

March 23, 2011

## **Rural Comox Valley Parks and Greenways Strategic Plan Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What's the purpose of the strategic plan?**

The **primary purpose** of the strategic plan is to identify opportunities for expanding the network of parks and greenways within Baynes Sound (Area 'A'), Lazo North (Area 'B') and Puntledge-Black Creek (Area 'C') of the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD).

The plan:

1. provides guidelines for parkland acquisition and park dedication;
2. identifies priorities for new parks and greenways for the next twenty years;
3. identifies funding mechanisms and possible partnerships; and
4. outlines an implementation plan with specific action items.

The strategic plan is not meant to replace the many park interests captured in the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan (OCP). These will remain in the OCP and guide decisions for dedicating parkland at time of rezoning or subdivision. However, unlike the OCP, the strategic plan identifies priority areas for the CVRD to actively pursue as future park or greenway, identifies a budget to acquire these areas and seeks authority to raise the necessary funds. As such, it is more similar to a business plan than an OCP.

### **Why do we need a strategic plan now?**

A lot of outdoor recreation in the Comox Valley occurs on private land. As the valley's population grows and private land is developed, access to private land for recreation disappears. By being more pro-active, the CVRD can set aside areas popular recreation areas as future park or greenway before those opportunities are lost forever.

### **What is the citizen resource group?**

The citizen resource group included eleven members who came from different sectors of the community that impact on, or have an interest in, parks and greenways. Group members shared expertise and knowledge and worked with staff to develop a vision for the Comox Valley parks and greenways system, identified criteria for parkland acquisition, collected close to 100 areas of interest as potential park or greenway and assisted in the identifying priorities.

Membership: Comox Valley Naturalists, Comox Valley Land Trust, Comox Valley Cycling Club, Backcountry Horsemen, Comox Valley Agricultural Advisory Committee, one representative each from the Areas 'A', 'B,' and 'C' Area Planning Commissions, TimberWest and Island Timberlands.

## What are the priority areas for future parks and greenways?

Area	Acquisition Tool
Seal Bay forest	Replace 10 year licence with 30 year licence from the province and/or seek a crown land grant
One Spot trail extension north and south and trail connections to existing parks (e.g. Wildwood, Macaulay, Bear Creek)	A mix of statutory rights-of-way (SRW's) and property purchase. Since the trail passes through the agricultural land reserve (ALR), farmers will be consulted and approval sought from the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC).
Courtenay River estuary	Support wildlife management area designation by the province and purchase property in strategic locations. Develop estuary management plan to support conservation objectives for the estuary.
Royston waterfront trail	SRW over unopened road right-of-way and license of occupation from the province
Puntledge Triangle incl. Browns River and Stotan Falls	SRW's, parkland dedication at time of subdivision, agreements with private landowners, purchase of select pieces of land
Garry Oak ecosystem	Land purchase and/or conservation covenants. Key sites lie within the ALR and covenants will require ALC approval.
Williams Beach forest and trail connections	Licence from province and/or explore co-management agreement for continued public recreational access with potential future first nation owners. SRW's over trail connections.
Royston to Cumberland trail	SRW, land purchase or agreements with private landowners. A portion of the trail may lie within the ALR and will require ALC approval.
Western toad breeding and migration areas	Agreements with private land owners, SRW's, parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase or conservation covenant. Key sites lie within the ALR and SRW's and covenants require ALC approval.
E&N Rail with trail and waterfront routes	Statutory right-of-way over a portion of the rail corridor and alternate waterfront routes
Trent River corridor	Parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase or conservation covenant.

## What are the reserve priorities?

Reaching the vision of this parks and greenways strategic plan will take many years. The implementation strategy will focus on the eleven active priority areas identified above with the understanding that some of these may not become available for acquisition within the next twenty years. On the other hand, opportunities for partnerships may arise that make acquisition of areas identified as 'reserve priority areas' possible within a short time frame. This strategy recognizes that a certain amount of flexibility is needed to shift from active to reserve priorities in order to respond to changing circumstances, budgetary realities and opportunities that arise.

Area	Acquisition tool
Saratoga Beach Parking and Washroom area	SRW, purchase with land donation component.
Black Creek Hall to Miracle Beach	SRW's, land purchases

Area	Acquisition tool
Trail	
Wolf Lake and trail connections (e.g. to One Spot Trail)	parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase and/or partnerships with property owners
Tsolum River crossing	SRW, ALC approval for trail connection
Wildwood Forest Trail north to Headquarters woodlot	SRW's, land purchase, agreement with landowners, ALC approval
Puntledge Triangle Trail extension (along Browns River to Medicine Bowls, back south to BC Hydro Recreation Area on the Puntledge).	Greenway dedication as part of subdivisions in area, access agreements with landowners
Morrison Creek Headwaters	Conservation covenant, parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase, for portions in ALR, ALC approval for covenants
Comox Road to Back Road Trail	Consultations with landowners and approval from the ALC.
Comox Road pedestrian/bike trail	Roads in regional districts are the responsibility of MoTI. CVRD will work with MoTI on a road-side cycling/pedestrian trail.
Sand dune ecosystem conservation park	land purchase and/or conservation covenant
Goose Spit to MacDonald Wood (connect to Filberg Park in Comox)	Use undeveloped road rights-of-way, waterfront where feasible
Vancouver Island Spine corridor	Support community initiative and partnerships with private forest land owners.
Rosewall Creek trail to waterfall and Waterloo Creek	Work with property owners to conclude a land use agreement. Involve BC Parks in discussions.
Access points to river spots for public use	Land use agreements with private landowners.
Beach accesses kept open for public use	Memorandum of Understanding with MoTI, permits over select accesses

## How were the priorities for new parks and greenways established?

The citizen resource group and CVRD staff worked together to collect close to 100 areas of interest as potential parks and greenways. The areas of interest came from existing electoral, local area and parks and greenways plans, Nature without Borders - the Comox Valley Land Trust's Regional Conservation Strategy, interviews with local residents and with the horseback-riding, mountain biking, cycling, hiking, naturalist and conservation communities. To help determining priorities, the resource group developed a set of criteria for parkland acquisition that include considerations related to recreation opportunities provided, ecological values, regional equity, community support and cost.

A list of 16 preliminary priorities, a draft vision and funding options were presented to the public at three open houses, held September 15, 16, and 20, 2010, one in each electoral area. At the open houses, the public identified their top ten priorities (see pages 28 and 29 of the final report). The CVRD also

commissioned a telephone survey to ask residents about their preferences for the types of future parks they would like to see.

The citizen resource group and staff reviewed open house questionnaire responses and telephone survey results. Every attempt was made to ensure the draft plan reflects residents' comments and preferences. The final list of priorities was developed by merging the top ten priorities of each of the three electoral areas. It also includes a balance of the types of parks residents wanted to see acquired.

### **Did my input make a difference?**

Input received from residents at the public open houses is reflected in the final plan. Public feedback resulted in adoption of a vision, a new park classification and the final list of priority areas. Public feedback also shaped the funding strategy. Based on comments received, CVRD staff recommended development cost charges for parks to be implemented (as is the case in Courtenay, Comox and Cumberland) and a moderate residential tax increase to fund acquisition of new parks and greenways. All the money raised from this new residential tax will go toward that purpose. CVRD staff will also explore other possible tools such as a natural areas tax exemption program to protect greenspace.

### **How much do I currently pay for regional district parks?**

Regional district parks within Baynes Sound (Area 'A'), Lazo North (Area 'B') and Puntledge-Black Creek (Area 'C') are funded through the electoral areas 'A','B','C' community parks and greenways service. In 2010, the community parks budget was \$800,000. This covered capital projects (trail resurfacing, foot bridges, parking lot repairs, etc.), maintenance and operation of parks. Residents paid \$18.17 per \$100,000 of assessed property value to fund parks. For the average home valued at \$365,000 this amounted to \$66 in 2010.

Until 2011 no regular annual contributions were made to a parkland acquisition fund. This restricted the CVRD's ability to purchase pieces of land that provide important linkages or additions to existing parks as they come up for sale. It also made it difficult to leverage funds and form acquisition partnerships with land trusts or nature conservancies.

### **What will it cost to acquire all priority areas and how can we afford that?**

#### **Initially the plan was supposed to be a 10 year plan, why is it a 20 year plan now?**

A number of the priority areas identified by the resource group can be obtained through licences of provincial Crown land, access agreements with private landowners, land donations or through parkland dedication at time of subdivision. Other lands would have to be purchased.

Implementation of the identified active priorities is estimated at roughly \$4.3 million. The time period identified for plan implementation at the public open houses was ten years. Over this time frame, the regional district would have to raise an average of \$430,000 per year requiring a tax levy of \$10 per \$100,000 of assessed property value. At the same time, the regional district's operations, maintenance and capital parks budgets are expected to increase in 2011 to keep up with maintenance of new parks, development of new trails and costs to replace aging infrastructure.

In order to lessen the overall tax burden, staff recommended to extend the implementation of the rural Comox Valley parks and greenways strategic plan from 10 to 20 years with a review of the funding strategy in five years. The tax levy required to implement the plan over 20 years is \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed

property value. At their March 14 meeting, the electoral areas services committee voted to implement a new parkland acquisition tax levy at \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed property value starting in 2011. The resolution will be presented for a final vote to the regional district board on March 29.