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

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**SUBJECT**     **Mountain Biking Opportunities in Regional Parks**

### **ISSUE SUMMARY**

This report provides an information update in response to a Notice of Motion on the consideration of mountain biking opportunities in Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks through land acquisition and community input and provides a summary of work done to date since the adoption of the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines.

### **BACKGROUND**

A Notice of Motion was introduced at the October 23, 2019 Parks & Environment Committee (PEC) meeting recommending that the CRD Board approve a budget, provide staffing and request that staff develop a Terms of Reference (TOR) for an advisory committee with the goal of developing a mountain biking policy for CRD Regional Parks within a defined timeframe.

On October 30, 2019, the CRD Board approved \$40,000 in the 2020 Financial Plan to support the creation of an advisory committee to support the development of a mountain biking policy. The Notice of Motion was approved by the CRD Board on November 13, 2019.

In response to the Notice of Motion, staff developed a draft TOR for an advisory committee to provide advice and guidance for the use of developing mountain biking guidelines in CRD regional parks. On May 27, 2020, the TOR for a Mountain Biking Advisory Committee (MBAC) was presented and approved by the CRD Board. Between September 20, 2020 and February 16, 2021, the MBAC developed the *Mountain Bike Guidelines: Advice & Guidance to CRD Regional Parks* document.

On May 12, 2021, the CRD Board approved the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines and the short-term actions to support the *Mountain Bike Guidelines: Advice & Guidance Report* with the stipulation that the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines be reviewed in the context of the Regional Parks Strategic Plan update.

A Motion Arising was introduced and carried at the April 28, 2021 Regional Parks Committee meeting:

1. *That we consider mountain bike opportunities in considering CRD parks acquisitions; and*
2. *That we entertain requests from the mountain biking community for design and construction of mountain bike trails in appropriate locations within CRD parks.*

The CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines were developed with the purpose of providing specific direction and a systematic and consistent decision-making process for planning, developing and managing mountain biking activities throughout CRD regional parks. These guidelines do not provide a plan for where, how and when mountain biking opportunities should occur in regional parks, rather they are forward looking and are intended to guide established

decision-making processes, such as strategic planning, park management planning and land acquisition. A series of updated short-term actions have been provided (Appendix A) to support and enhance mountain biking in regional parks where mountain biking is identified as an acceptable use.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### *Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies*

Since 2000, the CRD has acquired land through the Regional Parks Land Acquisition Fund. The acquisition of land has been guided by Board-approved land acquisition strategies, with the latest approved for 2020-2021. These strategies define the principles, criteria and processes that guide staff and the Board in the identification, assessment, prioritization and acquisition of new lands for regional park purposes. These multi-year strategies provide the Board with a roadmap for acquiring land for regional parks and trails and are guided by the CRD Regional Parks Strategic Plan.

The land acquisition criteria help establish the merit of individual parcels in a systematic and transparent way. The criteria are organized around three categories: environmental; outdoor experiences and activities; and management and planning. During property assessment, some of the key criteria used are:

- the naturalness of an area, including connecting to natural environments and protected areas
- the role of the property in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation
- the significance of an area for outdoor activities and visitor experiences
- the contribution the area makes to the regional growth strategy
- rationalizing existing park boundaries

The objective of the Land Acquisition Strategy is to establish a regional park system that meets the evolving conservation and outdoor recreation needs of residents in the region and anticipates the needs of future generations while providing a range of opportunities for people to connect with nature.

The Regional Parks Strategic Plan 2012-2021 indicates that mountain biking trails are one of the outdoor recreation gaps in the system. The plan also states that “management plans provide strategies to protect the environment, and they define appropriate levels of activities.” Through management planning, the goals, objectives and policies for a regional park are set to guide ongoing development and management actions. Management planning processes are designed to engage First Nations, key stakeholders and the general public.

Appropriate locations for mountain biking in regional parks are determined through the park management planning process. The recent Board-approved CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines are an additional decision-making tool that supports the park management planning process in identifying where mountain biking opportunities may occur.

### *Environmental & Climate Implications*

With 8.5 million visits to the regional parks system in 2020, it is important to manage how recreation and park values interact and minimize possible ecological impacts caused by

recreational activities on parks ecosystems. Protecting sensitive ecosystems and biodiversity are key factors to creating resiliency toward climate change. While the CRD recognizes the importance of mountain biking as one of the recreational opportunities offered in regional parks, it also needs to balance the demands of other recreational users, parks values and previous commitments.

#### *Intergovernmental Implications*

Regional parks are part of the mountain biking offer and a region-wide approach is required in order to provide a diversity of mountain biking experiences.

Any consideration of new recreational offers or land-altering works require an understanding of cultural values on the landscape. The CRD works with local First Nations to better understand the cultural values within regional parks and ensure that recreational uses and land-altering works are compatible and follow cultural heritage policies and legislation.

#### *Social Implications*

The CRD recognizes there is a gap between the demand for mountain biking and the outdoor recreation offered in the region. Although the full demand may never be met within regional parks, the CRD will continue to play a role in providing mountain biking areas and opportunities when identified through the land acquisition program and park management planning processes. Since the Board approval of the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines, significant work has been done to implement recommendations from the MBAC report, build positive relationships with mountain biking communities and find opportunities in the system that align with current park management plans.

#### *Financial Implications*

As determined by the Board at its May 12, 2021 meeting, all draft management plans presented to the Regional Parks Committee will identify a cost schedule for plan implementation. This cost schedule will form part of the draft management plan for consideration during the decision-making process. This will help the CRD place the planning for, and implementing of, mountain biking trails and supporting infrastructure within the larger context of sustainable service delivery. The financial cost of building and/or enhancing mountain biking trails and supporting infrastructure can be costly. Budgeting for these activities needs to be planned ahead and included in the appropriate budget cycle.

### **CONCLUSION**

The evaluation of land acquisitions currently considers the significance of an area for outdoor activities and visitor experiences, including mountain biking through the Board-approved Land Acquisition Strategy and Land Acquisition Criteria. Appropriate locations for mountain biking are identified utilizing the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines during the park management planning process. When appropriate locations have been identified, staff will seek further input from the mountain biking community during the management planning process to better understand the desired mountain biking experiences and trail objectives. The CRD will continue to support the mountain biking community while giving consideration to all regional park values.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:  
That the Mountain Biking Opportunities in Regional Parks report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, RPF, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT**

Appendix A: Update on the Short-term Actions to Support the Mountain Biking Advisory  
Committee Advice and Guidance Report – November 2021