responses fell within the following categories: (1) 'nothing' or 'no complaints', (2) cyclists and bikes - speeding,

and not using bell or signaling, (3) crowded or busy- especially on weekends, (4) dog poop, (5) construction and construction noise.

- When asked what they liked most about Weaselhead, most replies fell within the following categories. (1) nature and natural environment (2) peace and quiet (3) ‘doesn’t feel like you’re in the city’ (4) birds (5) trails (6) trees and forest.

Non-participant Observational Surveys

Table 3 shows the total number of people observed engaged in different activities in the park, and the survey date on which the largest number of people carrying out each activity was recorded. The totals include numbers of adults, children and number of individuals in groups summed together (e.g. a birding group recorded as 1x22 means that the 22 individuals are counted and added to the numbers displayed below.)

Table 4 below summarizes the total number of individual park-users engaged in winter and summer specific activities, as well as any activities listed as ‘other’.

Table 5 shows the number of on-leash and off-leash dogs observed.

Activity	Total number of individuals recorded	Date of highest recorded number
Walking/hiking	2179	April 22, 2017
Biking	2312	May 22, 2017
Jogging	504	April 22, 2017
Dog walking	249	January 28, 2017 & April 14, 2017
Bird Watching	124	March 30, 2017
Photography	36	January 26, 2017

Table 3: Activities and park-users – dates of highest recorded numbers taking part in each activity: (Dates from January 2017 - August 2017)

Summer specific activities	
Activity	Total number of individuals recorded
Skateboarding	5
Rollerblading	23
Fishing	11
Canoe/kayaking	22

Winter specific activities:	
Activity	Total number of individuals recorded
Skiing	3
Snowshoeing	4
Other activities recorded	
Activity	Total number of individuals recorded
Fat biking	5
Swimming	3
Scooter	3

Table 4: Number of people engaged in specific summer and winter activities

Off-leash dogs	33
On-leash dogs	244

Table 5: Off-leash vs. on-leash dogs (dates from January 2017 – August 2017)

IV PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM 2017 DATA

- People regularly travel considerable distances from across Calgary to visit and make use of the Weaselhead.
- For most people visiting the park it is their final destination – i.e. they are not simply passing through – and almost all visitors spend at least a couple of hours in the park when they visit.
- About one third of visitors to the park are cyclists. *(Note: no bike-racks are provided in the parking lot or in the park itself. For those who cycle to the park and wish to use the hiking trails, it means they either have to walk the trails pushing their bike, leave their bike unlocked and unattended, or stay on the main paved multi-use pathway. Some disregard park rules and bike on the trails.)*
- A significant percentage (28%) of people surveyed were ‘not sure’ whether or not the Ring Road will have an impact on the Park. This may indicate that in spite of the public consultation carried out in connection with the project, people still do not have enough information about the location, scale or proposed design of the project.
- ‘Peace and quiet’ ‘exercise’ and ‘a nature experience’ are the main reasons people give for choosing to visit the Weaselhead. This is consistent with the perception that compared to other parks, the Weaselhead is relatively large (affording the opportunity to be alone) and is ‘natural’.

- People value the accessibility of the Park and its proximity to where they live. It provides an alternative to visiting more distant ‘natural’ locations such as Kananaski, especially to those with limited time or money for longer trips.
- While park-users have some minor concerns and dislikes, general satisfaction with the park and with the experience when visiting it is very high.

V COMPARING RESULTS FROM 2016 WITH THOSE FROM 2017

In 2016, before the SWCRR construction began, baseline data from these surveys was collected. Generally the data collected in 2017 show slight change from the data collected in 2016 apart from those discussed below.

The most obvious change is the frequency with which respondents mention the ring road, or its construction. **Question 5** asks, “*Compared to when you first started visiting the park, has your specific nature experience changed, and if so how?*” Table 6 below indicates the responses to the ‘how’ portion of the question by examining individual mentions of the words ‘construction’ ‘ring road’ ‘SWRR’ and ‘noise.’

	2016	2017
Individual mentions of the words ‘construction’ ‘ring road’ ‘SWRR’ ‘noise’ excluding redundancies	3 out of 102 (2.94%)	14 out of 100 (14%)

Table 6: Higher instances in 2017 of people explicitly mentioning the construction related to the SWRR as it relates to their own nature experience in the park.

While the number of individual instances of respondents mentioning this topic is quite low (14 out of 100), when compared with the individual mentions from 2016 (3 out of 102) it is still an increase of 11 individual and unique mentions. This is largely unsurprising as earth-moving and grading operations began in 2017 and were easily heard throughout the park.

Questions 18 asks “What do you enjoy *least* about Weaselhead?” Table 7 below indicates the responses to the question by examining individual mentions of the words ‘construction’ ‘ring road’ ‘SWRR’ and ‘noise’ as well as the word ‘nothing’.

	2016 (N=207)	2017 (N=194)
Individual mentions of the words ‘construction’ ‘ring road’ ‘noise’ ‘SWRR’ - excluding redundancies	8 (3.86%)	20 (10.30%)
Individual mentions of ‘nothing’ -excluding redundancies	83 (40.01%)	37 (19.07%)

Table 7: Slight increase in the number of people in 2017 explicitly mentioning construction as something they like least about the park compared to 2016. Much higher percentage of people mentioning ‘nothing’ i.e. they have nothing to complain about/nothing they don’t like in 2016 than in 2017.

In 2016, there were 8 individual mentions of the words ‘construction’ ‘ring road’ ‘SWRR’ and ‘noise’ while in 2017 there were 20. This is a slight increase in respondents noticing the noise,

and the SWRR related construction. The more noticeable change is the mention of the word 'nothing'. In 2016, when asked "What do you like *least* about Weaselhead?" 40% of respondents said 'nothing', indicating that they enjoyed their time at Weaselhead and/or have no complaints about the park. When asked the same question in 2017, only 19% of respondents said 'nothing'. This is a change of 21%.

While it is unclear exactly what caused this change, or if there is a particular grievance or an overall change in their experience, it will be important to track this question (question 18) and its response in future survey data. Other 2017 survey data indicates that people visit Weaselhead for peace and quiet and a nature experience, and what they like best about Weaselhead is the natural environment, birds and wildlife. If the ring road construction affects park-user experience as it relates to these specific categories, the qualitative responses to this question will be important to monitor in relation to question 5 listed above "*Compared to when you first started visiting the park, has your specific nature experience changed, and if so how?*"

VI LIMITATIONS

- Both the participant and non-participant surveys are conducted by the Weaselhead/Glenmore Preservation Park Society staff. This means the surveys are subject to the time constraints of Society schedules and some months have more survey hours than others. In the summer months when staff takes vacation, survey hours cannot always be filled.
- Surveying is also subject to weather conditions. In the winter months if the weather is too cold, surveys can be cut short, or not conducted at all. Survey hours are rescheduled, but not always filled.
- Not all surveys are filled out completely or correctly and not all respondents choose to answer the questions.
- Observers ask the respondents the survey questions out loud and write down their answers. Respondents may be more or less willing to share their experience as opposed to them writing down the answers to the questions themselves.
- The majority of this data is collected from pedestrians. Observers do not stop cyclists, rollerblades or those on the water to complete participant surveys. Sometimes, groups (e.g. birding groups, school groups, event holders) are open to talking with observers, but other times are unable to talk due to time constraints.
- Weaselhead is used very differently in the summer versus the winter but survey questions are typically asked as an average of both seasons. *(It could be useful to identify seasonal considerations: "do you prefer to visit Weaselhead in the summer, or winter months? Why or why not?" or "what could be improved in the winter or summer months to encourage you to visit more often?" These types of questions directly relate to possible*

reasons why a person visits or does not visit based on what the park offers them for their chosen activity.)

VII QUOTES FROM SURVEY RESPONDENTS

225 surveys conducted throughout the 2017 season of surveying at Weaselhead Park collected some insightful, intriguing and sometimes humorous responses from a variety of park users. The Social Study is largely a qualitative survey, relying on the opinions and personal views of its respondents. This section highlights those personal thoughts and opinions of those who have generously shared them with us:

Question: Why do you visit Weaselhead, what specific nature experience?

- “Just like being here, in the woods”
- “Animals that won't attack me”
- “Birds, smells, back in nature”
- “Not bears”
- “The park itself”

Question: How has your specific nature experience changed?

- “Every time is new - discover things in nature”
- “Coming 40 years. Little easier to explore- more trails”
- “Volunteered a few times and that changed perspective. Look closer at things”
- “Didn't know trails existed”
- “More populated, better maintained (pathways), ringroad hurts”
- “Lusher”
- “Don't want it to change with road”

Question: Why is it important to you to preserve the biodiversity in Weaselhead?

- “Diversity, love it, variety is spice of life”
- “Oasis from concrete jungle city”
- “Bird watchers, such a beautiful area in the city easily accessible, similar to going much further afield”
- “It's important. Weaselhead is a little piece of untouched heaven in city”
- “Because cities need parks that bring natural experience to all ages. We need parks!”
- “Only so many places you can go for peace”
- “Important for children to experience nature. Once it's gone, it's gone”
- “Love to see this remain raw”

Question: How does Weaselhead compare to other parks you regularly visit in Calgary?

- “More nature, more bugs, more birds, more quiet”

- “The Weaselhead is a lot of different landscapes all together”
- “Weaselhead is more relaxed, more wild area”

Question: What do you like *least* about Weaselhead?

- “Aggressive birders”
- “The mud!”
- “Walking up the hill”
- “Swallowing bugs while riding. Nothing, it's great”
- “Kids!”
- “How far away it is, nothing else”
- “The chance to see a bear”
- “Hits all the notes”
- “Love it as is”
- “Thistles!!”
- “Other humans”

Question: What do you like *most* about Weaselhead?

- “Walking, listening to birds, everything”
- “Getting away. Oasis in sea of noise”
- “Piece of Kananaskis in the city, might as well be 1000 km away”
- “Woods in the city. Paradise”
- “Sense of wild, doesn't feel like a park”
- “Hooting with owls, all the animals”
- “Quiet, wind in the trees”
- “In city of 1 million people you don't feel like it”
- “It's wild”
- “Listening to the birds”
- “The bugs! The river! The swallows! The birds! The geocaching”
- “It's my happy place. Day before daughter was born I walked around park to induce labour. Got to look out over park from Rockyview hospital next day on birthday. Now 30 years later, walk around with my daughter and her kids. Becomes entrenched in who you are. We all need this for our souls”
- “I can get lost in here! Can be in nature so quickly and enjoy all the things you can see/hear/smell”
- “Filled with positive vibes”
- “Nude beach, variety of landscape, surveys- active participation!”
- “Nice tight asses of male bikers that come through”
- “Darn nice! Wildness, close to water, got everything going for it”
- “The quiet, the flora, fauna, the variety of folks using the park”