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## REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021

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**SUBJECT**     CRD Regional Trails Visitor Use Survey – 2019

### **ISSUE SUMMARY**

To provide information on the outcomes of the Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Trails Visitor Use Survey – 2019.

### **BACKGROUND**

Regional Parks has developed an in-house social science survey program to document public opinion about 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 Regional Parks staff to gather up-to-date information on visitor use, monitor public opinion and determine how local trends relate to the broader patterns concerning the region.

The first resident survey under this program 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 presenting visitor use surveys conducted in 10 regional parks in 2018 and 2019 to the Regional Parks Committee at its meeting of February 26, 2020. Because of the differences between use patterns of visitors to the regional parks versus the regional trails, a separate report was presented about the regional trail visitor use survey conducted on the E&N Rail Trail – Humpback Connector, Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails in 2019.

There were 854 questionnaires filled out by regional trails visitors in 2019: 227 for the E&N Rail Trail-Humpback Connector, 378 for the Galloping Goose Regional Trail and 249 for the Lochside Regional Trail. Data collection was performed on randomly selected days and times at 11 sites along the regional trails for a total of 236 hours of surveying. This methodology was chosen to maximize the diversity of respondents to the survey. The survey report documents the input received from participants (Appendix A).

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### *Social Implications*

The visitor use surveys offer a point-in-time snapshot of visitor use patterns. Only the views of people visiting the regional trails at the time of the survey who were willing to participate are represented in this report. The data obtained are not statistically representative and cannot be generalized to a broader population, hence the need to consider the results of the survey cautiously.

For all three trails, the general satisfaction rating was high for overall experience and outdoor recreation (80% or higher). Respondents described the regional trails as one of the most important aspects of the region and recognized the positive impacts these corridors had on their

life, including improving their physical and emotional well-being, and fostering environmental values and appreciation for nature. Respondents expressed the desire for more recreation and active transportation connectivity in the CRD.

The survey results provide valuable visitor demographics. Of note, the majority of visitors lived in the region, with most of them living in Saanich, Victoria and Langford for the Galloping Goose Regional Trail; in Saanich and Victoria for the Lochside Regional Trail; and Victoria and View Royal for the E&N Rail Trail-Humpback Connector. Respondents to the survey tended to have an older age distribution in all three regional trails (45-65+). These results parallel the 2013 Regional Trails Survey results.

Respondents used the Galloping Goose and Lochside regional trails mostly for commuting, while the E&N Rail Trail-Humpback Connector for fitness reasons. Respondents mainly biked on the three trails, followed by walking and running. Like the 2013 Regional Trails Survey, respondents used the three trails year-round for less than one hour to up to two hours each visit. Respondents stated that increased connectivity between regional trails and municipal trail networks encouraged them to access all three trails more frequently in the past five years, as travelling through the downtown core was perceived to be safer on the trails.

#### *Service Delivery Implications*

The information gathered by the visitor use surveys, combined with the visitation data, can help inform regional trails service delivery. For example, the visitors surveyed expressed the following concerns about all three trails: increase in traffic and speeding, lack of separation between trail users, poor trail etiquette, presence of motorized vehicles, unsafe road crossings, limited signage and lighting, illegal activity and limited facilities. Respondents suggested addressing those issues by expanding the regional trails network, improving regional connectivity, widening or twinning the trails, strengthening trail etiquette, establishing and enforcing a speed limit, improving dog management, improving road crossings, providing additional lighting, facilities and signage. The survey data offers a better understanding of the visitor use pressures regional trails are undergoing in relation to demand for services and offers direction for the future management of these trails network.

#### *Financial Implications*

Consistent with the trail counts, which show an increase in visitation from 3 million visits in 2015 to 3.8 million in 2019 (+21%), the majority of respondents stated they increased their use of all three trails over that period, highlighting the important role these active transportation and recreation routes are playing and will play in the future for climate change mitigation in the CRD. As use continues to grow, increased pressures on the trails infrastructure is expected to rise, as well as demand for services. Addressing the concerns expressed by visitors will require additional service delivery.

#### *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 2019 CRD Regional Trails Visitor Use Survey summarizes key responses provided by respondents regarding their use of, and experiences on, the regional trails. The survey results will help guide staff in planning for the future management of the regional trails 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:	Steve May, P.Eng., Acting General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT**

Appendix A: CRD Regional Trails Visitor Use Survey – 2019