



Weaselhead/Glenmore Park
SWCRR Impact Study
Social Study Aug 2016 – Jan 2017: baseline conditions

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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 lies directly east of the Elbow River Crossing section of the SWCRR. This project's EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment, 2006, updated 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

This first report (containing data collected in 2016 and Jan 2017) is of particular importance because it describes conditions in the study area prior to the landscape alterations that will take place during and following construction of the SWCRR. Together with data from visitor surveys carried out prior to 2016 provided by the City of Calgary, this information will be used to establish baseline conditions prior to disturbance. Data will be collected during construction of the SWCRR and once it is operational to quantify changes in park use e.g. specific types of activity may increase or decrease over time, and visitor experience. 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 are presented in a separate report: *"Environmental Monitoring Report 2016: baseline conditions"*.

METHOD

The South West Ring Road (SWCRR) Social Survey 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. Their 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 masterlist 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 such: 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 10 a.m. and 2 p.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 is run differently than in 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 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.

Non-Participant survey:

The non-participant observations record 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 colder weather, in winter the survey is run differently than in 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.

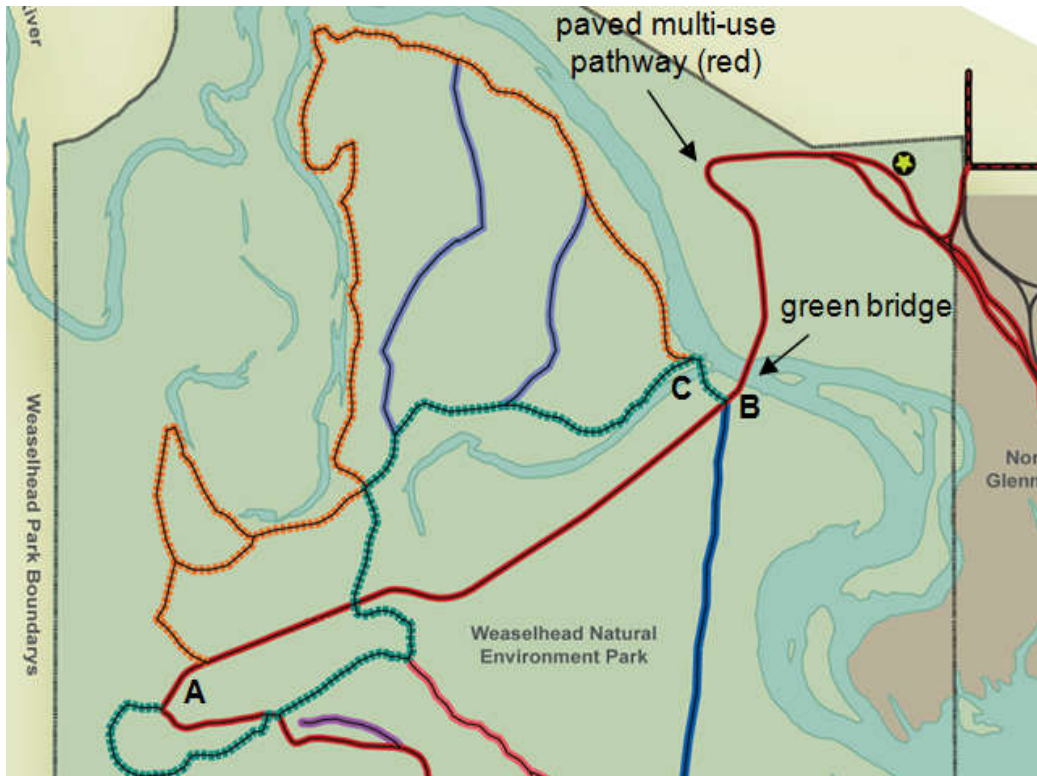


Fig. 1 - location of surveys in summer

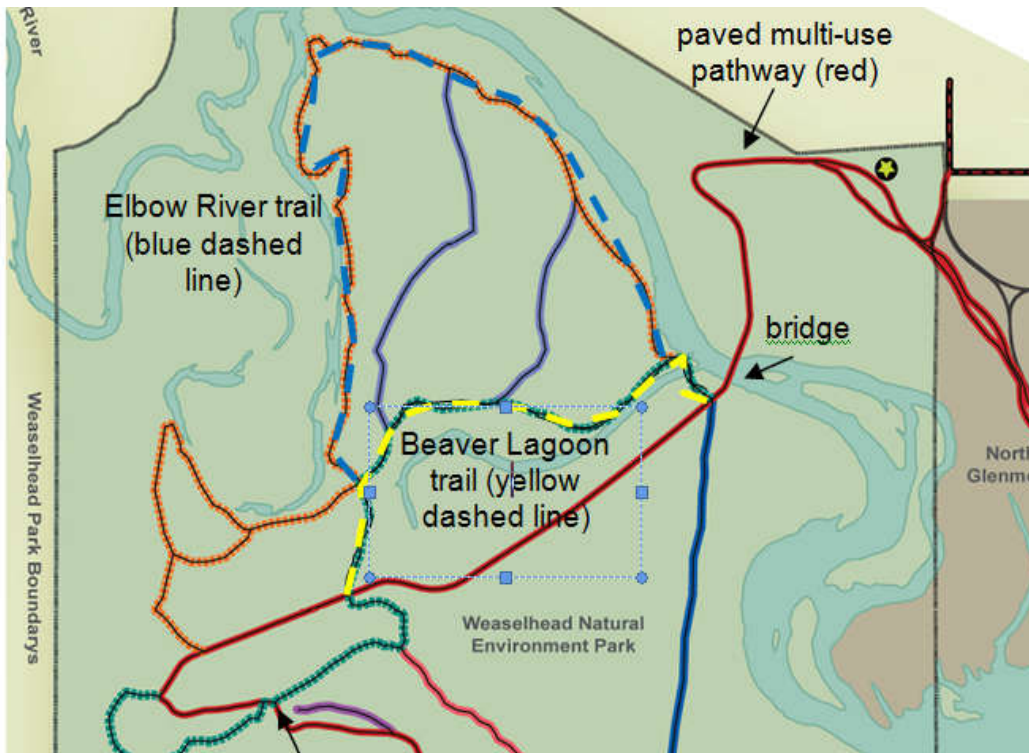


Fig. 2 locations of survey in winter

Number of surveys completed (August 2016- to January 2017) Table 1 and 2

- Individual participant surveys collected: 245
- Non-participant observation surveys recorded: 23

Dates	Time (3.5 hours max, within this time frame)
August 14	10 am – 2pm
September 15	10 am – 2pm
September 17	10 am – 2pm
September 21	10 am – 2pm
September 22	10 am – 2pm
September 24	10 am – 2pm
September 25	10 am – 2pm
September 29	10 am – 2pm
October 1	10 am – 2pm
October 8	10 am – 2pm
October 13	10 am – 2pm
October 17	10 am – 2pm
October 20	10 am – 2pm
October 29	10 am – 2pm

Table 1: Completed summer survey dates 2016:

Dates	Time (3.5 hours max, within this time frame)
November 7	9 am – 4 pm
November 13	9 am – 4 pm
November 17	9 am – 4 pm
November 20	9 am – 4 pm
November 26	9 am – 4 pm
December 5	9 am – 4 pm
December 15	9 am – 4 pm
December 18	9 am – 4 pm
January 9	9 am – 4 pm
January 21	9 am – 4 pm
January 22	9 am – 4 pm
January 26	9 am – 4 pm
January 28	9 am – 4 pm

Table 2: Completed winter survey dates 2016-2017

Variations in surveys during study period:

1. Participant observation survey:

- The original survey had 15 questions. This survey has been revised multiple times for the purpose of clarity, and to include other relevant questions, or remove redundant questions. Multiple choice questions were also altered to include different answer options.
- Questions removed:
 - “On a scale of 1 to 4, how important is it to you to conserve Weaselhead Park’s biodiversity?”
- Questions added:
 - “Do you think off-leash dogs affect wildlife use of the Weaselhead?”
“Why do you think this?”
 - “Do you think it is important to preserve the biodiversity (the number of different plants and animals) in Weaselhead?” “Why is it important to you?”
 - “What other parks do you visit in Calgary and how does Weaselhead compare?”

2. Non-Participant observation surveys:

- Changes to the non-participant survey are related to the different activities in summer and winter. A list of both summer and winter activities is listed below. The bolded activities are seasonal, the non-bolded activities occur year-round and are included in both surveys.

Summer activities:

- Biking
- Walking/hiking
- **Skateboarding**
- Jogging
- **Yoga**
- Dog walking
- Bird watching
- **Canoe/kayak**
- Photography
- Off leash/on leash dogs

Winter activities:

- Biking
- Walking/hiking
- Jogging
- **Skiing**
- **Snowshoeing**
- Dog walking
- Bird watching
- Photography

- An ‘other’ column was included to make note of activities that do not have a specific listing on the survey. These include fishing, rollerblading, scooter, wheelchair, and city worker. Based on their occurrence, these may be added to the regular listing of activities on the survey.

RESULTS

Participant surveys:

Total surveys to date, from 1st August 2016 to 31st January 2017 include 245 participant surveys. The surveys from August are the trial run, surveys so for the purpose of the data analysis below, they have been excluded. Therefore, the total number of surveys used in this report is 233, with dates ranging from September 2016 to January 2017. September and October are included with summer months, and November, December and January are included with winter months.

The data below looks at the percentage of people in particular categories, using data from the total number of surveys with that particular information *filled in*. For example, although we have 233 total surveys completed, not all data points have been filled in, such as age, or gender.

The people that participated in this survey were all pedestrians (i.e. not cyclists, roller-bladers etc.) so results represent this sub-set of park-users.

Responses to factual questions:

- Just over half the visitors (56%) surveyed were between the ages of 25-50; 35% were over 50 years old, and 9% under 25.
- The majority of respondents were female (55%).
- The majority of people surveyed (56%) visited the park every month: 28% multiple times a week, and 28% multiple times a month. For 12% of people it was their first visit ever, or the first time in the last 12 months.
- Respondents came from 92 different neighbourhoods in Calgary (out of a total of 198), especially from communities near the Weaselhead such as Lakeview, Marda Loop, Glamorgan, Springbank, Oakridge, Signal Hill and Killarney. There were 71 neighborhoods from which only one survey was obtained. 7 surveys were completed by visitors from elsewhere in Alberta or overseas.
- Most people arrive at Weaselhead by car (77%), or by walking (15%).
- 90% of respondents used the paved path (unsurprising as it is the main route into the park); 81% used the walking/hiking trails; 54% used areas by the river
- Most respondents (78%) visited the park for half-days (1-3 hours); 11% were just passing through (less than 1 hour), and 10% expected to stay for a full day (3+ hours).

Responses to questions about opinions:

- Question # 4 on the survey 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, including: (1) the park is getting busier with people, (2) park-users have a greater appreciation and better knowledge of nature and the park since visiting, (3) the paved path as a positive addition to the park (4) the 2013 flood changed the park environment and landscape.
- 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'. No people recorded a '1' ('not at all satisfied').
- When asked about the South West Ring Road, most believe it will have a negative impact with respect to their experience and usage of the park (56%). The next highest percent was the 'not sure' category (31%).
- 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) the park is large in size, (2) more 'wild' or 'natural', (3) has more wildlife (4) is 'remote' or 'quieter.'
- When asked what people liked least about Weaselhead, most responses fell within the following categories: (1) bikes – speeding, and no bell ringing or signaling (2) dog poop (3) no garbage containers (4) busier- especially on weekends (5)- pathway not ploughed in winter (6) 'nothing.'
- When asked what they liked most about Weaselhead, most replies fell within the following categories. (1) nature (2) peace and quiet (3) proximity to home (4) doesn't feel like you're in the city (5) it's a cheap alternative to Kananaskis.

Non-participant observation surveys:

Table 3 shows the total number of people observed involved in each activity, 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, and 'other' activities .

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	1268	Nov. 13, 2016
Biking	1048	Sept. 17, 2016
Jogging	256	Sept. 17, 2016
Dog walking	152	Nov. 13, 2016
Bird watching	70	Jan. 28, 2017
Photography	33	Jan. 26, 2017

Table 3: Activities and park-users – dates of highest recorded numbers taking part in each activity: (Dates from September 2016 – January 2017)

Summer specific activities: (dates from Sept. – October 2016)	
Activity	Total number of individuals recorded
Skateboarding	2
Yoga	0
Canoe/kayaking	21
Winter specific activities: (dates from November 2016 - January 2017)	
Activity	Total number of individuals recorded
Skiing	0
Snowshoeing	0
Other activities recorded: (dates from September 2016 – January 2017)	
Activity	Total number of individuals recorded
Wheelchair	1
Rollerblading	10
Fishing	9
Scooter	4
City workers	2

Table 4: number of people engaged in different activities

Off-leash dogs	41
On-leash dogs	172

Table 5: Off-leash vs. on-leash dogs (dates from September 2016 – January 2017)

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- 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. However 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 may choose to disregard park rules and bike on the trails.)
- A significant percentage (31%) of people surveyed was ‘not sure’ whether or not the SWCRR 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’ 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 ‘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 Kananaskis especially to those with limited time or money for longer trips.
- While park-users have some minor concerns and dislikes, generally satisfaction with the Park and with the experience when visiting it is very high.

FUTURE SURVEYS

The purpose of the social study is to collect data about the social value of the park to user groups and individual park-users. The baseline data from September 2016 to January 2017 indicates that we are collecting this type of information, particularly on an individual level, however there are some gaps that should be filled in future work:

- More work should be done to collect data from user groups, for example bird-watchers, organised event holders, yoga-class participants.
- Identifying 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.

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