

Photo: K. Gurak

A Natural Selection

Rural Comox Valley Parks
and Greenways Strategic Plan

2011-2030



March 2011

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Comox Valley Parks and Greenways Vision

A Natural Selection

The Comox Valley Regional District's system of parks and greenways protects the diverse range of landscapes and native plant and animal communities found in the valley – from mature coastal forests and Garry Oak meadows to lakes, wetlands, salmon-bearing streams, salt water marshes and coastal sand dunes. These natural areas provide a sanctuary for native plants and animals to thrive and a place for people to explore and connect to nature.

To maintain the natural diversity of life in the Comox Valley, regional district parks are part of a network of municipal and provincial greenspaces linked by riparian or biodiversity corridors. Some regional district parks or portions of a park are set aside as conservation areas with no or limited trail access to protect sensitive ecosystems such as heron rookeries, amphibian or wildlife migration routes, important bird areas and rare native plant communities.

A network of greenways, largely separate from the road system, connects parks and communities between the Oyster River and Mud Bay. As local residents cycle, ride their horses, or walk on this network of trails, they traverse coastal forests and meadows, pass by actively farmed fields, or enjoy superb mountain and ocean vistas.

CVRD parks promote healthy lifestyles through a variety of outdoor experiences and activities drawing people of all ages closer to nature. Interpretive signs, nature walks, and educational programs bring to life the history of First Nations and early settlers and inspire with images and stories of the intricacies and marvels of the natural world.

The CVRD is responsive to park users and the public and continues to evolve and adapt based on public input, trends in recreation and changes in environmental conditions. The CVRD acquires land for parks and greenways, manages existing parks, and stewards sensitive areas in concert with the community, business, landowners, First Nations and local municipalities. Tenure over regional district parks and greenways provides protection of these special places into the future for all Comox Valley residents and visitors to enjoy.

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Executive Summary

The Comox Valley Regional District's parks and greenways protect a diverse range of landscapes and ecological communities. They also contribute to the quality of life of Comox Valley residents by providing natural places for people to disconnect from their busy lives, enjoy nature and be active.

In 2006, the CVRD amalgamated its separate parks services for Baynes Sound (area 'A'), Lazo North (area 'B') and Puntledge-Black Creek (area 'C') into one community parks and greenways service. This amalgamation enabled pooling of previously separate funds and budgets and resulted in greater efficiencies in servicing community parks in the three electoral areas. It also facilitated joint parks and greenways planning and set the stage for the development of a parks and greenways plan.

In April 2008, the regional district board endorsed the planning process for the Rural Comox Valley Parks and Greenways Strategic Plan and in November 2009 provided direction on a public consultation process including public open houses and a telephone interview survey. The final plan was adopted by the regional district board on March 29, 2011.

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the rural Comox Valley parks and greenways strategic plan is to outline a strategy to expand the network of parks and greenways in the three electoral areas of the Comox Valley for public enjoyment, recreation and conservation. The plan establishes a vision, goals and objectives for the Comox Valley parks and greenways system (chapter 5, p. 21-24), provides guidelines for land acquisition and park dedication, identifies priorities for acquisition for the next twenty years, identifies funding mechanisms and partnerships and outlines an implementation strategy.

Citizen Resource Group Process

In September 2008, CVRD staff assembled a citizen resource group to assist in the development of the parks and greenways strategic plan. The resource group was composed of local citizens reflective of different sectors of the community and with knowledge of the different landscapes that make up the region, expertise in outdoor recreation, environmental stewardship, biodiversity conservation, tourism, land development, farming, management of private forest land, public outreach and community involvement. The group met over a period of six months and developed a vision, goals and objectives for Comox Valley parks and greenways (see chapter 5, p. 23-26). The group also collected close to 100 areas of interest as potential parks and greenways. The areas of interest came from existing regional district electoral and local area plans, interviews with local residents and community associations and with the horseback-riding, mountain biking, hiking and naturalist communities.

To assist in identifying priorities from the comprehensive list of areas of interest gathered, the resource group and staff worked together to develop a set of criteria for parkland acquisition (see chapter 6, p. 27-29). The criteria include considerations related to an area's conservation values, recreation opportunities, community values including regional equity and public support as well as financial and risk management considerations.

The resource group developed a list of 16 areas that met the criteria for parkland acquisition. These areas were presented to the public for feedback.

Public Consultations

In September 2010, the CVRD held three public open houses, one in each electoral area, to gather feedback on a proposed vision, park classifications, the preliminary list of 16 priority areas for parkland acquisition identified by the resource group and ways to fund the plan. About 110 residents attended the three public open houses and 74 completed the open house questionnaire.

The CVRD also hired Synovate to conduct a telephone interview survey with 312 residents living in Baynes Sound (Area ‘A’), Lazo North (Area ‘B’) and Puntledge-Black Creek (Area ‘C’). The margin of error was $\pm 5.5\%$ at a 95 % level of confidence, 19 times out of 20.

See appendices 3, 4 and 5 for compilations of public open house questionnaire responses and telephone survey results.

Support for proposed vision for Comox Valley parks and greenways

Residents strongly supported the proposed vision for Comox Valley parks and greenways with 95% of respondents to the open house questionnaire expressing their support for the vision.

Support for conservation areas

Residents were also in support of adding ‘conservation area’ as a park classification enabling the regional district to limit trails and access points to sensitive ecosystems in order to protect their integrity. Ninety-five percent of open house questionnaire respondents supported this. At the same time, the majority of residents wanted most of the parkland acquired by the regional district to be open for recreational use. Forty-five percent of telephone survey respondents agreed with this, 26% supported the majority of parkland to be there for the protection of sensitive ecosystems with no or few trails and 16% wanted all parkland to have trails and be fully accessible to the public.

Parkland acquisition priorities

Open house participants were asked to identify their top ten priorities for parkland acquisitions. They were given the option to rank the preliminary list of priority areas identified by the citizen resource group and/or add additional areas not identified. Table 1 summarizes the results.

Table 1: Summary of open house questionnaire results: Top ten priority areas

Priority	Area ‘A’ Priorities	Area ‘B’ Priorities	Area ‘C’ Priorities
1	Courtenay River estuary	Ownership of or longer term tenure for Seal Bay Forest	Ownership of or longer term tenure for Seal Bay Forest
2	Garry oak ecosystem conservation area	One Spot Trail extension	One Spot Trail extension
3	Royston waterfront trail	Puntledge triangle trail	Courtenay River estuary
4	Royston to Cumberland trail	Courtenay River estuary	Williams Beach Forest

Priority	Area 'A' Priorities	Area 'B' Priorities	Area 'C' Priorities
5	Secure tenure for Seal Bay Forest	Royston waterfront trail	Western toad conservation area
6	Puntledge triangle trail	Stotan Falls	E&N Rail with Trail
7	Trent River corridor	Williams Beach Forest	Garry Oak ecosystem
8	One Spot Trail extension	Trent River corridor	Coastal sand ecosystem
9	Coastal sand ecosystem	E&N Rail with Trail	Wolf Lake
10	Williams Beach Forest	Royston to Cumberland trail	Strathcona Parkway marsh and ponds

During the telephone interview survey residents were asked about their priorities with respect to what types of parks the CVRD should acquire (table 2).

Table 2: Summary of telephone survey results: Types of parks

Total importance	Type of parkland the regional district should consider buying.
54%	Protection of rare ecosystems such as Garry Oak meadows, sand dunes, wetlands, mature forests or wildlife corridors
46%	New trail corridors like a trail from Royston to Cumberland, a trail from the Courtenay riverway to Royston, etc.
40%	New large parks with trail systems similar to Seal Bay or Nymph Falls parks
36%	Access trails to popular hiking and/or mountain biking destinations such as the Glacier Trail that provides access to the Comox Glacier, the Boston Ridge Trail to Forbidden Plateau or a trail up into the Beaufort Range, etc.
31%	Beach access trails to Comox Valley beaches from the surrounding neighbourhoods
16%	Special recreation features like the climbing area at Comox Lake or the swimming area at Stotan Falls.

Note: Results are not broken down by electoral area since the differences were not statistically significant. The totals do not add up to 100% since 'total importance' reflects ranking within the top three.

Support for funding options

The majority of open house survey respondents (77%) favoured a combination of two funding mechanisms – development cost charges for parks and a parkland acquisition fund. A number of residents also wanted the regional district and municipalities to look into a joint regional parks service to jointly fund acquisition, operation and maintenance of regionally significant parks. Survey respondents also suggested using volunteers for park maintenance and implementing a natural areas tax exemption program (as in place on Denman and Hornby islands) that would reduce property taxes if landowners retained trees and native vegetation on their properties.

Parkland acquisition tax levy

When asked in the telephone survey whether they would support a new property tax to help buy parkland, 39% of respondents were strongly or somewhat in support, 16% said it depended on the tax amount and 42% opposed the idea, while 3% didn't know. The support for a tax levy

increased considerably when asked more specifically about the level of annual contribution interviewees were willing to make. Twenty-four percent maintained their initial opposition to a tax levy for parks and did not want to contribute even \$10 per year, 9% were willing to pay up to \$10, 28% were willing to pay up to \$20 and 39% were willing to pay up to \$35. Of course, those who were willing to contribute up to \$35 would also be willing to contribute the lesser amounts of \$20 and \$10. Consequently, overall, 67% would be willing to contribute \$20 per year toward a parkland acquisition fund and 76% would be willing to contribute \$10. Telephone survey respondents were not asked if they would be willing to pay more than \$35.

Of open house survey respondents 38% were willing to contribute up to \$50 to a parkland acquisition fund, 67% were willing to contribute up to \$35, 87% would contribute up to \$20 and 100% would contribute \$10 annually.

Implementation Strategy

Strategic Priorities

The citizen resource group and staff reviewed open house questionnaire responses and telephone interview survey results in November 2010. Every attempt was made to ensure the final plan would reflect residents' comments and preferences. Following is the final list of priorities. In finalizing the list, the top 5 priorities within each electoral area were included. Consideration was also given to achieving a balance between the different types of parks residents wanted to see acquired. In addition, priority areas had to have importance to the region as a whole, not only to a particular neighbourhood.

Table 3: Active priorities for parkland acquisition

Area	Acquisition Tool	Amenities to be developed
Seal Bay forest	Replace 10 year licence with 30 year licence from the province and/or seek a crown land grant	Upkeep of existing trails, stairs, outhouses, parking, etc.
One Spot trail extension north and south and trail connections to Wildwood Forest.	A mix of statutory rights-of-way (SRW's) and private property purchase. Where trail passes through agricultural land reserve, farming needs to be considered and approval from the Agricultural Land Commission sought	Multi-use trail, signs, parking for horse trailers, buffers to farms and signs on trail etiquette in agricultural areas.
Courtenay River estuary	Support wildlife management area designation by the Province and purchase private property in strategic locations. Develop estuary management plan to support conservation objectives for the estuary.	Interpretive signs, viewing areas, trail access.
Royston waterfront trail	Permit over unopened road right-of-way and license of occupation or permit from the Province	Trail. Shoreline protection to control erosion.
Puntledge Triangle incl. Browns River and Stotan Falls	SRW's, parkland dedication at time of subdivision, agreements with private property owners, purchase of select pieces of land	Multi-use trail, outhouses, parking
Garry Oak ecosystem	Land purchase and/or conservation covenants	Possible restoration work
Williams Beach forest	Licence from Province and/or explore co-	Possible trail improvements,

and trail connections	management agreement for continued public recreational access with potential future First Nation owners. SRW over trail connections.	parking, outhouses.
Royston to Cumberland trail	SRW, land purchase or agreements with private landowners	Multi-use trail
Western toad breeding and migration areas	Agreements with private land owners, SRW's, parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase or conservation covenant	None
E&N Rail with trail and waterfront routes	Statutory right-of-way over a portion of the rail corridor and alternate waterfront routes.	Multi-use trail, road and river crossings
Trent River corridor	Crown land licence from Province, parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase or conservation covenant.	Multi-use trail above bank, conservation-focused river corridor

SRW= statutory right-of-way

Note: See appendix 7 for an explanation of acquisition tools.

Not all of the above proposed active priorities may become available for acquisition, lease or other land use agreements that would allow for park dedication. Consequently, the parks and greenways strategic plan includes a reserve list of priority areas which may be considered for acquisition if an opportunity arises, purchase costs are within the available budget and/or there is a possibility to enter into a lease or other land use agreement for the site, not requiring an expenditure of acquisition funds. See chapter 7, page 37 of the plan for the list of reserve priority areas.

Funding the plan

In 2010 the tax levy for park planning, acquisition, operation, maintenance and capital projects for the electoral areas 'A', 'B' and 'C' parks and greenways service was \$18.176 per \$100,000 of assessed property value or \$66 per average home valued at \$365,000. Currently, no regular annual contributions are made to the parkland acquisition reserve fund. Implementation of the acquisition priorities cannot be achieved with the existing levy.

Implementation of the identified active priorities is estimated at \$4.3 million (assuming a number of areas can be acquired through leases and other land use agreements). 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 and tangible asset replacement costs.

In order to lessen the overall tax burden, the implementation of the rural Comox Valley parks and greenways strategic plan was extended 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 approximately \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed property value.

The new tax levy will be dedicated specifically to parkland acquisition. The tax impact on the average household (assuming an average home value of \$365,000) would be \$18 annually.

Below is a summary of funding scenarios that were presented to the electoral areas services committee at their January 14, 2011 meeting. The table shows what could be raised for parkland

acquisition under each scenario as well as public support of the different scenarios as determined through open house questionnaire responses and the telephone interview survey.

Table 4: Parkland acquisition tax levy scenarios

Funding scenarios	Scenario 1	Scenario 2 (proposed 2011 financial plan)	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	Scenario 5
Tax levy per \$100,000 of assessed value	\$3	\$5	\$6	\$10	\$14
Amount raised annually for parkland acquisition	\$134,000	224,000	\$268,000	\$448,000	\$627,000
Cost to the average household (assuming a \$365,000 home)	\$10	\$18	\$20	\$35	\$50
Open house attendees' support for this option	100%	not asked	87%	67%	38%
Telephone survey respondents' support	76%	not asked	67%	39%	not asked

Note: The percentages of residents in support of the different options do not add up to 100% since those willing to pay up to \$20, \$35 and \$50 would also be willing to pay any of the lesser amounts proposed.

At their March 29, 2011 meeting, the regional district board adopted the parks and greenways strategic plan and at the same time passed a resolution to establish a parkland acquisition tax levy of \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed property value starting in 2011 to fund implementation of the plan.

Non-financial acquisition tools

The regional district also has a number of non-financial tools at its disposal to acquire parkland. A considerable number of the above twenty year priority areas can be obtained through licences or leases over Crown land, statutory rights-of-way, conservation covenants, parkland dedication at time of subdivision and partnerships with senior levels of governments or First Nations (see column 2 in table 3 above for acquisition tools). The plan also recommends that the regional district explore density bonussing and natural areas tax exemption as other potential future tools to protect greenspace in the Comox Valley.

Development cost charges for parks

Those lands that cannot be acquired through parkland dedication at time of subdivision, parkland amenity contributions at time of rezoning, land leases, licences, statutory rights-of-way or partnerships, require outright purchase.

When it comes to financial tools, the majority of open house survey respondents wanted to see development cost charges for parks implemented in concert with a parkland acquisition tax levy.

DCCs for parks ensure that new residential development assists in the provision of new park area and park improvements to meet its residents' needs. The Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan, bylaw 2042, section C12 (d) states that "Development cost charge bylaws shall

be considered for adoption and implementation as a means to provide funding for the purchase of recreational lands, natural open space, and the development of these parcels for the benefit of the community.”

In recognition of this strong mandate to proceed with a development cost charges bylaw for parks, the CVRD will develop a DCC for parks bylaw in 2011. Income from development cost charges varies widely from year to year depending on development activity.

Park Management and Stewardship

Once land is acquired as parkland, the work starts to build trails and other public amenities, ensure public safety, provide trail and park interpretive information, manage visitor use and steward the natural environment. The regional district has put in place a number of policies to guide land development, park operation and management.

As the parks and greenways system grows and user pressures increase, a number of other guidelines and policies will be needed to ensure consistent standards of park planning, risk management, park operation and maintenance and environmental protection are applied. As the strategic plan is implemented, the regional district will work to develop a number of policies, guidelines and agreements with other levels of government as identified in the implementation actions below.

Accountability to the Public

Accountability to the public is an important component of this strategic plan. Since residents will be contributing directly to a parkland acquisition fund through a special tax levy, they deserve to know how their money is spent and what progress is being made toward achieving the goals of the plan.

The regional district will report annually on achievement of its acquisition targets. The progress reports will be presented to the regional district board, released to the media and made available to the public on the CVRD web site.

Prior to the expiry of the parks and greenways strategic plan, the regional district will start a planning process to review achievements with the public and consult to identify a new set of priorities and update the plan.

Implementation Strategy Actions

The strategic plan identified a number of implementation actions to achieve the goals of the plan. These are listed below and explained in greater detail in chapter 7, pages 36-46.

A framework for evaluating and classifying new park

- Action 1:** Evaluate new park interests using the criteria for parkland acquisition.
- Action 2:** Create ‘conservation area’ as a new park classification.

Acquisition Priorities

- Action 3:** Achieve acquisition priorities.
- Action 4:** Update the electoral areas official community plan to include the principles, policies and mapping in the parks and greenways strategic plan. Update

- existing parks and greenways policies and maps.
- Action 5: Refer areas of interest identified outside of the electoral areas to the relevant municipality.

Funding

- Action 6: Implement a tax levy for parkland acquisition.
- Action 7: Implement a development cost charges bylaw for parks.
- Action 8: Pursue opportunities to jointly acquire land to meet park needs in municipal and electoral areas during the first five years of this plan.
- Action 9: Actively encourage bequests, gifts of land and financial contributions in cooperation with land trusts and/or conservancies.
- Action 10: Review eco-gift authority of the regional district.

Partnerships

- Action 11: Partner with First Nations to provide recreational opportunities
- Action 12: Use land leases and statutory rights-of-way agreements to secure parks and greenways.
- Action 13: Work with the farming community when proposing trails within or bordering farm land to mitigate against negative impacts on existing and future agricultural operations.
- Action 14: Work with Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to ensure beach accesses remain open to the public.
- Action 15: Explore land use agreements over access to popular mountain biking areas.
- Action 16: Establish a multi-stakeholder Open Space and Ecosystem Task Force to develop strategies for ecosystem protection, overseeing and coordinating local and regional work on parks, trails, ecosystem protection and restoration.
- Action 17: Continue to work with the community in the development of parks and trails.

Ongoing Park Management and Stewardship

- Action 18: Update park management plan development guidelines.
- Action 19: Develop policies to ensure public safety.
- Action 20: Develop a policy for fencing along park boundaries.
- Action 21: Develop a 'Leave a Legacy' parks gift program.
- Action 22: Explore creating a park zone.
- Action 23: Explore other planning tools such as density bonussing and density transfer to encourage the protection of greenspace.
- Action 24: Explore natural areas tax exemption to encourage protection of greenspace on private property.

Accountability to the Public

- Action 25: Report regularly on progress toward achievement of the goals and actions of the rural Comox Valley parks and greenways strategic plan.
- Action 26: Review progress and consult with the public on outstanding priorities mid-way into plan implementation.



1. Introduction

Hearing a flock of cackling Trumpeter swans flying overhead, watching a bald eagle dive for salmon in the Courtenay River estuary, or observing Brant geese at their migratory stop-over at Goose Spit Park are treasured experiences for many Comox Valley residents. Estuaries, meandering streams, large tracts of forests and farmland make up the fabric that sustains these special encounters with nature.

Through their input in past land use planning processes and the Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy, Comox Valley residents have repeatedly expressed their strong support for the protection of the natural environment and the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities. This

strong support is also evidenced in people's volunteer activities. Many residents are active in the numerous environmental and habitat restoration groups active in the valley. Others volunteer their time building new trails or maintaining existing ones. In other cases, neighbours have gotten together to raise money to acquire land as park to protect sensitive ecosystems and provide trails for the community (e.g. Cumberland Community Forest, McDonald Woods Park), or to lobby governments to set aside land (Seal Bay Park and Forest). Some residents have even donated their private property as parkland.

The Comox Valley Regional District's community parks service complements citizen efforts to further realize community

needs for parks and greenways. Since establishment of the community parks service in 1987, the regional district has been acquiring community parks and greenways at time of subdivision, has negotiated leases over private land and provincial Crown land and has purchased land for parks.

Estimated at 63,700 in 2010, the population of the Comox Valley is projected to reach 76,500 by 2020 and 88,500 by 2030. Many people are attracted to the valley because of its natural environment, mild climate and recreational opportunities. As the population grows so do the pressures on existing parks and greenways. At the same time, informal recreational areas are disappearing as private lands that may previously have provided neighbourhood trails and greenspace are developed or public use is restricted.

So that years from now, Comox Valley residents can still enjoy watching bald eagles, herons, Brant geese and other wildlife and have places close to home to go for walks, bike rides, horseback riding or simply to connect with nature, a long term plan for the acquisition of parks and greenways is needed. The parks and greenways strategic plan identifies greenway links between communities, sensitive and rare ecosystems and popular recreation areas that have been identified by Comox Valley residents as priorities for protection as regional district park or greenway.

Purpose of the Parks and Greenways Strategic Plan

The **primary purpose** of this strategic plan is to identify opportunities for expanding the network of Comox Valley parks and greenways.

The objectives are to:

1. provide guidelines for land acquisition and park dedication;

2. identify priorities for acquisition for the next twenty years;
3. identify funding mechanisms and possible partnerships; and
4. outline an implementation plan.

A secondary purpose is to develop policies and guidelines for the operation and management of parks and greenways.

Scope of the Plan

The strategic plan focuses on priority parks and greenways within Baynes Sound (Area 'A'), Lazo North (Area 'B') and Puntledge-Black Creek (Area 'C'). Denman and Hornby Islands are excluded from the scope of this plan. Many of the regional district's priority areas for parks and greenways link up with municipal greenspaces. The three municipalities have developed, or are in the process of developing, parks and greenways plans within their municipal boundaries.

Planning Process

Citizen Resource Group

Development of the parks and greenways strategic plan was supported by a citizen resource group with a membership reflective of different sectors of the community that impact on, or have an interest in, parks and greenways. The resource group included members from the conservation, environmental stewardship, recreation and farming communities as well as representatives from the private forest sector and local residents from the three regional district electoral areas (see inside front page for resource group members).

Group members shared expertise and knowledge and worked with staff to develop a vision for the Comox Valley parks and greenways system, identify criteria for parkland acquisition, collect areas of interest and assist in the identification of a set of priorities for parkland acquisition.

Public Open Houses

In September 2010, the regional district held three public open houses, one in each electoral area, to solicit input from residents as to their preferences and priorities for greenways and parkland. Open houses were advertised in local newspapers, on JetFM radio and the CVRD website and facebook site.

All the information panels and maps presented at the open houses as well as the open house survey were posted on the regional district website. This allowed residents to review the materials and provide comments even if they were not able to attend one of the open houses.

See appendix 4 for a summary of completed open house surveys and submissions.



Telephone Survey

The regional district also commissioned Synovate to conduct a telephone interview survey to learn whether electoral area residents would support a tax levy specifically for parkland acquisition, how much they would be willing to pay and what types of parks they considered the most important to acquire.

The survey was conducted with 312 residents living in Baynes Sound (Area 'A'), Lazo North (Area 'B') and Puntledge-Black

Creek (Area 'C'). Denman and Hornby Islands are excluded from the scope of this plan. The margin of error was $\pm 5.5\%$ at a 95% level of confidence, 19 times out of 20. Telephone survey results are summarized in appendix 5 and further on in this report.

The initial priorities developed with the resource group were revised to reflect public comments and preferences received through the consultation process.

Agency Referrals and Public Comment Period

The parks and greenways strategic plan was drafted based on all the input received. A final draft was presented to the electoral areas services committee at their January 17, 2011 meeting for review and discussion of funding mechanisms.

Following the meeting, the draft plan was referred out to local governments, senior government agencies and First Nations for comment and also posted on the CVRD website for further public comment. Comments were received by the agricultural community, several senior government ministries, the three municipalities and the Islands Trust, the Regional Districts of Nanaimo and Strathcona, the CVRD property services and strategic and long range planning branches and the public (see appendix 6). The Comox Valley Conservation Strategy Community Partnership appeared as a delegation to the electoral areas services committee at their February 14, 2011 meeting to present their submission (see appendix 6, p. 117).

The final draft plan was revised to give consideration to the many comments received.

2. Context

Trends, Opportunities and Challenges

Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing interest in making the communities we live in more sustainable. Citizens are expecting their governments to place more emphasis on environmental protection, clean air and drinking water and sustainable growth. In October 2008, the Comox Valley Regional District, the Village of Cumberland, the Town of Comox and the City of Courtenay initiated development of a sustainability strategy for the valley. Completed January 2010, the strategy provides a road map for shifting the daily business of the Comox Valley to achieving a shared vision of sustainability. The strategy identifies environmental principles and related regional and municipal actions such as policies related to local food production, a sustainability checklist for developers, policies regarding pesticide use and incentives for using alternative transportation.

The sustainability strategy also sets targets for ecosystems protection and park creation. Implementation of the parks and greenways strategic plan will contribute to meeting the following two actions under Goal 5.2. Conserve and restore ecosystems, objective 5.2.1: Conserve currently unprotected sensitive ecosystems:

- k. Inventory and assess conservation funding initiatives that are currently in use by local governments. Based on this assessment, identify opportunities for additional conservation funding strategies, and

- l. Consider opportunities for land acquisitions to support the protection of key areas (possibly through a local government park acquisition fund or through a partnership with a local conservation organization).

Further, the strategic plan contributes to the achievement of Goal 5.4.: All citizens have access to recreational opportunities, objective 5.4.1.: Ensure widespread access to a variety of recreational parks and greenways and the target that by 2020 50% of municipal residents live within 2.5 km of a larger conservation area or large natural park area.

It also works toward implementation of the following three actions under goal 5.4.:

- b. Create a region-wide parks and trails network, linked by inter-community greenways, that addresses social and ecological needs.
- c. Where applicable, require new developments to include greenways that connect to a regional greenways network.
- e. Pursue opportunities to jointly acquire land to meet park needs in municipal and electoral areas.

Finally, the strategic plan contributes to the achievement of the 2020 target of 60% of residents living within 400 metres (5 minute walk) of a greenway or walkway and a dedicated cycling route that connects them to town centres, jobs and community services.¹

¹ *Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy*. Feb. 18, 2010 available at www.comoxvalleyrd.ca

Strong Public Support for Parks

A large number of residents use parks and trails in the CVRD on a regular basis – 74% use parks and trails once or twice a month or more often. Specifically, 20% use a park or trail almost daily, 35% once or twice a week, and 19% once or twice a month. 9% only use parks and trails twice every six months, 4% once a year or less, and 13% rarely or never. This information was collected by Synovate, a professional survey company, commissioned by the CVRD to learn whether electoral area residents would support a tax levy specifically for parkland acquisition, how much they would be willing to pay and what types of parks they considered the most important to acquire (see appendix 5).

The CVRD also conducts an annual telephone survey of regional district residents to understand public satisfaction with services provided by the CVRD as well as public preferences. In January 2009, the CVRD added several questions about regional district parks to the survey. Both the 2009 and 2010 surveys showed the importance Comox Valley residents place on parks. The surveys asked residents how frequently they visit a regional district park, what they consider the greatest benefits of parks and greenways and what they consider to be the top three priorities for the regional district.

In 2009 two-thirds (66%) of those surveyed said that they or someone in their household visits a regional park at least once a month, including 7% who do so almost daily, and 27% who use a park once or twice per week.

In 2010, the results were similar with 61% of respondents saying they visit a regional district park at least once a month, including 7% who do so almost daily and 22% who use a park once or twice a week.

The most important benefits of regional parks identified by residents included

“protecting greenspace for walking, cycling, and other non-motorized recreation” (81% identified this as a first, second, or third benefit in 2009 and 72% did so in 2010), and “protecting wildlife habitat and ecosystems” (73% identified this as a first, second or third benefit in 2009 and 74% did so in 2010). Interestingly, more respondents (36% in 2009 and 35% in 2010) indicated “protecting wildlife habitat and ecosystems” as their first choice - over “protecting greenspace for walking, cycling and other non-motorized recreation” - which was the first choice of 32% of respondents in 2009 and of 29% in 2010.

When asked their opinion about three distinct regional priorities 9 in 10 residents (92% in 2009 and 88% in 2010) agreed with preserving agricultural land, followed by 78% in 2009 and 73% in 2010 who agreed with expanding the regional park system by acquiring additional parkland. This was followed by 48% in 2009 and 46% in 2010 who agreed with promoting higher density development to encourage transit use.

Prior to being asked their priorities, residents were cautioned that achieving these may have tax implications including how tax revenue is allocated or spent by the CVRD.

This strong public support is both a challenge and an opportunity. The regional district will need financial resources to respond to public interest in securing more parkland and reach the goals the public identified as part of the planning process for this strategic plan.

Rapid Population Growth

Between 1991 and 2010, the population of the Comox Valley grew from 45,649 to an estimated 63,700. The population is expected to reach 76,500 by 2020 and

88,500 by 2030,² an additional 24,800 people over the next 21 years. This increase in the population will mean more development and expansion of urban areas with a potential concurrent loss of greenspace and neighbourhood trails that currently cross undeveloped private property. The increase in population also means more demand for outdoor recreation opportunities will increase user pressure on existing parks and greenways. Given the anticipated population growth, it is essential to plan now for a parks and greenways system that will meet the needs of present and future residents. To reach that goal, suitable areas need to be acquired in the near future before they are lost to urban and suburban development. A few opportunities to add important areas to the parks and greenways system have already been lost such as Lannan Forest and sections of the Wellington-colliery rail corridor.

Regional Growth Strategy

The Comox Valley's Regional Growth Strategy, bylaw 120, adopted in March 2011, directs most of the growth in the coming 20 years to core settlement areas (settlement nodes and settlement expansion areas). Consequently, opportunities to obtain park dedications at time of subdivision or parkland amenities at time of rezoning will be largely limited to those areas.

Changing Demographics

B.C.'s population is aging. In the Comox Valley, 18 % of the population were 65 and older in 2008.³ This is expected to increase to 26% in 2030.⁴

² B.C. Stats P.E.O.P.L.E. Projection 33, 2009.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Provincial Health Services Authority. 2009. *Foundations for a Healthier Built Environment, Summary Paper*. <http://www.phsa.ca/HealthPro/PopPubHealth/default.htm>

At the same time that the population is aging, the gap between rich and poor is growing in British Columbia. The gap is age related with more than half the wealth of Canadians now owned by people over 50. Young families with children are twice as likely to live in poverty (as defined by the low income cut-off).⁵ Parks and trails offer access to recreation that is affordable to young families with children.

Provincial Trends in Recreation

Current trends in recreation show an increased demand for low cost outdoor recreation opportunities. Especially young families are looking for inexpensive and informal activities that can be enjoyed by the whole family. When asked about preferred new recreation facilities, new trails consistently ranks at or near the top of public surveys.⁶

The demand for trails is reflected in people's favourite activities. Two of the fastest growing leisure activities amongst BC residents are walking and cycling followed by gardening, cultural activities, outdoor activities, environmental learning, cultural learning and eco-tourism.⁷

75% of adults report walking during their leisure time and 21 % report bicycling. Of youth aged 12 to 19, 63% report walking and 47% report bicycling during their leisure

⁵ Statistics Canada calculates the percentage of income the average family spends on clothing, food and shelter then defines any family spending twenty percentage points more than that average percentage as being below the cut-off.

⁶ BC Recreation and Parks Association. 2006. Strategic Plan for the Parks and Recreation Sector in B.C.

⁷ BC Recreation and Parks Association. 2006. Strategic Plan for the Parks and Recreation Sector in B.C.

time.⁸ Amongst outdoor focused activities, one of the fastest growing activities is bird watching. There is also a growing trend toward more intensive environmental experiences such as wilderness hiking. Other outdoor recreation activities gaining in popularity include mountain biking, trail running events, endurance riding competitions and frisbee golf. Responding to these varied interests and protecting the natural environment at the same time can be a challenge.

Environmental interpretation can help to create a greater appreciation of the natural environment and acceptance of the limits on human use required to protect sensitive ecosystems.

Protection of Agricultural Land

A large number of existing and proposed regional district trails and parks overlap with the agricultural land reserve (ALR) and/or border active farmland. The importance of agriculture to the local economy and to the cultural fabric of the Comox Valley is recognized in both the CVRD's regional growth strategy and the sustainability strategy.

Where proposed trail corridors are located entirely or in part within the ALR, approval of the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC) is required to develop a trail within that corridor. While ALC approval is not required to protect agricultural land as parkland (unless it involves subdivision of a parcel within the ALR), prior consultation with the agricultural community is critical in order to balance agricultural, environmental and recreation needs.

⁸ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. 2004. Physical Activity Monitor and Sport. Available at http://www.cflri.ca/eng/provincial_data/pam2004/british_columbia.php

The provincial guide to using and developing trails in ranch and farm areas⁹ provides useful guidelines for trail alignment, signage, fences, vegetated buffers and other natural barriers. The regional district also needs to work with the agricultural community to prevent the spread of noxious weeds from trail corridors to adjacent farmland and educate the public to respect farm operations when using trails in agricultural areas.

In cases where a proposed park within the agricultural land reserve is conservation focused, acquisition may not be necessary if affected landowners are supportive of taking measures to protect key conservation values (e.g. a wetland, a stand of Garry Oaks).

Protection of Ecosystems into the Future

Even when taken together, regional district, municipal and provincial parks protect only small fragments of the region's diverse ecosystems. Park boundaries follow property lines that often cut across plant communities and wildlife habitat, leaving out important areas that could protect more fully functioning ecosystems. In addition, ecosystems within a park are affected by park visitor use as well as uses on surrounding lands. For example, park staff are sometimes called to cut down potential hazard trees along a park boundary to protect adjacent private property. Park boundaries are not always respected and it is not uncommon that built structures, lawns, and garden sheds of adjacent private property owners encroach on parkland. A further challenge to the integrity of ecosystems found in parks as well as other open spaces is the invasion of non-native species. The invasive non-native species

⁹ Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. *A guide to using and developing trails in ranch and farm areas*. Available on the Ministry of Agriculture website at <http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/sf/trails/index.htm>

displace native plant communities and the diverse birds and animals these support. The regional district must work together with private land owners and other government agencies to maintain native ecosystems within parks into the future.



Climate Change

The predicted changes in climate including warmer temperatures year-round, wetter winters, drier and hotter summers, more frequent and severe weather events, rising sea levels and increases in stream temperatures will put enormous stresses on plant and animal life. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that 20 to 30% of species are at increased risk of extinction as climate change proceeds.¹⁰

The projected 1.5 – 3.5 °C increase in sea surface temperatures in the Northeast Pacific over the next 50 years will cause

¹⁰ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 4th Report. April 2007. *Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*.

significant ecological impacts on the marine, coastal and river ecosystems of the Comox Valley. For example, warmer waters will affect the spawning and migration of salmon, which in turn will disrupt the feeding habits of bears and bald eagles.

Rising sea levels will alter coastal sand ecosystems, mudflats, salt marshes and estuaries compromising essential habitat for shorebirds.

As temperatures become milder, sea level, montane, subalpine and alpine communities will shift upslope.

In an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, many of B.C.'s local governments, including the CVRD, have signed the *B.C. Climate Action Charter*, pledging to become carbon-neutral by 2012. As a signatory to the charter, the CVRD is required to report annually on steps taken to become carbon-neutral.

Through both the Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy and the Regional Growth Strategy, the CVRD has adopted a long term 80% reduction target of greenhouse gas emissions from 2007 levels by 2050 with a mid-term target of a 50% reduction by 2030.

To achieve these targets, the regional district will seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the building sector, the transportation sector and the solid waste sector. The regional district is also seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions created by deforestation by promoting the conservation of forested areas¹¹ and establishing 400 hectare minimum lot sizes in resource areas. Finally, the regional district is committed to promoting renewable energy generation.

Management strategies for parks and greenways will need to consider the potential

¹¹ This does not apply to forested areas within the agricultural land reserve since the purpose of the land reserve is to protect land for existing and future agricultural use.

effects of climate change on plant and animal communities. For example, restoration projects may increase the variety of species to be planted in anticipation that at least some may be able to adapt to a changed climate.



Maidenhair fern

3. Parks Mandate and Legislative Environment

Mandate of the Regional District Parks Service

The mandate of the regional district's park services is to:

- establish a network of parks and greenways that protect the natural diversity of the Comox Valley from coastal sand ecosystems to estuaries to mature forests; and
- provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and activities that foster appreciation and enjoyment of the natural environment.

While in many areas, the two components of this mandate are complementary, at times they may conflict. In such cases, environmental protection will come first.¹²

Regional District Land Use Planning and Bylaws

While one of the mandates of regional district parks is to protect the natural environment, parks and greenways alone

¹² Parks Administration and Operation Policy, June 1992. Amended June 2001.

cannot ensure long term health and functioning of the Comox Valley’s diverse ecosystems. An array of federal, provincial and local government legislation and planning tools need to work together to encourage responsible land use and environmental protection on public and private lands. The regional district has the following tools at its disposal to encourage ecologically based land use planning and management:

The *Regional Growth Strategy* (RGS) for the Comox Valley, adopted in March 2011, provides a broad vision for the region, goals and policies for managing growth and development. It defines where future growth will occur and the appropriate type, intensity and form of that growth. The regional growth strategy supports “the implementation of local government parks and greenways plans and policies to establish a network of interconnected local and electoral area parks and greenways in order to protect recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat and natural ecosystem functions (policy 2A-9)”.

Official Community Plans (OCPs) provide long term plans for specific areas, including goals and policies for environmental protection and community parks. The three electoral areas of the regional district are guided by the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan, 1998, bylaw 2042.¹³ Policies related to parks and greenways are summarized in appendix 8. The City of Courtenay, Village of Cumberland and Town of Comox each have their own OCP.

OCPs can designate *Development Permit Areas* (DPAs) for the purpose of protecting environmentally significant sites or types of areas. For instance, the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan establishes DPAs along watercourses to protect sensitive

streamsides and buffers around eagles and heron nests.

Zoning Bylaws direct land use by establishing residential, commercial, industrial, resource extraction, institutional and other land use zones. Each zone comes with a set of regulations that establish minimum lot size, uses allowed, required set-backs from the road and neighbouring properties, number of residences permitted, building heights, etc. Zoning bylaws may also establish setback requirements from the foreshore and limit building within a floodplain. In the regional district parks are allowed in any zone.

The Comox Valley zoning bylaw covers the electoral areas only. Each of the three municipalities have their own zoning bylaws.

Re-zoning, subdivision and development permit applications offer the potential for the regional district to place *restrictive covenants* on portions of a parcel to protect environmental features¹⁴ (See appendix 7 for further environmental protection and parkland acquisition tools)

The regional district may partner with conservation organizations and stewardship groups in acquiring protected areas, negotiating *conservation covenants* (environmental agreements) with landowners, and providing public education on environmental issues.

Parks and greenways need to be viewed as a component in this larger land use management context.

Parks and Greenways Policies and Bylaws

Land acquisition, parks planning and operation are directed by a number of regional district policies and bylaws.

¹³ See www.comoxvalleyrd.ca for a link to the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan.

¹⁴ Note that within the agricultural land reserve restrictive covenants require the approval of the Agricultural Land Commission.

The Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan, 1998 (bylaw 2042) identifies five objectives for parks, recreation and greenways:

1. To identify and work to acquire parks and recreation sites to meet the present and future needs of residents.
2. To promote recreational opportunities which meet local needs and complement the natural environment and existing resources.
3. To improve and maintain public access to park and recreation resources.
4. To promote the development of an integrated trail and park system in the Comox Valley.
5. To work cooperatively and seek partnerships to plan and implement a valley wide greenways network.¹⁵

The three electoral areas' parks and greenways plans, Schedules C, D, and H of the Rural Comox Valley OCP, list proposed ecological and recreational greenways identified during the public planning process for the electoral area plans. The importance of many of these areas was confirmed by the citizen resource group and the public during the consultation process. The areas with the greatest benefit for the region as a whole and supported by residents during the public consultation process will be pursued as part of the implementation of this plan. Other proposed parks, ecological and recreational greenways will be pursued at the time that subdivision or rezoning applications are received by the regional district for land that includes those areas of interest.

This strategic plan endorses the objectives and policies of the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan and schedules C, D, and H (Electoral Area 'C' Land Use and

Greenways Plan, Area 'B' Electoral Area and Greenways Plan and Electoral Area 'A' Greenways Plan) to the plan. See appendix 8 for a summary. Note that the objectives and policies will be consolidated at the time the OCP is reviewed to integrate key policies and priorities in this parks and greenways strategic plan.

Park Authority – The Local Government Act

The regional district's authority to establish and operate parks is set out in the *Local Government Act*, section 176 (1)(d). The Act allows regional districts to acquire land for parks and trails and pass regulatory bylaws with respect to managing those parks. The regional district may establish long-term (greater than five years) contracts and agreements for services.

The CVRD was given the authority for two service functions for parks by Supplementary Letters Patent. In 1971, the regional district established a regional parks function and in 1987 it established separate community parks functions for each electoral area. The regional district parks function was repealed in 2008 due to many years of inactivity.

Electoral Areas 'A', 'B', and 'C' Parks and Greenways Service

This function allows the regional district to raise money to acquire and operate parkland within the electoral areas only. Prior to 2006, the three electoral areas each funded their own community parks service. In April 2006, the three electoral areas amalgamated their parks services into a combined Electoral Areas 'A', 'B', and 'C' parks and greenways service. This allows the electoral areas to pool their resources for park operation, management and acquisition.

¹⁵ Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan, 1998 bylaw 2042, p. 23-25

The maximum tax rate for this service is \$50 per \$100,000 of assessed property value. In 2010, the parks tax levy was set at \$18.17 per \$100,000 of assessed value. For illustrative purposes, this is equivalent to \$66 per year for a property valued at \$365,000. The maximum allowable tax rate for the service would be \$183 for a property valued at \$365,000.

Land Acquisition at Subdivision

The *Local Government Act, section 941* gives the regional district the authority to require 5 % parkland dedication or cash in lieu at the time a parcel of land is subdivided. The cash in lieu of land must be used to purchase other land for community park purposes. The 5% park dedication requirement does not apply where fewer than three additional lots are created (unless the lot being subdivided was created within the past five years), where the lots that are created are larger than 2 hectares in size, or where the subdivision is a consolidation of existing parcels.

4. The Existing Parks and Greenways System

Parks and Greenways Classification

The 1986 Comox Valley Area Parks Plan classified parks into the following six categories: coastal recreation parks, shoreline protection parks, nature parks, community recreation parks, beach access parks and regional trails. These categories have been adjusted to reflect terminology used in the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan. The category of regional trail has been replaced by ‘recreational greenway’. Shoreline protection parks now fall under a new broader category called ‘conservation area’. This new classification was broadly supported by the public during the public consultation process. Following is a brief explanation of each category.

1. **Coastal recreation** parks focus on providing water based recreation opportunities. Goose Spit Park is an example of a coastal recreation park.
2. **Nature parks** are to conserve natural features of regional significance and provide opportunities for passive recreational activities such as hiking, biking, horseback riding and nature study. Nature parks are typically large parks with extensive trail networks. However, smaller parks may also be classified in this category if they include sensitive environmental features. Nymph Falls and Seal Bay are the regional district’s largest nature parks.
3. **Community parks** are intended to provide recreation opportunities for nearby residents and increase the walkability of neighbourhoods by providing short trail connections to

schools, community centres and commercial centres. Typically, community parks range from 1 to 5 hectares in size and are typically obtained as part of the 5 % parkland dedication at time of subdivision (see appendix 7, p.121) for an explanation of parkland acquisition tools). Examples of community parks are Joe Walker, Hudson and Loxely parks.

4. **Beach accesses** are not strictly speaking parks. Their primary purpose is to provide public access to the foreshore. Beach access is provided along road rights-of-way that end at the foreshore and are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI). In circumstances where beach access rights-of-way require improvements and/or active management to make the access safe for public use, the regional district may apply for a permit over the right-of-way from MoTI to allow it to make trail improvements. The regional district may also obtain permits to place a sign to mark foreshore accesses.
5. **Ecological greenway**¹⁶ – The electoral areas ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’ greenways plans identify two types of greenways – ecological greenways and recreational greenways. Ecological greenways protect aquatic habitat corridors, fisheries sensitive areas, upland habitat corridors such as wildlife migration corridors and may include eagle and heron nest sites. Masters Greenway fronting the Puntledge River is an example of an ecological as well as a recreational greenway.

¹⁶ See the glossary for more detailed definitions of ecological and recreational greenways.

6. **Recreational greenways** are linear parks and may feature walking, cycling or horseback riding trails. Often recreational greenways are multi-use. They connect natural areas or communities to each other. The regional district's most popular recreational greenway is the One Spot Trail.
7. **Conservation area** is a new category to recognize the role of the regional district in protecting rare or endangered species and their habitat and/or rare and endangered plant communities in the Comox Valley. In recognition of their ecological sensitivity and to ensure their long term integrity, these parks may provide limited access to people. For example, a sensitive wetland may include a viewing platform on one end but no trail around the wetland. Adding conservation areas to the regional district's parks system was supported by 100 percent of residents who completed the open house survey. The regional district currently manages Lazo Wildlife and Foden parks for conservation values.

Special Zones within Parks

The regional district may establish zones within some of its larger parks in order to identify the intended use and management approach for a specific area within a park. Zones are identified in the park's master plan. For example, the master plan for Seal Bay Park and Seal Bay Forest includes a wilderness zone with the emphasis on protecting ecosystems, a natural environment zone which allows for low impact recreation and an intensive recreation zone which allows for park entrance, parking, picnic and interpretive areas.¹⁷

¹⁷ Zones within parks serve to identify high use areas such as parking lots and trail heads and low use areas such as sensitive ecosystems. Zones in parks are not

Parks and Greenways Managed by the Regional District

The regional district currently manages 36 active parks and greenways (26 within the planning area of the Comox Valley parks and greenways strategic plan) for a total area of approximately 1155 hectares. Active parks and greenways have a trail system and signage. They may also have parking, outhouses, park benches and picnic tables. Most of the regional district's active parks are small neighbourhood parks ranging from under half a hectare to four or five hectares in size. Larger parks, 55 to 500 ha in size, with extensive trail systems are Seal Bay Nature Park, Seal Bay Forest, Nymph Falls and Wildwood Interpretive Forest. Most regional district greenways are relatively short connecting community amenities such as a neighbourhood school to a nearby park or a residential neighbourhood. The regional district's longest greenway is the One Spot Trail which stretches 7.8 km.

The regional district also has 34 small inactive community parks, of these 29 are within the planning area, a further 5 are on Denman and Hornby islands. Altogether the 29 inactive parks in the planning area cover 69 ha. Most of the individual parks are less than 1 hectare in size. They do not have a trail system or formal public access. Trails, access and other park amenities may be developed in the future when demand for greenspace in the immediate neighbourhood warrants investment in developing these into active community parks. Where located within a residential area, small community parks may also be used for urban agriculture in the future.

The regional district holds park interests in a variety of ways. A number of parks and greenways are owned in fee simple by the

established by bylaw and are not to be confused with land use zones in CVRD's land use zoning bylaw.

CVRD, others exist as a result of statutory rights-of-way or permits over unopened road allowances or over private land. The regional district also holds several 5 to 10 year licenses and one 20 year lease over areas of provincial Crown land. In two cases the regional district acquired land in partnership with a land trust and is leasing the portion of the land owned by the land trust under a 99 year lease to manage and operate it as a park.

A number of regional district parks are the result of the generosity of Comox Valley residents who donated or bequested their land to the regional district as parkland.

The regional district offers a tax receipt for land donations. In some cases, it is a tax benefit to the donor to have the donation recognized as having ‘ecological significance’ by Revenue Canada. Examples of lands donated to the regional district for parks are

Foden Park, Glover Community Nature Park and an addition to Mt. Geoffrey Park. Examples of parks that involved an ecogift are Bear Creek Nature Park and Sarah and Brian McLoughlin Park.

Individuals may also donate land to the regional district as a ‘life estate’. That means the donor retains the right to live on the land until the end of their lifetime and while the donors are alive, the regional district pays all or a portion of the property taxes. An example of a life estate is Sarah and Brian McLoughlin Park.

Table 1 shows current active regional district parks and greenways, type of tenure, classification, amenities and habitat. Table 2 shows inactive regional district parks to be developed when there is a need for more greenspace in the neighbourhood.

Table 1: Active regional district parks and greenways in the planning area (excl. Denman and Hornby islands)

Park	ha	Tenure	Classification	Amenities	Habitat
BAYNES SOUND (AREA ‘A’) (4)					
Glover Community Nature Park	2.47	CVRD owned	nature park	trails, benches	2 nd growth Douglas fir forest
Joe Walker Park	1.15	CVRD owned	community park	outhouse, 1bbq shelter with 2 fire pits, trails, 4 picnic tables	2 nd growth mixed forest
Royston Greenway	1.15	leased from Province	greenway	365 m long wharf, benches	n/a
Ship’s Point Park	1.17	CVRD owned	community park	outhouse, benches	Garry oak, coastal sand ecosystem
LAZO NORTH (AREA ‘B’) (12)					
Avonlee Greenway	0.4	Statutory right-of-way (SRW)	recreational greenway	375 m trail	2 nd growth mixed forest
Barbara Road Greenway	0.22	Licensed from MoTI	recreational greenway	144 metres	elevated boardwalk

Park	ha	Tenure	Classification	Amenities	Habitat
Dyke Road Park and Viewing Platform	1	licenced from Province	nature park	parking lot, viewing platform, picnic table	foreshore
Foden Park	7.54	CVRD owned	nature park	parking lot, trails	2 nd growth mixed forest, swamp
Goose Spit Park	21	licensed from Province	coastal recreation park	parking lots, outhouses, picnic tables, benches, interpretive signs, fire rings	coastal sand ecosystem
Huband Park	0.24	CVRD owned	Community park	recreational ball field	n/a
King Coho Greenway	0.09	CVRD owned	recreational greenway	trail	n/a
Lazo Wildlife Park	3.2	CVRD owned	conservation area	trails, interpretive sign	2 nd growth mixed forest, wetland
Little River Nature Park	6.34	CVRD owned	nature park	To be developed: trails, interpretive signs, parking	Sensitive stream, beach plan habitat, estuarine salt marsh, 2 nd growth Douglas-fir
Loxley Park	0.62	CVRD owned	community park and greenway	trail	2 nd growth Douglas fir forest, small wetland
Seal Bay Forest	519	leased from province	nature park	trails, viewing platform, outhouses, benches	2 nd growth forest, wetland
Seal Bay Nature Park	151.8	CVRD owned	nature park	trails, outhouses, viewing areas, benches, parking lots, beach	2 nd growth Douglas fir forest, foreshore
PUNTELEDGE-BLACK CREEK (AREA 'C') (10)					
Bracken Park	2.87	CVRD owned	conservation area	trails	mixed 2 nd growth forests
Bear Creek Nature Park	65	CVRD/Ducks Unlimited partnership	nature park	trails, benches, hatchery. To be developed: parking, interpretive signs	mixed 2 nd growth forest, riparian areas, mature forest
Eagle Drive Park	0.4	CVRD owned and SRW	beach access park	parking lot, trails, stairway to beach	2 nd growth Douglas fir, pebble beach
Headquarters Townsite Park	9	SRW	nature park	trails	riparian area, 2 nd growth mixed forest
Masters Greenway	6.06	CVRD owned,	nature park	trails	2 nd growth mixed forest, riparian

Park	ha	Tenure	Classification	Amenities	Habitat
		SROW and life estate			forest
Nymph Falls Nature Park	55.54	leased from Province	nature park	parking lot, trails, outhouse	2 nd growth mixed forests, riparian forest
One Spot Trail	17.55	several SRW's	recreational greenway	7.8 km gravel trail	2 nd growth mixed forest
Pinecrest Park	2	CVRD owned	community park	BMX jumps, trails	wetland, seasonal stream, pioneer forest
Tsolum Spirit Park	2.86	CVRD owned	nature park	trails, parking lot	floodplain, riparian forest, 2 nd growth Douglas fir
Wildwood Interpretive Forest	276	Permit to build and maintain trails from Province	nature park (trails)	trails	2 nd growth coniferous forest, pioneer forest
TOTAL	1154.67				

SROW = Statutory Right-of-Way

MoTI = Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

Table 2: Inactive regional district parks and greenways in the planning area (excl. Denman and Hornby islands)

Park	ha	Tenure	Classification	Amenities	Habitat
BAYNES SOUND (AREA 'A') (10)					
Baynes Park	0.4 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	2 nd growth Douglas-fir and grand fir forest
Briardale Park	0.8 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	2 nd growth Douglas-fir forest
Emerton Park	0.17 ha	CVRD owned	shoreline protection park	none	foreshore, mixed forest
Hyland Greenway	0.5 ha (315 m)	CVRD owned	recreational greenway	none	not assessed
Montrose Park	1.1 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	mixed 2 nd growth forest
Ravine Nature Park	2.43 ha	CVRD owned	nature park	informal trails	mixed riparian forest
Roy Creek Park	0.314 ha	CVRD owned	conservation area	none	mixed riparian forest
Ship Peninsula Park	1.7 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	mixed 2 nd growth forest
Trent River Greenway	6 ha	CVRD owned	nature park	none	riparian forest with mature

Park	ha	Tenure	Classification	Amenities	Habitat
					Douglas-fir on banks
Union Bay Greenway	0.1 ha	CVRD owned	recreational greenway	none	Foreshore, pebble beach
LAZO NORTH (AREA 'B') (8)					
Daye Park	0.874 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	mixed 2 nd growth forest
Dyke Road Greenway	0.018 ha	CVRD owned	recreational greenway	none	foreshore, tidal
Hudson Park	0.283 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	mixed 2 nd growth forest
Mallard Creek Nature Park	0.4	Covenant and SRW	ecological greenway	none	Sitka spruce, western red cedar, and riparian
Sandpines Park	1.4 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	2 nd growth Douglas-fir, grand fir forest
Sea Terrace Park	1 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	2 nd growth Douglas-fir forest and wetland area
Seacliff Park	2 ha	CVRD owned	nature park	none	riparian forest
Trillium Park and Greenways	1.01 ha	CVRD owned	community park and recreational greenway	none	2 nd growth mixed forest
PUNTLEDGE-BLACK CREEK (AREA 'C') (11)					
Dove Park	0.38 ha	CVRD owned	community park	none	red alder forest with Douglas-fir and Sitka spruce
Driftwood Marine Park	4.29 ha	CVRD owned	community park	informal trails	saltwater intertidal marsh, 2 nd growth Douglas-fir forest
Hillview Greenway	0.78 ha 1.1 km	CVRD owned, and SROW	recreational greenway	informal trail	red alder forest, 2 nd growth Douglas-fir forest
Macaulay Heights Park	5.03 ha	CVRD owned	community park	informal trailhead and trail	2 nd growth Douglas-fir forest, mixed shrub forest
Mountain Spirit Nature Park	9.3 ha	CVRD owned	nature park	informal trails	Young 2 nd growth and riparian forest
Pearl of the Oyster	8.45 ha	CVRD owned	conservation area	overgrown trails	wetland, red alder and Douglas-fir forests
Sarah and Brian McLoughlin Park	4.45 ha	Life estate – still private	future nature park	no public access	2 nd growth mixed forest
Saratoga Park	0.59 ha	CVRD owned	community park	informal	Red alder, maple,

Park	ha	Tenure	Classification	Amenities	Habitat
				trails	hemlock forest
Schulz Greenway	0.136 ha	CVRD owned	recreational greenway	none	not assessed
South Macaulay Heights Park	0.8 ha	CVRD owned	community park	informal trail	2 nd growth Douglas-fir forest
Wildwood Marsh	14.6 ha	CVRD owned	conservation area	footpath	marsh and riparian forest
TOTAL	69.3 ha				

SRW= Statutory right-of-way

Other Parkland in the CVRD

Besides regional district parks, the Comox Valley also has a number of municipal parks, provincial parks and conservation areas owned by non-profit organizations such as the Nature Trust, Ducks Unlimited and The Land Conservancy.

Some jurisdictions have it as their goal to protect a certain percentage of their land base as parkland. In BC those percentages typically range from 12% to 15%. The Comox Valley Regional District does not

have a goal with respect to protecting a certain percentage of its land base. One of the targets identified in the Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy is to protect 75% of currently unprotected sensitive ecosystems by 2030 and 100% by 2050. A further target related to the protection of greenspace is to develop a network of greenways such that by 2030 70% of residents live within 400 metres (a five minute walk) of a greenway and by 2050 90% do so.

Table 2: Parks and greenspaces within the Comox Valley Regional District

Jurisdiction	Area (ha)	No.
Provincial Parks (portion of Strathcona Provincial Park within regional district boundaries, Miracle Beach, Kin Beach and Kitty Coleman)	13,109	4
CVRD community parks and greenways (1155 ha active parkland and 69 ha inactive parkland)	1,224	68
CVRD exhibition grounds	15	1
City of Courtenay parks (including playing fields)	141	31
Town of Comox parks (including playing fields)	109	22
Village of Cumberland parks	82	16
Other greenspace (provincial, land trust...)	14,458	not available
Total area of parkland in CVRD	29,138	-
Total Area of CVRD	174,584	-
% of Comox Valley protected as parkland incl. Strathcona P.P.	17%	
not including Strathcona P.P.	9%	

Gaps in the Current Parks and Greenways System

Larger Nature Parks and Long Distance Trails

The regional district has 57 small parks, 1 to 8 hectares in size that, for the most part, serve the immediate neighbourhood. While these parks are locally important and the regional district will continue to provide smaller community parks, they only make a small contribution to achieving the vision for the Comox Valley parks system of a network of connected trails and parks that provide a variety of outdoor experiences and that protect the diverse range of landscapes and native plant and animal communities found in the valley.

Due to their size, small scattered parks have no or only very short trails. As a result, the recreation opportunities they provide are limited. They are also not sufficient in size to protect wildlife habitat and ecosystems.

To achieve the vision developed by the citizen resource group and supported by 98% of people who attended the public open houses, the regional district needs to focus its parkland acquisitions on larger parcels of land that may also protect sensitive habitat and allow for more extensive multi-use trail systems such as Seal Bay and Nymph Falls Nature parks.



Nature walk along One Spot Trail

To connect existing and future parks and trails and communities, additional long distance greenways, such as the One Spot Trail, are needed. Important greenway connections include Royston to Cumberland, Courtenay south to Mud Bay, Courtenay to the Oyster River and Seal Bay Park to Northeast Woods to the South and to Williams Beach and Miracle Beach to the North.

Rare and Endangered Ecosystems

The current parks and greenways system protects a variety of forest types, riparian areas and wetlands as well as one small site of a remnant Garry oak ecosystem and one site with a coastal sand ecosystem.

Underrepresented in the parks system are more significant areas of Garry oak ecosystems and additional sand dune ecosystems. The current system also does not adequately protect mature second or old growth Douglas-fir forest ecosystems and other rare plant assemblages.

Wildlife Migration Corridors

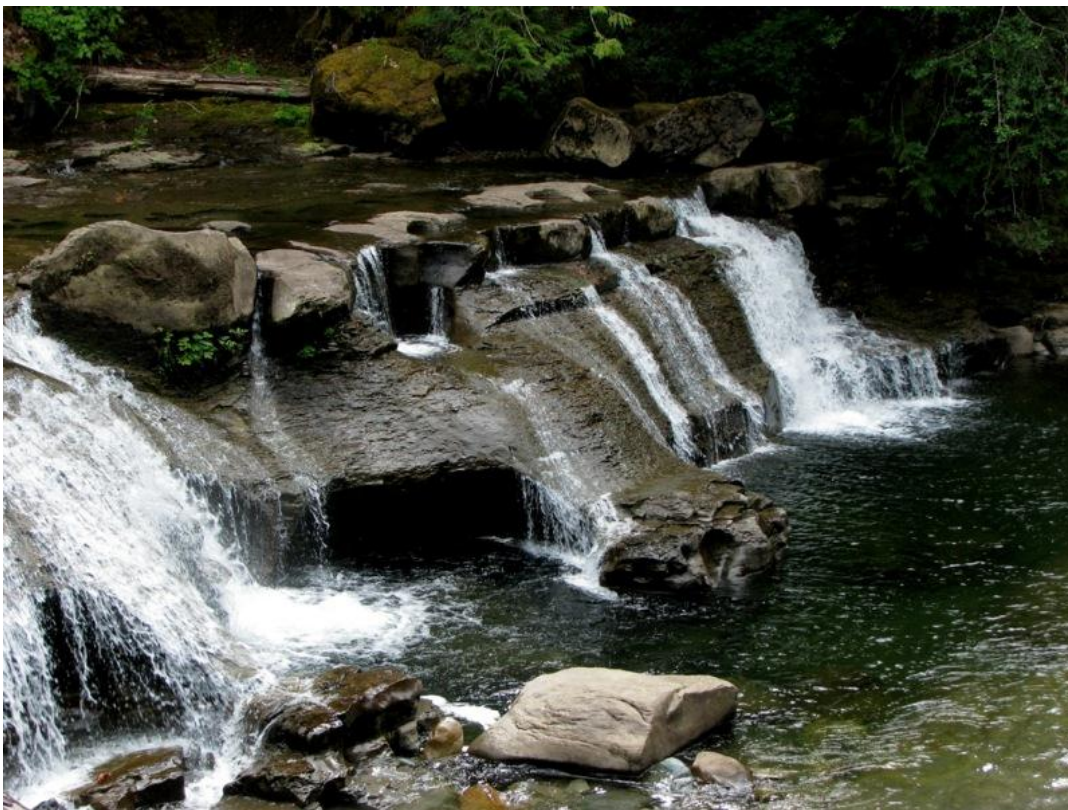
While it would be difficult to acquire entire wildlife migration corridors as parkland due to financial constraints, regional district parks could protect portions or core areas within such a corridor. Examples include the Trent River corridor between the old highway and the Inland Island highway and key Western toad breeding sites and migration corridors on either side of the Inland Island Highway.

To protect wildlife corridors, the regional district would have to use other tools such as restrictive covenants and environmentally sensitive area development permits (ESA DP). Private landowners may also conclude conservation covenants over environmentally sensitive areas of their property to protect these areas in perpetuity

(see appendix 7: Tools for acquiring parkland and protecting greenspace).

The Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy identifies the need to establish an Open Space and Ecosystem Task Force to develop

strategies for ecosystem protection. This action item in the Sustainability Strategy is reiterated in implementation action 16 of this plan (see p. 43)



Browns River Falls

5. Future Parks and Greenways System

The following vision and goals were developed by the parks and greenways strategic plan resource group. The vision was confirmed with the public during the public consultation process.

Vision for the Comox Valley parks and greenways system

- *A natural selection*

The Comox Valley Regional District's system of parks and greenways protects the diverse range of landscapes and native plant and animal communities found in the valley – from mature coastal forests and Garry Oak meadows to lakes, wetlands, salmon-bearing streams, salt water marshes and coastal sand dunes. These natural areas provide a sanctuary for native plants and

animals to thrive and a place for people to explore and connect to nature.

To maintain the natural diversity of life in the Comox Valley, regional district parks are part of a network of municipal and provincial greenspaces linked by riparian or biodiversity corridors. Some regional district parks or portions of a park are set aside as conservation areas with no or limited trail development to protect sensitive ecosystems such as heron rookeries, amphibian or wildlife migration routes,

important bird areas, and rare native plant communities.

A network of greenways, largely separate from the road system, connects parks and communities between the Oyster River and Mud Bay. As local residents cycle, ride their horses, or walk on this network of trails, they traverse coastal forests and meadows, pass by actively farmed fields, or enjoy superb mountain and ocean vistas.

CVRD parks promote healthy lifestyles through a variety of outdoor experiences and activities drawing people of all ages closer to nature. Interpretive signs, nature walks, and educational programs bring to life the history of First Nations and early settlers and inspire with images and stories of the intricacies and marvels of the natural world.

CVRD parks department is responsive to park users and the public and continues to evolve and adapt based on public input, trends in recreation, and changes in environmental conditions. The CVRD acquires land for parks and greenways, manages existing parks, and stewards sensitive areas in concert with the community, business, landowners, First Nations and local municipalities. Tenure over regional district parks and greenways is secure providing protection of these special places into the future for all Comox Valley residents and visitors to enjoy.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Protect and connect native ecosystems over time

Objectives:

- 1.1 Inventory the diverse range of ecosystems/landscapes in the Comox Valley.
- 1.2 Seek to protect the full range of native ecosystems so that each is represented within the regional district park system.

- 1.3 Protect sensitive and threatened habitats (wetlands, marshes, foreshore, streamside corridors, old growth and mature second growth forests, heron rookeries, eagle nest sites, etc.).
- 1.4 Work with other jurisdictions and landowners to protect areas of sufficient size to support wildlife, in particular mountain-to-sea wildlife corridors such as the Trent, Browns and Tsable river corridors. (This is in support of policy 2B-1 of the proposed Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw no. 120, 2010 which states: “Local governments should work together to adopt consistent actions and policies for environmental and natural resource protection, through OCPs, zoning and other mechanisms, that promote the principles of precaution, connectivity and restoration”).
- 1.5 Preserve, restore or enhance degraded natural ecosystems so they can support natural communities of plants and animals.



Chocolate lily in Courtenay River estuary

- 1.6 Respect ecosystem dynamics and natural processes to sustain healthy functioning ecosystems.
- 1.7 Respect the needs of wildlife and sensitive ecosystems when planning trails, parking areas, and other facilities and restrict access to sensitive areas (e.g. heron rookery, wetlands).
- 1.8 Protect recharge areas for aquifers such as wetlands when developing park plans and determining human use areas.
- 1.9 Work with other jurisdictions and landowners to protect greenbelts between development nodes. As per the Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw no. 120, 2010, 2B-2: “OCPs should explore the development of clear definitions and guidelines for *ecological greenways* and to work with neighbouring local governments to create region-wide linkages.

Goal 2: Connect people to nature

Objectives:

- 2.1 Offer places where people can experience ‘wildness’, solitude, inspiration, and spiritual renewal.
- 2.2 Secure access to community amenities and special features, such as Stotan falls, swimming holes, beaches, fossil beds, cultural and historic sites.
- 2.3 Interpret the natural environment to park visitors through interpretive signs and programming.
- 2.4 Provide greenways close to where people live to reduce the need to drive.

Goal 3: Link Communities with greenways

Objectives:

- 3.1 Decrease reliance on motorized vehicles and encourage active lifestyles by establishing a network of multi-use trails.

- 3.2 Provide continuous hiking, biking and horseback riding trails that connect community centres and greenspaces in the valley.
- 3.3 Create a clearly identified hierarchy of trails from single use (walking, cycling or horseback riding), to multi-use trails.
- 3.4 Establish major watershed hiking trails, link and recognize informal existing trails. e.g. Browns River.
- 3.5 Provide a variety of outdoor experiences and activities for people of all ages and abilities (e.g. camping).
- 3.6 Complement experiences available in more developed urban parks, on Crown and on private forest lands.

Goal 4: Plan and manage parks in a proactive and responsive manner

Objectives:

- 4.1 Ensure accessibility of parks and greenways for park visitors (e.g. safe access to the park or greenway along roadways, adequate parking, safe road and bridge crossings, wheelchair accessibility where feasible, etc.).
- 4.2 Plan for flexible and adaptive park areas and trails (e.g. move trails to protect sensitive habitat, add trails to improve links to existing trails, ...).
- 4.3 Be responsive to changes in the social and environmental landscapes and to input from the public and user groups.
- 4.4 Recognize opportunities and be proactive in planning and management (e.g. strategic land acquisitions to secure important links and greenspaces).

Goal 5: Form partnerships to achieve common goals

Objectives:

- 5.1 Nurture the relationship between parks and greenways and park users.

Encourage public participation in nature interpretation and educational programming, park maintenance, ecological restoration and other site specific activities.

- 5.2 Plan collaboratively with local municipalities. As per supporting policies 2D-1 and 2D-2 (p. 38) of the proposed Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw no. 120, 2010, coordinate local and regional greenway network connections and require new developments to link to, improve or expand the existing greenway network
- 5.3 Work with First Nations to identify and advance common interests.
- 5.4 Work with landowners during the development process to explore park opportunities.
- 5.5 Consult with the agricultural community, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Commission when

planning for parks or trails that fall wholly or partly within the agricultural land reserve and/or border agricultural operations and work to mitigate against impacts on existing or future agricultural operations.

- 5.6 Increase awareness of incentives and benefits of land donations to property owners.
- 5.7 Pursue private-public-community partnerships.

Goal 6: Obtain certainty of land tenure

Objective:

- 6.1 Seek long term protection of parks and greenways through legal mechanisms available (e.g. land ownership, statutory rights-of-way, easements, covenants, 30 year Crown land leases).

6. Parks and Greenways Priorities to 2030

Criteria for Park and Greenway Acquisition

The citizen resource group and parks staff identified 91 areas of interest as potential parks or greenways. Many of the areas identified have existing informal trail use, others have important conservation value (see map in appendix 2). The areas of interest were collected by reviewing the Rural Comox Valley OCP and schedules including existing electoral and local area parks and greenways plans, reviewing *Nature without Borders*¹⁸ mapping, talking to different community groups and local residents and reviewing park proposals submitted to the regional district in the past.

To help prioritize the many areas identified, the resource group and regional district staff worked together to develop a set of criteria for parkland acquisition. These criteria were used to evaluate each one of the areas of interest for their potential as regional district park or greenway.

Table 3: Criteria for Parkland Acquisition

CATEGORY	CRITERIA
Level of Development Pressure	Are there imminent development plans for the property? If so, can the conservation or recreation values be protected through riparian area regulations or other mechanisms as part of the rezoning, subdivision or development permit process?
Future Site Potential	Does the site have future recreation or conservation potential if restored?
CONSERVATION VALUES	
Ecological Values	Does the site coincide with a known or likely wildlife corridor, support rare and endangered species (e.g. amphibians), or include eagle, heron or other threatened wildlife nesting, roosting or feeding sites or other unique or special values?
Connectivity	Does the site provide a connection to other parks or protected areas and allow for wildlife movement between these?
Ecosystem Representation	Does the site protect an ecosystem that is threatened, rare and/or underrepresented in the system of protected areas in the region? E.g. Garry Oak ecosystem, coastal sand dune ecosystem, fresh or saltwater marsh, old growth forest, mature second growth forest, unique climatic zone.
Fisheries and Riparian values	Does the site protect an important fish bearing stream or riparian area that cannot be protected through other mechanisms (e.g. riparian area regulations)?
Buffer	Does the site support adjacent values? E.g. provide a buffer to an adjacent already protected and/or environmentally sensitive area.
Limited Access	Does the site have limited human access making it easy to protect principally for conservation?

¹⁸ Comox Valley Land Trust. *Nature without Borders. Comox Valley Land Trust Regional Conservation Strategy*. Phase 1 – Final Report. Revised and Updates January 2008.

CATEGORY	CRITERIA
RECREATION VALUES	
Special or Unique Recreational Feature	Does the site include a unique recreational feature such as a beach or popular swimming hole, alpine hiking access route, informal Nordic skiing area, public seafood harvesting site, diving site, rock climbing area, etc.
Access	Does the site protect access to a popular recreation area? (e.g. trails that connect to trails within Strathcona or other parks, trails that lead to a popular rock climbing area or to a mountain bike trail network, etc.)
Alternative Transportation	Can the land be used as an alternative transportation corridor?
Multi-Use	Does the site and its recreational features serve a wide range of user groups and public? Can site development encourage multi-use?
Popularity	Does the site support a popular recreational resource that is rare and/or threatened to disappear as a result of development? (e.g. walking trails along the waterfront, view points over the ocean and mountains, etc.)
Appropriate to CVRD Parks Mandate	Is the recreational opportunity prevalent at this site most appropriately provided by the CVRD or by another jurisdiction? (i.e. does it fit the CVRD Parks mandate to secure areas for conservation and low impact recreation)
COMMUNITY VALUES	
Heritage Value	Does the site have an important link to the past? Is there no or little other protection of this type of feature in the valley?
Agricultural Values	Does the proposed trail or park lie within the agricultural land reserve? If so, can the regional district mitigate against impacts on adjacent agricultural operations? Can the park or trail benefit farm operations, perhaps through eco-tourism or opportunities for farm gate sales?
Proximity to Where People Live	Is the site close to populated areas with existing or potential access from these areas?
Education and Interpretive Opportunities	Does the site provide educational and interpretive opportunities? (e.g. hatcheries, wildlife viewing areas)
Regional Equity	Is the site located in an area with no or few other protected areas? Would its protection contribute to greater regional equity across the valley in terms of conservation areas and recreational opportunities?
Community Stewardship	Is there a potential for community partnerships and/or stewardship agreements to help manage the site?
Demographic Needs	Does the site respond to the needs of residents close by or other likely users? For example to the needs of children of a near-by school for having a place to explore or the needs of seniors in an adjacent housing development for an accessible trail system.
FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	
Owner Support	Is the owner willing to sell or donate the land, enter into a statutory right of way agreement, easement or conservation covenant?

CATEGORY	CRITERIA
Affordability	If requiring purchase, is the site affordable, require fundraising, short term debt or involve participation of other partners (e.g. a land trust, other levels of government, private sector)?
Park Development and Operating Costs	Can the regional district afford park development costs required to provide or restrict access, restore the site, build or close trails, put up signs, gates, etc?
Risk Management	Is the area safe for public use or can it be made safe at a reasonable cost?

Park and Greenway Priorities

After evaluating each of the areas identified as potential park or greenway using the above criteria for parkland acquisition, the resource group came up with a list of priorities. The priority areas were mapped and presented to the public at the open houses for feedback. The map as well as open house information was also posted on the CVRD website for residents to view. The areas are listed below based on their location from north to south.

Priorities Identified by the Citizen Resource Group

Western toad conservation area. Every year Western toads migrate from wetlands south of Hamm Road and on the east side of the inland island highway across the highway to the headwaters of Black Creek and ponds and wetlands below Mount Washington. They return to the wetlands on the east side of the highway in August to breed. Protection of key sites along the Western toad migration corridors and their breeding areas would contribute to protecting this annual migration.

One Spot Trail extension - north and south extensions along the former railway right-of-way and connections to Wildwood Forest, Macaulay Road and other trails.

Williams Beach Forest – includes an internal trail system and trail connections to the forest from the surrounding neighbourhoods and to Miracle Beach Provincial Park. Some or a large portion of

Williams Beach Forest may be part of treaty settlement. The regional district could pursue partnerships with the new owners to retain some of the public recreation values of the forest.

Wolf Lake – a popular recreation area with informal camping areas on the south and north ends of the lake.

Seal Bay Forest (under licence from the Province) - seeking a long term lease from the province over Seal Bay Forest or a Crown land grant and formalizing trails to the park from the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Strathcona Parkway marsh and ponds - a possible conservation area, currently on private forest land, with a rare assemblage of wetland and subalpine plants.

Garry Oak ecosystem conservation area - protecting a key site or sites of this rare and endangered ecosystem as properties come up for sale or owners are open to considering a conservation covenant.

Sand dune ecosystem conservation area - protecting a key site of this rare and endangered ecosystem as properties come up for sale or an owner is open to considering a conservation covenant.

Puntledge triangle trails- extending the trail system east and north of Nymph Falls Park along the Puntledge and Browns rivers and with a connection south to Comox Lake. The area captures Stotan Falls, Browns River Falls and Medicine Bowls. A large portion of the trail system along the

Browns and Puntledge is already in place. This proposal would link them up to create a continuous loop.

Stotan Falls - a popular recreation area used in the summer for swimming and picnicking. Formal protection would allow better management of the area such as outhouses, garbage bins and pick-up.

Courtenay River estuary - the estuary is proposed as a provincial wildlife management area and is also of historic and cultural significance to the K'ómoks First Nation. The regional district does not have jurisdiction over the water (this is a shared provincial and federal responsibility); however it can protect the foreshore through development permit areas and strategic acquisitions along the foreshore and support the initiative underway to seek provincial designation as a wildlife management area or other form of formal protection.

Royston waterfront trail – continuation of the Courtenay riverway into the regional district to the Royston wharf.

Royston to Cumberland Trail - protecting a corridor from Royston to Cumberland as a public trail.

Trent River corridor – protecting a wide buffer on either side of the river to preserve a wildlife corridor, old growth trees, eagle nesting and perch trees, wild orchids and other native species.

E&N Rail with trail corridor and connections – the railway right-of-way extends from Courtenay south to the boundary of the regional district at Mud Bay. Since regional districts to the south are also working on a trail within the E&N corridor, the trail may eventually go as far as Victoria. The E&N is also a potential Trans Canada Trail connection via the Regional District of Nanaimo. The owner of the railway corridor, the Island Corridor Foundation, has expressed support for a multi-use trail

within the corridor. The regional district could seek a statutory right-of-way to develop a trail in the corridor. Where there are opportunities, the trail may be routed along the waterfront (e.g. Union Point) and connect back up with the E&N corridor. Funds would have to be raised from senior levels of government and private sponsors to build the trail, major road and river crossings.

Coal Hills and Hart Creek corridor - includes a popular trail system, partly on the waterfront. Coal Hills at Union Point and the estuary and lower reach of Hart Creek lie within the Kensington development area. A waterfront walkway around Coal Hills/Union Point and the Hart Creek corridor and mouth of Hart Creek are identified as desired public parks in the 2010 Kensington Master Development Agreement.



Public Feedback on Priorities

Residents who attended the public open houses were asked to rank the above areas in terms of priority. While a very difficult exercise (many felt all areas were important to protect), the ranking provides an indication of the overall importance residents accorded to each of the 16 areas listed above.

The top five areas identified by area 'A' residents were:

- Courtenay River estuary,

- Garry Oak ecosystem conservation area,
- Royston waterfront trail,
- Royston to Cumberland trail, and
- secure tenure for Seal Bay Forest.

Area ‘B’ residents’ top five priorities were:

- secure tenure for Seal Bay Forest,
- One Spot Trail,
- Puntledge River triangle trail
- Courtenay River estuary, and
- Royston waterfront trail.

For Area ‘C’ residents, the top five priorities were:

- Secure tenure for Seal Bay Forest,
- One Spot Trail,
- Courtenay River estuary,
- Williams Beach Forest, and
- Western toad conservation area.

A number of Town of Comox and City of Courtenay residents also attended the open houses and, as users of regional district parks, offered the following priorities:

- Courtenay River estuary
- secure tenure for Seal Bay Forest
- E&N Rail with Trail
- Puntledge River Triangle Trails, and
- Stotan Falls.



Cattail in Courtenay River estuary field

By merging the top ten priorities for each of the three electoral areas, the following additional areas were identified:

- Trent River corridor,
- E&N Rail with trail
- sand dune ecosystem conservation area,
- Wolf Lake and
- Strathcona Parkway marsh and ponds conservation area.

Priorities for Types of Parks

A telephone survey of electoral area residents, conducted by the survey company Synovate between September 7 and 13, 2010, helped identify residents’ priorities in more general terms:

1. **Protection of rare ecosystems** such as Garry Oak meadows, sand dunes, wetlands, mature forests or wildlife corridors (30% indicated this as most important with 54% ranking it as one of their top three).
2. **New trail corridors** like a trail from Royston to Cumberland, a trail from Courtenay riverway to Royston, etc. (18% ranked this as most important and 46% ranked it as one of their top three)
3. **New large parks with trail systems** similar to Seal Bay or Nymph Falls parks (ranked by 12% as most important and by 40% within top three)
4. **Access trails** to popular hiking and /or mountain biking destinations such as the Glacier Trail that provides access to the Comox Glacier, the Boston Ridge Trail to Forbidden Plateau or a trail up into the Beaufort Range, etc. (ranked by 11% as most important and by 36% within top three)
5. **Beach access trails** to Comox Valley beaches from the surrounding neighbourhoods (ranked by 8% as most important and by 31% within top three).

6. **Special recreation features** like the climbing area at Comox Lake or the swimming area at Stotan Falls (ranked by 2% as most important and by 16% within top three).¹⁹

Additional Areas of Interest Identified by the Public

The open houses asked the public to list other areas they felt were important to protect as park or greenway. The following is a list of additional areas identified by the public.²⁰

- Trail from east side of Macaulay Road linking to Macaulay Heights Park
- Trail from Miracle Beach Provincial Park to Black Creek Hall/Black Creek store and Williams Beach Forest
- Rosewall Creek trail portion that falls outside of the Provincial Park to waterfall and possible connection to Waterloo Creek
- Terasen gas pipeline right-of-way that connects Wildwood Forest to the One Spot Trail and Dove Creek neighbourhood
- Trail through Wildwood Park/Burns Road to Dove Creek and connecting to the old Firetrail through a local woodlot.
- Bog off Strathcona Parkway past Anderson Lake chain-up area
- Puntledge Triangle Trail extension along the Browns River north to Medicine Bowls, from there down access road to Mountain Spirit Nature Park and Coltsfoot Creek Park and back to town along Puntledge Trails/1st Ave Park and Malcolm Morrissey

¹⁹ The telephone interview survey results can be generalized to the larger electoral area population with an accuracy of +/- 5.5% at a 95% level of confidence (19 times out of 20).

²⁰ Duplications, or areas already identified on pages 29-30 are not repeated here. For a complete list, see appendices 3 and 4.

- Boy Scout camp as part of the Puntledge Triangle
- Comox Lake to Forbidden Plateau trail corridor. Existing mountain biking trails as per map at Dodge City Cycles including Forbidden Plateau area and area around Cumberland and Comox Lake.
- Connect Goose Spit Park to Filberg Park in Comox with walkway
- Cycle path/walkway along Dyke Road to Comox and Goose Spit Park
- Walking, cycling trail from Dyke Road to Back Road /East Courtenay to Courtenay trail
- Walking, cycling, horseback riding trail along Lazo and Knight Road
- A Courtenay to Cumberland trail
- Morrison Creek Headwaters
- Regional Park between 1st Street hill and railway grade at Condensory Bridge and Anderton (popular for swimming, fishing, tubing, parking, access to One Spot, use riverway concept).
- Access points to river spots used by the



Fall on the Puntledge River by Condensory Bridge public.

- Tuber's trail along the BC Hydro lands at the end of Powerhouse Road and access on the other side of the river to fishing trails across from the fish hatchery low head dam.

- Trail through proposed Raven Development to Seal Bay Park.
- Coastal recreational greenway from the boundary of the Strathcona Regional District to the boundary with Nanaimo Regional District
- Signature "demonstration farm" with animals and gardens
- Signature "marine park" area to reflect CVRD and island setting.
- Tsolum River crossing
- Vancouver Island Spine corridor
- Marine park on Clarkson Drive
- Public park day use area at Saratoga Beach
- Harvard Road Beach access trail
- All beach accesses protected from encroachment, clearing and signage
- Little River Marsh
- Pond on Clarkson Road
- Lands between Driftwood Estates and the mouth of Black Creek
- Millard Creek greenway and trail
- Green area at the confluence of Sandpiper Drive and Millard Road in south Courtenay

Areas of Interest Identified Within Municipalities

Residents also identified a few areas that fall within municipal boundaries or that cross municipal and electoral area boundaries. Since the regional district's community parks service is funded by the electoral areas only and its purpose is to acquire and manage parks and greenways for the electoral areas, the regional district has no legal authority to contribute to acquiring these lands through the community parks service function.

However, as the municipalities and the regional district work toward implementing the Sustainability Strategy's Goal 5.4 Action e. to "pursue opportunities to jointly acquire land to meet park needs in municipal and electoral areas", regionally significant

parkland could also be purchased within municipal boundaries. The regional district can also purchase a single park within municipal boundaries with the consent and participation by the municipality by establishing a common service for that park only.

A key site within a municipal boundary that was identified as a desirable conservation and recreation area was Maple Lake and wetlands located in the Village of Cumberland. The area includes a large wetland as well as a lake close to town that is popular with local residents for swimming, fishing, canoeing and kayaking. The public consultations also identified the need for a multi-use trail connecting the Forbidden Plateau and Comox Lake mountain biking areas passing through Cumberland and electoral area 'C' of the regional district.

Another important area that crosses jurisdictional boundaries is the Puntledge River, shoreline and upland area north and south of the Condensory Bridge. This area is used extensively by local residents and tourists for fishing in the fall and swimming, sunbathing and tubing in the summer.

All areas identified by the public that fall within municipal boundaries or cross from the regional district into a municipality will be forwarded to the applicable municipalities.

Cooperation between the regional district and the municipalities is essential to ensure connections are made between regional district and municipal parks and greenspaces.

Current Funding

The regional district parks system is funded through property taxes levied under the Electoral Areas 'A', 'B' and 'C' parks and greenways service. In 2010, the tax rate for this service was \$18.17 per \$100,000 of

assessed property value.²¹ Currently, most new parks are acquired as part of the 5% park land dedication requirement at time of subdivision as per section 941 of the *Local Government Act*. Most new greenways are statutory rights-of-way the regional district is able to obtain over undeveloped road rights-of-way. Occasionally, the regional district is able to obtain grants from senior levels of government or the B.C. Union of Municipalities to pay for park planning processes, feasibility studies, programs or infrastructure projects, such as trail development.

The regional district has a parkland acquisition reserve fund that can be used for land acquisition. No regular annual contributions are made to that fund limiting the CVRD's ability to budget for land purchases and assume short-term loans to achieve priority parkland interests.

Future Funding

To achieve the vision of an expanded parks and greenways system, the regional district will need to utilize a number of different funding tools (see appendix 7 for a discussion of parkland acquisition tools).

The great majority of open house survey respondents favoured a combination of two funding mechanisms - development cost charges for parks and a parkland acquisition fund. A number of residents also wanted the regional district and municipalities to look into a joint regional parks service to jointly fund acquisition, operation and maintenance of regionally significant parks. Survey respondents also suggested using volunteers for park maintenance.

In order to protect natural areas on private land, survey respondents suggested that the regional district implement a natural areas

tax exemption program (as in place on Denman and Hornby islands) that would reduce property taxes if landowners retained trees and native vegetation on their properties.

Parkland Acquisition Fund

When asked in the telephone survey whether they would support a new property tax to help buy parkland, 39% of respondents were strongly or somewhat in support. This percentage increased considerably when asked more specifically about the level of annual contribution interviewees were willing to make. 24% did not want to contribute even \$10 per year, 9% were willing to pay up to \$10, 28% were willing to pay up to \$20 and 39% were willing to pay up to \$35. Of course, those who were willing to contribute up to \$35 would also be willing to contribute the lesser amounts of \$20 and \$10. Consequently, overall, 67% would be willing to contribute \$20 per year toward a parkland acquisition fund. 76% would be willing to contribute \$10. Telephone survey respondents were not asked if they would be willing to pay more than \$35.

Open house survey respondents were generally more in support of contributing to a parkland acquisition fund with 56% willing to contribute up to \$50 and 83% willing to contribute up to \$35 (this percentage includes those willing to contribute the larger amount of \$50).

During the January to February 2011 public comment period on the draft plan, 8 electoral area residents expressed their support for a parkland acquisition tax levy and 5 opposed such a levy.

The above responses suggest that most residents are willing to contribute a reasonable amount of money to go toward parkland acquisition.

²¹ For illustrative purposes, this amounts to approximately \$66 per year for a property valued at \$365,000.

Development Cost Charges for Parks

To fund the parks and greenways strategic plan, the regional district will also develop a bylaw allowing it to collect development cost charges (DCCs) for parks. The development cost charges will ensure that new residential development assists in the provision of new parkland and improvements to meet its residents' needs. DCCs for parks will support implementation of the priorities identified in the parks and greenways strategic plan. DCCs for parks can be used for land acquisition and for specific improvements, such as trails and picnic areas.

Given growth policies under the Regional Growth Strategy, bylaw 120, the majority of future development in the Comox Valley will occur in core settlement areas.

Since development activity may vary greatly from year to year, development cost charges collected may range from as low as \$20,000 in years with little development activity to well above \$300,000 in busier years.

7. Implementation Strategy

Achieving 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 below with the understanding that some of these may not become available for acquisition, lease or licencing 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 needs to be flexible and allow a certain amount of shifting between ‘active priorities’ and ‘reserve priorities’ to respond to changing circumstances, budgetary realities and opportunities that arise.

Decisions will be guided by the criteria for acquisition outlined in chapter 6 and the vision and six overarching goals identified in chapter 5:

1. Protect and connect native ecosystems over time.
2. Connect people to nature.
3. Link communities with greenways.
4. Plan and manage parks in a proactive and responsive manner
5. Form partnerships to achieve common goals
6. Obtain certainty of land tenure.

The following implementation actions support the achievement of the six goals.

A framework for evaluating and classifying new parks

Action 1: Evaluate new park interests using the criteria for parkland acquisition.

New proposals for potential parks and greenways that are received by the CVRD

will be evaluated using the criteria for parkland acquisition in this report.

Action 2: Create ‘conservation area’ as a new park classification.

The regional district will add ‘conservation area’ as a new park classification. The classification will be given to parks that contain environmentally sensitive areas, rare or threatened ecosystems, such as wetlands, Garry Oak and sand dune ecosystems and where trail development may be limited to protect environmental values.

Acquisition Priorities

Action 3: Achieve acquisition priorities.

Priorities for the twenty year duration of this plan were established by reviewing public open house survey responses. Additional areas of interest identified at the open houses were evaluated using the criteria for parkland acquisition (see pages 27 - 29). That is, the areas had to meet the test of having regional importance, having important recreation and/or conservation values and be reasonably affordable given the parkland acquisition budget. Regional equity was also key to determining priorities. Since all three electoral areas pay into the joint community parks function, new parks and greenways need to be established in all three areas, especially those that are currently underserved by regional district parks.

Table 4 lists the top priorities for new parks and greenways for the next twenty years. Further priority areas, referred to as ‘reserve priorities’ are listed on table 5. These may be considered for acquisition if a funding partnership opportunity arises or if areas

from the table 4 priorities are lost to development or otherwise not available.

Table 4: Active Priorities for New Parks and Greenways, 2011- 2030

Area	Acquisition Tool	Amenities to be developed
Seal Bay forest	Replace 10 year licence with 30 year licence from the province and/or seek a crown land grant	Upkeep of existing trails, stairs, outhouses, parking, etc.
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), permits 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).	Multi-use trail, parking for horse trailers, buffers to agricultural areas and signs on trail etiquette in agricultural areas.
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.	Interpretive signs, viewing areas, trail access.
Royston waterfront trail	Permit over undeveloped road right-of-way and permit or license of occupation from the Province	Multi-use trail. Green-shores shoreline protection.
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	Multi-use trail, outhouses, parking
Garry Oak ecosystem	Land purchase and/or conservation covenants. Key sites lie within the ALR and covenants will require ALC approval.	Possible restoration work
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.	Possible trail improvements, parking, outhouses.
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.	Multi-use trail
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.	None
E&N Rail with trail and waterfront routes	Statutory right-of-way over a portion of the rail corridor and alternate waterfront routes	Multi-use trail, road and river crossings
Trent River corridor	Parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase or conservation covenant.	Multi-use trail above bank, conservation-focused river corridor

ALC=Agricultural Land Commission ALR=Agricultural Land Reserve SRW=statutory right-of-way

Table 5: Reserve Priorities for Parkland Acquisition

Area	Acquisition tool	Possible Amenities
Saratoga Beach Parking and Washroom area	SRW, purchase with land donation component.	Parking lot, outhouses, garbage bins.
Black Creek store and/or Black Creek Hall to Miracle Beach trail	SRW's, land purchases	Multi-use 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	Boat and canoe launch, parking, camping sites, outhouses, multi-use trails
Tsolum River crossing to link up One Spot Trail North and South	SRW or MoTI permit, ALC approval for trail connection	Bridge or other means to cross the river - location TBD
Wildwood Forest Trail north to Headquarters woodlot	SRW's, land purchase, agreement with landowners, ALC approval	Multi-use trail
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	Multi-use trail
Morrison Creek Headwaters	Conservation covenant, parkland dedication at time of subdivision, land purchase, for portions in ALR, ALC approval for covenants	To be determined based on sensitivity of site
Comox Road to Back Road Trail	Consultations with landowners and approval from the ALC.	Multi-use trail, possible restrictions to protect agriculture and wildlife.
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.	Cycling/pedestrian trail.
Sand dune ecosystem conservation park	land purchase and/or conservation covenant	To be determined based sensitivity of site
Goose Spit to MacDonald Wood (connect to Filberg Park in Comox)	Use undeveloped road rights-of-way, waterfront where feasible	Trail.
Vancouver Island Spine corridor	Support community initiative and partnerships with private forest land owners.	Hiking trail – volunteer initiative.
Rosewall Creek trail to waterfall and Waterloo Creek	Work with property owners to conclude a land use agreement. Involve BC Parks in discussions.	Trail upgrades, new trail development.
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	Signs, trail upgrades.

ALC=Agricultural Land Commission ALR=Agricultural Land Reserve SRW=statutory right-of-way

Action 4: Update the electoral areas official community plan to include the principles, policies and mapping in the parks and greenways strategic plan. Update existing parks and greenways policies and maps.

CVRD staff will update the electoral areas official community plan (OCP) to reflect the principles, policies and mapping in this strategic plan.

When the OCP is updated, staff will also review and update the existing electoral area parks and greenways policies and maps to guide CVRD staff in determining parkland dedication requirements at time of subdivision. The active and reserve priorities map in appendix 1 and the recreation inventory and conservation values map in appendix 2 will form the basis for those updates and will inform the 5% dedication requirement at subdivision.

The recreation inventory and conservation values map may be updated from time to time as new information about the location of informal trails, trail connections and sensitive ecosystems becomes available.

Action 5: Refer areas of interest identified outside of the electoral areas to the relevant municipality.

The planning process identified a few areas of interest within municipal boundaries or on the border between a municipality and an electoral area. Key examples of such areas are the Puntledge River foreshore by Condorsy Bridge in Courtenay, Maple Lake in Cumberland and a trail connecting the Forbidden Plateau and Comox Lake mountain biking areas via a multi-use trail that would pass through Cumberland and electoral area 'C' of the regional district. The regional district will review these and other areas with the municipalities and identify opportunities to include these areas within municipal parks and greenways plans

and link to the electoral area parks and greenways network. As per supporting policies 2D-1 and 2D-2 of the proposed Regional Growth Strategy Bylaw no. 120, 2010, local jurisdictions should work together to coordinate local and regional greenway network connections and new developments should be required to link to, improve or expand the existing greenway network (see p. 38 of bylaw 120).

Funding plan implementation

Implementation of the strategic plan depends on funding. At the open houses the public clearly identified that they would like to see a combination of funding mechanisms put in place.

Action 6: Implement a tax levy for parkland acquisition.

An estimated \$4.3 million is needed to acquire all eleven priority areas and to implement the parks and greenways strategic plan. To raise sufficient funds over the twenty year period of the plan requires a tax levy set at \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed property value.

At their March 29, 2011 meeting, the regional district board adopted the plan and at the same time passed a resolution to establish a parkland acquisition tax levy of \$5 per \$100,000 of assessed property value starting in 2011 to fund implementation of the parks and greenways strategic plan.

Action 7: Implement a development cost charges bylaw for parks.

The Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan, bylaw 2042, section C12 (d) states that "Development cost charge bylaws shall be considered for adoption and implementation as a means to provide funding for the purchase of recreational lands, natural open space, and the

development of these parcels for the benefit of the community.”

The majority of open house survey respondents wanted to see development cost charges for parks implemented in concert with a parkland acquisition tax levy.

In recognition of this strong mandate to proceed with a development cost charges bylaw for parks, the regional district adopted a resolution directing staff to prepare a development cost charges bylaw for parks at their February 1, 2011 meeting (see appendix 7, p.121 for an explanation of development cost charges for parks).

Action 8: Pursue opportunities to jointly acquire land to meet park needs in municipal and electoral areas during the first five years of this plan.

The Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy calls for cooperation of the four local governments in parks and greenways planning, land acquisition and other issues, creating a region-wide parks and trails network and pursuing opportunities to jointly acquire land to meet park needs.²² Municipal government staff provided comments on an early draft of the strategic plan and were also referred the final draft plan for comments. Those priority areas that are located in proximity to municipal boundaries link up with parks or greenways within the municipalities. Examples of links to municipal greenspaces are the One Spot

²² See *Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy*. Final Plan, February 18, 2010, Goal 5.4: All citizens have access to recreational opportunities, Objective 5.4.1. Ensure widespread access to a variety of recreational parks. Comox Valley Regional District and Local Municipal Governments: Action a. Coordinate parks and greenways planning, land acquisition and other issues; Action b. Create a region-wide parks and trails network, linked by inter-community greenways, that addresses social and ecological needs; and Action c. Pursue opportunities to jointly acquire land to meet park needs in municipal and electoral areas.

Trail extension south, the E&N Rail with Trail, the Royston waterfront trail and the Royston to Cumberland trail. Furthermore, the protection of the Courtenay River estuary will require partnerships with the municipalities to coordinate zoning bylaws as well as strategic acquisitions along the waterfront.

As the municipal core areas are densifying, opportunities for parkland acquisition to serve a growing population and protect natural ecosystems may be greater in the rural areas. Use of electoral area parks by municipal residents will also continue to grow. As this pattern continues, the regional district and local municipalities may wish to explore opportunities to jointly acquire land for recreation and/or to protect critical habitats. Mechanisms suggested during the planning process included a regional acquisition and restoration fund, a regional parks service and a Comox Valley Conservation Fund.

Within the first five years of this plan, the CVRD will encourage a joint review with the three municipalities of how the valley’s network of parks and greenways is funded.

Action 9: Actively encourage bequest, gifts of land and financial contributions in cooperation with land trusts or conservancies.

A number of regional district parks have been bequested or donated to the regional district. Gifts of land are tax-receiptable and if the gift is of ecological significance, the donation will have considerable tax write-offs. In some instances land trusts or land conservancies may be involved in the promotion and/or the acceptance of gifts of land.

The CVRD will provide information on how to make bequests and donations of land to the public.

Action 10: Review eco-gift authority

The regional district has the authority to accept ecological gifts of land (also referred to as eco-gifts). It can be a considerable tax benefit to a donor to have a land donation recognized as having ‘ecological significance’ by Revenue Canada. The CVRD will actively encourage eco-gifting of lands with important conservation value as part of its ‘Leave a Legacy’ gift program.



Browns River

Partnerships

The successful establishment of parks and greenways requires partnerships with private landowners, land conservancies and other non-governmental organizations, local municipalities, senior government agencies and First Nations.

Action 11: Partner with First Nations to provide recreational opportunities

The regional district recognizes that some of the priorities identified in this strategic plan may have been or will be identified through the treaty process and that the outcome of that process will influence what areas the regional district can actively pursue as parks or greenways. In areas where First Nation and regional district interests in greenspace overlap, the regional district would like to explore possible partnerships. The regional

district would also welcome working with First Nations to promote an understanding of First Nation culture through appropriate interpretation within regional district parks and greenways.

Action 12: Use land leases and statutory rights-of-way agreements to secure parks and greenways.

Not all lands proposed for addition to the current parks and greenways system require outright purchase of land. Some lands may be secured as parkland through the conclusion of Crown land or private land leases, licences of occupation over Crown land or statutory rights-of-way over undeveloped roads and utility corridors to allow the regional district to put a trail in the corridor.

Action 13: Work with the farming community when proposing trails within or bordering farm land to mitigate against negative impact to existing and future agricultural operations.

As the CVRD acquires parks and/or trails that border agricultural land, it will work with the adjacent farmers to prevent impacts from the trail and its users on agricultural operations. The provincial guide to using and developing trails in ranch and farm areas²³ provides useful guidelines for trail alignment, signage, fences, vegetated buffers and other natural barriers. The CVRD will employ these tools to prevent trespass onto farmland and conflict between trail users and farm operations.

Action 14: Work with Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to

²³ Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. *A guide to using and developing trails in ranch and farm areas*. Available on the Agricultural Land Commission website at <http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/>

ensure beach accesses remain open to the public.

Public open house attendees identified public access to the beach as important to protect. Eight percent of telephone survey respondents ranked beach accesses as the most important areas to protect and 31% ranked them as one of their top three types of parks.

The *Land Title Act* requires that public access to the beach be provided at regular intervals when waterfront properties are subdivided. The resulting beach accesses are owned by the provincial Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI). Some beach accesses are subsequently developed into roads, others may have informal walking trails on them – often put in by local residents – and yet others may remain undeveloped. In some locations, neighbours have encroached into beach accesses with their backyards or fences effectively closing off access to the public.

MoTI does not actively manage its beach accesses for public use and occasionally the regional district is approached by local residents to obtain a permit over a beach access from the Ministry to manage and improve it.

The regional district completed a review of all beach accesses from the Oyster River to Mud Bay in early 2011. The review identifies current use, management issues and need for signage.

Due to limited financial and staff resources, the regional district is not able to take on management of all beach accesses in the Comox Valley. The regional district will develop a Memorandum of Understanding with MoTI to work together to ensure beach accesses remain open for public use. The regional district may also obtain a permit over key accesses in particular need of trail development and management. Priorities

will be established through consultations with the public in 2011/2012.

Action 15: Explore land use agreements over access to popular mountain biking areas.

The planning process identified the mountain biking areas around Comox Lake, the Cumberland Community Forest and Forbidden Plateau as important recreational areas for Comox Valley residents. Mountain biking is not only a popular recreational activity, it is also an important economic generator for the valley. Most mountain biking trails in the regional district exist on private forest land.

Two main forest companies have extensive land holdings in the Regional District, TimberWest Forest Corporation and Island Timberlands. There are also several smaller forest companies and woodlot owners and operators who have mountain bike use on their lands. The main concerns of private forest landowners and woodlot owners and operators are:

- Liability for public uses and activities on their lands (e.g. users riding close to active logging areas or getting hurt on a trail).
- Users taking “ownership” over trails that they have built but that create conflict when forest companies intend to log that area or when access is cut off due to high fire hazard.
- Use of logging roads to access trails and parks, and the liability associated with that use.

The regional district does not have the staff or financial resources to enter into agreements over all mountain biking trails and manage associated liability risks. However, where greenways identified as priority areas cross private forest land, the regional district will work with the landowner to conclude access or lease

agreements. The access agreements may involve mountain biking groups as a third party to do maintenance and be responsible for the safety of the trails. And while the trails may need to be moved every few years to accommodate harvesting plans, agreements could protect long term access to popular recreation areas.

Recreational use of the more extensive network of mountain biking trails on private land needs to be addressed at a provincial level. The Regional District would support private forest landowner, woodlot operators and trail users in their efforts to legitimize mountain biking on private forest land. One such initiative may be to strengthen the *Occupiers Liability Act* to include inherent risk provisions that would provide better protection for landowners from lawsuits should a mountain biker get hurt on their land.

Action 16: Establish a multi-stakeholder Open Space and Ecosystem Task Force to develop strategies for ecosystem protection, overseeing and coordinating local and regional work on parks, trails, ecosystem protection and restoration.

Regional district parks are too small to protect entire ecological communities and ecosystem functioning into the future. The resources are not there to acquire and create parks large enough that would achieve larger conservation goals for the valley. Parks can serve as core areas within larger biodiversity corridors or links between important ecological areas. Conservation of ecosystems and ecosystem functioning requires a mix of tools including regional district parks, provincial parks, municipal parks, nature conservancies, conservation covenants, enforcement of riparian area regulations, zoning to protect sensitive ecosystems and biodiversity corridors, development permit

areas and, perhaps most importantly, responsible land use by private landowners. The latter can be encouraged through education and tax incentives such as the natural area tax exemption program recently implemented on Denman and Hornby islands. As per Action b. under Goal 5.1, Objective 5.1.1. of the Sustainability Strategy, CVRD will work with the three municipal governments to establish a multi-stakeholder Open Space and Ecosystems Task Force to address larger conservation and ecosystem protection issues.²⁴



Volunteers working on the One Spot Trail

Action 17: Continue to work with the community in the development of parks and trails.

The hiking, mountaineering, horseback riding and mountain biking clubs have all contributed greatly to the existing networks of trails in the Comox Valley. Many of the CVRD's most popular trails such as the One Spot Trail or trails within Wildwood Forest and Seal Bay Forest were built by volunteers. The CVRD will continue to work with user groups, volunteers, adjacent landowners and the broader community in the planning and management of parks and trails.

²⁴ See page 84 of the *Comox Valley Sustainability Strategy* Final Plan, February 18, 2010.

Ongoing Park Management and Stewardship

After land is acquired as parkland, the work starts to build trails and other public amenities, ensure public safety, provide trail and park interpretive information, manage visitor use and steward the natural environment. The regional district has put in place a number of policies to guide land development, park operation and management. Existing park policies deal with public safety and naming of regional district parks and facilities. The CVRD also has a protocol for wildlife sightings and procedures for commemorative park furniture donations.

As the parks and greenways system grows and user pressures increase, a number of other guidelines and policies will be needed to ensure consistent standards of park planning, risk management, park operation and maintenance and environmental protection are applied. As the strategic plan is implemented, the regional district will work to develop the following policies, guidelines and agreements with other levels of government.

Action 18: Update park management plan development guidelines

The 1986 Comox Valley Area Parks Plan identified a number of guidelines for the development of park management plans. These guidelines need to be updated to reflect changes to the classification system, provide guidance on zones within parks, and identify the required content of park management plans. Park management plans will include a vision for the park, purpose of the plan, park classification and rationale, biophysical, archaeological, historic, cultural and recreation inventories, a site plan showing areas designated for high public use and for trails and conservation areas, protection measures to preserve

environmental and cultural values and an implementation strategy.

Action 19: Develop policies to ensure public safety

Under the provincial *Occupiers Liability Act*, the regional district has the duty to take care that all park visitors are reasonably safe when on parkland. This applies whether the land is owned by the regional district or managed under a lease or licence agreement. The ‘duty of care’ requirement means that park facilities are regularly inspected to ensure they are safe for public use.

The regional district also needs to regularly assess trees for their strength and stability within high use areas to reduce the risk of trees falling and potentially hurting a park visitor, damaging parked vehicles or other private property. At the same time, trees such as dead standing snags that may pose a hazard to human safety often have considerable wildlife habitat value. Tree removal or cutting needs to follow guidelines that consider and balance both risk to humans as well as values for wildlife.

A further risk to park visitors, park neighbours and the natural environment is posed by the build-up of wood debris that can fuel and feed wildfires. Managing the risk of wildfires involves identifying high risk areas and developing strategies to reduce fuel build-up and/or create fire breaks in those areas.

To address risk management issues, the regional district will develop policies and guidelines on park inspections and hazard trees.

Action 20: Develop a policy for fencing along park boundaries

At times, park use may warrant putting a fence along a park boundary. The regional district will develop a fencing policy or

guidelines that identify circumstances under which the regional district may share costs for a fence with adjoining residential neighbours. The policy would also provide guidelines for form and type of fence. It would not restrict park neighbours from building their own fence if desired.

The regional district recognizes that the need for buffers and/or fencing are different in agricultural areas and also vary from one type of agricultural operation to the next. The CVRD will work with the agricultural community to develop principles and guidelines for buffers between farmland and trails and will involve the agricultural community in planning for trails that border agricultural land.

Action 21: Develop a ‘Leave a Legacy’ parks gift program

The regional district receives a fair number of requests for commemorative park benches and picnic tables. Other items that the public may wish to donate toward include park information kiosks, interpretive signs, picnic shelters and native ecosystem restoration programs. A ‘Leave a Legacy’ gift program will identify opportunities for donations of land, cash or amenities. In the case of amenity donations, the program will clarify maintenance responsibilities of the regional district and also responsibilities of the donor.

Action 22: Explore creating a park zone

The regional district will explore establishing a park zone bylaw that can be put into place when large areas of land are rezoned to enable higher density development than the existing zone would allow.

Establishing park zones within large development areas would allow the regional district to clearly identify its long term intentions and priorities for public

greenspace within that area. Park zoning decreases costs and increases certainty for developers as they design their development from the very start to integrate the identified greenspaces.

Action 23: Explore other planning tools such as density bonusing to encourage the protection of greenspace

The *Local Government Act* makes provision for a development proponent to offer public amenities, such as greenspace, when additional density is proposed and when both the development proposal and the acquisition of a specific amenity are in the public interest.

Valued greenspaces and environmental features may also be protected through agreements as part of a rezoning process or through restrictions as part of a development permit application.

It is acknowledged that the potential for using these tools primarily exists in core settlement areas identified in the Regional Growth Strategy, bylaw 120, since development opportunities in other areas will be limited and, in the case of the agricultural land reserve, non-existent.

An in-depth exploration of the potential of different planning tools to encourage more compact communities and more greenspace is needed. Guidelines for use of these tools could be included in the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan to ensure the tools are applied effectively and fairly.

Action 24: Explore natural areas tax exemption to encourage protection of greenspace on private property

Parks make up only a small part of the land mass of the Comox Valley. The vast majority of land is privately owned. The protection of ecosystems and ecosystem

functioning requires public and private land stewardship. Natural area tax exemption may offer a way to encourage the protection of natural ecosystems on private land. Denman and Hornby Islands have recently implemented a natural area tax exemption program. The regional district will review the merits and implications of such a program to promote biodiversity protection in the Comox Valley and present options to the regional district board for consideration and possible adoption.

Accountability to the Public

Accountability to the public is an important component of this strategic plan. Since residents are contributing directly to a parkland acquisition fund through a special tax levy, they deserve to know how their money is spent and what progress is being made toward implementing the before-mentioned actions.

Action 25: Report regularly on progress toward achievement of the goals and actions of the rural

Comox Valley parks and greenways strategic plan.

The regional district will report regularly on achievement of its acquisition program. The progress reports will be presented to the regional district board, released to the media and be available to the public on the CVRD web site.

Action 26: Review progress and consult with the public on outstanding priorities mid-way into plan implementation.

The regional district will review progress made to achieve acquisition priorities with the public 9 to 11 years into plan implementation. At that time, the regional district will also consult with the public to confirm priorities for the remaining years of the plan.

One to two years prior to the completion of the strategic plan, the regional district will work with the public to identify a new set of priorities and update the plan for a further ten to twenty years.

Glossary

Agricultural Land Commission (ALC)	The ALC is the administrative body of the Agricultural Land Reserve. It is an independent provincial agency responsible for administering the Province's land use zone in favour of agriculture, through the Agricultural Land Commission Act. The purpose of the Commission is to preserve agricultural land; encourage farming in collaboration with other communities of interest; and, to encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies
Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR)	The ALR was established in 1973 as a provincial zone in which agriculture is recognized as the priority use. Farming is encouraged and non-agricultural uses are controlled. The ALR covers approximately 4.7 million hectares and includes both private and public lands that may be farmed, forested or vacant, but where agriculture is recognized as the priority use. It is administered by the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC).
Beach Access (public)	Public access routes to bodies of water including rivers and foreshore are created at the time of subdivision of land pursuant to the <i>Land Title Act</i> , Section 75(1)(c) and (d). As part of the subdivision process, the developer is required to dedicate a 20m wide road right-of-way to a waterbody every 200 to 400m, depending on the size of the lots. These accesses are shown as public roadways on subdivision plans, though a road may not actually be constructed.
Biodiversity	The variety of life on earth in all its forms including genes, species, and ecosystems and the natural processes that link and maintain them.
Coastal sand ecosystems	<p>Coastal sand ecosystems encompass the terrestrial portion of beaches, spits and dunes in which sand is the dominant substrate. They contain sparsely-vegetated or grass-dominated ecological communities, as well as associated forest, wetland and bluff communities. Coastal sand ecosystems are influenced by natural disturbances such as sand movement, wind erosion, tides, storm surges, ocean spray, soil development, local climate and vegetation succession. Goose Spit is an example of a coastal sand ecosystem in the Comox Valley.</p> <p>Given the low percentage of sandy shoreline in BC, sand ecosystems are inherently sparse in occurrence. Development pressures, hardening of the foreshore and invasive plants have reduced their occurrence even further. As a result, five coastal sand ecosystem plants and animals are now listed as “at risk” species. One, the sand-verbena moth is known to occur at Goose Spit Park.</p>
Development Permit Area	OCPs can designate <i>Development Permit Areas</i> (DPAs) for the purpose of protecting environmentally significant sites or types of areas. For

instance, the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan establishes DPAs along watercourses to protect sensitive streamsides and buffers around eagles and heron nests.

Ecosystem

A complete system of living organisms interacting with the soil, land, water, and nutrients that make up their environment. An ecosystem is the home of living things, including humans. An ecosystem can be any size - a log, pond, field, forest, or the earth's biosphere - but it always functions as a whole unit. Ecosystems are commonly described according to the major type of vegetation - for example, old-growth forest or grassland ecosystem.

Ecosystem Functions

The physical, chemical and biological processes that keep an ecosystem operating. Examples include infiltration of surface water, evapo-transpiration and nutrient cycling.

Ecosystem Services

The benefits people derive from ecosystems as for example food, wood and other raw materials, pollination of crops, water infiltration and purification and erosion prevention.

Estuary

An estuary is a partly enclosed coastal body of water with one or more rivers or streams flowing into it and a free connection to the open sea. Estuaries form a transition zone between river environments and ocean environments and are subject to both marine influences, such as tides, waves, and the influx of saline water; and riverine influences, such as flows of fresh water and sediment. These conditions make estuaries among the most productive natural habitats in the world.

Garry Oak ecosystem

The area and organisms associated with Garry Oak trees and all of the interactions between the plants, animals and their environment.

Garry Oak Ecosystems contain a wide diversity of wildflowers, ferns, mosses, insects, birds and mammals. Garry Oak ecosystems exist in diverse climates ranging from cool and humid near the coast to hot and dry in inland valleys and foothill woodlands. Distribution gives evidence that Garry Oaks can withstand both lengthy flooding and drought.

In Canada, Garry oak and associated ecosystems are found only in southwest B.C. and their northern-most extent on Vancouver Island is the Comox Valley. Less than 5% of these ecosystems remain in near-natural condition. Because so much Garry oak habitat has been lost or degraded, more than 100 species of plants, mammals, reptiles, birds, butterflies and other insects that occur in these ecosystems are officially listed as “at risk”.

Greenway

The parks and greenways strategic plan adopts the definitions used in the 1998 greenway plans for electoral areas ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ and endorsed by the Comox Valley Land Trust in their *Nature without Borders* report.²⁵ The 1998 greenways plans distinguish between ecological greenways and

²⁵ Comox Valley Land Trust. 2008. *Nature without Borders*. The Comox Valley Land Trust Regional Conservation Strategy.

recreational greenways.

Ecological greenways protect aquatic habitat corridors, fisheries sensitive areas, upland habitat corridors including eagle and heron nest sites and biodiversity corridors.

Recreational greenways may connect natural areas or communities to each other or communities to natural areas and include greenway trails and greenway roads.²⁶ **Greenway trails** are separate from the road system and are for the use of walkers, cyclists and in some cases for equestrians. **Greenway roads** are located along roadways and may be separate from the pavement or run on a paved, graveled or grass shoulder. A network of proposed greenway roads has been identified in the Comox Valley Cycling Strategy and on the associated 2010 Comox Valley Cycling Network Plan.²⁷ The parks and greenways strategy focuses on parks, ecological greenways and greenway trails. Both ecological greenways and greenway trails may simply be referred to as greenways in this report.

Habitat	The area or natural environment where an organism or biological population lives, feeds, grows and interacts.
Land Act	This <i>Act</i> is the main legislation governing the disposition of provincial Crown (i.e. public) land in British Columbia. Crown land is any land owned by the Province, including land that is covered by water, such as the foreshore and the beds of lakes, rivers and streams.
Local Government Act	The purposes of this Act are to provide a legal framework and foundation for the establishment and continuation of local governments to represent the interests and respond to the needs of their communities; to provide local governments with the powers, duties and functions necessary for fulfilling their purposes, and, to provide local governments with the flexibility to respond to the different needs and changing circumstances of their communities.
Official Community Plan	An official community plan (OCP) can be developed by both municipalities and regional districts. The OCP provides the longer term vision for the community. An OCP is a statement of objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management, within the area covered by the plan, respecting the purposes of local government. Local governments are encouraged to consider how the OCP can be integrated with other community strategies, including transportation plans, sustainability plans, and waste management plans. Approaching planning and development in an integrated way supports coordinated efforts.

²⁶ Refer to *Area 'B' Electoral Area and Greenways Plan, Schedule 'D'* of the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan, 1998, bylaw 2042, p. 15-18; *Electoral Area 'A' Greenways Plan, Schedule 'H'* to the Rural Comox Valley official Community Plan, 1998, bylaw 2042, p. 2 – 5 and *Electoral Area 'C' Land Use and Greenways Plan, Schedule 'C'* of the Rural Comox Valley Official Community Plan, 1998, bylaw 2042, p. 15-21.

²⁷ Comox Valley Cycling Task Force. 2007. *Comox Valley Cycling Plan*. Prepared by Landworks Consultants Inc. and Comox Valley Cycling Network Plan 2010.

Regional Growth Strategy	The RGS is a regional bylaw that commits affected municipalities and regional districts to a course of action to meet common social, economic and environmental objectives. It is initiated and adopted by a regional district and referred to all affected local governments for acceptance.
Riparian Area	Land adjacent to and influenced in its vegetation and ecosystem composition by a water course.
Sensitive Ecosystems	Sensitive ecosystems are areas that may contain rare, threatened and fragile ecosystems. Sensitive ecosystems may support high levels of biodiversity and/or rare and threatened species.
Statutory Right-of-Way	An easement granted by a landowner to another entity (e.g. to another private landowner or a to public agency such as the regional district) to allow that entity access over the property. The easement is surveyed and registered on title under section 218 of the <i>Land Title Act</i> .
Sustainability	Sustainability is achieved when social and economic systems can be maintained indefinitely with no reduction in ecosystem functioning and the ability of the natural environment to renew itself.
Treaty Negotiations	A treaty is a negotiated agreement that will spell out the rights, responsibilities and relationships of First Nations and the federal and provincial governments. The negotiation process deals with far-reaching issues such as land ownership, governance, wildlife and environmental management.
Watershed	An area of land that contributes runoff to a specific delivery point, such as an estuary or the confluence with another river. Large watersheds may be composed of many smaller sub-watersheds, each contributing runoff to various streams and rivers that ultimately combine at a common delivery point.

Appendices

See www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/parksplan for appendices 1 to 9