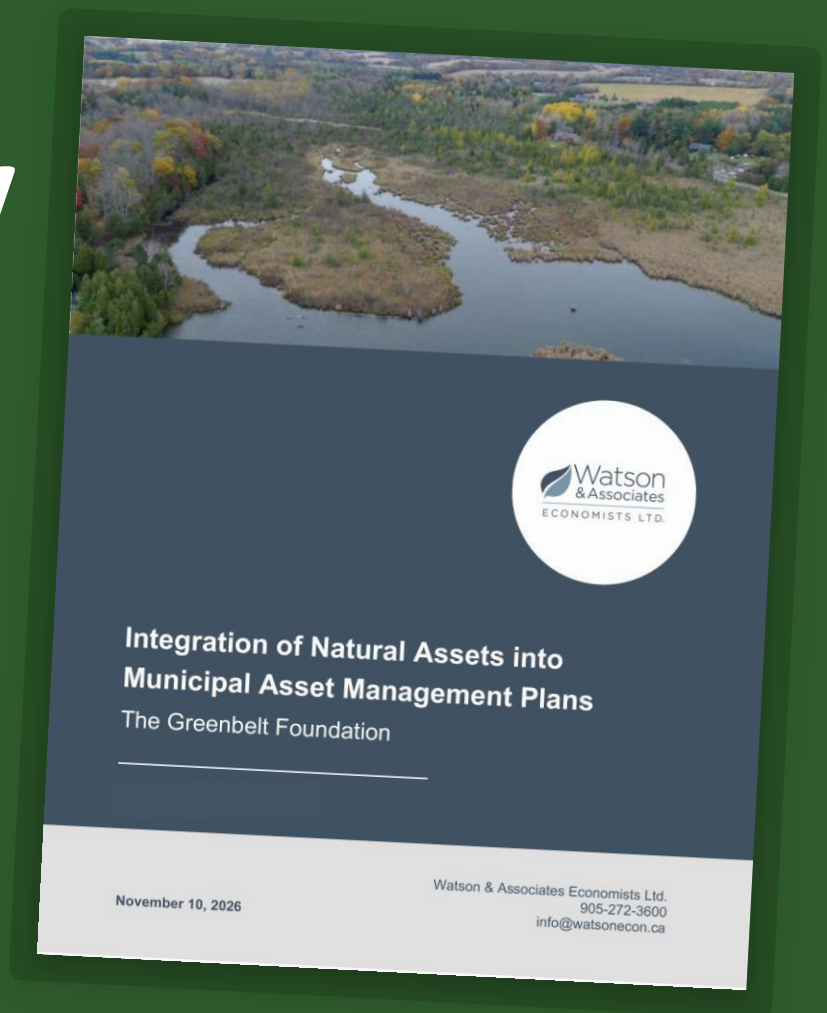
2026 INTEGRATION OF NATURAL ASSETS INTO MUNICIPAL ASSET MANAGEMENT PLANS

How 50 Greenbelt municipalities found infrastructure they already owned



What worked, what's in the way, and where yours can start.

The Greenbelt is a community asset supporting the lives and livelihoods of millions of Ontarians.

Its wetlands filter our water, its trees cool our communities, and its soils soak up storms.

Protecting and managing these natural assets lowers infrastructure costs and helps us withstand floods and extreme heat.

Put simply, investing in the Greenbelt's health delivers returns we depend on.



Imagine Mother Nature left your city an inheritance.

A NATURAL ASSET IS

A wetland, woodlot, creek, aquifer or street tree doing a job that a built asset would otherwise do.

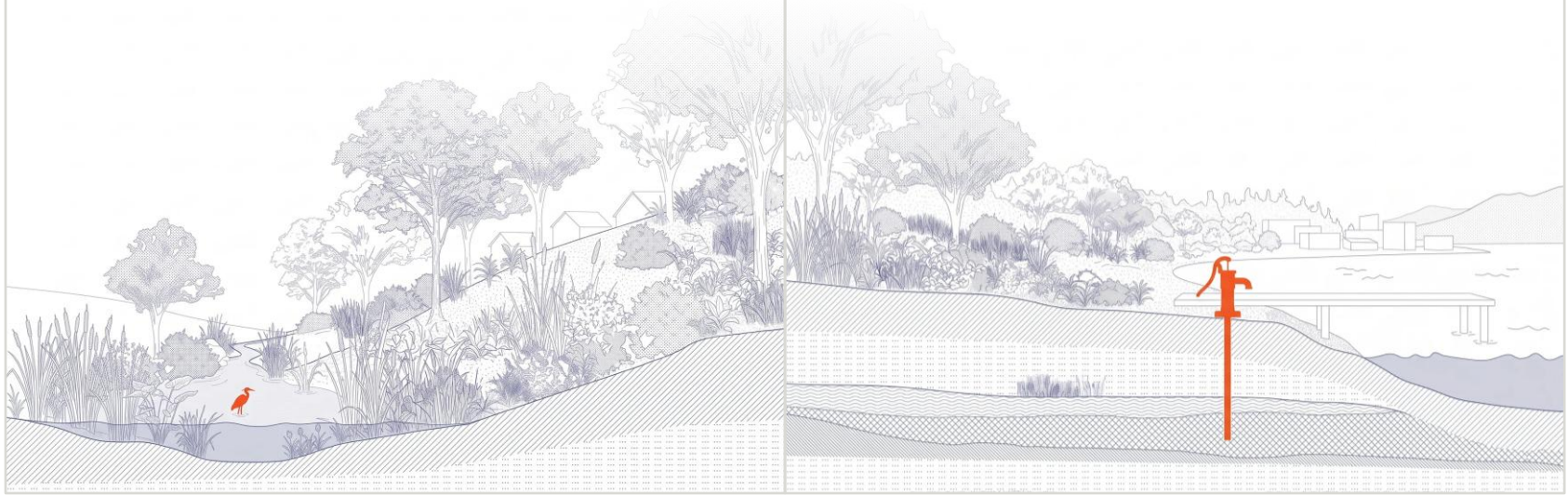
In one part of Pelham, forests and wetlands do stormwater work that would cost

$585M

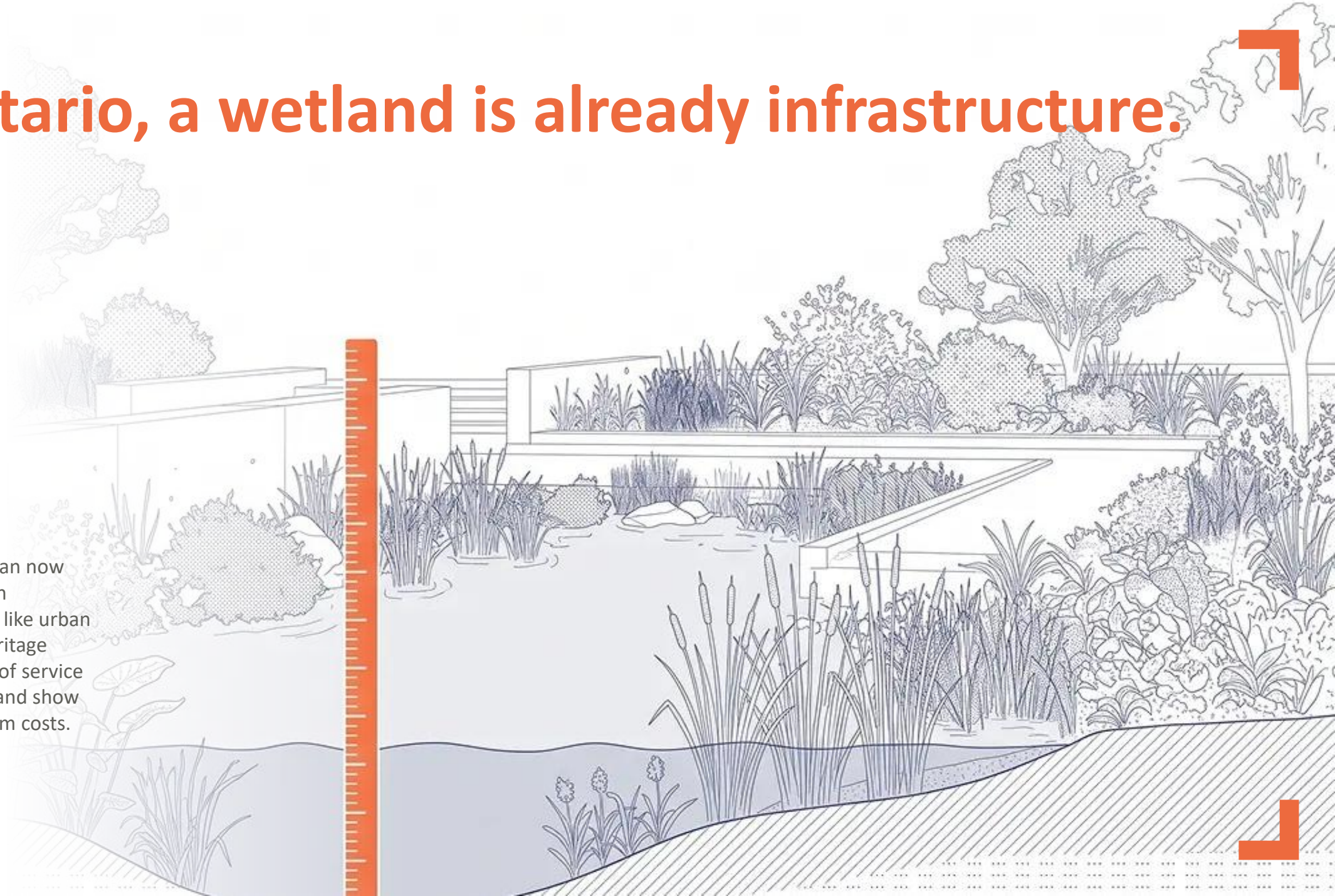
to build with engineered ponds and other built works.

Gibsons' aquifer does a water plant's job for about

$30K a year



In Ontario, a wetland is already infrastructure.



O. REG. 588/17

Every municipality's plan now must include the green infrastructure it owns, like urban forests and natural heritage features, set the level of service those assets provide, and show what looking after them costs.

Ontario municipalities have had a head start.

1st

province to regulate municipal asset management planning



2014

Gibsons, B.C. names natural assets an asset class

2017

Ontario regulates municipal asset planning

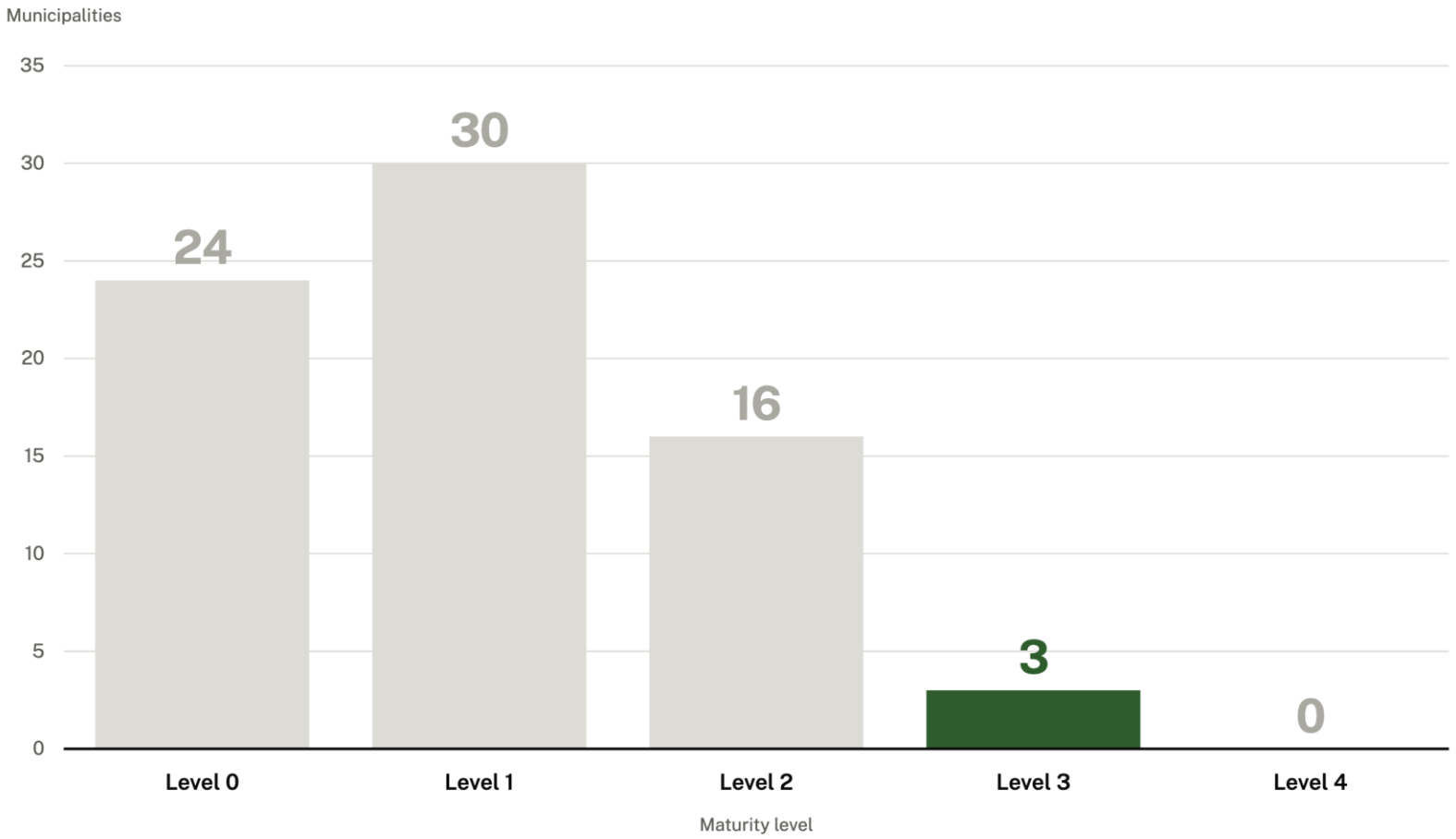
2024

First Greenbelt benchmark of 73 municipalities

2026

This report

Late 2023: …it was early days.



24 of 73

Greenbelt municipalities had natural assets in their plans

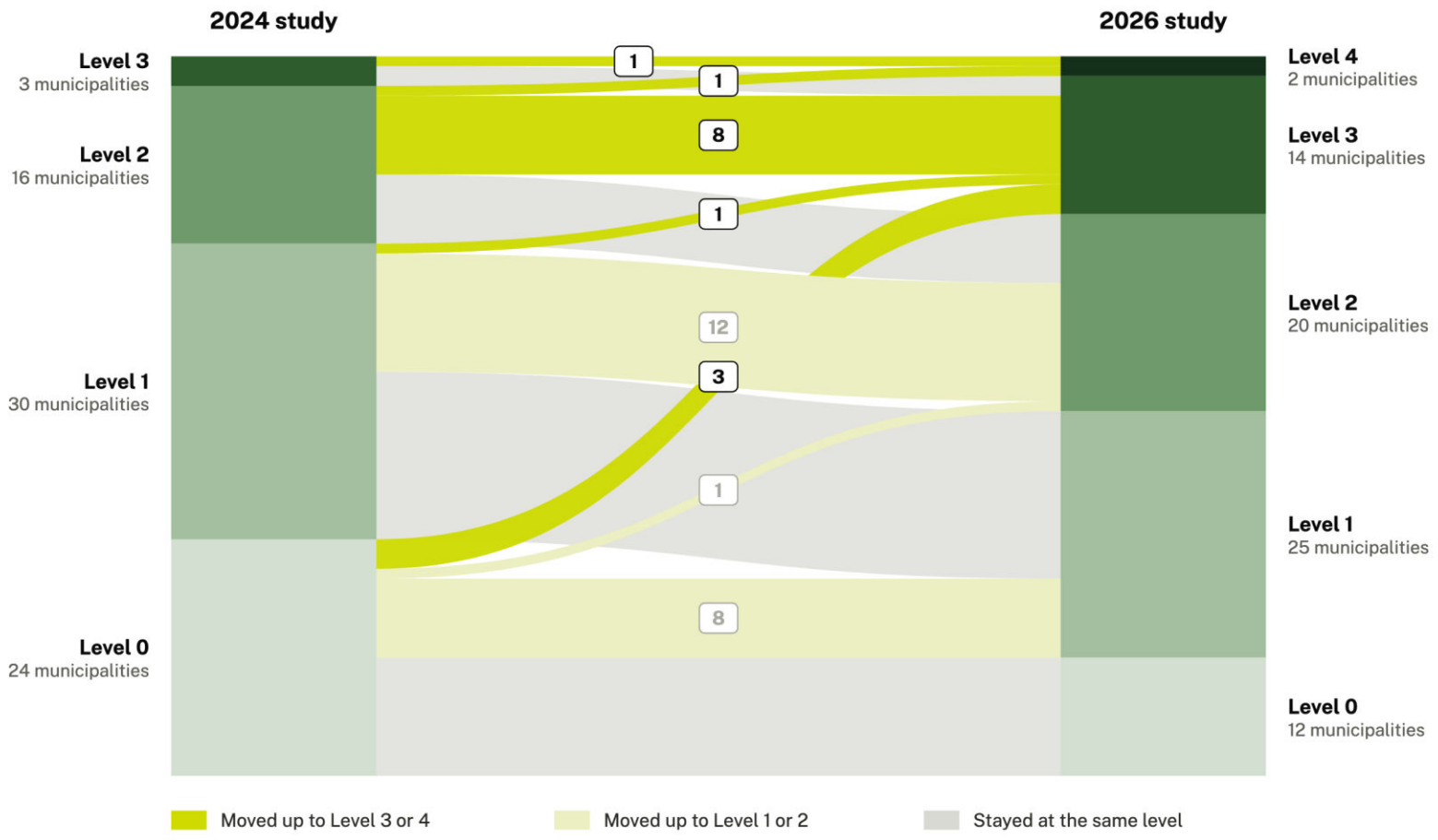
3 of 73

were in the leading group

Three years later…



2026: …green indicators across the board.



50 (up from 24!)

Greenbelt municipalities now have natural assets in their plans

16 (up from 3!)

are now in the leading group

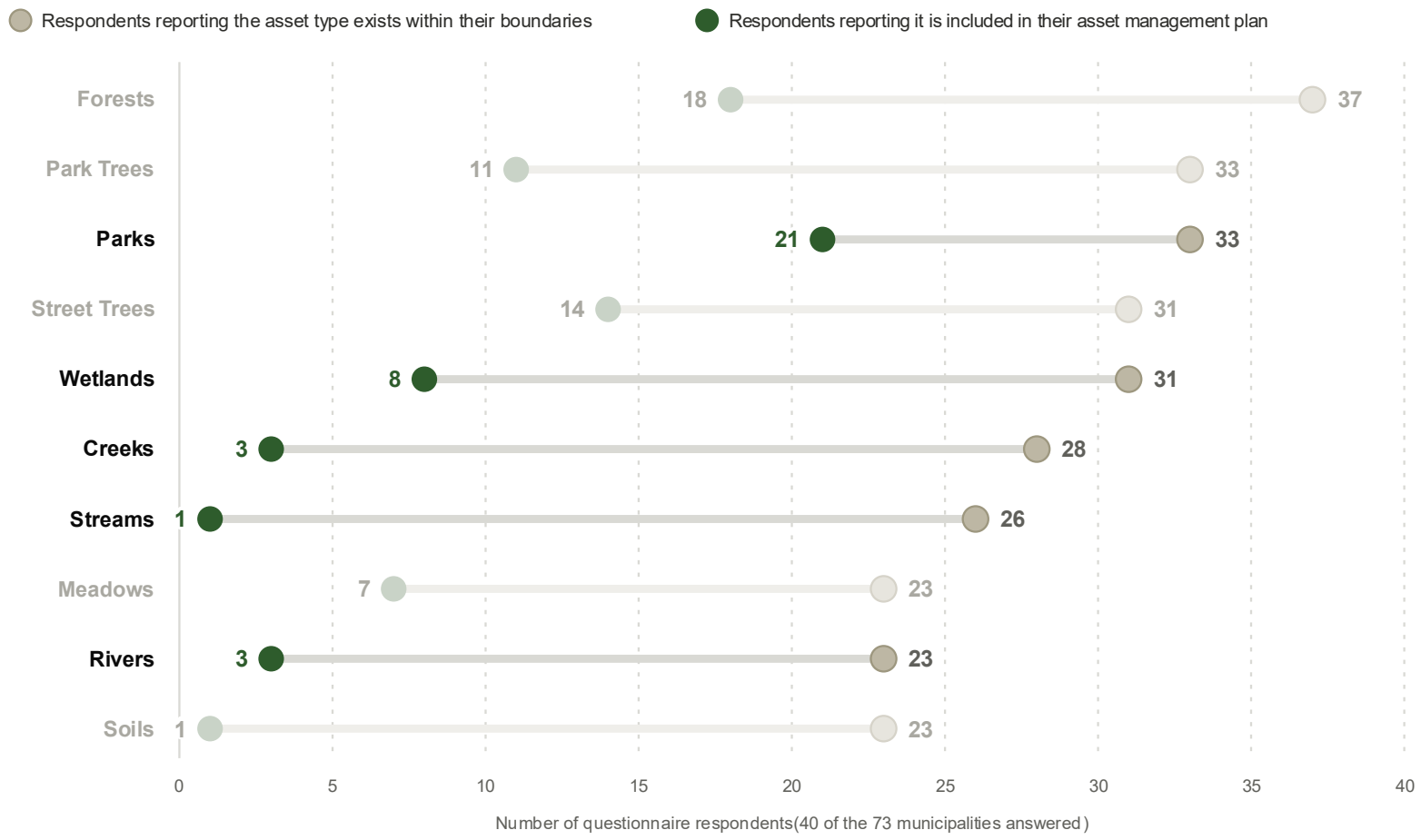
Integration of Natural Assets into Municipal Asset Management Plans (2026)

Fig 1 Adapted

If you look after parks or street trees, you already manage natural assets.



Most respondents have wetlands and waterways. Few have them in the plan.



21 of 33

respondents with parks include them in their plan

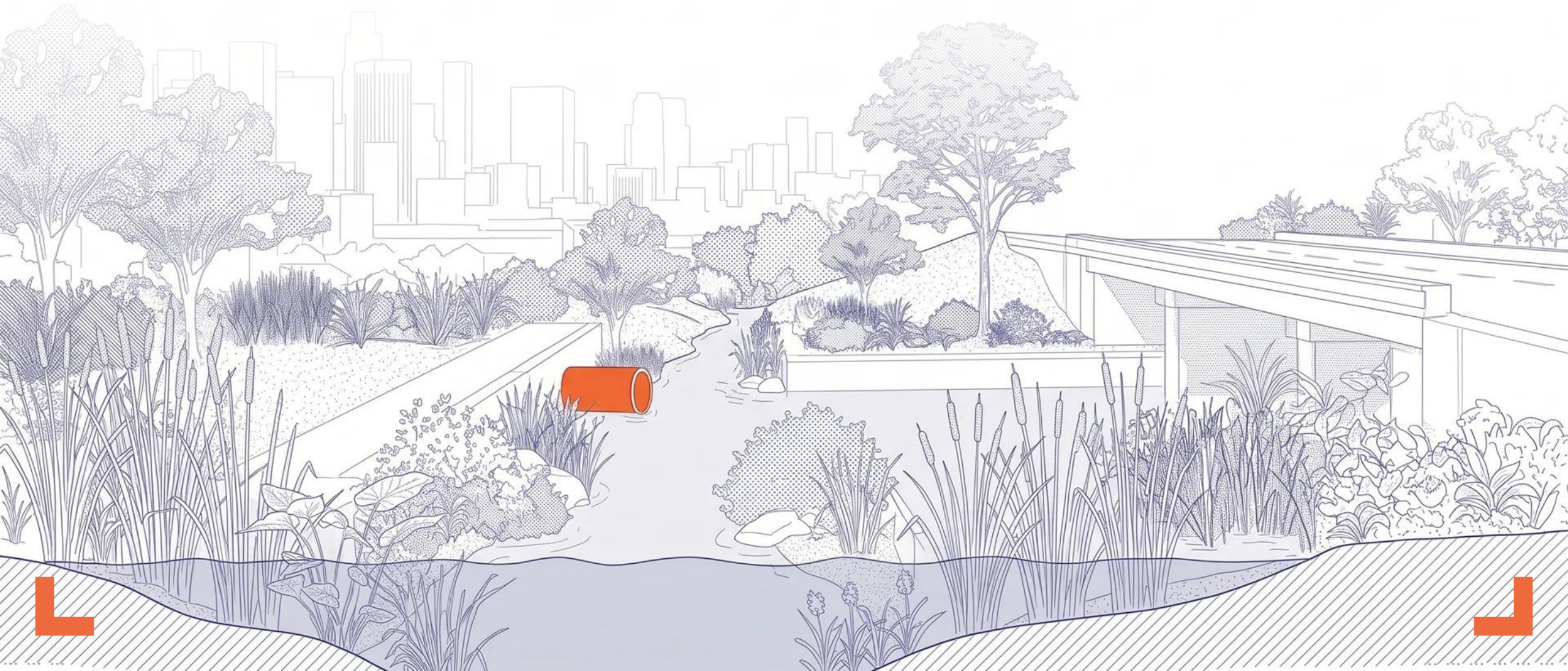
8 of 31

respondents with wetlands include them in their plan

Integration of Natural Assets into Municipal Asset Management Plans (2026)

Fig 3-4 Top Ten

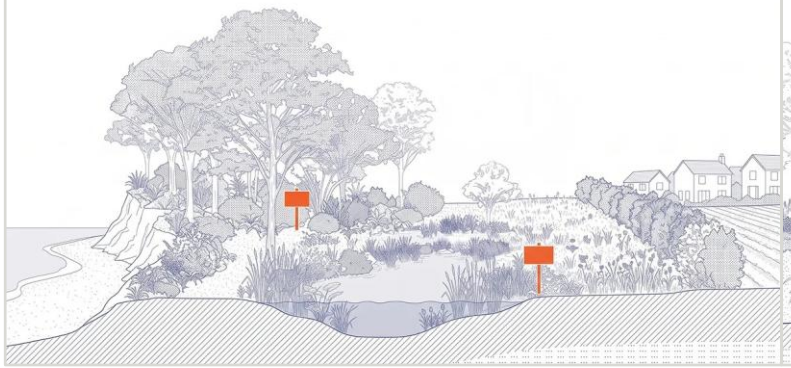
Familiar challenges.



It takes what roads and pipes take.

ROI

Making the business case for the studies and annual upkeep



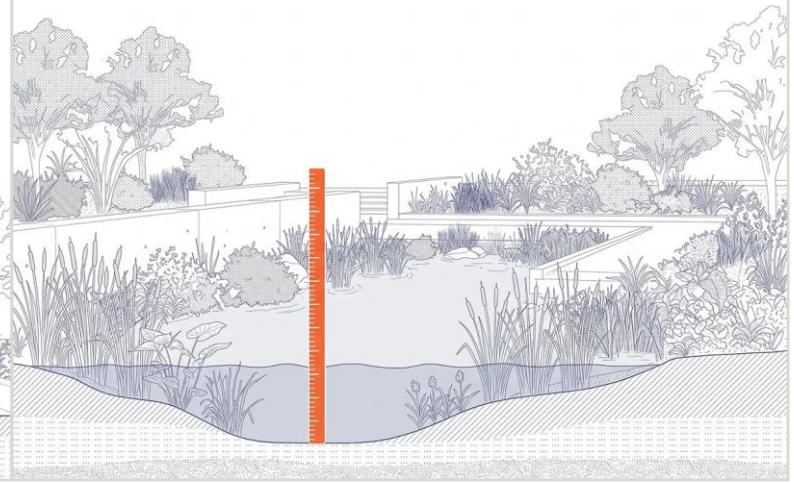
Staff and Councils

Enough hands to do the work and council leadership



Know-how

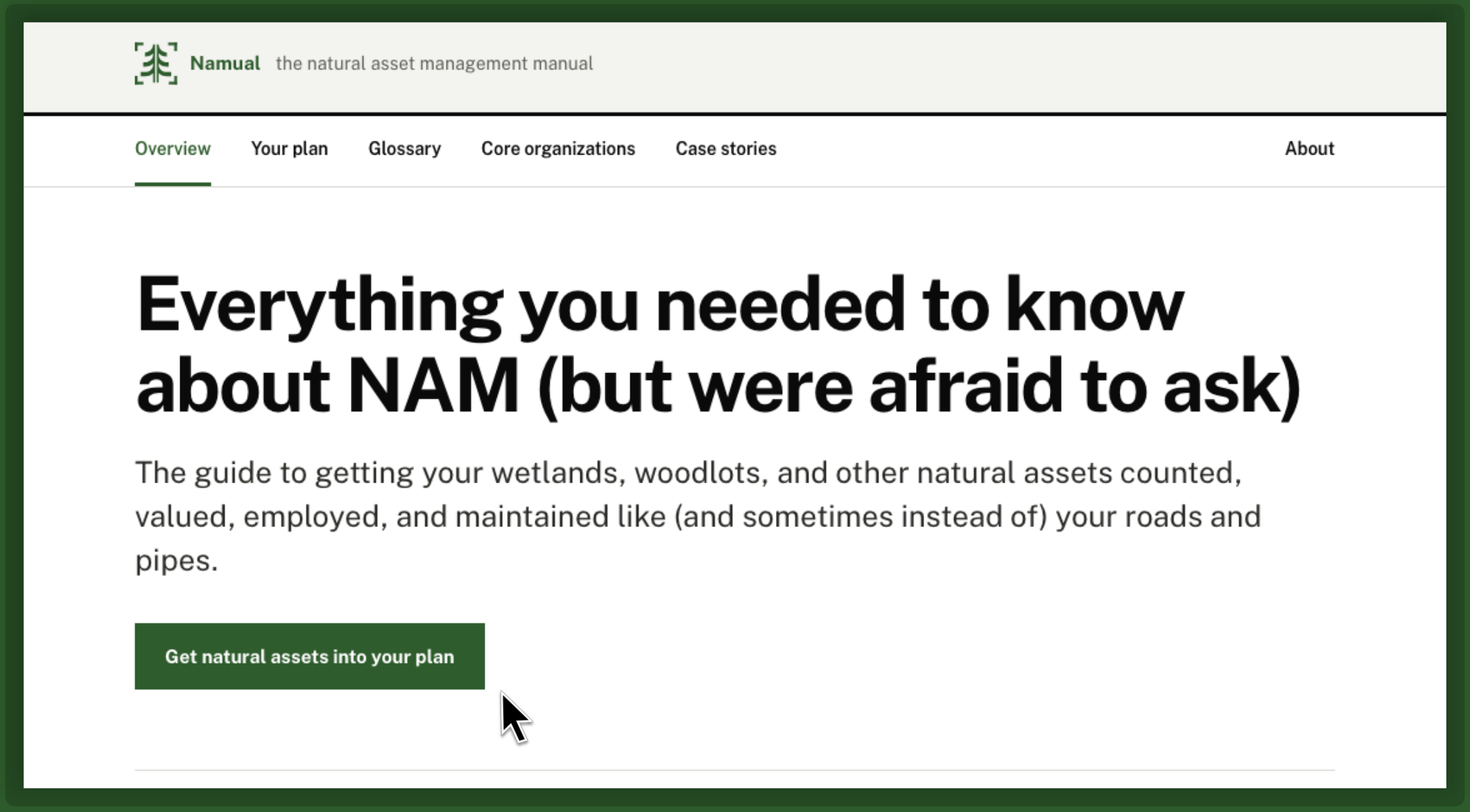
Departments pooling what they know, and municipalities learning from each other in a working group



After the business case and staff, the next hurdle is know-how.



Good news: we built a place to start.



Namual has your plan’s steps and who can help.

A glossary

Plain-language terms

A place to start

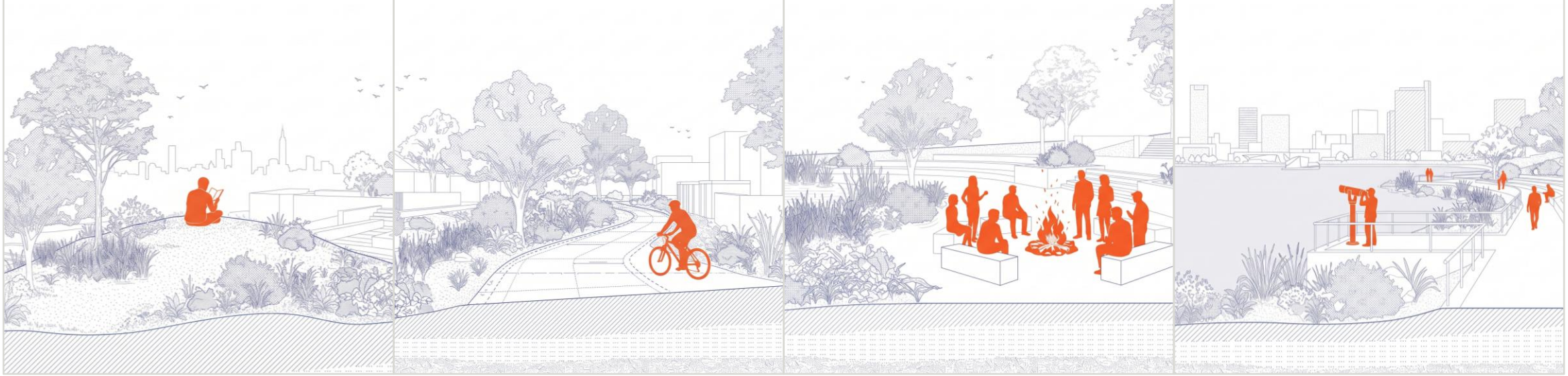
Five steps to get natural assets into your plan

Who to call

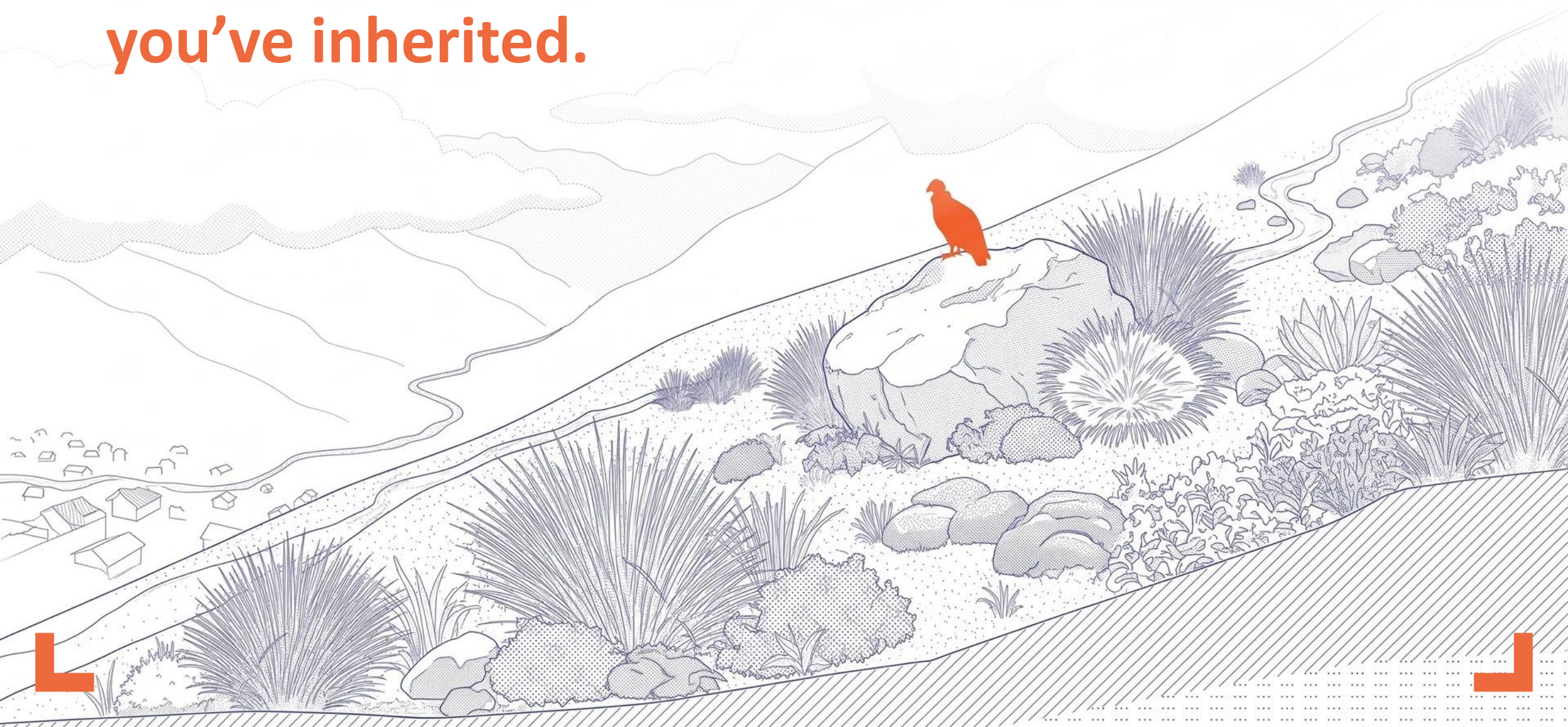
Organizations you'll work with

Case stories

Examples of municipalities that have navigated barriers



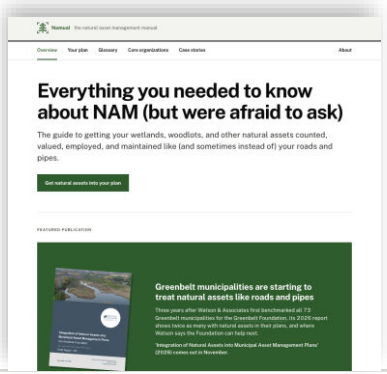
Start by taking stock of what you've inherited.



Where to go next

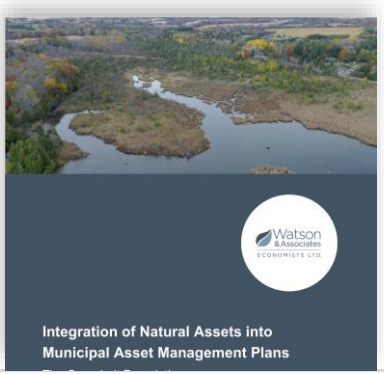
1 Open Namual

Start your inventory at namual.ca



2 Read the report

The findings, the method and Watson's five recommendations



3 Meet the partners

Natural Assets Initiative, Conservation Ontario and Asset Management Ontario can help at each step.

4 Share what's worked

Send your story to Ryan Carlow at rcarlow@greenbelt.ca

Behind the report

73 Greenbelt Municipalities

7 Assessment Categories

2 Studies

Scope

Who: Greenbelt municipalities, all assessed in both studies

What: Municipal asset management plans and related documents

How: 40 questionnaire responses, and plans and public documents for the municipalities that did not respond

Scoring

Levels 0 to 4, based on total score and the number of categories with points

Categories: State of Infrastructure, Levels of Service, Climate Change Measures, Lifecycle Management and Financial Strategies, Risk Management Plan, Project and Policy Implementation, Continuous Updates and Improvements

Baseline: A municipality's score could increase or stay the same, but could not decrease from its 2024 baseline

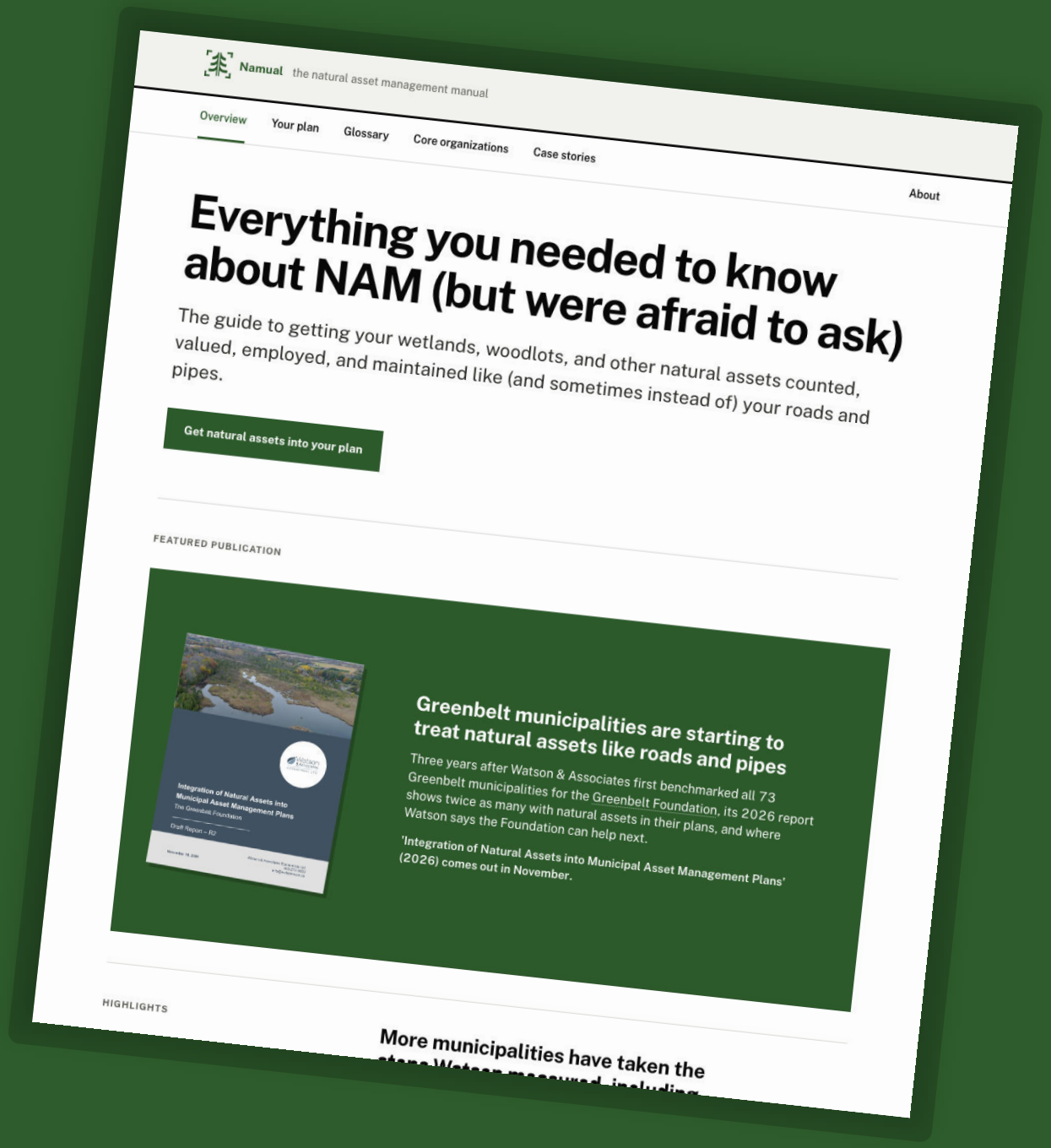
Timing

Studies: 2024 benchmark and the 2026 follow-up

Process: Questionnaire June to August 2026, interviews in August, document review August to September 2026, scoring in September

namual.ca

The living natural asset management manual



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