

RE: Item 5, Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund Report

To: the Standing Policy Committee on Community Services.

From: Trees Please Winnipeg.

Dear Councillors:

This report on the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund itemizes the important steps the city council can take to ensure the expansion of parks and greenspaces across the city, especially in underserved neighbourhoods.

As indicated in the report, acquiring natural lands on the outskirts of city is essential and offers substantial benefits to all residents. In order to ensure livability, the report also recommends expanding greenspaces in the downtown area and vulnerable neighbourhoods to ensure the benefits extend to all Winnipeggers.

Those benefits – that is, the value of city parks and treed greenspaces in terms of enhancing urban climate resiliency, biodiversity and human health - have been well documented.

For example:

1. **Urban Heat Island Mitigation:** Green spaces, especially those with trees, can reduce local daytime temperatures by up to 6°C during heatwaves. This protection will become increasingly important as the number of +30 degrees Celsius days increase as predicted. Research also suggests that urban parks need to be carefully designed and interconnected to maximize their cooling impact.
2. **Flood Reduction:** Permeable park surfaces and vegetation reduce storm runoff, mitigating flood risks.
3. **Air Quality & Carbon Storage:** Green space acts as a carbon sink and helps to reduce air pollution which is critical as climate-related health risks increase.
4. **Human Health:** Recent studies have shown multiple positive health effects from urban green spaces including improved mood, stress relief and increased physical activity.
5. **Biodiversity:** According to the research, preserving and protecting natural greenspaces, whether intact forests, wetlands or grasslands, is key to preventing biodiversity loss. Research indicates that *interconnected greenspaces* are essential in efforts to protect urban biodiversity by creating safe corridors for wildlife.

Our riparian or riverside forests and trees constitute key habitat and corridors for wildlife. Currently the city owns less than 50% of the riparian forest which means that those corridors and habitats are being increasingly denuded or fragmented, which threatens wildlife, especially migrating birds.

To climate proof our city and protect the health of its citizens and wildlife, Winnipeg City Council must begin to allocate the level of funding needed to naturalize and increase treed greenspaces and parks to 50 square metres per person, the internationally established standard for urban climate resilience and livability.

Those funds will ensure that Parks, Naturalization and Urban Forestry can partner with non-profits and private donors as well as access Federal funding from the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund (NSCSF) and other federal programs such as the Natural Infrastructure Fund and the Disaster Mitigation Fund.

While numerous other cities were immediately able to access NSCSF funds as soon as the first round of funding was announced in 2025, Winnipeg failed to do so because the capital budget for Parks was insufficient to secure that funding.

That is an embarrassment.

To correct that and ensure that Winnipeg is in a position to immediately apply for federal funding to expand and naturalize our greenspaces and parks, I urge your committee to move now to endorse this report and send it forward for council approval.

Thank-you for your attention to this.

Sincerely,

Erna Buffie

Trees Please Winnipeg