

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE  
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2021**

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**SUBJECT**     **2022 Service Planning – Parks & Natural Resource Management**

**ISSUE SUMMARY**

To provide the Regional Parks Committee with an overview of core service levels, new and progressing initiatives and performance metrics related to the Parks & Natural Resource Management Community Need. These activities are undertaken by the Regional Parks Division and deliver on approved Board Strategic Priorities and the Capital Regional District (CRD) Corporate Plan.

**BACKGROUND**

The CRD Board identified its strategic priorities in early 2019. Subsequently, staff prepared the 2019-2022 CRD Corporate Plan to align with this direction. The CRD Corporate Plan presents the work the CRD needs to deliver over the Board term to meet the region's fifteen most important needs (community needs). These initiatives are delivered in conjunction with the mandated core services and regulatory requirements that the CRD is accountable for delivering. The priorities were reconfirmed by the CRD Board at the annual check-ins on May 13, 2020 and May 12, 2021.

At the start of the Board term, staff identified that the ambitious plan for the region would require a significant amount of effort and resources to action and implement Board and Corporate Priorities, and to keep pace with the anticipated increase in service demands, primarily driven by population growth and construction activity. The general level of effort deployed by the organization has been increasing to keep pace since the direction was set and, in some cases, emerging trends and changes in economic activity have had a significant impact on the demand for services driving additional resource requirements.

This is the final year of service plan and budget approvals for this CRD Board, as well as the final year of implementation of its strategic priorities. For 2022, staff are recommending a significant package of work to finalize the delivery of the strategic priorities and Corporate Plan. Implementation timeframes for much of the work initiated in 2022 will carry into 2023.

2022 is a transition year for the CRD Board. Staff anticipate that any service planning requests for 2023 will be focused on operational adjustments while the Board is determining its strategic priorities for the 2023-2026 term.

The Community Need Summary Report (Appendix A) provides an overview of the strategic context for service areas by department, core service levels for services, new initiatives and a summary of the business model and performance metrics associated with targeted outcomes. A summary of the capital investment made in support of the Community Need (Appendix B) and the initiatives progressed over the course of this Board's term (Appendix C) have also been appended to this report.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### *Alternative 1*

The Regional Parks Committee recommends the Committee of the Whole recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

That Appendix A, Community Need Summary – Parks & Natural Resource Management be approved as presented and form the basis of the 2022-2026 Financial Plan.

### *Alternative 2*

That Appendix A, Community Need Summary – Parks & Natural Resource Management be approved as amended and form the basis of the 2022-2026 Financial Plan.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### *Financial Implications*

The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) is taking steps to mitigate the financial impacts resulting from the work. ELT has reviewed the phasing of the work for 2022 to ensure that the activities and resources are allocated as efficiently as possible. Phasing out the initiatives over a longer period of time helps avoid delays that can occur when staff are too thinly spread across projects. Additionally, timing initiatives to start mid-year will also reduce the impact in 2022, but will have an incremental annualization impact in 2023 for ongoing impacts.

The CRD continues to look for ways to fund its services in a manner that relieves affordability pressure for the taxpayer. This is reflected in the policy for reserve balance measures and gaps/surplus, which was approved by the CRD Board on July 14, 2021. The CRD has had other funding successes optimizing capital funding and leveraging grant funding in a more aggressive way than ever before.

At the June 23, 2021 Regional Parks Committee meeting, staff were directed to report back to the Committee as part of the service planning process with a recommended financing option for future investments in land and major capital works that incorporate finance guidelines currently under development.

The 2022 Regional Parks budget introduces a plan of debt financing for land acquisition allowing for redirection of existing requisition capacity to cover adjustments to operating costs. This plan allows for enhancement to regional parks management by increasing staffing and materials in order to better service increased visitation and land acquisition which has outpaced operational growth in recent years.

Finally, where feasible, an incremental change management strategy has been adopted for larger projects. This means that divisions are testing out the objectives and delivery approach with a proof-of-concept and then deploying out more broadly, if the benefits can be demonstrated. This has been a successful strategy adopted for our enterprise asset management strategy deployment, for example.

A comprehensive overview of the resources required to advance the initiatives listed in all Community Need Summaries, including all proposed staffing changes, will be presented to the Committee of the Whole at the 2022 provisional budget review.

#### *Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities*

The current Board Strategic Plan priority initiative under Climate Action and Environmental Stewardship is to “Ensure appropriate funding for parks and trails infrastructure, improvements and maintenance by updating the Regional Parks Strategy with consideration to ecological, recreation and reconciliation principles, land acquisition capacity, and expanded partnerships with First Nations.” Actions and key deliverables to date include: renewing the Land Acquisition Fund for an additional 10 years; development of an asset management plan; \$925,000 increase in the operating budget to address deficiencies and asset replacement; additional staffing; restructuring areas; and optimizing assets – to make the regional parks and trails system more efficient and cost effective.

#### *Service Delivery Implications*

CRD Regional Parks faces challenges to achieve basic service levels aimed at protecting and restoring regional park values, while offering compatible outdoor recreation opportunities. These challenges to the regional park system have steadily increased over a number of years as the size and complexity of the parks and park issues have grown. Adequate resources are required to effectively manage the park system and to meet the basic service levels required to deliver the CRD Regional Park mandate and CRD Board directions. As such, the identification of gaps and the resources required to fill those gaps is a critical step in determining and delivering the service delivery model going forward.

At its March 27, 2019 meeting, the Parks & Environment Committee directed staff to identify options during the 2020 budget process for service level adjustments to sustain CRD Regional Parks service delivery. At the October 23, 2019 meeting, staff presented sustainable service delivery report cards that identified that financial and human resources were no longer sufficient to meet current asset renewal demands. That meeting resulted in two motions related to sustainable service delivery: 1) that an additional \$925,000 be requisitioned each year for capital reserves to fund the refurbishment and replacement of existing assets; and 2) that staff report back in 2020 on strategies to ensure that sufficient funding is in place in future years to sustain the Regional Parks service. At the November 25, 2020 Regional Parks Committee meeting, a Regional Parks Revenue Generation Strategy 2021-2024 was presented. At this time, the Regional Parks Committee referred the matter back to staff to report back to the Committee with a set of revisions. At the February 24, 2021 committee meeting, staff presented alternatives for implementing the revenue strategy. The Regional Parks Committee directed staff to report back during the Regional Parks Strategic Planning process on additional options for parking revenues in regional parks.

Staff have undertaken various initiatives to make the regional parks and trails system more efficient and cost effective, such as an organizational review of its current structure, streamlining business processes, restructuring operational areas, repurposing positions and optimizing assets. In 2021, in line with a development of corporate-wide financing guidelines, reserve levels were reviewed to further optimize planned use and source of funds. Most recently, following a request from the Chief Administrative Officer, CRD Regional Parks has undertaken a comprehensive

service level exercise. This exercise identified CRD Regional Parks' ongoing needs to meet core service levels now and into the future. Gaps identified in financial and human resources are being used to justify a 2022 budget adjustment for CRD Regional Parks.

See Appendix A for more details about core service delivery.

### New initiatives proposed for 2022:

Staff have identified three initiatives in support of this community need that will have budget implications in 2022 (Table 1). The key drivers for this work are:

1. Responding to an increase in demand for an existing service: visitation to regional parks has grown substantially, from around 5 million visitors a year in 2010 to over 8.5 million visitors in 2020. At the same time, the size of the parks and trails system the CRD is accountable for has grown by more than a third. This continues to place considerable strain on the CRD's ability to maintain service levels, protect park values, ensure public safety, meet asset maintenance requirements, meet public expectations for suitable recreation opportunities, and accessible facilities.
2. Imperative to operationalize capital investments: new requirement to maintain and monitor two aeration systems which are being installed at Elk and Beaver Lake to remediate toxic blue-green algae blooms.

**Table 1: Parks & Natural Resource Management Community Need Initiatives**

#	Initiative	Description	Year(s)	FTE impacts (2022)	Cost impacts (2022)	Funding source
6a-13	Elk/Beaver Lake Aerator Maintenance	Maintenance and monitoring of new aeration equipment	2022	--	\$100K	Requisition
6a-18	Accessibility Study	Evaluate current regional parks system against accessibility standards/best practices	2022	--	\$30K	Requisition
6g-1	Regional Parks Service	Comprehensive service level review of Regional Parks services	2022	+26 FTE* ongoing	\$3.5M	New funding model, allocations, requisition

\* includes support service(s) adjustment

This information reflects the business case costs that the ELT reviewed as part of its annual assessment of initiatives.

### 6a-13 Elk/Beaver Lake Aerator Maintenance

Over the last several years, the appearance of toxic blue-green algae blooms has indicated

diminished health of the lake ecosystem and has caused the closure of the lakes on several occasions by the Vancouver Island Health Authority. Due to increased concerns regarding the health and safety of users of the park and the overall concern for the aquatic environment, the remediation of the lake ecosystem has become a priority for the CRD.

Two aeration systems are needed to address the low dissolved oxygen conditions. Funding for installation of the infrastructure (approximately \$1.5M) has been identified in the Regional Parks Capital Plan, with additional funding received from the Province. Initiative 6a-13 seeks additional operating funding to provide for the maintenance and monitoring of the aeration equipment on an ongoing basis, once installed.

#### 6a-18 Accessibility Study

Regional parks visitation has grown considerably over the last 10 years. This has resulted in more demand for outdoor recreation opportunities from a wide variety of users, including those who may have different accessibility needs. The CRD has identified the need to conduct an accessibility study to evaluate the current network and identify next steps to better serve the public.

Initiative 6a-18 seeks funding to hire a consultant to evaluate the current regional parks system considering current standards of practice/design and user-friendly accessibility options. Implementation of any recommendations that could not be absorbed within existing core service levels would be subject to a separate business case, once developed and assessed.

#### 6g-1 Regional Parks Service

From 2010 to 2020, visits to regional parks and trails have increased by more than 60% from 5.2 million in 2010 to 8.6 million in 2020. This growth has been steady at approximately 2-5% per annum, but increased significantly in 2020 due to COVID-19.

2020 has been typified by the efforts required to manage against the spread of COVID-19. The public appreciated the value that regional parks and trails played in managing personal health during these times. As a result of increased pressures on the system, the vast majority of regional parks and trails resources are being directed to high-profile areas with high visitation to address regional parks safety and satisfaction.

The division continues to face challenges in achieving existing service levels to protect and restore regional park values while offering compatible outdoor recreation opportunities. To address this, Regional Parks has undertaken a comprehensive service level review that identified gaps in services and the ongoing resources required to fill those gaps, as well as those required to deliver basic service levels that will meet public expectations now and into the future. Direction was received from the Regional Parks Committee on June 23, 2020 to translate the conclusions of this review into a refreshed service budget for presentation in the fall.

Initiative 6g-1 seeks to amend the funding and staffing structure (+24 FTE regular) of Regional Parks to:

- Enhance divisional capacity to manage new types of assets, increased levels of visitation and the changing recreational landscapes associated with a growing park system.

- Increase the capacity to undertake and manage increasingly complex projects, management plans and other initiatives while ensuring that meaningful engagement is a part of these processes.
- Introduce expert level conservation programs, that will ensure the maintenance and monitoring of ecological integrity including the impacts of recreation and climate change.
- Build operational elasticity so that the effects of weather events such as flooding and blowdown associated with climate change do not negatively impact core services for extended time periods, and so that staff can respond in a more timely manner to complaints and concerns raised by the public about safety issues.
- Enhance the capacity to meet the demands associated with the land acquisition process so that land purchasing decisions can be more efficient and opportunistic.
- Increase the resources available to meet the compliance and enforcement pressures associated with a park system approaching 9 million annual visits; pressures include: user conflicts on regional trails, displaced persons camping in parks, illegal trail building, encroachments, wildfire security, encroachments and safety issues in popular swimming areas.
- Improve the capital replacement, renewal and development program by providing dedicated staff to plan, manage and implement capital projects including those that ensure compliance with provincial regulations such as dam management.
- Increase staffing levels in order to address issues associated with approximately 200 km of backcountry trails as well as, other backcountry assets that are currently attended to infrequently due to time constraints.
- Accelerate the quantity of, and delivery time for, park management plans that will provide vision and direction for current and future regional parks.
- Increased capacity to work with volunteers, stewardship groups and park user groups to leverage volunteer hours in areas such as priority invasive species removal, mountain biking trail maintenance, and shoreline clean up.
- Increased awareness and education campaigns to protect visitors and park values and support education and compliance on emerging park issues.
- More proactive communications efforts that address complaints/issues before they arise, improved capacity to respond to public messages through social media, email and report to parks.

The size and scope of this initiative will also increase demand and requirements for a number of support services. This initiative will result in an adjustment to the Financial Services (+1.0 FTE) and Information Technology & GIS (+1.0 FTE) staffing models to accommodate the demand and an increase to the Human Resources & Corporate Safety auxiliary hours to keep pace with the increase in FTEs and associated workloads. To provide full transparency, the financial impact of the initiative reflects the whole cost of delivering the work, including flow-down impacts on support services.

#### *Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities*

The direction given to staff was to bring forward work that is of essential nature. This was defined as:

- initiatives that provide for public health and safety and/or deliver on a regulatory requirement
- initiatives that are required to deliver the Board Strategic Priorities
- initiatives that will prevent the materialization of significant negative impacts on service

- customers, partners, the region, local services or the CRD's finances
- initiatives that minimize the materialization of financial, reputational or other risks and liabilities for the CRD by ensuring the organization is keeping pace with expectations and demand
- there is an imperative to deliver the work immediately and/or quickly

The current Board Strategic Plan priority initiative under Climate Action and Environmental Stewardship is to "Ensure appropriate funding for parks and trails infrastructure, improvements and maintenance by updating the Regional Parks Strategy with consideration to ecological, recreation and reconciliation principles, land acquisition capacity, and expanded partnerships with First Nations." Actions and key deliverables to date include: renewing the Land Acquisition Fund for an additional 10 years; development of an asset management plan; \$925,000 increase in the operating budget to address deficiencies and asset replacement; additional staffing; restructuring areas; and optimizing assets – to make the regional parks and trails system more efficient and cost effective.

The ELT has reviewed and assessed all business cases against the criteria. The consolidated package of work is appropriate and commensurate to the challenge facing the organization.

### **CONCLUSION**

Staff have been progressing initiatives and actions identified in the CRD Corporate Plan, including Board Strategic Priorities. The CRD Board determines resourcing through its annual review and approval of financial plans. As per previous years, to support the Board's decision-making, staff are providing recommendations on funding, timing and service levels through the service and financial planning processes.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Regional Parks Committee recommends the Committee of the Whole recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

That Appendix A, Community Need Summary – Parks & Natural Resource Management be approved as presented and form the basis of the 2022-2026 Financial Plan.

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

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix A: Community Need Summary – Parks & Natural Resources Management  
Appendix B: Capital Plan Report  
Appendix C: Initiative Progress Report