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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 2023

SUBJECT **First Nations Feedback on the Interim Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide feedback from continued engagement with First Nations on the Interim Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 and to consider the Plan for approval.

BACKGROUND

The Capital Regional District (CRD) Board initiated an update of the Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021 at its meeting of December 8, 2021 and requested that staff engage all First Nations in the region in an early, meaningful and ongoing manner in the development of the renewed Strategic Plan. A workshop was held with the Regional Parks Committee in January 2022 to develop a proposed vision, mission, values and priorities for regional parks and trails. In February 2022, the CRD Board approved these materials for First Nations, stakeholder and public engagement, and directed that a lens of conservation and protection of biodiversity be applied to the development of the priorities and the planning process.

Staff led the development of an updated Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) between January and June 2022 and sought input from First Nations, stakeholders and the public. A consulting firm was retained to assist with First Nations engagement. Many First Nations indicated an interest to engage in the process but could not accommodate the timeline presented.

At its meeting of July 13, 2022, the CRD Board carried the following motions arising:

1. *That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 be approved on an interim basis for one year while engagement with First Nations continues.*
2. *That bike parking and e-bike charging stations be added to priority action 4-2e.*
3. *That the Regional Parks Committee direct staff to report back, as part of the review, on the advisability of including the following target in the plan: "That CRD work with Indigenous, federal, provincial, philanthropic partners to expand protected areas in the region to 25% of the region's land base by 2032."*
4. *That staff be directed to consider the expansion of camping opportunities as part of the development of the Outdoor Recreation Plan as well as the report back on the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan.*

First Nations Engagement

Engagement with First Nations in the region continued between August 2022 and April 2023. Nineteen First Nations with traditional territory in the CRD were invited to review and provide input on the Interim Strategic Plan. Fifteen First Nations provided feedback and based on the feedback received, proposed changes have been incorporated into the Strategic Plan for consideration (Appendix A; revisions shown in orange text). A summary report outlining the First Nations engagement process and feedback received is included in Appendix B.

Protected Area Targets

In response to the Board's request to determine the advisability of including a target in the plan to work with Indigenous, federal, provincial and philanthropic partners to expand protected areas in the region to 25% of the region's land base by 2032, staff determined that the target falls short of international and national targets to achieve 30% protection of land and water by 2030. The Interim Strategic Plan commits the CRD to its continuing role of contributing to the 30% by 2030 target in the following ways:

- Priority action 2-1e: *Support global, national and local conservation targets by increasing protection of the region's large and connected natural areas, rare and at-risk species and ecosystems, natural assets, and representation of diverse ecosystems.*
- The actions included in strategic priority 4-5: *Strategically acquire and manage natural areas to address climate mitigation, urban containment and access to green space for a growing population.*
- Annual reporting indicators for 2-1 increased area of park land protected, 3-1 increased area available for compatible outdoor recreation, and 4-5 increased representation of all regional park classifications.

Updating the Land Acquisition Strategy (priority actions 4-5b and 5-4c) is a key initiative to set the direction for the regional parks system expansion over the coming years. Feedback received from First Nations reinforces the important role of land and Indigenous rights in reconciliation efforts. The CRD seeks to better understand the interests of local First Nations in land acquisition for regional parks, as well as the goals and capacity of other government partners, to collectively achieve protected area targets in the region. This work will provide revised principles, processes, criteria and partnership opportunities to guide the expansion of the regional parks system.

Strategic Plan priority action 4-5a sees ongoing collaboration with First Nations, government partners and organizations to identify regionally significant parkland and determine alignment of goals and objectives. The CRD is already contributing to Canada's national conservation network by recognizing all 33 existing regional parks in the national Protected and Conserved Areas Database. By connecting with partners to protect and conserve biologically diverse lands within the region, the CRD will continue to support the 30% by 2030 target. Therefore, staff suggest that embedding a 25% target by 2032 in the Strategic Plan is not advisable.

Other Proposed Edits

Staff took the opportunity to review the Interim Strategic Plan document with a view to correcting any minor grammatical issues, errors or omissions. The changes proposed to the Interim Strategic Plan relate to the following:

- Compatible Outdoor Recreation: refinement of what is 'compatible outdoor recreation' based on feedback received from accessibility community; incorporated consistent terminology for 'outdoor recreation opportunities' throughout; added 'front-country' overnight camping terminology introduced in preparation for the Outdoor Recreation Plan.
- Park Classifications: Brooks Point Regional Park classification has been amended in Appendix E: Regional Park Classifications to classify it as a Conservation Area, in alignment with the management plan approved in 2014.

- Priority Action 4-2e: Bike parking and e-bike charging stations added to priority action 4-2e (previously incorporated).
- Minor edits and corrections to the following sections:
 - Section 2.3 Physical Setting and Appendix B calculations.
 - Map 6 Regional Trail Classifications and Priority Projects to show Phase 5 of the E&N Rail Trail as proposed (not yet planned or designed).
 - Correct regional park names.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 be approved.

Alternative 2

That the interim Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 be referred back to staff.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental & Climate Implications

The Strategic Plan applies a lens of conservation to the Vision, Mission and Value statements that emphasize conservation of environmental and cultural values, protection of biodiversity, and connecting people to nature through stewardship, education, and compatible outdoor recreation opportunities. The goal to protect the region's natural assets and cultural heritage for future generations is supported by several priority initiatives related to incorporating Indigenous knowledge, stewardship and restoration, and incorporating best practices for compatible outdoor recreation. Many First Nations indicated the benefits of incorporating traditional knowledge and stewardship approaches into park management planning to achieve long-term sustainability of resources.

Regional parks and regional trails are vital in helping to achieve the region's climate action, environmental and active transportation goals. The Strategic Plan includes priorities for increasing protection of the region's biodiversity; protecting cultural heritage and traditional cultural use; advancing regional active transportation opportunities; and strategically acquiring and managing natural areas to address climate mitigation, urban containment, and access to green space for a growing population.

Intergovernmental Implications

Continuing a journey of reconciliation with First Nations in the region is a foundational principle of the Strategic Plan. Proposed edits to the Strategic Plan draw on input received from First Nations in the region between August 2022 and April 2023. First Nations are invited to continue being involved in the implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Feedback received from First Nations on the Interim Strategic Plan expresses interest in strengthening relationships between First Nations governments and the CRD. Interest in how the Strategic Plan will be implemented with First Nations involvement and collaboration was also communicated.

In developing this Strategic Plan, staff consulted representatives from other park agencies and other CRD divisions to understand how priorities for the CRD's regional parks might align with the goals and objectives of other agencies, with the aim of aligning desired outcomes between groups, strengthening partnerships, clarifying roles and responsibilities of the different agencies, and enhancing information sharing.

Social Implications

A key concern expressed by First Nations during engagement is the alienation of land and resources from Indigenous People. Many First Nations expressed interest in highlighting Indigenous rights, managing areas in regional parks for cultural use activities and opportunities for public education, where appropriate.

Financial Implications

Financial implications associated with service level adjustments identified by the updated Strategic Plan will be considered by the CRD Board in future service planning processes. A funding strategy to accompany implementation will be brought forward for consideration following finalization of the Strategic Plan.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The 2023-2026 CRD Board Priorities include strong relationships with First Nations, progress on climate action and environment, and multi-modal transportation systems. Completion of the strategic planning and engagement process to bring forward a final Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan addresses goal 7a of the CRD's 2023-2026 Corporate Plan. The proposed Strategic Plan, as included in Appendix A, aligns with the goals and initiatives in the Corporate Plan. Implementation of the 13 strategic priorities and 57 sub-actions identified in the Strategic Plan will be implemented over the next 10 years and progress will be reported on annually.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The region faces different challenges and opportunities than when the Regional Parks Strategic Plan was adopted in 2012. The Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 is in alignment with recent Board-approved strategies: Regional Growth Strategy, Regional Transportation Plan, Climate Action Strategy and the Special Task Force on First Nations Relations Final Report. The Strategic Plan creates strong linkages to Board directions, the engagement process, relevant legislation, guidance documents, operational knowledge and the feedback from public surveys.

CONCLUSION

The CRD Board approved the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan in July 2022 on an interim basis for one year while engagement with First Nations continued. Nineteen First Nations were invited to engage on the Interim Strategic Plan and are invited to continue being involved during implementation. Proposed edits to the Strategic Plan draw on input received from First Nations in

the region between August 2022 and April 2023. Additional edits are proposed to correct errors and grammar, to clarify the scope of 'compatible outdoor recreation', and to reclassify Brooks Point Regional Park as a Conservation Area. The Strategic Plan includes 13 strategic priorities and 57 sub-actions to guide the CRD in achieving its vision for regional parks and trails over the next ten years. Finalizing the CRD Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-32 is a key initiative in the CRD Corporate Plan 2023-26.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 be approved.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Revised Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan – 2022-2032 (revisions shown in orange text)
- Appendix B: First Nations Engagement Report
- Appendix C: Presentation Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan – 2022-2032