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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2021

SUBJECT **Initial Engagement Reports for the Mount Work, East Sooke, Matheson Lake and Roche Cove Regional Parks Management Plans**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To summarize and present highlights of the initial round of public engagement for the development of management plans for Mount Work, East Sooke, Matheson Lake and Roche Cove regional parks.

BACKGROUND

In May 2020, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board provided approval for Regional Parks to initiate three park management planning processes for four regional parks (Mount Work, East Sooke and Roche Cove/Matheson Lake). Project descriptions and engagement plans for each of these management planning processes were provided to the Board in June 2020 and the projects were started shortly thereafter.

The objectives of engagement are to inform people about the park management planning process, to seek input and information and to discuss various interests and ideas about how these lands are to be managed. Two rounds of engagement opportunities are scheduled as part of the preparation of these park management plans. The first round of engagement occurred between June and November 2020. First Nations, government agencies, stakeholders and the public were notified of opportunities for engagement by way of letter, email, advertising and social media. Online surveys were available for at least four weeks.

Initial Engagement Reports have been prepared for Mount Work (Appendix A), East Sooke (Appendix B) and Matheson Lake and Roche Cove (Appendix C) that summarize the engagement steps and key input received for the first round.

Mount Work

The Malahat, Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tsawout and Tseycum First Nations were notified and provided information by letter of the project and were invited to participate in the planning process. Two meetings and a site visit were held with the WSÁNEĆ Land Use Committee to date that included representatives from the Tsartlip, Tsawout and Tseycum communities. Continued participation is expected as the planning work continues. Input was also provided by staff of eight government agencies. Internal CRD engagement is occurring with Environmental Resource Management staff related to Hartland Landfill activities and solid waste management planning. Additional information regarding engagement with the mountain biking community will be presented with the Solid Waste Management Plan public engagement report, scheduled to be presented to the Environmental Services Committee at its April meeting. Approximately 1,175 people engaged with the CRD in this initial public participation phase through online comment forms, emails/phone calls, interviews and small group meetings.

In general, some of the key themes heard through the engagement process included:

- the diversity of recreational opportunities is appreciated (from swimming or fishing at a lake, to the challenge of hiking or mountain biking in Mount Work’s terrain, to horseback riding)
- protection of ecosystems, species at risk and nature is an important aspect of the park for many people
- acknowledging, honouring and working with First Nations is desirable
- the park provides for health – human health and nature’s health
- more and updated mountain biking opportunities are desired
- there are various issues that need to be considered and addressed (including unsanctioned trail building, conservation needs, parking, trespass on private lands and conflicting desired experiences/attitudes)

East Sooke

Initial conversations have taken place with T’Sou-ke and Sc’ianew First Nations and the CRD is looking forward to further dialogue and to building stronger relationships with these communities. Meetings were held with three local government agencies and two provincial ministries. Twelve interviews were conducted with stakeholder groups representing local conservation, recreation or service delivery interests in the parks. One on-site meeting was held with local residents with an interest in park access. In total, 813 online survey responses and 14 written comments were received from residents and interest groups.

In general, some of the key themes heard through the engagement process included:

- the park is highly valued by virtually all respondents as a rugged, pristine and vast wilderness area close to Victoria; many consider it the “gem” of the regional parks system
- most respondents don’t want the park to be commercialized or overdeveloped
- many respondents are concerned about the increasing number of people using the park and the impacts of this use on the natural environment and the visitor experience
- a large number of respondents expressed concern about the parking situation at Aylard Farm and the difficult access along Becher Bay Road up to the park entrance
- comments about dog management in the park were mixed; 40 respondents spoke favourably about dogs and support maintaining the current under-control policy, while 133 respondents spoke negatively about dogs and support increased regulation of dogs in the park
- the majority of respondents are satisfied with the existing trail system and recreational offerings, while some respondents want new recreational activities considered
- there is strong support for improving trail signage, park mapping and cell coverage in the park to assist with general orientation and for emergency response
- many respondents want to learn more about First Nations culture and history in the park and to ensure that vulnerable cultural heritage features are secured and protected

Matheson Lake and Roche Cove

Initial conversations have taken place with T’Sou-ke and Sc’ianew First Nations and the CRD is looking forward to further dialogue and to building stronger relationships with these communities. Meetings were also held with seven government agencies. Two interviews were conducted with stakeholder groups holding a park-related tenure or agreement, and eight interviews were held with stakeholder groups representing local conservation, recreation or service delivery interests in

the parks. Agencies with specific expertise also provided information relevant to the park management planning process. Additionally, 495 online survey responses and 17 written comments were received from the public and interest groups.

In general, some of the key themes heard through the engagement process included:

- the parks are valued for being pristine and wild
- concern that increased visitation is affecting park values and facilities (parking, washrooms)
- erosion/drainage issues and invasive species removal should be addressed
- important cultural heritage should be highlighted
- the parks are accessible to a broad range of abilities and to the local community
- although the level of recreational opportunities is seen as appropriate, there is a desire for improved access to the lake, continued equestrian access, recognition of rock climbing areas and for mountain biking trails
- conflicts between users (cyclists, dog walkers) are primarily occurring on the Galloping Goose
- additional signage is needed to improve safety, emergency response and compliance

CONCLUSION

The initial engagement phase allows an opportunity for interested parties and stakeholders to provide input at the onset of the planning process. This is important because it provides the CRD with information and insight into what is working well in the parks, what issues may need to be addressed and what people envision for the long-term direction of the parks. In order to achieve the highest degree of public support possible, the work of obtaining preliminary feedback, analyzing comments and addressing interests are important for the next step of developing draft management plans. When draft plans are completed, they will be brought to the Regional Parks Committee and the CRD Board and, subject to Board direction, a second round of public engagement will occur.

RECOMMENDATION

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

That this report be received for information.

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Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Mount Work Regional Park – Management Plan Initial Engagement Report
- Appendix B: East Sooke Regional Park – Management Plan Initial Engagement Report
- Appendix C: Matheson Lake and Roche Cove Regional Park – Management Plan Initial Engagement Report