

# Big Island Cultural Values



## Overview

Big Island is a 68 hectare parcel of Crown-owned parcel located within the Woodbend planning area in the North Saskatchewan River valley in southwest Edmonton, an area known in Cree as amiskwaciywâskahikan (amisk-WA-chee wass-skag-N). Big Island contains mature balsam poplar stands but the majority of the site is low-lying and within the floodway, separated from the lands above by steep slopes and a seasonally flooded back channel. The Woodbend area stretches along both sides of the river and is made up of private, municipal and Crown land. While the entire Woodbend area is important for conservation, the focus of this establishment proposal is the Crown-owned Big Island.

## maskêkosak Cultural Significance

Since time immemorial, the River Cree and Western Cree peoples, living in small bands, enjoyed wahkohtowin (Wa Koo ta WIN) (kinship) with all aspects of nature including trees, plants, fish, birds, abundant game, migrating flocks and herds while trading along the North Saskatchewan River. The land was respected and cared for and in turn it gave abundant provisions to humankind. Plants provided plentiful remedies – some say more than 200 medicines were gathered and used. Land meant, and still means, animate and inanimate family members, culture, identity and self. The land, spirituality and natural law were intertwined and still are.

The arrival of settlers in the 1880s led to the depletion of traditional food sources, the introduction of diseases, and the creation of reserve lands, which at one time stretched all the way to the North Saskatchewan River adjacent to Big Island. Those lands are known as maskêkosihk (muss KAY go sik) (the Land of Medicines), or Enoch Cree Nation, and the living descendants of the original people are known as the maskêkosak (muss KAY go sik) (people of the Land of Medicines). The maskêkosak (muss KAY go sik), as with other Indigenous peoples, have an intimate connection with the land and their traditional lands once encompassed Big Island.