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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2020

SUBJECT 2020 CRD Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program

ISSUE SUMMARY

To update the Regional Parks Committee on the Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program from January to August 2020.

BACKGROUND

The CRD Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program has evolved over the past several years. With the continued growth of the regional parks land base and the increasing number of visitors, balancing conservation and multiple recreational interests will continue to be a key focus. A Compliance and Enforcement Program, with a focus on compliance education, is one of the best tools to help alleviate the pressures on regional parks and trails. In 2020, the CRD restructured its Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program by changing its park technician position to a senior ranger and tasking the senior ranger with oversight of the program. In addition to hiring the senior ranger position, the CRD approved the hiring of two new full-time park rangers, bringing the full-time park ranger allocation to 3.5 positions; four auxiliary rangers were also hired for peak season coverage.

Park rangers are the frontline ambassadors in regional parks and on regional trails. They support a broad range of events, activities and issues, such as:

- serving as friendly ambassadors for CRD regional parks and trails, building relationships and assisting park visitors
- deterring negative activities through a uniformed, diplomatic and authoritative presence
- promoting voluntary compliance by educating the public about park regulations, such as smoking, dogs on-leash and, most recently, social distancing associated with COVID-19
- supporting and monitoring permitted events
- working with bylaw enforcement, police, fire and rescue service, BC Ambulance and other departments and agencies on issues found in regional parks and on regional trails
- dealing with homelessness as it impacts regional parks and connecting individuals with support services
- participating in facility and trail maintenance
- conducting compliance and enforcement patrols
- undertaking routine inspections in response to complaints or incidents
- investigating alleged non-compliance with legislation when enforcement action is being contemplated
- providing wildfire support outside of municipal fire districts in the form of wildfire mop-up duties
- educating park visitors on First Nations traditions and culture

The CRD also uses a combination of park rangers and bylaw enforcement officers to provide a regular presence in parks and on regional trails. The Compliance and Enforcement Program supports CRD Board priorities and CRD Regional Parks strategic goals around climate action, environmental stewardship and protecting the natural environment by ensuring park visitors use

regional parks and trails in a way that is safe and consistent with the principles driving those strategic directions.

Conducting compliance and enforcement patrols in regional parks reduces the risks of major incidents, as park rangers and bylaw officers address hazardous behaviors (e.g., cliff jumping, drinking, etc.) before accidents can happen—this reduces the burden on other municipal response agencies. Appendix A provides a summary of compliance and enforcement actions in 2020 within regional parks and trails.

During the core 2020 season (May to August), bylaw officers spent over 670 hours patrolling Thetis Lake Regional Park (60% of their overall patrols), with park rangers spending an additional 166 hours in that park. Municipal resources also provide valuable services in their capacity as first responders and are, on occasion, requested to attend regional parks to deal with matters beyond the capacity of CRD staff. For example, in 2020, Thetis Lake Regional Park, which sees an annual visitation level of 500,000, was identified as an area of concern by View Royal Fire Department due to the volume of call outs. For the past two summers, View Royal Fire Department was called out to Thetis Lake Regional Park 14 times (2019 – 5 times and 2020 – 9 times); medical assist (5), rescue (4), fire (3), assist police (1), and diesel spill in parking lot (1).

In 2020, COVID-19 created increased pressure on the program, as park rangers and bylaw officers were out in the parks and on regional trails educating visitors on social distancing. Overall, visitation to regional parks (excluding regional trails) has increased approximately 22% for the period January to August 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. This is likely the result of a number of other park agencies being closed during COVID-19, along with people recreating locally.

CONCLUSION

In 2020, the CRD restructured its Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program by changing its park technician position to a senior ranger position and tasking the senior ranger with oversight of the program. To date in 2020, regional parks experienced a 22% increase in visits. The CRD Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program will continue to focus on compliance education as one of the best tools to help alleviate the pressures and challenges the system faces.

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: 2020 Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Summary