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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 2022

SUBJECT **Renewed Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To present the renewed Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan for approval on an interim basis for one year.

BACKGROUND

The CRD Board initiated an update of the Regional Parks Strategic Plan at its meeting of December 8, 2021, and extended the 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan until July 2022. Staff led the development of an updated Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) between January and June 2022 (Appendix A). The Strategic Plan reflects current Board priorities, related CRD strategies and corporate knowledge. Input from First Nations, stakeholders, the Regional Parks Committee, Transportation Committee and the public has been considered during the development of the Strategic Plan. Feedback, in general, aligns with the proposed document (Appendices B and C). A presentation outlining the key highlights of the Strategic Plan is provided in Appendix D.

The Regional Parks Committee provided input on the proposed direction for the new Regional Parks Strategic Plan. On February 9, 2022, the CRD Board accepted the proposed vision, mission, values and priority statements for stakeholder, First Nations and public input, and recommended that a lens of conservation and protection of biodiversity be applied to the priorities and processes.

The Transportation Committee provided input on the Strategic Plan at its April 20, 2022 meeting and recommended that the CRD Board change the name of the Strategic Plan to "Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan". The Committee also recommended that the Board direct staff to include actions in the Strategic Plan to improve service levels for regional trails and direct staff to develop a funding strategy for regional trails to support the Strategic Plan.

Engagement with stakeholder groups, park agencies and the public occurred between February and April 2022. In total, 1,228 online surveys were completed, 3 public information sessions held, and 5 focus groups were held with representatives from 44 organizations having interest in conservation, outdoor recreation or community/social wellness. Feedback received is included in Appendix B.

The CRD Board requested staff to engage all First Nations in the region in an early, meaningful and ongoing manner in the development of the Strategic Plan. Fifteen First Nations, whose traditional territories lie within the CRD boundary, were invited to engage in the Strategic Plan update. Engagement with First Nations was facilitated by a consultant between February and June 2022. Input has been received from eight Nations to date, and a summary is included in Appendix C. Many of the First Nations indicated an interest to engage in the process, but could not accommodate the timeline presented, or have not yet responded. Specifically, WSANEC Leadership Council submitted a letter requesting additional information and an extension to the engagement period.

At the June 15, 2022 Transportation Committee meeting, the Committee recommended that the Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 be approved on an interim basis for one year while engagement with First Nations continues (Appendix E). The Transportation Committee, at the same meeting, approved a motion that bike parking and e-bike charging stations be added to priority action 4-2e.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 be approved on an interim basis for one year while engagement with First Nations continues.

Alternative 2

That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 is accepted as a draft for public, stakeholder and First Nations engagement, and the current Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021 is extended until June 2023.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental & Climate Implications

Regional parks and regional trails are vital in helping to achieve the region's climate action, natural resource protection and active transportation goals. The Strategic Plan includes priorities for conservation, including increasing protecting of the region's biodiversity; protecting cultural heritage and traditional cultural use; and partnering in research and monitoring efforts. The Strategic Plan includes priorities for climate action and resiliency, including advancing regional active transportation opportunities; supporting the development of complete communities; aligning service delivery with climate action; ensuring long term and consistent management of regional parks; and strategically acquiring and managing natural areas to address climate mitigation, urban containment and access to green space for a growing population.

Intergovernmental Implications

In developing this Strategic Plan, staff consulted representatives from other park agencies and other CRD divisions to understand how priorities for the CRD's regional parks might align with the goals and objectives of other agencies, with the aim of aligning desired outcomes between groups, strengthening partnerships, clarifying roles and responsibilities of the different agencies, and enhancing information sharing.

Working toward reconciliation with First Nations in the region is a foundational principle of the Strategic Plan. Fifteen First Nations have been invited to engage in the Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan renewal and implementation in an ongoing and meaningful manner to determine how to strengthen relationships, and what key priorities and initiatives are most important to work on together over the 10 years. Priorities and actions included in the Strategic Plan draw on past input and recommendations from First Nations in the region, such as those identified in the Special Task Force on First Nations Relations Final Report, as well as from input received from eight First Nations on the Strategic Plan update. WSANEC Leadership Council submitted a letter to the CRD on May 25, 2022 requesting additional information, and stating the Nations represented by the Leadership Council cannot support the Strategic Plan without further engagement. In response

to meetings and correspondence with staff, WSANEC Leadership Council are preparing a process and budget for ongoing engagement. WSANEC Leadership Council's letter of June 15, 2022 has been added at the end of Appendix C. Staff recognize the limitations of the engagement timeline for First Nations to provide meaningful input and that First Nations communities have been under considerable strain over the past two years which, among other factors, have limited the opportunities for dialogue. Staff recommend that the Strategic Plan be accepted on a one year interim basis in order to provide more time to engage and deepen an understanding of the issues and interests relevant to First Nations. An interim approval of the Plan will also provide the opportunity for reconciliation efforts identified in the plan to proceed.

Social Implications

A focus on accessibility and equity in the regional parks and trails system is included in the updated Strategic Plan with actions in support of enhancing health and well-being by providing equitable access to regional parks and regional trails. A focus on improving visitor experiences to regional parks and trails is also included in the updated Strategic Plan by offering compatible outdoor recreation experiences that are enjoyable, healthy, safe and immersed in nature; and foster stewardship through program delivery, knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Financial Implications

Financial implications associated with service level adjustments identified by the updated Strategic Plan will be considered by the CRD Board in future service planning processes.

Service Delivery Implications

The CRD manages and operates the regional parks and trails system, and decision making is supported by advice and recommendations provided to the CRD Board through the Regional Parks Committee and the Transportation Committee. Changes to the operation and management of regional parks and trails will have service delivery implications. A funding strategy will be developed in fall 2023 to facilitate implementation of the regional trail initiatives identified in the Strategic Plan. A priority action included in the Strategic Plan is to develop an Asset Management Plan for regional parks and regional trails that achieves critical infrastructure life cycle renewal.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The 2019-2022 CRD Board Priorities include ensuring appropriate funding for parks and trails infrastructure, improvements and maintenance by updating the Strategic Plan with consideration to ecological, recreation and reconciliation principles, land acquisition capacity, and expanded partnerships with First Nations and parks user groups. The 2019-2022 Corporate Plan envisions that residents of the region have additional land acquisitions and increased access to parks and recreational trails, and have access to convenient, green and affordable multi-modal transportation systems that enhance community well-being. These priorities are key drivers for this renewed Strategic Plan.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The region faces different challenges and opportunities since the Regional Parks Strategic Plan was adopted in 2012. The Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 is in alignment with a number of recent Board-approved strategies: Regional Growth Strategy, Regional Transportation Plan, Climate Action Strategy and the Special Task Force on First Nations

Relations Final Report. The Strategic Plan creates strong linkages to Board directions, the engagement process, relevant legislation, guidance documents, operational knowledge and the feedback from public surveys.

CONCLUSION

The CRD Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan provides a renewed vision, mission, values, priorities and actions to guide regional parks and trails service delivery from 2022 to 2032. This Strategic Plan was developed in consultation with agencies, stakeholders and the public, and with ongoing input from First Nations in the region. Interim approval of the plan for one year will provide additional engagement opportunities with First Nations. During the interim approval period, staff will continue to engage with First Nations in order to deepen an understanding of their issues and interests and allow reconciliation efforts identified in the Strategic Plan to commence.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Capital Regional District Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032 be approved on an interim basis for one year while engagement with First Nations continues.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, RPF, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan 2022-2032
- Appendix B: Public Engagement Report
- Appendix C: First Nations Engagement Report
- Appendix D: Presentation
- Appendix E: Transportation Committee Staff Report – June 15, 2022