



## WEASELHEAD: 'TAKE A STAND' ACTIVITY

Pre- or post-field trip activity. Please let us know if you would like this included on your field-trip by contacting [education@theweaselhead.com](mailto:education@theweaselhead.com).

(Can also be done on your own in the classroom.)

**OBJECTIVE:** To make students aware of the issues surrounding the construction of the SW Calgary Ring Road where it crosses the Elbow River Valley. This activity will help students appreciate the difficulty in making complex decisions at the civil and provincial government levels.

**ACTIVITY SCENARIO:** On October 24, 2013 the Tsuut'ina First Nations voted in favor of a land exchange with the Province of Alberta to build the SW Calgary Ring Road along the west boundary of the Weaselhead Natural Environment Area, cutting across the valley upstream of the park.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The Ring Road has been a topic of debate since the 1950s. Crossing the Elbow River valley is arguably the most important link in the SW Calgary Ring Road project, but it is also the most ecologically sensitive portion of the entire Calgary Ring Road. The valley acts as a corridor that allows wildlife to move between the City and land upstream, the Weaselhead is one of the most biodiverse parks in Calgary, the Weaselhead is an important park for recreation and education, and its wetlands and natural vegetation help protect one of Calgary's two sources of drinking water: the adjacent Glenmore Reservoir.

It is anticipated that the new ring road will move traffic off Macleod Trail, Elbow Dr. and 14th Street and allow traffic to by-pass the city more easily. It will become the TransCanada Bypass for the trucking industry, including businesses hauling toxic goods. The ring road will not increase access for local traffic to downtown, as major new routes into the downtown core are not planned. Following the approval of the SW Calgary Ring Road the City approved construction of a new neighbourhood, Providence in the SW. This will provide houses for 32,000 new residents. The road is expected to open in 2022.

The Province of Alberta and Mountain View Partners have signed a 'Design, Build, Finance and Maintain' P3 contract for the Southwest Calgary Ring Road project. The contract will see the contractor design and construct the project, and then maintain the road for 30 years of operation, concluding in 2051. The contract was valued at \$1.42 billion in 2016. The Province of Alberta, with support of the Federal Government, will fund 60% of the project while Mountain View Partners will finance the remaining 40% over the life of the contract.

**STUDENT ROLES:** Divide your class into stakeholder groups. Give students class time in these groups to plan their position regarding the development of the SW Calgary Ring Road, in terms of their stakeholder roles. Below are some examples of stakeholders and the types of statements they might make.

## TAKE A STAND ACTIVITY

### Stakeholder Roles

---

#### Local Resident/Property Owner:

Someone living in one of the communities on either side of the Weaselhead. You might live in Lakeview on the north side, or Oakridge and Cedarbrae on the south side.

#### Ideas:

- a) "My neighbourhood is wonderful being so close to a natural area. This is why I moved here. We must do everything possible to keep the area natural for plants and animals to remain and to use the area. This affects our quality of life and the value of my house."
  - b) "I don't want to hear the sound of an 8-lane highway through my window and when I go for walks. Let's build a sound wall to reduce the noise from the road."
- 

#### Environmentalist:

Someone who feels that not enough thought is put into the environmental concerns when development takes place.

#### Ideas:

- a) "The Weaselhead is the most biodiverse Park in the city. Biodiversity, or the abundance of different living things, will be severely impacted by this road development."
  - b) "The Elbow Valley is a wildlife corridor between the Weaselhead and the mountains and must be protected. Room had been left for animals to move under the bridges where the ring road crosses the river but elsewhere the road blocks this corridor. Wildlife is going to find it difficult to move freely in and out of the Weaselhead."
  - c) "This road would jeopardize the quality of water in the reservoir. Salt and other highway by-products from vehicles will wash into the wetlands and find their way into the drinking water for south Calgary."
- 

#### Taxpayer:

Every person who works also pays taxes to the government of Canada and Alberta. If more money is spent on the Elbow River crossing to allow for wildlife crossings, bat roosts or fish habitat construction, the taxpayers are the ones who will ultimately pay for it.

#### Ideas:

- a) "I work hard and feel I already pay enough taxes. I do not want my taxes to be even higher just to protect a few fish and some wildlife."
- b) "Let the Wildlife live in the mountains and the Tsuut'ina land. We don't really need these animals in the city of Calgary."
- c) "Let's put more money into people getting jobs, education and social programs."

d) I am OK with putting more money into environmental protection of our precious natural areas. It is too important for our health and well-being as a society to ignore.”

---

**Developer and prospective house buyers:**

This developer has purchased land along 37<sup>th</sup> Street south of Fish Creek Provincial Park. The land is largely undeveloped farmland now but will become the community of Providence, described as a mini-city unto itself and be home to 32,000 people. It may provide up to 11,000 jobs. Completing the ring road will make selling these homes much easier for the developer and homes more attractive for families wanting cheaper housing solutions.

Ideas:

- a) “We need a way for these families to get to downtown to jobs, or for students to get to universities further north, without having to drive all the way to 14 St, which is already too congested”
  - b) “This road means a shorter route to where we want to be - we will waste less gas driving and pollute less”.
  - c) “We need affordable housing in this city. It is hard for families to afford housing and still get to work”.
  - d) “The developers should contribute to the well-being of the community with the profits they will be making and set aside some money for sound mitigation from the new ring road”.
- 

**Bird watcher:**

This naturalist spends a considerable amount of time down in the Weaselhead bird watching and has recorded a number of rare bird sightings in the area.

Ideas:

- a) “ Calgary lies on a migratory route for birds. We need more natural area for birds rest and feed in as they migrate. This road will take valuable resting and feeding habitat away”
  - b) “Traffic on the ring road will be noisy. This noise will affect the ability of birds to hear each other – which in turn will affect their ability to effectively establish and defend nesting territories.”
  - c) “Some species will adapt to the road, but others will avoid it completely and no longer visit and/or breed in the Weaselhead. We will no longer have them to watch and to enjoy.’
- 

**Recreational User:**

This person skis, roller-blades, bikes, canoes and kayaks through the Weaselhead for recreation.

Ideas:

- a) “The Weaselhead is one of the only natural areas in Calgary where the trails are good for cross-country skiing. I like to see if I can see signs of deer, moose and other mammals in the park. This experience adds to my quality of life in the city. If these disappear because of the ring road I will go somewhere else.”

- b) "I have a stressful job in a noisy area of town and a busy home life. I visit the Weaselhead for peace and quiet. Currently the Weaselhead is the quietest park in the City of Calgary but this will change once the ring road is in operation."
  - d) "We should be doing everything possible to keep this place as natural as possible without having to go all the way to the mountains to see animals. I am getting old and don't like driving so far."
- 

### **Spokesperson from Tsuut'ina Nation**

This person represents the Tsuut'ina Nation. The road will pass through their land in exchange for a decided sum of money and more land to the west.

#### Ideas:

- a) "We need this opportunity to create businesses along this road. Economic development will bring jobs to our people."
  - b) "300 of our residents voted against the road as it disturbs ancient burial grounds, destroys many homes and disturbs nature."
  - c) "700 of our people voted in favor of the land exchange for the road as it brings cash into our community and helps us and future generations shape our destiny."
- 

### **Students**

This group represents the 5,000 students that visit the Weaselhead annually to learn about the environment and nature.

#### Ideas:

- a) "This amazing outdoor classroom should be kept for us to learn about wetlands, trees and forests and the animals that use them. It helps us see the connections in nature that sustain life. We can't see these in built-up areas. This natural area should be protected for us and all future students in Calgary."
  - b) "We would like measures put in place that stop all contaminants from getting into the wetlands – even if it is expensive. We know healthy wetlands help keep drinking water clean".
  - c) "We feel like we are not even in the City when we visit the Weaselhead. Our field trips give us a chance to be in nature, perhaps for the first time for some of us. A road without a sound wall to reduce noise pollution, or without an effective wildlife corridor to allow animals in and out of the park, will change this experience".
-

### 'Take a Stand': Instructions to Naturalists or Teachers:

Give the students a short introduction to the SW ring road progress and history, pointing out where it is being constructed while standing at the Weaselhead look-out (or if in classroom, showing GoogleEarth images of the Weaselhead and ring road site before and after construction started.)

Get students into groups and assign stakeholder roles. Give the students 5-10 minutes to break up review these roles and make notes on their position: for or against the building of the ring road, and why. Check each group to see if they have chosen a spokesperson or if they are all going to comment. Remind them they are not necessarily stating their own personal views but are role-playing. Remind them they need to include reasons for their point of view – they need to convince the mayor and council (and persuade other stakeholders) their view is correct.

When the students are ready, ask them to form a large circle. If on a field-trip parent-volunteers and/or the teacher may be asked to be the mayor or council members. Have the students sit in their stakeholder groups so they can be identified as a group. Tell them they are in a city council meeting and review respectful behavior and the need to talk in turn and one at a time.

The first time when going around the circle each group states its position for or against the road, and why, without any debate, getting their main points across.

The next time when going around the circle, a group can address another group with a question or comment and allow them to respond. (This can get quite heated, so the 'mayor' will control the debate as needed.)

After the debate allow a few minutes reflection for the stakeholder groups to review their position and decide if they are still for or against the road. Each group is asked to share their decision and if it has changed, why.

Finally the mayor (and council) decide – after listening to the arguments put forward by the stakeholders – would they have approved construction of the ring road or not?

