



RIVER VALLEY
ALLIANCE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2026

Creating connections to your river valley



CITY OF
FORT SASKATCHEWAN



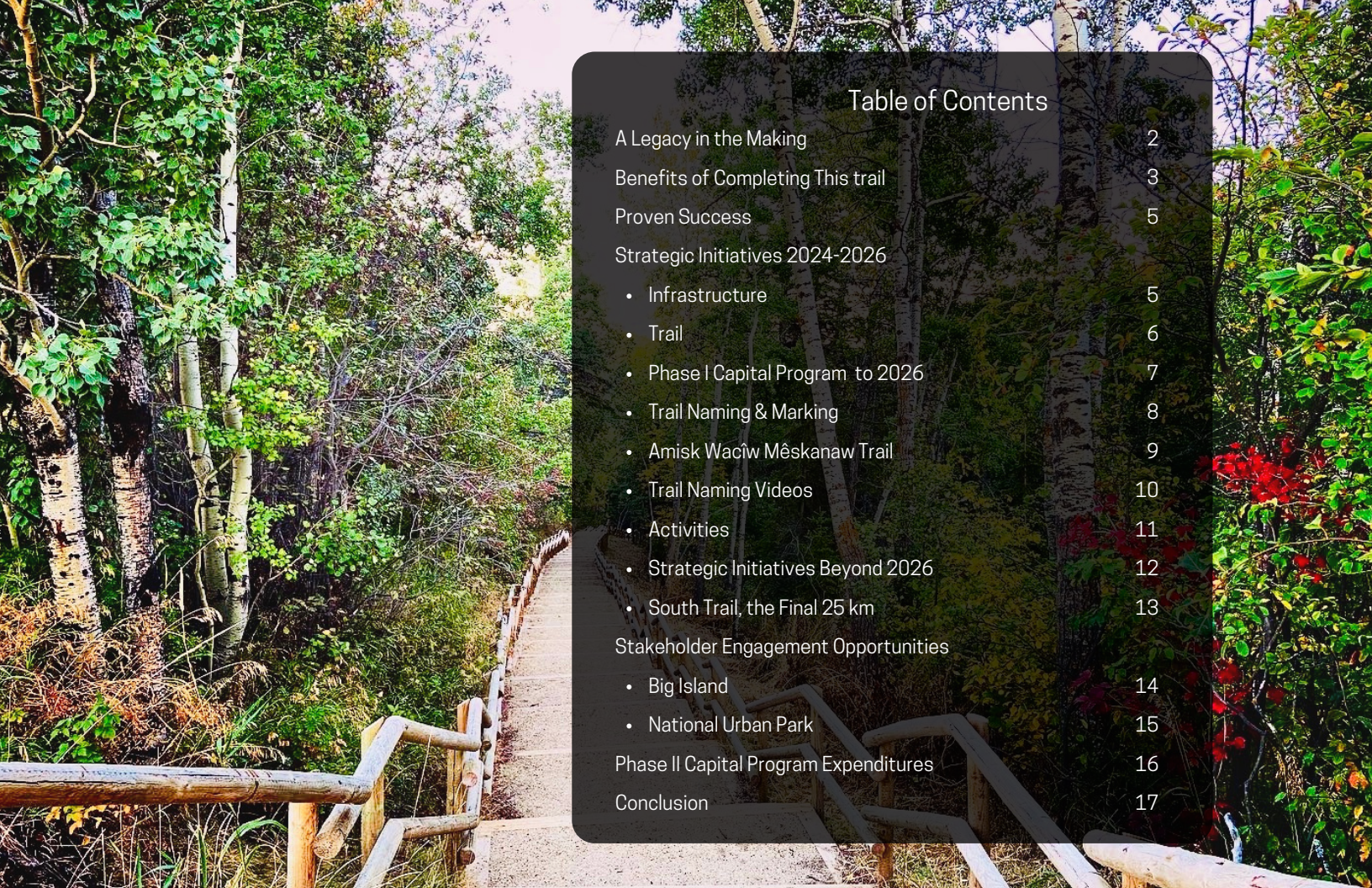


Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| A Legacy in the Making | 2 |
| Benefits of Completing This trail | 3 |
| Proven Success | 5 |
| Strategic Initiatives 2024-2026 | |
| • Infrastructure | 5 |
| • Trail | 6 |
| • Phase I Capital Program to 2026 | 7 |
| • Trail Naming & Marking | 8 |
| • Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw Trail | 9 |
| • Trail Naming Videos | 10 |
| • Activities | 11 |
| • Strategic Initiatives Beyond 2026 | 12 |
| • South Trail, the Final 25 km | 13 |
| Stakeholder Engagement Opportunities | |
| • Big Island | 14 |
| • National Urban Park | 15 |
| Phase II Capital Program Expenditures | 16 |
| Conclusion | 17 |

A LEGACY IN THE MAKING

The River Valley Alliance (RVA) has always been about connecting metro Edmonton's River Valley from end to end with one continuous 100 km trail. This is also the longest river valley trail in all of North America and a true point of pride for the entire region.

The RVA has proven to be responsible stewards of public funds in the coordination of building and connecting this trail, but the work that began more than 20 years ago still needs to be completed. This Strategic Plan outlines the priorities, plans and funding schedule to complete the 100 km trail, including short-term projects already underway and long-term goals to connect the final 25 kms between southwest Edmonton and Devon.



BENEFITS OF COMPLETING THIS TRAIL:

- **Economic Diversity & Job Creation** - North America's longest river valley trail connects the largest river valley park system. Once complete, this trail holds enormous potential as an international tourism destination supporting businesses and job creation.
- **Conservation & Ecosystem Benefits** - preserving this area as a park system helps protect its diverse ecosystem, resulting in long-term sustainability, which supports critical environmental services such as flood mitigation, carbon sequestration and protection against extreme weather events.
- **Access to Nature** - is an essential factor in the well-being of humans, both physically and mentally. Being in nature reduces anger, fear and stress and is an essential factor in improving public health.
- **Encouraging Movement** - as a practical active transportation route and a free recreational haven, there are many ways to be physically active on the trail. Enhancing connectivity and mobility of residents and visitors alike further reduces the use of vehicles and lessens carbon emissions.
- **Supporting Community** - this trail and park system provides accessible and inclusive spaces for individuals, families and community groups, providing critical social connections and a more profound feeling of social responsibility and belonging.
- **Cultural Awareness** - the new unifying trail name, Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw Trail (Beaver Hill Road Trail), is rooted in Indigenous language and history, which provides opportunities for place-based learning and understanding of Indigenous culture, an authentic act toward truth and reconciliation.

PROVEN SUCCESS

From 2012 to 2024, the RVA and its shareholders undertook 13 projects in the Phase 1 Capital Plan. These projects include:



Terwillegar Footbridge
Edmonton



100 Street Funicular
Edmonton



Hwy 15 Underslung Pedestrian Bridge
Fort Saskatchewan/Sturgeon County



70 km of new trails
throughout the region

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES 2024-2026

INFRASTRUCTURE

With its remaining funds from our Phase I Grants, the RVA has one infrastructure project underway through 2024-26. Once this project is complete, all Phase I grant funds will have been fully and successfully utilized in the creation and connection of 75% of the river valley trail (75 of 100 km complete).



Edmonton to Strathcona County Footbridge

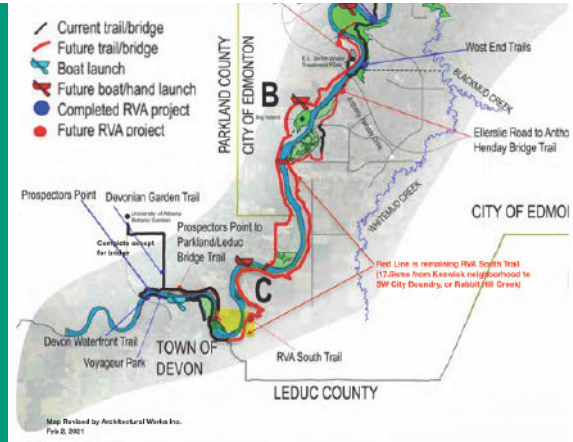
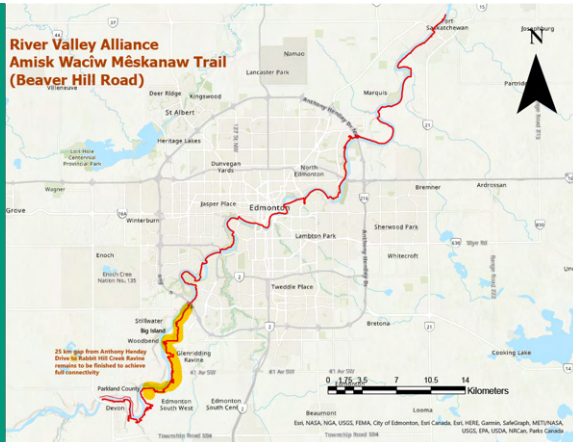
This vital link will connect Edmonton's East End Trail across the North Saskatchewan River to the Riverside Nature Trail in Strathcona County, effectively connecting 75% of the proposed 100 km trail. The RVA worked closely with the City of Edmonton and Strathcona County to complete the design, environmental impact assessment, and public and Indigenous consultation phase from 2021 to 2022. Construction began in the summer of 2023 and the bridge is slated to be open to the public by the spring of 2026.

TRAIL

The final 25 km section of trail needed to achieve full connectivity is located in the southwest quadrant of Edmonton from the Anthony Henday Bridge SW to Rabbit Hill Creek Ravine outside of Devon.

Access via Right-of-Way or purchase of portions of these lands is crucial for the RVA to complete regional connectivity of the 100 km trail.

Throughout 2024-26, the RVA will continue to build positive relationships with landowners through communication and engagement to ensure they are informed about the RVA's work and the opportunity to play a positive and meaningful role in this big-picture legacy-building initiative.



Phase I Capital Program Expenditures to 2026

| Project | Expenditure | Municipality |
|---|-----------------|--|
| *Edmonton to Strathcona County Footbridge – Design & Construction | \$ 19 million | City of Edmonton, Strathcona County |
| Creation and installation of trail name signs and wayfinding markers | \$ 0.4 million | All |
| Total Capital Expenditures | \$ 19.4 million | |

Government of Alberta - 1/3 funding
 Government of Canada - 1/3 funding *(Capital Projects Only)
 Municipalities - 1/3 funding

TRAIL NAMING AND MARKING

"To be recognized as a trail, the infrastructure must be named, mapped, and marked with signage" – Exceptional Trails Guide, Alberta Parks.

As the longest River Valley trail in North America, this regional trail system could become an international destination with many tourism opportunities to support the economic diversity of the region, the province and the country. But the trail needed a unifying name to reach that level of exposure and reputation. In support of truth and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, it was important that the trail name reflect and respect the Indigenous history of the North Saskatchewan River Valley.

In close collaboration with Naheyawin, the RVA sought input from diverse Indigenous voices to guide the trail naming work. This inclusive approach ensured a rich variety of perspectives, encompassing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ways of knowing and being. Through these enlightening conversations, we came to appreciate the profound significance of names within Indigenous cultures as they shape identities, relationships, values, and worldviews. The trail's chosen name, graciously gifted by Elder Jerry Saddleback, who also offered his continued guidance and advice to the RVA, is in nêhiyawêwin, the Cree language. This name invites everyone to "sing the song" of the river valley, nurturing a deeper sense of responsibility and belonging for all who traverse the trail.



◁ Γ ^ 6 . ρ ° Γ ^ 6 q °

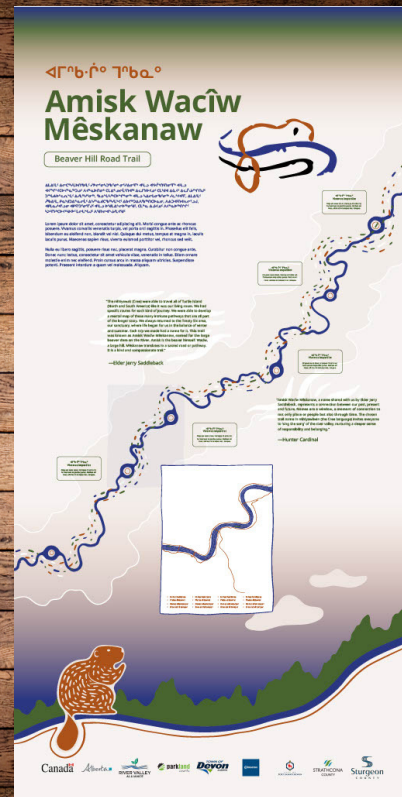


"The nêhiyawak (Cree) were able to travel all of North and South America like it was our living room. We had specific routes for each kind of journey. We were able to develop a mental map of these many intricate pathways that are all part of the longer story. We always returned to the Treaty Six area, our sanctuary, where life began for us in the balance of winter and summer. Each trip we made had a name for it. This trail was known as Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw, named for the large beaver dam on the River. Amisk is the beaver himself: Wacîw, a large hill. Mêskanaw translates to a sacred road or pathway. It is a kind and compassionate trail."

- Elder Jerry Saddleback

TRAIL MARKING

In 2024, an interpretive sign will be installed at a key location in each of the six municipalities. These signs will provide the trail name, wayfinding information and a QR code that links to additional historical facts and place-based storytelling. There will also be a wayfinding symbol, created by Dene - Métis artist Matthew Weigel, installed along the trail from end to end.



AMISK WACÎW MÊSKANAW TRAIL (BEAVER HILL ROAD TRAIL) ᐱᐃᐃᐃ ᐃᐱᐃᐃ ᐃᐱᐃᐃ

*Saskatchewan River at Strathcona, Alta.
1912*



Learn about the history of the name



Learn about the naming of the trail



Elder Jerry Saddleback

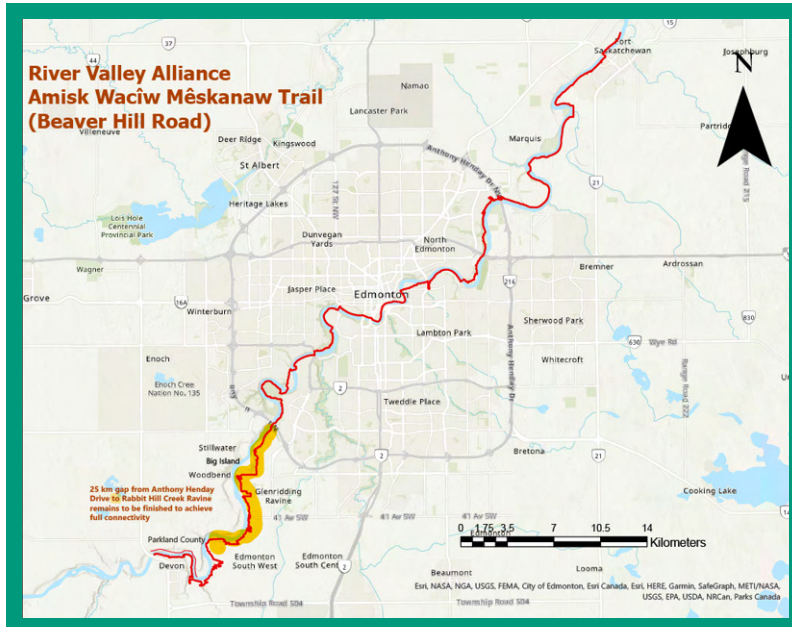
ACTIVITIES

People want to be in our beautiful river valley. Through our #trekthetrails video blog posts featuring 20 + different walks in the river valley, our monthly scheduled walks, our e-newsletter, active social media platforms and podcasts, the RVA is the “go-to” organization to source activity in the river valley while balancing the importance of respectful use to help protect the sensitive ecosystems and wildlife within it.



STRATEGIC INITIATIVES BEYOND 2026

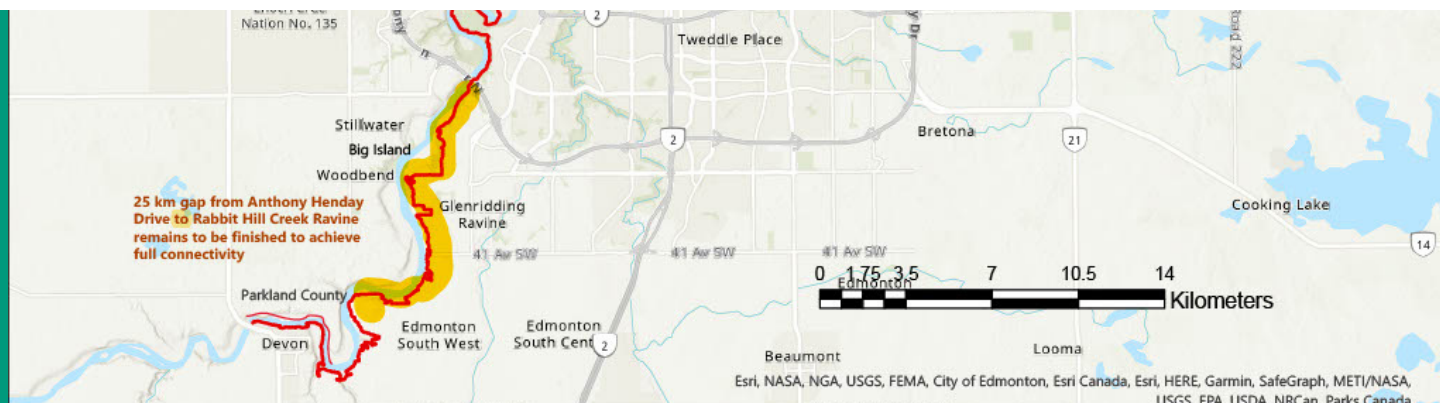
INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRAIL



Beyond 2026, the RVA will work to complete the final 25 km of trail in southwest Edmonton, from Anthony Henday Bridge SW to Rabbit Hill Creek Ravine outside of Devon. Connecting the existing Devon trails to those across the river in Parkland County will also be a priority. These final but vital projects will fully connect the 100 km trail.



SOUTH TRAIL - THE FINAL 25 KM



This final 25 km of the trail is proposed to be completed in four segments.

Segment 1 – Anthony Henday Drive to Ellerslie Road
This phase consists of 8.8 km of trail.

Segment 2 – Ellerslie Road to Shalom Park area
This phase consists of 10.7 km of trail.

Segment 3 – Shalom Park area to Rabbit Hill Creek Ravine
This phase consists of 6.9 km of trail.

Segment 4 – A pedestrian bridge linking the trails in
Devon to those in Parkland County.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

BIG ISLAND

The Government of Alberta, Forestry and Parks, is working to create Big Island Provincial Park in southwest Edmonton to ensure that all Albertans can enjoy and appreciate parks and public lands.

The RVA was included as a stakeholder in this project and remains supportive of trail development on and around Big Island and south to the Woodbend area while acknowledging the importance of mindfulness toward environmental sensitivity.

The RVA submitted a trail development proposal to the Government of Alberta in 2020 based on our Plan of Action and is ready to assist where appropriate as Big Island Provincial Park is created and eventually connected to the larger river valley trail system.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

NATIONAL URBAN PARK

In 2022 -2023 the RVA was included as a stakeholder in the potential establishment of a National Urban Park in the Metro Edmonton Region. The proposed park supports Parks Canada's goals to conserve nature, connect people with nature and advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, all of which closely align with the goals of the RVA.

The RVA submitted feedback suggesting the inclusion of all or a portion of the River Valley trail system within the National Urban Park and is ready to support as the proposed project moves to the next steps.

PHASE II CAPITAL PROGRAM EXPENDITURES (TOTAL COST)

Working with our shareholder municipalities, the RVA established a list of potential projects to be completed once Phase II funding is confirmed. These projects are within the RVA's Plan of Action and will complete connectivity of the 100 km trail while enhancing the user's experience and balancing the preservation of the natural ecosystem.

| Project | Expenditure | Municipality |
|--|---------------|---|
| South Trail (Devon to Anthony Henday Drive SW to Rabbit Hill Creek Ravine) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land ROW • 25 km of Trail | \$ 18 million | City of Edmonton |
| Amenities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail Heads / Parking / Washrooms | \$ 3 million | Devon, Parkland County, Edmonton, Strathcona County, Sturgeon County, Fort Saskatchewan |
| Devon - Parkland Footbridge | \$ 18 million | Devon, Parkland County |
| Total | \$ 39 million | |
| Proposed to be supported via our current 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 funding model, split evenly between the municipalities, the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada. | | |

CONCLUSION

The work of the RVA has been ongoing for more than 20 years. Incorporated in 2003, the RVA has worked tirelessly with its municipal shareholders, government partners, stakeholders and many enthusiastic volunteers to bring the vision of North America's longest river valley trail to life.

With this Strategic Plan in place, full connectivity remains our top priority, with new initiatives to engage and inform a diverse and supportive public and encourage a healthy and vibrant River Valley park system.

We are so close to fulfilling our mission - completing a sustainable, world-class, one-of-a-kind outdoor destination unique in all of North America that will be enjoyed by generations to come.

With your support, the final 25 km of the Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw Trail can be completed! The North Saskatchewan River Valley defines our region and is beloved by residents and tourists alike. Through the RVA's work of balancing access to nature while protecting the ecosystem surrounding us, we can all enjoy, appreciate and sustain this natural gem, vital to the well-being of our diverse communities.





Follow us on social

Compiled & written by RVA
Layout & design by Makennah Walker

Other photos by Chad Griffiths, Burton Xu, ,
Mark Gibbons, Keith Moore, Jeff Szczusik,
Katharine Weinmann, Kyle Schole, Talana
Hargreaves, Harmony Wolgemuth,
UnClocked Photography

River Valley Alliance, 4638 - 90A Ave
Edmonton, AB T6B 2P9 ♦ Phone: 587-401-3355
Email: contact@rivervalley.ab.ca ♦ Web: rivervalley.ab.ca

