FISH CREEK PROVINCIAL PARK

DRAFT TRAILS MASTER PLAN

PHASE 2 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

May-June 2021

Alberta
Environment
and Parks

Introduction

Project Purpose

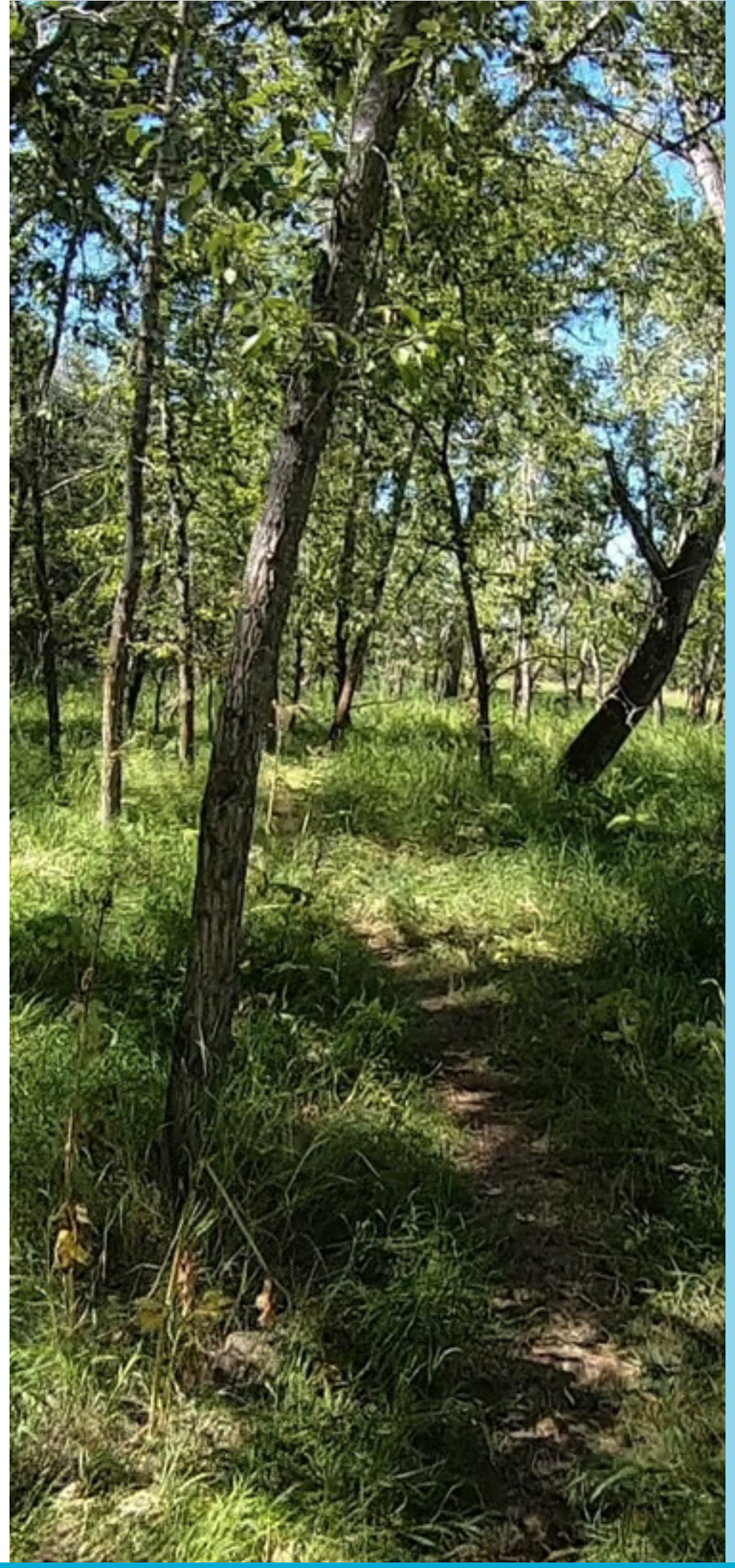
Due to an intense level of use, maintenance challenges, and an extensive informal trail network, the trails at Fish Creek Provincial Park (FCPP) are in need of attention. With a range of users and trail types crisscrossing through a diverse and sensitive natural environment, Alberta Parks requires a plan to provide opportunities and address issues related to trails throughout FCPP.

Role of Public Feedback

This engagement provides information on the draft Fish Creek Trails Master Plan. Alberta Parks is providing an opportunity for park users to share their ideas and insights on key decisions guiding the next steps in plan development.

Timeline

Alberta Parks launched the targeted stakeholder engagement in fall 2020 which guided the core guidelines and technical considerations for inclusion in the Plan. The current public engagement will confirm and revise these considerations. Following the engagement, Alberta Parks will prepare the Final Fish Creek Provincial Park Trails Master Plan targeted for mid-2021.



How to use this document

Use the links below to jump to your topic of interest:

Vision & Objectives

Plan Vision

Fish Creek Provincial Park has a sustainable trail network that provides unique and safe trail opportunities for a diverse range of recreationalists while reducing impacts to natural resources and supporting stewardship.

Plan Objectives

The Trails Master Plan responds to the following core principles:

Sustainability

The FCPP Trails system:

- Is sustainable environmentally, socially, and operationally.
- Is appropriately planned through flood prone areas.
- Decommissions trails that are unsustainable or redundant.

Stewardship

The FCPP Trails system:

- Is supported by users through volunteering, partnership, and advocacy.

Park User

The FCPP Trails system:

- Is designed with input from partners, key stakeholders, and the public.
- Provides opportunities to connect in the park and with the park.
- Provides accessible experiences.
- Is easy to use, follow, and share.
- Responds to a diverse mix of skill levels and challenges.
- Integrates with surrounding communities, bikeways, and pathways.

Reducing Impacts

The FCPP Trails system:

- Supports key wildlife habitat by avoiding trail activity in park preservation zones.
- Reduces operational challenges and issues related to beavers.
- Avoids or reduces impact to intact grassland and native vegetation.
- Formalizes access where appropriate in sensitive aquatic and riparian zones.

Planning Documents

Key Documents Informing the Plan

The Provincial Parks Act, the Plan for Parks, previous park management plans, the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan, and the City of Calgary's Pathway and Bikeway Plan informed the draft Trails Master Plan.

Provincial Parks Act, 2000

Under the Provincial Parks Act, the government establishes parks to maintain and protect natural diversity and intact habitat for supporting biodiversity and to support a range of recreation and tourism experiences.

Plan for Parks (2009)

This plan identifies desired outcomes for parks, including the provision of recreational opportunities, conservation of Alberta's natural heritage, and support for the long-term sustainability of park ecosystems.

Fish Creek Provincial Park Management Plans (1997 & 2009)

These management plans emphasized the role of Fish Creek within its urban context – a unique setting for a provincial park. The focus of these plans is largely on preserving a natural landscape immersed in an evolving urban setting while balancing the needs of wildlife and natural systems with outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, stewardship, and environmental education.

South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (2017)

This plan provides a high-level framework for managing development intent and land uses in provincial parks, including:

- Protecting water courses;
- Designating staging and access areas;
- Ensuring parks facilitate appropriate activities in appropriate places;
- Effectively managing historic resources for preservation, education and tourism; and
- Delivering education, awareness and compliance programs to promote and support responsible land use and stewardship through collaborative partnerships.

Calgary Pathway and Bikeway Plan (2001)

This plan directly lists Fish Creek Provincial Park as a critical stakeholder for ensuring the successful implementation of trails, pathways, and bikeways that facilitate regional connectivity to, from, and within the park. The Trails Master Plan responds to reflect this focus that encourages access to the park from throughout the City.

Ideas Supported in the Trails Master Plan

- **Supporting a Range of Recreation and Tourism Experiences:** Pursuant to the existing management plans, FCPP's trails should remain open and accessible, providing a diverse array of recreational and education activities to users of all skill levels and abilities.
- **Preserving Nature Systems:** FCPP's trails must respect the invaluable natural resources found within the park, including environmentally sensitive areas, preservation zones, and other areas of natural interest worthy of protecting.
- **Regional Integration:** FCPP's trails should directly interact with the City of Calgary's broader bikeway and pathways network, ensuring the park's trail network is easily accessible and interconnected with the City.
- **Managing Historic Resources:** FCPP's should respond to the historic natural and built resources found throughout the park, maintaining access to appropriate sites without diminishing or degrading their function.
- **Environmental Education:** FCPP's trails should directly contribute to the educational potential of the park, providing opportunities for learners of all ages, backgrounds, and interests to interact with the unique and special environments found within Fish Creek.

Trail Planning & Design Principles

Sustainability

Any investments in FCPP's trails must be sustainable from an environmental, social, and operational perspective. Approaching trail planning and design from a sustainability perspective ensures that all proposed improvements in the Trails Master Plan are implementable, durable, and appropriate for the goals and objectives of FCPP.

Reducing Ecological Impacts

All trails have an innate impact on the local ecology, but these impacts can be mitigated through intentional design, thoughtful location of trails, and building trails capable of handling anticipated demand.

Visitor Experience

Trails should be located and designed in a way that maximizes the experience of those using them within the parameters of the project's vision and guiding principles. Creating a positive visitor experience is important for fostering broad community stewardship over the park as a cherished asset valued by all.

Market-Driven

The location and design of trails must reflect the existing demand for these amenities in the park. The significant development of an informal trail network over the years speaks to the popularity of FCPP. Ensuring the new Trails Master Plan responds to the use already occurring in the park is imperative to successful implementation.

Accessibility

Trails should be designed for a range of abilities and activities. Contemplating accessibility from the outset of trail planning allows for a strategic and park-wide approach that can help minimize conflict between different activities and users, while promoting a comprehensive network of trails throughout the park that create accessibility for all.

Wayfinding

Planning and designing trails with wayfinding in mind leads to a clearer, easier to navigate network throughout FCPP. Wayfinding can also provide means for educating users about trail etiquette, the natural environment of a particular part of the park, and many other uses.

Stewardship

A number of volunteer groups are involved with stewardship at Fish Creek. This includes education, ecological restoration, trail building and maintenance, and park monitoring. The trail plan should integrate relationships between park stewards and trail priorities.

Environmental Guidelines

Preservation

Park management plans identify preservation zones for valuable, sensitive and at-risk resources. These zones have been designated for preservation due to their local and, in some cases, provincial significance. These areas will not include trails.

At Shannon Terrace, a fenced preservation area protects sensitive snake habitat. This will remain fenced with no admittance.

PHOTO: FRIENDS OF FISH CREEK

Located between Bebo Grove and Votier's Flats, Raven's Rock preservation zone will be protected with no trail access.

Poplar Island, located on the Bow River near Mallard Point, will remain closed to the public to protect an important wildlife corridor along the river.

PHOTO: BIRDS CALGARY BLOG

Preserving, protecting, and restoring important habitat in the park benefits us all.

Environmental Sensitivity

The mandate of the provincial park is to provide access for recreation and education while preserving the natural environment. Endangered habitats such as rough fescue and low shrub located on south facing slopes are limited within the city and must be protected. Marshes, wetlands, seasonally wet areas, and riparian zones along the creek and river are important habitat to protect. Trails through these areas will be limited.

Trails through rough fescue/low shrub habitat on south facing slopes will be limited to existing sustainable trails. All unsustainable trails will be closed.

Trails through wet areas will be limited to key, sustainable trails that may provide an educational experience and important connectivity in the network.

PHOTO: FRIENDS OF FISH CREEK

Trails that are flooded due to beaver activity will be assessed individually for mitigation measures or closure. Beavers will not be removed from the park.

Riparian zones along the creek and river must be protected. Trails and access points will be intentionally placed and all others closed.

Restoration

The creation of excessive amounts of informal trails and the large areas of invasive grassland are main environmental concerns that require restoration throughout the park. Informal trails that are high-quality and play an important role in the trail network will be included in the trail plan. Trails that are unsustainable or redundant will be closed and restored. Invasive grasslands that occupy a large area of the park are targeted for restoration, not only to increase the quality of habitat in the park, but to increase the quality of the park experience.

Trail proliferation along the creek and river is a major concern. Many areas have as many as three trails paralleling the creek within 10m of the water line. Key trails along the creek will be maintained while redundant trails will be closed. Trail segments that are too close to the creek will be rerouted.

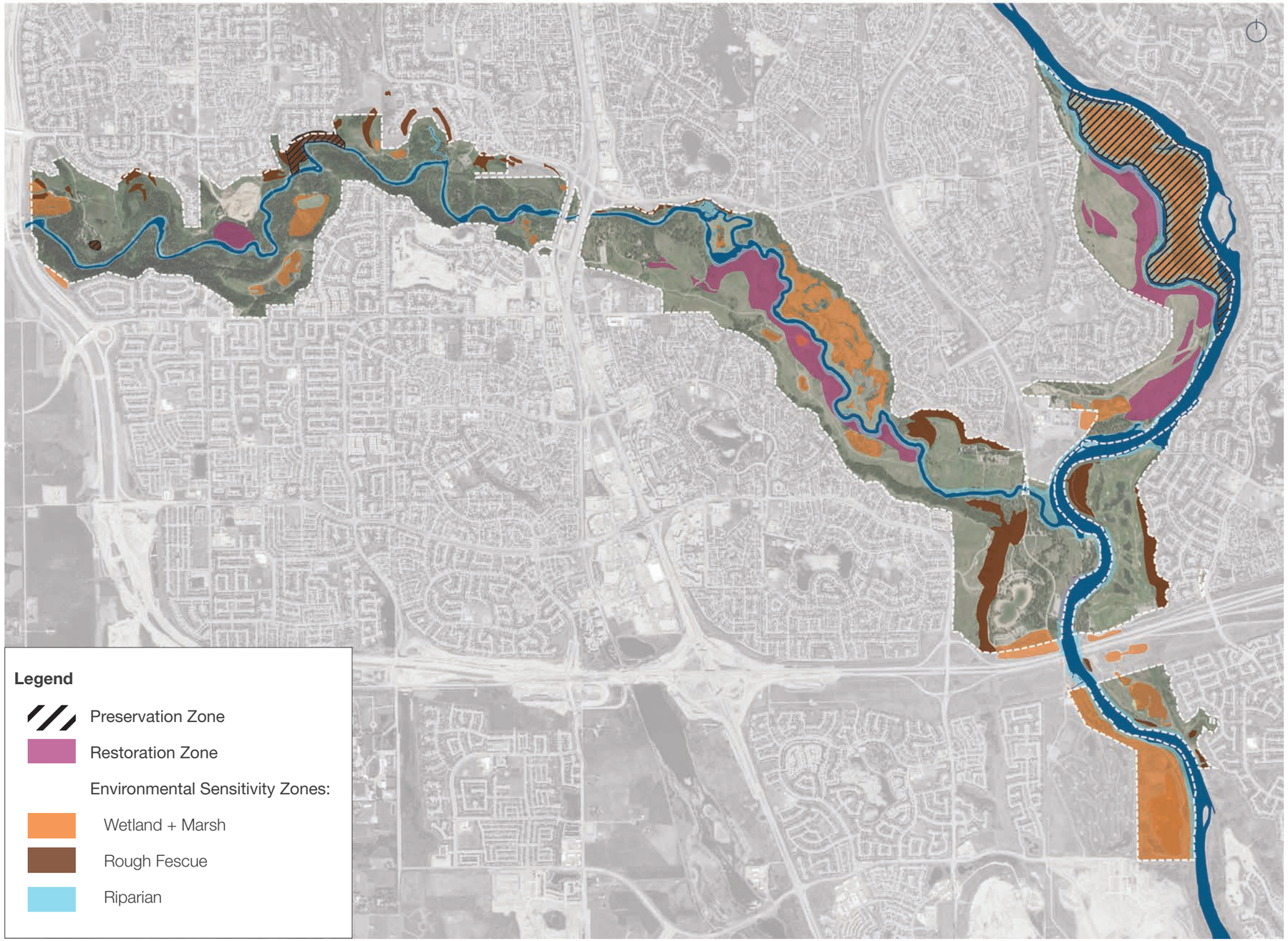
Trail proliferation through wooded areas causes erosion, degraded understory, and at times, unsafe conditions. Key, sustainable trails will be maintained while unsafe, unsustainable, and redundant trails will be either rerouted or closed.

Frequent creek access points degrade stream banks and riparian vegetation. Strategically located, formalized creek access points will be integrated into the plan (see park features) and all others closed and restored.

Invasive grasslands may look picturesque to some, but they contribute little to park habitat value. Areas where invasive grasslands have replaced stream side riparian vegetation are of particular concern. With the creek identified as a important wildlife corridor, restoration efforts are focused around improving plant diversity in these areas.

Environmental Guidelines: Environmental Zones

This plan outlines existing preservation zones, zones targeted for future restoration, and environmentally sensitive areas.



Design Guidelines: Park Features

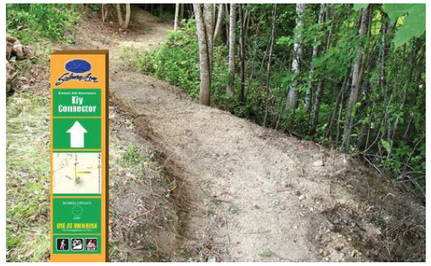
Park Access, Signage & Wayfinding

Access points tie in with City of Calgary pathways, sidewalks, and roads as well as existing use patterns. All park access points will include wayfinding and information signage.

New signage and wayfinding will be located throughout the park to facilitate the use of the trail network. An updated park map will include trail distance and elevation, trail surface type, destination points, and trail etiquette.

Kiosks will include a map of the full park, other park information, and will act as wayfinding and meeting points.

Full park maps will be located at all entry points. Blow-up maps of the local area will be located at key intersections throughout the park.



Sign posts will be located at trailheads as required throughout the gravel and natural surface trail network.

Destination Points & Creek Access Points

The trail network will be designed to facilitate access to a variety of destination points and creek access points for all users. Existing destination points will be preserved and at times enhanced to allow for improved access and resilience to high levels of use. Creek access points will be located frequently along the trail network to allow for a range of creek experiences and to limit damage to the creek.

Type 1 Creek Access Point: Key destinations like the Ice Caves will have improved trail access, additional park amenities like seating and waste bins above the top of the creek bank, and naturalized creek hardening along the banks to facilitate high use while protecting the creek and riparian vegetation. Naturalized creek hardening is done using a combination of strategically placed boulders to create seating and stabilize banks and deep rooted plants (soil bioengineering).

Type 2 Creek Access Point: Key creek access points located on existing, eroded cut banks along the trail network will be partially hardened and stabilized with rocks and deep rooted plants to facilitate access to easily eroded areas while protecting the creek.

Type 3 Creek Access Point: Trails will lead to natural points along the creek where access does minimal damage to banks. These access points will remain natural with no stabilization.

Parking & Facilities

While the Trails Master Plan does not include the design of parking and facilities, the trail network corresponds to existing parking and facilities to improve connectivity and circulation.

Design Guidelines: Asphalt Pathways

The asphalt paths offer a long, continuous, smooth surface that meanders for kilometres through the park. The paths are by far the busiest areas in the park. User conflicts are often reported due to blind corners, hidden intersections, varying levels of speed and poor trail etiquette. A central issue, however, is the large number of users accessing the park each day.

Required Upgrades to Existing:

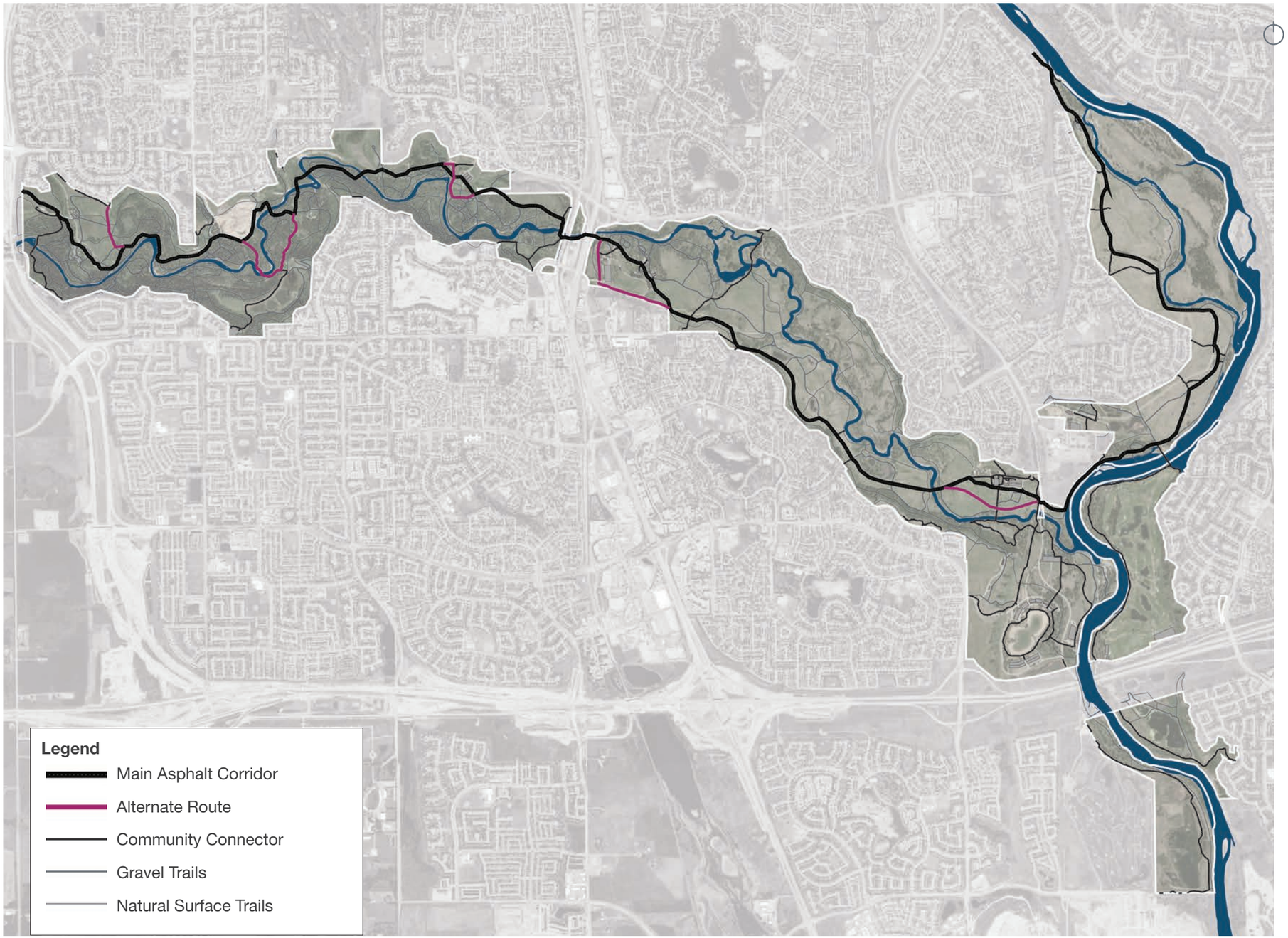
Poor sight lines and dangerous trail intersections will be improved across the park through signage, vegetation clearing, site specific mitigations measures and strategic trail planning. Many asphalt paths are in poor shape and require replacement, this has been tied in with the pathway concept below.

New Asphalt Pathway Concept:

The largest improvement to the asphalt pathways will be the expansion of the main asphalt path that acts as a central corridor through the park. This route has been identified through use studies and will be widened to 3.0-4.0m through the length of the main corridor. New alternate routes will be created around the busiest day-use areas including: Shannon Terrace; Votier's Flats; Glennfield; and Bow Valley Ranch. These alternate routes will be 3.0m width while pathways that connect into the central corridor from surrounding communities (community connectors) will remain their existing widith.

Prioritization of Work:

Replacing the main corridor pathway and building the alternate routes will be prioritized. Replacement of other park pathways will be prioritized based on condition and level of use.



Design Guidelines: Gravel Trails

With a lower number of users and lower overall speeds, the gravel trails are the ideal place for a relaxed park experience. User conflicts largely arise at dangerous trail intersections and in bottleneck areas where natural surface trails adjoin with gravel trails. Due to the nature of the loose gravel, gravel trails require regular maintenance to maintain a high quality surface. Many gravel trails on steep slopes have become hazardous due to a lack of maintenance. Similarly, gravel trails in flat areas can become water logged and flooded if additional gravel is not added regularly.

Required Upgrades to Existing:

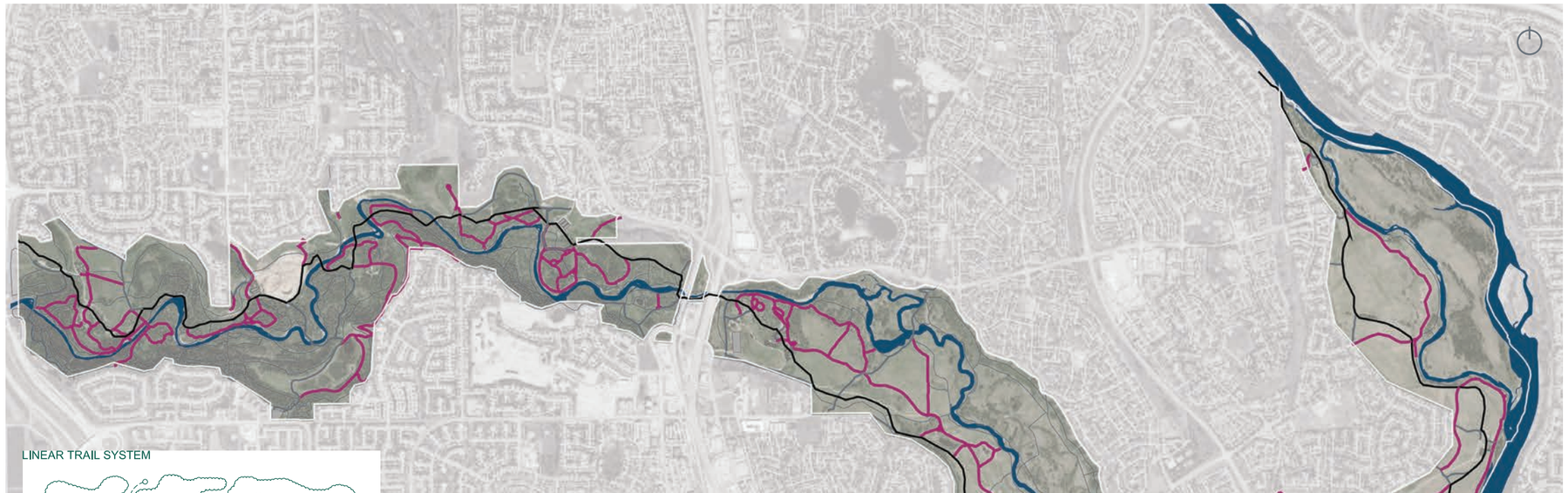
Dangerous trail intersections and bottleneck areas will be improved across the park through signage and strategic trail planning. Gravel trails on slopes will be assessed for required maintenance or replacement with asphalt. Gravel trails with water issues will receive additional gravel and improved drainage.

New Gravel Trail Concept:

Each parking lot/day-use area will be associated with a stacked loop gravel trail network. Creek access points are located within close walking distance proximity to parking lots to provide destination points along the trail network. The stacked loop trail network offers multiple route options to explore and return to the day-use area.

Prioritization of work:

Routine maintenance of key gravel trails will be prioritized followed by the construction of new gravel trails to create stacked loop systems.



Design Guidelines: Natural Surface Trails

The natural surface trails at Fish Creek offer a diverse and high quality trail experience for recreational trail users. User conflicts arise at dangerous trail intersections with both gravel and asphalt paths as well as within the natural surface trail network. Trail connectivity issues have been identified across the park and trail quality has diminished in many areas due to sitting water, erosion, overly steep trails and unsanctioned trail and structure building. Wayfinding can be difficult through the natural surface trails due to a lack of signage and trail proliferation in many areas.

Required Upgrades to Existing:

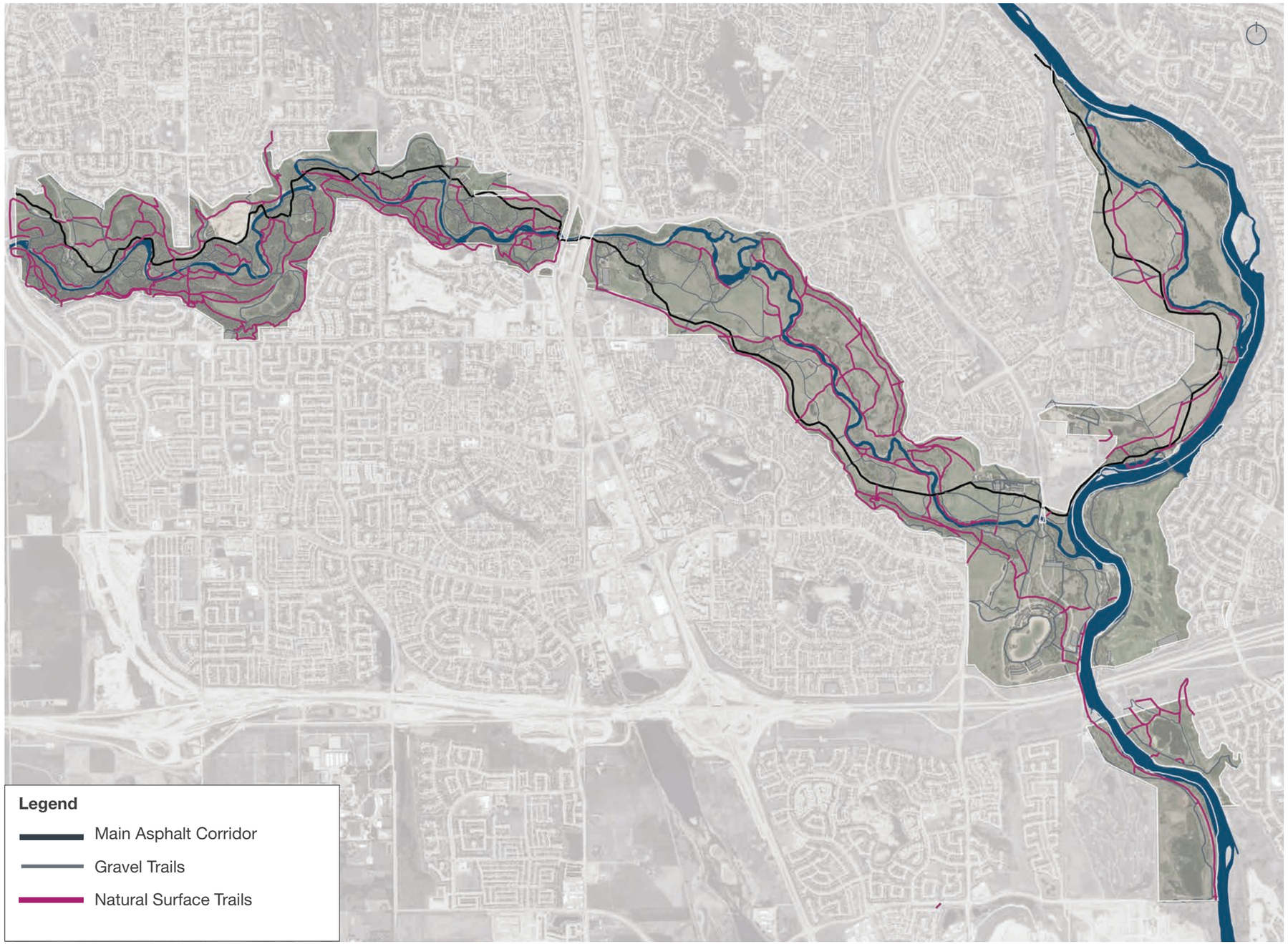
Trails through wet areas will be rerouted or repaired with proper drainage crossings installed. Unsustainable and redundant trails will be rerouted or closed in favour of sustainable, well-connected trails. Signage and wayfinding will be located throughout the trail network.

New Natural Surface Trail Concept:

The trail network will be well-connected and provides as much continuous trail as possible for both easy and moderate difficulty levels. Gravel and asphalt paths are used as connectors between trails as little as possible. Two main trail areas occupy 2/3 of the park and contain the majority of the natural surface trails. The western trail area contains more moderate difficulty level trails with some easy level trails, while the eastern trail area contains more easy trails with some moderate trails. Trails that run north/south from Mallard Point to Lafarge Meadows in the eastern part of the park are single trails rather than trail networks.

Prioritization of Work:

Key trails to improve safety, connectivity, and to protect the natural environment will be prioritized.



Park Zones

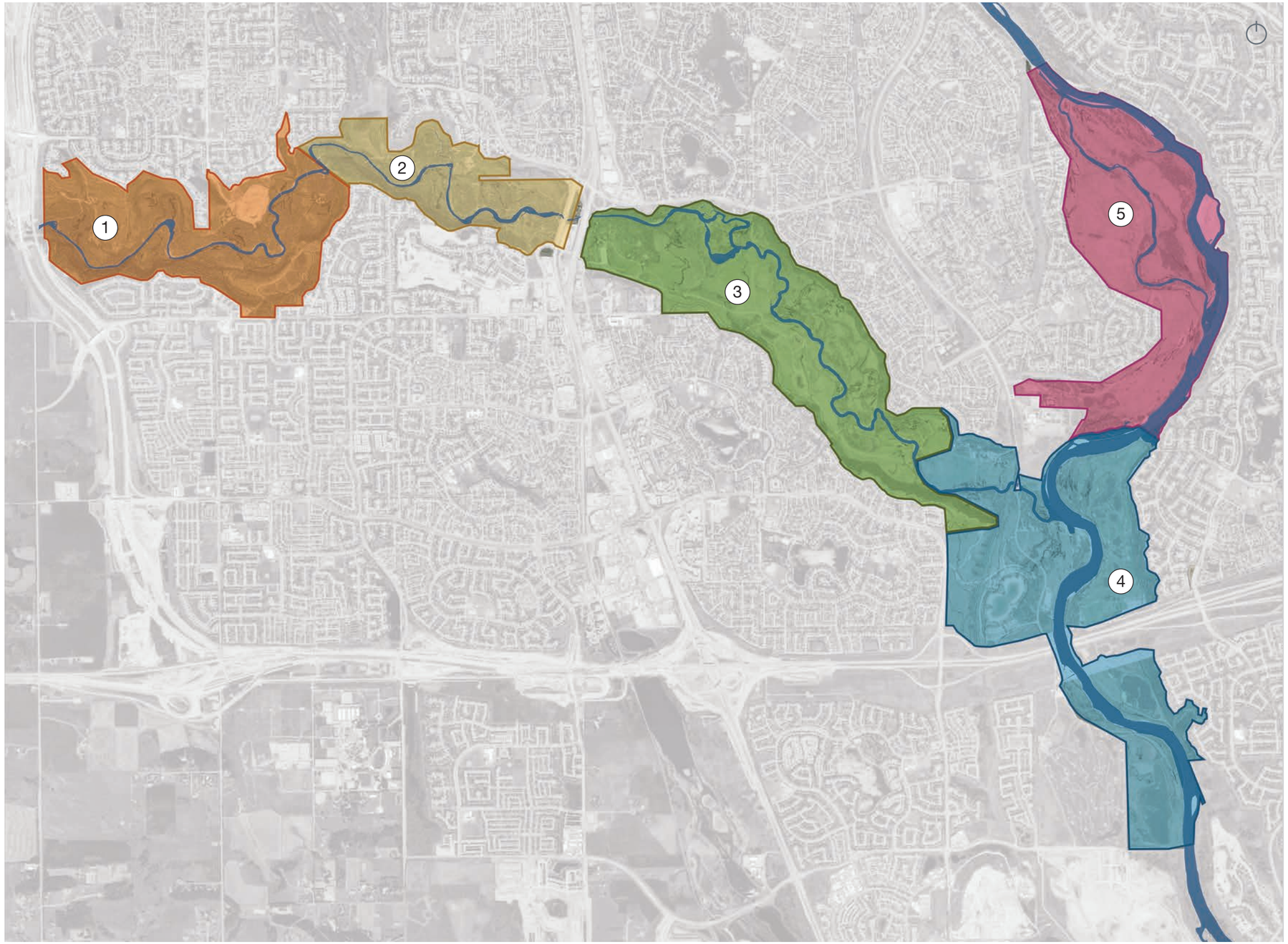
Zone 1:
Shannon Terrace, Bebo Grove, and Marshall Springs

Zone 2:
Raven's Rock, Votier's Flats and Shaws Meadow

Zone 3:
Glennfield and Canyon Meadows/Parkland

Zone 4:
Bow Valley Ranch, Sikome Lake, Hull's Wood, Burnsmead, Mackenzie Meadows Golf Club, and Lafarge Meadows

Zone 5:
Mallard Point, Poplar Island, and Bankside



Zone 1: Shannon Terrace, Bebo Grove, and Marshall Springs

This section of the park is extremely high-use with very diverse terrain. A wide variety of park users access this area on all trail types including environmental education programs, races, events, weddings, day-users, families, hikers, trail runners, mountain bikers, bird watchers and more. To facilitate the best use of the park for all users and limit user conflicts, the environmental and design guidelines (see P. 6-10) have been applied in this area with the following highlights:

Asphalt:

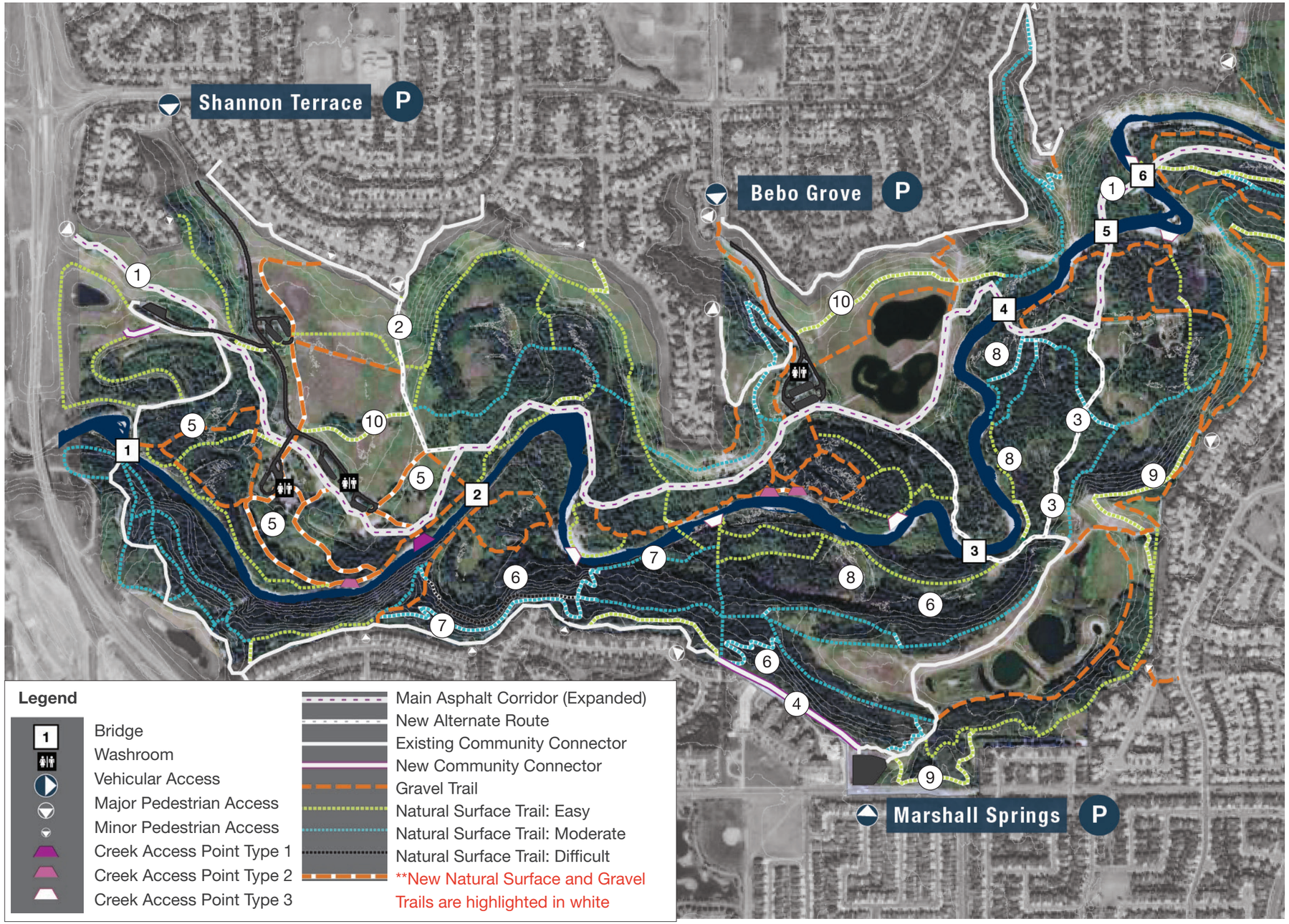
1. Expand the main asphalt trail to accommodate high use.
2. Create a new alternate route to by-pass the parking area at Shannon Terrace.
3. Raise pathways, add drainage features and improve the drainage to mitigate beaver flooding below Marshall Spings.
4. Connect Marshall Springs parking lot to the west.

Gravel:

5. Expand the gravel trail network at Shannon Terrace to create stacked loop options that includes two creek access points.

Natural Surface:

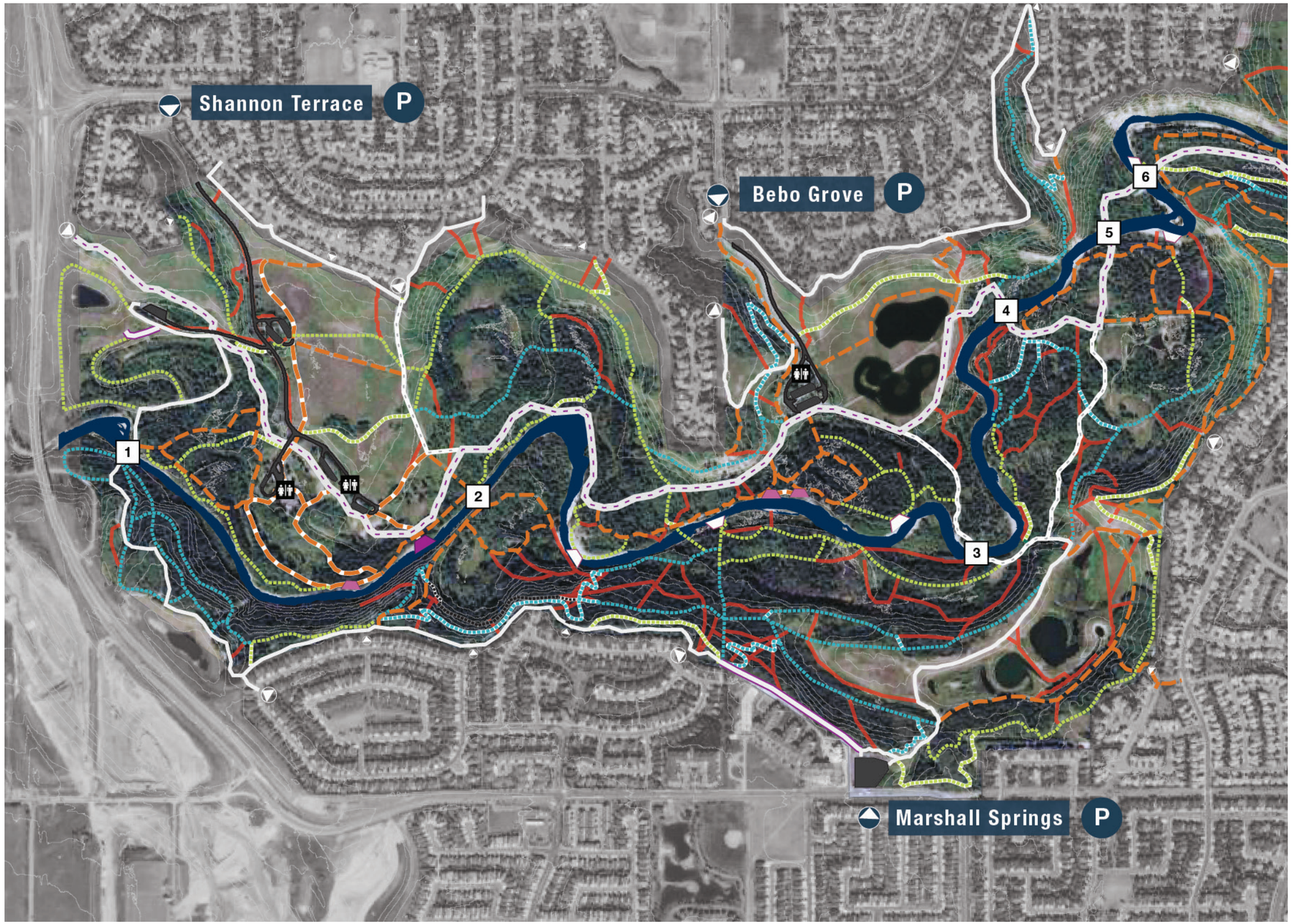
6. Conduct major repair work and several new trails between bridges 2 and 3. Close unsustainable trails in this area to address trail proliferation.
7. Include optional technical trail features (TTFs).
8. Reroute or close trails throughout the Marshall Springs area that are affected by beaver flooding. Mitigate flooding with crossings where appropriate.
9. Install a trail along the top of slope to provide easy trail access on the south side.
10. Improve trail connectivity on the north side of the creek for both easy and moderate trail difficulty levels.



Zone 1: Shannon Terrace, Bebo Grove, and Marshall Springs

Proposed Trail Closure Plan

This plan provides proposed trail closures. This includes trails with environmental issues, trail sustainability issues, redundant trails, and trails that cause the creation of more informal trails.



Legend

- Proposed Trail Closure
- 1 Bridge
- Washroom
- Vehicular Access
- Major Pedestrian Access
- Minor Pedestrian Access
- Creek Access Point Type 1
- Creek Access Point Type 2
- Creek Access Point Type 3
- Main Asphalt Corridor (Expanded)
- New Alternate Route
- Existing Community Connector
- New Community Connector
- Gravel Trail
- Natural Surface Trail: Easy
- Natural Surface Trail: Moderate
- Natural Surface Trail: Difficult

**New Natural Surface and Gravel Trails are highlighted in white

Zone 2: Raven's Rock, Votier's Flats and Shaws Meadow

This section of the park is high-use with very diverse terrain. A wide variety of park users access this area on all trail types including day-users, families, hikers, trail runners, mountain bikers, bird watchers and more. To facilitate the best use of the park for all users and limit user conflicts, the environmental and design guidelines (see P. 6-10) have been applied in this area with the following highlights:

Asphalt:

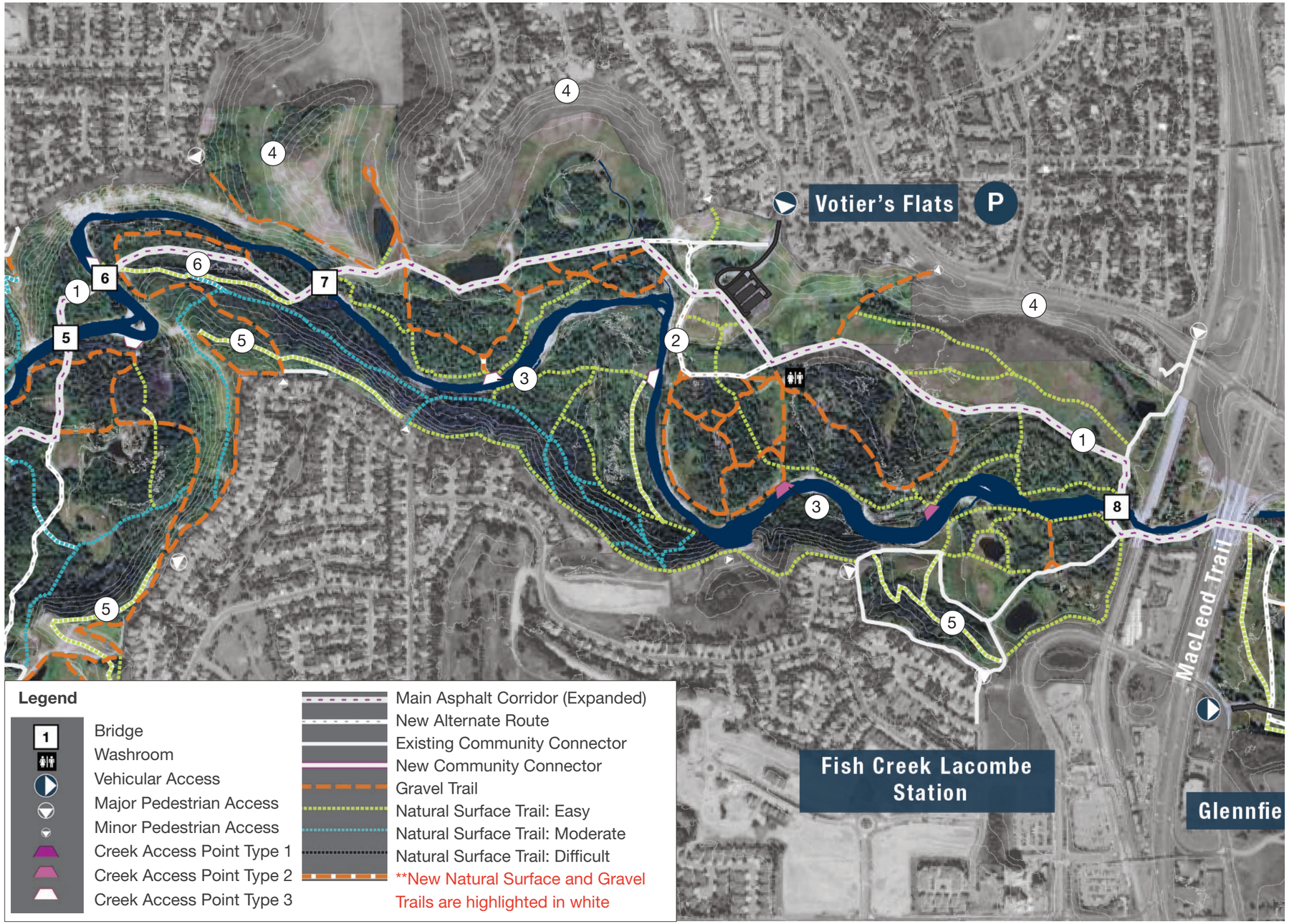
1. Expand the main asphalt corridor to accommodate high use.
2. Create a new alternate route to bypass the Votier's Flats parking lot and heavily used main pathway.

Gravel:

3. Maintain the existing gravel trail network and add creek access points that will act as destination points along the route.

Natural Surface:

4. Due to sensitive grasslands on the south facing slopes and adjacent property lines, no new trails are proposed on the north slopes.
5. On the south side, install an easy trail along the top of slope leading to the MacLeod bridge to improve easy trail access and connectivity. This is a continuation of the trail to the west with some gravel trail connections.
6. Close trails and create new connections between bridges 6 and 7 to improve trail sustainability and limit conflicts with pathway users through this busy section.



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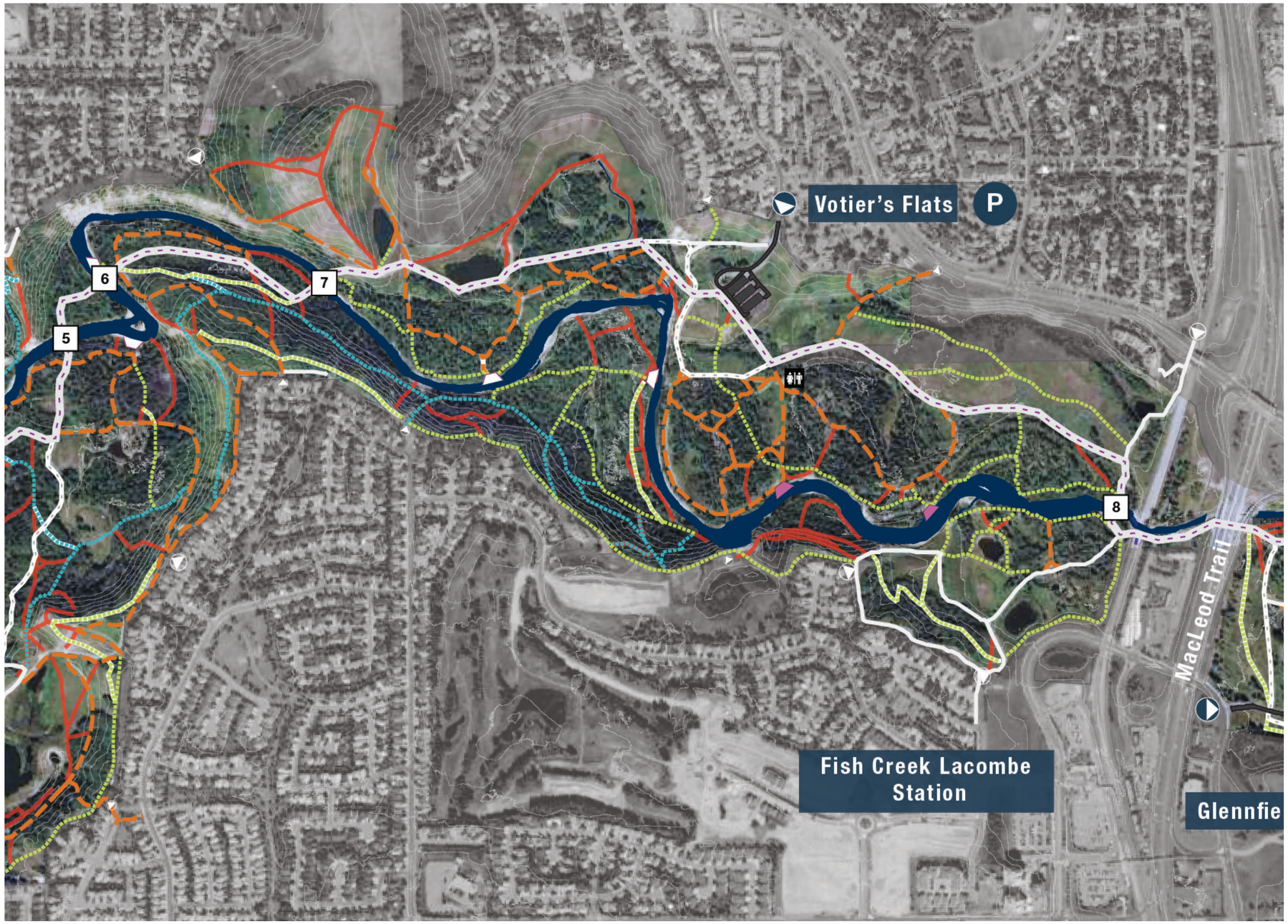

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Zone 3: Glennfield and Canyon Meadows/Parkland

The Glennfield day-use area is extremely high-use while the area on the opposite side of the creek is lower use. This section of the park contains both large amounts of invasive grassland and valuable low lying riparian areas. A wide variety of park users access this area on all trail types including races, events, weddings, day-users, families, hikers, trail runners, mountain bikers, bird watchers and more. To facilitate the best use of the park for all users and limit user conflicts, the environmental and design guidelines (see P. 6-10) have been applied in this area with the following highlights:

Asphalt:

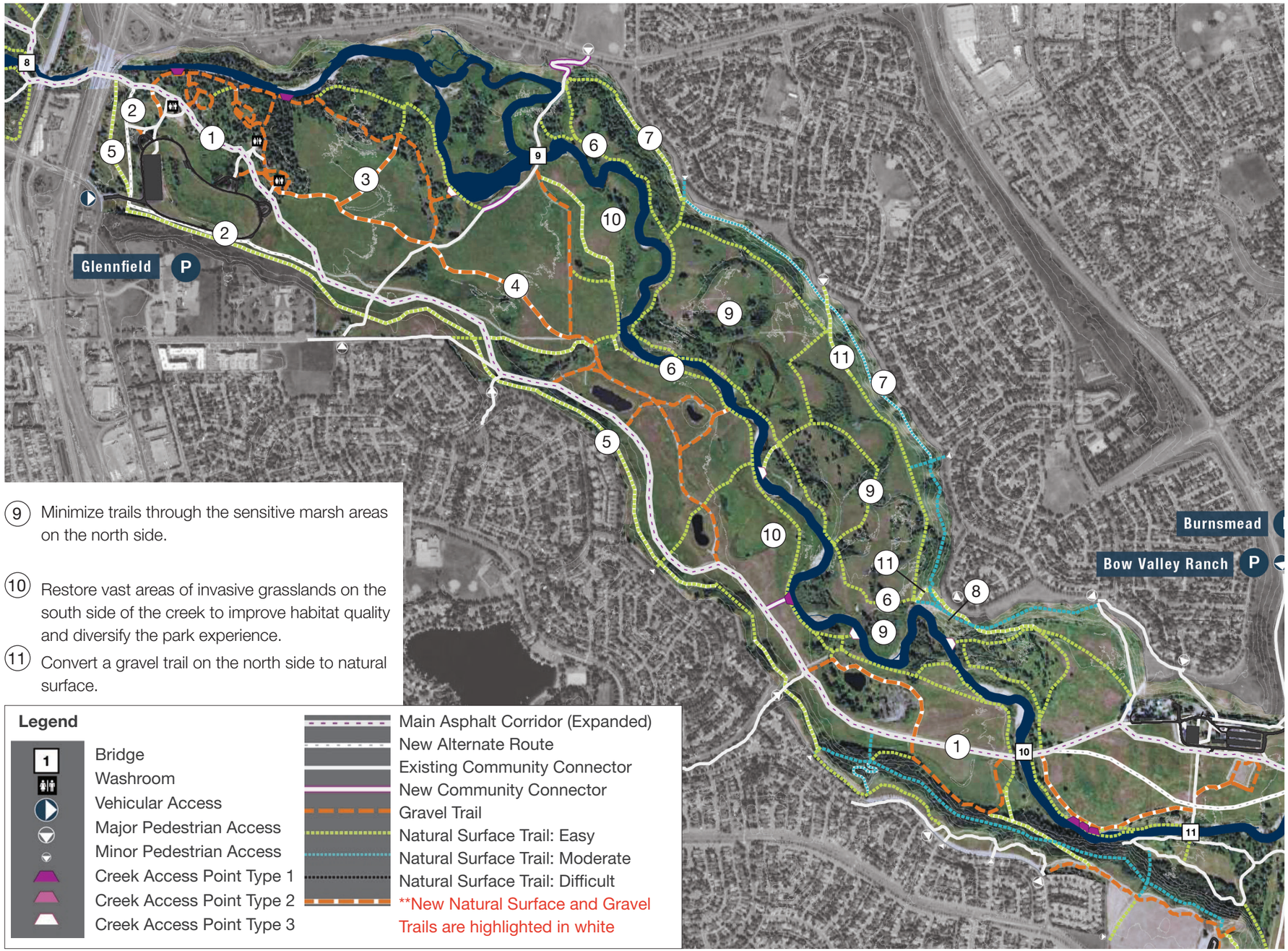
1. Expand the main asphalt corridor to accommodate high use.
2. Bypass the Glennfield day-use area with a new alternate route.

Gravel:

3. Expand the gravel trail network at Glennfield to create stacked loop options including three creek access points.
4. Realign a section of existing gravel trail to better connect to Glennfield.

Natural Surface:

5. Route natural surface trail users around the Glennfield day-use area to connect with a long, continuous, easy trail along the south slope.
6. Maintain the trails along the creek on both sides. Reroute sections of the trails that are too close to the creek and install drainage crossings. Close redundant trails.
7. Install a new trail along the north slope. Part of this trail requires environmental assessment for approval.
8. Close unsustainable trails through a failing slope with wildlife concerns. Create a connection above slope.



9. Minimize trails through the sensitive marsh areas on the north side.
10. Restore vast areas of invasive grasslands on the south side of the creek to improve habitat quality and diversify the park experience.
11. Convert a gravel trail on the north side to natural surface.

Legend

- Bridge
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- Minor Pedestrian Access
- Creek Access Point Type 1
- Creek Access Point Type 2
- Creek Access Point Type 3
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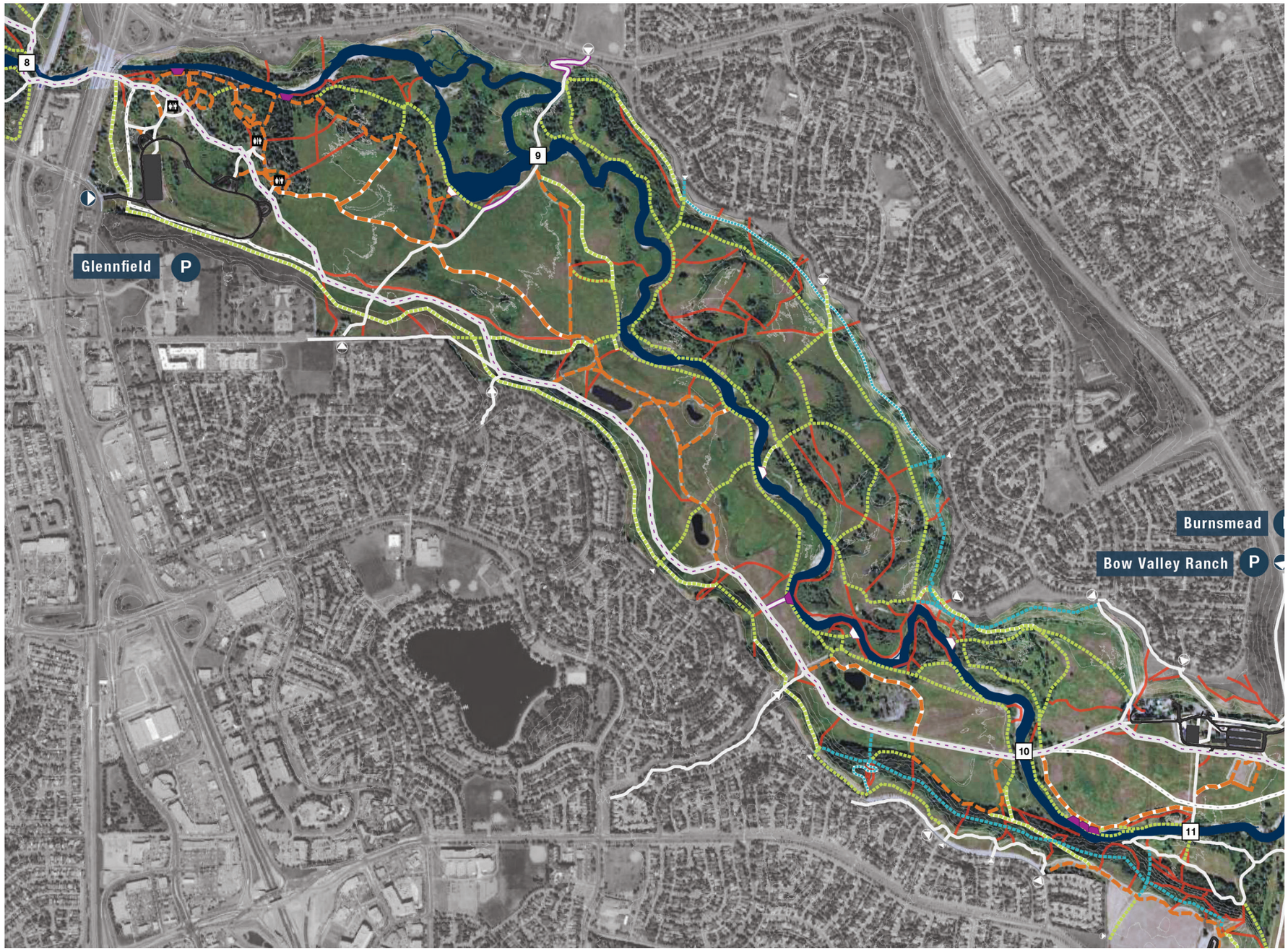

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Zone 4: Bow Valley Ranch, Sikome Lake, Hull's Wood, Burnsmead, Mackenzie Meadows Golf Club, and Lafarge Meadows

This section of the park is extremely high-use with very diverse terrain. A wide variety of park users access this area on all trail types including environmental education programs, day-users, families, hikers, trail runners, mountain bikers, bird watchers and more. To facilitate the best use of the park for all users and limit user conflicts, the environmental and design guidelines (see P. 6-10) have been applied in this area with the following highlights:

Asphalt:

1. Expand the main asphalt corridor to accommodate high use.
2. Create a new alternate route to bypass the Bow Valley Ranch parking lot and heavily used main pathway.
3. Reroute pedestrian access into Sikome Lake to align with entrances and with new pedestrian crossings through the parking lots.

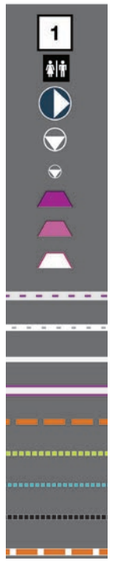
Gravel:

4. Install a new gravel trail to provide access to the Ice Caves.
5. Expand the gravel trail network at Hull's Wood to create a loop with a creek access point destination.

Natural Surface:

6. Install a new trail connection from east of Sikome Lake to the northwest.
7. Maintain a single trail along the river bank and close all others.

Legend



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- Existing Community Connector
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- Proposed Trail Closure
- Bridge
- Washroom
- Vehicular Access
- Major Pedestrian Access
- Minor Pedestrian Access
- Creek Access Point Type 1
- Creek Access Point Type 2
- Creek Access Point Type 3
- Main Asphalt Corridor (Expanded)
- New Alternate Route
- Existing Community Connector
- New Community Connector
- Gravel Trail
- Natural Surface Trail: Easy
- Natural Surface Trail: Moderate
- Natural Surface Trail: Difficult
- **New Natural Surface and Gravel Trails are highlighted in white

Zone 5: Mallard Point, Poplar Island, and Bankside

This section of the park is moderate use with flat terrain and large areas of invasive grasslands. A wide variety of park users access this area on all trail types including day-users, families, hikers, runners, bikers, bird watchers and more. To facilitate the best use of the park for all users and limit user conflicts, the environmental and design guidelines (see P. 6-10) have been applied in this area with the following highlights:

Asphalt:

(1) Expand the main asphalt corridor to accommodate high use.

Gravel:

(2) Create additional gravel trail connections.

(3) Extend a gravel trail to create a new creek access point.

Natural Surface:

(4) Maintain a single trail along the river. Repair low areas and reroute sections that are too close to the river. Close redundant trails.

(5) Locate numerous creek access points along the bank.

(6) Restore vast areas of invasive grasslands to improve habitat quality and diversify the park experience.

Legend

- Bridge
- Washroom
- Vehicular Access
- Major Pedestrian Access
- Minor Pedestrian Access
- Creek Access Point Type 1
- Creek Access Point Type 2
- Creek Access Point Type 3
- Main Asphalt Corridor (Expanded)
- New Alternate Route
- Existing Community Connector
- New Community Connector
- Gravel Trail
- Natural Surface Trail: Easy
- Natural Surface Trail: Moderate
- Natural Surface Trail: Difficult

**New Natural Surface and Gravel Trails are highlighted in white

Zone 5: Mallard Point, Poplar Island, and Bankside

Proposed Trail Closure Plan

This plan provides proposed trail closures. This includes trails with environmental issues, trail sustainability issues, redundant trails, and trails that cause the creation of more informal trails.