



JAN 0 2 2024

Mr. Bart Guyon
Reeve, Brazeau County
7401-Twp Rd 494
P.O. Box 77
Drayton Valley AB T7A 1R1

Dear Mr. Guyon:

Thank you for your letter of July 25, 2023, regarding the North Saskatchewan River's nomination as a Canadian Heritage River. I understand that the Honourable Rebecca Schulz, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas with the Government of Alberta has also received a copy of your letter. I regret the delay in responding.

I would like to assure you that a Canadian Heritage Rivers System designation is purely honorific. It carries no legal or regulatory powers. It does not grant any new planning or decision-making powers to federal or provincial governments. The designation has no impact on Brazeau County's decision-making authority, as the municipalities along the other 40 designated Canadian Heritage Rivers can attest to.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System was established in 1984 as a cooperative federal-provincial-territorial program that identifies, celebrates, and conserves Canadian rivers with exceptional natural, cultural, and recreational values. The Canadian Heritage Rivers System informs, inspires, and encourages Canadians to connect with the country's river heritage and share in its safe-keeping. Being part of the Canadian Heritage River System provides designated rivers with:

- opportunities to foster cooperative river management that unites communities,
- supports cultural connections of Indigenous peoples with rivers,
- stimulates adventure travel and sustainable tourism,
- promotes stewardship and citizen engagement, and
- engages the public in river education, conservation, and recreation.

.../2

To achieve a Canadian Heritage Rivers System designation, a series of documents and studies must be prepared and approved including a pre-screening report; background study with inventory of the river's cultural, natural, and recreational values; a nomination document; and designation document. These documents and studies are required for each new designation, including for any tributaries of existing Canadian heritage rivers.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, consisting of 14 members appointed by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments involved with the program, provides leadership and program direction as outlined in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System's principles, procedures, and operational guidelines. The board also guides the implementation of the 2020 to 2030 strategic plan, reviews nominations, and provides recommendations to federal, provincial and territorial ministers as to whether nominated rivers meet the selection criteria for designation.

Canada's 40 designated heritage rivers each celebrate different elements of Canada's unique cultural, natural, and recreational heritage. Some of the rivers that are part of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System are the Fraser, Ottawa, Saint John, Red, Kazan, and Athabasca rivers. A full list of Canadian Heritage Rivers can be found at <https://chrs.ca/en/rivers>.

Importantly, the Canadian Heritage Rivers System is a non-regulatory program. Under section V – scope of *The Canadian Heritage Rivers System Charter*, “each participant shall retain exclusive responsibilities for its undertaking” and “this Charter shall not be interpreted to create any legal right or obligation between the participants.” The Canadian Heritage Rivers System is not responsible for the day-to-day management of designated rivers or setting individual rivers' management plan objectives.

Management and monitoring activities on designated rivers are led by the local river manager or river stewardship group. The North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance has volunteered to be the primary river manager for the North Saskatchewan River as the role aligns well with their mandate. As the river manager, the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance is well positioned to establish relationships and partner with local stakeholders, experts, and municipalities, including Brazeau County, on river conservation and engagement projects, as well as monitor and report on the values outlined in the river's management plan.

Existing efforts from Brazeau County and other partners will be enhanced as a result of designation. For example, water quality trends on the North Saskatchewan River have been improving, thanks in part to individual community initiatives such as those that Brazeau County has in place. One of the goals outlined on the North Saskatchewan River's designation document is to maintain or improve water quality. Through annual and decadal monitoring reports, the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance and Smoky Lake will be able to track, share, and celebrate the efforts of the numerous stakeholders along the river.

Promoting the North Saskatchewan as a diverse recreational amenity and destination, compatible with the natural and cultural heritage values of the river is another key goal outlined in the North Saskatchewan River's designation document. Through designation, stakeholders can come together to develop market-ready tourism and recreation products, encourage tour operators to develop signature experiences in the region, and encourage the development of new amenities. To that extent, becoming a designated Canadian Heritage River represents a starting point for communities and stakeholders to further collaborate on economic and tourism pursuits, establishing new partnerships and thereby unlocking new funding opportunities.

Thank you for sharing your concerns in advance of my consideration of the designation document. In the meantime, I invite you to contact Christine Drake, Manager for Ecological Corridors and Heritage Rivers at Parks Canada at Christine.Drake@pc.gc.ca if you have further questions about the Government of Canada's involvement with the Canadian Heritage Rivers System program.

I appreciate your ongoing leadership with regards to the North Saskatchewan River and applaud your municipality's conservation efforts.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P. (il/lui/he/him)

c.c.: The Honourable Rebecca Schulz, M.L.A.