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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 2018

SUBJECT Parks & Environmental Services Wildfire Suppression Program

ISSUE

To provide information on the Parks & Environmental Services Wildfire Suppression Program.

BACKGROUND

Since 1994, the Capital Regional District (CRD) has operated a wildfire suppression program to respond to wildfires in regional parks. All wildfires that are detected in regional parks are actioned, given the close proximity to urban areas and values adjacent to park lands (e.g., Greater Victoria Water Supply). On average, staff respond to three wildfires and several campfire reports each year.

Each spring, approximately 25 staff are trained to suppress wildfires using the BC Wildfire Service standards. Staff participation on fire crews is voluntary. Fire crew members are required to pass a standard physical fitness test. When the local wildfire danger rating reaches “moderate”, a four person fire crew is placed on standby after normal work hours and on weekends, and will respond to any report of a wildfire that is suspected to be burning in a regional park. When the wildfire danger rating reaches “extreme” a four person fire crew is placed on standby 24 hours a day.

In the event of a significant fire or other emergency in a regional park, Regional Parks staff will initiate a Departmental Operations Centre (DOC) to coordinate the departmental response and to support the emergency incident site. The Regional Parks DOC will be directly supported by the CRD Corporate Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) which will collaborate with key CRD, municipal and other government response agencies, such as Emergency Management BC, to ensure appropriate resourcing and coordination to effectively manage the emergency.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Parks & Environmental Services staff work with municipal fire departments, CRD Integrated Water Services (IWS) and BC Wildfire Service in the suppression of wildfires in regional parks as part of a collaborative mutual aid response agreement. Each year, Parks & Environmental Services and IWS enter into a cost-sharing agreement with the BC Wildfire Service. The agreement ensures that the BC Wildfire Service will supply human and material resources to suppress wildfires on CRD properties that are not under the jurisdictions of municipal fire departments. In exchange for the service, the CRD is charged a fee of \$0.31 per hectare and is required to maintain internal capacity to suppress wildfires.

For those wildfires or other emergencies impacting regional parks that are not readily managed by the initial response, the CRD will activate the Regional Parks DOC and Corporate EOC and will request a task number from Emergency Management BC in order to access and fund additional resources necessary to mitigate the event.

Suppression of wildfires in regional parks that are located within municipal fire department boundaries are the responsibility of those municipal fire departments. CRD wildfire crews assist municipal fire departments in initial wildfire attack efforts and play a larger role in managing wildfires once they are considered to be contained.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

In 2017, the Parks & Environmental Services Wildfire Suppression Program expenses totalled \$48,865. Of the overall costs incurred, standby expenses totalled \$39,360, wildfire suppression supplies totalled \$7,380, and expenses for the cost-sharing agreement with BC Wildfire Service totalled \$2,125. Total fire response costs vary year to year depending on the number of events requiring a response and the contributions of other partners.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The maintenance of a wildfire response program, that includes trained CRD staff and response agreements with the BC Wildfire Service and local fire departments, has enabled fast and effective responses to reported wildfires in regional parks. The program enhances visitor safety and provides a level of protection for adjacent properties.

In Sea to Sea and Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Parks, wildfire suppression is critical for the protection of the Greater Victoria Water Supply Area (GVWSA) which is located immediately north of those regional parks. Any wildfire that reaches the GVWSA has the potential to impact drinking water quality and supply.

CONCLUSION

The Parks & Environmental Services Wildfire Suppression Program's preparedness levels and collaborations with other agencies have led to a successful record in the suppression of wildfires in regional parks and continues to be an important program for protecting regional park lands and neighbouring assets. The program is funded through the Regional Parks core budget and typically costs less than \$50,000 annually.

RECOMMENDATION

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

That this report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Brett Hudson, Acting Senior Manager, Regional Parks
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Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

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