

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AND UPDATE**Stormwater Management Facilities Winter Recreation Activities****Report Purpose**

To provide the Priorities Committee with an update on actions taken to address safety concerns related to Stormwater Management Facilities and winter recreation.

Our Prioritized Strategic Goals

Goal 4 - Ensure effective stewardship of water, land, air and energy resources

Goal 7 - Provide opportunities for public engagement and communication

Goal 8 - Foster an environment for safe communities

Report

Over the past several years Strathcona County's messaging around Stormwater Management Facilities (SWMF) has consistently been that SWMFs are not safe for recreation activities and that ice conditions on SWMFs are unpredictable and dangerous. This message is consistent with messaging from other municipalities in the Edmonton region and EPCOR.

Administration has received a few requests from the public, Council members, stakeholders, etc. to allow winter recreation activities (skating) on various SWMFs located throughout Strathcona County, or alternatively, to provide further rationale on why they should not be allowed. This report is intended to inform Council on why Strathcona County does not allow winter recreational activities on SWMFs.

Though SWMFs have always been stormwater infrastructure, residents and municipalities have historically considered SWMFs water features of neighbourhoods as well, and recreational activities other than swimming often took place on these facilities. Over the years, both private and public skating rinks were established on SWMFs in Sherwood Park, but since the 1990s, a shift in perception has taken place where SWMFs are now more likely to be considered by municipalities as dedicated stormwater infrastructure. SWMFs, generally, are now operated in accordance with Best Management Practices which are driven by environmental stewardship, and recreation activities are either discouraged or illegal under municipal bylaws.

SWMFs have year-round flows from storm sewers that can transport heat and winter road chemicals into the wet ponds; flows in storm sewers can continue even when temperatures are below freezing for extended periods. Additionally, wet ponds normally do not freeze solid, which can allow organic activity to continue to generate heat. Given their nature, SWMFs tend to have significantly higher variability in ice thickness relative to natural or manmade waterbodies that are not components of urban stormwater systems. While ice thickness measurements can inform whether ice thickness is adequate to support recreation activities at a specific location at a point in time, there is really no way to determine with certainty that the ice is thick enough to support recreation activities over an entire SWMF, or even a localized area of a SWMF, at a point in time. Strathcona County used to maintain rinks on Broadmoor Lake and Woodbridge Farms Lake but has not done so since 2013 and 2009 respectively due to the unpredictable ice conditions and inconsistent ice measurements that would prevent people or equipment on the lake. Currently, there are no municipalities in the Edmonton region that permit skating on SWMFs.

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The County has obligations for public safety in relation to SWMFs. The County, consistent with the regional approach, has developed messaging to educate the public on the dangers associated with SWMFs and has signage at all SWMFs. If the County was to allow winter recreational activities on SWMFs, it would increase the risk of incident. Even if consideration was made for those SWMFs with few inlets (which theoretically should have less ice thickness variability), a comprehensive ice measurement program would not eliminate public safety risk and could cause confusion around which SWMFs are accessible for skating. While Strathcona County has highly trained personnel capable of rescuing and treating casualties of cold-water immersion, rescue and recovery is not guaranteed.

The safe delivery of recreation and culture opportunities is essential to the well-being of individuals and the community, and this work is guided by the Recreation and Culture Strategy. The Strategy outlines how Strathcona County will identify, prioritize and best meet community need through service delivery, and Recreation, Parks and Culture's (RPC's) approach has been to enhance outdoor skating opportunities while adapting to changing community need. By taking this approach, the County has added numerous outdoor destination skating amenities in recent years. Given the additional risks to the public associated with allowing winter recreation activities on SWMFs, and considering that there are numerous alternative safe skating opportunities available for residents, Administration is not advancing any actions that would enable skating on SWMFs.

Council and Committee History

November 9, 2021 The Priorities Committee referred the Stormwater Management Facilities Winter Recreation Activities Report to the November 30, 2021 Council meeting.

Other Impacts

Policy: N/A

Legislative/Legal: N/A

Interdepartmental: Utilities, Communications, Planning and Development Services, Legislative and Legal Services, Emergency Services

Master Plan/Framework: Best Management Practices for Stormwater Management Facilities, Environmental Framework, Recreation and Culture Strategy

Communication Plan

A communication plan is developed for this initiative.

Enclosure(s)

1 Winter Recreation Activities on Stormwater Management Facilities in the Community