

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2026**

SUBJECT Large Carnivore Monitoring Project — East Sooke, Matheson Lake and Roche Cove Regional Parks

ISSUE SUMMARY

To introduce the Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks Large Carnivore Monitoring Pilot Project in East Sooke, Matheson Lake and Roche Cove regional parks, focusing on black bears, cougars and grey wolves.

BACKGROUND

Information on the distribution and behavior of black bears (*Ursus americanus*), cougars (*Puma concolor*) and grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) in regional parks has been historically limited due to resource constraints and the challenges of tracking such elusive, wide-ranging species. The 2025 State of Natural Features Report identified key data gaps, including the inventory of wildlife habitat features such as black bear dens, which are essential for informed park planning and management.

Large carnivores are keystone species that play a critical role in ecosystem health by regulating prey populations and maintaining biodiversity. Their presence in regional parks underscores the ecological value of these areas and highlights opportunities to address visitor experience and human-wildlife coexistence.

In 2025, staff conducted track and sign surveys to inform the placement of 23 remote wildlife cameras in high-suitability habitats within three regional parks in off-trail locations. The objectives were to:

- Establish baseline data on carnivore presence and activity
- Identify seasonal habitat use and key wildlife features
- Inform park planning, management and conservation priorities

The project builds on CRD's collaboration with the University of Victoria and the Coexisting with Carnivores Alliance, which began in 2021 to monitor large wildlife in Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park. This collaborative project expands monitoring capacity and complements staff efforts to better understand wildlife presence, habitat features and interactions with recreation. This report summarizes data collected from January 3 to October 31, 2025. Staff continue to monitor carnivore activity at the existing camera sites across all three parks.

Preliminary Findings by Regional Park:

- East Sooke Regional Park—five cameras detected 30 observations (24 bears, two cougars, four wolves)
- Matheson Lake Regional Park—three cameras detected 29 observations (six bears, 14 cougars, nine wolves)
- Roche Cove Regional Park—15 cameras detected 100 observations (73 bears, 20 cougars, seven wolves)

Preliminary Findings by Species:

- Black Bears—103 observations; active year-round, including daytime; frequent observations near popular trails
- Cougars—36 observations; less frequent observations but consistently present; travel corridors intersect with trails
- Grey Wolves—20 observations; least frequent observations but consistently present, use undisturbed park areas

The data confirms the presence of all three species in each park and highlights key habitat features critical for large carnivores. However, due to biases in camera placement, duration, and distribution across the parks, the results do not provide reliable insights into species abundance or spatial distribution.

Moving forward, staff will deploy 55 additional wildlife cameras in regional parks to support meaningful comparisons between parks and to draw stronger conclusions about carnivore habitat use and their response to recreational activity. Staff continue to pursue partnerships with First Nations, local governments, community groups, and academic institutions to strengthen long-term ecological monitoring. Insights from this study will directly inform management of the three parks, including education, signage and trail management. The study will also improve understanding of habitat suitability for large carnivores across the regional park system, guiding future park planning and strategies to protect habitat and mitigate human-wildlife conflict.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

This project addresses gaps identified within the State of Natural Features Report and responds to priority action 2-1c of the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 to protect, restore, enhance and mitigate impacts to important habitat and sensitive ecosystems in regional parks by developing decision-making tools that are informed by research.

Financial and Service Delivery Implications

There are no immediate financial or service delivery impacts. Monitoring uses non-invasive, cost-effective measures supported by core funding and grants. Future partnerships may leverage additional resources.

Climate Implications

Climate change alters carnivore habitats and food availability, increasing the potential for human-wildlife conflict. Identifying and protecting key habitats supports the resilience of regional parks and mitigates potential impacts to visitor experience.

Environmental Implications

Monitoring confirms the ecological importance of regional parks, identifies areas that need enhanced conservation and guides future park planning and management.

First Nations Implications

Traditional ecological knowledge has not yet been incorporated. Staff continue to seek respectful and equitable opportunities for knowledge sharing.

Social Implications

Findings reveal overlap between carnivore habitat use and recreational trails, emphasizing the value of coexistence. Further research is essential to understand how these species respond to human presence and what levels of disturbance they tolerate. Staff currently mitigate potential human-wildlife conflict through park signage, public communications, interpretive programming, and ranger patrols to ensure park visitors secure food attractants, stay on trail and keep dogs on leash in designated areas. Insights from this study will inform future actions to ensure compatibility with conservation goals.

CONCLUSION

The large carnivore monitoring pilot project provides valuable data confirming the consistent presence of black bears, cougars, and grey wolves in East Sooke, Matheson Lake, and Roche Cove regional parks. These findings reinforce the need to integrate wildlife considerations into park planning and visitor management. Continued monitoring and collaboration will strengthen conservation efforts, support visitor experience, and enhance the resilience of regional parks in the face of climate change.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

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ATTACHMENT

Presentation: Regional Parks Large Carnivore Pilot Project