

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2021**

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**SUBJECT     Regional Parks – Strategic Plan**

**ISSUE SUMMARY**

To present an update on the renewal of the 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan, approved by the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board in 2012 for a 10-year term.

**BACKGROUND**

The development of the current Strategic Plan was initiated in 2009 to replace the CRD Parks Master Plan that had been in effect since 2000. The project was staff supported but primarily led by a volunteer Citizens Advisory Panel and included engagement with stakeholders, the public, government, First Nations and other park agencies.

The Strategic Plan continues to be a well-used reference document, providing ongoing guidance and remains useful as a “roadmap” for the Regional Parks Division. The vision, mission and goals outlined in the Strategic Plan considered many of the trends, challenges and protected area values that are still relevant today. With respect to plan implementation since 2012, six strategic priorities and 26 associated actions were identified. Of the 26 strategic actions outlined in the document, 22 actions are ongoing, three have been completed, and one has yet to be initiated (i.e., developing an outdoor recreation strategy).

Since the publication of the plan, many things have changed. For example, the CRD is now part of a national movement toward Reconciliation with Canada’s Indigenous peoples, and envisions strong relationships with First Nations across the region based on trust and mutual respect, partnerships and working together on shared goals. Park acquisitions have added over 300 hectares to the system since 2010, and many more acquisitions are anticipated over the next decade, as the Land Acquisition Fund has been renewed until 2029.

Current management challenges include pressures of increased visitation and striving for sustainable service delivery. Large capital-intensive critical assets, such as bridges, trestles and dams, require ongoing inspections and maintenance and, in some cases, extensive rebuilds. The regional trail system continues to expand, with the third of the five phases of the E&N Rail Trail to be completed by May of 2021.

The CRD has recognized the importance of the Strategic Plan and the fact that its term ends in 2021, by including Initiative 6a-1 in the 2019-2022 Corporate Plan as both a Board and Corporate Priority. It directs staff to *Ensure appropriate funding for parks & trails infrastructure, improvements & maintenance by updating the Regional Parks Strategy with consideration to ecological, recreation & reconciliation principles, land acquisition capacity, & expanded partnerships with First Nations & parks user groups.*

Staff will commence a review and update process in the fall of 2021 and submit an updated plan to the Board for consideration in 2022.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

#### *Alternative 1*

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That staff report back on a plan to review and update the Regional Parks Strategic Plan.

#### *Alternative 2*

That that this report be referred back to staff for more information.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### *Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities*

Updating the strategic plan will be in alignment with current Board priorities. Efforts to work closer with First Nations during this project would help achieve Priority Initiative 6a-1 in the 2019-2022 Corporate Plan, which directs staff to *Undertake engagement with First Nations regarding greater collaboration and parks management*.

#### *Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies*

An updated Strategic Plan will reflect outcomes from the newer CRD plans, reports and strategies, such as the Climate Action Plan, the Regional Transportation Plan, the First Nations Task Force Report, the Land Acquisition Strategy, Regional Trails Management Plan and other completed regional parks management plans.

Notably, completing a Regional Parks Outdoor Recreation Strategy, as directed in the Strategic Plan has yet to be developed. In lieu of this work, additional emphasis will be placed on providing more management direction for outdoor recreational pursuits in an updated Strategic Plan.

#### *Environmental & Climate Implications*

The Strategic Plan is the umbrella guiding document for Regional Parks, which forms more than half of the capital region's formally protected areas and regional trails. This system is key in helping to achieve the region's climate action active transportation goals. These goals will be considered during the plan update. An updated plan could also provide better direction on navigating the balance and potential competing interests between conservation and recreation, in light of increasing visitation.

#### *Social Implications*

The regional parks and trails system facilitates healthy lifestyles and wellbeing, providing access to nature, recreation and opportunities for active transportation.

There will be coordination with other major CRD engagement initiatives planned for 2021/2022 to maintain clear communication with the public and manage staff workloads. There will be engagement with First Nations, municipalities and electoral areas, stakeholder groups and citizens of the CRD. The planning process itself will facilitate stronger relationships and partnerships to support plan implementation and system management. A detailed project and public engagement plan will be developed this Spring and be presented to the Parks Committee later in 2021.

#### *Service Delivery Implications*

Staff are committed to other multi-year projects underway in 2021 and 2022, such as park management planning for East Sooke, Mount Work, Matheson Lake and Roche Cove regional parks. Retaining consultants to undertake some activities of this work will be required. This particular planning initiative has been deferred by six months to accommodate public engagement on the Regional Trails Widening Study, as directed by the Board.

#### *Financial Implications*

Over and above staff time to provide project management and internal functions, such as project oversight and plan reviews, additional financial considerations include fees for consultants, advertising, facility rental and honorariums. The costs will be covered by the Regional Parks core budget and any additional funding will be determined and brought forward as part of the 2022 budget process.

#### *Intergovernmental Implications*

In addition to public consultation, there will be engagement with First Nations, municipalities and electoral areas. This is an opportunity to build awareness, ownership, and advocacy for the plan, as well as to strengthen relationships. The planning process will be an opportunity to advance the CRD's reconciliation initiatives, including dialogue with First Nations regarding their interests within the regional parks system.

#### *Regional Growth Strategy Implications*

Regional parks and regional trails aspects such as: ecosystem and human health protection and improvements; climate change mitigation and adaptation; parkland acquisition; and regional trail network expansion are elements of the 2018 CRD Regional Growth Strategy (RGS).

An updated plan will be better aligned with the vision and objectives of the RGS. Action items could outline ways to support achieving RGS targets, such as realizing the Sea-to-Sea Green/Blue Belt or completing the regional trail network.

### **CONCLUSION**

The 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan sets the strategic direction for the regional parks service; however, its term ends in 2021. Staff will commence a Strategic Plan review and update project in 2021, and submit an updated plan to the Parks Committee for consideration in 2022. Regional Parks will further develop a detailed project and engagement plan and present later in 2021 as an update to the Committee.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That staff report back on a plan to review and update the Regional Parks Strategic Plan.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, RPF, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
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