

**REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2021**

SUBJECT CRD Regional Parks – Interpretive Program

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide an informational update on the interpretive program offer at Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks.

BACKGROUND

The interpretation program at CRD Regional Parks was established in 1976, with a focus on nature education for children. Over the past forty-five years, the type of educational programs has widened but the priority to provide opportunities to discover and learn about parks and trails and to connect people to regional parks has remained constant.

The interpretive program within the visitor services section of CRD Regional Parks is comprised of an interpretation coordinator, three full-time interpretive staff, and auxiliary staff, as required, who develop and deliver school programs, guided walks, in-park and community events and training sessions for educators. They develop content for park information kiosks, interpretive signs, articles and social media, as well as oversee three nature centres. Interpretation is a core service that plays a fundamental role in the protection of regional parks and trails. It educates visitors about the natural and cultural history of the region and park management issues through direct experiential learning in regional parks. The interpretive program encourages stewardship and advocates for the regional parks and trails system.

With more than 8.6 million visits annually to regional parks and trails, the interpretive program has increased its role in providing education around responsible park use and the protection of park values. By providing fun and engaging information on key regional parks management issues, such as social distancing, dog management, impacts of off-trail travel, carnivore awareness and wilderness park visit preparedness, park interpreters are an integral part of the education and compliance spectrum. Working together with CRD regional parks rangers, they help to ensure park visitors have a positive, safe and respectful visit in regional parks.

The CRD's boundaries span the traditional territories of over 20 First Nations, whose ancestors have been taking care of the land since time immemorial. Many of CRD regional parks are significant historically, culturally and spiritually for these Nations. First Nations histories, language, culture and perspectives have been under-represented in interpretive programs in CRD regional parks. In March 2020, a new cultural programmer position was created as a first step toward educating the public about traditional cultural values, Indigenous perspectives and the relationship between First Nations and the land. Through this public education, the CRD is supporting regional parks as a culturally safe place for Indigenous community members to practice their traditional rights. Some highlights of the new offer to date include:

- meeting with educators from local Nations to discuss program development.
- developing a cultural display for the Francis/King Nature Centre.
- piloting a live online park program, in partnership with the Royal BC Museum.

- offering a new self-guided walk titled “Exploring Indigenous Perspectives.”
- offering a new guided walk about traditional uses and preparation for ceremonial gatherings
- delivering guided walks on the topic of Indigenous Perspectives throughout the fall/winter 2021.
- contributing engaging social media content that aligns with park messaging and includes Indigenous rights to harvest.
- development and delivery of a school program series called EAGLE (Education and appreciation Garnered through Listening and Exploring).
- drafting five Indigenous school programs for input from the WSÁNEĆ and Ləkʷəŋən people
- evaluating current interpretive program offerings for opportunities to include cultural content and to encourage respectful exploration.
- drafting Indigenous content for park and trail information kiosks and a new interpretive sign for Gonzales Hill Regional Park.
- delivering a professional development workshop for teachers to encourage park stewardship inspired by cultural protocols.
- ongoing work to bring cultural awareness to regional parks staff and to educate staff about traditional rights, including a mandatory cultural awareness video from WSÁNEĆ for park rangers.

The interpretation program aims to connect people to nature and culture within regional parks. Over the last four years, the interpretive program has reached 10,897 students through school programs, 21,956 park visitors through public programs, 6,922 residents through community events, and 23,651 park visitors through pandemic social distancing outreach. In addition, the three nature centres see over 8,000 visitors a year, on average.

IMPLICATIONS

Intergovernmental Implications

Through its reconciliation statement, the CRD recognizes the integral relationship First Nations have with the land. The CRD has made a commitment to work with First Nations on taking care of the land while providing space for cultural and ceremonial use, food and medicine harvesting, traditional management practices and reclaiming Indigenous place names. It is understood that a commitment alone is not enough and that action is needed to take measurable steps toward a better relationship with Indigenous peoples. In that spirit, a key component of the cultural program is to work with local First Nations to build relationships, support traditional rights and offer more cultural education programs in regional parks.

Social Implications

With increasing visits to the regional parks system, it is important to manage and minimize possible impacts to ecological and cultural integrity caused by recreational activities. Fostering a deeper connection to regional parks and educating park visitors about their role in parks stewardship is an integral step in protecting sensitive ecosystems, cultural values and biodiversity.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan identifies that a key mission of regional parks is to “provide environmental and cultural interpretation that focuses on the visitor’s relationship to

nature, natural processes, ecology, the value of natural conditions, and the cultural history and stories of the parklands and trails.”

CONCLUSION

Education in regional parks has a unique role to play in connecting people’s hearts and minds to nature and culture in the regional parks system. Over the last four years, more than 63,000 people participated in interpretive events and programs that have provided opportunities to discover and learn about regional parks and trails and the ecosystems and cultures that depend on them. The interpretative program at CRD Regional Parks is built on a strong 45-year foundation of environmental education and continues to evolve and grow to provide quality programs and meet visitor expectations.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the CRD Regional Parks Interpretive Program report be received for information.

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