

**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2023**

SUBJECT **Bylaw No. 4575 – Regional Coordination of Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To initiate the conversion of the invasive species program under the Climate Action Service to a separate service focused on regional biodiversity and protection of ecological assets.

BACKGROUND

The Capital Regional District (CRD) Board identified a strategic initiative to “explore options for a regional approach to biodiversity and the protection of ecological assets” in its 2023-2026 Strategic Priorities. Protecting and enhancing regional biodiversity and ecological assets will help build climate resiliency, improve watershed and harbour health, support food security and enhance the livability, sustainability and resilience of the region through environmental stewardship.

Staff propose converting the existing invasive species program into a new Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Service that integrates coordination of biodiversity, protection and stewardship of ecological assets and invasive species management. This proposed service supports the following Board priorities: (1) regional action around protection of biodiversity and ecological assets (i.e., invasive species, urban forests, terrestrial ecosystems, waterways and wetlands, and intertidal/near shore marine habitats); (2) engagement with First Nations partners on collaborative stewardship of key ecological and cultural features in support of meaningful reconciliation and restoration; and (3) to enhance regional collaboration and action in building climate resiliency.

Staff have drafted a new establishment bylaw (Appendix A) and a proposed cost apportionment (Appendix B) for consideration.

Initially the service will regionalize the invasive species program, including support to the Electoral Areas, at the current level of support and formalize local government requisition for the part-time invasive species coordinator. Currently, the invasive species program is funded through an allocation model from Regional Parks, Watershed Protection and Environmental Protection divisions. Additional staff capacity and operational funds will be considered in future budget cycles.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the CRD Board:

1. That Bylaw No. 4575, “Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Coordination Establishing Bylaw No. 1, 2023”, be introduced and read a first, second and third time;
2. That participating area approval be obtained by regional alternative approval process; and
3. That Bylaw No. 4575 be forwarded to the Inspector of Municipalities for approval.

Alternative 2

That the report be referred back to staff for more information to be considered in the 2025 budget process.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental and Climate Implications

Healthy environments form the foundation for healthy communities and biodiversity is a key metric of healthy and resilient environments. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services released the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in 2019, which found that biodiversity is being altered at an unprecedented rate. Five direct drivers of biodiversity loss were identified:

- 1) Land/Sea-Use Change
- 2) Invasive Alien Species
- 3) Climate Change
- 4) Overexploitation of Resources
- 5) Pollution

The existing CRD program is a good basis for the new service; invasive species management is an integral component of environmental stewardship that restores, protects and enhances healthy ecosystems.

Social Implications

Enhanced knowledge and awareness relating to biodiversity will inform the ways citizens across the region relate to the environment. Our goal is to prompt more environmentally conscious actions, such as ecosystem restoration and protection, watershed protection, planting of trees and native species and removal of invasive species to enhance and protect biodiversity and ecological assets in the region.

Intergovernmental Implications

A regional approach to biodiversity and protection of ecological assets requires coordination across multiple levels of government, First Nations, environmental organizations, landowners, and residents of the region. Currently, staff collaborate and coordinate with many of these partners through CRD-facilitated, multi-stakeholder initiatives around watershed and harbour stewardship, invasive plants, and Canada geese. The CRD is well-positioned to take on a role in the regional enhancement and protection of biodiversity and ecological assets.

Financial Implications

Currently the invasive species program is funded through an allocation model across three divisions: Regional Parks, Watershed Protection and Environmental Protection. The proposed new service would shift funding to a regional requisition at the current budget (approximately \$100,000). This new regional service would be cost-shared based on population (50%) and converted assessment (50%). The proposed cost apportionment for the participating partners for 2024 is in Appendix B.

Legal Implications

A regional district may operate any service it deems desirable provided that, on establishment of the service by way of service establishing bylaw, it received participating area approval. There are three options to obtain participating area approval for Bylaw No. 4575: regional alternative approval process; municipal consent on behalf with alternative approval process (AAP) in the electoral areas; and referendum/elector assent.

A regional district's bylaw-making powers are subject to certain levels of provincial approval, such as for bylaws relating to public health or, in this case, bylaws that may relate to regulation of the natural environment. As this bylaw is for coordination, engagement and public education, and not for regulation, no additional Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy approval is required. The draft bylaw contains a provision for clarity, stating it is not for regulation, to avoid confusion on the Inspector of Municipalities' review.

As a regional biodiversity and environmental stewardship service is most effective if all municipalities and electoral areas participate, a regional AAP is advised. This would put the responsibility of objecting to the service on the electors who, if 10% were not in favour, could determine not to proceed. An alternative is the municipal consent process, which would permit any municipality or electoral area to effectively veto the creation of the service if they were not in favour of its establishment. Given an AAP is already required in the Electoral Areas, it is recommended a regional AAP be pursued.

CONCLUSION

The Capital Regional District (CRD) Board identified the preservation of regional biodiversity and protection of natural assets as a strategic priority and directed staff to explore options for a regional approach to the issue. Converting the current invasive species program to a service under a new establishing bylaw will support the Board's direction, expand the service more broadly towards environmental stewardship and allow for service level amendments based on future Board direction. Staff have prepared a service establishment bylaw to pursue a regional approach to biodiversity and the protection of ecological assets and to coordinate partnerships between land use agencies under various jurisdictions, including First Nations, federal and provincial agencies, local and regional governments, environmental stewardship groups and residents. Increased environmental stewardship and action on biodiversity and protection of ecological assets can improve watershed health, build climate resiliency and create more sustainable and livable communities.

RECOMMENDATION

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the CRD Board:

1. That Bylaw No. 4575, "Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Coordination Establishing Bylaw No. 1, 2023", be introduced and read a first, second and third time;
2. That participating area approval be obtained by regional alternative approval process; and
3. That Bylaw No. 4575 be forwarded to the Inspector of Municipalities for approval.

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Bylaw No. 4575, “Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Coordination Establishing Bylaw No. 1, 2023”

Appendix B: Participants Cost Apportionment – Regional Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Service