

# Report on Park Stewardship

Meewasin Valley  
Authority

2023

Prepared by  
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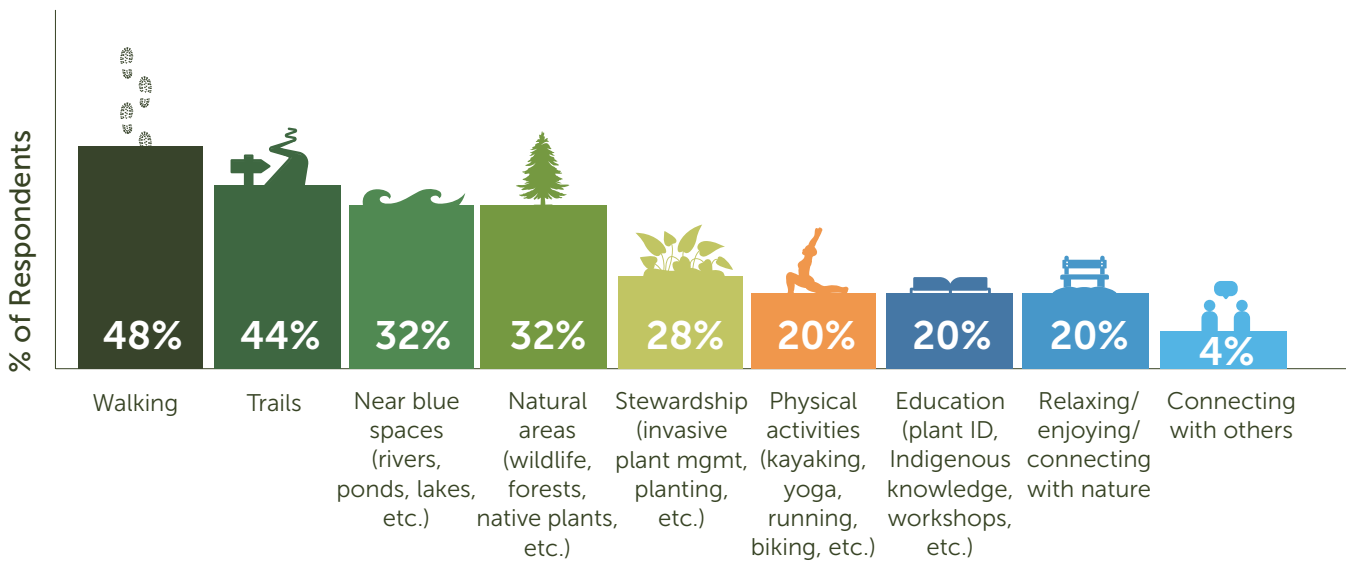
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## Park Context

The Meewasin Valley Authority manages the Meewasin Valley, which is a 6,700 hectare (67 sq km) area located in the South Saskatchewan River Basin in Saskatoon, SK. The Meewasin Trail runs over 110 km along both sides of the river, passing through an abundance of parks, lookouts, and natural areas which provide residents and visitors with ample opportunities to interact and connect with nature.

Previous Cornerstone research in 2022 found that a strong connection to nature was highly associated with better perceived mental and physical health and overall well-being. Therefore, as people feel more connected to nature, their health and well-being improve.

## Places and Activities that Promote Nature Connectedness



Just as certain park qualities can encourage nature connectedness, there are spaces and activities in parks that can have the opposite effect. Our 2023 survey showed that spaces that inhibit nature connectedness are grey/paved spaces (**47%**), crowded spaces (**40%**), and built environments such as sports facilities, playgrounds, and other structures (**13%**).



## Park Restoration and Stewardship Programs

Meewasin exists to ensure a healthy and vibrant river valley, with a balance between human use and conservation, for the benefit of present and future generations, in the Saskatoon region. Partners work together through Meewasin to conserve the cultural and natural resources of the South Saskatchewan River Valley.

### Meewasin Valley Stewardship Impacts 2023

| Metric   | Quantity                  |
|--|---------------------------|
| Square metres of invasive species removed<br>*This number is overall restoration in m <sup>2</sup> | 25,421,077 m <sup>2</sup> |
| Stems of invasive species removed (individual stems and plants)                                    | 143,465                   |
| Number of trees, shrubs, and grasses/wildflowers planted   | 8,897                     |
| Number of people who participated in Cornerstone Parks initiatives                                 | 2,805 People              |
| Number of stewards who volunteered in hands-on, park-based programmings                            | 542 People                |
| Number of hours dedicated to stewardship and restoration activities                                | 6,000 Hours               |

### Meewasin Stewards

Much of the restoration done within the Meewasin Valley is conducted by volunteer stewards working with the Meewasin Valley Authority. From our surveys with stewards, we found that in 2023:

**40%** volunteer on an occasional basis (2-5 times per year)

**27%** of surveyed stewards were new to the program within the year

**20%** volunteer on a regular basis (6 or more times per year)

“I find it very rewarding to share my knowledge with my community - to help them learn more about nature.”

- Meewasin Volunteer





Photo: Tree planting.  
Taken by: Meewasin Valley Authority

## Benefits from Stewardship

From our surveys, we also found that not only does the environment benefit from stewardship, but there are a host of benefits for stewards. The 2023 survey of the Meewasin stewards found that:

**96%** of surveyed stewards say that participating in stewardship contributes to a sense of self (feeling more connected to who they are)

**96%** of surveyed stewards found that participating in stewardship contributes to feeling connected to nature and the environment

**96%** of surveyed stewards say that participating in stewardship contributes to feeling happy and satisfied

**93%** of surveyed stewards say that participating in stewardship contributes to a sense of meaning and purpose in their life

**89%** of surveyed stewards said that participating in stewardship activities contributes to their mental well-being (eg. they feel more relaxed and peaceful)

When stewards were asked how they feel in the Meewasin Valley, the most common responses were:

**46%** Happy

**38%** Connected (to nature/  
community/self)

**38%** Peaceful/calm/relaxed





Photo: *Changing Seasons.*  
Taken by: Meewasin Valley Authority, 2023

## Pro-Environmental Behaviour of Stewards

Our 2023 survey results also indicate that those participating in stewardship activities often carry their experiences beyond the Meewasin Valley. They also engage in other pro-environmental behaviour, some of which are newly adopted and possibly inspired by their work with Meewasin.

**96%** of stewards say that participating in stewardship contributes to them thinking about how their actions affect the environment

**96%** of stewards are conducting stewardship or conservation at home and/or in their neighbourhood (i.e. planting native species, tending a garden, pulling invasive species) with 43% of them having started taking this action within the year

**75%** of stewards are teaching other people about park stewardship and/or environmental issues

**57%** of stewards have encouraged friends or family to get involved in park stewardship since volunteering with Meewasin

“My husband and I have been involved in Meewasin’s volunteer program for the last few years. Being close to nature and doing hands-on projects has been very rewarding.”

- Meewasin Volunteer



## Fostering Inclusion in the Park

Cornerstone surveys conducted from 2021-2023 found that park users and stewards tend to identify as women, white, and able-bodied. However, Saskatoon residents need to share access to high-quality, large urban parks equally. Therefore, Meewasin Valley Authority is working to employ strategies to foster inclusion within the park and stewardship programs.

### To increase inclusivity in the park and the Meewasin Valley Authority programs, Meewasin has undertaken the following actions

**Trail system upgrades:** The Meewasin Trail has been upgraded in a number of areas; these span a wide variety of communities from North, South, and core Saskatoon neighbourhoods.

**The Meewasin App:** An app showcasing the intersection between traditional Indigenous and ecological knowledge; highlighting traditional uses for land, river, and medicinal plants in the region.



*Photo: Multiuse Paths.  
Taken by: Meewasin Valley Authority*

# Appendix

## A. What are Cornerstone Parks?

Cornerstone parks are rich in biodiversity, increase our cities' resilience to climate change, and for the millions of urban Canadians who visit them yearly, provide the deep connections to nature that people need to ensure their mental and physical well-being. These parks are stewarded and animated by communities to maintain and enhance the benefits these green spaces provide to society and the environment.

Cornerstone Parks is Canada's only national network dedicated to maximizing the impact and influence of Canada's large urban parks.

## B. Methodology

Data was collected through surveys developed by Park People in collaboration with our Cornerstone Park partners. In 2023, 86 park stewards participating in programs with four of our Cornerstone partners were surveyed. These partners include; Meewasin Valley Authority, Saskatoon; Darlington Ecological Corridor, Montreal, Free the Fern Stewardship Society and Everett Crowley Park Committee, Vancouver.

The survey was designed for participants of park stewardship programs (activities related to caring for the land, i.e. invasive species removal, tree planting, and plant and wildlife inventory) and was conducted in the fall of 2023 through online surveys. This is the second iteration of the survey and previous research findings from our surveys in 2022 at our founding Cornerstone Parks can be found on our website.

The goal was to understand better the impacts that stewardship participants perceive on their well-being and behaviour.



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