

Sandy Lake Wilderness Area What We Heard Report — Summary

Project

The Sandy Lake Wilderness Area is a 167-hectare Environmental Reserve in the west of Sturgeon County. The area's maintenance and use has been largely self-regulated. Sturgeon County Council passed a motion on June 8, 2021 to explore opportunities for several projects including the Sandy Lake Wilderness Area. In order to properly enhance the use of the area, a concept plan and biophysical assessment were initiated to identify potential amenities and natural area management approaches. The biophysical assessment includes things like the natural and sensitive features in the area.

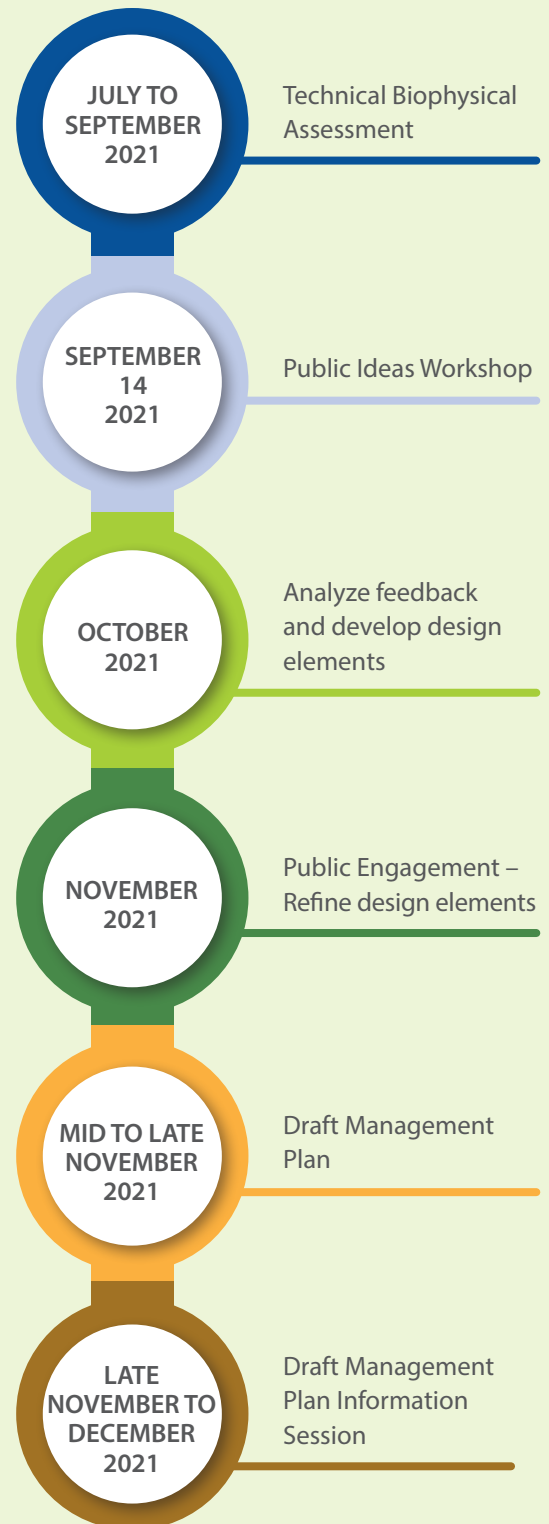
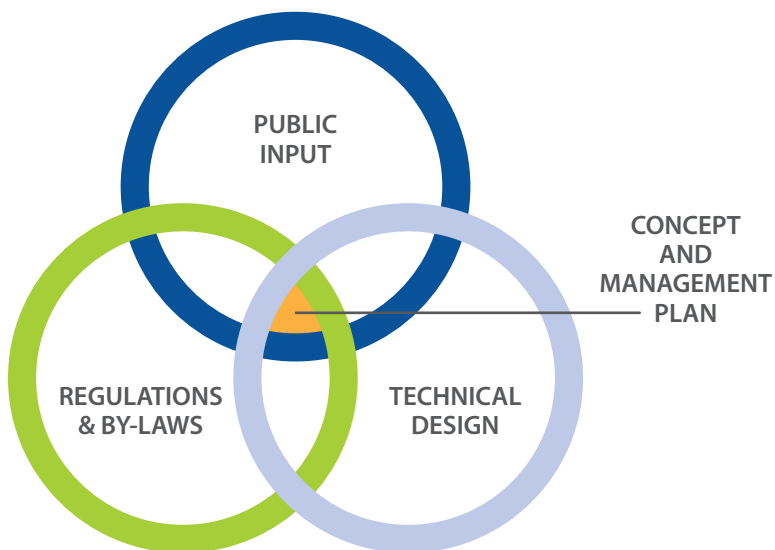
The purpose of the project is to prepare a Sandy Lake Wilderness Area Concept and Natural Area Management Plan.

Decisions

Before developing options for the new plans the County needs to understand residents' issues and aspirations for the space within the constraints/opportunities identified in the biophysical assessment. This local knowledge is useful in helping the County identify and address:

- Existing site issues that the plan should address
- Desired uses and amenity ideas
- Ways to manage the area in the future

The site is designated as Environmental Reserve (ER) and must be left in its natural state or be used as a public park, according to provincial legislation. County technical teams will work to develop a plan that responds to both public input and the regulations and bylaws for environmental reserve lands, which may include potential amenities.





Public Engagement – What We Did

An in-person workshop was held at the Calahoo Hall on September 14, 2021, from 7-9 p.m. The invitation was sent to all landowners west of Highway 44 via an addressed postcard along with multiple road signs in the Calahoo area. Forty-three people participated.

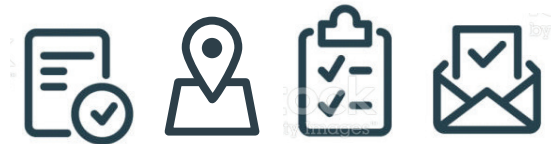
The event had three separate activities collecting input on:

1. Existing site issues that the plan should address
2. Desired uses and potential amenities for the space
3. Ways the area could be managed in the future

Participants were reminded of the limitations mentioned earlier including legislation and regulations for the wilderness area, County bylaws not permitting off-highway vehicle use, as well as budget and scope limits.

Input in numbers

- +200 comments (sticky notes)
- +220 comments on maps
- 160 assessments of 4 scenarios
- 1 email submission



Negative Human Impacts

Participants shared over 123 comments that described how humans' activities negatively impact the area. The leading themes were:

- Dumping
- Safety and user conflicts
- Damage to environment

What keeps me from using the area

Participants shared over 94 comments that described what keeps them from using the area. Overall, the responses could be grouped into two broad themes:

- No amenities
- Avoiding conflict with other users

What We Heard - Desired Uses and Amenity Ideas

General Uses

Participants listed potential amenities that could be applied across all four areas. While everyone had a slightly different idea of exactly how to make best use of the space, the following themes emerged.

<p><i>Picnic and Day Use Amenities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staging area and parking lot• Maps• Camping/picnic areas• Water• Toilets• Garbage• Year-round access for all ages and abilities	<p><i>Trails and Connections to New Destinations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formalize trails• Signs or wayfinding• Different trails for different uses such as walking, biking, skiing, horse riding and boardwalks for wet areas• Educational spaces• Lookout points• Conservation opportunities
<p><i>Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use damages the wilderness area and should not be permitted• OHV use conflicts with other users, especially people riding horses.• OHVs can be mobility aide• Possible separation of activities into different areas• Create barriers around the wilderness area to prevent OHV access	<p><i>Maintenance and Enforcement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhancements or structures built may not last due to vandalism• Ongoing illegal and dangerous activities in the space damage it and keep people away• Person or attendant should be responsible for monitoring the space, keeping trails cleared and enforcing rules

Feedback specific to the Natural Areas includes:

<p><i>Meadows and Grasslands</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Picnic and day-use amenities• The open grassland at the current entrance is the preferred location of a parking lot	<p><i>Forests</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defining and maintaining trails and way-finding inside the forested areas was a key highlight• Some participants mentioned fires in the forest would be dangerous
<p><i>Wetlands and Riparian Shoreline</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boardwalks and lookout points or pathways to less environmentally sensitive beaches• People want to see and touch the water• Environmental programming and education	<p><i>Wildlife Considerations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Birdhouses and bat boxes• Varying input suggested that there is not much wildlife in the area, others asked that a wildlife corridor be maintained• Person or attendant should be responsible for monitoring the space, keeping trails cleared and enforcing rules



Feedback on Scenarios – Managing the Space

Participants rated the below two scenarios highest for how to manage the space.

1. Community Barn Raising (high community involvement in building and maintaining the area / high environmental stewardship) – most support
2. County Knows Best (low direct community involvement in maintaining/high environmental stewardship) – second support/neutral

While the Community Barn Raising scenario was the most prominent, written comments generally indicated participants want the County to actively manage the natural area.

Next Steps

The information collected will be used to prepare concept plan alternatives. Concept plan options will be shared with the public in another stage of engagement in November.

After the November engagement, a recommended Concept Plan will be presented to the public and then to Council during the capital budget planning process in 2022.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us:

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