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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2022

SUBJECT **2021 Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To update the Regional Parks Committee on the Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks 2021 Compliance and Enforcement Program.

BACKGROUND

Recognizing that a Compliance and Enforcement Program, with a focus on compliance education, is one of the best tools to help alleviate the pressures on regional parks and trails and protect park values, the CRD Board supported the creation of a park ranger position with the first permanent park ranger hired in early 2018. Since that time, the program has responded to the increasing system size and visitation and, in 2021, was comprised of 1 senior ranger and 3.5 full-time park ranger positions, augmented by 4 auxiliary rangers who worked over the April to October core season.

With more than 8.6 million visits annually to regional parks and trails, the ranger program has a key role in helping to ensure park visitors have a positive, safe and respectful visit in regional parks and that park values are protected.

Park rangers support a broad range of events, activities and issues, such as:

- serving as friendly ambassadors for CRD regional parks and trails, building relationships and assisting park visitors
- deterring negative activities through a uniformed, diplomatic and authoritative presence
- promoting voluntary compliance by educating the public about park regulations, such as smoking, dogs on-leash and illegal camping
- supporting and monitoring permitted events
- working with bylaw enforcement, police, fire and rescue service, BC Ambulance and other departments and agencies on issues found in regional parks and on regional trails
- responding to homelessness and connecting individuals with support services
- participating in facility and trail maintenance
- undertaking routine inspections in response to complaints or incidents
- investigating alleged non-compliance with legislation when enforcement action is being contemplated
- providing wildfire support outside of municipal fire districts in the form of wildfire mop-up duties
- educating park visitors on parks values
- supporting regional parks as a culturally safe place for Indigenous community members to practice their traditional rights

CRD Regional Parks also supplements compliance and enforcement patrols with CRD bylaw officers. In 2021, bylaw officers provided approximately 1,860 hours of patrol at a cost of almost \$161,000. The combination of park rangers and bylaw enforcement officers provides a regular presence in regional parks and on regional trails.

In 2021, park rangers and bylaw officers had an increased presence at Thetis Lake Regional Park in an effort to reduce non-compliance with the parks regulations, and to address hazardous behaviors (e.g., cliff jumping, drinking, etc.) before accidents can happen. This reduces the burden on other municipal response agencies. Park rangers and bylaw officers spent a total of 1,360 and 957 hours respectively patrolling Thetis Lake Regional Park during the peak season, which resulted in no major incidents or call outs for municipal resources.

The CRD Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program also piloted the use of restorative justice as an alternative to court action, in response to an unsanctioned wedding that took place in Brooks Point Regional Park in summer 2021. The wedding resulted in disturbance and damage to important environmental values, including the mowing and trampling of federally designated critical habitat, as well as disturbance and disruption to other park users. Restorative Justice is a voluntary system of justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of the offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large. It is an alternative to the court system and is commonly used for offences such as vandalism, mischief, minor theft, causing a disturbance, etc. The restorative justice process can result in significant cost savings to the CRD relative to court actions and can help create lifelong stewards with a better understanding of the values that CRD Regional Parks protect.

In 2021, park rangers and park interpreters worked together to provide 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. By keeping education as the first and most important step on the compliance spectrum, visitors are provided with the information they need to be respectful park visitors, which reduces the need for enforcement actions.

Appendix A provides a summary of compliance and enforcement actions in 2021 within regional parks and trails.

IMPLICATIONS

Intergovernmental Implications

Park rangers work with bylaw enforcement, police, fire and rescue service, BC Ambulance and other departments and agencies on issues found in regional parks and on regional trails. By having a coordinated approach and by providing a consistent presence in the regional parks system, it helps reduce the number of incidents requiring municipal response.

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. Educating park visitors about their role in parks stewardship through voluntary compliance with parks regulations is an integral step in protecting sensitive ecosystems, cultural values and biodiversity.

Service Delivery Implications

As part of the 2022 budget, additional resources have been provided to regional parks to support the ranger program with the addition of 1.5 FTEs.

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The Compliance and Enforcement Program supports CRD Board priorities and CRD Regional Parks' strategic goals around climate action, environmental stewardship and protecting the natural environment by ensuring park visitors use regional parks and trails in a way that is safe and consistent with the principles driving those strategic directions.

CONCLUSION

In 2021, the CRD Regional Parks rangers were instrumental in addressing a number of compliance and enforcement issues across the system at the same time providing safe and enjoyable experiences for visitors. The CRD Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program will continue to focus on compliance education as one of the best tools to help alleviate the pressures and challenges the system faces.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That the 2021 Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Program staff report be received for information.

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

ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: 2021 CRD Regional Parks Compliance and Enforcement Summary