

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 2026**

SUBJECT Off-leash Dogs in the Governor General Area at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park

ISSUE SUMMARY

To report back on the Regional Parks Committee's October 22, 2025, Motion with Notice regarding potential options for improving off-leash dog use in the Governor General Area at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park.

BACKGROUND

At its October 22, 2025, meeting, the Regional Parks Committee carried the following Motion with Notice:

That CRD Parks staff be directed to review and report back on potential options for better accommodating off-leash dogs in the Governor General Area at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park along Elk Lake Road in Saanich, including site suitability, impacts to park use, environmental considerations, community input, and estimated costs.

DISCUSSION

The Governor General Area is a popular multi-use area within Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park, located within the Haliburton Watershed on the southeast boundary adjacent to Elk Lake Drive and south of Haliburton Brook. The area is accessed via a secondary gravel driveway and a small parking area with eight to ten spots. It features an open grass area bordered by mature coniferous forest along the south and west sides and a hedgerow and intermittent fencing on the east side along Elk Lake Drive.

The 2010 Elk/Beaver Lake and Bear Hill Regional Park Management Plan (park management plan) designates the Governor General Area as a *General Outdoor Recreation Zone*. This designation is intended to support a broad range of recreational uses while maintaining environmental protection. The park management plan also emphasizes maintaining the park in a predominantly natural state, limiting the introduction of established single-purpose or special-interest facilities, and minimizing additional built infrastructure beyond the split-rail fencing along Elk Lake Drive.

The 2020 Elk/Beaver Lake Watershed Management Plan (watershed management plan) further identifies restoration and enhancement of the Haliburton Brook Watershed as a high priority, reinforcing the need to carefully limit interventions that could alter site conditions, increase intensity of use, or introduce new infrastructure.

Refer to Appendix A for an overview of the Governor General Area that includes details of the watershed management plan.

Current Use and Management

The Governor General Area supports a variety of recreational uses, including hiking and running, equestrian activity, community events, film production, and amateur and professional sporting events such as regional cross-country races. It also functions as overflow parking for large-scale events, like the Ironman competition and annual Saanich Strawberry Festival. The area is also a popular location for off-leash dogs.

Given the diversity of activities and popularity of off-leash dog use in this area, current management efforts focus on maintaining compatibility among various uses while protecting site conditions. Recent and ongoing measures include:

- March 2025—Installation of approximately 58 linear metres of split-rail fencing in gaps between the field and road to reduce potential conflicts (Appendix B).
- January and February 2026—Targeted outreach, including two PAWS in Parks¹ events; feedback indicates overall user experience is generally positive.
- Ongoing—Reduced mowing along the Elk Lake Drive hedgerow to strengthen natural barriers along the roadway.
- Ongoing—Regular patrols of CRD park rangers to reinforce compliance and awareness and facilitate safe, enjoyable uses for multiple user groups.

These measures appear to be effective, as incident data indicate that issues related to off-leash dogs remain low relative to overall use. A recent review identified only two complaints in the past two years related to potential dog access to the roadway and no known incidents involving dog injuries.

In response to the Motion, staff evaluated the following three options for accommodating off-leash dogs in the Governor General Area and considered alignment with plans and policies, site suitability, impacts to park use, environmental considerations, community input, and estimated costs. Refer to Appendix C for the analysis.

- Option 1: Maintain existing conditions (status quo).
- Option 2: Partial chain-link roadway fencing along Elk Lake Drive.
- Option 3: Fully fenced dog enclosure.

System-Wide Dog Management Approach

Across the entire regional parks system, CRD Regional Parks manages off-leash dog use under *CRD Parks Regulation Bylaw No. 4225* through a regulatory framework that requires dogs to remain under effective control (within sight and reliably recallable). This approach supports off-leash use in suitable areas while emphasizing low infrastructure, flexible shared recreation, and preserving the natural character of the park system. Accordingly, no CRD regional park hosts formalized or enclosed off-leash facilities.

¹ PAWS in Parks is an annual public awareness campaign. The campaign focuses on protecting ecosystems and wildlife, preserving visitor experience and reinforcing safety.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff maintain existing conditions (status quo) for off-leash dog use in the Governor General Area at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park.

Alternative 2

That staff advances the installation of partial chain-link roadway fencing along Elk Lake Drive and incorporates the project within the five-year Regional Parks Capital Plan and undertakes any required planning and engagement process.

Alternative 3

That staff undertake a fulsome park management planning process to further assess park use and infrastructure requirements for a fully fenced dog enclosure, including First Nations and public/interest holder engagement to ensure consistency with park values and stewardship objectives.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan (2022–2032) (strategic plan) emphasizes balancing recreation with conservation by supporting activities that do not compromise ecological integrity while prioritizing protection and restoration of sensitive habitats (Priority Action 2-1c). The park management plan limits the expansion or introduction of special interest group amenities, and the watershed management plan identifies restoring and enhancing watershed function within this area.

Option 1 aligns with the strategic plan, park management plan, and watershed management plan; Options 2 and 3 do not. Chain-link fencing (Option 2) is not a standard approach for restoration or enhancement activities, nor is it consistent with CRD regional park management practices. Furthermore, Option 3 is inconsistent with the intent to limit additional specialized amenities that would limit other uses and preserve (or enhance) the park's natural character.

Across the regional parks system, the *CRD Parks Regulation Bylaw (No. 4225)* emphasizes owner responsibility as the primary tool for managing dog activity. The current regulatory framework is designed to enable off-leash use in designated locations without the need for specialized infrastructure. Option 1 or 2 aligns with this premise, whereas Option 3 would establish a precedent that is not consistent with Regional Parks' management approaches.

Environmental Implications

The Governor General Area is adjacent to sensitive and at-risk ecosystems, including an older coniferous forest exceeding 250 years in age and provincially identified red-listed ecological communities such as western redcedar–osoberry and grand fir–three-leaved foamflower (Appendix A). The site supports a diverse range of wildlife, including songbirds, raptors, great horned owls, northwestern garter snakes and black bears, which indicates a healthy and well-functioning ecosystem. The open meadow provides important foraging habitat and facilitates

wildlife movement between forested areas, particularly for edge species that rely on the transition between meadow and forest.

Option 1 maintains the existing environmental conditions. The continuous chain-link fencing in Option 2 could restrict wildlife movement and limit opportunities to implement vegetation planting in support of watershed function improvements. Option 3 would concentrate recreational use within a confined area and could adversely affect the environmental values. Potential impacts include degradation of the existing open grassland foraging habitat, disruption of wildlife movement, and increased nutrient inputs to the watershed due to a concentration of use and potential increased visitation. Additional environmental impact assessment and mitigation measures are required for this option.

Service Delivery Implications

Option 1 provides flexibility for accommodating multiple park uses and events and maintains the current level of park maintenance and enforcement.

While Option 2 also accommodates multiple park uses and events, it introduces a change in service delivery through the addition of new infrastructure and represents a moderate shift from the park management plan. As such, an engagement process is recommended and is anticipated to take approximately two to four months. This would cause delays to strategic plan priorities, including the development of the Regional Parks Land Acquisition Strategy renewal.

Option 3 could increase visitation to the Governor General Area and may require infrastructure upgrades to expand parking², improve circulation, and enhance safety. This option would not accommodate current uses, such as school cross-country races, film production, or overflow parking during large community events. It represents a significant shift from the park management plan and would require an update to the park management plan and a more extensive engagement process, estimated to take 2.5 years. Advancement of this effort would impact Regional Parks' ability to deliver on current strategic plan priorities, including the development of the Mount Work Regional Park Management Plan, the Regional Parks Land Acquisition Strategy renewal, and the Regional Parks Stewardship Plan.

Furthermore, implementing Option 3 would represent a new approach to dog management within an existing off-leash park and could set a precedent for similar requests across the regional park system. It may also create a perception there are challenges with achieving effective control under the current model, which would need to be carefully considered and addressed through further engagement and communications.

Financial Implications

The split-rail fence installed in March 2025 had an operational expenditure of approximately \$2,000; maintaining existing conditions (Option 1) would continue to be managed within existing operational budgets.

Installing partial roadway fencing (Option 2) adjacent to Elk Lake Drive is an estimated capital cost of approximately \$45,000 for materials, with potential additional costs contingent on engagement (\$20,000 - \$40,000 estimate) and design requirements.

² The existing gravel parking area is unstructured and accessed from the main Beaver Lake entrance.

A fully fenced dog enclosure (Option 3) is estimated at approximately \$95,000 for materials only. Implementing this option would require updating the park management plan, which is a complex and resource-intensive process with significant implications for service delivery. A full management planning process (including engagement) could take approximately two to three years to complete and is estimated to cost \$100,000 to \$150,000. Potential infrastructure requirements, such as parking, would be assessed through the management planning process and would incur additional costs.

Since 2021, 31 park use permits have been issued for the Governor General Area, generating over \$16,000 in revenue over that period. Option 3 would constrain the park's ability to accommodate filming, community, school, and sporting events, potentially resulting in a loss of future permit revenue for CRD Regional Parks.

Social Implications

Options 1 and 2 support the continued use of compliance and stewardship-focused initiatives to reinforce responsible dog ownership, clarify regulations, and promote respectful shared use of regional parks.

Option 3 could result in reduced supervision of dogs and a loss of flexible open space currently used for recreational activities, community and school events, and overflow parking. This would constrain the park's ability to accommodate these uses and potentially lead to the displacement or cancellation of events and associated social and economic impacts for CRD Regional Parks, community groups, and event organizers.

CONCLUSION

The Governor General Area is a popular off-leash dog area within Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park that supports a range of recreational and environmental functions. Recent improvements have addressed concerns related to dog safety while maintaining accessibility for other users and wildlife. More prescriptive infrastructure, such as a fully fenced dog enclosure, would limit multi-use opportunities and would not align with park management objectives or with system-wide approaches to dog management. It would also require additional planning, public engagement, and resource commitments. Overall, existing plans, regulations, and operational practices provide sufficient direction to address site-specific considerations within current priorities and budgets.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That staff maintain existing conditions (status quo) for off-leash dog use in the Governor General Area at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park.

Submitted by:	Mike MacIntyre, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Glenn Harris, Ph.D., R.P.Bio., Acting General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Overview of Governor General Area and Haliburton Brook - Map

Appendix B: Governor General Area - Map

Appendix C: Off-Leash Dog Management Options Analysis (Governor General Area)

Presentation: Governor General Area Off-Leash Dog Use - Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park