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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2026

SUBJECT **Regional Parks Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To submit the Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031 for approval.

BACKGROUND

Volunteers are central to delivering the CRD Regional Parks goals of protecting and restoring biodiversity while supporting compatible recreation and education. Community involvement has been integral to park planning and management since the CRD's inception in 1966 and continues to expand CRD Regional Parks' capacity to steward natural areas and engage the public.

Over the past five decades, volunteer involvement has evolved from informal participation to a structured, multi-program model that now includes individual and group volunteers, stewardship agreement groups, recreation license groups, and student work experience placements.

In 2025, more than 630 volunteers contributed over 8,200 hours, nearly double the total recorded in 2020, reflecting strong community interest and growing reliance on volunteer stewardship to address ecological pressures.

The Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031 (the Plan) (Appendix A) sets out a five-year framework to modernize and strengthen the volunteer program. It is informed by national volunteerism trends, the 2023 Volunteer Satisfaction Survey and current operational needs.

Fully realizing the Plan's objectives will require additional staff capacity to coordinate, support, and sustain expanded volunteer involvement. Approval of the Plan establishes a strategic and policy framework; it does not authorize additional resources. Any future resourcing would be considered through existing budget and business case processes.

National Trends in Volunteerism

[Statistics Canada's General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating \(GSS-GVP\)](#), conducted every five years, provides the most comprehensive data on volunteering in Canada. In addition, organizations such as Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada, Volunteer Canada and Volunteer Victoria highlight several trends shaping volunteer engagement, these include:

- Declining participation, increasing pressure on recruitment and retention.
- Greater emphasis on reciprocal value for volunteers and organizations.
- Greater demand for accessible, inclusive, and flexible opportunities.
- Increased emphasis on equity, decolonization, and DEI-informed program design.
- Continued interest in virtual and episodic volunteering.

Adapting to these trends is critical to maintaining a relevant, resilient, and effective volunteer program.

Volunteer Satisfaction Survey Findings

In 2023, CRD Regional Parks conducted a Volunteer Satisfaction Survey (Appendix A) that assessed volunteer experiences, motivations, and perspectives on recognition and inclusion. Key findings confirmed high satisfaction levels, strong feelings of support and appreciation, and broad willingness to recommend the program.

The survey also identifies opportunities to strengthen the program as volunteer participation continues to grow in scale and diversity. These findings directly inform the objectives set out in the Plan.

Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031 Objectives

Drawing on national trends, survey findings, and operational experience (Appendix A), the following objectives are designed to increase stewardship capacity, improve volunteer retention, reduce operational risk, and strengthen delivery of CRD Regional Parks' biodiversity and recreation mandates over the next five years:

- 1) Diversify the Volunteer Base:
 - Engage a broader demographic, including youth, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) communities, and people with disabilities.
 - Identify and address barriers to participation for underrepresented groups.
 - Develop recruitment partnerships with newcomer programs, cultural organizations, youth groups, recreation groups and disability organizations.
 - Offer flexible scheduling and varied opportunities to attract new demographics.
- 2) Promote, Recognize and Appreciate Volunteers:
 - Strengthen promotion of volunteer opportunities through social media, signage, and other communication channels.
 - Improve data collection and reporting to highlight volunteer achievements (e.g., before-and-after restoration pictures, invasive species removal totals).
 - Continue meaningful recognition through events, tokens of appreciation and regular acknowledgement.
- 3) Foster Opportunities for Learning and Connection:
 - Provide ongoing education, training and skill-building opportunities.
 - Create more opportunities for volunteers to connect socially, both in-person and digitally.
- 4) Update and Maintain Program Administration
 - Uphold the high standards of the CRD Regional Parks Volunteer Program.
 - Refresh the volunteer mission and vision.
 - Update policies, procedures and handbooks, ensuring they are accessible online.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That the Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031 be approved as a strategic framework to guide the growth, diversification, and modernization of the Regional Parks Volunteer Program, supporting stewardship objectives while informing future operational and staffing decisions.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The Plan directly advances priorities in the Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2022-2032:

- Priority 2-1: Take action to increase protection of biodiversity, ecological integrity and natural assets in the region through improved knowledge, proactive stewardship and land acquisition.
- Priority 2-3: Work with and support partners in taking care of the region's species, habitats and natural areas.
- Priority 3-2: Foster stewardship through program delivery, knowledge sharing and collaboration.

The 2024 Regional Parks and Trails Resident Survey reinforces public support for environmental protection, facility maintenance, and restoration projects—all areas strengthened by volunteer involvement.

Financial and Service Delivery Implications

The CRD Regional Parks Volunteer Program is supported through an approved annual operating budget of \$161,039, funded through the CRD Regional Parks core operating budget. This represents approximately 0.76% of the total CRD Regional Parks' annual operating budget of \$21,147,786.

The program is further supported by existing staff resources, including one full-time volunteer coordinator position and approximately 80% of a full-time stewardship technician position, both funded within the approved CRD Regional Parks operating budget.

Implementing the Plan and meeting projected demand will require additional staffing over time. The current model does not fully support program expansion or the administrative requirements of a modern, inclusive, and risk-managed volunteer program.

Approval of the Plan does not commit the Board to additional financial expenditures. Any future staffing or resource requests would be evaluated through the Initiative Business Case process.

Climate Implications

Climate change is intensifying pressures on regional parks, including increased invasive species, stressed native ecosystems, and more frequent extreme weather events.

Volunteers play a critical role in mitigating these impacts by supporting invasive species removal, rare species monitoring, native plant propagation and restoration, public education, and stewardship activities that enhance ecosystem resilience.

Environmental Implications

Environmental restoration work is crucial to maintaining ecological health. Volunteers are involved with hundreds of invasive species removal events annually, support rare species monitoring through the EcoMonitors program, grow native plants for restoration, educate the public, and act as early reporters of environmental issues in parks.

First Nations Implications

The volunteer program continues to collaborate with local First Nations. For example, six restoration events are planned for 2026 with the Tsawout First Nation on their land adjacent to Island View Beach to remove invasive species.

Volunteers also receive chance finding training to recognize archaeological and cultural features and are instructed to pause work and notify staff—including the CRD archaeologist—who then consults with First Nations, where appropriate, to support respectful stewardship practices.

Social Implications

The Plan supports inclusive community participation by reducing barriers to volunteering and intentionally engaging a more diverse range of residents, including youth, newcomers, Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, and people with disabilities. By expanding access to stewardship opportunities and offering flexible, varied volunteer roles, the Plan helps ensure that the volunteer program at CRD Regional Parks reflects the diversity of the region and strengthens public connection to parks and natural areas.

The Plan also promotes social connection, learning, and well-being through enhanced training, skill development, and opportunities for volunteers to connect with one another. Improved recognition and clear, accessible program administration supports positive volunteer experiences, reduces social and operational risk, and reinforces public trust in CRD Regional Parks' stewardship activities.

CONCLUSION

The CRD Regional Parks Volunteer Program is a high-value asset with demonstrated ecological and social impact and strong community demand. Volunteer participation has grown rapidly in recent years, increasing both program benefits and operational complexity.

The Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031 provides a focused, evidence-based roadmap to responsibly expand capacity, diversify participation, modernize practices, and strengthen stewardship outcomes in alignment with organizational priorities and sector trends.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031 be approved as a strategic framework to guide the growth, diversification, and modernization of the Regional Parks Volunteer Program, supporting stewardship objectives while informing future operational and staffing decisions.

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ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031
Presentation: Volunteer Services Plan 2026-2031