

**REPORT TO FIRST NATIONS RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2021**

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**SUBJECT     Ecological Asset Management Plan**

**ISSUE SUMMARY**

Update regarding implementation of Board Priority 3a-4, relating to natural asset management planning with a First Nations lens.

**BACKGROUND**

The Board's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan includes Board Priority 3a-4:

To prepare an ecological asset management plan that includes natural infrastructure, First Nations guiding principles, First Nations language & place names, historical uses & invasive species management.

The Regional Board has considered undertaking ecological asset management planning in the past but ultimately did not include natural assets in our corporate Asset Management Strategy.

On July 6, 2016 the Board endorsed a Notice of Motion requesting the CRD's Asset Management approach be refined to include Natural Capital, attached at Appendix A.

On December 14, 2016, in follow up to the Notice of Motion, the Board received a report with background information related Natural Asset Management (Natural Capital) and that staff were initiating some work around natural asset management within service delivery. The report was received for information, attached at Appendix B.

In June 2017, the Board received a presentation regarding the Municipal Natural Assets Initiative (MNAI) Request for Expressions of Interest. Staff provided a verbal overview of what would be entailed in submitting a proposal in regards to costs, time and staffing. The Board did not direct further action at that time.

On March 13, 2019 the Board adopted the Corporate Asset Management Policy and Strategy. The Board did not include natural asset management in the strategy. See Appendix C.

Staff have undertaken preliminary investigations to determine the cost of retaining a consultant to incorporate ecological asset management planning into our Corporate Asset Management program. Initial estimates range as high as \$300,000-\$500,000. Additional funds may be required to incorporate an Indigenous lens into the plan to meet the full intent of the Board Priority.

In the absence of an ecological asset management plan, staff have continued to advance a number of initiatives that meet many of the same objectives as an ecological asset management plan. Concurrently, staff have been incrementally advancing more understanding of Indigenous perspectives through additional consultation and information-sharing with local First Nations on land-altering works and on parks management projects. More information on existing initiatives is discussed below.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### *Alternative 1*

The First Nations Relations Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff proceed with ongoing, existing projects and activities that identify and proactively value ecological features in the region and support strategic engagement of First Nations regarding ecosystem values, taking care of land and water, Indigenous languages and place names.

### *Alternative 2*

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### *Environmental & Climate Implications*

Understanding the multitude of ways that ecosystems support and enable communities in the region, whether as ‘ecosystem services’ supporting human needs or as ‘gifts’ to which we respond with reciprocity, leads decision-makers to make choices that nurture ecosystem abundance and resilience. Enhancing our collective understanding of ecological values in the region and proactively taking steps to nurture these values will support both climate mitigation (by protecting, managing and restoring of natural habitat that provide important carbon sinks) and adaptation (by maintaining natural mechanisms to reduce flooding and sea-level rise risks).

A variety of existing initiatives serve to identify and proactively value ecological features in the region and support strategic engagement of First Nations regarding ecosystem values, taking care of land and water, Indigenous languages and place names. Related, ongoing work includes the following:

- Biodiversity inventory for the capital region; to protect biological diversity and foster extraordinary environmental stewardship, CRD staff are engaging with key stakeholders (municipalities, provincial/federal governments and the stewardship sector) to promote biodiversity awareness with the public and to compile a regional biodiversity inventory. Tasks include:
  - Facilitating a regional discussion on biodiversity information;
  - Compiling existing relevant biodiversity data, information and research from various sources to identify data gaps and to support local government responsibilities;
  - Promoting public awareness of the importance of biodiversity and its role in improving harbour and watershed health through outreach and education and collaboration with stewardship groups.
- Updating the intertidal and backshore Harbours Ecological Inventory and Rating of the five core area harbours (Victoria and Esquimalt harbours, the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and Esquimalt Lagoon to Albert Head); using low tide orthophoto imagery of the intertidal zone and backshore to gather data and classify the information into a spatial data set of biological and physical features and assign an ecological rating of the shoreline. This project is underway and will be completed by early 2022. In 2022, underwater video will be used to update the subtidal inventory for the five core area harbours. All maps and datasets will be publically available on the CRDs Harbour Atlas.

- Completing the fourth update to the land cover data for the region with a specific emphasis in changes in tree cover and impervious surface cover in a time series (1986, 2007, 2011, and 2019). Potential riparian habitat and potential tree planting areas were also identified. These data are provided to municipalities and First Nations to support urban forest plans, storm water management and watershed initiatives.
- Watershed report cards; CRD is working on a tool to assess the health of watersheds in the region, using various parameters (i.e. tree cover, impervious cover, road density, water quality and quantity).
- Updating the Regional Parks Strategic Plan; provides an opportunity to incorporate strategies regarding First Nations guiding principles, languages and place names, where requested by the Nations.
- Ongoing management planning of Regional Parks; staff regularly assess and consider ecosystem values and work with First Nations to understand and protect cultural heritage values, incorporate Indigenous place names, and support traditional use in parks.
- Land Altering Works policy and MOU; staff conduct impact assessments for land-altering works and engage in quarterly reviews with the WLC, which includes consideration of ecological values as well as archaeological and cultural values.
- Invasive species management; The Capital Region Invasive Species Program brings together local governments and First Nations with an interest in, or management responsibilities for, invasive species within the capital region to pursue a coordinated approach to effectively and efficiently managing invasive species. Priority focus areas are collaboration, capacity building and training, regional education and outreach programs, early detection and rapid response for new invasive species in the region, disposal, inventory and mapping and restoration, research and trials. Four Nations are currently participating in this program and CRD staff are actively working with T'Souke Nation, District of Sooke and the Province on the management of a significant knotweed infestation on the lower Sooke River.
- Updating the CRD Climate Action Strategy; includes opportunities for collaboration with First Nations on key regional climate adaptation priorities and actions.
- Watershed protection in the Sooke Lake watershed and Leech River watershed; to protect the natural functions of the watershed in order to supply good quality drinking water, for example proactive investments in fire suppression and in enhancing green infrastructure by acquiring and restoring additional sources of drinking water in the Leech watershed.

There is increasing understanding globally that respecting Indigenous worldviews and approaches to ecosystem management can help support resilient ecosystems and communities (including health and food security) in the face of the climate emergency. Continuing to learn from Indigenous perspectives on ecological values will enable the CRD to more effectively collaborate with local Nations on climate solutions for the benefit of the region.

*Intergovernmental Implications (First Nations)*

Staff have considered how Board Priority 3a-4 links First Nations guiding principles, languages, place names and historical uses to the preparation of an ecological asset management plan. The concept of 'assets' tends to imply ownership, and a view of nature as a service provider, which does not easily align with Indigenous worldviews which recognize the reciprocal relationship amongst humans and all beings in nature. Further, Indigenous languages and place names are definitively not 'assets' of the CRD.

In comparison to how an ecological asset management plan tends to highlight separate parts of the environment for their specific function, many Indigenous worldviews take a more holistic view. A better understanding of Indigenous perspectives and guiding principles related to ecosystem values, language, place names and traditional use would be important foundational work prior to proceeding with ecological asset valuation, with a possible re-framing of the approach to valuing ecosystem features in a manner that incorporates Indigenous perspectives.

Upcoming opportunities to deepen CRD awareness of First Nations guiding principles include:

- Development and delivery of Regional Parks Indigenous interpretive cultural programming, which includes working with First Nations regarding guiding principles for how to respectfully and reciprocally engage with all beings, as well as incorporating First Nations language, place names and historical uses into Parks programs.
- Inclusive governance; where First Nations have nominated representatives to participate in CRD Standing Committees, First Nations can offer their perspectives and guiding principles as related to a wide range of CRD governance and decision-making.
- Annual Forum of All Councils; provides an opportunity for municipal leaders to hear directly from First Nations leaders on a variety of topics. For the 2022 Forum, First Nations Relations staff will ask First Nations if they would like to share Indigenous understandings of ecological values and guiding principles for taking care of land and water in support of the CRD's Climate Action Strategy.
- Protection and Conservation of Heritage Sites; staff are working with First Nations on how to respect cultural heritage sites.
- Cultural sensitivity training for staff who engage directly with First Nations; may include opportunities to learn Indigenous perspectives on taking care of land and water.
- Cultural training sessions for Regional Parks staff, Salt Spring Island parks staff, and Southern Gulf Islands park commissioners and contractors; will provide an opportunity for First Nations to share their perspectives on ecological and cultural values and on taking care of land and water.

Through these opportunities, CRD staff, Directors and the public will be encouraged to learn from Indigenous perspectives on understanding, protecting and conserving ecosystem values.

*Financial Implications*

Alternative 1 would require no additional resources, as all current initiatives are already within existing budgets. If the Board wishes to proceed with an Ecological Asset Management Plan,

approximately \$500,000 would need to be included in the 2022 provisional budget to retain a consultant to develop the plan.

*Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities*

Further to Priority 3a-4 to prepare an ecological asset management plan, additional Strategic Board Priorities identified in the 2019 – 2022 CRD Corporate Plan relate to valuing ecological features in the region and working with First Nations to take care of land and water. These include:

3a-3 Work with First Nations on taking care of the land and water while providing space for cultural and ceremonial use, food and medicine harvesting, traditional management practices and reclaiming Indigenous place names.

5a-6 Evaluate & respond to Climate Change impacts & risks to water supply

6a-1 Ensure appropriate funding for parks & trails infrastructure, improvements & maintenance by updating the Regional Parks Strategy with consideration to ecological, recreation & reconciliation principles, land acquisition capacity, & expanded partnerships with First Nations & parks user groups

6b-1 Provide residents with information for advancing with invasive species management by increasing the number of partnerships

15c-2 Integrate asset management & risk analysis into our capital planning processes to strengthen our fiscal management practices & support resource sustainability

*Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies*

Related strategies include:

- Special Task Force on First Nations Relations Final Report and the Statement of Reconciliation
- Regional Climate Action Strategy
- Regional Parks Strategic Plan
- Regional Water Supply Strategic Plan
- Corporate Asset Management Strategy

**CONCLUSION**

In 2019, when the Corporate Asset Management Policy and Strategy was adopted by the CRD Board, the direction was to not include natural asset management. Instead, staff have implemented Board Priority 3a-4 through a variety of other existing initiatives which serve to identify and proactively value ecological features in the region and support strategic engagement of First Nations regarding ecosystem values, taking care of land and water, Indigenous languages and place names.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The First Nations Relations Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff proceed with ongoing, existing projects and activities that identify and proactively value ecological features in the region and support strategic engagement of First Nations regarding ecosystem values, taking care of land and water, Indigenous languages and place names.

Submitted by:	Caitlyn Vernon, MES, Manager, First Nations Relations
Concurrence:	Kristen Morley, J.D., General Manager, Corporate Services & Corporate Officer
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P. Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Nelson Chan, MBA, FCPA, FCMA, Chief Financial Officer
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Appendix A: Notice of Motion: Refinement of CRD's Asset Management Approach to Include Natural Capital, July 6, 2016

Appendix B: Staff Report: Natural Asset Management (Natural Capital), November 23, 2016

Appendix C: Staff Report: Corporate Asset Management Policy and Strategy, March 6, 2019