

2025 State of Outdoor Recreation Report



Making a difference...together

September 2025

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The CRD conducts its business within the Territories of many First Nations, including but not limited to BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin), MÁLEXET (Malahat), paaʔčiidʔatx (Pacheedaht), Spuneʼluxutth (Penelekut), Scʼianew (Beecher Bay), Songhees, STÁUTW (Tsawout), TʼSou-ke, WJOŁŁP (Tsartlip), W SIKEM (Tseycum), and xʷsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations, all of whom have a long-standing relationship with the land and waters from time immemorial that continues to this day.



Dancing Dragonflies by Chris Paul

The CRD commissioned WŚÁNEĆ artist Chris Paul to create an image based on the idea of First Nation and Settler communities living side by side and our governments making a difference together.

Dragonfly is a symbol of change, transformation and swiftness. He represents a symbol of change in the view of self-understanding and the kind of change that has its source in maturity and insight into the deeper meaning of life.

It is our hope today that our work to change and transform will be swift, that as we mature, we will develop insight that allows us to be poised for reconciliation and that we continue to build strong and meaningful relationships with local First Nations.

Cover photos:

Front: Mount Work Regional Park Back:
Gallopig Goose Regional Trail

Background

The State of Outdoor Recreation report provides a comprehensive understanding of the current scope of outdoor recreation opportunities, amenities and programs within the Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks. It was primarily commissioned to inform the development of the Regional Parks Stewardship Plan—a priority action from the CRD Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032. The Stewardship Plan will provide a holistic, evidence-based approach to the management of CRD regional parks. The plan will provide conservation and outdoor recreation management strategies in a balanced and complementary manner, to inform the planning, management and monitoring of the parks system.

The State of Outdoor Recreation report will also support the development of related plans, strategies and policies and facilitate knowledge sharing with interested First Nations and other inter-governmental partners. The report set out the following objectives:

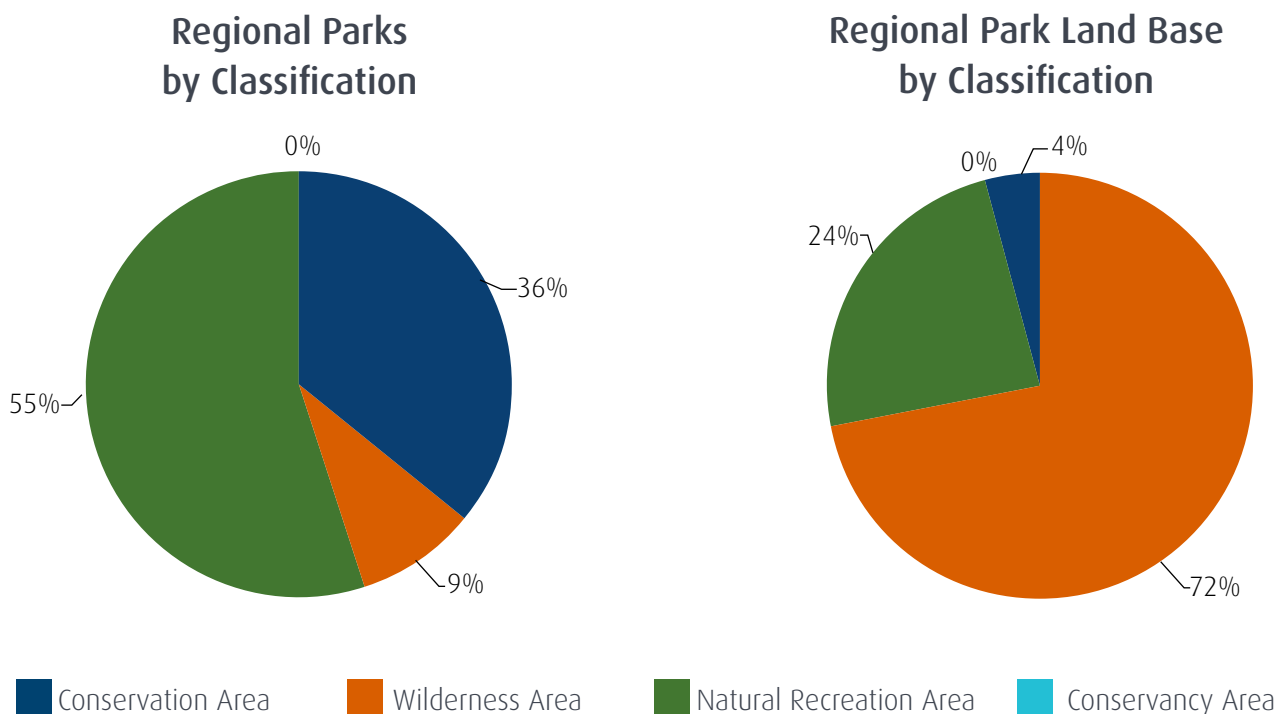
1. Provide an overview of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the capital regional district and their implications on outdoor recreation.
2. Summarize the latest and most influential outdoor recreation trends.
3. Provide an overview of visitation and visitation trends in regional parks and on regional trails.
4. Describe and quantify the outdoor recreation opportunities, amenities/ infrastructure and programs provided in regional parks and trails, including licences and park use permits.
5. Summarize the level and extent of outdoor recreation-specific volunteerism in regional parks and trails.
6. Present the most significant physical or environmental barriers to accessing regional parks.
7. Identify outdoor recreation and visitation-related data gaps.
8. Provide considerations and recommendations to be addressed in the Regional Parks Stewardship Plan.



Capital Regional District Regional Parks

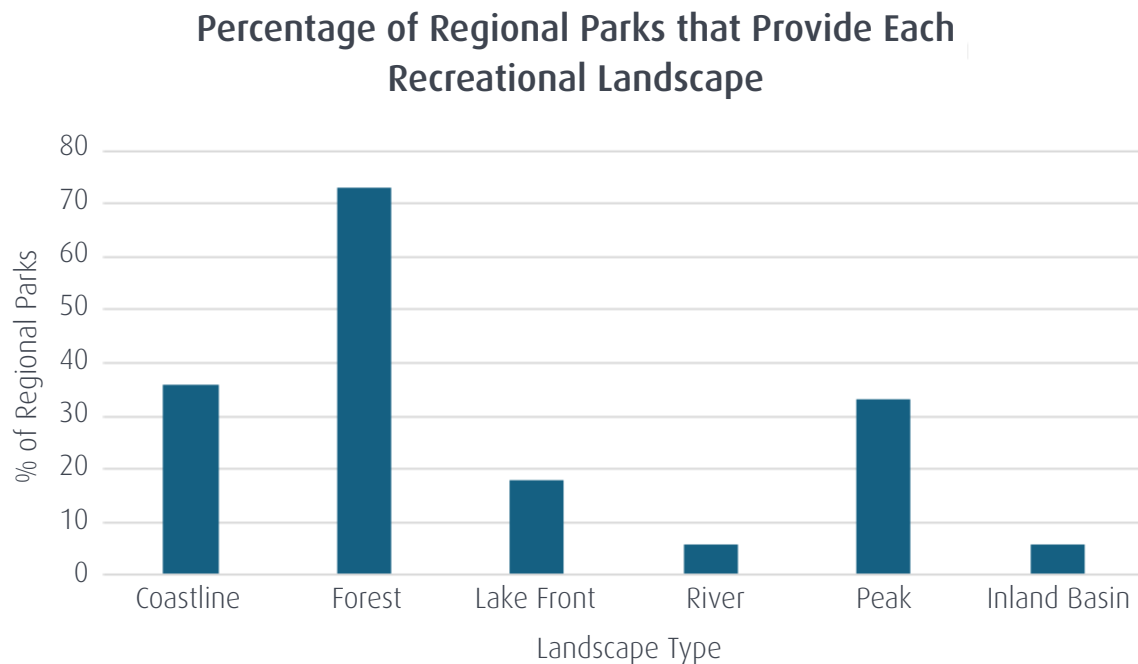
The CRD is responsible for managing 34 regional parks covering 13,400 hectares and representing 6% of the regional land base. While the CRD regional parks system is just one of multiple parks systems in the region, it is the largest park system by area and represents 27% of all parks and protected areas in the CRD.

Regional parks are given one of four classifications to guide their management. Conservation Areas focus on interpreting natural and cultural features. Wilderness Areas provide remote and secluded outdoor recreation. Conservancy Areas enhance the understanding of Indigenous cultural use. And Natural Recreation Areas balance the protection of natural areas with compatible outdoor recreation. This classification dictates the types and intensity of supported outdoor recreation, with Conservation, Wilderness and Conservancy Areas prioritizing ecological and cultural values over recreation, while Natural Recreation Areas strive to balance these priorities. The figures below identify the proportion of parks and the proportion of park land base within each classification.



Regional parks support a range of outdoor recreation activities. Visitors can enjoy frontcountry/ auto-accessible camping, various trail activities such as hiking, running, walking, backpacking, equestrian activities and different types of cycling, including mountain biking and gravel biking. Water activities include swimming, rowing, paddling, sailing, powerboating and fishing. Additionally, other activities like wildlife viewing, photography, geocaching and picnicking are supported within regional parks.

Regional parks provide opportunities for these activities to be enjoyed in a range of recreational settings and landscapes. They can primarily be classified as front or mid-country, though some opportunities for backcountry recreation exist within the area of Sea to Sea and Sooke Hills Wilderness regional parks. Regional parks provide a range of recreational settings including coastline, mountains (peaks) and lake front, but forested landscapes are the most highly represented setting across the system.





Trails and Recreational Infrastructure

Regional parks include a variety of infrastructures and amenities that support high-quality outdoor recreation. Within regional parks there are 345 km of sanctioned trails, primarily multi-use, allowing for hiking, cycling and equestrian activities. Day-use and picnic areas are available in nine parks, with a total of 151 picnic tables. The CRD provides three regional campgrounds with 141 camping pads and one main accessible play structure at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park. There are 17 parks with beach access (freshwater and coastal) and four boat launches, along with various comfort and convenience amenities such as toilets, washrooms, parking areas, drinking fountains, benches and bicycle racks.

- 345 km of sanctioned trails
- Beach areas – 21
- Boat Launches – 4
- Campgrounds – 3 (141 campsites)
- Docks – 6
- Mobi-mats – 2
- Mountain Bike Technical Training Areas – 1
- Nature Centres – 2
- Parking Lots – 85
- Picnic Shelters – 4
- Picnic Tables – 151
- Playground structures – 2
- Washrooms - 55

The CRD has four formal licence agreements with not-for-profit organizations that support specific outdoor recreation locations or activities. Through these agreements more than 6,000 volunteer hours annually are contributed to support visitor experience in the regional parks.

Visitation

Between 2014 and 2024 regional park visitation increased by 58%. A substantial proportion of this increase coincided with the COVID19 pandemic; visitation increased 24% from 2019 to 2020. However, long-term visitation patterns suggest that the increase in visitation and participation in outdoor recreation is a sustained trend that will likely continue and possibly even grow further into the future, especially given the region's projected population growth.



When regional parks are considered individually, growth in visitation varies substantially, with 13 regional parks experiencing visitation growth above the average 58% system-wide increase. High visitation parks include Elk/Beaver Lake and Thetis Lake regional parks. In general, parks near urban areas and parks with diverse settings and activities tend to attract more visitors.

Access to CRD Regional Parks

Despite the extensive network of regional parks and current infrastructure and amenities throughout the CRD Regional Parks system, barriers to access still exist. CRD regional parks are geographically dispersed across the region. Approximately, 91% of households within the CRD are within a 15-minutes drive of at least one regional park. However, barriers are present that limit access to regional parks. Only 30% of regional parks are accessible by public transit and only 35% of regional parks are connected to one of the CRD regional trails. Social barriers also play a role, such as gaps in information, the effects of urbanization, and underrepresentation of equity-denied groups in park usage and management.

Capital Regional District Regional Trails

The CRD is responsible for four regional trails with a total length of approximately 103 km. The regional trails provide visitors the opportunity to participate in both active transportation and recreational activities, as well as linking eight regional parks with neighbourhoods, amenities and other community spaces.

- E&N Rail Trail Humpback Connector – 13.9 km
- Galloping Goose Regional Trail – 55.85 km
- Lochside Regional Trail – 29.5 km
- Mayne Island Regional Trail – 4 km

Trail-based outdoor recreation opportunities provided on the regional trails include hiking, running, walking, dog walking, equestrian activities, roller blading, skateboarding, and cycling. Designated uses vary according to specific trail and location. The entirety of the E&N and Mayne Island regional trails are designated for cycling and pedestrian use with no equestrian use permitted. 66% of the Galloping Goose Regional Trail and 45% of the Lochside Regional Trail are designated for cycling, equestrian and pedestrian use and the remainder is limited to cycling and pedestrian use.

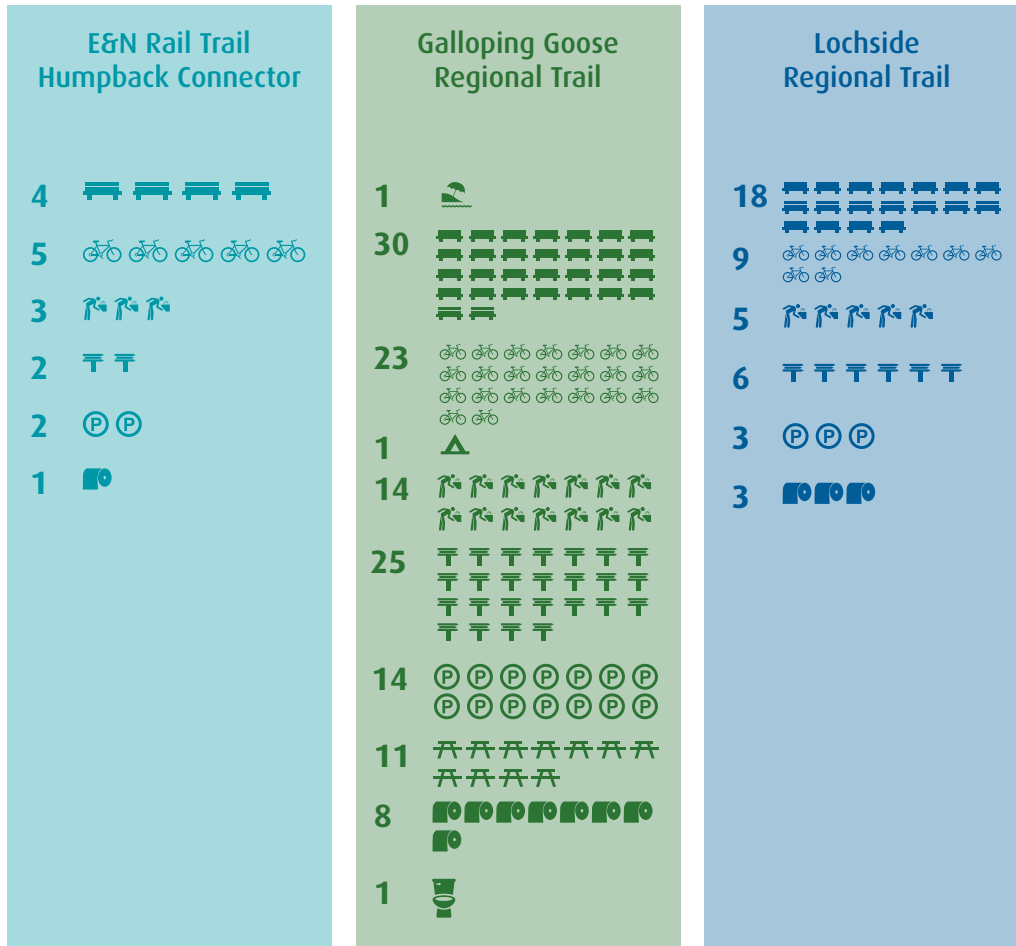
The regional trails traverse multiple landscapes and developed urban areas, rural areas and regional parks. In general, the E&N Rail Trail provides a developed recreational setting, the Lochside and Mayne Island regional trails provide both developed and frontcountry settings, and the Galloping Goose provides developed, frontcountry, mid-country and some backcountry semi-primitive settings.



Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park

In respect to the outdoor recreation landscapes, each trail provides a range of opportunities to experience different recreational landscapes, with the Galloping Goose Regional Trail providing the most diverse range of landscapes, including coastlines, forests, rivers and lakes. Along CRD regional trails (within 100 m of a given regional trail) there is a broad range of outdoor recreation-related infrastructure and amenities.

189 Total Amenities



Legend





Regional Trail Visitation

Consistent with regional park visitation, regional trail visitation has increased in the past decade. Between 2014 and 2024 regional trail visitation increased by 35% to an estimated visitation of over 4 million in 2024. Overall trail use is highest in urban areas with a mix of different forms of transportation and ability levels, whereas rural sections see more seasonal, varied use.

Resident Feedback

The 2024 Resident Survey revealed that 94% of CRD residents think that regional parks are an important fixture in the community with high visitation rates and top activities, including walking, hiking, wildlife viewing and dog walking. The 2013 and 2019 Regional Trail Surveys highlighted the importance of commuting and fitness, satisfaction with trails, and concerns about safety and facilities. The 2021 Regional Park Visitor Survey emphasized outdoor recreation as a primary motivator, high satisfaction rates, concerns about dogs off-leash, and lack of amenities.

Outdoor Recreation Data

The details, data and summaries outlined in the State of Outdoor Recreation report are crucial for effective outdoor recreation planning and management and the development of the CRD Regional Parks and Trails Stewardship Plan. A few data gaps have been identified, including the classification of trails, understanding regional outdoor recreation demands, inventory of recreation settings, monitoring visitor use impacts, and assessing the economic impact of outdoor recreation.

Conclusion

Overall, the CRD's regional parks and trails system plays a vital role in providing diverse outdoor recreation opportunities, supporting conservation efforts, and enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors. Continued efforts to address barriers, manage impacts, and gather comprehensive data will help ensure the sustainability and enjoyment of these valuable natural resources.



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