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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2026

SUBJECT **CRD Regional Parks 2025 Visitor Monitoring Program Update**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide an update on visitation trends for the Capital Regional District's (CRD) regional parks and trails and explain how these trends inform operational planning, resource allocation, and long-term service, staffing, and capital considerations.

BACKGROUND

Since 2009, CRD Regional Parks staff have used a combination of vehicle counters at park entrances and trail counters on key trail access points to estimate and track visitation across the regional park system.

Counter data is compiled and analyzed to identify seasonal patterns, long-term trends, and changes in use across individual parks and the system as a whole. These insights are used to understand demand on park infrastructure, ecosystems, and staff capacity and to support informed decisions related to service delivery, maintenance planning, environmental protection, and future investment.

In 2025, staff deployed a total of 77 counters across the regional parks and trails system. Counters are primarily located at main entrances and priority trail access points and are intended to capture the majority of use in monitored areas. While counters do not capture all visits system-wide, the resulting data provides a consistent and repeatable index of use that supports reliable week-over-week, month-over-month, and year-over-year comparisons.

The overall visitation to the regional parks system continues to rise. In the past 10 years (2016-2025), visits to regional parks have increased by 47.2%. In 2025, just over 5.2 million visits were recorded through trail and traffic counters. Appendix A provides a year-over-year comparison and park-by-park breakdown. These trends demonstrate sustained growth in demand and increasing pressure on park assets, staff resources and ecological systems.

Since 2009, visits to CRD regional trails (Galloping Goose, E&N, and Lochside) were captured using the same methodology used for regional parks. In the past 10 years (2016-2025), visits to regional trails increased by 31.6%, reaching more than 4.4 million annually. Combined regional park and trail visitation increased by 39.6% over the same period, with 9.7 million total visits recorded in 2025.

With the establishment of the Regional Transportation Service, responsibility for tracking regional trail visitation will transition to that service, which will use new technologies and forecasting methodologies to estimate and report visitation metrics. The Regional Parks Service will continue to report on visits to regional parks and will use regional trail data provided by the Regional Transportation Service to understand operational and maintenance implications, as responsibility for trail operations continues to rest with the Regional Parks Division.

Visitation trends inform a range of operational responses, including:

- Adjustments to maintenance schedules and staffing deployment.
- Targeted facility, access, and parking improvements.
- Planning for education, outreach, stewardship, and compliance activities.
- Measures to protect ecological and cultural values in high-use areas.

Together, these responses support safe, welcoming parks while managing the impacts of continued growth in use.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The collection and interpretation of visitation data supports the CRD Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan, including Goal 3-1: Maintain high rates of visitor satisfaction. Despite increasing visitation, the 2024 CRD Regional Parks Resident Survey indicates that 79% of respondents report satisfaction with their visits. Ongoing monitoring helps ensure that growth in use is managed in a manner that maintains visitor experience over time.

Environmental Implications

Increased visitation can place additional pressure on park ecosystems, particularly in popular or sensitive areas. Impacts may include trail widening, unofficial route creation, soil compaction and erosion, vegetation loss, wildlife disturbance, and the spread of invasive species. Visitation data enables staff to identify emerging pressure points, prioritize mitigation measures, and direct site management and education efforts to minimize environmental impacts while supporting public access.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Implications

Monitoring visitation patterns helps identify where crowding or access limitations may discourage participation by some user groups. This information supports efforts to improve accessibility, reduce barriers to participation, and ensure that regional parks remain welcoming and inclusive spaces for a diverse range of visitors.

Financial Implications

Increased visitation has financial implications related to staffing, maintenance, and capital renewal. Visitation data provides the evidence base needed to justify budget requests, prioritize investments, and plan for long-term operational costs associated with sustained growth.

The Visitor Monitoring Program is delivered within the existing operating budget of \$2,848. This budget line supports the acquisition of new visitor counters and maintenance of counters currently in operation. It does not include staff time for counter maintenance, data collection, or analysis, which is absorbed within existing operational resources. No additional funding is being requested through this report.

First Nations Implications

The preservation of culturally and archaeologically significant sites must be considered as visitation increases. Monitoring data helps identify areas where increased use may pose risks to cultural values, supporting early engagement and collaborative protection measures with First Nations.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

The Capital Regional District Regional Growth Strategy (2018) forecasts a 22% population increase by 2038. Visitation monitoring, combined with historic trends, supports projections of future park use to inform long-term planning aligned with Objective 2.1: Protect, Conserve and Manage Ecosystem Health.

Between 2022 and 2025, regional park visitation increased by an average of approximately 2.47% annually. If this growth rate continues, total visits to regional parks could increase from approximately 5.23 million in 2025 to about 7.2 million by 2038, an increase of roughly 1.9 million visits. Under a more conservative growth scenario of 1.5% annually, visitation is projected to reach approximately 6.3 million visits by 2038.

Service Delivery Implications

Visitation levels are a key performance metric used to assess service demand and determine whether existing staffing levels, maintenance schedules, and facility service standards are sufficient to meet expected levels of service, as outlined in the Regional Park and Trail Facility Service Guidelines.

As visitation continues to increase, additional pressure may be placed on operational staff to sustain day-to-day maintenance, servicing, and visitor management, highlighting the importance of monitoring data in future staffing and service delivery discussions.

Social Implications

As the region grows and urban areas become denser, demand for regional parks will increase. Higher visitation can contribute to user conflicts and public safety concerns. Visitation data helps staff anticipate social pressures, apply the Regional Parks bylaw effectively and tailor education, outreach, and enforcement efforts to support safe, positive visitor experiences.

CONCLUSION

Visitation data provides essential insight into how regional parks are used and the level of demand placed on park assets, ecosystems, and staff resources. Long-term monitoring enables early identification of emerging pressures, supports transparent communication of service challenges, and informs proactive planning. As visitation continues to rise, sustained investment in the Visitor Monitoring Program is critical to managing growth responsibly, maintaining service levels, and protecting the long-term ecological and recreational value of regional parks.

RECOMMENDATION

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

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: 10-Year Visitation Trend and 2025 Regional Parks Visitation Breakdown
Presentation: Regional Parks 2025 Visitor Monitoring Program Update