

Thetis Lake, Francis/King, and Mill Hill Regional Parks Management Plan



October 2004

Message from the CRD Parks Committee Chair

In October of 2004 the CRD Board approved the Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill Regional Parks Management Plan. The plan is a significant achievement, providing direction on how to best manage over 1000 hectares of hills, lakes and forest lands, strategically located in the center of a green corridor stretching from Tod Inlet to Esquimalt Harbour.

The vision for these parks is to provide a high degree of protection for the mature Douglas-fir forests, spectacular hilltop meadows, and many diverse ecosystems. At the same time, visitors will be provided with opportunities to enjoy and appreciate their natural beauty. An extensive trail network provides visitors access to the outstanding natural features found within the three parks.

The long-term stewardship of these lands brings many challenges. CRD Parks will be working to ensure that residents of the region can enjoy these parks while they remain as natural jewels within the Capital Region.

Sincerely,

*Karen Watson
Chair, CRD Parks Committee*

Vision Statement

Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks together maintain a large area of natural environment in an urban and suburban landscape, connected to other natural areas by green space and trails. These three parks protect important regional ecosystems, waterways and watersheds, and provide people of the region with a place to experience and appreciate the beauty and wonder of nature close to where they live. Visitors marvel at magnificent stands of first growth and regenerated forests, rocky hilltops carpeted with wildflowers, lush and productive wetlands, waterways rich in salmon and trout and beautiful undeveloped lakes with clean inviting waters. Many areas in the parks retain a feeling of wildness and serenity.

People of all ages come to the parks to experience a beautiful natural area. Recreational activities in the parks are compatible with their natural character and environmental sensitivities. Park visitors and adjacent landowners respect and care for the parks, and each other. Conflicts between recreational activities are rare.

Volunteers, educational institutions, government agencies and non-government organizations work together to improve the health and management of the parks. The integrity of the natural environment in the parks is carefully considered in all decisions about land use and development within the parks and on surrounding lands.

Acknowledgements

CRD Parks gratefully acknowledges the following members of the Management Plan Advisory Group for their significant contribution to the Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill Regional Parks Management Plan. Completion of this plan would not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of these and many others in the Capital Region.

Management Plan Advisory Group

Tom Baker - Volunteer Warden

Lynn Husted - Victoria Natural History Society

Denise Kendall - Outdoor Club of Victoria

Jacques Marc, Robert Raappana, Darrel Woods - Members at Large

Michael Meagher - Thetis Lake Park Nature Sanctuary Association

Mary Noakes - South Island Mountain Bike Society

Janet Williams - Capital Regional Horse Owners Association

Mark Hawkes – Dog Owner Representative – May 2003 to May 2004

The Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill Regional Parks Management Plan was approved by the CRD Board in October 2004

Table of Contents

<i>Vision Statement</i>	1
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	2
<i>Executive Summary</i>	5
<i>Section 1 - Background</i>	7
Map 1 – Regional Context	9
Regional Context of the Management Plan	10
Purpose of the Management Plan	10
General History of the Three Park Area	11
<i>Section 2 - Ecological Context of the Management Plan</i>	12
Map 2 – The Three Parks In Relation to the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory	15
Regional Parkland Management Zones	16
Management Zones	16
Park Management Zone Guidelines	17
Map 3 – Park Management Zones	18
<i>Section 3 - Park Boundaries</i>	19
Lands of Interest to CRD Parks	19
Map 4 – Lands of Interest Adjacent to the Three Regional Parks	21
Encroachment, Neighbourhood Access and New Development on Adjacent Lands	22
Former Thetis Lake Pistol Range Site	23
<i>Section 4 - Thetis Lake Regional Park Management Plan</i>	24
Park Features	24
Park History	24
Park Management Objectives	25
Key Park Management Issues and Proposed Actions	25
Map 5 – Thetis Lake Regional Park	26
Park Management Priorities	36
<i>Section 5 - Francis/King Regional Park Management Plan</i>	38
Park Features	38
Park History	38
Park Management Objectives	39
Key Park Management Issues and Proposed Actions	39
Map 6 – Francis/King Regional Park	40
Park Management Priorities	42

<i>Section 6 - Mill Hill Regional Park Management Plan</i>	43
Park Features.....	43
Park History	43
Park Management Objectives	44
Mill Hill Restoration Plan.....	44
Map 7 – Mill Hill Regional Park	45
Key Park Management Issues and Proposed Actions.....	46
Park Management Priorities.....	48
 <i>Section 7 - Integrating the Park Management Plans</i>	 50
Recreational Links	50
Communicating Park Management Messages.....	51
Map 8 Major Trail Designations.....	52
 <i>Section 8 - Management Plan Implementation</i>	 53
Phase 1 Implementation Priorities	53
Phase 2 Implementation Priorities	54
Phase 3 Implementation Priorities	55
Financial Implications of Implementing the Management Plan.....	55

Executive Summary

The CRD Parks Master Plan adopted by the CRD Board in September 2000 sets out the broad strategic goals for regional parks. It is system-wide in scope, providing the vision and purpose for CRD Parks. It also provides direction for achieving the highest standards of public service and stewardship, protecting the natural environment while at the same time providing opportunities for outdoor experiences. The Plan establishes a framework for managing the regional parks and trails system, and assists the CRD Board in making related decisions.

The CRD Parks Master Plan also sets the direction for park management plans. It outlines the goals and principles of managing regional parks and defines the overall process for preparing this management plan. The management plan for Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks focuses on the issues and policies that relate specifically to each of the three parks. It also sets out park management goals and objectives, and defines specific actions for achieving them.

Regional Context of the Three Parks

Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks are strategically located in the centre of a near continuous green/blue belt stretching from Tod Inlet to Esquimalt Harbour. These parks are a vital green space of over 1000 hectares, wedged between the developing urban and suburban areas of Saanich, View Royal and Langford. It will be important to maintain this land base and manage it in a way that maintains and improves its ecological health. This will require continued commitment to the principles of ecosystem management.

Ecological Context

Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks are all within the Coastal Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone. This zone is important as it contains the nationally endangered Garry oak ecosystems. All three parks, in particular the hilltops of Mill Hill, Seymour Hill, Scafe Hill and Stewart Mountain, have representative examples of these rare Garry oak ecosystems. Forests older than 100 years make up more than 50 percent of the land area of the three parks.

Proposed Park Management Actions

Park management actions are focussed around the need to maintain and improve the quality of the natural environment. All three regional parks included in this management plan are designated as Regional Conservation Areas in the CRD Parks Master Plan. This is the highest level of protection for the natural environment provided for in the CRD parks system. Management actions need to address the more environmentally harmful activities occurring in the parks.

Key management actions proposed in the implementation of Phase I of the plan are:

Land Acquisition

- A key priority is to continue to improve the environmental significance of these Regional Conservation Areas by acquiring land outside the current park boundaries that complement the parks' natural features.

Park Restoration

- Restore trampled and eroded areas around Prior Lake, and on the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails where damage to lakeshore vegetation is evident.
- Reclaim and re-vegetate areas in Thetis Lake Regional Park that have been damaged from unsanctioned mountain bike use, including Seymour Hill, Scafe Hill and Stewart Mountain.
- Implement recommendations in the Mill Hill Restoration Plan to restore Garry oak areas and damaged riparian areas along Millstream Creek.

Thetis Lake Trails

- Complete the construction of a clearly defined trail around Upper and Lower Thetis lakes to direct park visitors along the main trail corridor and eliminate areas of trail “braiding” and compaction of the soil around the tree roots.

Thetis Lake Park Entrance

- Redesign the Thetis Lake Regional Park entrance to create a focal point for park visitors to obtain information about the park’s natural features, and messages regarding the management of user groups in the park’s sensitive environments.

Cycling Management

- Create a cycling trail from the main beach area of Thetis Lake Regional Park to the Phelps subdivision on the west using a route that parallels the Trans Canada Highway.
- Work with organized cycling groups to assist CRD Parks keeping cyclists away from environmentally fragile lands such as Scafe Hill, Seymour Hill and Stewart Mountain.
- Target enforcement of cycling regulations to prevent further damage, and conduct site mitigation and reclamation of areas in Thetis Lake Regional that have been damaged by mountain bikes riding on hiking-only trails.

Other key actions recommended to implement the management plan include relocating trails away from the riparian areas of Craigflower and Millstream creeks.

Section 1 - Background

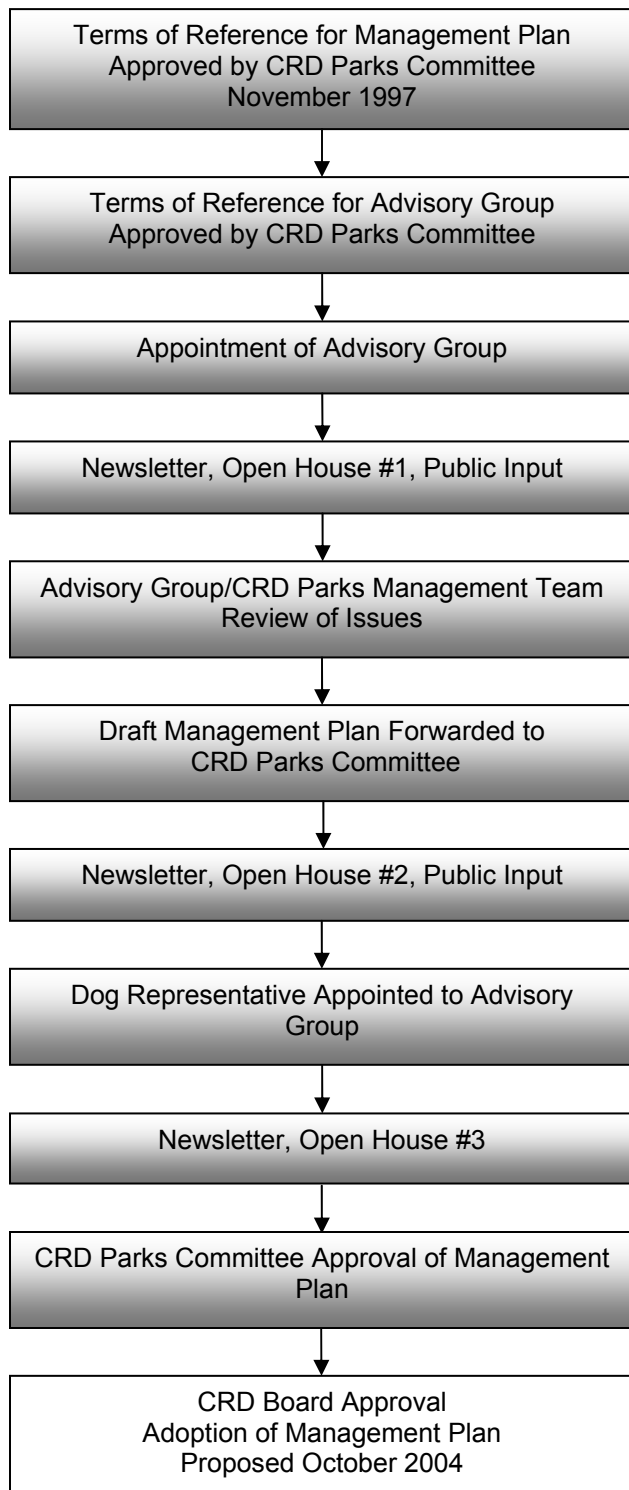
The CRD Parks Master Plan adopted by the CRD Board in September 2000 sets out the broad strategic goals for regional parks for this decade. It is system-wide in scope, and provides the vision and purpose for CRD Parks. It also provides direction for achieving the highest standards of public service and stewardship in protecting the natural environment, while at the same time providing opportunities for outdoor experiences and activities. The Plan establishes a framework for managing the regional parks and trails system, and assists the CRD Board in making related decisions.

The Master Plan is a key component of the Regional Green/Blue Spaces Strategy, a broad vision for protecting the natural and semi-natural areas - both land and water - of ecological, scenic, renewable resource, outdoor recreation or greenway value. The Green/Blue Spaces Strategy includes interconnected provincial and regional parks that form a significant natural north-south corridor stretching from Tod Inlet on the Saanich Peninsula to the marine waters of Esquimalt Harbour (Map 1). Gowlland Tod Provincial Park, Mount Work Regional Park, and the three parks included in this management plan contribute the majority of the green space and natural areas that make up this important environmental corridor.

The Thetis Lake, Francis/King, Mill Hill Regional Parks Management Plan is organised into eight sections. The background section gives the regional context and the purpose of the management plan and a brief overview of the three-park area. Section 2 provides the ecological context of the plan, including the various park management zones. Section 3 discusses the boundaries of the parks, and identifies lands outside the present park boundaries that are of interest to CRD Parks. Sections 4, 5 and 6 are the specific management initiatives proposed for Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks respectively. These sections outline each individual park's history, features, issues, actions and management priorities. Section 7 shows how the three park plans are interrelated. Section 8 describes how the plans will be implemented, and identifies priorities for management actions.



Process for Completing the Management Plan



Map 1 – Regional Context (follow link to open map)

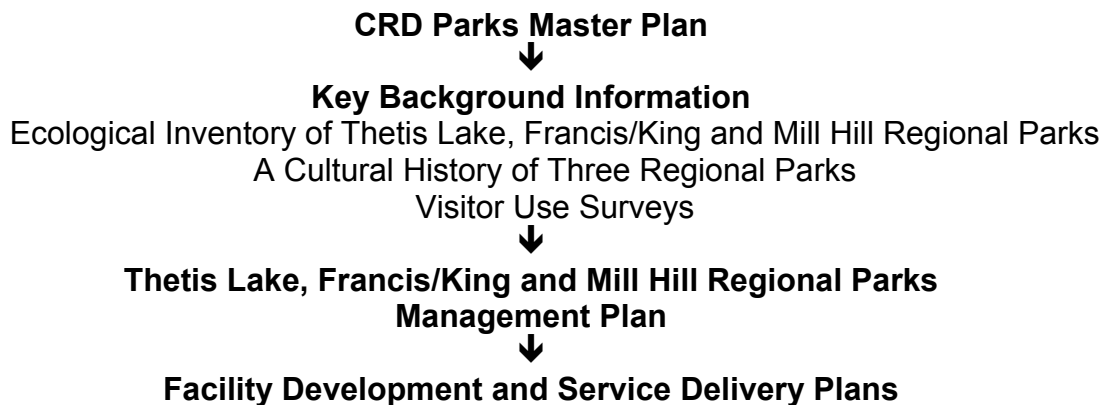
Regional Context of the Management Plan

Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks are strategically located in the centre of a near continuous green/blue belt stretching from Tod Inlet to Esquimalt Harbour. These parks are a vital green space of over 1000 hectares, wedged between the developing urban and suburban areas of Saanich, View Royal and Langford. As the region's population grows, these important lands will be a vital part of the continuous green/blue belt. It will be important to secure a land base for the parks and manage it in a way that maintains its ecological health. This will be a challenge to all public land managers, and will require continued commitment to the principles of ecosystem management which are:

- To protect the natural environment of the parks, including land, air, water, plants and wildlife.
- To sustain regional parks for the benefit of people and other living things by maintaining the long-term environmental health of ecosystems inside and outside the parks.
- To incorporate environmental conservation and stewardship into all aspects of park management and operations.
- To conduct environmental conservation through the careful protection, use and planned management of living organisms and their vital processes, and to prevent their depletion, exploitation, destruction or waste.
- To provide environmental stewardship through caring, thoughtful and cautious management of land and associated natural and cultural values.
- To pass on healthy ecosystems to future generations.

Purpose of the Management Plan

The CRD Parks Master Plan sets the direction for all management plans. It outlines the main goals and principles of managing regional parks and defines the overall planning process for this integrated management plan as outlined below. Direct references from the Master Plan used in this management plan will be identified in italics. The planning framework is as follows:



The management plan focuses on issues and policies that relate specifically to each of the three regional parks. The plan relies on key background information such as ecological inventories, visitor-use surveys and information from the public in formulating park management policies. It sets out, in a broad but comprehensive way, park management goals and objectives, and defines specific actions for achieving them that address:

- How natural environment and cultural values in the parks will be protected and managed
- What types of outdoor activities will be permitted and where
- The types and locations of park facilities
- The proposed park boundaries and identification of areas that have regional park potential
- How specific management issues will be addressed
- The types of services that CRD Parks will provide
- Priority management actions and implementation strategy

The management plan provides a set of policies that will define a logical, trackable rationale for making decisions in the management of the parks.

Overview of Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill Regional Parks

Thetis Lake, Francis/King, and Mill Hill regional parks are located between the urban and suburban areas of Saanich, View Royal, the rapidly developing urban and suburban community of Langford and the rural community of Highlands (Map 1). Together the three parks comprise 1019 hectares, and include stands of older Douglas-fir forest, upland Garry oak ecosystems, and lakes, wetlands and stream corridors that are regionally significant. The parks also protect many plant communities and species considered threatened and endangered in BC. Ecologically, the parks are a complex mosaic of forest types, moss-covered rock outcrops, wetlands and dry hillsides dominated by Garry oak and wildflowers.

The three parks are linked to the urban areas of the Capital Region by the Galloping Goose Regional Trail, and connected to other significant municipal and regional trail systems. Increasingly, they are becoming natural area islands in an urban and suburban setting, as surrounding lands are developed for residential, commercial and recreational uses.

General History of the Three Park Area

At the time of European contact (Manuel Quimper landed at Sooke and Esquimalt Harbour in 1774), the area encompassed by the three parks was the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt people, known collectively as the Lekwammen. The lands that make up the three parks were an important part of their territory, and there is evidence that these First Peoples fished Millstream and Craigflower Creek, gathered shellfish in Esquimalt Harbour, and hunted on lands now occupied by the parks. When Europeans began populating the Lekwammen

territory, disease and rapid cultural changes reduced the numbers of First Peoples here. Many who occupied this area in historic times relocated closer to the emerging Fort Victoria.

Early European history in the Capital Region is dominated by the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company. First Peoples signed treaties with James Douglas, and much of their traditional territory was taken over by the company, cleared and converted to farms. Colwood Farm, established around 1851, pre-empted much of the land near the parks, and clearing for farming activities altered the landscapes from their original forested nature. Subsequent land uses have erased most traces of the original culturally significant areas, with only a few specific archaeological finds (hunting artifacts and shell middens) remaining within the three parks. A brief history of each park is outlined in the individual management plans. A more complete outline of the history of the parks is provided in the report *A Cultural History of Three Regional Parks*.



Section 2 - Ecological Context of the Management Plan

Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks are all within the Coastal Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone found along the south-eastern coast of Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and to a minor degree on the mainland coast of BC. Under this classification system, zones are named for the dominant tree species, in this case Douglas-fir. In the late 1990s, Environment Canada, the provincial Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks (now Water, Land and Air Protection) the Habitat Conservation Trust and regional districts combined resources to conduct an inventory of sensitive ecosystems in the southern Vancouver Island area. The Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory project mapped the key remnant ecosystems, including older forest, woodland, meadow, wetland, riparian and maturing forest categories.

Older growth forests have been mapped by the inventory because of their rarity in the Coastal Douglas-fir zone. This zone is important as it contains the nationally endangered Garry oak ecosystems. All three parks, in particular Mill Hill, Seymour Hill, Scafe Hill and Stewart Mountain, have representative examples of these rare Garry oak ecosystems. Map 2 shows the extent of Garry oak ecosystems protected by the three parks. A very large contiguous area of Garry oak ecosystems is found within the boundaries of Mill Hill.

The map also shows that forest older than 100 years makes up more than 50 per cent of the land area of the three parks. Together they protect over a thousand hectares of high quality and rare natural ecosystems. Their importance to the biodiversity of southern Vancouver Island cannot be over emphasised. The map also shows that many of the natural ecosystems end abruptly at park boundaries. Park ecosystems in the context of the surrounding landscape are becoming increasingly isolated.

While the inventory gives a general idea of where sensitive areas are located, it is not detailed enough to assist in defining specific areas within the park that need protection. In 2001, CRD Parks completed the study *Ecological Inventory of Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill Regional Parks*. This inventory serves as a snapshot or baseline of the existing ecological condition of the parks, using the Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping methodology developed by the Province of BC. The ecosystems described by Map 2 can be interpreted for the creation of environment protection zones within the parks. The *Ecological Inventory of Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill Regional Parks* highlights key environment protection issues:

- increased use of the parks, including unofficial trail use, for all kinds of outdoor recreation
- more intensive recreation uses, such as inappropriate mountain biking in the Mount Seymour area of Thetis Lake Regional Park
- maintenance and upgrading of eroding trails that do not adequately consider the protection of rare plants and ecosystems
- residential development directly adjacent to the parks, with no allowance for natural area buffers

- encroachment of invasive exotic plant and animal species that compete with and replace native species.

Having this information available as the parks and the park settings evolve will facilitate ecosystem management as the basis for decision-making in regional parks. Outdoor activities can be managed for ecological sustainability. Facilities can be matched to outdoor activities that meet the environmental protection requirements. Ecological information already gathered in the parks will assist in more clearly defining the various zones within the park, and various special areas within the zones that require different levels of protection in order for the parks to be environmentally sustainable. The key recommendations in the report are for CRD Parks to:

- develop an environment assessment policy for trail and facility planning, maintenance and upgrades
- develop a strategy to address mountain bike use in non-designated areas of the parks
- assess remnant natural areas adjacent to the parks for their value as ecological buffers, and investigate options for acquisition, stewardship, covenants or community park designations,
- include guidelines from the CRD Parks *Public Communications Plan* for outreach to residents living adjacent to the parks
- prepare a restoration plan for Mill Hill Regional Park
- control priority invasive exotic plants in priority areas in the parks, as per *CRD Parks Guidelines for Managing Invasive Exotic Plant Species*
- encourage academic research and apply an adaptive management ethic. Adaptive management encourages the use of the best information available to manage natural environments and the adoption of new management methods, as more information is available, usually through scientific research.

For those seeking this detailed ecological information, the complete report is available from CRD Parks.



Map 2 – The Three Parks In Relation to the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory (follow link to open map)

Regional Parkland Management Zones

Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks are classified as Regional Conservation Areas in the CRD Parks Master Plan. The primary purpose of a Regional Conservation Area is protection of the natural environment. The three parks cover an area large enough to make a significant contribution to the long-term viability of the natural features. In the environmentally-sensitive parts of the parks, only activities that have minimal impact on the natural environment are provided for. Although this classification sets out the overall context for park management, different areas within the park must still be managed according to their environmental sensitivity and unique features. The landscapes that make up these regional parks can be described according to a combination of ecological factors that define each park zone.

Zone classifications may be used to determine the general uses the lands in each category can support, and are defined by the limits of acceptable environmental change that can occur within each park zone. In general, five management zones can define the parklands. (Individual site-specific areas containing pockets of rare species may appear in other zones, but are not the general character of the zone, and must be managed as individual ecologically significant sites). Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks contain lands in all five zones, reflecting the diversity of features found in these parks.

Management Zones

Sensitive Environment

Lands that have exceptionally high environmental value or sensitivity to development are in the sensitive environment category. Lands within this designation are limited in what they can provide in terms of recreational use and facilities. Specific sections may have limited or special access such as boardwalks, if used for educational purposes. Examples are bogs, wetlands, riparian shorelines, mossy outcrops, or ecologically sensitive areas sheltering rare and endangered plants or animals.

Natural Area Conservation

Areas of the park that are largely left in their natural state (the biggest part of most regional parks) fall into the natural area conservation category. Trails, viewpoints or viewing towers may be situated to provide better access to natural settings. Some recreational development can occur on these lands, but activities are commonly dispersed over a large area.

Natural Area Recreation

These large natural areas have often been subjected to human disturbance in the past, and may contain a number of informally used areas that have not had natural area management. Other areas, such as those beneath power lines, are subject to on-going vegetation management practices. Because of their disturbed nature, they do not always support rare ecosystems, and may be suitable for recreational activities.

Recreation Zone

Areas of the park that are set aside for intensive or active recreation are included in the recreation zone. Included are sites with specific facilities such as developed beaches, boat launches, centralized picnic areas and play areas.

Park Infrastructure Zone

Parking lots, necessary roads, service yards, administrative buildings and storage areas in the parks are in the park infrastructure zone. Efforts are made to ensure that facilities will have minimal impact on the park.

Park management zones, their descriptions and the activities they support are summarized in the following Table.

Park Management Zone Guidelines

Management Zone	Characteristics	Examples	Activities	Facilities Permitted
<i>Sensitive Environment</i>	High natural values Rare or endangered species or habitats	Mossy outcrops Wildflower meadows Garry oak forests Riparian shoreline	Nature study Environmental interpretation Limited hiking	Low impact nature trails Boardwalks Viewing blinds
<i>Natural Area Conservation</i>	High natural values Outstanding natural features Large, contiguous land areas	Large forested areas Natural viewpoints Ocean and lake shorelines	Hiking Cycling on trails Horseback riding Activities dispersed over wide area	Trails
<i>Natural Area Recreation</i>	Often subject to past human disturbance Informal trails and use occurring May be used to buffer other areas	Second growth forest Areas beneath power lines subject to vegetation management	Equestrian use Mountain biking	Equestrian trails Cycling trails
<i>Intensive Recreation</i>	Outstanding recreation features Natural values may be compromised	Recreation beaches Play areas Picnic areas Multi-use trails	Swimming Boating Fishing Group picnicking	Change rooms Boat launch sites Beaches
<i>Park Infrastructure Zone</i>	Necessary park service structures Natural values minimal Considerable landscape modification	Parking lots Staging areas	Visitor oriented services	Nature houses Washroom buildings Concession buildings Operations buildings

Map 3 – Park Management Zones (follow link to open map)

Section 3 - Park Boundaries

For the most part, the boundaries of Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks are based on property lines rather than geographical contours, or other ecological features such as watershed boundaries. Lot lines often divide ecological features, resulting in part of a natural feature being left outside the park. Adding these adjoining natural areas to existing natural systems within the parks would improve the overall ecological health of the natural feature. In addition, the parks are threatened by urban and suburban development on all sides. The result is a need to protect what natural areas already exist, whether they are in the parks or not. Working with the public and municipal governments, a number of actions can be taken to protect sensitive ecosystems.

The CRD Parks Master Plan states that CRD Parks will strive to:

- *protect and maintain the natural environments in existing regional parks*
- *use ecological or watershed boundaries for making decisions about park boundaries*
- *provide adequate buffers from activities on adjacent land*
- *protect natural environments adjacent to regional parks, in order to consolidate ecosystems bisected by park boundaries.*

Strategic Direction 2 of the Master Plan identifies Thetis Lake, Frances/King and Mill Hill regional parks as containing natural systems that can be improved by adding certain environmentally significant lands to the parks. CRD Parks has identified areas outside the park boundaries as having environmental significance, and in need of protection or special consideration when development occurs.

Lands of Interest to CRD Parks

CRD Parks has an interest in a number of specific natural areas immediately adjacent to the parks, as shown on Map 4. Identifying lands outside the park boundaries as areas of interest does not commit the CRD to acquire these or any other lands. The guidelines and criteria for the acquisition of regional parks and trails are outlined in the CRD Parks Master Plan, and apply to all areas of interest. The regional park acquisition guidelines are as follows:

- *Acquire land for regional parks and trails based on fair market value, and a willing buyer and seller*
- *Whenever possible, CRD Parks will work in partnership with community groups, land trusts, and other levels of government to acquire land*
- *Acquire property in accordance with the Master Plan and park management plans, giving careful consideration to operating and program needs, CRD Parks' financial position, and timing factors that affect the sale of the property*
- *Before acquiring land or land rights, CRD Parks will prepare an acquisition evaluation for the proposed land, based on the best available information, to determine its consistency with the Master Plan or park management plan and its suitability as an addition to the regional parks and trails system*

Eight general areas of interest outside the present boundaries of Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks have been identified. Numbers refer to locations shown on Map 4. (The numbers on the map are for area identification only, and do not indicate any order of priority assigned to these lands by CRD Parks).

1. A number of forested woodland areas and wetlands on properties to the west of Thetis Lake Regional Park were identified in the SEI. Some of these woodlands are an extension of existing plant communities found within the park, and are part of the Craigflower Creek watershed. Water flows from these properties into Thetis Lake. The wetland and stream corridor flowing into Thetis Lake Regional Park and the forested areas adjacent to the park are worthy of protection through parkland dedication, or as a buffer to the park using conservation covenants or other land stewardship arrangements.
2. A rural residential area to the west of McKenzie Lake in the Town of View Royal would make a good addition to Thetis Lake Regional Park. The forest in this area, although it has been selectively logged, was identified as an extension of the natural areas in the adjacent regional parkland. The main CRD Parks north-south fire road/multiple use trail passes through this area under agreement with the property owner. This parcel is important in maintaining the integrity of the western portion of Thetis Lake Regional Park and is included as an area of interest to CRD Parks, should the lands come onto the market and resources are available to purchase them.
3. Potential parkland dedications and desirable buffer areas are found on private lands proposed for development in the Pike Lake and McKenzie Lake areas north of Thetis Lake in the Town of View Royal. The SEI identified older Douglas-fir forest and a number of wetlands on these properties. The main stem of Craigflower Creek enters and exits Pike Lake along the eastern portion of the area, while the western portion contains the upper part of the McKenzie Lake drainage, in the Craigflower Creek watershed. Preserving a vegetation corridor along Craigflower Creek and its tributaries, and protecting the fish habitat in these streams, is a priority in the Craigflower Creek Watershed Management Plan.

These undeveloped lands are outside the urban containment boundary in the new View Royal Official Community Plan and designated *Rural*. The area is also a designated Development Permit Area, requiring protection of the natural environment and assurance that the development is acceptable to the municipality. The Official Community Plan specifies that a 30-metre buffer will be required between Thetis Lake Regional Park and any development on these lands. The development of these properties presents an opportunity for an east-west regional trail connection along Barker and Westoby roads, connecting the eastern portions of Thetis Lake Regional Park with the Scafe Hill and Stewart Mountain side of the park.

4. A small area at the south-west corner of Thetis Lake Regional Park in the District of Langford (owned by the City of Victoria) provides public and emergency fire access into Thetis Lake Regional Park from Phelps Avenue. This area, which includes a large wetland that drains into the lake, is protected by a District of Langford covenant that states that the property is to remain parkland. CRD Parks believes this area should be added to Thetis Lake Regional Park. The City of Victoria is considering CRD Parks request to transfer these lands to CRD Parks.

Map 4 – Lands of Interest Adjacent to Regional Parks (follow link to open map)

5. The eastern bank of Craigflower Creek along the park boundary was also identified in the SEI as an extension of the forest stand within the park. Maintaining these forested banks is important to protect the environmental values of the creek. If the area to the east of the creek is developed as a golf course, it would be desirable to have a buffer between the creek and adjacent developed areas.
6. An area on the north slope of Mill Hill in the Town of View Royal is an integral part of the ecological and scenic connection between Mill Hill and Thetis Lake regional parks. It contains original, un-logged older Douglas-fir forest of high conservation significance, and is an important component of the green space corridor along the Trans Canada Highway. This area is zoned as parkland in the Official Community Plan for the Town of View Royal. The District of Langford has proposed that a trail be built across the property paralleling the highway to link a Langford neighbourhood trail with the CRD Parks trail from Mill Hill to Thetis Lake. This property should be included in and managed as part of Mill Hill Regional Park. The City of Victoria (who owns the land) is considering CRD Parks request to transfer this property to CRD Parks to complete the transfer of lands originally in Thetis Lake Regional Park.
7. There is an area between the southern portion of Thetis Lake Regional Park and the Trans Canada Highway that contains a trailer park and campground, as well as a relatively undisturbed natural area. The area appears in the SEI, and identifies rock outcroppings with Garry oak and wildflower meadows. The land is also part of the Millstream Creek watershed. Consolidating these lands into the park and having the highway as the southern boundary would complement the adjacent parklands to the north. If we don't acquire these lands, do park impact studies of any new development proposal.
8. Portions of the upper eastern slopes of Mill Hill in the Town of View Royal could serve as a natural buffer between Mill Hill Regional Park and nearby residential development. Including this area in the park would also protect important vegetation communities and the viewscape of the upper slopes of Mill Hill. These slopes are included in a Development Permit Area, designated to protect the natural environment and to ensure that any proposed development is acceptable to the Town. The lands in this area are forested and relatively undisturbed. Plant communities on portions of the upper eastern slopes were identified in the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory. This area is also highly visible from the Trans Canada Highway and from numerous points in Saanich and View Royal.

CRD Parks will work with the districts of Highlands and Saanich, and the Town of View Royal, using a variety of tools - including outright acquisition, conservation covenants, parkland dedication or access agreements with private landowners - to protect key lands.

Encroachment, Neighbourhood Access and New Development on Adjacent Lands

Residential subdivisions (Phelps, Millwoods, Crystalview, and Langvista) are being developed adjacent to all three regional parks. There is often local encroachment onto parklands from residents making their own access into parks. This causes park fragmentation, as many small

paths created collectively have a significant impact on a park's natural features. Because of this, CRD Parks will endeavour to have a clear single access to parks from adjoining neighbourhoods when the subdivisions are built. CRD Parks will work co-operatively with municipalities and neighbours to ensure that multiple small accesses are not created. Where so-called "desire line" trails are found, every effort will be made to close them off and re-vegetate the damaged areas. CRD Parks will work with the community to educate landowners about the cumulative damage to parks caused by encroachment, and by creating several small access paths into the parks.

The CRD Parks Master Plan states that: "*CRD Parks may undertake an environmental impact assessment of an action taken on land outside of a regional park or trail that could have an adverse impact on the natural environment of a regional park or trail. CRD Parks may ask the proponent of the action to pay for the environmental impact assessment.*"

Former Thetis Lake Pistol Range Site

A 7.2-hectare site off Highland Road in the Town of View Royal was used for many years as a pistol range by various police forces, security companies and gun clubs. Ownership and management of the site were transferred from the City of Victoria to CRD Parks in 1993 as part of Thetis Lake Regional Park. Because of the extended period of use as a firing range, there are a number of environmental issues associated with the site. The total area actually contaminated by the activities of the pistol range is 0.75 hectares. It is registered as a contaminated site by the provincial government, and is currently fenced off from public use.

In 2001 the CRD approved the formation of an advisory group to determine the future use of the site. Membership of the group included representatives from the local community, View Royal municipal council, the Thetis Lake Park Nature Sanctuary Association, and a member of the advisory group for this management plan. The advisory group looked at a number of options for the site, from commercial and residential, to keeping the land within the park. After reviewing all options, the group recommended that the site be kept within Thetis Lake Regional Park, and that it be remediated and returned to its natural state. In July 2002, the CRD Parks Committee and Board accepted the recommendations of the advisory group and agreed to keep the area as part of the park. Over the next several years, the site will be cleaned up and rehabilitated, eventually becoming a passive use area within Thetis Lake Regional Park.

Section 4 - Thetis Lake Regional Park Management Plan

Park Features

Thetis Lake Regional Park is 846 hectares (2,090 acres), and contains three lakes, numerous wetlands, relatively large stands of older un-logged Douglas-fir forest, Garry oak ecosystems and several rocky hilltops (Map 5). The Thetis Lake area has been a popular recreation spot since the early 1930s. Its popularity has grown over the years, and in 2003 the park accommodated an estimated 173,000 visitors, making it one of the region's busiest parks. It is this combination of environmentally sensitive areas and heavy use that makes park management at Thetis Lake a challenge.

Thetis Lake provides opportunities for fishing and swimming, and is popular with kayakers and canoeists. A main swimming beach, with change rooms and concession building, is located at the southern end of the lake. A smaller beach, mainly used for boat launching, is a short distance west of the main beach. There is another small swimming area at Prior Lake, about a kilometre from the main beach area.

Numerous hiking trails cross through this large natural area, as well as multi-purpose and dual-purpose trails to accommodate cycling and equestrian use. Some activities have increased dramatically over the past few years. Without a management plan in place, many of these activities take place in areas that cannot sustain their impact. Thetis Lake was originally conceived as a nature sanctuary, a place where nature was to be enjoyed with as little impact as possible. As a result, this management plan has to deal with a number of complex issues, and some management actions will require changes in park use.

Park History

Thetis Lake is named after the Royal Navy frigate H.M.S. Thetis, which was stationed in Esquimalt in 1852. In 1885 the Esquimalt Waterworks Company, which supplied water to Esquimalt and Victoria West until 1915, owned the lake. An earth dam, constructed in 1887, raised the water level enough to join the upper and lower lakes and provide additional water storage. Water was delivered by wooden flume to the growing communities, and to a brickwork company and lime kiln located on Millstream near Parson's Bridge. When Sooke Lake became the region's main water source, Thetis Lake became available for recreational use. In 1932 Thetis Lake was officially opened to the public for recreational use. In the 1930s the lake was a popular swimming destination on a hot summer day, and in the 1940s there was a dance pavilion next to the lake, and a dock and float to accommodate boating and swimming.

In the late 1940s, real estate developers recognised Thetis Lake for its potential as a residential area. The land, then owned by the City of Victoria, was being considered for a lakeshore subdivision. A group of concerned individuals who knew of the beauty and diversity of the lake and its surroundings, gathered support to have the entire area set aside as a park. In 1958, an area close to 160 hectares around the lake was established as Thetis Lake Park Nature Sanctuary,

thought to be the first nature sanctuary established in Canada. It was cared for by the Thetis Lake Park Nature Sanctuary Association, a group that continues to actively support the park today.

In 1980 the park was expanded with land transferred from the provincial government. In 1993, ownership and management of the park (which was experiencing wide use by residents from throughout the region) was transferred to CRD Parks. In 1998, a further 140 hectares of land, including Scafe Hill, were added to the park. Further acquisition of important lands north of Thetis Lake, connecting to Mount Work Regional Park was added in 2004, bringing its size up to the current 846 hectares. (For a more detailed history of the park, refer to *A Cultural History of Three Regional Parks*).

Park Management Objectives

Thetis Lake Regional Park is designated in the CRD Parks Master Plan as a Regional Conservation Area. This designation in a broad way defines how the park will be managed. The primary purpose of a Regional Conservation Area is the protection of the natural environment. Although this classification sets out the overall context for park management, specific areas within the park may need to be managed according to their specific environmental sensitivity and unique features. With this in mind, the management objectives for Thetis Lake Regional Park are to:

1. Protect and prevent disturbance to existing natural areas and resources contained within the park that have not been impacted by human use.
2. Institute park management practices that will prevent future use from encroaching onto existing healthy natural areas.
3. Protect and restore degraded priority natural areas identified in the “Management Guidelines for Invasive Alien Species in CRD Parks”.
4. Direct outdoor activities away from the more fragile ecosystems in the park.
5. Provide appropriate opportunities for outdoor activities in areas of the park that can sustain further use without causing environmental damage.
6. Manage use in the parks in a way that it does not impact the park’s natural values and features.
7. Monitor public use over time and adjust management practices to protect the park resources.

Key Park Management Issues and Proposed Actions

Through the management planning process, several important issues have been identified that need to be addressed in the management plan for Thetis Lake Regional Park. These include:

Park visitor impact on the natural environment	Dog management
Craigflower Creek watershed management	Park trail designations
Equestrian management	Cycling management
Special event management	Beach area improvements
Highland Road	Prior Lake

Map 5 – Thetis Lake Regional Park (follow link to open map)

Each of these issues has been reviewed using an interest-based approach to solving the park management challenges facing the parks. An interest-based approach uses interests to define the issues and to help develop solutions. Interests get at the roots of the issues, and the real motivations that people have for becoming involved in park issues. They are the concerns, needs, wants, objectives and focus that CRD Parks, other levels of government, interest groups and the public have about a park management issue. A set of actions is proposed to address each issue.

Issue: Park Visitor Impact on the Natural Environment

CRD Parks is faced with balancing increased recreation demands in a developing urban area with its primary role of protecting the lands it has been entrusted to manage. While use of the parks will undoubtedly increase, the rare and valuable natural resources within the parks must be protected. Balancing these competing needs is a park management challenge.

Current CRD Parks Position

The Parks Master Plan states that *“CRD Parks’ purpose has two complimentary parts: (1) to protect regionally significant natural environments, and (2) to provide a range of opportunities for outdoor recreation. Both are reflected in the establishment and management of all regional parks. Although the two parts of the purpose complement each other, they can- and often do- create management challenges. Residents of the region have said that while they want CRD Parks to emphasise both parts, **protecting the natural environment is considered CRD Parks’ primary responsibility.** This will be reflected in selecting and establishing areas for a regional park and managing regional parks.”* Visitor use guidelines in the Master Plan state that CRD Parks will *“try to accommodate a range of appropriate activities in regional parks and on regional trails, while minimizing the impact on the natural environment.”*

Interests:

- The Thetis Lake Park Nature Sanctuary Association and others are concerned that some areas of the park are over-used, and that some recreational activities are damaging park resources.
- The population is increasing, and the popularity of some recreation activities (e.g., mountain biking) is growing. Recreationists want expanded opportunities to participate in their sport.
- The heavy use of trails (particularly around the lakeshore) has deteriorated much of the original corridor. To avoid walking on wet, muddy or rutted portions of the trail, park visitors go off to either side of the main trail, which expands the footprint (overall width) of the trail, damages tree roots and tramples vegetation. Trail users want to walk on well-defined trails, and park visitors concerned with the environmental impact of this trail “braiding” want the main trails improved to prevent further expansion of the trail footprint in the park.
- There is currently no clearly identified location to get information about the park and its features. There is a need for a central location to:
 - a) disseminate information about park policies
 - b) educate the public about the sensitive nature of the parklands
 - c) convey other park management messages.

Proposed Actions:

- Designate specific areas within the park as off limits to recreation activities that are damaging to the park's natural environment such as cycling and equestrian use in environmentally sensitive areas such as Seymour Hill, Scafe Hill and some low-lying wetlands.
- Establish a clearly defined trail around the lake (the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails) to direct park visitors along a sustainable all-season trail corridor. Conduct site mitigation where damage to the natural environment has already occurred. The site mitigation should be conducted in conjunction with an educational and regulatory signing program.
- Redesign the park entrance from the main parking area to create a focal point for park visitors to get information as they enter. Provide a central location where park visitors can obtain interpretive messages about the park's natural assets as well as important park visitor messages regarding the management of park visitors in the park's sensitive environments.
- Use the vacant concession building (off-season) as a "storefront" to disseminate park management information.
- Install informative regulatory signs at strategic locations in the park, in an effort to educate park visitors about the fragile nature of the parklands.
- Extend educational messages outside the park into the community, such as at schools and cycling shops.
- Develop communication approaches to show park visitors what each trail is designated for, and require visitors to adhere to restrictions imposed by trail designations.

Issue: Management of the Craigflower Creek Watershed

A large portion of Craigflower Creek, an important fish-bearing stream, flows through Thetis Lake Regional Park. Nearby urban development and manipulation of the watershed for drainage purposes could potentially affect water quality within the stream. Co-ordinated management of the watershed is necessary if a sustainable fish run is to be maintained. All land managers within the watershed need to contribute to the protection and improvement of Craigflower Creek.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks Master Plan guidelines for managing riparian and wetland resources proposes to *"manage riparian and other wetland environments and their buffer zones to conserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of these important resources, and to prevent the destruction, loss, or degradation of habitat."*

Background Information:

The Craigflower Watershed Management Plan, prepared by CRD Environmental Services, was completed in August 1998. The plan looks at the entire watershed as one planning area, and makes recommendations regarding land issues that affect it. Provincial, regional and municipal jurisdictions contributed to the plan and made specific commitments to help maintain the health of the watershed. The Town of View Royal and the District of Highlands (municipalities with the major portion of the watershed in their boundaries) refer to the plan when reviewing any new

developments that may affect the watershed. CRD Parks' primary role as outlined in the plan is to maintain water control structures that help manage the water levels and stabilize water flows in the creek.

Interests:

- The Thetis Lake watershed protects a significant portion of Craigflower Creek, an important fish-bearing stream (Coho salmon and Cutthroat trout). This resource needs to be protected.
- Some park visitors are concerned that activities within the park or upstream of the park may adversely affect water quality and fish habitat within the Craigflower Creek watershed.

Proposed Actions:

- Ensure that as much as possible, any new park facilities and trails are kept away from the riparian area and floodplains of McKenzie and Craigflower creeks. When conducting activities or constructing facilities adjacent to these streams, ensure the streams are protected from adverse environmental impacts such as increased siltation or streambed damage.
- Upgrade the Craigflower Creek trail and relocate trail sections in the floodplain away from riparian areas.
- Continue to work with the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection to monitor water levels, maintain water control structures and release water from Thetis Lake to enhance conditions for salmon and trout in the Craigflower Creek system.

Issue: Dog Management

Dog management is an issue in Thetis Lake Regional Park which will be addressed through a separate planning process.

Issue: Park Trail Designations

The trail system in Thetis Lake Regional Park has expanded over the years to include fire access roads, equestrian trails, multi-purpose trails and numerous small hiking-only trails. While some of the trails are remote, and user incidents few, increased use of many of the more popular trails has resulted in more conflicts. Designating trails for particular uses can resolve some of these conflicts, and trails can be built to accommodate the uses they are designed for.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks Master Plan states that a goal is: *to provide, for regional residents and visitors of all ages and abilities, opportunities for a range of experiences and activities that have a minimal impact on the natural environment of regional parks and trails, are appropriate to the purpose of each park or trail, and best serve visitor needs. An appropriate outdoor activity is defined as one that:*

- *Is dependent upon a natural environment*
- *Has a minimal impact on the natural environment*

- *Encourages an appreciation for and understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment, and*
- *Is compatible with other park uses*

Interests:

- Cyclists and equestrians wish to have access to more park trails. These trails must be built to a multi-use standard, which is considerably greater in width and height and often requires a greater amount of surfacing than a conventional hiking trail.
- There is a need to connect the multi-use trails through the park, creating loops wherever practical.
- Hikers wish to have narrower, less developed trails to access the natural areas of the park.
- Traditional fire access roads and a network of existing trails fragment the park. Not all routes are needed for fire access. Some park visitors wish to have some of these roads and trails blocked off and rehabilitated.

Proposed Actions:

- Designate each of the main trails for specific user groups in Thetis Lake Regional Park (Map 5). Ensure that only those trails that have been designated for cycling or equestrian uses are used for those purposes.
- Manage all trails within the park not otherwise designated as hiking-only trails. Work directly with user groups to ensure that cyclists and equestrians remain on trails designated for them, and stay off hiking-only trails.
- Identify any trails or fire access roads that are not required and allow natural re-growth.
- Create physical barriers to block off unnecessary trails and sign them as closed.
- Create loops wherever possible in the trail network.
- Continue to support a regional access route following Barker and Westoby Roads as well as a route beneath the power lines to the north (which are not within the park) to ensure there are additional connections linking the eastern and western portions of the park.

Issue: Equestrian Management

Horse riders have traditionally used the multi-purpose trails throughout Thetis Lake Regional Park. While there have been some user conflicts, equestrian use on the busier trails is minimal. There are opportunities to expand equestrian use to some of the more remote areas of the park, and in turn re-route equestrian use away from the busy hiking trails along the lakeshore.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks bylaw states that horses only are allowed on trails and park areas that have been designated for that use. Currently horseback riding is allowed on designated trails within Thetis Lake Regional Park.

Interests:

- Equestrians are seeking expanded opportunities to ride in the park.

- Some park visitors are concerned that horse use is causing environmental damage and that there are equestrian use conflicts on some of the trails within the park, particularly the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails.
- There is currently no equestrian-friendly east-west trail through the park to allow equestrians access to the multi-purpose trails on the western sections of Thetis Lake Regional Park.
- The only horse trailer off-loading area in the park is the main parking lot, which is removed from the majority of the horse trails in the western portions of the park.

Proposed Actions:

- Upgrade the existing trail leading from Upper Thetis Lake to the Stewart Mountain fire access road (shown as proposed equestrian trail on Map 5) for equestrian use. Once the trail is available for use, phase out equestrian use on the portion of the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails west of this new route.
- Assist the equestrian community in finding a horse trailer off-loading area that will facilitate easier equestrian access to the western portions of the park. Explore with BC Hydro the possibility of locating a horse trailer unloading area on their property in the Pike Lake area.

Issue: Cycling Management

The number of cyclists using the trails in Thetis Lake Regional Park has grown tremendously over the past decade. Cycling is allowed on the multi-use trails within the park, including the Trillium Trail, the Stewart Mountain Trail and fire access roads throughout the park. While the multi-use trails are available to cyclists, some of these trails are not connected to form a loop. In addition, more avid cyclists are seeking opportunities for single-track trail riding in the park. Some cyclists are venturing into areas where cycling is prohibited, causing environmental damage and creating user conflicts.

Current CRD Parks Position

Trail guidelines in the Master Plan propose to:

- *Provide a range of cycling opportunities within the regional parks and trails system*
- *Consider cycling facilities during the preparation of regional trails and parks management plans*
- *Examine the idea of providing off-road cycling opportunities on single-track trails*

Background Information

A consultant study of impacts of mountain biking on Seymour Hill in Thetis Lake Regional Park was completed in August 2000. The report suggested that the current management strategies in place should be strengthened to deter further mountain biking activity within the sensitive areas of the park.

Interests:

- Mountain bikers wish to have a complete trail loop through the park.
- Cyclists wish to have expanded opportunities for single-track cycling in the park.

- Some park visitors are concerned about the ecological damage caused by cyclists riding in areas of the park where cycling is prohibited, such as Seymour Hill, Scafe Hill and Stewart Mountain.
- Some park visitors are concerned because cyclists are using unsanctioned trails to access the western part of the park. There is a need for an east-west trail through the park to allow cyclists to access the multi-purpose trails in the western part of the park.
- There is a need to create a formal partnership with cycling groups, to explore opportunities to work together to create new environmentally sustainable cycling trails.

Proposed Actions:

- Work directly with organized cycling groups to educate other riders, and assist CRD Parks keeping cyclists away from environmentally fragile lands such as the mossy outcrops on bare rock sections of Scafe Hill and Seymour Hill, or any areas where rare plants or fragile ecosystems are known to occur.
- Enter into a formal agreement with South Island Mountain Biking Society (SIMBS) or other cycling groups to determine locations where a limited number of single track or otherwise challenging cycling trails could be built. The disturbed areas beneath the power lines on either side of Stewart Mountain are possible locations for these trails.
- Conduct site mitigation and reclamation of areas in Thetis Lake Regional Park (such as Seymour Hill) that have been damaged by unsanctioned mountain bike use.
- Create a cycling access from the neighbourhoods to the west of the park (Phelps subdivision) using the route shown as proposed hiking/cycling trail on Map 5. An agreement with the Ministry of Transportation and Highways will be needed.
- Work with bike shops and cycling advocacy groups to educate cyclists about the significant damage their activities can cause if conducted in environmentally fragile areas.
- Use interpretive/regulatory signs to inform cyclists about the impact of their activity on fragile ecosystems, and reinforce the reasons requiring that cyclists stay on designated trails.
- Where cyclists are found to consistently ignore park bylaws regarding cycling in restricted areas, target these areas for increased enforcement.
- Review the success of the new cycling initiatives after a period of 3-5 years and adjust as necessary.

Issue: Special Event Management

There are an increasing number of requests to conduct a variety of special events in regional parks. Running events, triathlons, swimming competitions, commercial filming and orienteering groups often seek the kinds of terrain found in the regional parks system. A park use permit system has been developed to help manage the large number of requests, but the increased demand requires some direction from the management plan as to what the terms will be, and how to make decisions on what is an acceptable event. Thetis Lake Regional Park is one of the few parks with a parking area large enough to accommodate large numbers of event participants and spectators.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks Master Plan has guidelines for special uses of regional parks. These guidelines: *Permit special use in regional parks and on regional trails provided that they do not have a negative impact on the natural environment, facilities, operations, or the public's enjoyment and safety. These activities and events will require a park-use permit.* Major events are managed to ensure that there is minimal environmental impact on the park.

Interests:

- There are continuing requests for park-use permits for special activities. Some park visitors are concerned that these activities (filming, running events) may negatively impact the natural environment, or conflict with other park visitors.
- Some events, such as the annual triathlon that utilizes a portion of Thetis Lake Regional Park, have been very successful and beneficial to the community as a whole and there is a desire to see them continue, provided they can be accommodated in a way that does not damage the park ecology.
- There is a concern that large events may produce considerable short-term disruption of public enjoyment of the park.
- Some group activities such as orienteering require that event participants go off park trails, which is contrary to CRD Parks' policies. In addition to causing environmental damage, some park visitors are concerned that allowing large groups off trails may be sending the wrong message to other park visitors about staying on trails.
- Some activities which cause short-term impacts (orienteering and natural history surveys) result in expanded knowledge and mapping of park areas, providing needed bio-geographical information to CRD Parks.
- Historically some user groups have had access to the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails and other parts of the park to conduct their annual cross-country run. With increased park use around the lake, there is concern that the trail may no longer be appropriate for large cross-country runs.

Proposed Actions:

- Assess each proposed special event on its own merits, based upon impact to other park visitors, the natural environment and overall benefits to the community.
- Do not approve any park use permits that include going off-trail within the Sensitive Environment Zone, sensitive ecosystems, shorelines, or any plant or animal community in a sensitive condition (for example, when birds are nesting).
- Locate high impact activities away from the Sensitive Environment and Natural Area Conservation zones within the parks.
- Do not sanction new large-scale recreational events or runs on the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails.
- Work with park visitor groups such as the Prairie Inn Harriers, who have historically used the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails for their athletic events to find suitable alternative locations away from the park's environmentally sensitive areas.

- When large events are planned, ensure that park neighbours are informed, to minimize conflicts during the event.

Issue: Beach Area Improvements

The main beach area at Thetis Lake Regional Park is one of the most popular summer beach destinations for people in the Capital Region. The size of the beach area is relatively small for the number of visitors that go to the lake, so it is often crowded. The concession building and change room are located right in the middle of the main beach area. The buildings do not fit with their natural surroundings, but are still functional. There are no washroom facilities at the north end of the lake.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks Master Plan (Strategic Direction 4) proposes eventual upgrading of the concession building, and the washroom/change facility at Thetis Lake Regional Park.

Interests:

- CRD Parks cannot fulfil all the regional demand for access to freshwater recreation opportunities at Thetis Lake. Although there is a demand for more recreational water access, there is a concern from those who like the more natural shoreline of the lake that the demand may put pressure on CRD Parks to expand the beach areas. There is no opportunity to expand the beach areas at Thetis Lake.
- There is a concern that the park may have reached its carrying capacity and that pro-active means (e.g., limit parking) may be needed to manage the numbers.
- Some park visitors are concerned that the present concession and change room buildings are “out of place” in the natural environment where they are located.
- There is concern that the present turn-around, drop-off and parking areas at the main beach do not meet universal access standards.
- The park entrance and main beach area needs to be made more functional to better communicate park management messages to park visitors.
- Improvements are needed to accommodate increased canoe and kayak launching.
- Toilet facilities are needed on the north side of Upper and Lower Thetis Lake, which are some distance from the facilities at the main beach area.

Proposed Actions:

- Improve, but do not expand, the beaches at the main beach area.
- Prepare a site plan for the main beach area that will ensure the best use of the available space.
- In the short term, change the colour scheme of the current buildings to help them blend into the natural background.
- Re-design the park entrance from the main parking area to the main beach to make it more functional. Include a kiosk for communicating park messages to visitors. In the re-design, consider decommissioning the turn-around area, and re-vegetating it to a more natural state.
- Ensure that any new facilities meet universal access standards.

- Provide a toilet facility near the junction of Upper and Lower Thetis lakes.

Issue: Highland Road

Highland Road runs through the eastern part of Thetis Lake Regional Park. It connects the main part of the Town of View Royal with a number of View Royal residences north of the park. The segment of Highland Road that goes through the park is narrow, and meanders through a section of old-growth forest. Some people park on Highland Road to avoid paying parking fees at the main Thetis Lake parking lot. In summer months the road is congested with cars parked along the roadside, negatively affecting the natural character of the park, as well as impacting the vegetation adjacent to the road. The road is an intrusion into an otherwise remote part of the park that has significant environmental features.

Background Information

The paved portion of Highland Road is deemed by the Ministry of Transportation and Highways to be a “Section Five” road. Public access must be maintained for roads in this category. Controlling access to the road by gating would increase response times for emergency vehicles, and would likely not be allowed. The Town of View Royal maintains the paved road surface.

Current CRD Parks Position

CRD Parks currently allows free parking on the unpaved portions of Highland Road. Cars parking on the paved surface are towed away, as they can impede emergency vehicles needing access through the park.

Interests:

- Residents north of the park currently need to use Highland Road to access to their homes.
- There is a concern that new residential development north of the park would create a need to expand Highland Road. Increased traffic would negatively impact the park’s natural character, and widening the road would require cutting old growth forest.
- Some park visitors are concerned that even now Highland Road cuts through the heart of the park, bisecting and fragmenting the old growth forest ecosystem. As a long-term goal, they would like to see this road decommissioned and converted to a regional trail. This would allow consolidation of the valued ecosystems within the park.
- There is a concern by some that continued parking along the roadside causes damage to the vegetation and exposes tree roots, which can eventually kill the trees. They would like to see parking on Highland Road eliminated and the road edge rehabilitated.

Proposed Actions:

- Do not allow any expansion of Highland Road (widening, straightening the corners) within the park.
- Do not provide any new park facilities in this part of Thetis Lake Regional Park.
- As future residential development occurs in the surrounding area, work with the District of Saanich, the Town of View Royal and the District of Highlands to see if an acceptable

alternate access can be provided for the residents north of the park. In the future, if a suitable alternate access can be provided, request that the Ministry of Transportation and Highways close Highland Road as a through road through the park. The road could then be used primarily to access park facilities and for emergencies.

Issue: Prior Lake

Prior Lake is a small lake with limited available shoreline situated away from the main lakes in a remote area of Thetis Lake Regional Park (see Map 5). Because of its isolated location, it became a place where naturists (nude sunbathers) go to enjoy the park. There is a small beach area and float. Park visitors curious about the naturists have caused the vegetation surrounding the lake to be trampled and many small trails have fragmented the lakeshore habitat.

Current CRD Parks Position

CRD Parks wishes to maintain the high environmental values associated with this Regional Conservation Area. Where damage has occurred, CRD Parks actively restores these areas by restricting public access and replanting these areas with native vegetation.

CRD Parks currently does not charge for parking on Highland Road, at Prior Lake or at the Trillium Trail entrance to the park, which attracts park visitors that want to avoid paying for parking at the main parking area. In summer months this creates a crowded roadway, and often requires that vehicles be towed.

Interests:

- There is a concern that the Prior Lake area is a very limited site that has reached its carrying capacity (full use potential) already and that any further increase in use could impact the natural areas surrounding the lake.
- There is a concern that some peripheral activities occurring around the lake are having a negative environmental impact on the lands (e.g. trampled vegetation) and that work is needed to restore the natural features in this part of the park.
- Some park visitors that use Prior Lake are concerned that restricting parking on Highland Road would make it more difficult to visit the lake.
- Some park visitors wish to continue to park on Highland Road to avoid paying the parking fee at the main entrance to the park.

Proposed Actions:

- Do not expand any facilities in this part of the park.
- Conduct site restoration on damaged areas around the lake.

Park Management Priorities

Because Thetis Lake Regional Park is a Regional Conservation Area, park management priorities will be based upon environmental considerations. Management actions over the next five years will be implemented according to the following priorities:

1. Protecting the natural environment.

- Establish a clearly defined trail around Upper and Lower Thetis lakes to direct park visitors along the all-season trail corridor in an effort to minimize trail “braiding” and compaction of the soil around tree roots.
- Work directly with organized cycling groups to educate other riders and assist CRD Parks in keeping cyclists away from environmentally fragile lands such as the mossy outcrops on Scafe Hill, Seymour Hill and Stewart Mountain.
- Relocate the Craigflower Creek Trail out of the riparian areas in the floodplain where the trail goes down to the water’s edge.
- Create a parking area near the south-east corner of Thetis Lake Regional Park (near the bus loop and Terasen gas line corridor) as an additional parking area for the park.

2. Rehabilitating areas that have been damaged by public use.

- Conduct site restoration on damaged and trampled areas around Prior Lake.
- Conduct site mitigation and reclamation in areas of Thetis Lake Regional Park that have been damaged from unsanctioned mountain bike use, such as near the top of Seymour Hill.
- Conduct site mitigation on the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails where damage to the lakeshore vegetation from public use has caused some areas to be eroded.
- Identify any trails or fire access roads in excess of park requirements and allow them to grow over. Create physical barriers to block off unnecessary trails, allowing natural re-growth.

3. Informing park visitors about their park management responsibilities.

- Redesign the entrance to the park from the main parking area. Create a focal point for park visitors to get information about the park as they enter. Provide a central location for park visitors to view messages about the park’s natural assets and important messages on the management of park visitors in the park’s sensitive environments.
- Install signs at strategic locations in the park that are regulatory and informative to educate park visitors about the fragile nature of the parklands, and why park management actions have become necessary.
- Create educational materials that explain the need for park management action messages and make them available to the community, especially schools and cycling shops.

4. Improving opportunities for outdoor experiences.

- Enter into a formal agreement with SIMBS or other cycling groups to formally determine locations for a limited number of single track or otherwise challenging cycling trails, such as beneath the power lines on either side of Stewart Mountain.
- Provide a toilet facility near the junction of Upper and Lower Thetis lakes.

Park management actions over the next five years should reflect these priorities. Budgets and work plans should be set each year to implement the recommendations in the management plan. It is recognized that annual budgets are subject to CRD Parks Committee and Board approval.

Section 5 - Francis/King Regional Park Management Plan

Park Features

Francis/King Regional Park is 113 hectares in size, and contains stands of older and regenerating Douglas-fir forest, a heritage grove of the tallest Douglas-firs remaining on the Saanich Peninsula, and a number of wetlands (Map 6). The park is bordered by rural residential lands and connected to Thetis Lake Regional Park by a BC Hydro corridor acquired by CRD Parks in 1993. Francis/King has a nature centre that provides information and displays to help park visitors get the most out of their visit. There is also a cabin near the park entrance used for programs, special events and meetings throughout the year.

Meandering trails take the park visitor through the forest to see the heritage grove, with trees over 75 meters high and over 600 years old. They are a spectacular sight. Still more trails take the nature enthusiast through Garry oak meadows and past small wetlands. The trail system connects with Thetis Lake Regional Park trails, providing visitors with ample opportunity to extend their visit to other natural attractions in the area.

The 750 meter Elsie King Interpretive Trail is a key feature of the park. This trail winds through a serene natural area, and is universally accessible, so that people of all ages and abilities can enjoy a self-guiding tour through this beautiful park. Hiking and nature study are the main activities here.

There were over 27,000 visitors in 2003. Washrooms, parking and a caretaker's residence are located near the entrance to the park. A horse trail paralleling Munn Road facilitates equestrian use from stables in the nearby neighbourhood.

Park History

Francis/King Regional Park is made up of what were two separate but adjacent parks: Thomas S. Francis Provincial Park, established in 1960, and Freeman King Municipal Park, established in 1967 by the City of Victoria. The Victoria Natural History Society managed both until they were transferred to CRD Parks in 1981. Both parks have a long and interesting history.

James Francis, a pioneer from England, bought the land that is now part of the regional park and built the Francis homestead, near the present caretaker's cabin. Thomas "Tommy" Francis, one of James' three sons, was born there in 1878. Tommy Francis was an accomplished outdoorsman, hunter and lover of nature. He made his living raising cattle and farming the family homestead.

Tommy Francis met Freeman "Skipper" King in 1946. At the time Freeman King was a Boy Scout leader who would take his scouts for hikes on the Francis property, largely because of all the magnificent natural features it had to offer. King received permission to ramble about the

Francis property with the scouts because Tommy Francis noted the respect with which the group held the natural things that he also loved so much.

The two became very close friends over the years, and the younger King was a great help to Francis as he aged. As a result of their friendship, Francis offered to leave his land to Freeman King, but was persuaded by King to donate it to the Province instead, and have the area declared a park. As a result, in 1960 Thomas S. Francis Provincial Park was created.

Freeman King Park was created in 1967 when property adjacent to Francis Park on the west side of Munn Road was transferred from the City of Victoria to the Province, and named in honour of Freeman King. The property was transferred in exchange for allowing BC Hydro to put a major power line through Thetis Lake Park, a move that was opposed by conservationists. The City of Victoria built the Forester's Cabin and gifted it to the park in 1968. The original Elsie King Interpretive Trail was opened in honour of Freeman King's wife Elsie, who was a prominent Girl Guide leader and Freeman's companion for nearly 60 years. For a more detailed history of the park, please refer to *A Cultural History of Three Regional Parks* available through CRD Parks.

Park Management Objectives

Francis/King Regional Park is designated in the CRD Parks Master Plan as a Regional Conservation Area. This designation in a broad way defines how the park will be managed. The primary purpose of a Regional Conservation Area is the protection of the natural environment. Although this classification sets out the overall context for park management, specific areas within the park may need to be managed according to their specific environmental sensitivity and unique features. With this in mind, the management objectives for Francis/King Regional Park are to:

1. Protect and prevent disturbance to the existing natural areas and resources contained within the park that have not been impacted by human use.
2. Institute park management practices that will prevent future use from encroaching onto the existing healthy natural areas.
3. Restore natural areas that have been damaged as a result of human activity over the years by closing off unneeded trails which will facilitate consolidation and enlarging the existing ecosystems into more contiguous blocks.
4. Direct outdoor activities away from the more fragile ecosystems in the park.
5. Manage public use so as to not impact on the park's natural values and features.
6. Monitor public use over time and adjust management practices to protect the park resources.

Key Park Management Issues and Proposed Actions

Through the management planning process, two important issues were identified that need to be addressed in the management plan for Francis/King Regional Park. These are:

- Park fragmentation
- Dog management

Map 6 – Francis/King Regional Park (follow link to open map)

Issue: Park Fragmentation

The lands that now make up Francis/King Regional Park have a long history of human use. Trails have been built by a variety of groups, and criss-cross the park from many entry points. To date there has been no co-ordinated review of the trail system, and there are too many trails fragmenting the ecosystems within the park. Too many trails create a signing and safety problem. People can lose their way, so a large number of signs are required.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks Master Plan provides some guidance on protecting the natural environment. These guidelines state that *“Conservation, enhancement and restoration of biological systems will promote naturally functioning ecosystems.”* The guidelines also state that *“Outdoor recreation uses and facilities will be matched with the capabilities of the natural environment to support such uses.”* Vegetation guidelines state that CRD Parks will strive to: *“Maintain and manage vegetation to conserve, enhance and restore native plant communities, to preserve and protect populations of rare, threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species and their habitat, and, where possible to protect biological diversity and achieve a high representation of native vegetation”.*

Interests:

- Some park visitors are concerned that the fragmentation of the sensitive ecosystems from trails within the park lessens their ecological viability in the long term.
- There is a concern that such a myriad of trails presents safety and signing issues, with some park visitors finding it difficult to always know where they are in the park.
- There is a need to eliminate some small informal trails that cross Munn Road at unsafe locations.

Proposed Actions:

- Eliminate “desire line” and other unnecessary trails. Replant with native vegetation in an effort to unify adjoining ecosystems.
- Eliminate trails that cross Munn Road at unsafe places.
- Clearly define the main trail network by surfacing and signing that will encourage park visitors to stay to the main trails.

Issue: Dog Management

Dog management is an issue at Francis/King Regional Park which will be addressed through a separate planning process.

Park Management Priorities

Because Francis/King Regional Park is a Regional Conservation Area, park management priorities will be based upon environmental considerations. Management actions will be implemented according to the following priorities:

1. Protecting the natural environment.

- Eliminate informal trails that cross Munn Road at unsafe places.
- Clearly define the main trail network by providing consistent surfacing and signing that will encourage park visitors to stay to the main trails.

2. Rehabilitating areas that have been damaged by public use.

- Develop a program to eliminate “desire line” and other unnecessary trails. Replant with native vegetation in an effort to unify adjoining ecosystems.

3. Informing park visitors about their park management responsibilities.

- Initiate an educational program outlining to park visitors the effects they are having on sensitive environments within the park.

Park management actions over the next five years should reflect these priorities. Budgets and work plans should be set each year to implement the recommendations in the management plan according to the above priorities. It is recognized that annual budgets are subject to CRD Parks Committee and Board approval.



Section 6 - Mill Hill Regional Park Management Plan

Park Features

Mill Hill Regional Park is 60 hectares of variable terrain and ecosystems, including a number of outstanding natural features (Map 7). Hiking and nature study are the main activities at Mill Hill, which is noted for its spring wildflowers. April and May are the most popular months for visitors to the park. Trails meander through cedar wetlands along Millstream, in the lower part of the park, while further up the hill a Douglas-fir forest leads to a rocky hilltop and a Garry oak ecosystem. At the 200 metre summit there are impressive views of Esquimalt Harbour, the greater Victoria area, and the Olympic Mountains, as well as other nearby hilltops. At the summit, hikers can find the CRD Parks 35th anniversary peak-finder cairn, pointing out distances to visible peaks from this 360-degree vantage point.

The park is known for its rare and interesting plants, such as hairy manzanita, a large shrub resembling a miniature sprawling arbutus. In early spring, white fawn lilies are the first wildflowers to appear. Later the intense bluish-violet Camas emerges, standing out amid the Garry oaks. Rock faces are decorated with stonecrop and sea blush. Members of the orchid family, including striped and spotted coral root, rattlesnake plantain and calypso orchid bloom in the spring and summer. For adventurous hikers, the Calypso Trail continues down the eastern side of Mill Hill and connects with a pathway along Six Mile Road to Thetis Lake Regional Park.

Even though it has limited facilities, over 21,000 people visited this popular regional park in 2003. Besides the trails, other facilities include parking, a picnic area and a washroom building near the park entrance. Mill Hill is also the location of the CRD Parks headquarters, just 50 metres west of the main park entrance. There visitors can meet Parks staff, and pick up brochures and other information on the regional parks and trails system.

Park History

Mill Hill and Millstream are named after the first sawmill in BC (1848), built by the Hudson's Bay Company at Mill Falls, just outside the park boundary. At the time of initial survey, Millstream was a roaring torrent of water, capable of running a much-needed sawmill that would provide cut lumber for the developing settlement at Fort Victoria. Although the mill was productive the first year, the more typical flows in the summer render Millstream into a gentle flowing creek. By 1855, the mill became obsolete when a steam-powered sawmill located near Craigflower Farm, a few miles to the east, replaced it.

Millstream (originally known as Rowe Stream) was also used as a fresh water source by the British Navy based in Esquimalt Harbour. At high tide, small water barges would proceed to the falls, and fill up with water to take back to the ships. Later flumes were built to bring the water further into the deeper water.

From that time until after the Second World War, there appears to have been very little activity around Mill Hill itself. In 1948 a number of buildings housing a forest insect rearing facility (to study insects for biological control) were built by the federal Department of Agriculture near what is now the park entrance and CRD Parks headquarters. The BC Forest Service also had a ranger station and fire suppression camp at Mill Hill. The Forest Service built a road up the hill connecting the fire suppression camp with the ranger tower, which was located there because of the commanding view of surrounding lands. The tower was dismantled in the 1960s, although the concrete footings can still be seen at the hill summit.

Mill Hill became a regional park in 1981 through a combination of land purchase and transfer of lands from the Province. In 1997, when the Trans Canada Highway was being upgraded, more land was added to the park to allow a connection to Thetis Lake Regional Park. In 2001, an additional eight hectares of Garry oak meadow and rocky bluffs were added to the eastern slopes of the park, bringing it up to the 60 hectares it is today. The federal government contributed to the purchase of these important lands and holds a covenant to ensure that the Garry oak meadows in particular are protected.

Park Management Objectives

Mill Hill Regional Park is designated in the CRD Parks Master Plan as a Regional Conservation Area. This designation in a broad way defines how the park will be managed. The primary purpose of a Regional Conservation Area is the protection of the natural environment. Although this classification sets out the overall context for park management, the park may need to be managed according to its specific environmental sensitivity and unique features. With this in mind, the management objectives for Mill Hill Regional Park are to:

1. Protect and prevent disturbance to the existing natural areas and resources contained within the park that have not been impacted by human use.
2. Institute park management practices that will prevent future use from encroaching onto the existing healthy natural areas.
3. Restore natural areas that have been damaged as a result of human activity over the years by proactively restoring the compromised natural areas such as the Millstream shoreline and the Garry oak ecosystems.
4. Direct outdoor activities away from the more fragile ecosystems in the park.
5. Manage public use so as to not impact on the park's natural values and features.
6. Monitor public use over time and adjust management practices to protect the park resources.

Mill Hill Restoration Plan

Due to its size, its concentration of rare plants and ecosystems and the effect of development in the surrounding lands, Mill Hill Regional Park was chosen as the first regional park where major ecological restoration would take place. Restoration issues include management of invasive species such as Scotch broom and Daphne. These non-native plants are becoming well established in the portions of the park once dominated by native species. The riparian corridor of Millstream Creek is also in need of rehabilitation. CRD Parks staff is preparing a restoration

Map 7 – Mill Hill Regional Park (follow link to open map)

plan with input from other government and non-government agencies. The plan will guide future management actions at Mill Hill, enabling CRD Parks to protect the park's natural values by restoring existing natural systems. Lessons learned from restoration projects at Mill Hill can then be applied to other areas in the park system such as Seymour Hill, Scafe Hill and Stewart Mountain. The knowledge and experience gained from this project can also be shared with other groups and agencies that wish to restore other natural areas in the region.

Key Park Management Issues and Proposed Actions

Through the management planning process, several important issues were identified that need to be addressed in the management plan for Mill Hill Regional Park:

- Neighbourhood access to the park
- Millstream Creek management
- Dog management

Issue: Neighbourhood Access to the Park

Mill Hill Regional Park is an outstanding natural feature located near the centre of a growing urban and suburban area. Housing and other developments are being built all around the park. Increasingly, the park is becoming a natural island in an urbanised area where projected population growth is high. At the same time, Mill Hill continues to have thriving natural features, including Garry oak ecosystems and wildflower meadows that are becoming increasingly rare. As more people move into the area, access to these natural features is becoming a significant park management issue.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks Master Plan discusses the need to manage the parks on an ecosystem basis. The Plan states *“since regional parks are always part of a larger ecosystem, the management of land and water in that larger ecosystem affects the ecological integrity of parkland. The well being and future survival of ecosystems in regional parks depend on the sustainable use of parkland and surrounding landscapes. Parks cannot properly survive as islands. For that reason, CRD Parks has an interest in how lands surrounding regional parks are managed. It needs to work co-operatively with adjacent landowners and other levels of government to protect the natural environment in regional parks and on trails.”* There is a covenant on the recently acquired addition to Mill Hill Regional Park imposed by the federal government who contributed funds for the land acquisition. The Nature Conservancy of Canada holds the covenant which states that the primary purpose of the land is for protection of the rare and endangered ecosystems found there.

Interests:

- Because Mill Hill Regional Park is located in a part of the region that will experience high population growth over the next several years, there is a fear that overuse, or uncontrolled

access to the park from the emerging neighbourhoods, could negatively impact the park's natural values.

- There is a need to have a park entrance that communicates park messages and presents the park character to the visitor.
- There are currently attempts to introduce salmon into the upper reaches of Millstream, including portions within the park. There is a concern that activities in the floodplain and riparian areas of Millstream Creek could adversely affect the salmonid restoration project.

Proposed Actions:

- Work with land developers who are building subdivisions adjacent to the park and with the District of Langford to ensure that their developments do not negatively impact the park values and features.
- Work with park neighbours to ensure that the park is accessible to communities without creating many small access points.
- Create a park entrance that communicates park messages and presents the park character to visitors.
- Work with the Sooke School District to ensure that the new school does not negatively impact the park.
- Ensure through design that there is only one access from the school area to the trail system at Mill Hill.
- Work with the school administration to ensure that students have an appreciation for the sensitive nature of the park, and work to ensure that the park is protected and even enhanced through school teaching programs. Consider having the school "adopt" portions of the park to foster good stewardship principles with the students and teachers.

Issue: Millstream Creek Watershed Management

Millstream Creek is an important stream in this part of the region, and a portion of the stream flows through Mill Hill Regional Park. CRD Parks is working with local municipalities, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and a local stream-keeper group to facilitate the migration of salmon up Millstream. This requires creating fish ladders at some downstream waterfall areas that are currently barriers to fish passage. The goal is to expand the amount of available fish habitat on Millstream and create a natural salmon run that is sustainable without further human intervention. In order to protect the stream's fishery and other wildlife values, the entire watershed should be managed as a unit, with environmental protection being a key goal of all land managers in the watershed.

Current CRD Parks Position

The CRD Parks Master Plan guidelines for managing riparian and wetland resources propose that CRD Parks "*manage riparian and other wetland environments and their buffer zones to conserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of these important resources, and to prevent the destruction, loss, or degradation of habitat.*"

Background Information:

The Millstream Watershed Management Plan was completed in June 1999. The plan looks at the entire watershed as one planning area, and makes recommendations regarding land issues that affect the watershed. Each jurisdiction (provincial, regional and municipal) contributed to the plan and has specific commitments to maintain the health of the watershed. The District of Langford, with the major portion of the watershed in its boundaries, makes reference to the plan when reviewing any new developments that may affect the watershed. CRD Parks is not a lead agency for any of the priority actions, but Millstream Creek runs through part of Mill Hill Regional Park, and CRD Parks is responsible for maintaining the health of the stream within its boundaries.

Interests:

- There is a concern that further urban encroachment may increase the water flows in Millstream that may affect water quality and fish habitat.
- The riparian area along Millstream is dynamic, and the stream channel occasionally changes course. There is a need to ensure that the trails along the Millstream corridor are sustainable over all seasons.
- Much of the shoreline of Millstream is in public ownership, with several jurisdictions managing the land. There is a need for the stream needs to be managed as a unit.

Proposed Actions:

- Ensure that the shoreline of Millstream within Mill Hill Regional Park is protected, and that future development in the park does not impact negatively on the stream.
- Eliminate park trails in the Millstream floodplain. Relocate existing trails onto higher ground for year-round sustainability.
- Restore any damaged riparian areas within the park and work with local governments to ensure management goals in the Millstream Watershed Management Plan are met.
- Work with the District of Langford and the Town of View Royal to ensure that all park parcels along Millstream are managed as a continuous greenway corridor.
- Continue to work with Langford and other partners to remove barriers to fish passage on the lower reaches of Millstream in an effort to increase availability of salmon habitat further upstream.

Issue: Dog Management

Dog management is an issue in Mill Hill Regional Park which will be addressed through a separate planning process.

Park Management Priorities

Because Mill Hill Regional Park is a Regional Conservation Area, park management priorities will be based upon environmental considerations. Management actions will be implemented according to the following priorities:

1. Protecting the natural environment

- Eliminate park trails in the Millstream floodplain that go to the water's edge. Relocate existing trails to higher ground for year-round sustainability.
- Continue to work with Langford and other partners to remove barriers to fish passage on the lower reaches of Millstream in an effort to increase availability of salmon habitat further upstream.

2. Rehabilitating areas that have been damaged by public use.

- Restore any damaged riparian areas along Millstream Creek that have been impacted by previous human use.
- Continue to implement the Mill Hill Restoration Plan.

3. Informing park visitors about their park management responsibilities.

- Work with the school administration to ensure that students have an appreciation for the sensitive nature of the park, and that the park is protected and even enhanced through school teaching programs. Consider having the school “adopt” portions of the park to foster good stewardship principles with the students and teachers.
- Work with park neighbours to ensure that the park is accessible to communities without creating many small access points.

Park management actions over the next five years should reflect these priorities. Budgets and work plans should be set each year to implement the recommendations in the management plan according to the above priorities. It is recognized that annual budgets are subject to CRD Parks Committee and Board approval.



Section 7 - Integrating the Park Management Plans

Although Thetis Lake, Francis/King and Mill Hill regional parks are each unique and have their own special features, there are connections between them. Thetis Lake and Francis/King regional parks border directly on one another, while the Trans Canada Highway separates Mill Hill from Thetis Lake. Together they protect 951 hectares of interconnected ecosystems. There are natural connections and recreational links between the parks.

Natural Connections

Maps 2 and 3 show that the natural systems in the three parks have a number of similarities. Wildlife travel to take advantage of the remoteness of some park areas that have similar landscapes. Birds fly from one area to another responding to threats, or to take advantage of varying food sources. There are subtle climatic differences between the three areas that give the parks unique characteristics. Francis/King has tall Douglas-firs while Mill Hill has an abundance of wildflowers. Thetis Lake has a diversity of landscapes, including oak meadows, old forest and wetland complexes.

The park boundaries are not perfect, as significant natural areas are located outside the parks, and not all watersheds are intact. Areas of interest related to expanding park boundaries are indicated on Map 4. CRD Parks is actively pursuing opportunities to secure even more of the important ecosystems that could complement the existing parks. These three parks form a key component (over 1000 hectares) of connected green space proposed to stretch from Tod Inlet in the north to Esquimalt Harbour (Map 1). Extending the natural areas in this corridor will be a goal of CRD Parks and other park agencies for the next several years.

Recreational Links

The three parks all have significant trail networks throughout them. There is a trail connecting Thetis Lake and Francis/King regional parks, and a pathway under the Trans Canada Highway connecting Thetis Lake to Mill Hill (Map 8). Specific uses have been designated for each trail within the parks as shown on Map 8. Francis/King and Mill Hill have primarily hiking-only trails, while Thetis Lake has a variety of hiking, cycling and equestrian trails. Only the major trail networks in the three parks are shown on Map 8. There are a number of minor trails throughout the parks that are not part of the main trail system.

By taking advantage of these connections, park visitors can also connect with the Galloping Goose Regional Trail and extend their trek for dozens of kilometres in either direction. Thetis Lake in particular is easily accessible from the Galloping Goose Regional Trail, and close to the centre of the populated portions of the region.

Several loops are possible between the parks, making the entire three-park area a recreational destination of regional significance. Equestrians can travel from Francis/King along multi-purpose trails to the upper western reaches of Thetis Lake Regional Park. Cyclists can travel

from Thetis Lake to Francis/King along an extensive trail network, or go outside the park along Westoby Road to link with other trails in the western part of Thetis Lake. Proposed future trail extensions will provide cyclists with access from the main Thetis Lake parking lot to the trails in the western part of the park all the way to Stewart Mountain. Hikers can take advantage of a number of trails throughout the three-park complex.

Inappropriate uses on some of the smaller trails in the ecologically sensitive areas were identified as an issue elsewhere in the management plan. The large area covered by these parks makes it possible to designate certain areas for specific limited uses only, while allowing more active recreation pursuits in the less sensitive areas of the park. By looking at the three parks as a single unit, CRD Parks can place activities in the appropriate places, and fulfil its mandate for Regional Conservation Areas to protect the natural environment.

Communicating Park Management Messages

While CRD Parks has a responsibility to manage these parks for protection of the natural environment, park visitors share some of the responsibility for preserving their natural spaces. CRD Parks can help by providing timely and accurate information about park management issues. With a cooperative public, it will be easier to protect these natural spaces. CRD Parks can facilitate this by:

- Creating effective park entrances that can serve as information outlets, advising the visitor what is special about the park, and about park management issues and reasons behind the management directions
- Providing interpretive/regulatory signing at strategic locations within the parks to educate the park visitor about various environmental issues, and management actions being carried out to alleviate environmental problems
- Being proactive in communicating directly to the user groups, such as schools, cycling organizations and equestrian groups
- Using a variety of media (web site, brochures, displays, kiosks) to assist the public in understanding the reasons behind park rules and regulations
- Providing effective enforcement where required to support environmental protection goals.



Map 8 Major Trail Designations (follow link to open map)

Section 8 - Management Plan Implementation

Because Thetis Lake, Francis King and Mill Hill Regional Parks are all Regional Conservation Areas — CRD Parks' highest level of protection — park management priorities will be based upon environmental considerations.

While the objective is to implement the actions outlined in this management plan, it is recognized that not all recommendations can be implemented immediately. Actions need to be scheduled into work plans and future budgets. Some actions needed to address the outstanding issues can be undertaken right away as they do not involve major capital investment or large commitments of staff time. Other actions are more urgent, and require planning, scheduling and budget allocations. Actions that are easily implemented, and actions that are needed immediately to properly manage the parks, will be given a high priority.

Implementation will be done in phases, with some actions being carried out soon after the plan is adopted, and others scheduled in the following years.

Phase 1 Implementation Priorities

Land Acquisition

- A key priority is to continue to improve the environmental significance of these Regional Conservation Areas by acquiring land outside the current park boundaries that complement the parks' natural features.

Thetis Lake Park Entrance

- Redesign the Thetis Lake Regional Park entrance from the main parking area to create a focal point for park visitors to get information about the park as they enter. Provide a central location where park visitors can obtain interpretive messages about the park's natural assets as well as important park visitor messages regarding the management of park visitors in the park's sensitive environments.

Dog Management

- Fill ecological information gaps, increase communication and education programs, continue monitoring and park visitor surveys and increase bylaw enforcement in the three parks.

Mill Hill Park Entrance

- Continue to develop the entrance and main parking area at Mill Hill Regional Park to improve picnicking and walking opportunities.
- Fully utilize the new park information kiosk to provide visitors with messages about the park's natural assets as well as important park visitor messages regarding the management of park visitors in the park's sensitive environments.

Park Restoration

- Conduct site restoration on trampled areas around Prior Lake, and on the Upper and Lower Thetis Lake trails where damage to lakeshore vegetation has caused some areas to be eroded down to bare soil.
- Conduct habitat restoration and reclamation in areas of Thetis Lake Regional Park that have been damaged from unsanctioned mountain bike use such as near the top of Seymour Hill, Scafe Hill and Stewart Mountain.
- Fulfil the rehabilitation requirements outlined in the Mill Hill Restoration Plan. Restore any damaged riparian areas along Millstream Creek that have been impacted by previous human use.

Thetis Lake Trails

- Complete the construction of a clearly defined trail around Upper and Lower Thetis lakes to keep park visitors on the main trail corridor, and minimize trail “braiding” and compaction of the soil around the tree roots.

Cycling

- Create a cycling trail from the main beach area to the neighbourhoods west of the park (Phelps subdivision) using a route paralleling the Trans Canada Highway.
- Work directly with organized cycling groups to educate riders, and assist CRD Parks keeping cyclists on the cycling trails, and away from environmentally fragile lands such as the mossy outcrops and bare rock sections of Scafe Hill, Seymour Hill and Stewart Mountain, or any areas where rare plants or ecosystems are known to occur. Target enforcement of cycling restrictions at these sites to prevent further damage.

Phase 2 Implementation Priorities

Trails

- Relocate trails away from the riparian areas and water’s edge in the floodplains of Craigflower and Millstream creeks.

Park Restoration

- Eliminate “desire line” trails in Francis/King Regional Park. Eliminate informal trails that cross Munn Road at unsafe places. Clearly define the main trail network with consistent surfacing and signing that will encourage park visitors to stay to the main trails. Replant reclaimed areas with native vegetation in an effort to unify adjoining ecosystems.

Public Education

- Install signs at strategic locations in the parks to educate park visitors about the fragile nature of the parklands, and explain the reasons why park management actions are necessary.
- Prepare educational materials that explain the need for park management actions and distribute them outside the park into the community, such as at schools and cycling shops.

Phase 3 Implementation Priorities

Cycling

- Enter into a formal agreement with SIMBS or other cycling groups to develop and manage a limited number of single track or otherwise challenging cycling trails such as beneath the power lines on either side of Stewart Mountain.

Public Education

- Work with the Crystalview school administration to ensure that students have an appreciation for the sensitive nature of Mill Hill Regional Park, and work to ensure that the park is protected and even enhanced through school teaching programs. Consider having the school “adopt” portions of the park to foster good stewardship principles with students and teachers.
- Explore working with the Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) to institute their “Good Neighbours Program” for Mill Hill Regional Park.

Financial Implications of Implementing the Management Plan

Implementing the actions proposed in the management plan will be a combination of initiatives that can be covered in the annual core budget of CRD Parks, and some initiatives that will require new or additional money. The table below identifies budget items that will require additional funds if they are to be implemented.

These are only preliminary cost estimates. Including these costs in the plan does not constitute automatic approval of funding for implementing the plan. Standard CRD funding procedure approvals will be adhered to at all stages of plan implementation.

Phase 1 Actions	
Actions that Require Additional Funding	Estimated Costs
Complete trail upgrades in Thetis Lake	\$48,000
Construct a cycling trail from the main beach to Phelps subdivision	\$80,500
Redesign Thetis Lake park entrance and main beach area (design costs only)	\$15,000
Address Dog Management Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communication/Education ▪ Ecological Information ▪ Bylaw Enforcement ▪ Park Visitor Input 	\$77,560
Total for Phase 1 Actions	\$221,060

Phase II Actions
Core Budget Items (no additional funds)
Relocate trails away from Craigflower Creek and Mill Stream
Prepare educational materials on park management issues
Create/install new park management/ interpretive signs at strategic locations

Phase III Actions
Core Budget Items (no additional funds)
Develop formal agreements with cycling groups to develop new trails
Work with Crystalview School administration
Sign and protect sensitive environment zones
Restore fragmented habitat at Francis/King