

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2023**

SUBJECT **Pay Parking at Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes Regional Parks**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide background information and seek direction regarding the continuance of pay parking at Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes regional parks.

BACKGROUND

At its August 9, 2023 meeting, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board considered funding options for the renewal of critical infrastructure and the widening and lighting of priority sections of the Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails. The Board moved that the Regional Trestles Renewal, Trails Widening and Lighting Project (the Project) be accelerated by the inclusion of the Project in the 2024-2028 Financial Plan and that project funds be secured by way of debt; and that staff continue to develop partnerships, pursue grant opportunities and report back to the Regional Parks Committee's September 27, 2023 meeting with options to generate additional funds through non-tax revenue, in addition to working with the province to secure opportunities for supporting the work identified.

At the September 27, 2023 Regional Parks Committee meeting, staff brought forward a report indicating that pay parking was the most reliable mechanism for non-requisition revenue in the regional parks system and sought direction for the expansion of pay parking to nine regional parks at fair market value. The committee did not have enough time to discuss the matter and moved that the item be considered at the October 11 Board meeting. During that meeting, the following motions arising were carried:

- 1) *That the Board reaffirms the appropriateness of the property tax requisition as the primary revenue source for Regional Parks' operating costs.*
- 2) *Refer the decision on the continuance of parking fees at Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes to the Regional Parks Committee.*
- 3) *Direct staff to report back to the Regional Parks Committee on the barriers to equitable access to Regional Parks for CRD residents.*

Pay parking is currently in place in two regional parks. In 1994, the CRD assumed ownership of Thetis Lake Park from the City of Victoria, which had parking fees in place at the rate of \$1/day with pay parking in place May 1 to September 30 each year. In 1994, the CRD charged \$2/day at the main beach and \$4/day at the smaller lot and a service provider was contracted to implement the pay parking. For 1995, the CRD Board directed Regional Parks to continue with pay parking at Thetis Lake Regional Park at the rate of \$2 in both lots and with the introduction of a \$15 seasonal pass.

In 2005, when the CRD acquired and opened Sooke Potholes Regional Park to the public, the CRD Board considered the additional costs required to operate the park and approved the implementation of pay parking. A service provider was contracted to implement the pay parking at the same rates as Thetis Lake Regional Park.

It is notable that fees have only increased 25 cents for a day pass and \$5 for a season's pass since 1994.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

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

That pay parking continue at Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes regional parks, with a gradual rate adjustment to fair market value starting in 2025 over three years and the introduction of a short-term rate.

Alternative 2

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

That pay parking be discontinued for 2025 at Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes regional parks and that lost revenue be compensated through tax requisition and an additional \$50,000 be added for traffic management.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental & Climate Action

Regional parks continue to see increased use and, in turn, increased demand for parking. Encouraging alternative modes of transportation, such as transit or active transportation, is key to alleviating pressures for increased parking lots.

Demand management in parks systems is often achieved through parking management, such as pay parking or day use permits. This has a positive impact on transit and shared vehicle use, which supports initiatives such as reducing car use, encouraging physical activity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As regional parks continue to gain popularity and see increased use, continually expanding parking lots to meet demand is not a sustainable option.

Social Implications

The regional parks system has grown from just over 8,400 hectares in 2000 to more than 13,300 hectares in 2023. Visits to regional parks and trails have also increased by nearly 32%, from 6.1 million in 2013 to 8.1 million in 2022.

Regional parks and regional trails are a public good that belong to everyone in the region. The benefits of experiencing and interacting with nature for physical and mental well-being are felt by many. Park entrance fees, as utilized in other parks systems, can be a barrier for accessing nature and recreational opportunities.

Currently, only two regional parks have pay parking in place, which can be perceived as unfair to the communities in which these parks are located. However, these parks have had pay parking in place for many years and they continue to be some of the busiest in the regional parks system. Additionally, fees are only collected during the peak season to help offset operational costs and for the rest of the year residents have vehicle access without parking fees.

Financial Implications

Presently, seasonal parking revenue from Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes regional parks provide approximately \$240,000 for the regional parks budget, which helps offset park maintenance and park improvement projects, as well as support the bylaw enforcement program in these two parks. CRD Bylaw Officers support CRD Park Rangers with increased patrols during peak summer months, and a large percentage of their time is allocated to both Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes regional parks, which these fees help support.

Major events at regional parks and attractions draw visitors from outside the region, putting additional pressure on the parks and trails system. Parking fees are one of the ways visitors from outside of the region can help contribute to offset the costs without an increased burden on regional taxpayers.

Bringing the price for pay parking in these two parks up to fair market value could ultimately generate \$400,000 in additional annual revenue. These estimates need to be considered cautiously because the introduction of the short-term parking option, the value of the seasonal pass, the fact that visitors with a seasonal pass may visit more than one park, the variability of modes of travel to different parks, and the change in visitor use patterns are all variables that can influence gross parking revenue projections.

There is a service delivery contract in place for pay parking services that does not expire until September 30, 2024. It is recommended that, should the Regional Parks Committee and Board decide to cease pay parking at these locations, it should align with the end of the current contract period. This will allow for adjustments to tax requisition amounts for the 2025 budget, as well as avoid additional costs to prematurely terminate the contract.

Removing pay parking in these two regional parks would result in the need to increase tax requisition in order to continue service delivery at the same levels.

Service Delivery Implications

The current pay parking provider patrols the lots and contributes to traffic management. There would be an increase in parking issues and parking demand with no fees or pay parking contractor in place. This would result in a need to increase the core budget for additional staff presence at these locations to manage safety and access.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The CRD Board-approved Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 identifies a climate action and resiliency goal priority action (4-2b) to align implementation of parking fees where regional parks can be easily accessed by transit, walking or cycling as a disincentive to motor vehicle use, excluding vehicle parking for people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

CRD Regional Parks has long had pay parking in place in two regional parks – Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes. In October 2023, the CRD Board considered the expansion of pay parking to other regional parks, but ultimately confirmed that property tax requisition is the appropriate

funding source for CRD Regional Parks' operating costs. In light of that decision, the matter of the continuance of parking fees at Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes regional parks has been brought forward for decision.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That pay parking continue at Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes regional parks, with a gradual rate adjustment to fair market value starting in 2025 over three years and the introduction of a short-term rate.

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