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**REPORT TO CAPITAL REGIONAL DISTRICT BOARD
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24, 2020**

SUBJECT **Management Plans for East Sooke and Roche Cove/Matheson Lake Regional Parks**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To initiate management planning processes for East Sooke Regional Park and for Roche Cove and Matheson Lake regional parks.

BACKGROUND

East Sooke Regional Park (East Sooke) is located in the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area in East Sooke (Appendix A). The park was established in 1970 and is 1,456.6 hectares in size. East Sooke is classified as a Regional Wilderness Area because of its large size and remote and rugged nature. It features 48.9 kilometres of trails through forest, marsh and old fields, including the challenging 10-kilometre coast trail with its outstanding views of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Olympic Mountains. In addition to a developed trail system, the park features other facilities, including parking lots, rest areas, a group shelter and information kiosks.

Roche Cove and Matheson Lake regional parks are located in East Sooke within the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area, District of Sooke and District of Metchosin, and are adjacent to Sooke Basin and the Galloping Goose Regional Trail (Appendix A). Roche Cove Regional Park was originally acquired by Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks in 1985 and additional lands were acquired through a Crown Grant in 1990 and through private purchase in 1994. Adjacent Matheson Lake Regional Park was transferred from BC Parks to the CRD in 1994. Combined, Roche Cove and Matheson Lake regional parks comprise approximately 320 hectares. These parks are classified as Regional Natural Areas and feature opportunities for hiking, equestrian, fishing and nature appreciation.

Through management planning, the goals, objectives and policies of the park are set to guide ongoing development and management actions. Even though East Sooke, Roche Cove and Matheson Lake regional parks have been open to the public for 30 to 50 years, they do not have management plans in place. Park management plans are needed now to guide decision-making over the next 15 to 20 years to safeguard critical environmental, cultural heritage and recreational values. Management planning processes are also designed to engage First Nations and include public outreach and consultation.

At the May 27, 2020 CRD Board meeting, the Board approved initiating East Sooke, Roche Cove and Matheson Lake regional park management planning processes. Roche Cove and Matheson Lake will be under one management planning process due to the close proximity of these parks to each other. The proposed project scope is included in Appendix B and the engagement process outline is included in Appendix C.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental & Climate Implications

East Sooke is classified as a Regional Wilderness Area in the Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021. The park includes a variety of ecosystems and species, some of which are federally or provincially listed. The park provides critical habitat for species as diverse as seaside bone lichen, black knotweed, coast microseris, Macoun's meadow-foam, sharp-tailed snake, warty jumping-slug, little brown bat and northern myotis bat. Old fields provide habitat for resident and migratory birds, while forests shelter a diversity of species. The park includes several watersheds which play an important role in water storage, infiltration and nutrient cycling. Major creeks include Pike Creek, Barnes Creek and Vera Brook. A management plan will provide direction for the on-going protection of these important values.

Roche Cove and Matheson Lake are classified as Regional Natural Areas in the Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021. These parks are predominantly within the Wildwood Creek watershed and have known ecological values, including wetland and riparian habitat. The parks provide critical habitat for western painted turtle, blue-grey tail dropper slugs, sharp-tailed snake, threaded vertigo, and salmonid species, among others. The management planning process will consider how best to protect environmental values and mitigate climate change implications, while providing compatible recreational opportunities.

Intergovernmental Implications

East Sooke, Roche Cove and Matheson Lake are within the traditional territories of Sc'ianew First Nation and the T'Sou-ke Nation. These Nations will be invited to participate in the planning process to address their interests in the parks. Local, regional, provincial and federal agencies will be invited to participate in the planning process where they have legal, jurisdictional or other interests relevant to the management planning process.

Social Implications

There were approximately 205,000 visits to East Sooke in 2018, making it one of the most highly visited parks in the regional parks system. Visitors to East Sooke engage in a range of activities, including walking, hiking, wildlife viewing, photography, beach activities, picnicking and organized group events. At Roche Cove and Matheson Lake, visitors engage in similar recreational activities as well as equestrian, swimming, fishing and boating. Park management plans provide for stakeholder and public involvement during their development, and seek to ensure that the parks are managed in an environmentally responsible manner while providing sustainable recreational experiences.

Financial Implications

Costs associated with this project will be funded by the Regional Parks core budget.

Service Delivery Implications

Development and implementation of park management plans are a key aspect of the regional parks service.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The 2019-2022 Corporate Plan notes community needs relating to environmental stewardship, protecting natural resources, and reconciling First Nations interests with respect to Park Management Plans. The management planning process includes opportunities to work together with the Sc'ianew and T'Sou-ke First Nations and will outline goals and actions for environmental stewardship and protection of environmental values in the parks.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021 includes a strategic priority to strengthen the management of existing parks and trails, and strengthen community involvement and partnerships. The strategic plan includes an action to complete or update park and trail management plans for priority parks and trails. The management planning process as presented is consistent with this direction and will include opportunities for stakeholders, government and public involvement.

CONCLUSION

At the May 27, 2020 CRD Board meeting, the Board approved initiating East Sooke, Roche Cove and Matheson Lake regional park management planning processes this year. Accordingly, a management planning process will be initiated for East Sooke and another for Roche Cove and Matheson Lake with opportunities for First Nations, local, regional, provincial and federal agency involvement, as per the attached project scopes and engagement processes. The completed plans will provide strategic direction for the effective management of these parks for the next 15 to 20 years by addressing environmental protection, recreational opportunities, cultural heritage management and park development.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Capital Regional District Board receive this report for information.

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ATTACHMENT

- Appendix A: Location Map
- Appendix B: Project Scope
- Appendix C: Engagement Process