

# Conservation Strategy for **DRAFT** Capital Regional District - Regional Parks | *Providing strategic direction for parkland stewardship*

March 17, 2010

## F R A M E W O R K



MILL HILL REGIONAL PARK

CRD

Making a difference...together



# CONSERVATION VISION

*CRD Regional Parks are comprised of vibrant, functional ecosystems, with healthy populations of native species and a secure future for rare plants, animals, fungi, and other organisms. All of us—policy makers, parks staff, volunteers, visitors, and neighbours, and the general public—are aware of and respect the ecological values of CRD Regional Parks. Together, we steward regional parks and take care that our activities help the ecosystems, ecological communities, and species flourish for the long term.*

## Introduction

British Columbia's Capital Regional District (CRD), covering the southern tip of Vancouver Island and the southern Gulf Islands, encompasses a unique area in Canada, with a complex geography and climate and a diverse range of ecosystems dominated by Coastal Douglas-fir and Coastal Western Hemlock forests. Home to Coast Salish and Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations peoples for thousands of years, in recent times it has been increasingly settled and developed. The intersection of intense development and unique ecosystems has made the area one of Canada's focal points for conservation concerns. Protected areas, including lands set aside for conservation purposes by parks agencies and land trusts, are quickly becoming the only remaining areas of natural habitat within the developed landscape of the CRD. This fact underscores the critical importance of ongoing appropriate stewardship of acquired lands, to protect and restore native biodiversity over the long term.

The CRD Regional Parks system currently includes 28 parks and four regional trails ranging in size from 1.8 to over 4,000 hectares and totaling more than 11,500 hectares of land. Parklands help to protect a broad diversity of native ecosystems, ecological communities, and species, including dozens of species and ecological communities at risk of disappearing from the wild. Parklands also provide a range of critical ecosystem services, such as carbon storage, climate regulation, flood control, and many others. The *CRD Regional Parks Master Plan (2000)* states that the two primary purposes for CRD Regional Parks are:

1. To establish and protect a network of regional parks in perpetuity that represent and help maintain the diverse range of natural environments in the Capital Regional District.
2. To provide opportunities for outdoor experiences and activities that foster appreciation and enjoyment of, and respect for, the region's natural environments.

The Master Plan also affirms that protecting the natural environment is CRD Regional Parks' core value and primary responsibility, and that protecting the natural environment provides the means by which people can partake in the outdoor experiences that put them in close touch with nature. The Master Plan outlines a commitment to incorporate environmental conservation, defined as the careful protection, use, and planned management of living organisms and their vital processes, to prevent their depletion, exploitation, destruction or waste, into all aspects of park management and operation.

The *CRD Strategic Plan* similarly upholds the importance of protecting the natural environment by identifying environmental protection as one of the five priorities for 2009-2011. The Strategic Plan further identifies "effective stewardship of regional park lands and protected areas" as a desired outcome of this strategic priority. However, given intense pressures on the parks system from factors originating both within and without park boundaries, managing parks to protect and maintain the diverse range of ecosystems, ecological communities, and species is an enormous challenge. This Conservation Strategy provides guidance for meeting that challenge.



MOUNT WELLS REGIONAL PARK PHOTO RICK EPPLER

# Context

The ecological values and conditions within the CRD Regional Parks system include:

- Representation of two biogeoclimatic zones, the Coastal Douglas-fir and the Coastal Western Hemlock, of the three that occur in the CRD, and three of 9 different subzone variants that occur within the CRD. All 3 of the variants, the Coastal Douglas-fir Moist Maritime and the Eastern and Western Very Dry Maritime Coastal Western Hemlock variants, are globally significant because of their limited distributions and unique ecosystems. Those variants not represented within regional parks are located west of the Sooke River, an area that to date does not include any regional parks.
- All nine different ecosystems of conservation significance mapped by the federal-provincial *East Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory*.
- Forest cover dominating 85% of the land base within regional parks, interspersed with other ecosystems.
- Documented disruptions to natural disturbance regimes in all regional parks, most commonly logging history, and numerous developments such as roads, buildings, parking lots, and utility corridors.
- Many invasive exotic plants invading non-forested areas, and some species invading forested areas.
- One-third of regional parks having excellent or good connectivity with other natural areas, the remainder being more or less isolated “islands” of habitat within the greater landscape.
- Reported occurrences of 59 different nationally and/or provincially-listed plant species, 31 animal species, and 12 ecological communities at risk, distributed among 26 of the regional parks and trails. How many of these occurrences are extant is not currently known.
- Potential habitat for 9 different regionally significant wildlife species or species groups that require large areas of relatively undisturbed habitat and/or specific important habitat elements. Five native salmonid species are distributed among 10 different regional parks and trails.

# Purpose of the Conservation Strategy

The Conservation Strategy outlines a practical, science-based approach to reduce key stressors, or factors that can negatively affect ecological values within CRD Regional Parks. It is system-wide in scope, and follows the analysis of ecological values, ecosystem stressors, and organizational context presented in *Towards a Conservation Strategy for Capital Regional District – Regional Parks: Situational Analysis*.

The Strategy develops the following series of logically-linked desired outcomes:



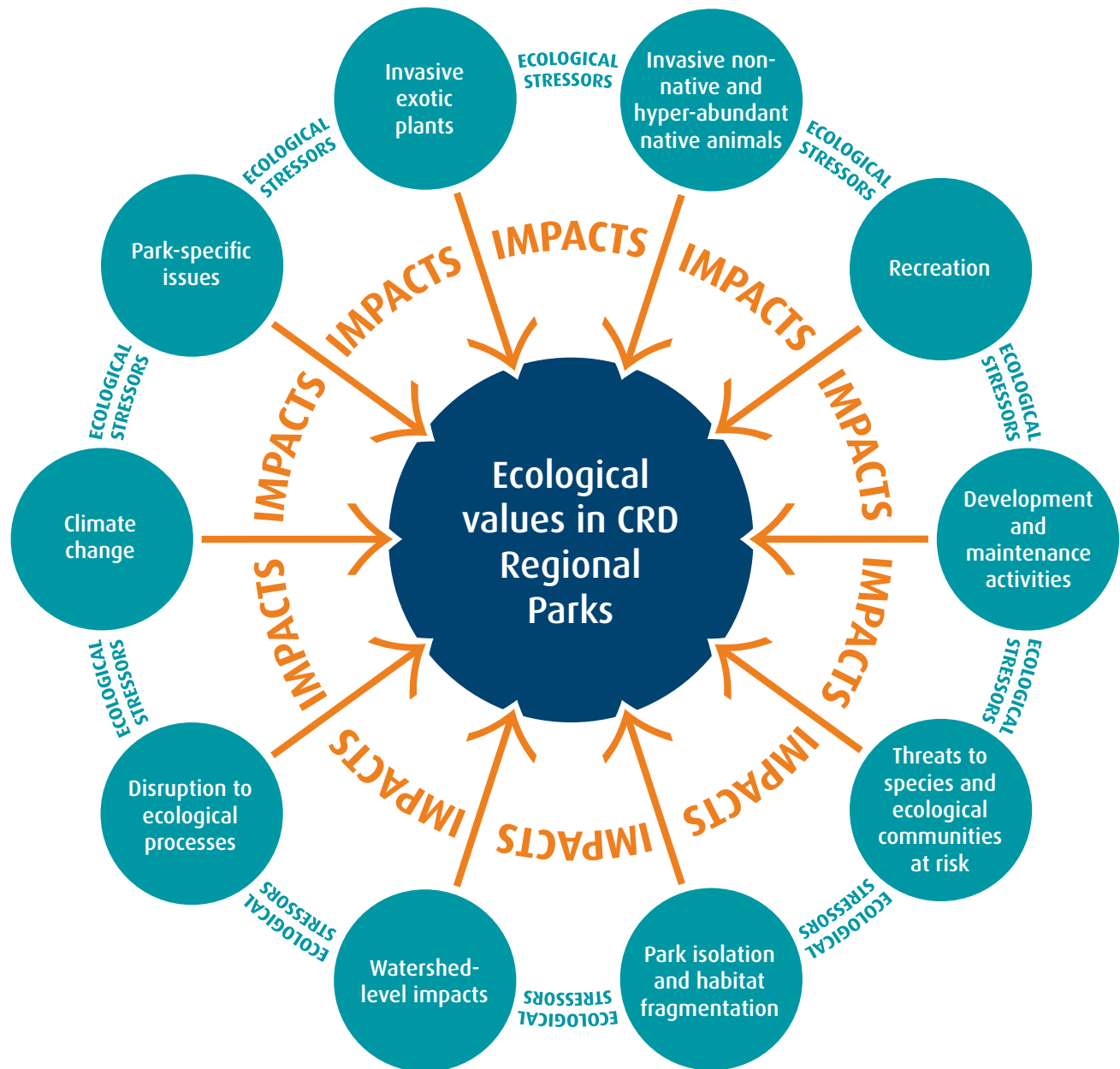
1. A **goal** statement for each stressor.
2. A list of target changes in **condition or state** associated with each stressor. These are changes that are aimed at the longer term and require significant changes in policies and practices, which must be achieved through shorter term changes in human behaviour.
3. For each change in ecological condition, a list of associated changes in human behaviour, described as **policies and practices required**. Often considered the “medium-term” outcomes, identifying these required changes in behaviour helps in the process of identifying appropriate short-term outcomes and outputs that will achieve the longer term change in condition.
4. **Potential participants**, or groups of people who would likely have a role to play in achieving each of these changes in policies and practices.
5. The **information and understanding** the potential participants would need to have the motivation as well as the technical tools and capacity to participate.



ROUGH-SKINNED NEWT

# Strategic Approaches

## Ecological Stressors, goals and targets



The ecological stressors, their associated goals, and the target states and conditions outlined in the Strategy are:

## 1. Invasive exotic plants

**Goal: The presence and impacts of invasive exotic plants are minimized.**

- New invasions are prevented to the extent possible.
- Early invasions are eradicated (“early detection and rapid response”).
- Select species of invasive exotic plants (including legally designated noxious weeds, species posing human health hazards, and other priority species) are eliminated from park lands.
- Select species of established invasive exotic plants are managed at priority sites.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address the threat to ecosystems and species from invasive exotic plants.



JAPANESE KNOTWEED - INVASIVE EXOTIC PLANT

## 2. Invasive non-native and hyper-abundant native animals

**Goal: The presence and impacts of invasive non-native and hyperabundant native animals are minimized.**

- New invasions of non-native animals are prevented to the extent possible.
- Early invasions of non-native animals are eradicated where possible.
- Select species of established invasive non-native animals and hyperabundant native animals are managed at priority sites.
- Impacts of invasive non-native animals and hyperabundant native animals are mitigated.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address the threat to ecosystems and species from invasive non-native and hyperabundant native animals.

## 3. Recreation

**Goal: Recreational activities within CRD Regional Parks are compatible with protection of ecosystems and species.**

- Recreational impacts are prevented to the extent possible.
- Impacted ecosystems are restored.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address current and potential impacts to ecosystems and species from recreation.

## 4. Development and maintenance activities

**Goal: Development and maintenance activities within CRD Regional Parks are compatible with protection of ecosystems and species.**

- Ecological impacts of development and maintenance activities are prevented or mitigated.
- Impacted ecosystems are restored.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address current and potential impacts to ecosystems and species from development and maintenance activities.

## 5. Threats to species and ecological communities at risk

**Goal: Species and ecological communities at risk thrive within CRD Regional Parks at current or improved population levels and/or distributions.**

- Threats to species and ecological communities at risk are mitigated.
- Essential attributes of critical habitat for species at risk are protected and restored.
- Additional recovery actions are implemented.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address protection and recovery of species and ecological communities at risk.



NATIONALLY ENDANGERED BLUE-GREY TAILDROPPER PHOTO KRISTIINA OVASKA

## 6. Park isolation and habitat fragmentation

**Goal: The impacts of park isolation and habitat fragmentation are minimized.**

- Within-park habitat fragmentation is minimized.
- Within-park habitat connectivity is restored where possible.
- Connectivity between parks and other natural areas is protected and enhanced.
- Habitat buffers surrounding parks are protected and enhanced.
- Activities of park neighbours do not compromise ecological values within parks.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address impacts to ecosystems and species from park isolation and habitat fragmentation.

## 7. Watershed-level impacts

**Goal: Healthy aquatic ecosystems exist in CRD Regional Parks, with excellent water quality and water flows within natural ranges.**

- Degradation of water quality from upland conditions and activities is reduced or eliminated.
- Disruptions to water flow from upland conditions and activities is reduced or eliminated.
- An interconnected network of aquatic and riparian ecosystems is protected and restored.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address watershed-level impacts to aquatic and riparian ecosystems and species.

## 8. Disruptions to ecological processes

**Goal: Natural ecological processes are protected and restored.**

- Disruptions to ecological processes are prevented or minimized.
- Ecological processes that have been disrupted are restored or the impacts are mitigated.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address protection and restoration of ecological processes.

## 9. Climate change

**Goal: Ecosystems and species in CRD Regional Parks retain their natural potential to mitigate and are resilient to climate change.**

- Carbon storage capacity of ecosystems is protected.
- Degraded carbon storage capacity of ecosystems is restored.
- Ecosystem and species diversity support ecosystem resilience to climate change.
- Protection of key ecological functions of species and species groups support ecosystem resilience to climate change.
- Land management interventions consider ecosystem resilience to climate change.
- Amelioration of all ecosystem stressors considers predicted changes from, and supports ecosystem resilience to, climate change.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address climate change mitigation and adaptation.



DEAD AND DYING WESTERN REDCEDARS. PHOTO RICHARD HEBDA. FROM MITIGATING AND ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, PUBLISHED BY LAND TRUST ALLIANCE OF BC, 2008.

## 10. Park-specific issues

**Goal: Impacts on ecological values from park-specific stressors are minimized.**

- Impacts on ecological values from unique proposed developments or activities are prevented to the extent possible.
- Impacts from former and current developments and activities are mitigated and/or sites are restored.
- Regional Parks policies appropriately address current and potential impacts to ecosystems and species from park-specific issues.

## Next Steps

The next steps in developing a comprehensive conservation program will entail developing action plans outlining the outputs, consisting of activities, services, events, and products that would provide the information and understanding required by the potential participants, as defined in this Strategy, and thereby support the participants to make each of the designated changes in policies and practices.



The actions plans need to define objectives that are SMART – specific, measureable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.

The conservation program outlined in this Strategy is an ambitious undertaking involving a wide range of participants and partners, and will require significant commitments of internal and external resources. A suggested initial sequence for Strategy implementation is:

1. Invasive exotic plants and threats to species and ecological communities at risk, based upon the immediacy of the conservation issues and the potential consequences of delaying action.
2. Recreation and development and maintenance activities, based upon the feasibility and likely effectiveness of implementation.

This implementation sequence should not be equated with overall priority. Most of the other stressors are more complex, yet likely the most important, to address, given their impacts on fundamental ecological attributes that structure and maintain ecosystems at the broadest scales. CRD Regional Parks will build as much capacity as possible to address the stressors in the coming years.

Resource challenges notwithstanding, this Conservation Strategy provides an important and innovative program for protecting and maintaining the regionally, provincially, nationally, and globally significant ecological values represented in CRD Regional Parks. The CRD has a tremendous responsibility to steward the natural resources under its jurisdiction and a critical role to play in protecting and restoring the ecological values so they can persist into the future. This comprehensive and integrated conservation program that systematically addresses all of the key risks to ecological values offers the best hope for success.



MATHESON LAKE REGIONAL PARK





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