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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2020

SUBJECT Regional Parks – Visitor Use Surveys – 2018 and 2019

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide information on the outcomes of the 2018 and 2019 Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks visitor use surveys.

BACKGROUND

CRD Regional Parks has developed a broad social science survey program to document public opinion toward the regional parks and trails system. This program involves conducting a resident survey every five years, in conjunction with canvassing seven to eight regional parks and trails yearly through a visitor use survey. These two levels of information gathering – at a regional and local scale – allow CRD Regional Parks staff to gather up-to-date information on visitor use, monitor public opinions and determine how local trends relate to the broader patterns concerning the region.

The first resident survey was conducted in 2017 and the results were submitted to the Regional Parks Committee at its meeting of February 21, 2018. This was followed by the first visitor use survey, which took place from June to September 2018 at Kapoor, Mt. Wells, Mt. Work, Sea to Sea, Sooke Hills Wilderness, Sooke Potholes and Thetis Lake regional parks. A second round of visitor use surveys took place from June to September 2019 at Lone Tree Hill, Francis/King and Witty's Lagoon regional parks, as well as the E&N Rail Trail – Humpback Connector, the Galloping Goose and the Lochside regional trails. The data for both visitor use surveys was analyzed throughout 2019. Because of the differences between the visitor use pattern data collected in the regional parks versus the regional trails, a separate report will be generated for the E&N Rail Trail – Humpback Connector, Galloping Goose, and Lochside regional trails and brought to the Regional Parks Committee for information in 2020.

There were 756 questionnaires filled out by park visitors in 2018 and 333 for 2019, respectively, for a grand total of 1,084. The survey report documents the input received from participants (Appendix A). The report offers a summary of answers provided by respondents regarding their use of and experiences in regional parks. Data collection was performed at randomly selected days and times at the main parking lots of the regional parks canvased. This methodology was chosen to maximize the diversity of respondents to the survey.

IMPLICATIONS

Social Implications

Only the views of people visiting the regional parks at the time of the survey who were willing to participate in the survey are represented in this report. People not visiting the regional park system due to concerns, such as those identified in the CRD Regional Parks Service Resident Survey 2017 (meeting dogs off-leash, too far from home, not enough time, feeling unsafe, and too many cyclists), are not represented in the report.

In all the parks surveyed, there was a general satisfaction rating of at least 84% or higher for overall experience. This is in line with the 2017 resident survey, which indicated that 85% of respondents were satisfied with their experience in regional parks and trails.

The survey results provide valuable visitor demographics. Of note, the majority of visitors live in the region, with the exception of Sooke Potholes Regional Park, which had a larger international demographic. All ages were represented across the system; however, certain parks showed stronger use by specific age groups. For example, 56% of the visitors surveyed in Francis/King Regional Park were over the age of 55.

The top four recreational activities in these parks were identified as hiking, biking, swimming and dog walking. Of the visitors surveyed, a third were visiting with a dog. The majority of visitors surveyed were satisfied with other visitor use of the trails within the park.

Service Delivery Implications

The information gathered by the visitor use surveys, combined with the visitation data, can help inform regional parks service delivery. The visitor use survey results will help guide staff in planning for the future management of the regional parks canvased, as well as identify emerging visitor use trends. For example, the visitors surveyed consistently noted that the protection of the natural environment and species should be an area of focus in these parks over the next five years. Overall, the highest areas of satisfaction were the trails and outdoor recreation opportunities. The areas identified for improvement varied by park; however, enforcing CRD Regional Park regulations and CRD Regional Parks information on the CRD website were two of the higher-ranked areas for improvement overall. By serving as a baseline, subsequent surveys will allow staff to measure any changes to visitor satisfaction and visitor use over time.

Financial Implications

The survey data offers a better understanding of the visitor use pressures regional parks are undergoing, especially in relation to use of park facilities and demand for services. For example, at least 75% of the visitors surveyed in each park indicated that they travelled to the regional park by car. As visitation increases, this could correlate with increased pressures on parking infrastructure.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The survey program supports the 2019-2022 CRD Corporate Plan Board Priority 6a-1 by providing a better understanding of parks user groups and demands on park infrastructure.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The program aligns with the Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021 strategic priorities of undertaking resident and visitor use surveys to strengthen community involvement and partnerships.

CONCLUSION

The Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021 identified conducting visitor use surveys as a strategic action to strengthen community involvement and partnership. The 2018 and 2019 CRD Regional Parks Visitor Use Surveys summarize key responses provided by respondents regarding their use of, and experiences in, the 10 regional parks canvassed. The survey results will help guide staff in planning for the future management of the regional parks and identify emerging visitor use trends as well as provide a baseline for subsequent surveys.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That this report be received for information.

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

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: CRD Regional Parks 2018-2019 Visitor Use Survey Summary Report (published February 2020)