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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2024

SUBJECT **Water Safety Pilot Program at Thetis Lake and Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Parks – Summer 2024 Update**

ISSUE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2024, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board directed staff to implement a pilot program to provide personal floatation devices and life rings at Thetis Lake (Main Beach) and Elk Lake (Hamsterly Beach) and report back after one season of implementation.

BACKGROUND

Within the CRD, there are 18 regional parks with known fresh and saltwater swimming locations. The most frequented freshwater swimming areas are Thetis Lake, Elk/Beaver Lake, Sooke Potholes, Durrance Lake and Matheson Lake. Island View Beach, Witty's Lagoon and Jordan River contain popular beaches for recreation and water access.

Following a staff report brought to the July 10, 2024, CRD Board meeting, the Board directed staff to implement a pilot program to provide personal floatation devices (PFD) and emergency life rings at Thetis Lake Regional Park (Main Beach) and Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Hamsterly Beach). These two beaches were identified due to the high levels of visitation during the summer months.

The pilot program was operationalized on July 12, 2024, with the installation of PFD loaner stations and temporary emergency life rings at both beaches. Permanent emergency life rings, near the water's edge, were installed at both locations by August 8, 2024. Each PFD loaner station provides nine PFDs, in three sizes, suitable for children up to a weight of 41 kg.

The pilot program was completed on September 30, 2024, at which time all PFDs were removed for the winter; however, emergency life rings will remain at both locations throughout the year.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That the Water Safety Program be continued at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park and Thetis Lake Regional Park for the foreseeable future.

Alternative 2

That the Water Safety Program be referred back to staff for updates.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

This pilot project aligns with the CRD's *Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022 – 2032* Priority 5-1: Enhance health and well-being by providing equitable access to regional parks and

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regional trails and Priority 3-1: Offer compatible outdoor recreation experiences that are enjoyable, healthy, safe and immersed in nature.

Intergovernmental Implications

In addition to the provision of emergency life rings and PFD loaner stations at two locations, during the summer of 2024, CRD Regional Parks’ rangers conducted one joint patrol with the boating safety officer from Transport Canada at Thetis Lake Regional Park. These patrols focused on educating those recreating on the water about the requirements for PFDs. Furthermore, CRD bylaw officers and CRD park rangers completed over 1,550 hours of patrols at Thetis Lake and Elk/Beaver Lake regional parks so far in 2024. In the summer, in particular, these patrols primarily focused on addressing regulatory issues and dangerous behaviors, such as alcohol/drug consumption and cliff jumping at Thetis Lake Regional Park.

Financial Implications

The pilot program was delivered for a total cost of \$6,673.70, including all equipment and supplies.

Item	Cost (including tax)
Personal Flotation Devices	\$ 913.31
Life Rings	\$3,122.01
Signage	\$2,016.00 plus CRD sign shop costs
Miscellaneous	\$ 147.74
Total	\$6,673.70

Throughout the pilot program, one PFD at Thetis Lake Regional Park required replacement.

It is anticipated for ongoing delivery of the program; PFDs would be required to be replaced every two years at the cost of \$1,000.

Service Delivery Implications

Ongoing staff requirements to deliver this program includes weekly condition checks of the PFDs to ensure no damage, daily inspection of the life rings to ensure they are in a suitable condition for deployment and end of season PFD maintenance and storage.

In future years, this program will provide PFDs for a 17-week period through the summer, from June 1 to September 30. It is estimated that delivery of the program requires 50 hours of staff time; this includes annual set up, weekly inspections and program shut down.

The operational costs of delivering this program are funded through core budget sources.

Social Implications

Swimming and other water-based outdoor recreation opportunities, including kayaking, canoeing and stand-up paddleboarding, are popular with regional park visitors. PFD usage monitoring was undertaken weekly throughout the duration of the pilot program, from July 25 to September 30. Throughout the duration of the PFD use monitoring, at least one PFD was in use on 76% of the monitoring visits. On average, throughout the monitoring period, three PFDs were in use at the time of monitoring, the total number in use ranged from zero to nine. At 13% of monitoring visits

all the PFDs were in use. There have been no reports of, or recorded deployments of, the life rings at either Thetis Lake or Elk/Beaver Lake regional parks.

To support the PFD loaner stations and in-park signage, between May 10 and August 30, the CRD posted six social media posts across Facebook, Instagram and X (Twitter), focused on water safety in regional parks. The social media posts had a combined reach of 2,989.

In addition to CRD social media water safety messaging, the Lifesaving Society’s WaterWise team, through funding from Island Health and with on-the-ground support of CRD staff, delivered 22 pop-up informational events at Elk/Beaver Lake, Thetis Lake, Matheson Lake, Mount Work and Sooke Potholes regional parks.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Implications

The cost of PFDs can be a barrier to accessing safe water-based outdoor recreation. The installation of PFD loaner stations provides all families with access to PFDs, therefore providing access to important water safety equipment to children from all socio-economic backgrounds.

Language barriers and unfamiliarity with common hazards in BC lakes remain a factor to consider. Each emergency life ring is accompanied by a sign which includes an image and colours that are internationally recognizable as safety equipment. Furthermore, CRD staff will continue to work with the Lifesaving Society to consider further work that could be undertaken to increase education and awareness for non-English-speaking visitors.

CONCLUSION

At the July 10, 2024, Capital Regional District Board meeting, staff were directed to implement a pilot program to provide personal floatation devices (PFD) and life rings at Thetis Lake Regional Park (Main Beach) and Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park (Hamsterly Beach). PFDs and life rings were installed at the two popular beaches for a period of 11 weeks, from July 12 to September 30, 2024. Staff have completed the pilot program and assessed the implications and impacts and will continue this program at the two locations on a long-term basis. Emergency life rings will be available year-round and PFD loaner stations will be installed seasonally from June 1 to September 30 annually.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Water Safety Program be continued at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park and Thetis Lake Regional Park for the foreseeable future.

Submitted by:	Mike MacIntyre, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Glenn Harris, Ph.D., R.P.Bio., Acting General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: Personal Flotation Device and Life Ring Loaner Stations – Elk/Beaver Lake (Hamsterly Beach) and Thetis Lake (Main Beach) Regional Parks