

# **QUEER PRAIRIE FUTURES**

**Reorienting Relationships In Alberta's Lost  
Aspen Parkland**

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the Master of Landscape Architecture, School of  
Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of British Columbia.

Scott Archer  
May 4, 2021

Advised by: Sara Jacobs

## RELEASE FORM

Landscape Architecture  
School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture  
University of British Columbia

Name: **Scott Archer**

UBC Student number:

Graduate Project Title: **Queer Prairie Futures:  
Reorienting Relationships in Alberta's Lost Aspen Parkland**

In presenting this report in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Landscape Architecture, University of British Columbia, I agree that UBC may make this work freely available for reference or study. I give permission for copying the report for educational purposes in accordance with copyright laws.

---

Name

Signature

Date



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Sara Jacobs as my advisor for fostering a queer space in our sessions, and for your continued encouragement..

Thank you Kees Lokman for your patience and understanding while leading my cohort through both GP1 and GP2 during this challenging year.

Thank you to The Coven.

Thank you to my pandemic family who provided me with emotional support and life outside of landscape architecture: Alyssa, Jeremy, Katrina.

## ABSTRACT

Queer Prairie Futures is an exploration in the intersection of rural landscapes and queer space theory using Alberta's Aspen Parkland ecoregion as a testing ground. The aspen parkland was once a fluid, transitional ecoregion of forests, grasslands, and wetlands. This fluidity was carefully managed in collaboration with all beings in the space. The prairie landscape has since been altered by a heteronormative settler system that prioritizes and reproduces controlled landscapes of sameness. Through decades of resource extraction and monoculture farming, all queer expression of the land has been overwritten, and it has become one of the most static, human-altered ecosystems in North America.

This project identifies three sites that demonstrate this heteronormative control, and speculates new landscapes that hypothesize queer methods of relating to the land and other beings. A fair amount of writing and research has been done on analysis and production of queer space, especially in the disciplines of building architecture and urban planning, but how does this analysis and theory apply to (re)designing landscapes in rural spaces?

## FIGURES

01. Milkweed seed pod	iv
02. Messy, queer, prairie	1
03. Human-nature binaries	2
04. Queer relationality	2
05. “Outside Snax Club” by Wolfgang Tillmans	3
06. “Cowboy coffee”	4
07. Highway 2, Southern Alberta	7
08. Thistle and Butterfly.	9
09. 18 Shades of Gay aerial	12
10. 18 Shades of Gay canopy	12
11. 18 Shades of Gay on the ground	13
12. Floor Plan	14
13. The Bar	14
14. The Darkroom	15
15. DS+R’s Blur Building.	16
17. The garden in 1991	17
16. Derek Jarman at his garden in 1991	17
18. Flotsam in the garden	18
19. Flotsam in the garden	18
20. Aspen Parkland.	20
21. North American context	22
22. Ecoregions of Alberta	23
23. Aspen Parkland. (2)	24
24. Pipelines running through canola field.	26
25. Forces of Control over Alberta’s Aspen Parkland.	28
26. Aspen Parkland. (3)	30
27. Bison Await Transport.	34
28. Buffalo National Park.	34
29. Buffalo Paddock immediate surroundings	35
30. Wallow Relations Collage	36
31. Grazeway Commons	38
32. Two field system	40
33. Planting the wallows	41
34. Wallow isolation	42
35. Wallow integration	43
36. <i>John T. Moore</i> . Red Deer News. 1917	44
37. Piper Mountain today.	45
38. Piper Mountain Collage	46
39. Section showing managed erosion process	48
40. Axonometric	49
41. Worm’s eye view	50
42. Leduc No. 1 well site	52
43. Oil Artifacts on the Museum Grounds.	53
44. Leduc No. 1.	53
45. Prairie, Fire, and Oil. Collage of static binaries.	54
46. Butterfly Camp Plan	56
47. Campground Perspective	58
48. Opening Fire Ceremony	60
49. Mess Hall	62
50. Caterpillar Nursery	64
51. Overwintering Butterflies	67
52. Milkweed Seed Rain	68
53. Monarch Visitation	69
54. Offsite Intervention	70

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
POSITIONALITY	vi
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>vi</b>
QUEER SPACE	1
QUEER RELATIONSHIPS	2
METRONORMATIVITY and QUEER RURALITY	5
RENOVATION as RESTORATION	8
<b>CASE STUDIES in QUEER SPACE</b>	<b>11</b>
18 SHADES OF GAY	12
CRUISING PAVILION	14
DEREK JARMAN'S GARDEN	17
<b>ASPEN PARKLAND: A QUEER BEING</b>	<b>19</b>
A FLUID ECOSYSTEM	22
<b>PRAIRIE RENOVATIONS</b>	<b>32</b>
QUEER DESIGN DIRECTIVES	33
BUD COTTON PADDOCK at CFB WAINWRIGHT	34
GRAZEWAY COMMONS	40
PIPER MOUNTAIN in RED DEER	44
CANADIAN ENERGY MUSEUM	52
BUTTERFLY CAMP	56
<b>QUEER PRAIRIE FUTURES</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>WORKS CITED</b>	<b>74</b>



## POSITIONALITY

This project was developed in my basement suite in East Vancouver, separated from my cohort due to COVID-19, and buried in the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh people. And the project sites itself in land spanning both Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 territory, the living and gathering space for a multitude of people, including the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Tsuu Tina, Sioux, Stoney Nakoda, and Metis.

I was born in this treaty territory, in central Alberta, also known by Canadian ecologists as aspen parkland. Growing up in Alberta's aspen parkland, I've both benefited from the white settler control imposed on that landscape, but also grew up suppressing my own queerness in response to this normativity. This project is my way of entering that into a conversation around decolonizing design from a framework that feels genuine to my own experience. So I see this as a personal reclamation of the prairie landscape, where study of past and present conditions can inform alternative queer futures. Ultimately, I hope it can provide a stepping stone for others to begin thinking about how they can queer their own design practice.

# INTRODUCTION

## GP1 EXPLORATIONS

*“Normative spaces are spaces where rules are very strict, but you can feel that there are other places with many different layers to them, where many things could happen. Queer, in this sense, is the possibility of behaving differently.”*

Andrés Jaque





## QUEER SPACE

There is quite a bit of writing that has been done on the production of queer space in building architecture. Much of this research leans on program and physical structure to define queer space. Landscape architecture is in the unique position to push forward conversations around queer space by exploring the phenomenological qualities of queer space. Landscapes can produce these spaces through rethinking landscape processes of care and considering queer relationships.

What do I mean by queer relationships? And how does that make its way into landscape architecture? Ideas of queer relationality actually fit quite well into landscape architectural practice, and I would argue that this is what makes queer landscapes distinct from queer architectures.

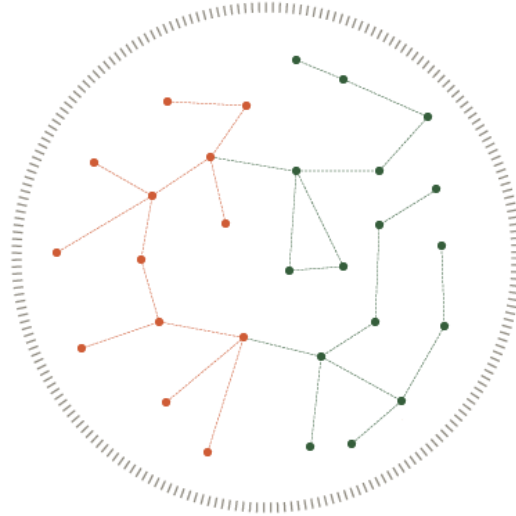
## QUEER RELATIONSHIPS

Heteronormativity sees relationships as a set of binaries, and this is present in the way settler colonialism relates with nature, positioning humans and nature as separate hierarchies, where the only connections are through food production, resource extraction, or recreation. Queerness, however, simultaneously recognizes the spectrum of individuality between all beings, and that these beings are collectively connected in all sorts of ways.

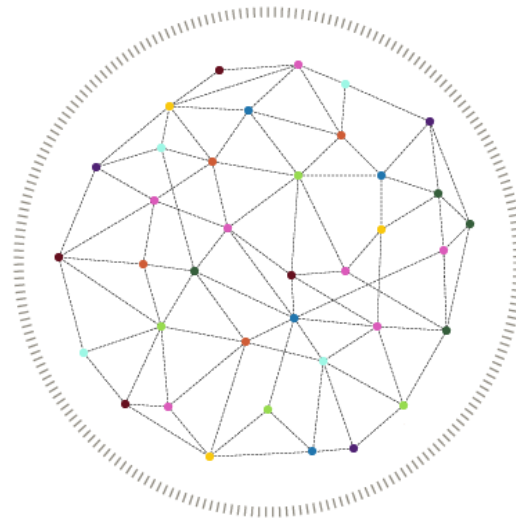
Nicole Seymour says:

queer values—caring not (just) about the individual, the family, or one’s descendants, but about the Other species and persons to whom one has no immediate relations—[these] may be the most effective ecological values” (2013, 27).

This observation puts queerness in line with the stated goals of landscape architecture, which are arguably to produce ecologically sustainable designs, but it adds a layer of relationship with non-human beings that many of the sterile landscapes that get constructed often fail to engage.



03. Human-nature binaries



04. Queer relationality



What does a queer space look like? There are quite a number of competing views on the definition of queer space, and, of course, no one definition can be taken as essential truth. Brian Macgrath, in a 1994 art exhibition asserted that “There Is No ‘Queer Space,’ Only Different Points of View” (Reed 64) This view emphasizes that queerness is manifested within individual bodies, and not inherent to space itself. To some extent, this is a sensible position, but it ignores the reciprocal relationship between body and space.

Macgrath’s notion is directly challenged by Christopher Reed. He admits that “such arguments contain a kernel of truth: queer space is the collective creation of queer people. But that doesn’t mean it disappears when we leave” (Reed 64). To Reed, queer space is an active process of claiming territory. In this sense it is a reclamation and physical appropriation of spaces.

**Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright**

He describes this appropriation as a process by which the abandoned spaces of the dominant culture are transformed so that “old and new are in direct juxtaposition” (Reed 68). In urban building architecture, the prototypical example of a queer space can be seen in the renovation of industrial spaces like warehouses

into gay nightclubs, bookstores, or arts spaces. On the one hand, these warehouses are made queer through a transformation of program, from the industrial to the queer, on the other hand, it also involves a finding of space which has been discarded from productive, capitalist society. It is in these discarded spaces that a new, queer, life is found.

Another queer space scholar, Sara Ahmed, defines queer space by identifying the opposite: that is the hegemonic influence of heteronormative space. In her explorations of queer space-making, she says that “heterosexual genders form themselves through the renunciation of the possibilities of homosexuality, as a foreclosure which produces a field of heterosexual objects at the same time as it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love” (Ahmed 87).

She uses a metaphor grounded in landscape architectural terms, identifying the desire line as a line upon which heterosexual norms are entrenched in the landscape through repetition. She describes heteronormativity as a requirement to follow a straight line, whereas queerness deviates from the line. For her, the landscape of heterosexuality is created through repetitive actions that turn bodies in a certain, default, direction. Heterosexuality creates the condition upon which the landscape can be formed. The queer body is a response and rejection of this condition. Queer body and, by extension, space require a reorientation through gathering and bringing closer other beings that are rejected by this status quo. In other words, to become queer requires a relationship with other queer beings.

When considering central Alberta, Ahmed’s perspective may identify the landscape’s background condition as belonging to white, corporatized family farms which prioritize monocultures and oil speculation, that through repeated action has overwritten the aspen parkland groves and grasslands. A queering of this space could involve breaking these extractive typologies and reintroducing a human relationship with this lost aspen parkland ecosystem.

For my purposes, I propose a working definition of queer space as it relates to landscape architectural practice, based on the work of queer scholars before me. The queer landscape is built through collaborative disruption. It juxtaposes traditional landscape with other objects that are otherwise not visible or reachable in the field of heterosexuality. In terms of landscape

architecture: a queer space breaks pre-established typologies. It mashes typologies together to create new spaces that turn the original use on its head. This combination of typologies calls attention to the precarity and preposterousness of heteronormative, patriarchal, and capitalist design languages.

However, the goal here is not to create a new “homonormative” design standard, but rather to create room for new ways of relating to space, land, and other beings (Steyaert 59). In the rural Alberta setting, what might it look like, for example, to renovate the orphan oil well, or the monocultural farmland into a queer landscape?

## **METRONORMATIVITY and QUEER RURALITY**

There is a pervasive assumption in popular culture that all gay culture is necessarily urban, while rural spaces are decidedly heterosexual spaces. It is true, that patriarchal (i.e. heteronormative) systems of capitalism and colonization have formed the rural landscape into what it is today. And further, it is true that incidents of homophobia are high in rural areas. That being said, there are many examples of queer space-making in rural North America. Queer spacemaking, therefore, goes beyond the simple ownership of farmland by a white gay couple (an adoption of the dominant culture’s way of being).

On the contrary, it requires a radical rethinking of how humans, plants, animals, and space interrelate. One notable example of this is Southern Oregon’s lesbian separatist movements in the 70s. These communities of queer women retreated from urban spaces into rural Oregon to create intentional communities.

These communities pose a challenge to the capitalist underpinnings of modern life, and “the essentialized narrative by which rural, pastoral nature has been heterosexualized in North American culture” (Mortimer-Sandilands 155). The women learned to approach relations with nature differently, viewing plant beings as an integral part of their sexual identity. Following the proposed definition of queer space outlined earlier, the landscape design of

Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright

these communities mashes typologies together, embedding queerness within the landscape. They created “places where boundaries are intentionally blurred: a garden specifically for the deer, outdoor kitchens and outhouses, inedible flowers in the same patch as food, markers of human life in the middle of the wildest patches of the land, and traces of the wild in those most humanized.” (Mortimer-Sandilands 146). While not all queer people who engage with rural space create such communes, “there is an unmistakable thread of green utopianism within both lesbian and gay communities” (Bell and Valentine 119). This way of living may seem to propose a utopian rethinking of human to land relationships; however, this model of relationality is nothing new, particularly in the history of Alberta’s aspen parkland and prairie.

When applying queer space theory to the Albertan landscape, we can see heteronormativity woven into the fabric of the landscape. This is present beyond explicitly obvious outbursts of homophobia. Heteronormativity is inherent in the way the land was claimed through settler colonialism: a paternalistic struggle for control over what was deemed a virgin wild. Agriculture and oil extraction have become the expected background of heterosexuality (as Ahmed would say) upon which the prairie landscape is now formed.

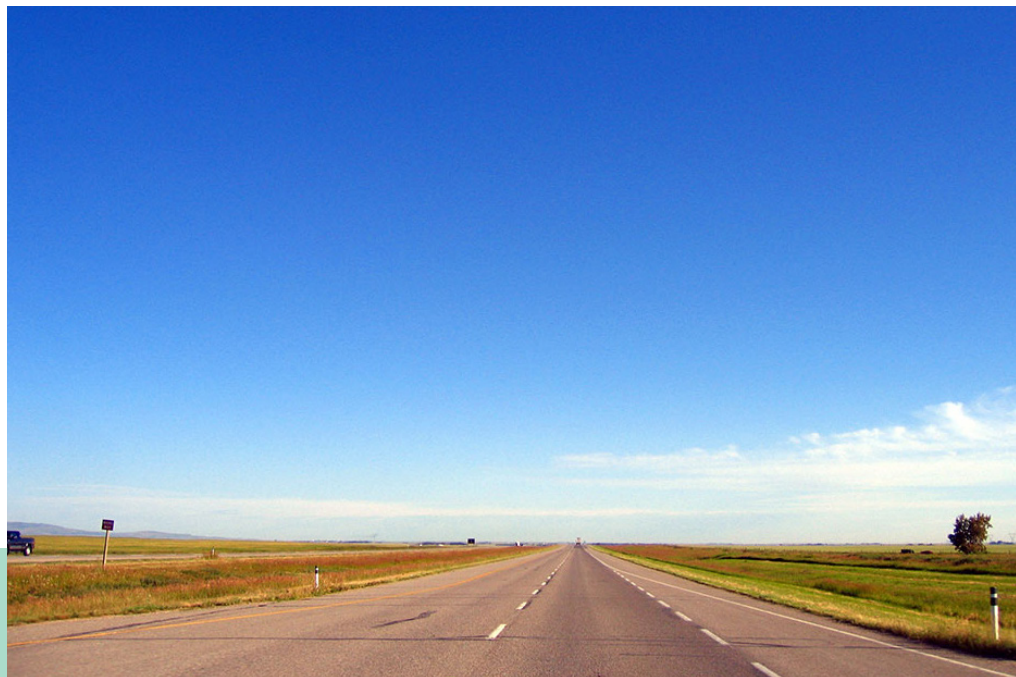
What was once a rich transitional landscape of wetlands, aspen groves, grasslands, and wildflowers has been overcome by a monoculture of imported wheat, canola, barley, and other commodified plants. Settler-colonialism imported a set of ideals that have severed human relations with the landscape. Nature is viewed as separate from human, but the indigenous history of this landscape is rich with human-nature kinship. Furthermore, these same settler-colonial ideals imposed western conceptions of the gender binary and heterosexuality. Queer and Two-Spirit indigenous folks are actively suppressed and othered by settlers, who “policed the intimacy of Indigenous peoples . . . to promote heterosexual, monogamous relationships between cisgendered men and women to the exclusion of all other intimate partnerships” (Simpson 127).

Where can queerness find space in this

rural landscape? Today, there is a dominant narrative both within and outside of the LGBTQ community that queer freedom requires migration from (allegedly oppressive) rural areas to (allegedly liberated) urban centres. Judith Halberstam coined this term as “metronormativity,” wherein a spatial story of migration from country to city is mapped onto the “coming-out narrative” (Halbertstam 36).

Thus, in some queer literature, the queerest piece of rural landscape infrastructure is the highway. The highway is an oft romanticized line of transport; it is the road-trip, a line toward an endless horizon and opportunity. Or it is the escape, a line that brings queer folk out of the homophobic countryside to an urbanized sexual liberation.

The speed and material of the highway offers an escape route, but in that speed is an erasure of “the contours of a ruralized . . . identity” (Herring 156). The highway levels the landscape, and uproots the rural queer, planting them into a



metronormative space. In my view, the highway is an unsatisfying offering by landscape architects to the rural queer. It implies that a queer person must choose their queer identity over their rural identity, and assimilate themselves into a promise of regionally non-specific cosmopolitanism. I recognize that this is a reality for many queer folk, who do indeed find safer and more fulfilling liberations in urban centres than in their rural hometowns. Design should seek to create space within rural landscapes that allow for queer folk to root themselves in the local particularities of the landscape, a space allowing for healing, restoration, and relationship with the land and each other.

## **RENOVATION as RESTORATION**

The discipline of landscape architecture can employ its knowledge of ecological restoration and aesthetics to bring queer people in closer relationship with the land. Restoration, or rather, renovation, can provide healing to both the queer body, and the prairie landscape. Renovation is distinct from typical restoration in that it describes a queer process of claiming and transforming discarded space. Restoration on its own is not suitable, because it is perhaps inappropriate to expect a return to a past normal (Clare 2015). Queer bodies are a palimpsest of experiences defined by their rejection of the heteronormative status quo. In the same way, the landscape of Alberta's aspen parkland is a palimpsest. The history of wetlands, aspen groves, grasslands, controlled burns, waterfowl, songbirds, migrating bison and moose, all essential to the aspen parkland's being, their presence would now be a rejection of the status quo.

Monocultural agriculture and oil drilling have overwritten and transformed this landscape, just as heteronormative society transforms the queer body. Regeneration does not erase the presence of harm, or revive the "pristine" conditions of a bygone era. However, it can acknowledge the pain on land and body, perhaps by bringing new program and abandoned infrastructure into hard collision. Imagine walking through a grove of quaking aspen and coming upon a small clearing of cultivated canola. Or an abandoned oil well half submerged in a new wetland habitat. These sorts of renovations do not fully cure a traumatized landscape, but rather queers it by calling attention to the absurdity of the status quo. The following sections of this booklet will point to case studies in queer space, and explore selected sites within central Alberta that require a queer renovation.





*“[queerness] is an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning”*

Jaffer Kolb (in Pavka, 2020)



## **CASE STUDIES in QUEER SPACE**

Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright

## **18 SHADES OF GAY**

**QUEERNESS as VISIBILITY IN SPACE.**

DESIGNER: Claude Cormier  
LOCATION: Montreal, QC  
PROGRAM: Pedestrian boulevard

09. 18 Shades of Gay aerial <https://www.claudecormier.com/en/projet/18-shades-of-gay/>

10. 18 Shades of Gay canopy <https://www.claudecormier.com/en/projet/18-shades-of-gay/>

Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright

18 Shades of Gay is a public art installation by landscape architect Claude Cormier. The installation is a one-kilometer long canopy of coloured balls running overtop a street in Montreal's Gay Village. The coloured balls follow a rainbow colour scheme, inspired by the rainbow Pride Flag. Each hue of the rainbow is separated further into three colours, to create a gradient, acknowledging the plurality of identities that exist in the queer community. This project is included in this precedent study, because it represents queer spacemaking at its simplest, and perhaps most superficial, form. It is an expression of visibility for queer identities, and signals to the public that this is a safe place for people who identify and present themselves as queer.

In creating queer spaces, I believe that this symbolic signalling can be an important aspect of the design. However, as I discussed in the introduction, I am interested in queer spaces that rub up against normative typologies, calling attention to the absurdity of the status quo. This project is a beautiful example of the public acceptance and expression of queerness (in a metropolitan centre like Montreal), but I aim to design a queer space that realizes its subversive potential.

**Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright**

Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright

12. Floor Plan - <https://www.cruisingpavilion.com/>

## **CRUISING PAVILION**

**QUEERNESS as SEXUAL EXPRESSION IN SPACE.**

CURATORS: Pierre-Alexandre Mateos, Rasmus Myrup, Octave Perrault and Charles Teyssou

LOCATION: ArkDes Gallery, Stockholm, SE

PROGRAM: Art exhibition

13. The Bar - <https://www.cruisingpavilion.com/>

Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright

Cruising Pavilion is a response to the growing interest in queer spaces and queer futurity that has begun to take hold in the discipline of building architecture. This pavilion is a reminder of the explicit role of sex in buildings, which the organizers assert has been forgotten in architectural thinking. The exhibition is split into three spaces: The Bar, The Darkroom, and The Bedroom. Each room of the pavilion contains artwork by queer artists that engage with the concepts of each room, and thus acts a sort of meta-precedent. So, while the space itself is a representative, typological example of the spatial arrangement of cruising sites, the artwork pushes the space to engage with multiple forms.

The Bar is the meeting space. It is an architectural intervention containing some sort of queer aesthetic code. That code can be as simple and forthright as a rainbow flag and neon lights, or they can be camouflaged interventions, like a doorbell, blacked-out facades, curtains, and screens. The Bar is a space where likeminded queer people can meet with security. Historically this has included spaces like clubs, bookstores, and bathhouses. The defining feature of these spaces is that they include rooms for socializing.

The Darkroom is a space defined by its labyrinthine qualities and low visibility. The work in this space draws direct connections to other architectural work, like DS+R's Blur Building, likening it to the steam from a bathhouse. The space is also compared with landmark landscape architectural projects, like the Tuileries pleasure garden and Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, whose thick bushes and high hedges provide their own sort of labyrinths that allow for cruising activities.

**Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright**

14. The Darkroom- <https://www.cruisingpavilion.com/>

The final room of this exhibition is The Bedroom, where public “space” (social media and other online spaces) has been brought into private spaces. Intimacy for homosexual men is no longer confined to secluded public spaces. Cultural change has brought more acceptance of queer relationships, allowing for intimacy and acceptance (of self and others) in the bedroom. The Bedroom acknowledges the modern trajectory and evolution of cruising culture, through apps like Grindr, that create space for queer people to flirt and engage in casual sex without some of the risks associated with public cruising.

I do find the curators’ essential thesis interesting: that architects, when considering queer space, have forgotten the role of sex in buildings. However, the act of cruising has been almost exclusively reserved for cisgender men. The curators of this exhibition do acknowledge that, but it would be valuable to study the spatial equivalents of cruising for queer women, trans women, or non-binary people. Another layer to this critique is that queerness is not a purely sexual identity. Queerness encompasses different gender expressions not necessarily related to sexuality. As a precedent, Cruising Pavilion is valuable in that it is able to succinctly identify the queer appropriation of famous architectural projects

that may not have had queerness in mind when first built (like Blur Building and the Tuileries Garden).

**Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright**

Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright

16. Derek Jarman at his garden in 1991 - photo by Geraint Lewis

## **DEREK JARMAN'S GARDEN**

**QUEERNESS as RESISTANCE IN SPACE.**

DESIGNER: Derek Jarman

LOCATION: Dungeness, UK

PROGRAM: Private garden, now memorial

17. The garden in 1991 - photo by Howard Sooley

Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright

Derek Jarman was not a landscape architect by trade. Rather, he was a multi-disciplinary artist: film-maker, actor, writer, painter, and gardener. Toward the end of his life, as he was diagnosed with HIV, he designed and cultivated this garden at his cottage. The garden sits along the sandy shores and salty ocean winds of Dungeness, the UK's only desert. Looming over this otherwise flat landscape is the Dungeness Nuclear Power Plant. To Jarman, this garden communicates vitality in an otherwise damaged world--this relates both to the global state of environmental degradation, as well as the disease that was degrading his own body. The creation of this space acted as a therapeutic and self-actualizing process for Jarman as he faced the HIV epidemic, with all the physical and social trauma inherent in that battle.

The design of the garden rejects traditional garden aesthetics: plants can travel as they please, weeds are welcome visitors, and the garden is not defined by a fence or hedging--the edges are defined by a visitor's own comfort level. Raked gravel defines and gives texture to the negative space. Where trees are ecologically inappropriate, scavenged sea-debris act as hinges and columns to give height to the garden. Garden elements are encouraged to degrade, decay, or be eaten by roaming birds and rabbits.

The planting palette thrives in direct sun and salt-spray, and the plants need little to no additional water. This planting scheme is a direct response to the waste of the traditional English garden, draped in watered lawn and chemicals, which he said "would give Gertrude Jekyll a heart attack or make her turn in her grave" (Jarman 7). Rather than the manicured gardens of other British homes, where plants are forbidden from touching, this space celebrates plants as sexual, queer beings that touch, mix, and mingle with whom they wish. This space exhibits queerness as an outward rejection of tradition, and an inward process of self-realization and healing. It is an experimentation of form and relationality that breaks away from heteronormative, and capitalist, tradition.

**Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright**

18. Flotsam in the garden - photo by Howard Sooley

**Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright**

19. Flotsam in the garden - photo by Howard Sooley



## **ASPEN PARKLAND: A QUEER BEING**



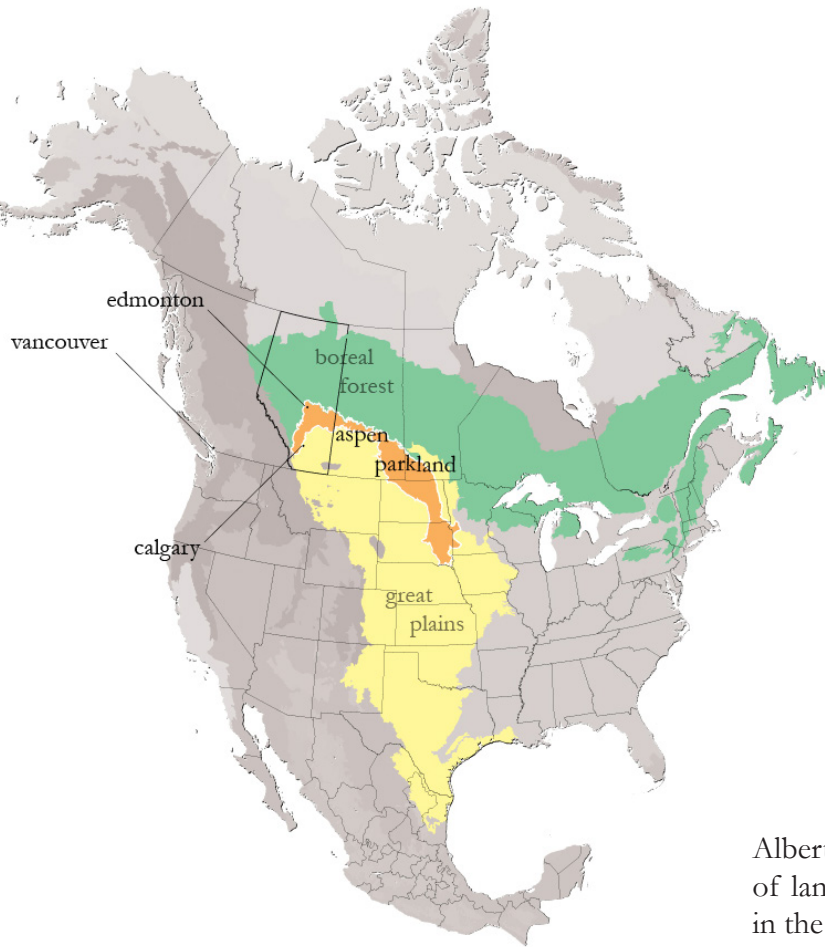
20. Aspen Parkland. © Justin Meissen (<https://flic.kr/p/oyzZ2W>) CC BY-SA 2.0





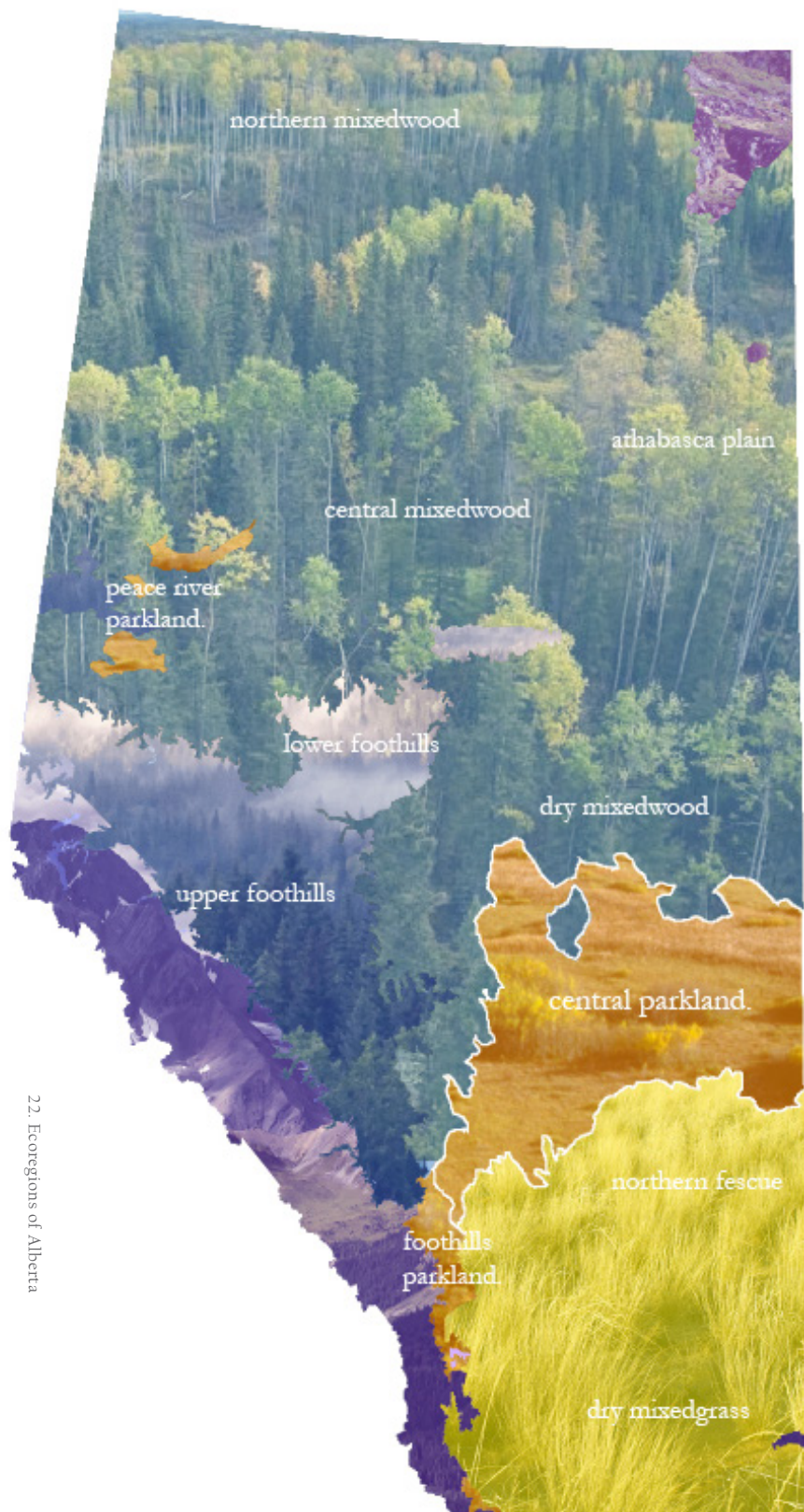


## A FLUID ECOSYSTEM



21. Aspen Parkland (orange) in its North American

Alberta's Aspen Parkland ecoregion is a vast ribbon of land that separates Alberta's prairie grasslands in the south from the boreal forests to the north. By modern environmental analysis, this region is represented in binary terms and given a hard edge. This representation of discrete ecological zones demonstrates the heteronormative urge to label and assign identity to all beings, including these vast regions of land which in themselves are multifaceted and exist along a spectrum. Perhaps none of these regions show this more clearly than this orange band known as Aspen Parkland, an assigned name that does not necessarily conure up a singular imaginary in the same way that boreal forest, rocky mountains, or grasslands might. This is because the aspen parkland region itself is difficult to define, and to hold within a series of cartographic lines.



aspen parkland.



boreal forest.



grassland.



foothills



rocky mountains



canadian shield





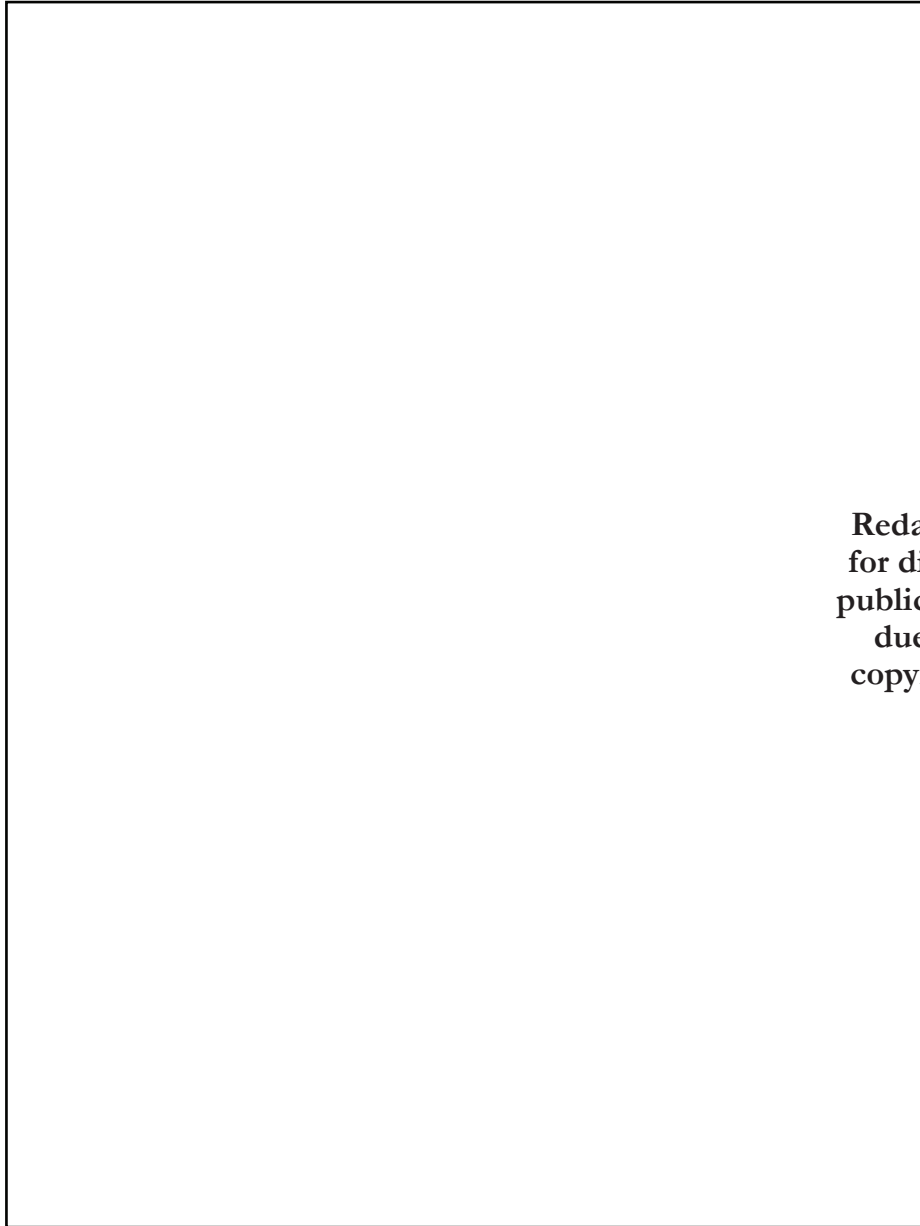


23. Aspen Parkland. © Justin Meissen (<https://flic.kr/p/oAxC7a>) CC BY-SA 2.0





The reality of this region is incredibly fluid. Aspen Parkland is a queer body itself, and does not belong to either binary of boreal forest or prairie grassland. It is a transitional space, allowing for a patchy interplay between forest, wetland, meadow, and grassland. The boundaries of these smaller ecosystems shifted in response to the needs and actions of the region's kin, whether human, bison, beaver or bulrush. This constant state of fluidity developed a rich, fertile ground for cultivation of berries, grains, and herbs. Of course, the rich fluidity of this region posed both a natural challenge and opportunity to the rigid capitalist system that settlers brought to the region. The system imposed a landscape of sameness on this otherwise diverse region.



Reda  
for d  
public  
due  
copy

24. Pipelines running through canola field. Photo by Amber Bracken

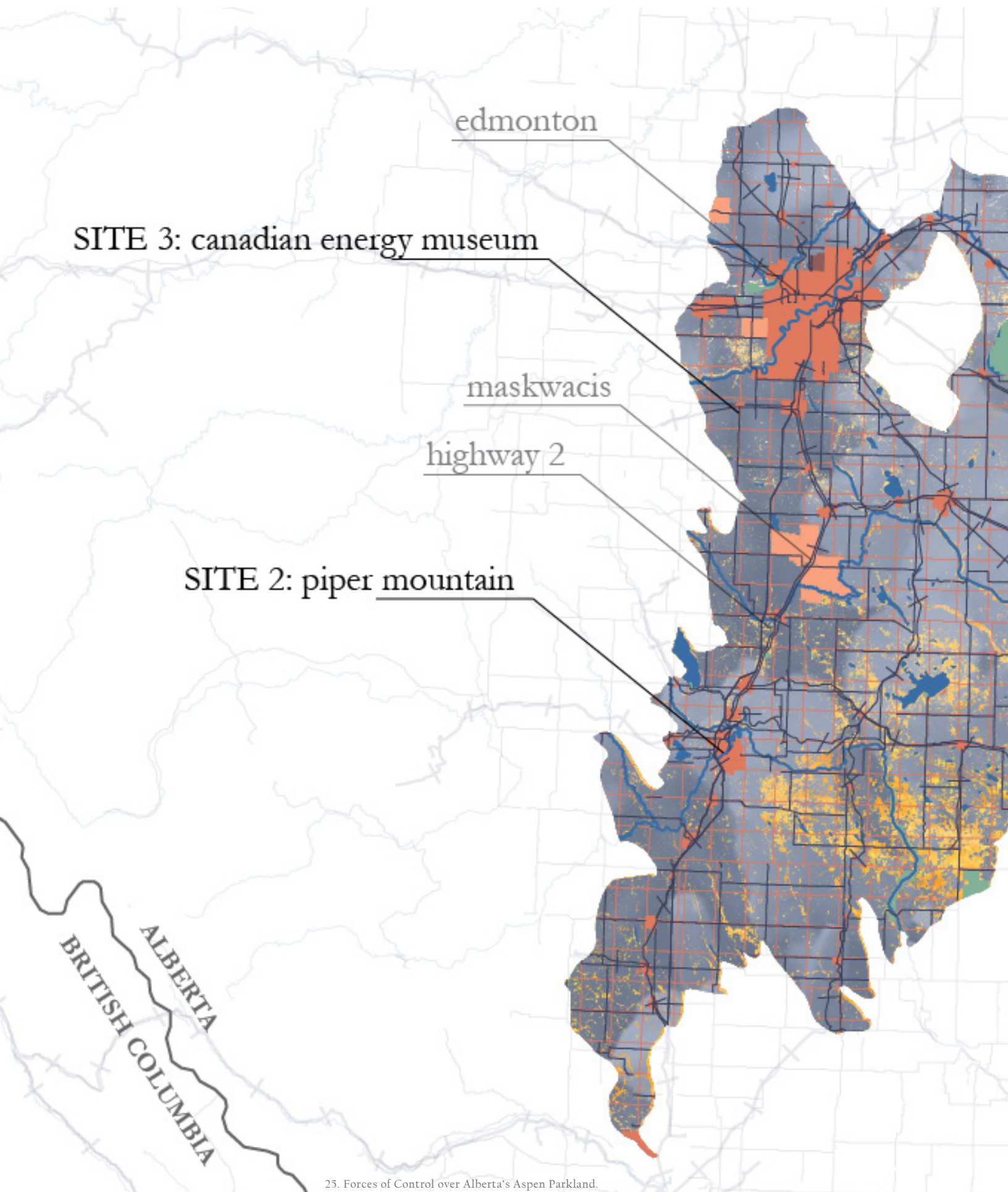


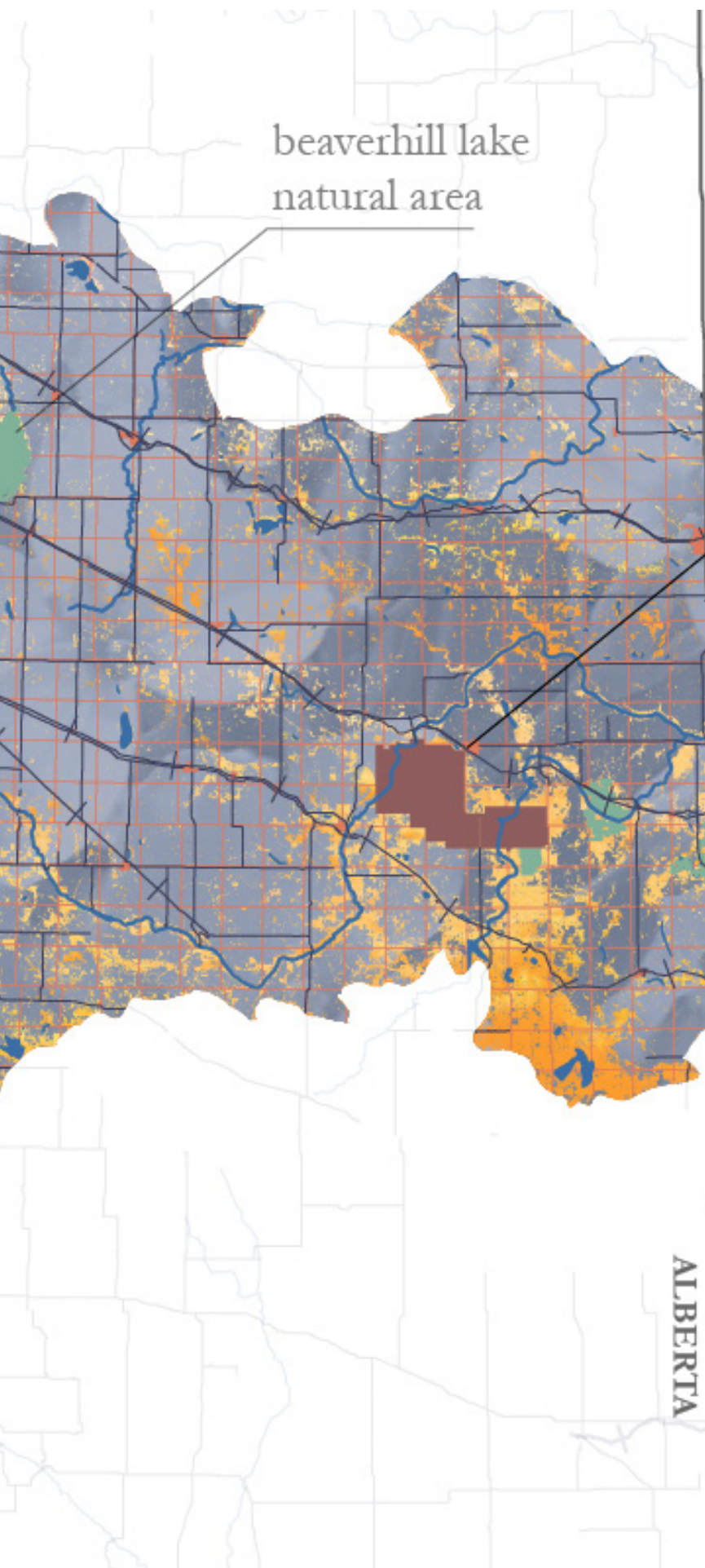
ucted  
igital  
cation  
e to  
right

Sara Ahmed describes heteronormativity as a requirement to follow a straight line, and repeated action reinforces that line (71). The settlement of farms, reserve land, cities, highways and railways, fortified military training bases, and fenced-off conservation areas all require a measured, gridded and controlled landscape. This reinforces those straight lines and repetitive actions that serve to control, monetize, or sever queer relationships with other beings and land.

I have chosen three sites within this aspen parkland region that demonstrate these forces of heteronormative control in some way. Bud Cotton Buffalo Paddock in Wainwright, Piper Mountain in Red Deer, and the Canadian Energy Museum. The first two sites will show how a queer design perspective recognizes the agency of non-human beings to change the landscape, and proposed methods of healing and land management that respond to

those beings. And the third site builds upon those ideas in the creation of an explicitly queer space for queer people.





beaverhill lake  
natural area

SITE 1: cfb wainwright

aspen parkland.

crop cover.

indigenous reserve.

urban settlement.

transportation.

military.

protected area.





26. Aspen Parkland. © Justin Meissen (<https://flic.kr/p/m5RZwe>) CC BY-SA 2.0

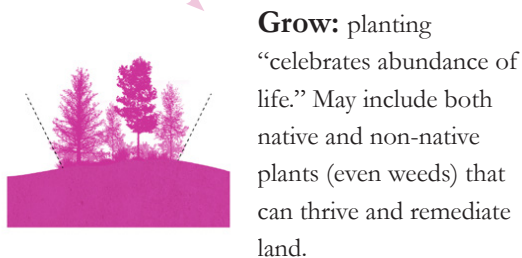
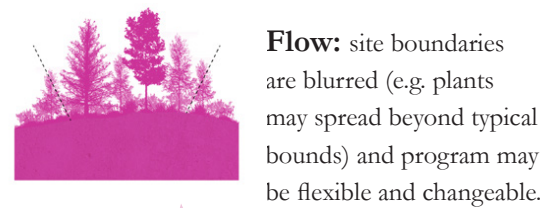
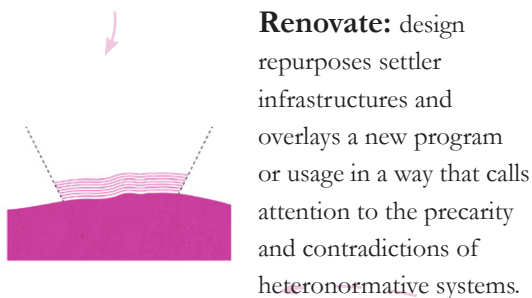
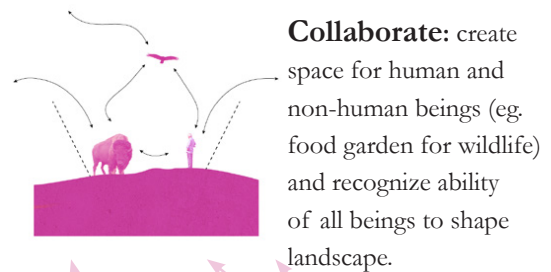
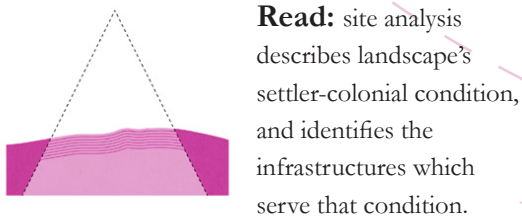


# **PRAIRIE RENOVATIONS**

## **GP2 DESIGN PROPOSALS**

## QUEER DESIGN DIRECTIVES

To help me through the process of designing queer landscapes, I developed 6 queer design directives based on my queer space research. These are just guidelines, and upon reflection, each site employed these guidelines in very different and non-linear ways. These directives are continually re-explored throughout the design, build, and maintenance of any queered landscape. I must reiterate that my intention here is not to create a new homonormative standard in design, but rather to add to the ongoing discussion around what queer landscape design can look like.





## BUD COTTON PADDOCK at CFB WAINWRIGHT

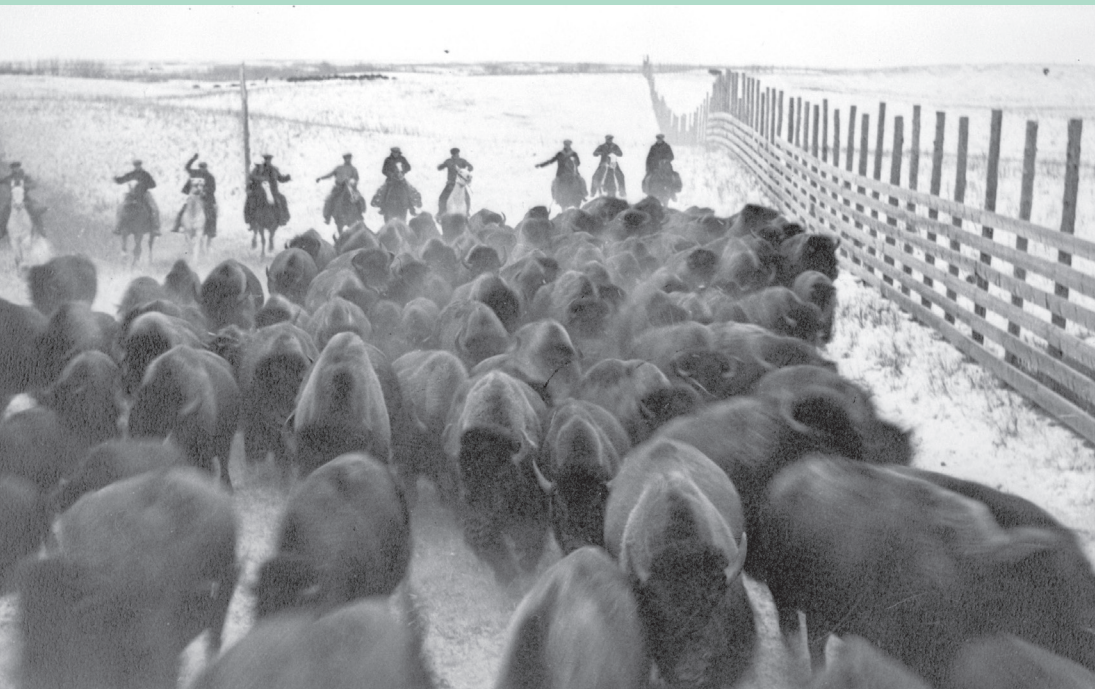
Bison are the groundskeepers of the Aspen Parkland region. Through their migrations, the trampling of grassland and the wallows they carve out into the earth, they aid in the shaping and transformation of this fluid landscape. With the arrival of settler agriculture and the fur trade, they were nearly wiped out. In the 20th Century, settlers took note of the near-extinction of these bison, and attempted to restore bison populations.

One such attempt was in Wainwright, Alberta, with the creation of Buffalo National Park on June 5, 1909. Plains Bison were shipped north from Montana, and a reserve was established here. The reserve was established on land that was deemed unsuitable for profitable agriculture. The project was successful, but it fell under the weight of its own success. Numbers grew so much that the land could not sustain this sedentary population of bison, which rely on vast grasslands and wetlands to trample through. Disease and starvation devastated the herd. The surviving herd was either culled or sent to other national parks, which have had success in sustaining a managed bison population.

27. Bison Await Transport. Provincial Archives of Alberta A4726 <https://flic.kr/p/wFE2c3>



28. Buffalo National Park. Provincial Archives of Alberta A4730 <https://flic.kr/p/xBQLKQ>



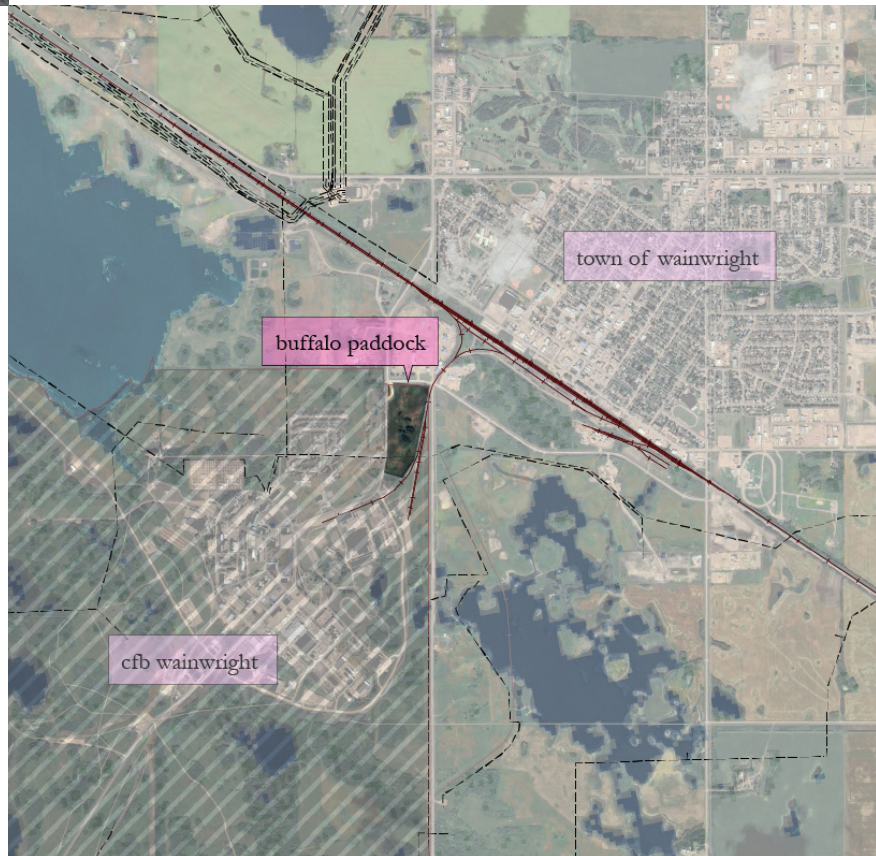




After closing, the Alberta government leased the land out to the Department of National Defense, where the site acted as a POW camp during World War II, and afterward became a training camp and ammunition storage base for the armed forces. In 1985, a commemorative herd of 4 bison was sent to the site of this former park, and the army now manages a few dozen bison that live fenced off in Bud Cotton Paddock. A visitor can drive up to this paddock and, if lucky, can catch a glimpse of one of these endangered animals through the paddock.

The intervention here will recognize the bison as co-landscape designers. Bison are powerful land movers and managers of the aspen parkland. They create these circular depressions known as wallows that can turn into small wetland habitats, dry shelter for smaller mammals. They bring a richness and subtle topography to the relatively flat landscape of the prairies. They've left behind quite a few of these wallows in the current buffalo paddock, but the wallows are isolated from any migratory relationship with the bison, so they cannot support new habitat due to continual disturbance and trampling from the bison.

29. Buffalo Paddock immediate surroundings





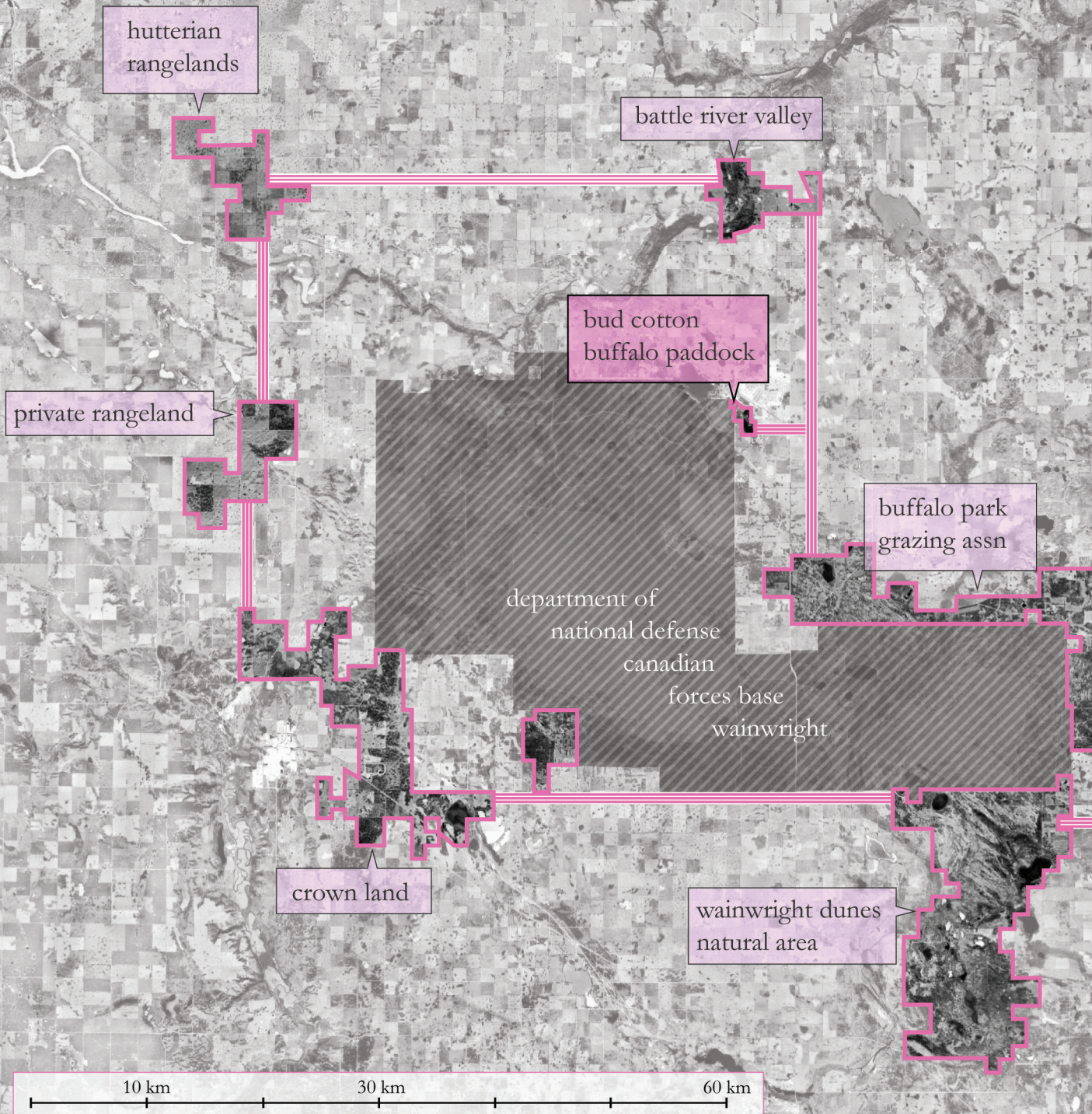


30. Wallow Relations Collage











## GRAZEWAY COMMONS

current herd: 40 bison

average annual range: 140 km

bud cotton buffalo paddock : 0.15 sq. km

proposed grazeway commons: ~895 sq. km

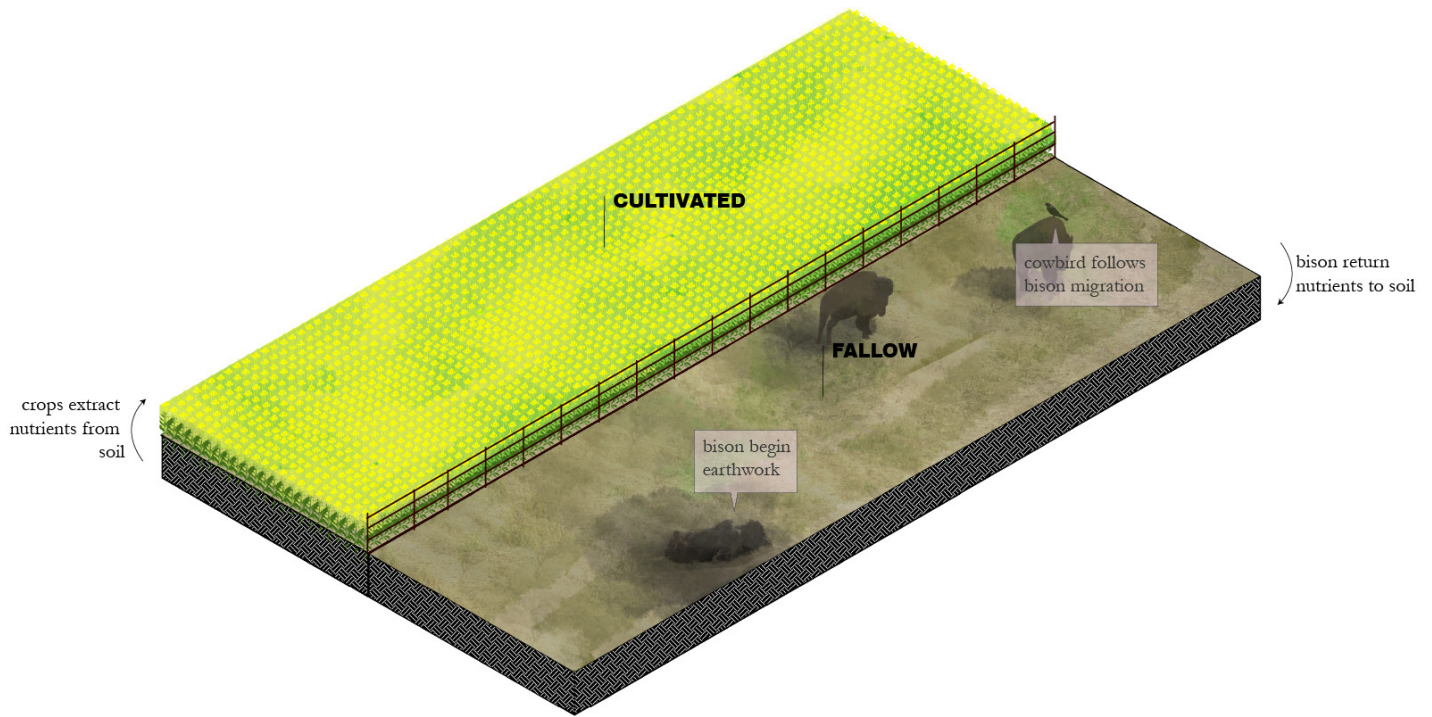
ribstone creek  
rangelands

manitou lake  
rangelands



## GRAZEWAY COMMONS

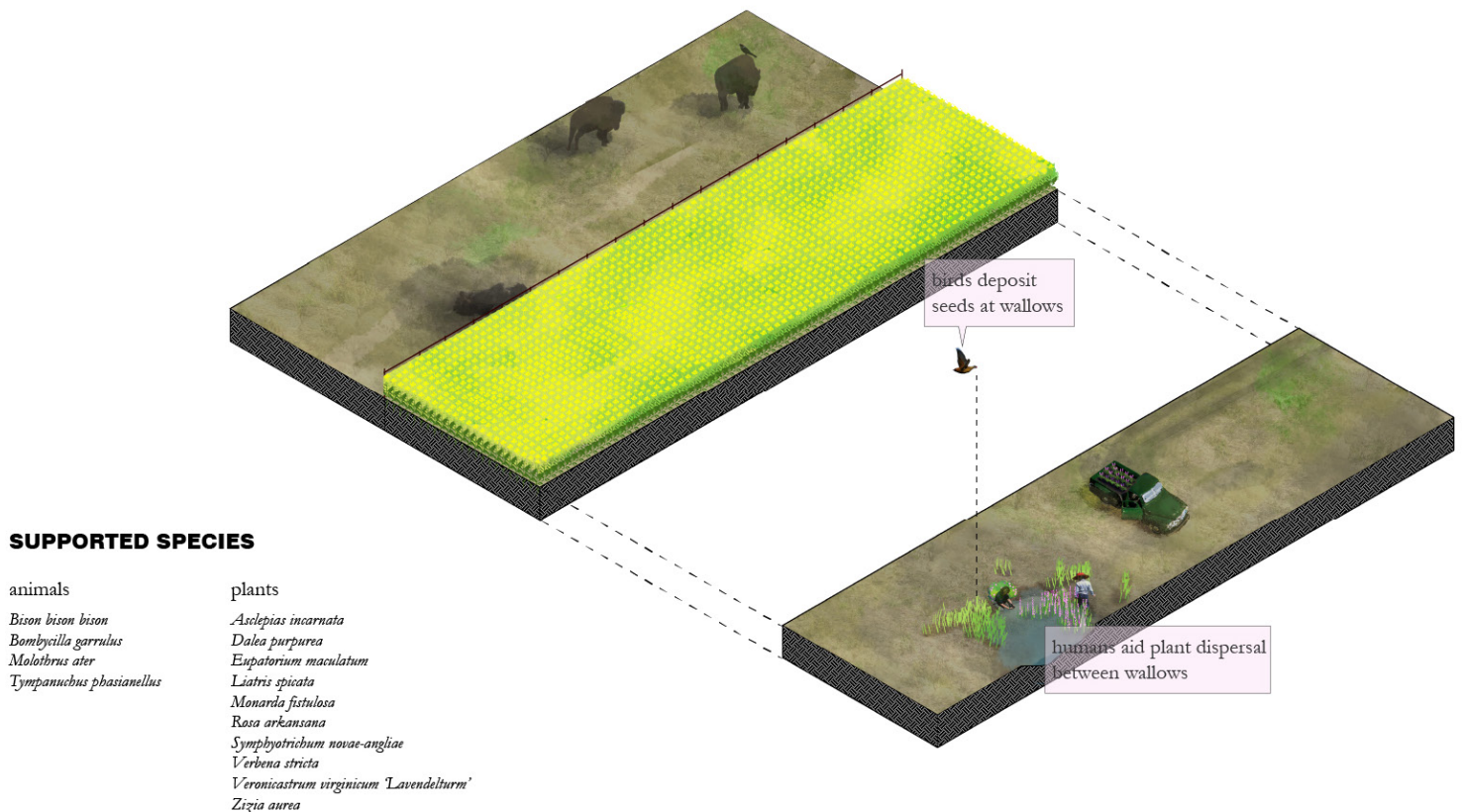
The initial intervention removes the existing fence around the paddock, and expands the bison's living space. Here the bison will be connected via a rotating land-lease system to nearby grazing areas and grasslands, creating a grazeway commons. The regional plan on the previous two pages shows what the grazeway might look like given current land usage. Pink corridors are farmland lease corridors that connect to existing forest and grasslands.



32. Two field system

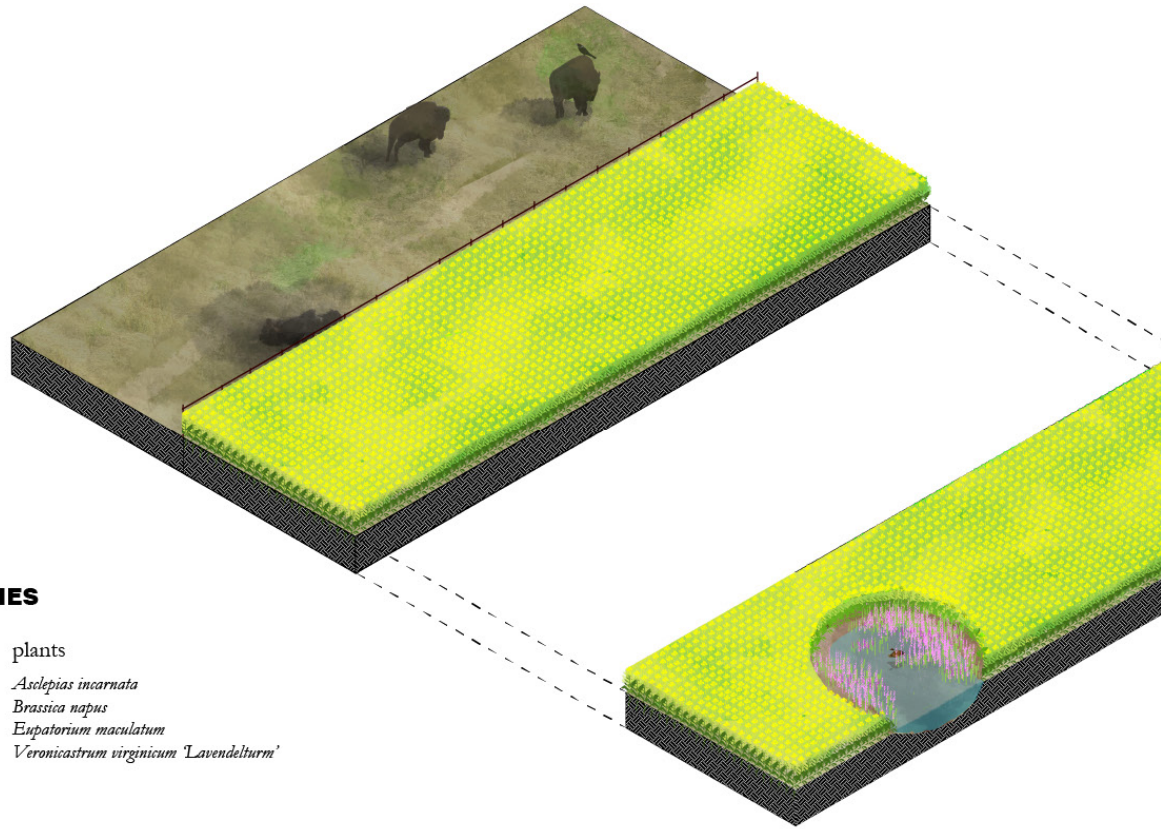
These land leases will in effect create a two field crop rotation system, where a portion of land along a corridor is set aside for bison to trample through. Where cropland takes nutrients from the soil upon harvest, fallow land is left for bison to trample, forage, and fertilize-- reintroducing lost nutrients.

As the bison migrate through the grazeway, humans and birds will have a hand in planting plants around and within these wallows. Essentially creating nodes of habitat that dot across the grazeway landscape. Planting decisions are ecologically sound, and aesthetically they introduce an exaggeration of colour with pink and purple flowering plants such as purple prairie clover, verbena and prairie rose, which naturally contrast the wallows from the yellows and chartreuses of commonly cultivated canola that could otherwise be easily ignored or erased.



33. Planting the wallows





### SUPPORTED SPECIES

#### animals

*Anas spp.*  
*Bombycilla garrulus*  
*Tympanuchus phasianellus*

#### plants

*Asclepias incarnata*  
*Brassica napus*  
*Eupatorium maculatum*  
*Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Lavendelturm'

34. Wallow isolation

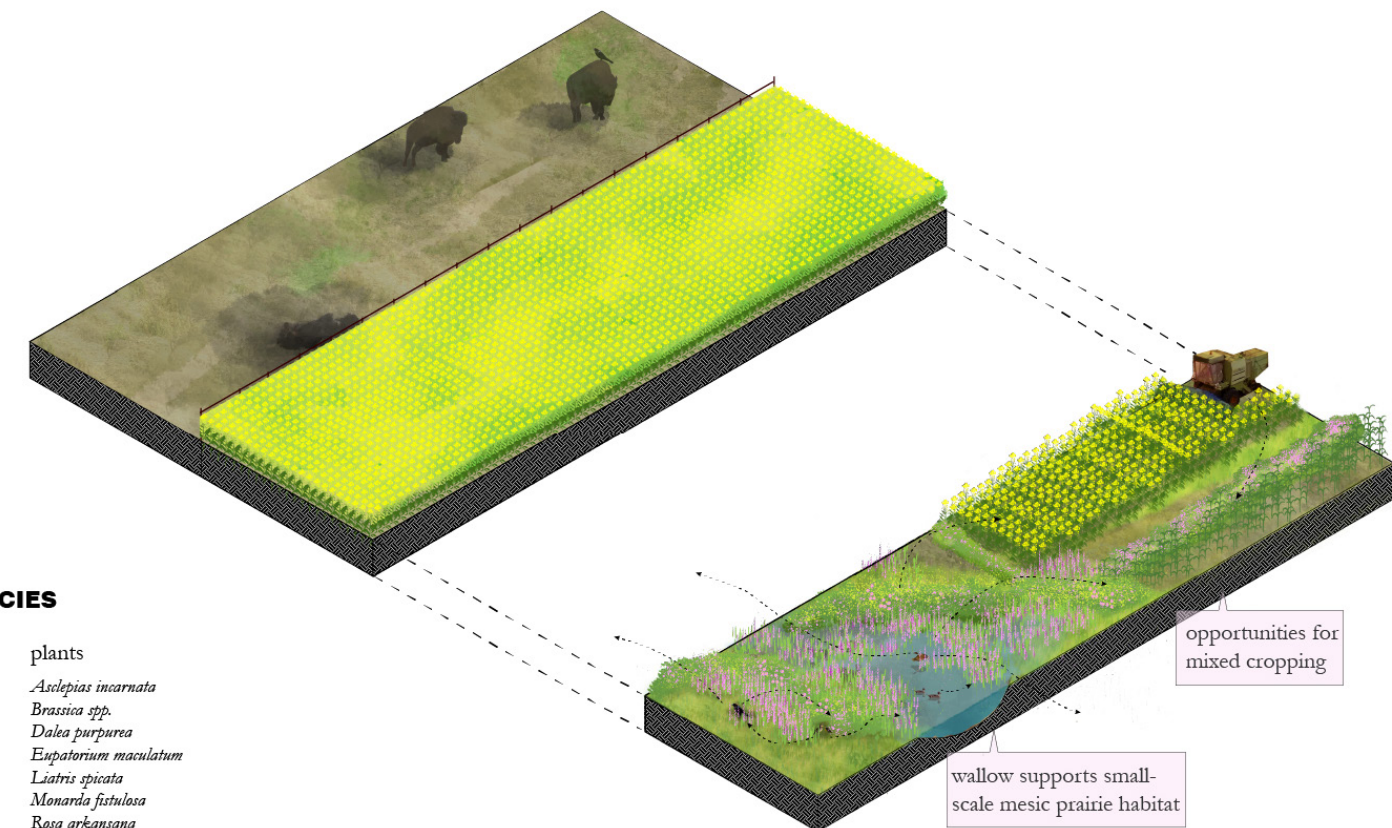
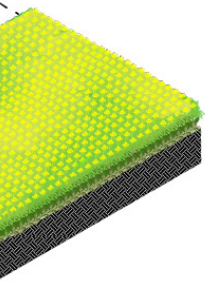
As they develop, those wallows may either stand as exceptions in the landscape, existing in defiance of the surrounding monocrop culture. Or they can provide opportunities to encourage farming practices that include some amount of land stewardship and be integrated into ecologically diverse farming practices.

### SUPPORTED SPECIES

#### animals

*Anas spp.*  
*Cistothorus palustris*  
*Bison bison bison*  
*Bombycilla garrulus*  
*Microtus ochrogaster*  
*Molothrus ater*  
*Ondatra zibethicus*  
*Sturnella neglecta*  
*Thomomys talpoides*  
*Tympanuchus phasianellus*

In either outcome, the goal with this development of a grazeway commons is not exactly to solve bison conservation or monocrop farming practices, but to use my queer framing to push against how we collectively manage land and private property, and propose a system that would bring humans into relationship with each other and other beings through a sharing of space.

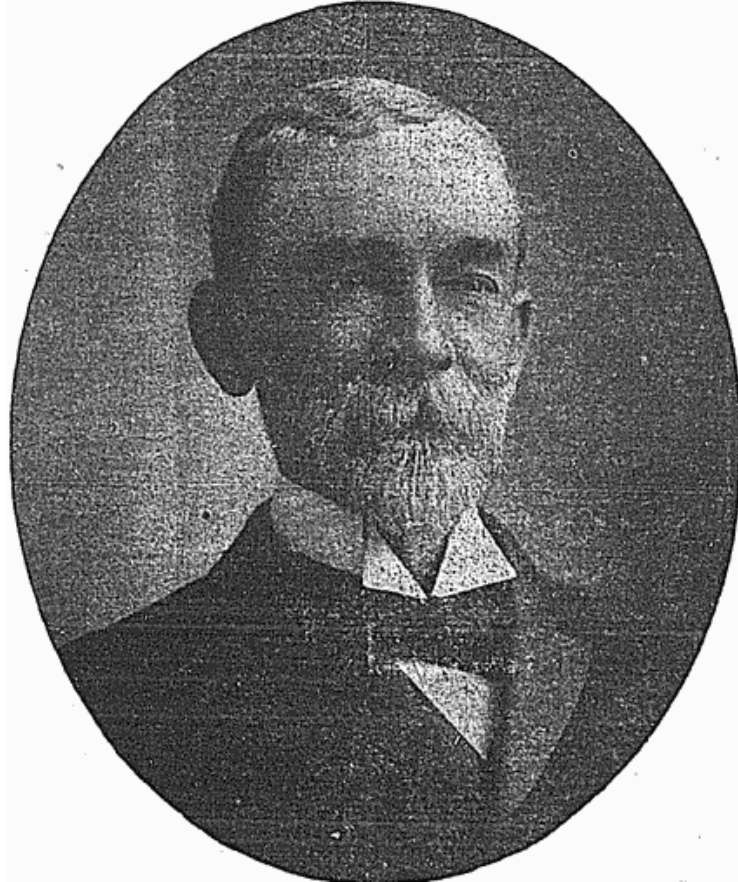


35. Wallow integration

## PIPER MOUNTAIN in RED DEER

Piper Mountain is a large hill in the wâwâskêsiw-sîpiy valley, today known as the town of Red Deer. Piper Mountain sits at the junction of Waskasoo and Piper Creek, before they go on to drain into the larger Red Deer River. This is the site of one of Red Deer's creation myths. The story goes, in 1881, "Red Deer's first capitalist," John T. Moore, operating under the direction of Saskatchewan Land and Homestead Company, scouted these supposedly unsettled valleys (Dawe, 2004). He camped along the creek banks one morning when he took his horse up a clay-rich hill later named Piper Mountain. From the top of this hill, Moore was apparently struck by the agricultural potential of the river valley before him. What he saw, exactly, is not recorded.

36. John T. Moore. Red Deer News. 1917



Following Moore's "discovery," the Canadian government instituted the Dominion Lands Act which enabled early settlers from Europe to acquire a piece of land for a very modest price provided they made a commitment of time and effort to the cultivation of that land. Settlers began to move into the region, constructing homesteads and leveling the gradient of ecosystems for agricultural and industrial development.

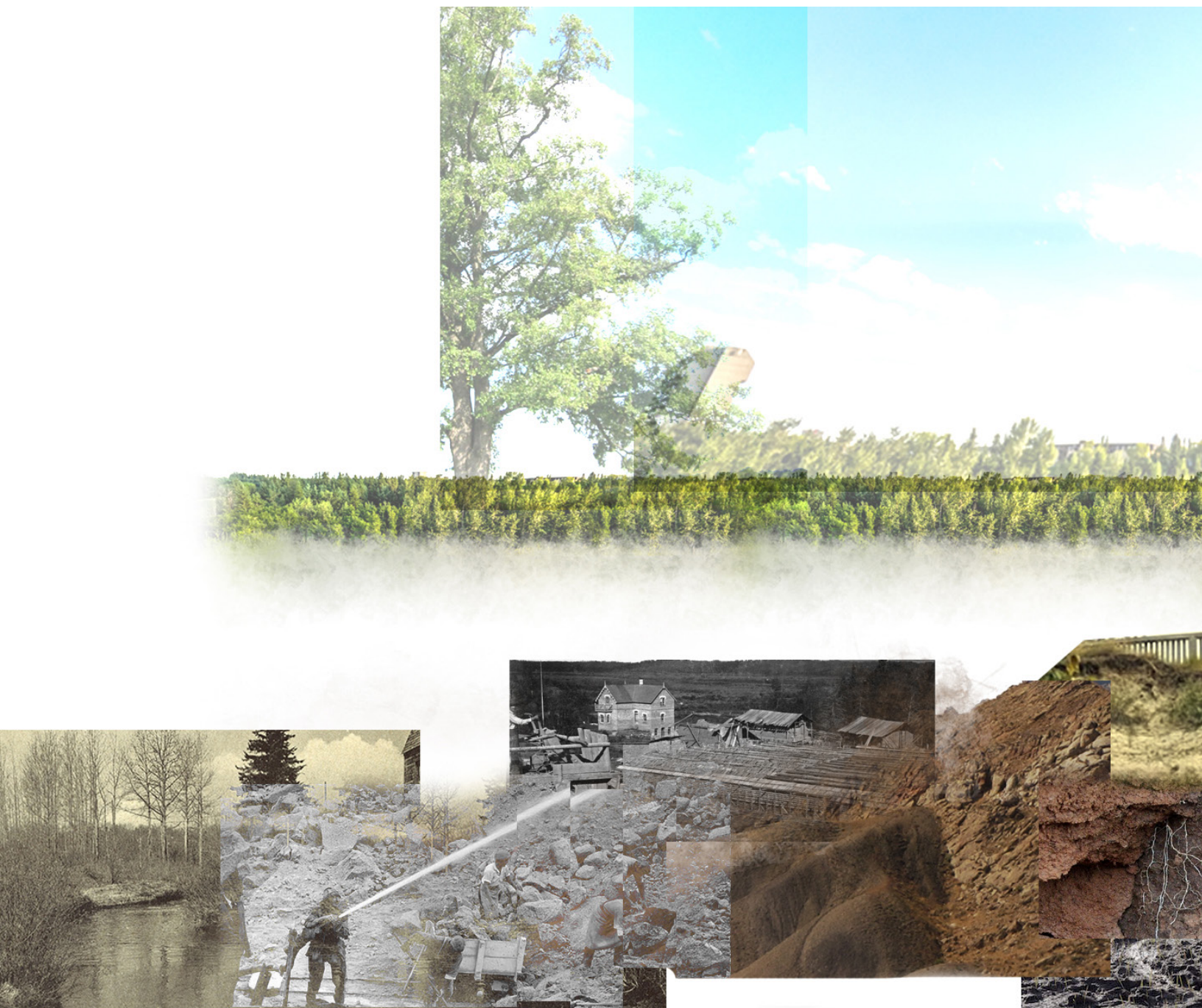
In the early 1900s Piper Mountain itself was targeted as a site of development. The Piper and Company Brickyards set up operations at the base of this hill. The face of Piper Mountain was shaved away, and its clay subsurface was used in the bricks to construct some of the early homes and government buildings in the growing town surrounding it. The brickyard shut down before the company could extract all of the clay, and the half-carved body of this hill still exists today. It is now city property, as part of Rotary Park with a playground and picnic area at the base of the defaced hill.

**Redacted  
for digital  
publication  
due to  
copyright**

37. Piper Mountain today.  
Clay extracted from other side of hill

This site engages with concepts of visibility and trauma. The hill itself shows visible signs of this extraction, though the viewpoint directs visitors to look over this evidence. The goal of my intervention here is not a typical slope stabilization plan, rather my intervention uses planting, repurposed infrastructure, and worms to manage a slow and healthy erosion that celebrates the life that can exist here.





38. Piper Mountain Collage

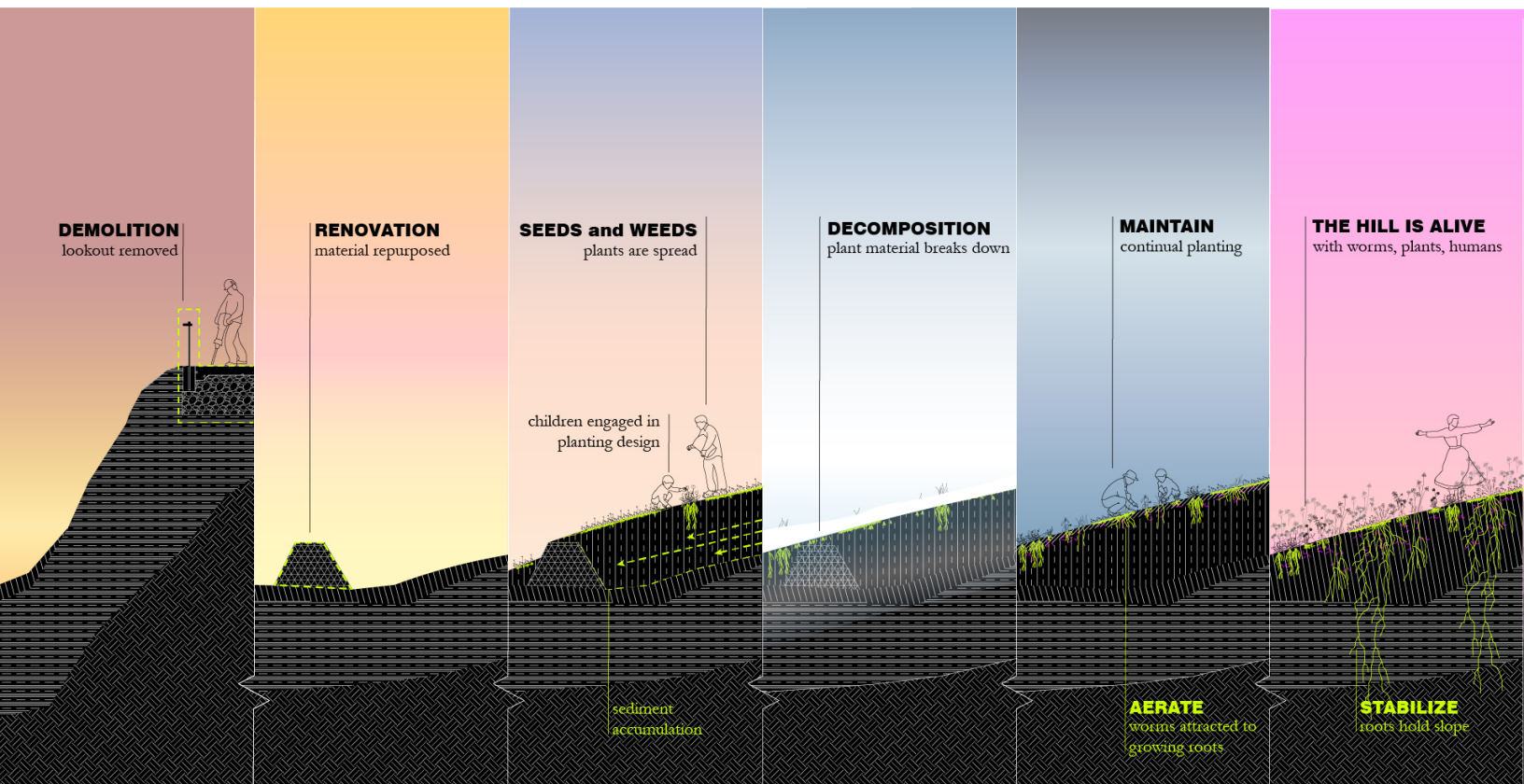




My intervention will remove the existing platform structure that serves as a viewpoint and is helping to stabilize the top of the hill. This structure will be repurposed into material to create a berm at the bottom of the eroding slope, these berms capture the clay sediment to ensure that future sediment does not accumulate in the creek below the hill.

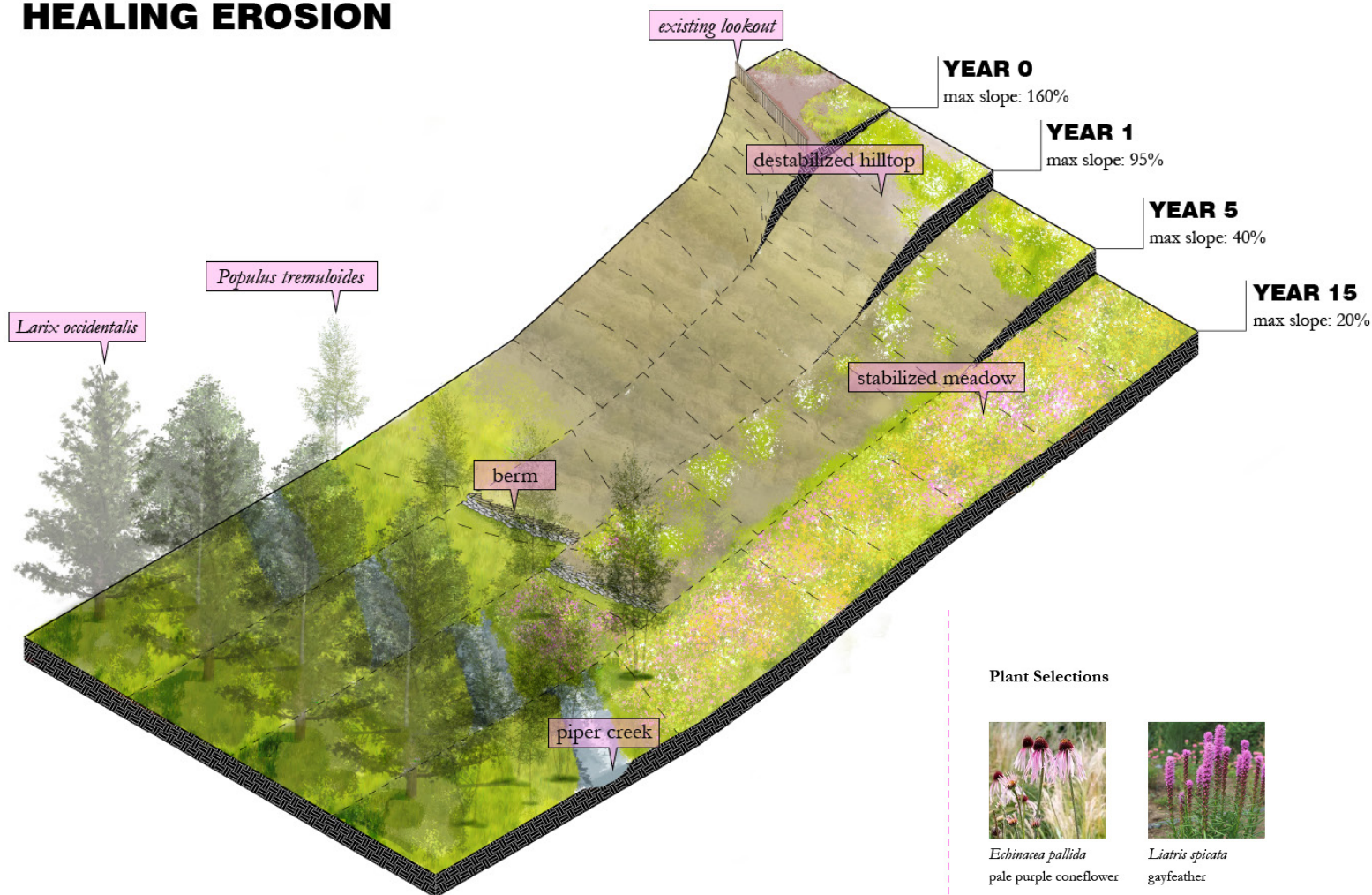
Periodic disruption will make it difficult for most plants to establish, but local weedy plants like white clover and dandelion are tough and will be the first to move in and begin adding biomass to the soil. As the slope softens and erosion slows, deep tap-rooted plants and clay-loving perennials will be planted by children from the nearby playground. These children may plant in more random arrangements than the adult who has been trained to appreciate normative ideas around aesthetics. These large root systems are attractive to earthworms, who will come to these plants for food, tilling the soil, and entering a reciprocal relationship with these plants who provide food, and benefit from the worm's earthwork. Throughout this process, the hill is alive, with worms, plants, and humans.

39. Section showing managed erosion process

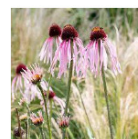




# HEALING EROSION



## Plant Selections



*Echinacea pallida*  
pale purple coneflower



*Liatris spicata*  
gayfeather



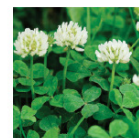
*Helianthus divaricatus*  
woodland sunflower



*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*  
aromatic aster



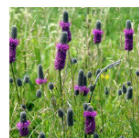
*Taraxacum officinale*  
common dandelion



*Trifolium repens*  
white clover



*Achillea millefolium*  
yarrow



*Dalea purpurea*  
purple prairie clover

40. Axonometric showing surface condition as time passes

Humans, roots, snow, and worms work together here to add biomass, break it down, and till the soil, slowly remediating and stabilizing the soil over time, eventually creating a prairie meadow that, rather than directing views away from this active meadow, it encourages engagement inward. The continued maintenance of this eroding slope is community managed and slow. The goal with this intervention is not to erase damage done to the land, but to call attention to that damage through a slow, collaborative healing process, and then celebrate the life that can exist going forward.





41. Worm's eye view





## CANADIAN ENERGY MUSEUM

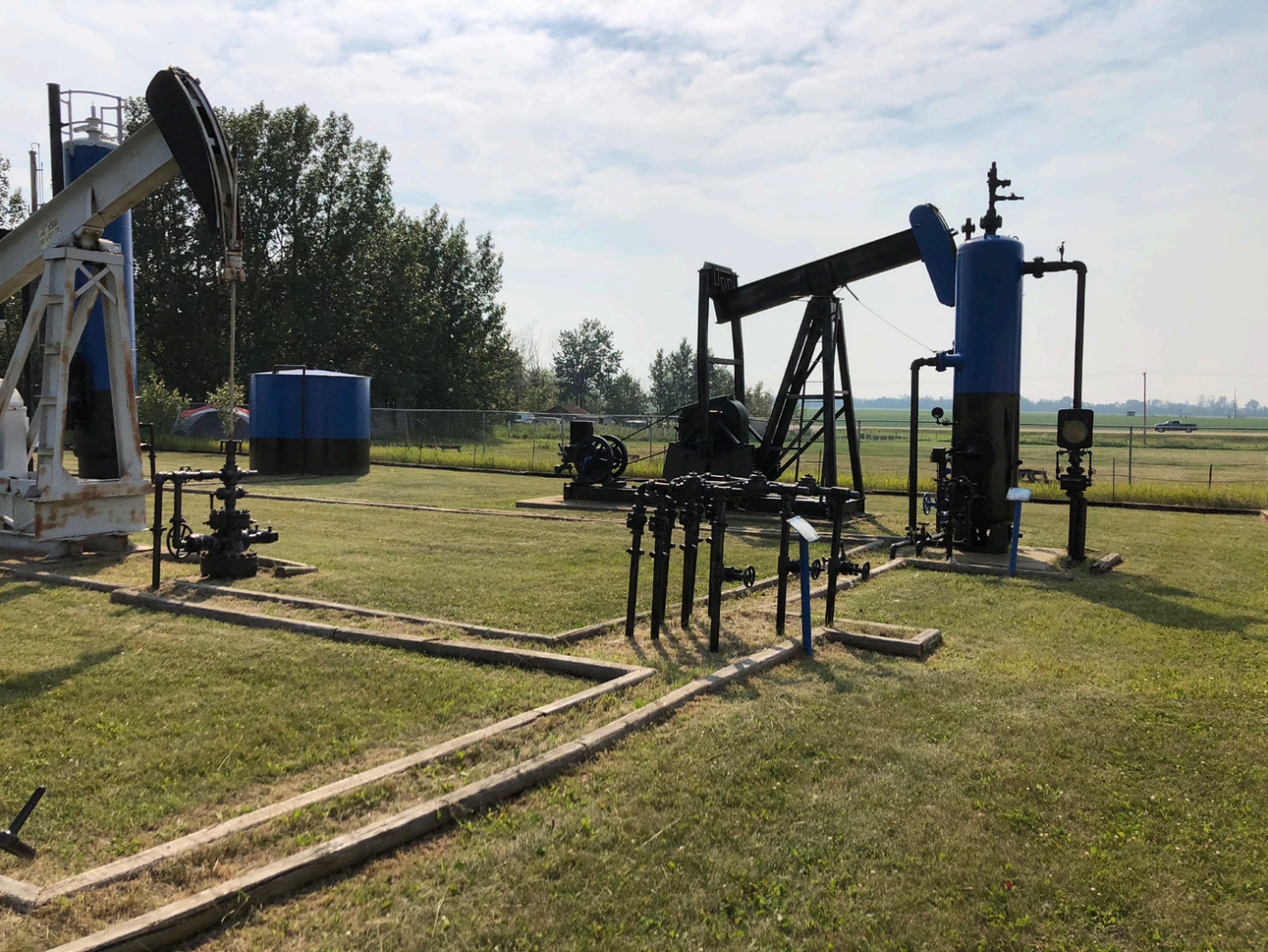
This is the site of the first major crude oil discovery in Alberta. The discovery was made by Imperial Oil in 1947, by which time much of the landscape of the Aspen Parkland region had been converted into agricultural land. Similarly, the economy of Alberta was primarily driven by agriculture. This discovery was the catalyst and key for the hundreds of oil wells that would be constructed from this point on. Now the Alberta economy would radically shift from breadbasket to oil country. Up until this point, Imperial Oil had drilled 133 of holes in the Aspen Parkland region, and all were dry.



42. Leduc No. 1 well site on February 13, 1947. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Harry Pollard Collection P2733

The discovery of this oil reserve resulted in a huge influx of people, mostly oil-working men, into this region just south of Edmonton. Temporary camps were set up for some of the transient workers, and the government eventually designed a planned community, named Devon, to account for the more permanent influx of workers. The well would be the first in hundreds that would penetrate the parkland landscape. The oil from this site has since been fully used, and the derrick memorialized, but the Alberta economy retains its economic reliance on oil. The derrick now acts as the site for the Canadian Energy Museum and RV campground





43. Oil Artifacts on the Museum Grounds © Jason Woodhead (<https://flic.kr/p/28CWuqD>) CC BY-SA 2.0



44. Leduc No. 1. © Jason Woodhead (<https://flic.kr/p/LfWNPk>) CC BY-SA 2.0





This site engages with a layering of capitalist priorities. Where agriculture was once profitable, oil has taken its place. A queer future on this site could imagine a similarly radical shift in priorities. Just as the oil derrick is layered on top of the farm, a queer regeneration of the land can layer over this history of environmental damage.

45. Prairie, Fire, and Oil. Collage of static binaries.

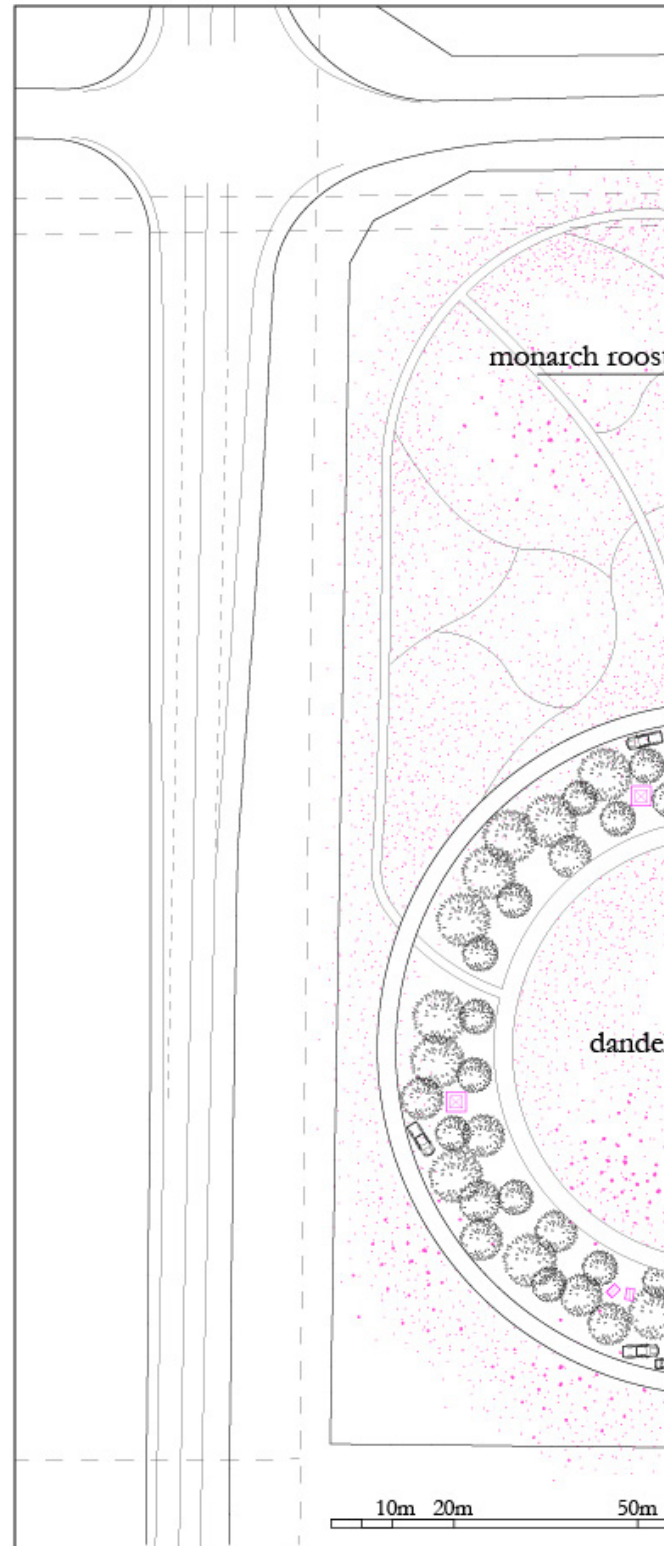




## BUTTERFLY CAMP

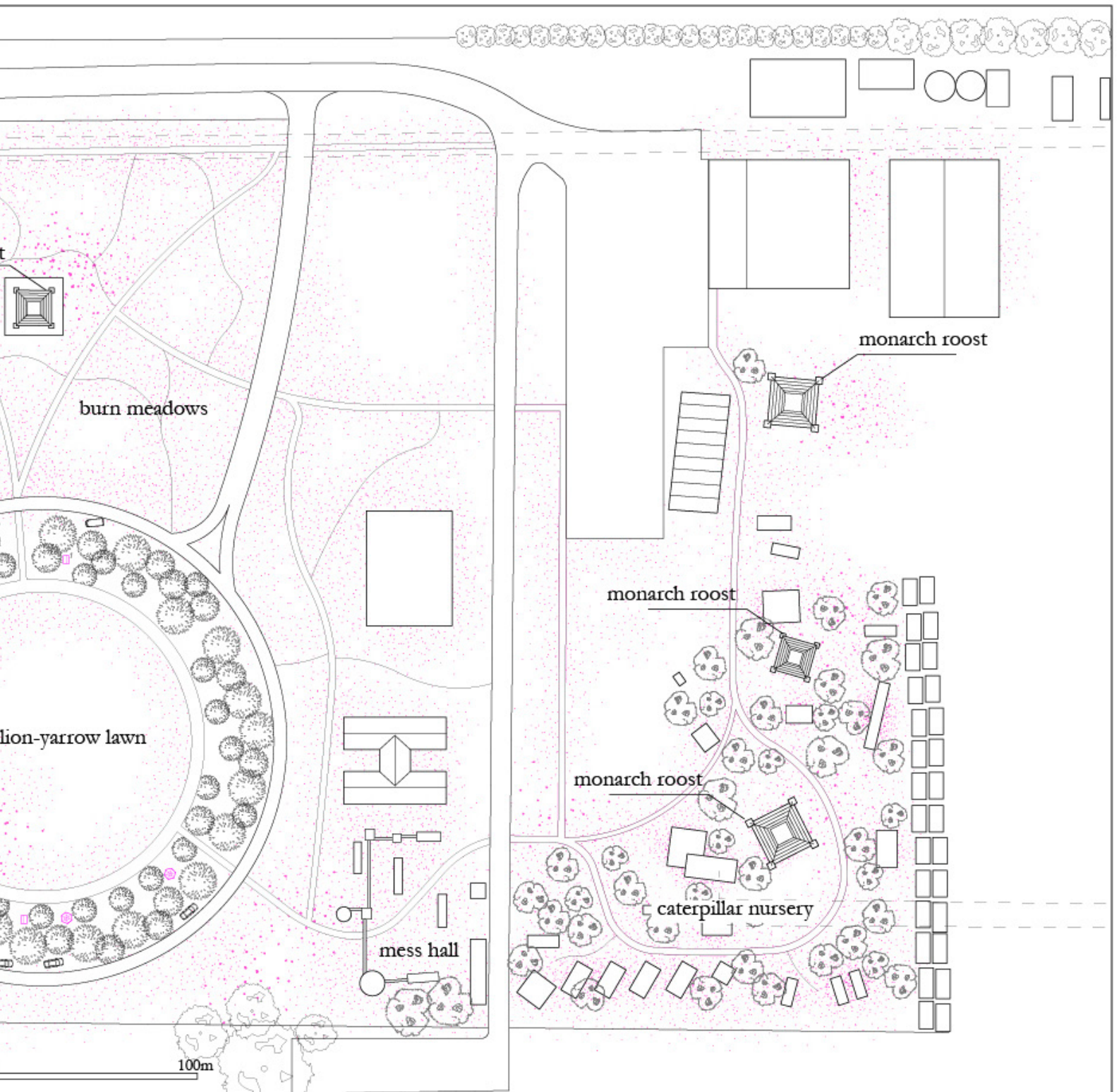
The Canadian energy museum website has recently put forward a call for objects and stories that include LGBTQ+ perspectives in Canada's energy industry. My intervention is a direct response to that call, with the proposed object being a counter monument and ceremonial practice recognizing the history of violence and erasure against queer people are involved in the energy industry and rural spaces more broadly. It is a countermonument that responds to the static binaries that form this landscape, and the harm done by the settler-colonialism's extraction of it. This countermonument is called butterfly camp.

Butterfly camp makes use of the existing program of the RV campsite, and redesigns it to support queer ceremonies that celebrate cycles of life and transformation. The planting is colourful, eclectic, and is specific to support butterflies, a queer little bug that embodies ideas of transformation and growth. Marked on the site plan is a trail system that leads the visitor through the burn meadows, campsite, mess hall, caterpillar nursery, and milkweed roosts.



46. Butterfly Camp Plan









47. Campground Perspective



The campground itself deprioritizes RV camping, and provides more amenities for those who wish to camp in tents and smaller vehicles. It is arranged in a circle, facing campsites inward

toward the other campers, with a scrim of cottonwood trees along the outer edge. This offers some sense of privacy and security from the surrounding highways and rural-industrial landscape, and allows for opportunities for group activities between campsites.











Each spring begins with a ceremonial burning at the burn meadows, signalling the opening of the campsite. This ceremony burns off remaining plant matter from last year and prepares the land for new growth. This returns the prairie land to its historical rhythms of managed burns.

Throughout the year, different butterfly species may be dominant in the landscape. In the spring the mess hall will be populated with newly metamorphosed tiger swallowtails. They and other butterflies will engage in a behaviour known as puddling-- which is when they gather and drink minerals from these troughs of mud as campers enjoy their own meals in this extrastimulated environment.

49. Mess Hall















By the summer, many butterfly species will have laid their eggs in the caterpillar nursery, a grove of birch and aspens that surround the loose machinery. The leaves of these trees provide important food sources for the hungry caterpillars, and the cracks and crevices in the various industrial artifacts provide winter shelter for hibernating cocoons and butterflies.





hibernating  
*Nymphalis antiopa*

overwintering  
chrysalides





51. Overwintering Butterflies

In the fall, many of the flowering plants will begin dispersing their seeds. The monarch roosts will rain down milkweed seeds and spread through the site and beyond. These milkweed are vital food sources that sustain migrating monarch butterflies. Monarchs currently only make an appearance this far north-west about once a decade, but as climate change continues, that is expected to become more frequent, so long as milkweed is available. These roosts stand as an invitation to the monarch butterfly that they may make a future summer home here.













*Asclepias speciosa*  
showy milkweed



54. Offsite Intervention

Finally, as the campground closes in the fall, people engage in closing ceremonies of seed harvesting. These seeds are then brought home to be spread throughout the province. In the future, perhaps these seeds will be spread along the provincewide network of natural gas pipelines, which heat the earth above them. This land has proven to be unsuitable for growing crops, as the heat causes plants like canola to mature too early, but this heat transfer may be beneficial for protecting milkweed seedlings as they germinate in the spring.





This final renovation of oil industry artifacts spreads the butterfly camp past its bounds, finding and celebrating life in spaces known for extracting life.

## QUEER PRAIRIE FUTURES

The nature of this project asks for novel ways of imagining landscapes. Landscape Architecture is well-positioned, as a discipline, to engage with and represent ideas of futurism, especially in how we relate with other beings. Queer Futurism reimagines relationships between beings, seeing human and other-than-human as kin. As queer people, we have already reimagined ways of relating to one another, and to our own bodies. So, extending this same consideration to non-human kin is a natural path for Queer Futurism. This reading of environmental futures by queer people is a direct response to a history of “homophobic discourse that positions queers as ‘against nature’” (Seymour 181).

In fact, queer ecology sees the queer body as closer to nature. Queerness demands the queer body to examine itself and how they relate to the normative landscape they inhabit. This self-reflection allows the queer person greater agency in imagining landscapes, as they have already broken free of the normative thinking that guides the heterosexual body. This futurist imagining is also an act of necessity.

The queer person, by definition, is “out of place” in the heteronormative present landscape, so futurist design ideation provides an aspirational path toward something that breaks the status quo which scars the queer body. As stated in the outset of this book, this project is a reclamation of the parkland landscape. I want to imagine optimistic futures in which alternative ways of being, relating, and caring can shape our landscapes. My hope is that this is evident in my design proposals, and that future queer landscape designers can continue to build upon these ideas.



*“we have reimagined our bodies, we have experienced our desire or our joy as something sacred, to be transmitted not always through biological reproduction, but through other means.”*

from “Trans(Eco)Futurism and Dreampunk”

## WORKS CITED

- “18 Shades of Gay.” *Claude Cormier + Associes*. <https://www.claudecormier.com/en/projet/18-shades-of-gay/>
- Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, Durham, 2006.
- Bell, David, and Gill Valentine. “Queer Country: Rural Lesbian and Gay Lives.” *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1995, pp. 113-122.
- Bison Await Transport*. 1925. Photograph. Provincial Archives of Alberta. <https://flic.kr/p/wFE2c3>. A4726.
- Corraling buffalo in Wainwright Buffalo Park*. 1925. Photograph. Provincial Archives of Alberta. <https://flic.kr/p/xBQLKQ>. A4730
- Dawe, Michael. “John T. Moore.” *Red Deer Express*, Red Deer, AB, February 9, 2003.
- Clare, Eli. “Notes on Cure, Disability, and Natural Worlds.” Guest lecture at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, April, 2015.
- Halberstam, Jack/Judith. In *A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York University Press, New York, 2005.
- Herring, Scott. *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*. New York: NYU Press, 2010.
- Jaque, Andrés. “Queer Architecture with Andrés Jaque.” *Dis*. <https://dis.art/queer-architecture-with-andres-jaque/info>
- Jarman, David. *Derek Jarman’s Garden*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995.
- Leduc No. 1 well site on February 13, 1947*. 1947. Photograph. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Harry Pollard Collection. P2733
- “Old Timer Dead: The Late John T. Moore.” *Red Deer News*. 1917. Peel’s Prairie Provinces. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/RDN/1917/06/06/1/Ar00109.html> Ar00109
- Mateos, Pierre-Alexandre; Teyssou, Charles; Myrup, Rasmus; and Octave Perrault. *Cruising Pavilion*. <https://cruisingpavilion.com/>
- Meissen, Justin. *Aspen parkland*. 2012. Photograph. Flickr. <https://flic.kr/p/oyszZ2W>. CC BY-SA 2.0
- . *Endless Marsh*. 2010. Photograph. Flickr. <https://flic.kr/p/m5RZwe>. CC BY-SA 2.0



- . *Tallgrass Aspen Parklands*. 2012. Photograph. Flickr.  
<https://flic.kr/p/oAxC7a>. CC BY-SA 2.0
- . *Thistle and butterfly*. 2012. Photograph. Flickr.  
<https://flic.kr/p/oyN8eK>. CC BY-SA 2.0
- Miguelb. *Highway 2, Southern Alberta*. 2005. Photograph. Flickr.  
<https://flic.kr/p/3BD1z>. CC BY-SA 2.0
- Morgensen, Scott Lauria. "The Biopolitics of Settler Sexuality and Queer Modernities." *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*. University of Minnesota Press, August 24, 2015. Minnesota Scholarship Online.
- Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona. "Lesbian Separatist Communities and the Experience of Nature: Toward a Queer Ecology." *Organization & Environment*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2002, pp. 131-163.
- Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona, and Bruce Erickson, editors. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. Indiana University Press, 2010. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzhnz](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzhnz).
- Pavka, Evan. "What do We Mean By Queer Space?" *Azure Magazine*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.azuremagazine.com/article/what-do-we-mean-by-queer-space/>
- Reed, Christopher. "Imminent Domain." *Art Journal* (New York. 1960), vol. 55, no. 4, 1996, pp. 64.
- Riley, Sharon J. "'Hidden danger': Life for farmers atop Alberta's 400,000 kilometres of pipelines." *The Narwhal*, November 20, 2019, <https://thenarwhal.ca/hidden-danger-life-for-farmers-atop-albertas-400000-kilometres-of-pipelines/>
- "Rotary Picnic Park." *The City of Red Deer*. <https://www.reddeer.ca/recreation-and-culture/outdoor-recreation/year-round-activities/playgrounds/rotary-picnic-park/>
- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. "Indigenous Queer Normativity." *As we have always done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2017, pp. 119-144. doi:10.5749/j.ctt1pwt77c.
- Seymour, Nicole. *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2013, doi:10.5406/j.ctt2ttbjv.
- Steyaert, Chris. "Queering Space: Heterotopic Life in Derek Jarman's Garden." *Gender, Work, and Organization*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2008, pp. 45-68.

- Tramontana, Mary K. "Planted in Sickness, Derek Jarman's Garden Still Gives Joy." *The New York Times*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/movies/derek-jarman-garden-prospect-cottage.html>.
- "Trans(Eco)Futurism and Dreampunk." *Queer Nature*. May 28, 2019. <https://www.queernature.org/blog/2019/5/28/transecofuturism-and-dreampunk/>
- W.J., Oliver. *Cowboy drinking coffee*. 1926. Photograph. Glenbow Museum. NB-H-16-452
- Woodhead, Jason. *Leduc No. 1 Oil Well*. 2018. Photograph. Flickr. <https://flic.kr/p/LfWNPK>. CC BY-SA 2.0