

# Mapping access to nature

## The Restorative Natural Area (RNA) Index

Spending time in nature has well documented benefits for wellbeing. At the same time, people's diverse experiences, preferences and beliefs shape their perspective on nature. So what is "nature", and how do we map it?

Most wellbeing benefits of nature come from spending time in "Restorative Natural Areas". RNA are natural places we can go to "clear our mind" and experience "soft fascination": tranquil moments of passive, curious attention.

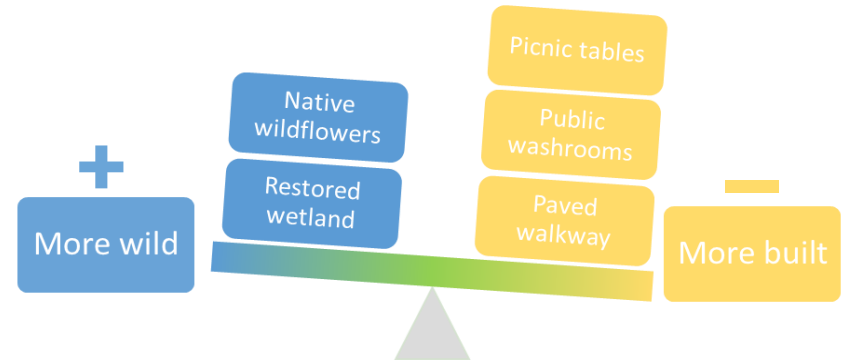
 Quiet, minimal crowding, limited/no road noise or interruptions

 Minimal built infrastructure

 Contains natural elements like water, large trees, wildflowers

 Unlikely to be a pocket park, green roof, sport field, playground, etc.

 Co-benefits for conservation + habitat restoration



The RNA index assigns a score to an area by adding points for features that contribute to soft fascination (like natural shoreline or large trees) and subtracting points for those that impede it (like loud music or urban traffic).

Data to inform the index is often collected and available through municipal data libraries. Partnerships with stewardship groups and universities can help to fill in the gaps.



**Low access:** Being >30 minutes away from a RNA or needing to use a car to access that space.

**Medium access:** Being able to walk, roll, or take transit to a RNA within 30 minutes or less.

**Excellent access:** Being able to walk or roll (within 300m) to a RNA in your home neighbourhood.

The RNA index can be used to build a choropleth or bivariate choropleth map. Using the above example spectrum, areas on the map that have more natural features appear more blue, whereas more built-up areas with less RNA appear more yellow. Areas that fall somewhere in between appear in green.

