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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2018

SUBJECT **Stewardship Agreement with Southern Vancouver Island Nature Trails Society**

ISSUE

The Capital Regional District (CRD) has entered into a Stewardship Agreement with the Southern Vancouver Island Nature Trails Society to undertake a pilot project for using volunteers to construct trails in regional parks.

BACKGROUND

In September 2016, pursuant to a presentation by the Southern Vancouver Island Nature Trails Society (NTS) outlining its desire and capacity for undertaking volunteer trail construction in regional parks, the Regional Parks Committee directed staff to work with the NTS and other interested groups and report back on options for pursuing the vision of an integrated trails network within the Regional Parks system.

In discussions with staff, the NTS identified a segment of trail in Thetis Lake Regional Park as a suitable candidate for a pilot project to determine whether use of volunteers for trail construction in regional parks is feasible for both CRD staff and the volunteers. The trail is identified in the approved Thetis Lake Regional Park Management Plan as a proposed hiking/cycling/equestrian trail. The trail currently exists on the ground, but is unofficial, and crosses a small section of adjacent private property (see Attachment 1).

CRD staff and the NTS have entered into a Stewardship Agreement (Attachment 2) under which volunteers under the supervision of the NTS would, with the prior approval of the CRD, improve that trail segment to support hiking, cycling and equestrian use, including re-routing the existing trail to eliminate the trespass on private property. The NTS would be responsible for obtaining all necessary insurance and meeting Worksafe BC requirements for its volunteers. CRD staff would be responsible for providing the NTS with a site briefing outlining known safety issues, if any, and for inspecting the trail post-construction to confirm that it is appropriate for its intended use.

The project will be evaluated by participants prior to a determination regarding whether to apply this model elsewhere in the regional parks system.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Volunteering in parks engages members of the community in the care and restoration of regional parks, and helps to forge long-term connections to these places among the public. This project represents an addition to an already well-established volunteer program in regional parks. If successful, the proposed pilot project may serve as a model that can be deployed in other parks and with other volunteer groups in the CRD.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed project would result in a trail designed and built to sustainably accommodate hikers, cyclists and equestrians. Impacts on environmentally sensitive areas, such as wetlands, would be avoided or mitigated through re-routes of the existing trail or trail improvements if necessary.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

There are no costs to the CRD for this project other than staff time. Any further expansion of the role of volunteers to construct or maintain trails in parks will create additional demands on staff resources for project coordination, inspections, safety (e.g., hazard tree management) etc. These demands must be considered when deciding whether to employ this approach elsewhere in the CRD.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

A portion of the proposed trail passes over undeveloped road right-of-way in the District of Highlands. Staff and the NTS will work with the District of Highlands staff to ensure appropriate authorizations are in place prior to undertaking any work on the proposed trail.

CONCLUSION

The Stewardship Agreement with the NTS will result in a pilot project under which NTS volunteers will undertake improvements on an existing, unofficial trail that has been identified in the Thetis Lake Regional Park Management Plan as a multi-use trail. The project will be evaluated upon completion to determine its potential for wider application in the regional parks system. Use of volunteers for trail improvements in parks more broadly would respond to identified desires among some groups to engage in this work. Volunteering in parks creates many benefits for the parks system, the public and for participants. These considerations must be balanced with the additional staff resources that would be required to support volunteer groups in this work.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Regional Parks Committee recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

That this report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Mike Walton, PhD, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
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Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

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Attachments: Attachment 1 – Map
Attachment 2 – Stewardship Agreement