

**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2017**

SUBJECT **Regional Invasive Species Coordinator**

ISSUE

To present the implications and feasibility of housing the duties of a Regional Invasive Species Coordinator within the Capital Regional District (CRD).

BACKGROUND

Invasive species are plants, animals and microbes that are not native to a region and that tend to dominate ecosystems, often forming dense populations and out-competing native species for available resources. Invasive species include terrestrial plants (knotweed, broom), aquatic plants (milfoil weed) and animal species (geese, bullfrogs and carp).

Under the CRD Board strategic priority of Biodiversity & Ecosystem Health, the CRD is committed to following best practices for managing invasive species on CRD lands and to advocate to the provincial and federal governments to maintain and fulfill their roles to protect biodiversity. The CRD Corporate Plan 2015-2018 states we will assess service needs, respond to issues that threaten ecological health, such as invasive species, and profile best practices.

Invasive species represent a significant environmental and economic risk to local ecosystems. They have the potential to overwhelm healthy watersheds and ecosystems, displace native species, disrupt infrastructure and impact service delivery. Climate change will also likely accelerate these risks over the coming decades.

Capital Region Invasive Species Partnership (CRISP) is a collaboration of local stakeholders that has coordinated invasive species control and outreach in the region since 2010 within a limited mandate and budget. CRISP operated through the leadership and coordination of a few municipal staff who have been carrying this workload for the region. CRISP's funding and organizational model make it difficult to attract and retain a suitable coordinator.

CRISP is no longer viable and the CRD has received a request from CRISP and motions from four municipalities (Highlands, Metchosin, North Saanich and Victoria) asking the CRD to investigate the implications, feasibility and/or recommendations to house the duties of a Regional Invasive Species Coordinator within the CRD.

ALTERNATIVES

That the Environmental Services Committee recommend to the CRD Board:

Alternative 1

1. That staff be directed to bring forward an establishing bylaw for a new Regional Invasive Species service for the purposes of coordinating Invasive Species management and education in the Capital Region; and

2. That the new service be supported by a half-time coordinator and provincial funding for 2018, and that staff propose service level changes, if necessary, for 2019 and beyond.

Alternative 2

That the Capital Regional District not create a Regional Invasive Species service.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Invasive species management lacks consistent leadership across the Capital Region, making it difficult to deal with this region-wide issue. Additionally, there is a disconnect between the local governments and the community in species prioritization, response and management. While CRISP provided this role in the past, local government participation was inconsistent. The issues of invasive species affect, or will affect, all areas of the Capital Region. Invasive species can spread quickly across local government borders or arrive anywhere in the region through soil transport, retail sales or personal importation.

The CRD currently has no service for regional control, coordination and education of invasive species management. The initial steps to create a new service would be for staff to bring back an establishing bylaw that includes an associated cost-sharing formula. The new service would be established on an opt-in basis for municipal, First Nations and electoral area participants.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Many invasive plants (i.e., Scotch broom, English ivy, Himalayan blackberry) are firmly established throughout the region, impacting native ecosystems. Invasive species have the ability to establish quickly and spread rapidly, often displacing native plants and becoming the predominant species in an area because their new environment has few natural competitors to keep them in check. Invasive species are increasingly difficult and expensive to control. It is generally accepted that they will become more problematic with anticipated climate change.

The initial work plan of the proposed service would mirror the tasks previously undertaken by CRISP, including coordination of the following:

- planning
- early detection and removal strategies
- species prioritization
- monitoring
- management of contractors treating high-priority species
- mapping and reporting
- training
- public engagement
- education and guidance for disposal
- liaising with internal CRD invasive control programs (Regional Parks and Integrated Water Services)

The initial invasive species of concern would likely be the same as CRISP's program: priority terrestrial plants (e.g., knotweed) and European fire ants. With a regular half-time coordinator, the CRD would be well positioned to coordinate invasive removal/treatment at the most effective times of the year, as well as focusing on consistent education so that residents are aware of best practices for invasive removal and early control, which is one key piece of invasive species management.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff have had preliminary conversations with provincial staff responsible for funding invasive species initiatives through grants. These grants are only for incentive-level funding to support local governments in developing invasive plant/noxious weed programs and bylaws. The grant amount is determined by the Province after receiving an application detailing the scope of work for the upcoming year. Staffing costs are not factored in. The CRD grant amount would likely be similar to CRISP at \$16,000 per year. The highest amount provided to a local government (excluding those with intensive agricultural areas) to date is \$29,300.

CRISP's annual budget for 2016-2017 was approximately \$62,750, consisting of: \$41,750 cash (\$9,750 local government contributions, \$16,000 Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations grant and a \$16,000 Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure contract) plus an estimated \$21,000 of in-kind labour from City of Colwood and District of Saanich staff to manage the program.

The cost of a new CRD-delivered service in 2018 is approximately \$95,000: \$75,000 for labour and \$20,000 operating expenses.

Provincial grant funding would be applied each year to reduce the requisition. Appendix A shows an example breakdown of the requisition cost-sharing, assuming full regional participation and apportioned based on converted assessments, with the provincial grant included.

CONCLUSIONS

Invasive species is one of many stressors that dynamically impact our natural environment because of their ability to establish quickly and spread rapidly, often displacing native plants and animals to become the dominant species in an area. In the past, CRISP coordinated invasive species control and outreach in the region within a limited mandate and budget; however, they are no longer able to provide this function.

Housing the duties of a Regional Invasive Species Coordinator within the CRD is feasible and aligns with the environmental protection, watershed protection, climate change and biodiversity roles for the region. However, this requires establishment of a new service, 2018 Service Plan amendments and a budget for the service that is cost-shared among participants. Staff would emulate the CRISP work plan for 2018 then adjust, if necessary, for 2019 and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Environmental Services Committee recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That staff be directed to bring forward an establishing bylaw for a new Regional Invasive Species service for the purposes of coordinating Invasive Species management and education in the Capital Region; and
2. That the new service be supported by a half-time coordinator and provincial funding for 2018, and that staff propose service level changes, if necessary, for 2019 and beyond.

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DG:cam

Attachments: Appendix A – Example of Requisition Cost-Sharing Breakdown