



Making a difference...together

## REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27, 2024

---

**SUBJECT**     Regional Parks and Trails Stewardship Plan

### **ISSUE SUMMARY**

To provide information on the Capital Regional District's (CRD) Regional Parks and Trails Stewardship Plan (Stewardship Plan) and seek approval to begin engagement.

### **BACKGROUND**

CRD staff are in the process of preparing a *State of Natural Features Report*, which will complete a priority action listed within the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 (Strategic Plan). The report will provide a review of existing ecological knowledge, restoration activities, and research, as well as identify gaps in data and priorities for future conservation monitoring and reporting within the regional parks and trails system. A companion *State of Outdoor Recreation Report* is also being prepared, which will provide a review of existing recreation opportunities and trends, as well as identify gaps in data and priorities for future recreation monitoring and reporting within the regional parks and trails system. CRD staff intend to use the information from these reports to foster knowledge sharing with interested First Nations, with the aim of gaining additional information to provide a more complete picture of the state of regional parks and trails. The information from the two reports and collaboration with First Nations will then be used to inform the development of the Stewardship Plan.

The Stewardship Plan will provide a holistic, evidence-based approach to the management of the CRD's regional parks and trails. The plan will provide conservation and outdoor recreation management strategies in a balanced and complementary manner, to inform the development, implementation, monitoring, and review of management actions for the regional parks and trails system. The plan will be informed by continued collaboration with First Nations and input from the public and stakeholders, including the results of the 2023 Resident Survey. The updated Regional Parks & Trails Planning Process will be used to guide the development of the Stewardship Plan, and an outline of the proposed process, including a summary of engagement opportunities, is attached to this report (Appendix A).

Completion of the Stewardship Plan will achieve two priority actions listed within the Strategic Plan, completion of a Natural Areas Conservation Plan and an Outdoor Recreation Plan. Integrating system-wide direction for conservation and recreation into one plan acknowledges that exceptional ecosystems can provide good recreation value, and responsible, well-managed recreation can support the maintenance of healthy ecosystems. The plan will have a targeted planning horizon of 10 years and will be updated, as needed, to incorporate new information and evolving strategic direction and to provide an adaptive management approach.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

#### *Alternative 1*

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:  
That CRD staff begin First Nations engagement for the development of a Regional Parks and Trails Stewardship Plan.

*Alternative 2*

That the engagement approach for the development of a Regional Parks and Trails Stewardship Plan be referred back to staff with direction for revision.

**IMPLICATIONS**

*Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies*

The Strategic Plan includes direction for staff to prepare and implement a Natural Areas Conservation Plan and an Outdoor Recreation Plan. These plans are needed to support research prioritization, data collection and development of monitoring and reporting procedures to better inform how the CRD's regional parks and trails are managed. Staff received prior direction from the Regional Parks Committee to ensure that the preparation of the plans be undertaken together, so that these two aspects of parks and trails management are equally supported. Staff propose to undertake the development of these plans together, through the preparation of the Stewardship Plan, to provide a balanced and holistic approach to conservation and recreation management.

*Environmental & Climate Action*

Implementing a Stewardship Plan that emphasizes conservation efforts alongside recreational activities fosters a sense of environmental responsibility among users of parks and trails. In turn, this promotes a deeper appreciation for the natural world and connection to local ecosystems.

The Stewardship Plan will identify how to protect and restore natural systems within parks and trails. With a focus on the important role of habitat in improving ecological health and integrity, the plan will guide management and operational decisions to support ecosystem resilience and the ability of natural areas to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

*Social Implications*

As the population within the region continues to expand, there is increased pressure on regional parks and trails to meet recreation demand, as well as increased threats to the natural environments they encapsulate from additional use. The Stewardship Plan will identify how to provide high-quality and compatible outdoor recreation opportunities that promote social cohesion, physical and mental health, environmental education and volunteerism. Providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities can have positive impacts on increasing environmental and cultural awareness, enhancing stewardship values, and promoting user etiquette. By taking a stewardship-based approach, it acknowledges the co-benefits of preserving and restoring healthy ecosystems and providing quality recreation value.

*Equity, Diversity & Inclusion*

The Stewardship Plan will provide direction for the delivery of compatible visitor experiences in regional parks and trails, ensuring equitable access to park amenities and recreation opportunities for a diverse range of users. By making the regional parks and trails system more inclusive, a greater number of community members can receive the physical and psychological benefits gained from interacting with nature.

*First Nations Reconciliation*

The Stewardship Plan has region-wide parks and trails management implications and, as such, staff will seek to collaborate with First Nations with traditional territory in the CRD to inform the

development of the plan. Staff will seek opportunities for First Nations to collaborate with the CRD at multiple project stages, and through a means that best suits each Nation’s individual capacities. Given the large number of Nations that may be interested in this project, staff will explore the formation of a multi-Nation working group to inform the development of the plan. If there is sufficient interest, the working group would be comprised of First Nations representatives, CRD staff, and a meeting facilitator, as needed. Some Nations may wish to participate in other ways, and these requests will continue to be accommodated to support First Nations rights and sovereignty on the path towards reconciliation.

*Financial Implications*

The Stewardship Plan will be developed using core budget funding.

*Service Delivery Implications*

By outlining strategies for both conservation efforts and recreational activities, the Stewardship Plan provides a balanced approach that benefits both the natural environment and park visitors. This holistic approach enhances the overall quality of service delivery by improving the caliber of outdoor recreation experiences, as well as the health and integrity of the ecosystems in which they occur.

**CONCLUSION**

CRD staff are seeking approval to begin engagement for the development of a Stewardship Plan. The plan will provide conservation and outdoor recreation management direction that will inform the development, implementation, and monitoring of management actions across the regional parks and trails system. The project meets Strategic Plan direction, will be developed in collaboration with First Nations, and will provide a basis for evidence-based management decisions.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:  
That CRD staff begin First Nations engagement for the development of a Regional Parks and Trails Stewardship Plan.

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

**ATTACHMENT**

Appendix A: Project Steps and Tentative Timeline – CRD Regional Parks and Trails Stewardship Plan, March 2024