



Eagle Point-Blue Rapids Parks Council

Eagle Point – Blue Rapids Reclamation Strategy Summary

The unique natural and human history of the Eagle Point – Blue Rapids (EPBR) Park System has resulted in a mosaic of native vegetation and disturbed sites in various stages of natural succession. Disturbed sites make up approximately 8% of the Park System land base, with land uses responsible for the majority of the disturbance footprint being roads, wells, pipelines and aggregate extraction.

Restoring productivity to disturbed sites is an important aspect of conserving and protecting the natural and cultural landscape of the Eagle Point – Blue Rapids (EPBR) Park System, and is therefore an objective of the EPBR Park Management Plan. To address this reclamation objective the Parks Council developed a [Reclamation Strategy](#) (link to pdf) to encourage, guide and facilitate the conversion of disturbed sites to ecologically and/or recreationally productive areas. The Strategy includes:

- An inventory of disturbed sites, describing their distribution and common causes;
- Clarification as to who takes the lead on reclamation of different types of sites;
- An overview of the EPBR Reclamation Framework, which is a 7 step process for reclaiming disturbed sites, taking the site from its disturbed condition to realizing its end use vision (adapted from the Parks Canada 2008 Framework for the Planning and Implementation of Ecological Restoration Projects);
- A discussion of the development of end use visions for disturbed sites;
- Recommendations for Parks Council involvement in the reclamation of industrial leases;
- EPBR Restoration Guidelines intended as an aide to identifying appropriate restoration techniques for restoring ecological productivity to a disturbed site.

Priorities for Reclamation identified in this strategy are:

All Sites

- Develop a comprehensive vision for the Park System that incorporates end use visions at different scales so that reclamation and restoration activities can be focused and timely.
- Develop EPBR specific seeding and planting programs that reflect the native vegetation communities in the EPBR Vegetation Classification.

Industrial Leased Sites

- Work with Alberta Parks and other relevant provincial government authorities to:

- Take advantage of current and new mechanisms to encourage the timely reclamation of sites when industrial operations are completed.
- Facilitate non-traditional reclamation of industrial sites on a site-by-site basis to an alternative end use, such as a recreational facility.

Non-Industrial Sites

- Ongoing prioritization of sites for restoration and identify any appropriate end uses.
- Proceed with applying the EPBR Reclamation Framework to sites in order of priority.

Addressing Reclamation Priorities in the EPBR Park System

- The Parks Council is working on addressing the priorities identified in the EPBR Reclamation Strategy. In 2013, the Parks Council was awarded a grant from Environment Canada to reclaim and/or ecologically restore 15 disturbed sites in the Park System. The project, *EPBR Ecological Restoration (read below)*, was implemented from 2013 to 2015.

Eagle Point – Blue Rapids Ecological Restoration – Environment Canada EcoAction Grant

During 2013 and 2014, the Eagle Point – Blue Rapids Parks Council restored and enhanced habitat in 15 disturbed sites in Eagle Point Provincial Park and Blue Rapids Provincial Recreation Area. This work was primarily funded by a grant awarded from Environment Canada under the EcoAction Community Funding Program. Eagle Point Provincial Park and Blue Rapids Provincial Recreation Area cover almost 60 square kilometers of land along the North Saskatchewan River just outside of Drayton Valley, Alberta. The two provincial protected areas, which together make up the Eagle Point – Blue Rapids Park System (Park System), were created to bring better management to the area, enhance outdoor recreation opportunities, and revive, enhance and protect ecological values. The EPBR Ecological Restoration Project enhanced habitat by planting native vegetation, managing noxious weeds, educating youth and the public about responsible recreation, and monitoring the success of restoration efforts over the long term.

Environment Canada’s EcoAction Community Funding Program supports community-based, nonprofit organizations conducting action focused projects with measurable, positive impacts on the Environment. When awarding the funds to the Eagle Point – Blue Rapids Parks Council (Parks Council) in 2013, the former Minister of the Environment, the Honorable Peter Kent, noted that EcoAction projects are “...an essential part of the environmental agenda” and an “...important initiative for a healthy environment.” This project will restore native wildlife habitat to 15 disturbed sites, improve the community’s recreational experience by creating a more natural place to play, and provide ecological and recreational education and stewardship.

“In 2013 and 2014, the Parks Council and community volunteers planted several thousand trees on these disturbed sites to facilitate natural succession.” says Kerri Widenmaier, the Science and Reclamation Coordinator with the Parks Council, who is managing the project. “The species of trees and shrubs chosen for planting are based on the forests that surround a disturbed site, so they are all native to the Park System.” Over 6000 trees were planted as part of this project, with trees and planting equipment provided by Weyerhaeuser, and planting conducted by the Parks Council, individual

volunteers, and the Jr. Forest Wardens, a youth community group that focuses on forestry, ecology, outdoor skills and leadership. "This is very much a community project" says Widenmaier, "it wouldn't be possible without the help of volunteers, community groups and companies such as Weyerhaeuser, Drayton Valley Sand and Gravel, Range Helicopters and the Jr. Forest Wardens." Many local companies donated time and services imperative to the completion of this project.

Most of the sites ecologically restored were disturbed through oil and gas activities decades ago, where reclamation work conducted in the 60s and 70s has not resulted in adequate forest re-growth. "Criteria weren't as strict as they are now when it comes to reclamation, and trees didn't grow very well," says Widenmaier. Some of the sites were also disturbed through recreational use, which is why, according to the Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Parks Council, JeanAnne Prysliak, the community and youth education component of this project is so important. "It's great that we are doing on-the-ground work to enhance habitat, but we also need to help the community to enjoy the outdoors without having a lasting negative impact on the environment. For example, by practicing no-trace camping, or sticking to the trails when using your off-highway vehicle."

Work related to this ecological restoration project, and its positive impacts on the Environment, will continue long after the funding provided by Environment Canada is complete. "Part of this project involves setting up a long term monitoring program, so we can see if our restoration work is successful," says Widenmaier. "The monitoring will help us to learn from this project, so that we can improve on our ecological restoration efforts in the future. We plan to continue restoration and monitoring work for in the Park System for many years to come".

Link to Western Review article **Trees planted to rejuvenate areas of park:**

<http://www.draytonvalleywesternreview.com/2013/08/06/trees-planted-in-to-rejuvenate-areas-of-park>

Link to other Western Review article **Hard work fosters sense of community, pride:**

<http://www.draytonvalleywesternreview.com/2014/10/20/hard-work-fosters-sense-of-community-pride>